English for a New Millennium
AATE Interface Series
Series Editor: Cal Durrant

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Edited by Cal Durrant and Karen Starr 2009

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*Gender and Texts: A Professional Development Package for English Teachers*
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English for a New Millennium
Leading Change

Edited by
Cal Durrant and Karen Starr
This book is dedicated to
M. Bruce Durrant, Ian McDonald and Barbara Starr,
and in loving memory of Vyrona M. Durrant and John T. Starr.
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It’s a double pleasure to introduce the latest text in the AATE Interface series. First, because it’s always a joy to assemble the work of one’s peers, particularly those whose research has helped shape one’s own thinking over the years. And secondly, because this book places on public record a representative sample of the hours of collaborative thinking, planning and energy that went into the production of the 2008 Australian Government Summer School for Teachers of English.

Some readers will have recognised a number of the ‘flying texts’ that appear on Stacey Zass’s delightfully whimsical cover design for this volume. They were taken from the beginning of an article I wrote for English in Australia in Volume 43, Number 1 entitled ‘Shift Happens: The 2008 Australian Government Summer School for Teachers of English’ (Durrant: 2008). I would like to thank the editorial team at English in Australia, and in particular ELA Editor Dr Karen Moni, for granting permission to reproduce some of that article for this chapter. My thanks also go to the members of the Summer School Organising Team who are named below, and of course to my co-editor Karen Starr, without whom this text would not have made it to print.

The Australian Government Summer School for Teachers program was announced as part of the 2007-08 Budget Package: Realising Our Potential. Funds earmarked for this initiative totalled some $102 million over four years, and it was
sold to the Australian public as something that would both recognise and reward up to 4,000 of Australia’s highest performing teachers in the areas of:

1. Literacy and Numeracy;
2. English;
3. Mathematics;
4. Science; and
5. Australian History.

One of the wonderful things about the passing of time is that one forgets just how exhausting such endeavours can be. As with most national tenders, the turn-around time frames were extremely tight for the Summer Schools. I have an email-box that has a complete set of the correspondence that took place not long after the call went out for Expressions of Interest (EOI). It makes for quite amusing reading now, though at the time it represented a dizzy roller coaster ride as universities around the country were caught up in the frantic search for consortium partners. Because there was so much money on offer, most university Education Faculties/Schools were under considerable administrative ‘encouragement’ to get involved, and in those first few weeks, lots of prospective tender partners circled, united, fractured and reformed. Some of our initial colleagues from other universities who were involved in the early Deakin/Murdoch/AATE negotiations suddenly found they had to withdraw on discovering that those further up the management chains had aligned themselves with different groupings (Beavis, 2007). I think Catherine Beavis and I swung between ‘yes’ and ‘no’ to our involvement in the English tender at least three times.

Of course there was an overall irony in the way things panned out. Our original target was to claim all five summer schools, though the flagship submissions were clearly the Maths and Science bids. English was a late inclusion, but when the Minister announced the successful tenders, it was the only one of the Deakin/Murdoch submissions that got up.

Calls for EOI were advertised in mid-July, 2007, with a closing date of 8 August (DEST, 2007). As Council was in meeting (following the Canberra national conference) when the calls for EOI were announced, it deliberated over whether or not it would submit a separate bid; while many members of Council were uncomfortable with the elitist elements of the initiative, the majority
believed that as the relevant national association, AATE should be a contributing part of any such professional development rather than sitting on the sidelines wringing its hands (AATE Council Minutes, 2007:Item 7d). As AATE President Mark Howie recalled it in his keynote address: ‘It is important that Australian teachers are better recognised and their professional learning better supported – both were important reasons in AATE’s determination to be part of the Summer School initiative’ (Howie, 2008a).

When it was realised that under the ‘Course design and development’ requirements, intending applicants would need to ‘demonstrate collaboration with teacher professional associations’ (DEST, 2007:Item 1.3.1.ii), Council resolved that it would make itself available as a partner to any appropriate consortium to maximise the chances of there being an AATE presence when the successful bid was announced. A Position Paper outlining AATE’s expectations was sent to all intending consortium partner organisations, and as a consequence, many of these sought and received AATE endorsement for their applications during the lead up to the submission deadline.

The then federal Minister for Education, Ms Julie Bishop, launched the Summer School Programme at Parliament House in Canberra on September 13 and announced that a consortium comprising Deakin University (Programme Team: Catherine Beavis (Leader), Clare Bradford, Julie Mitchell, Liz Parsons and Chris Walsh), Murdoch University (Cal Durrant) and AATE had been awarded the tender for the English Summer School. AATE Council was delighted to learn that ALEA – in partnership with Wollongong University, the University of New England and Edith Cowan University – had also been successful with their tender for the Literacy and Numeracy Summer School.

While successful consortia went into overdrive in order to plan the presentation of the Summer Schools within an extremely tight set of deadlines, teachers who had applied to attend them waited with some expectation. More than two hundred successful applicants received their English packs from ACE (the Australian College of Educators) towards the end of November. Just over a month later, they arrived in Geelong and registered at Deakin University’s Waterfront campus, a spectacular refurbishment of an old wool store situated right opposite the picturesque Geelong foreshore.

The Programme Team divided the ten days into the following series of modules, using STELLA – Standards for Teachers of English Language and Literacy in Australia (AATE, 2004) – as a foundation:
1. Leading Change (Cal Durrant and Catherine Beavis, with additional keynotes by Professors Jill Blackmore and Karen Starr);
2. Literature and the Canon in the 21st Century (Catherine Beavis and Julie Mitchell, with additional keynotes by Professors Elizabeth Webby, Peter Kuch and Ray Misson);
3. Multiliteracies, Multi-modality and Design in the English Classroom (Chris Walsh, with additional keynotes by Professors Gunther Kress and Jackie Marsh);
4. Children’s and Young Adult Literature (Clare Bradford and Liz Parsons, with additional keynote by Professor Kerry Mallan); and
5. Commonality and Assessment (Julie Mitchell and Catherine Beavis, with additional keynotes by Professors Gabrielle Matters and Roly Sussex and the ACER’s Marion Meiers).

The Leading Change module was designed to be the connecting link as both DEEWR (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations; formerly DEST) and the Programme Team were determined that successful applicants would return to their schools not just with the ‘Summer School experience’, but with a clear idea of how they might implement appropriate aspects of change into their own school environments and then share their experiences with colleagues. The expectation was that attendees would conduct an action research project/initiative in their classrooms/schools and report their findings through local, state and national English teaching conferences and journals. This process began as soon as participants returned to their schools, with a small number of attendees presenting papers and/or workshops at the 2008 AATE/ALEA national conference in Adelaide (see chapters by Bain et al. and Shortland-Jones in Section Four). Similar initiatives have also happened at state levels.

On Monday morning, January 7 – following a traditional Welcome to Country – the Summer School was officially opened by Faculty and Administrative personnel from Deakin University, along with members of the Summer School Course Development Team representing DEEWR.

AATE President Mark Howie delivered the opening keynote entitled STELLA as a Compass for Leading Change (see Chapter Two). While some members of the audience may have found his address somewhat challenging – even confronting at times – it provided a very useful framework for the
remainder of the summer school. Effectively, Howie described how certain aspects of the language used to promote the Summer School to principals and teachers were antithetical to notions of community and collective endeavour – ideas and ideals that are crucial both to STELLA and effective English teaching (Sawyer, Brock and Baxter, 2007). He also suggested that the genesis of the Summer School needed to be placed in the context of broader cultural and political issues, including the so-called ‘culture wars’, more specifically the ongoing contestation surrounding what is taught in English and how it is taught, as well as the previous government’s promotion of merit pay initiatives and its (not unrelated) public criticisms of teacher unions (Howie, 2008). As Howie has since observed: ‘Both of these “themes” continued to be written about in the national press during the fortnight of the Summer School’ (2008a).

Howie doesn’t back away from any potential criticism by those who found his address provocative: ‘I didn’t set out to be negative or controversial,’ he says; ‘My line of argument was in fact couched in terms of a series of challenges to participants. In other words, I was looking for a generative response. I was reminding participants of the “response-ability” (Pope 2002, following Bakhtin) they should be looking to exercise over the fortnight of the Summer School if they were to truly engage with the rich program created by Catherine Beavis and the rest of the organising team’ (2008a).

So, did what followed during the Summer School address or meet any of the AATE President’s challenges? In commenting about the post-Summer School activity, Howie observed that:

The Summer School website is abuzz with chat about the follow-up professional learning plans of groups of teachers, many working across states and school systems and sectors. There is real enthusiasm for working collaboratively with others and sharing the results as part of an ongoing national dialogue about English and English teaching… I am very excited by this development. It is an outcome of the Summer School that promises much for subject renewal at a time when – as Brenton Doecke (2007) observes – a good deal of public discourse about English is urging a narrowing of the curriculum and restrictions being placed on the professional autonomy of teachers. (Howie, 2008a)

What, then, was Summer School really about? Simplistically, it was an occasionally exhausting blend of keynotes and breakout sessions; if you have attended
one, it was a bit like a two week AATE/ALEA national conference! AATE Council negotiated with its consortium partners to have AATE observers present on each of the ten days both to share in this unique experience and to maintain a strong AATE presence; many of them have reported back to their respective associations, and much of what follows consists of snapshots taken from those reports that will provide readers with some sense of what Summer School 2008 was like.

Guy Bayly-Jones was an AATE observer during the first week and argues that ‘there ought to be more opportunities like this for more teachers’. The South Australian President believes that the ‘goodwill and enthusiasm which it buys is immeasurable’. And what about the sessions themselves? ‘The ones I attended were full of lively, involved discussion’, he says. ‘While the teachers who attended gave up two full weeks of their holidays, they seemed to find it a valuable professional learning experience. What they also told me was how much they appreciated the accommodation, the food, and the excursions; in short, they felt that for once in their professional lives, they were spoilt – which is something that teachers very rarely experience’ (Bayly-Jones, 2008).

The Victorian Association for the Teaching of English’s (VATE) AATE representative, Scott Bulfin, also observed part of the first week:

> From my outsider/insider vantage point, the Summer School program and the rich conversations it encouraged among participants … reaffirmed my sense that, across Australia, there is much English teachers have in common. Despite recent government reports, including the curious findings of an ACER study of ‘Year 12 Curriculum and Achievement Standards’, teachers at the Summer School found that they were working with similar core concepts, motivated by similar ideals and experiencing the same challenges and frustrations. I only wish Professor Geoff Masters, CEO of ACER and co-author of the above report, who recently characterised English curricula across Australia as ‘a dog’s breakfast’, could have been there to see the ease with which teachers talked about their work across State boundaries. (Bulfin, 2008)

As suggested earlier, teacher expectations about Summer School were both high and varied. Given that attendees had been identified as being change agents in their schools as part of the selection process (many were Heads of English Departments), there appeared to be some initial unease about Summer
School presenters being able to teach them anything much about their work in classrooms and schools. On the other hand, others seemed to expect that the two weeks would provide information and activities that they had never experienced or heard of before. One wonders how the latter group view their own abilities to stay abreast of contemporary debates and developments in English teaching and, if they were that far out of touch, how they gained selection into the program in the first place? However, just as Mark Howie alluded to in his opening address, such misconceptions about the purpose of the Summer Schools were in part the products of the official discourses that the Government had used to promote them. Fortunately, as the program and events began to unfold, such tensions appeared to ease and participants started to recognise the value of the opportunity with which they had been provided.

South Australian English Teachers Association (SAETA) participant, Richard Apps, captured it in this way:

Some participants were more blasé than me and thought that there was not much new in what was offered. In some senses they may have been correct, but the experience of two concentrated weeks dealing with the central issues of English and English teaching, away from any distractions, was an opportunity to rethink and discuss aspects of English in a way that I have never previously done. I found the overall experience to be generally inspiring; it was a real tonic for someone who has been in the business for many years. (Apps, 2008)

Melinda Kearns, from ETANSW, used a particularly apt analogy to describe this settling in period:

When I was studying linguistics at university, I remember the lecturer telling me that the difference between a language and a dialect was that people who speak neighbouring dialects often understand each other, but say that they sound ‘funny’. This was very much my experience at the Australian Government Summer School for Teachers of English. Our initial communication problems overcome, the two weeks was an incredibly rewarding and stimulating time, allowing for genuine collegiality amongst the group based on a sharing of experience and expertise’. (Kearns, 2008)

Immediate Past President of AATE, Karren Philp, was one of the AATE
observers during the second week of Summer School. As evidence of the participants’ assertions included above, what she noticed on her arrival was: ‘the distinct “buzz” and excitement that was evident in the way participants greeted each other’ on the Monday morning before Catherine Beavis presented the first keynote of Week Two’ (Philp, 2008). Those of you who know Karren will be aware of her opinions about the critical importance of the social aspects of an event to its overall success. She was delighted to learn that the middle weekend had been preserved free of organised activities:

Teachers had had a weekend away from the program. Many had used the time to sight-see and catch up with friends and family in the beautiful surrounds of Geelong and Corio Bay, the Old Coast Road or in Melbourne. However variously they had spent their weekends; everyone to whom I spoke on that morning had taken the opportunity to reflect on their learning thus far, and on their good fortune in being involved in such a marvellous event. (Philp, 2008)

One of the purposes in having AATE observers present during the Summer School was to try and keep a finger on the pulse, and this meant mixing and talking with participants. According to Past President Philp:

Teachers were impressed with the five star rating of the food, accommodation and the Waterfront campus venue. They thought the quality of the resources superb. They loved their resource files that housed the professional readings (in both electronic and hard copy), their journal and the workshop handouts. They were blown away by the standard of the presenters and they were looking forward to the challenge of implementing the ideas and strategies they had heard into their teaching and learning programs. However, what excited them most was the cumulative effect of all these aspects of the summer school – which was to raise the status of English teachers and to make them feel valued. ‘At long last’, a fellow Western Australian enthused to me, ‘I feel as though I am being taken seriously and that what I think about my job is important to the future of our subject’. (Philp, 2008)

Another participant that the then English Teachers Association of Western Australia (ETAWA) Executive Officer spoke to mid-week provided yet a different perspective:
I came here with a pretty good self-belief. I was sure I knew what I needed to do to be a good English teacher, and each year I set out with some clear goals and objectives pertaining to teaching kids how to write essays and prepare for their final examinations. However, this summer school has really lifted my head up and shifted my horizons. For the first time in years I am questioning those goals. Yes, kids still need to learn to write good exam essays – but that’s no longer THE thing. I want to engage kids with new texts, and ensure they are confident and critical consumers and producers of new text types, like blogs; wikis and … Well, have you seen www.inanimatealice.com? (Philp, 2008)

Another visitor during the second week of the Summer School was AATE’s former Executive Officer, Robyn Cations. She enjoyed the opportunity of meeting and talking to the many English teachers who took advantage of the wide selection of professional books and resources available at the AATE book stand:

It reminded me of the important role AATE and its affiliates can and do play in the lives of teachers. As a behind the scene manager I enjoyed having an opportunity to talk to our members about the problems they face: lack of resources in some of the poorer schools, remoteness from professional development for our rural and remote teachers, the lack of recognition they receive for their efforts; and the pleasures: the pleasure of trying new techniques, satisfaction when their students respond positively to the texts, the collegiate atmosphere in many English faculties. (Cations, 2008)

Summer School provided a unique opportunity for state ETAs to promote their work and canvass memberships, yet it was surprising to me to hear the number of times I heard participants asking one another what ‘AATE’ stood for; clearly the national Association’s message is not necessarily penetrating all corners of the English teaching fraternity in Australia! Nevertheless, state membership forms were widely distributed during the Summer School and hopefully some of the associations will see a small increase in numbers at state conferences over the next few years.

Another AATE observer to arrive during the second week was Garry Collins from the English Teachers’ Association of Queensland (ETAQ):
My allocated stint was for the final three days of the second week, so a highly productive atmosphere was already well established by the time that I arrived at Deakin’s excellent Waterfront campus…. My personal impression, confirmed by all I spoke to, was that this was an excellent professional development activity. In addition to the formal learning program, the networking opportunities made available were of significant value. I look forward to seeing sessions arising from the experiences of some of the participants presented at our own seminars and state conferences in Queensland. (Collins, 2008)

The ETAQ President also started posting to the Summer School website, regretting the fact that he hadn’t had the opportunity to attend for the full ten days: ‘I would have relished the opportunity to work through the computer lab, hands-on multi-literacies sessions and thus add to my repertoire of skills and develop the confidence needed to better exploit the exciting possibilities of this newer area of the English curriculum’ (Collins, 2008).

In summing up, then, what can be said about the sort of professional development for English teachers modelled by the Summer School? VATE’s Scott Bulfin suggests that:

Despite the ideological reservations some of us might have about the broader politics of the Summer School program and the tensions in the model of professional learning it might be seen to embody, what can be said with some certainty, at least of the English Summer School, is that the organisers grabbed the opportunity to engage with quite rich notions of the subject such as those embodied in the ethos of projects like STELLA … In the end (which is also a beginning) the proof of any professional learning experience is in the teacher learning (collective), and so the long term success of the Summer School initiative will, in large measure, be defined by the way it is able to support teachers’ efforts to continue their conversations in different spaces into the future. I know that Deakin, Murdoch, AATE and State ETAs all have plans to support Summer School participants in their post-school action learning projects and so there will be more to say and hear about these in the future. (Bulfin, 2008)

And would 2008 Summer School participants recommend future Summer School programs to their colleagues? If ETAWA Council Member Tim Manea’s report on his Summer School experience in the February 2008 ETAWA
Newsletter is anything to go on, then the answer is a resounding ‘Yes!’

Overall, the experience for the 30 teachers that represented schools throughout Western Australia, as part of the 200 strong presence from across the country, was one that will live long in the memory. I highly recommend the program, congratulate all the organisers and encourage interested teachers to apply for the Summer School in 2009. (Manea, 2008)

There is little doubt that the 2008 Summer School represented an enormous investment of time, money and professionalism on behalf of the sponsors, the organisers as well as the participants, but as Past President Karren Philp laments:

*If it is to happen again, then the worth of the project must not be allowed to remain in the hands of so few learners. Such a lot for so few, really. Only two hundred lucky teachers out of thousands and thousands of English teachers nationwide. Would that we all could have such a worthwhile professional learning experience!* (Philp, 2008)

These are sentiments that I have heard expressed on numerous occasions, and also repeated by current AATE President, Mark Howie. While the Australian Government’s Summer School initiative represents an important contribution to the professional development of Australian teachers, it is benefiting a very small minority of the profession, and one could argue that because of the ‘merit’ selection processes, this cohort probably represents the ‘least needy’. Is this the best possible way, then, to generate and implement change in Australian classrooms, schools and systems? Mark Howie expresses some misgivings about this:

*Notwithstanding the wonderful program on offer, and all of the hard work undertaken by the Deakin and Murdoch personnel in what was a very demanding time frame, this is a question about which I remain personally ambivalent. However, I have no doubt that it was a very worthwhile – and well deserved – experience, on many different levels, for those lucky enough to attend. If only it were possible for all English teachers to participate in such intensive and sustained professional learning …* (Howie, 2008a)
So what of the future as far as the Australian Government’s Summer Schools for Teachers program goes? While the original announcement was for a four-year program, the incoming Labor Government elected not to continue with it. But that doesn’t mean all that energy is now lost to the profession. As can be seen from the two chapters in Section Four of this book, 2008 Summer School participants around the country have been busy applying their knowledge and expertise via the action research projects they committed to in Geelong, but like Richard Apps from South Australia, they are also adapting strategies and problem solving skills to at least ensure that their own Summer School experience is not lost on them, their students or those with whom they work:

In the first couple of weeks back at school I’ve largely been too busy with routine matters to go back over my notes and think about what I want to recast or implement as a result of my Geelong experience. A change I did want to bring in immediately, with Year 12 students contributing to a forum about the process of reading a novel as they read, has been stymied by the protection set up by the Department to shut out unsavoury sites. However, as a result of my Geelong experience, I will get around this somehow … (Apps, 2008)

AATE has already demonstrated its partner commitment to the Summer School by supplying observers, workshop facilitators and keynote speakers for that memorable fortnight in Geelong. Yet, as has been pointed out by a number of participants in the preceding paragraphs, one of the consistent observations about the summer school concept has been that a professional learning program of this quality and significance deserves to be shared with a much larger portion of the English teaching fraternity.

The original tender proposal included strategies for ensuring program sustainability, and one of the designated deliverables included the provision of resources for schools to make maximum use of the knowledge and strategies developed by teachers at the summer school. AATE has responded in a timely fashion as English for a New Millennium provides a thumbnail sketch of that experience for every English teacher. So for those of you fortunate enough to have
been there, it’s good to see you back; for those readers who didn’t attend, welcome to the continuing conversation.

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Howie, M. (2008) STELLA as a compass for leading change, Keynote address to the Australian Government’s Summer School for Teachers of English, January 7, Deakin University, Geelong.
This book came about as a result of The Australian Government Summer School for Teachers program that was announced as part of the 2007-08 Budget Package: Realising Our Potential. The Australian Government Summer School for Teachers of English was contracted to a consortium comprising Deakin University, Murdoch University and the Australian Association for the Teaching of English (AATE), and was held for two weeks in January 2008 in Geelong opposite the seashore, with perfect weather and the great company of people from around Australia who share a passion for English teaching.

The Summer School brought together academics, teachers, AATE – the peak subject association, a reference group with broad skills and representing numerous stakeholder groups, and officials from the then Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST). What was amazing is how quickly the program came together, which was astounding considering the huge range of tasks to be accomplished to deliver such a significant national event. Irrespective of roles, everyone involved contributed over and above the call of duty to ensure the delivery of the best program possible.

Summer School was an extremely enjoyable event, and we knew from the time it commenced that it would be a memorable one. That’s not to say there were no problems or obstacles to resolve – there were plenty. But they were overcome, through the sheer hard work and determination of a remarkable group of people.

We know this because we were both heavily involved in its organisation and production. Karen directed the project, chaired its organising committees and reference groups, took on the role of master of ceremonies and was a keynote speaker. Cal was a keynote speaker, a workshop facilitator and a member of the program development team. This small group of people had the mammoth task...
of creating the Summer School curriculum in a very short space of time; it involved many days and nights at residential retreats and numerous daily electronic communications. Prior to the Summer School, most people involved never knew one another or were only aware of each other professionally from a distance. By the end of the Summer School, the groups involved in the project development and the teachers who participated felt very much like insiders. We had created something wonderful together.

And so, as in all cases where teamwork and the goodwill of people produce outstanding results, there are many people to thank. First, thanks go to Susie Groves who initiated the application to government to run the Summer School in the first place. Susie was a key player throughout the project, being a member of the management group, and participating in the deliberations of the development and advisory groups, and being involved in the formal delivery of the program at the Waterfront campus of Deakin University in Geelong, Victoria.

We would also like to thank our colleagues who were involved in the development of the Summer School program and who were also keynote presenters. Catherine Beavis had the chief curriculum and program role. She led the development team, and her tenacity, wonderful insights and immense knowledge of the field were of paramount importance to the Summer School’s success. Catherine was pivotal and the program could not have had better stewardship.

We are also grateful to the development team members – the sage and determined minds of Clare Bradford, Liz Parsons, Julie Mitchell, Chris Walsh, and Cal Durrant. This team orchestrated a diverse program based on five major themes. Their thoroughness and lucidity produced the comprehensive program, proceedings, readings and study guide for participants. The success of the Summer School is also due in no small way to the AATE leadership of Karren Philp, Karen Moni and Mark Howie, and the sterling efforts of AATE Council and other co-opted members who worked as observers and workshop facilitators over the fortnight.

We thank the staff of the Centre for Educational Leadership and Renewal, who undertook the program management role, which entailed the administration, undertaking the accountability tasks for the Commonwealth government, and all the other things that had to be organised. The Summer School not only involved a program of work and study. It involved accommodating, feeding and entertaining over two hundred teachers and over fifty presenters and organ-
isers for an entire fortnight. There were welcoming events, program excursions, bus tours, conference dinners and a culminating dinner dance. We thank Melissa Di Pasquale for her work leading this side of the program.

This project would not have been possible without support from the federal Department of Education, Science and Training (which by the time of the Summer Schools had become the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations) who sponsored this project. In particular we thank the people who were involved from the announcement of the Summer School right through to its conclusion – Daniel Owen, Regina Camara and Errol Bannister.

We also acknowledge and thank the teachers from diverse schools from around the nation who took the plunge and spent their school holidays undertaking professional learning for the benefit of their students. We were amazed at their energy, commitment, ideas and creativity, and we hope that this book provides stimulus for further teamwork and cross-school, cross-national collaborations.

Last but not least, we are extremely indebted to the individuals who wrote the chapters in this book and who took a chance to come on a journey with us in seeing this project through to completion. We are confident you will appreciate their efforts.

The Summer School integrated theory and practice, promoted individual development and collective endeavour. Participants produced action plans for their work back in schools, based on personal reflections, group understandings and contextual knowledge. Some teachers continued along their learning path by commencing further tertiary studies. Others took up the challenge to be supported to present papers at national curriculum and research conferences. Many were already authors in their own right, having published novels, poetry and English text books, and others disciplined themselves to undertake long-held desires to write through inspiration from the Summer School. Having achieved these remarkable outcomes, it seemed imperative to produce a record of some of the proceedings and results of the Summer School. We trust readers will find this book to be as useful to them as the two hundred English teachers found the Summer School itself to be.

Karen Starr and Cal Durrant
6 April, 2009
Part 1

Leading Change
Introduction
At the beginning of 2008, over two hundred English teachers from around Australia assembled in Geelong, Victoria, for a two-week intensive professional development Summer School. Being the first of its kind, the Australian Government Summer School for Teachers of English also brought together keynote speakers and workshop presenters from around the world.

The Summer School was a highly successful venture, with strong positive comments being returned through both the official evaluations conducted by KPMG and the informal feedback from participants, some of which adorn the cover of this book. The program was developed by Deakin University in Victoria and Murdoch University in Western Australia in collaboration with the Australian Association for the Teaching of English (AATE). This consortium established a team of leading educators, assisted by a comprehensive reference group, to create a unique, cutting edge, relevant and responsive program for primary and secondary teachers of English organised under five broad themes:

- Leading change;
- Literature and the canon in the 21st century;
- Multiliteracies, multi-modality and design in the English classroom;
- Children’s and young adult literature; and
- Commonality and assessment.
The Summer School was an occasion where teachers from around the country spent two full weeks – day and night – discussing, sharing and debating ideas about English, and learning new practices through their participation in a range of hands-on workshops.

Context is all
After the announcement of the Summer School for English, various media commentators tried to embroil it in controversy (See Ferrari, 2007). Keynote presenters were derided as promoters of trends that would be the downfall of subject English as we know it. Standards, literacy levels, language conventions and even the ability of students to engage in understandable conversation were all presumed to be at stake. The doomsayers were not practicing teachers, of course. When AATE members spoke out in defense of the Summer School for Teachers of English program, they were tarred with the same brush as those who, despite their recognition as the subject’s leading theorists and thinkers in the field, were being pilloried by the press.

The English teachers we met at the 2008 Summer School turned out not to be the renegades the media often make them out to be, and neither, of course, were the keynote speakers. From our interactions with participants during the Summer School and the virtual conference that followed, and through witnessing their subsequent presentations at national and state conferences, we became aware of a number of teacher frustrations and a general sense of cautiousness. Digital texts absorb the lives of today’s young people, often leaving their teachers with a strong sense of urgency about their own experimentation in new fields. Consequently, some teachers worry about the complexity of teaching English given they must meet the needs of a more diverse range of students and student interests than ever before. Still others are concerned about conservative curriculum policy regimes that condemn and fail to acknowledge that the world embraces many more forms of text and publication than it once did. However, readers may be reassured to learn that the Summer School participants demonstrated an overwhelmingly palpable desire to take the most sensible course of action: to valorise creativity, imagination, critical literacy and new and diverse literatures whilst responding to, and understanding, calls for the conservation of tradition and maintaining English classrooms as spaces for engagement in meaning making and sharing. While today’s teachers of English and their students have so many more avenues at their disposal for communi-
cating ideas and thoughts, the subject has not lost its sense of what is important.

English teaching has never been static — it is context and time dependent, and takes on different yet familiar forms (Peim, 2003). In other words, practices in English are always changing, just as they should in order to remain current and relevant, but the values the subject leans towards haven’t. It will never split from traditions that are still at its core: the study of language and text, as the National English Curriculum: Framing Paper has also reinforced (NCB, 2008). And whatever meaning ascribed to it, English remains a critical curriculum component of every Australian school. The subject embraces endless possibilities that position it in a contested domain, the arguments of which are important. The ‘politics of knowledge’ (Peim, 2003, p. 7) concern values, power and authority, substance and consequence. So it’s not surprising to find that this book reflects a range of topics that depict diverse and sometimes divergent current thinking and practice.

The politics of practice and the controversy surrounding the subject, however, mean that teachers need a greater awareness of the role of English in the curriculum and the continual need to redefine and explain its purposes. This book was conceived at the Summer School with just such a purpose in mind. The idea of capturing the messages of leading practitioners and thinkers in the field seemed to be too good an opportunity to waste, and having been aired at a national conference, they had undergone a ‘test-run’ as to their relevance and currency. The chapters in this book thus engage with current dilemmas and debates in the field that emerged during both keynote presentations and workshop discussions, including such issues as:

- the role of English teaching in the twenty-first century;
- the expanding definitions of ‘literacy’ and the new world child;
- the pedagogical challenges in preparing students to be active, critical and reflexive learners and knowledge producers;
- the place of professional standards for teaching English and literacy;
- the roles of new forms of technologies of representation and dissemination and their subsequent socio-cultural effects;
- the re-conceptualisation of textuality;
- the accommodation of new emphases on literacy assessment and testing and determining what this means for professionalism amongst teachers of English;
the roles of teachers in leading, managing and supporting curriculum and pedagogical change in schools;
• the re-defining of what is meant by ‘literature’;
• the exploration of cultural identities in and through texts;
• the changing nature of Australian and world Englishes, and
• the exploration of how English teachers can best learn from and with each other through networking and sharing their practices.

Within this context, then, we believe that *English for a New Millennium* reminds readers of the reality of teaching English, engages with current and emerging changes, and signposts future directions, discussions and repercussions.

**Why ‘Leading change’?**

While we have kept to the original Summer School program as best we could in the way we have organised chapters and sections within this volume, readers who were in attendance will note some changes. For example, we have collapsed ‘Literature’ and ‘Children’s Literature’ into the one section: ‘Literature in the Twenty-first Century’. We have also changed the order of chapters from the original timetable, remembering that many of the Summer School presenters appeared when they did in order to match their physical availability in Geelong over a busy holiday season rather than for any strict thematic link.

When the Summer School team first sat down and started to toss around ideas for a likely theme that might carry over the fortnight, we discovered that each of us had different ideas about what was central and what might be peripheral to contemporary English teachers’ professional lives. In order to move forward, there was a unanimous decision to try and find something that we could use as a conduit for the program and then look to see where our own unique interests might fit with that. What you see in this book is the result of that thinking. While we all have our ‘favourite’ aspects of English, it is the constant imperative of change that continues to drive our working lives, something that often contributes to a sense of helplessness, of being persuaded that we are mere pawns or victims of other more powerful decision makers. Yet such should be neither cause for despair nor for complacency. In the end, we chose to adopt the theme ‘Leading Change’ as a way of positioning teachers as agents rather than subjects within such a dynamic. In addition, on closer examination, we discovered that such a conference theme also sat very comfortably with the
principles and framework of STELLA (Standards for English Language and Literacy in Australia): accomplished English/Literacy teachers ‘encourage colleagues to be open to innovation and change’ (AATE & ALEA, 2002: Statement 3.3). It is this aspect of the change process that drives our chapter’s attempt to provide an informative context for the 2008 Summer School for Teachers of English.

On the other hand, having such a theme can also be interpreted as attempting to drive change based on the belief that change is somehow needed because of the assumed inefficiency, incompetence or ignorance of others. AATE’s incoming president, Mark Howie, picked up on this deficit model notion of change in his opening address, particularly as it applied to much of the education discourse adopted by governments and the Australian media, including the way in which the Summer Schools themselves were presented to the nation. In this revised version of that address, Howie’s chapter points to a number of challenges posed by the Summer Schools project, including those of political elitism; bonus payments and the status of teachers; change for whose sake?; the valuing of individualism over collectivism and the potential polarisation of the profession; the value of learning communities in reducing the need to rank, sort and divide people and the potential compass that STELLA presents as ‘a dynamic, enabling model for considering standards, which puts real and sustained professional learning at the heart of things’ to help guide the English teaching profession through these shoals (Howie, 2008).

Karen Starr reflects on leading and managing major change in schools, particularly as it pertains to teachers. Change is never easy in any organisation, but is particularly difficult in schools where ‘busyness’, constant demands and continual policy revisions hamper internal impetus for change and renewal. Change is frequently resisted, but there are some behaviours and processes that give it a better chance of success. Karen strongly supports distributed leadership and teacher leaders in particular, and this chapter may assist if readers wish to help instigate change in their own schools or classrooms.

Section Two takes up one of the most controversial elements of subject English, that of the place of literature in twenty-first century classrooms. In the years leading up to the Summer School announcement, the teaching of literature in Australian schools had been under close scrutiny, particularly the role of critical literacy (Slattery, 2005, 2005a, 2005b and 2005c). It is an element that continues to dominate public debates about English teaching, as has been
evident during the framing of documents for a National English Curriculum over the past twelve months and the anxieties surrounding the 2007 Literature Round Table. It is difficult to find any two parties who have the same definition of the term ‘literature’ and it is even more difficult to find any two parties who can agree as to how it should then be taught. Part of the media driven agenda over the past five years would appear to be a return to the days when such was apparently not the case. According to Kevin Donnelly, ‘literature was once read for the joy of reading and for its aesthetic and moral influence’ (Donnelly, 2005). Such views of subject English – and the teaching of literature in particular – are simplistic, falsely nostalgic and historically naïve. One only has to examine the controversy surrounding Leavis and Thompson’s *Culture and Environment* (1948) to realise that there has probably never been a period of time when subject English was not a contested field. Indeed, the writers of the Newbolt Report made it clear that the subject was of supreme political and social importance in post–World War I Britain:

> We were told that the working-classes, especially those belonging to organised labour movements, were antagonistic to, and contemptuous of, literature… Literature… as a subject of instruction is suspect as an attempt to “side-track the working class movement”. We regard the prevalence of such opinions as a serious matter, not merely because it means the alienation of an important section of the population from the “comfort” and “mirthe” of literature, but chiefly because it points to a morbid condition of the body politic which if not taken in hand may be followed by lamentable consequences. For if literature be, as we believe, an embodiment of the best thoughts of the best minds … fellowship which “binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time” then the nation of which a considerable portion rejects this means of grace and despises this great spiritual influence, must assuredly be heading to disaster. (Board of Education, 1921: par. 233)

The contributors to Section Two each deal with different elements of the controversies surrounding literature. Catherine Beavis picks up on the historical positioning of literature in the English curriculum, and considers the topic in terms of both continuity and change. She identifies three key assumptions that prompted the broad approach to literature taken at the Summer School:
1. That while English as a subject may be (singularly) recognisable, there are multiple stories of English rather than one grand narrative, such that it makes more sense to speak ‘plurally’ of the English subjects;

2. That historical perspectives on the framing discourses, agendas and debates that have shaped and continue to shape English provide a lens for understanding both past and present, and for conceptualising possible futures and alternate possibilities; and

3. That English in Australia has its own distinctive contexts and trajectories, including ‘the distinctive features of the Australian context, post 1901, as a “commonwealth” of former colonies with enduring ties to the UK and the British Empire’. (Green and Cormack, 2008, p. 255)

Elizabeth Webby takes a nostalgic look at the introduction of Australian literature into the English curriculum, particularly during the culturally assertive period of the 1970s. She mourns the recent loss of Australian authors from book lists around the country, though it should not be forgotten that these do not necessarily form an accurate barometer of what is actually being used in English classrooms. Primary aged students, for example, are quite possibly exposed to more Australian authors and illustrators than ever before via the buoyant Australian picture book industry. Like Beavis, Webby also calls for a broader definition of what comprises Australian literature than is commonly constructed by media commentators.

Ray Misson highlights the slippery nature of language – particularly its indeterminate and unstable qualities – via a very traditional Australian yarn, Henry Lawson’s ‘Water them Geraniums’, one of the Joe Wilson stories. It’s a two part narrative comprising ‘A Lonely Track’ and ‘Past Carin’ that explores the desperate plight of people trying to survive in a parched Australian landscape. Misson suggests that while postmodernist theories are often used to explore the difficulties of applying one fixed and final reading to a text, much can be gained by teasing out different readings so long as the focus remains on the text itself and doesn’t get sidetracked by the critical framework. For the teacher, this is always an exercise in tension: ‘one wants to stress the imagination and creativity – the freedom – available to the reader, while at the same time asserting that the freedom is constrained by the text’ (Misson, 2009). Misson’s treatment of the aesthetic element as it is linked with student engagement offers a way forward for English teachers caught in this dilemma.
Section Two concludes with Clare Bradford’s examination of indigeneity and children’s literature. She commences with Charles Long’s collection of a set of graded readers in 1930 that became known as the *Victorian Readers*. As with many projects of this type, the omissions and gaps are as interesting as the selection of texts themselves. Bradford highlights the absence of indigenous representations of what it meant to be Australian in the early part of the twentieth century and how indigenous Australians were positioned as being part of a dying race; she then poses and explores the telling question: Do stereotypes of Indigenous people survive in contemporary Australia? If so, what kinds of stereotypes, and how do they function in children’s texts? What follows is a fascinating account of the social, moral and ethical complexities implicit in non-Indigenous representations of Indigenous narratives, culminating in the *Dust Echoes* project, an example of just how successful culturally sensitive collaborations can be. Few who viewed the accompanying DVD in Geelong remained unmoved by the power of this narrative and the realisation that Indigenous texts often demand quite different reading strategies.

Section Three comprises two chapters by ACER (Australian Council for Educational Research) representatives around the themes of commonality and assessment, two of the cornerstone issues that have lent considerable weight and momentum to the thinking that is mobilising the establishment of a national curriculum in Australia. Marion Meiers examines the recent history of the various initiatives towards a national curriculum, commencing with the national statements and profiles work begun in 1988 and formally handed over to the states and territories in 1993 through to the setting up of a National Curriculum Board in 2008 and the appointment of its chair, Professor Barry McGaw. She then poses a series of questions and challenges for the writers of a national curriculum, again using STELLA as a marker for established practices in English teaching, and points to the extensive degree of commonality that already exists across the country.

Gabrielle Matters focuses on a different aspect of commonality and assessment, concentrating on the production of a number of key reports produced by the ACER for the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST). Matters believes that it is unnecessary for Australia to mandate content in a national curriculum, arguing rather that nationwide achievement standards should be established that would guarantee comparability across the states and territories. She addresses a number of overarching research questions relevant to
what is offered at Year 12 across the nation, what is considered essential learning within those offerings and what is required for individual students to gain the highest available grades in each of the states and territories. Some of these comparisons prove to be surprising, while others are more predictable. She concludes her chapter with the following challenge to those charged with the responsibility of constructing national curriculum documents:

_The challenge for those responsible for a ‘national curriculum’ is to set clear statements of core curriculum content within which schools and teachers have flexibility in relation to teaching strategies and learning contexts. An additional challenge is to set clear achievement standards that provide comparable results while allowing for different methods of assessment._ (Matters, 2009)

The final section in this volume is a mixture of topics, including a workshop presentation on aspects of multi-modality, two exciting examples of action plans carried out by Summer School participants, and finally a summary of the post-Summer School online environment that was used to support participants on their return home.

By far and away, the most popular element of the Summer School was the work Christopher Walsh did in the multi-modalities workshops. This was evidenced not just by the lively discussions they sparked at the time, but also by the percentage of participants who chose to anchor their follow-up action plans in some form of non-print, ICT associated environment. In this chapter, he maps out a set of step-by-step instructions for dealing with a range of digital literacies in the classroom, including:

- Designing a free website with Google Sites;
- Designing a free message board with Proboards;
- Setting up an EduBlog;
- Linking your EduBlog to your Google website;
- Setting up Wiki at Wikispaces;
- Inviting participants to Wikispaces;
- Linking your WikiSpace to your Google page;
- Recording a podcast;
- Using Microsoft Photostory 3 to design a digital movie;
- Using TeacherTube; and
- Using Windows Movie Maker.
Towards the conclusion of the Leading Change module, Catherine Beavis and Cal Durrant outlined a number of ways that participants could stay connected to one another on completion of the fortnight in Geelong. The organising team believed that it was important for participants to recognise that the contacts they had made during this time could be of immeasurable assistance on their return to their schools during 2008 and beyond. Participants were encouraged to stay connected to both the Summer School team members as well as their newfound colleagues from the break out sessions in the following ways, by:

- Using the SS website;
- Registering for the follow-up Online/Virtual Conference;
- Working on case studies; and
- Preparing action plans.

Participants developed their action plans during the breakout sessions that followed and we have included two of these in Section Four in order to illustrate the types of synergies that were fostered by the Summer School. Kathy Shortland-Jones chose to combine the study of Shakespeare with her senior English class with that of her newly discovered interest in multi-modal text creation. What followed was a presentation of her paper at the ETAWA state conference, then a second presentation at the AATE/ALEA national conference in Adelaide in July, 2008. A version of this chapter appeared in Volume 41, 2008, of the ETAWA journal, Interpretations, and we thank the editorial staff, Jennifer Bailey-Smith and Kelly Klymiuk, for their permission to reproduce it here.

During discussions at the Summer School, Julie Bain, Louise Cullen, Paul Gough and Karen Farrow described how they had been using ICTs and multi-modal texts in their individual classroom practice. What they began to realise was that the integration of multi-modal texts was implicit within their pedagogical practices. These discussions highlighted for them the need for a common language of assessment in order to determine how successful multi-modal texts can be for both teaching and learning. Further, the complexity of multi-modal texts for assessment of learning creates a critical site for teachers and students to ponder the nature of successful and meaningful texts. These four teachers decided to present their experiences at the AATE/ALEA national conference in South Australia, ‘Stories, Places, Spaces’ in July, 2008 in order to share the ways Web 2.0 technologies can be used to create multi-modal texts as evidence of
student learning. The response to the paper was very positive, and we were delighted when they agreed to work the paper into this chapter. It is a fine example of reflective teachers interrogating their own pedagogies.

The final chapter is one that forms a fitting postlude to this volume. Colin Warren was the web master for the Summer School website, the vehicle for delivering and maintaining all post-Summer School aspects of the project. Here he provides a fascinating view from ‘the outside’ on the way English teacher participants engaged with this technology, and an analysis of how successful this aspect of the program was in creating and supporting a community of practice. The two main areas of concern with the website and its functionality were to do with broadband access for participants and a lack of familiarity with the design of the Drupal social software. However, participants generally acknowledged that the website served to support and sustain professional learning, long after the actual Summer School was over. For teachers, being able to develop and maintain connections across state boundaries and educational systems was one of the real positives to come out of Warren’s research. As the Rudd Government’s *Digital Education Revolution* is rolled out around the nation, there is considerable benefit to be had in having evidence based research that demonstrates a practical rather than a mere rhetorical imperative for this type of support for schools and teachers.

**Conclusion**

We began this chapter by examining some of the key ideas that went into the formation of the Summer School for Teachers of English. We also briefly outlined the role of STELLA in forming a scaffold for the program itself. The writers of the STELLA document acknowledge that teachers know their subject; Statement 1.2 confirms that they ‘know the history of their subject and understand the nature of and reasons for curriculum change’ (AATE & ALEA: 2002). Historically, this may not always have been the case. In his commentary on schooling in the United States, Larry Cuban developed his ‘ocean’ metaphor to describe how change and the lack of it appeared to operate in American schools over the previous century:

> In examining how various forces shaped the curriculum and their consequences for classrooms over the last century, I used the metaphor of a hurricane to distinguish between curriculum theory, courses of study, materials and classroom instruction.
Hurricane winds sweep across the sea tossing up twenty-foot waves, a fathom below the surface turbulent waters swirl, while on the ocean floor there is unruffled calm. (Cuban: 1984)

Given the rate of curriculum change in Australia in the past decade, it’s highly likely that readers have seen examples of how systemic curriculum change has been ‘calmed’ by school leaders and senior teachers who have merely gone through the motions of implementing it during the ‘launch’ period. In fact, educational change is rarely easy, always hard to justify, and almost impossible to sustain (Hargreaves and Fink, p. 2003). Of course, Hargreaves and Fink are quick to point out that not everything in educational change is necessarily worth keeping, that only those aspects of teaching and learning that are deep and that foster sophisticated understanding and lifelong learning define the core of sustainable education. Despite its problematic beginnings, we believe that the Australian Government’s Summer School for Teachers of English nurtured just that type of lifelong learning, and that this volume represents part of its ongoing influence. Just as the Summer School itself, we are confident that this book will promote practical and theoretical, political and ideological, philosophical and pedagogical debates about the teaching of English in Australian schools for the benefit of teachers and ultimately for students right across the nation.

Note
1 Despite this success, however, a change in federal government just before the Summer School started meant that it would not be repeated.
References


Howie, M. (2008) STELLA as a compass for leading change, Keynote address to the Australian Government’s Summer School for Teachers of English, January 7, Deakin University, Geelong.


