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TEACHING AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE SURVEY
FINAL REPORT
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Table of Acronyms

AATE	Australian Association of Teachers of English
ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
ADB	Australian Dictionary of Biography
ALEA	Australian Literacy Educators' Association
ALTC	Australian Learning and Teaching Council
APAFT	Australian Public Affairs Full Text
APAIS	Australian Public Affairs Information Service
ASAL	Association for the Study of Australian Literature
ASO	Australian Screen Online
DET	Department of Education and Training, New South Wales
ERA	Excellence in Research for Australia
ESL	English as a Second Language
ETAQ	English Teachers' Association of Queensland
HSC	Higher School Certificate
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
InASA	International Australian Studies Association
JASAL	Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature
MLA	Modern Language Association of America
NCB	National Curriculum Board
NeAT	National eResearch Architecture Taskforce
NESB	Non-English Speaking Background
POD	Print On Demand
SEI	Socio-economic Index
SETIS	The Sydney Electronic Text and Image Service
SOSE	Studies of Society and Environment
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TAL	Teaching Aust. Lit. Resource
TER	Tertiary Entrance Ranking
VCE	Victorian Certificate of Education
YA	Young Adult



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1. Executive Summary

The context of the *Teaching Australian Literature* (TAL) Survey project is the ongoing national debate about education in contemporary Australia, including the teaching of language and literature in our schools and universities, and the development of a national curriculum that includes the study of Australian literature.

This debate has included publicly expressed concern about the fate of Australia's national literary heritage. Rosemary Neill's article, 'Lost for Words,' in the *Weekend Australian* (December 2–3, 2006) discerned a generational change in the teaching of Australian literature in universities and interpreted this as a decline in institutional support for Australian literary studies. Responses to Neill's article included Professor Elizabeth Webby's masterclass for postgraduate students at The University of Sydney, 'The Future of Australian Literature' (2 February, 2007), Associate Professor Peter Kirkpatrick's article, 'The Strange Death of Australian Literature, or a Furphy Exposed' for the Australian Society of Authors' journal *The Australian Author* (April, 2007), Professor Robert Dixon's comments as the then incoming Professor of Australian Literature at The University of Sydney, in 'Dixon the Defender' in the *Sydney Alumni Magazine* (Autumn 2007) and in his keynote address to the February 2007 Association for the Study of Australian Literature (ASAL) mini-conference, excerpted in the *Australian Higher Education Supplement* (28 March, 2007), as 'An Agenda for Our Own Literature' (see also David Brooks, 'Australian Literature: "Death" or a Transformation?' [2010]). In 2007, a Roundtable was convened in Canberra by the Australia Council's Literature Board to discuss the future of Australian literature in education. The Roundtable's communiqué recommended 'a survey of the current level of the teaching of literature in universities, in teacher training courses as well as in other undergraduate programs which should include a specific statement on Australian literature courses and on the staffing profile in Australian literature'.

This debate tended to move away from the actual institutional situation of the teaching of Australian literature in universities and towards a range of more generalised assertions about disciplinary shifts in Australian Literary Studies and the cognate fields of Literary Studies (including theory) and Cultural Studies. It also (necessarily) moved away from the mediatised space of public debate in which Rosemary Neill was writing. Discursive and disciplinary shifts are important elements in the narratives a discipline tells of itself, and the ability of a discipline to tell its own story, even if sometimes in defensive mode, is one of the signs of its vitality and its ability to evolve.

Such narratives include one of the central concerns of the 1987 *Windows onto Worlds* report published by the Committee to Review Australian Studies in Tertiary Education (CRASTE) in promoting students' awareness of the 'culture of work'. Despite the committee's recommendations for a cross-curriculum approach to Australian (s)tudies, Bruce Bennett suggested, in retrospect, that understanding the history of a profession or discipline in Australia 'became an important concept' in the Committee's recommendations for tertiary programs, including English:

An understanding of the history of the subject English in universities enabled us, I suggested, to understand the slow growth and relative lack of prominence of Australian literature in certain universities. More generally, if each profession or discipline could be considered as a window or perspective on the whole history of Australia, lecturers, researchers and students would understand better, and perhaps more critically, the function of value of their field of learning in Australia and in the world at large. (36)

And, as Ken Ruthven has argued, in a chapter in the 1998 *Knowing Ourselves and Others: The Humanities in Australia into the 21st Century* report entitled 'The Future of Disciplines: A Report on Ignorance,' disciplines, like Literary Studies in Australia, need to cultivate self-reflexiveness, because:

It enables them to understand – from situating their own histories in changing institutional topographies – the importance of modifying their agendas in response to different socio-economic circumstances. They also need to produce representations of themselves which will enable them to justify their activities by powerful arguments rather than by evoking nostalgia for an imaginary yesteryear. One way in which a discipline can develop this state of preparedness is by teaching the genealogy of its own formation, so that those who graduate



in it can acquire an informed awareness of exactly which version of it they themselves have encountered, why, and in what ways their educational experience might have been otherwise. (97; see also Robert White, 'The State of English Studies in the 1990s')

This survey returns to the initial context of the recent inflection of this discussion in the specific institutional structures, practices and resourcing of Australian literature teaching and the ways in which a discipline is reflected in, and constituted by, institutional spaces and practices (teaching experience, tertiary and secondary curricula, infrastructure, teaching-research nexus, disciplinary history, etc).

In the rapidly changing and sometimes contentious educational landscape of contemporary Australia it remains important to have reliable and detailed information about how and where Australian literature is being taught, and about the questions and issues that are of immediate and practical concern to tertiary and secondary teachers of English and Australian literature, and to students studying Australian literature at senior secondary level and at university. This TAL Survey is designed to provide such information about the teaching of Australian literature in various learning contexts, in universities and at upper secondary level, in the present and the recent past, nationally and internationally. It is hoped that the results of the Survey will provide an informational base for strategic changes in the teaching of Australian literature and for the development of long-range policies, curricular design, and innovative resources for changing practices of Australian literature teaching. The process, as well as the outcomes of the Survey, is also aimed at fostering the collaboration of teachers in the discipline and learning communities and the sharing of quality teaching practice, across sectors, state boundaries and in international contexts, wherever Australian literature is taught.

The aims of the Teaching Australian Literature Survey project were to:

- gather and disseminate comprehensive educational data on current and recent past teaching of Australian literature;
- enable on-going collaborative communication between disciplinary stakeholders and teaching practitioners across the field of Australian literary studies;
- analyse the needs of the discipline and support a new internationalised paradigm of Australian literature teaching.

Major outcomes of the Teaching Australian Literature Survey project:

1. A *survey* of the current state of the teaching of Australian literary texts in Australian universities and upper-level secondary schools using both qualitative and quantitative means. The Survey included detailed questionnaires targeted to cohorts of Australian tertiary and senior secondary teachers and undergraduate and postgraduate students.
2. The project also surveyed Australian literature teaching activities in university schools and departments around Australia. The purpose of this Survey report is to present as representative as possible a sample of the very diverse range of views and responses on the current state of Australian literature teaching. A further, more detailed analysis of the Survey results will be published in a recognised, peer-reviewed journal in due course. The creation of the *Teaching Aust. Lit. Resource* (<http://teaching.austlit.edu.au>). This resource is a freely available, web accessible database designed to house information about, and to build upon, the teaching activities data collected during the course of the Survey. The Teaching Aust. Lit. Resource enables users to quickly discover details about where and in what context Australian literary texts are taught alongside the types of assessment undertaken and the secondary texts recommended, etc, and providing links to relevant university websites in schools and departments at universities around the country and internationally. The Teaching Aust. Lit. Resource is interoperable with the AustLit database so that biographical, bibliographical and other contextualising information on Australian literary cultures is easily accessible to teachers, students and researchers. Teachers of Australian literary texts are able to submit information about their teaching practice and to participate in the building of the resource.



There has been a very good level of uptake of the TAL resource since its launch in late 2009. See: <http://teaching.austlit.edu.au/>

It is intended that the TAL database will be updated annually through AustLit's ongoing work in the field to ensure that the snapshot of 2009 data can be built upon over time and thereby trace the changes from the perceived low point in the study of Australian literature in the first decade of this century, through the national curriculum debate, the appointment of senior positions in Australian literature at university level, and the maturing of the AustLit database as a recognised national teaching resource.

Highlights of Survey findings:

Survey responses are too complex and diverse to summarise simply. The following points, however, were made consistently across questionnaire responses:

- Australian literature should be studied in all contexts – in relation to local (regional), national and international literatures.
- The teaching-research nexus is imperative to the most effective learning experiences. Students and teachers both identified 'knowledge' and 'passion' as key motivators for student engagement. Tertiary and secondary teachers also identified some commitment to carrying out research on their teaching.
- The growth of Creative Writing in the tertiary sector has contributed to transformative approaches to the study of Australian literature. Engaging with industry (authors, publishers) through guest lectures and writers' festivals was a key priority for many tertiary teacher respondents.
- The inclusion of a diverse selection of Indigenous texts was identified as crucially important in tertiary Australian literature teaching.
- Consistently, respondents to both secondary and tertiary questionnaires suggested that teachers need to engage with 'students' changing patterns of learning'.
- Work commitments and demand for online teaching resources (lecture notes, assessment) were identified as a key change to student needs in the tertiary sector.
- Many tertiary and secondary teachers suggested that longer texts were difficult to teach because of time constraints, variable reading abilities, and student work commitments.
- Senior secondary teachers identified as a priority, the need for autonomy for teachers to select texts and design units around their students' specific needs or with relevance to regional and state needs.
- A need for the better resourcing of Australian literature teaching was identified at both upper secondary and at tertiary levels. An online 'clearing house' of teacher resources and information on Australian literature units was repeatedly recommended in the tertiary and senior secondary teacher responses, while the idea of teaching tools employing new technologies and web-based learning practices was warmly responded to.
- Senior secondary and tertiary teachers consistently identified the 'human networks' existing in professional associations as integral to support and skills development in teaching Australian literature.

Major opportunities resulting from the Survey:

A number of key findings have been made in the preliminary analysis of the results of the Survey and some important opportunities identified. These are simply noted here but they will bear further development when a more comprehensive analysis of the Survey results is undertaken.

There is a strong indication that the dialogue between secondary and tertiary teachers, especially as it relates to the scholarship of teaching, could be usefully expanded to the benefit of both sectors.

Related to this is a perceived need, especially in the secondary teachers' cohort, for expanded professional development opportunities specific to teaching Australian literature, and for there to be an accessible point of information about courses and other professional development opportunities relating to teaching practice.



The digitisation of textual resources was a repeated theme in the Survey findings. There is a strong perception that greater online availability of both primary and secondary texts would enhance their teaching practice as it relates to Australian literature.

The place, value and consistency of the representation of Indigenous texts in the curriculum at both secondary and tertiary levels was identified as needing analysis.

The TAL Survey project team has identified a further stage of the project as the development of tools and services for teachers of Australian literature to be delivered online through the Teaching Aust. Lit. and AustLit portals. The results of the Survey provide evidence that these developments would be welcomed by the teaching communities at both secondary and tertiary levels.



2. Approach and Methodology

2.1 Approach

The approach of the Survey project was informed by initial research and surveying conducted by the Association for the Study of Australian Literature (ASAL) in 2006. As a pilot exercise, this Survey yielded some limited results and was useful in identifying the specific methodological, scoping and resourcing aims at the core of this project's design.

Because of the complex educational and cultural setting in which Australian literature teaching occurs, the decision was made to adopt a multivalent approach to survey research methods, one that was receptive to multiple applications, interpretations and values. A multivalent approach to research allowed us to move between and to cross-reference different orders of information, from the quantitative and qualitative responses in the Survey questionnaires, to the web-based research on tertiary Australian literature units for the Teaching Aust. Lit resource. An imperative to compare and contrast the experiences of tertiary and secondary teachers and students generated a complex set of questionnaires which was informed by extensive research in curriculum documents and scholarly work on tertiary and secondary teaching. Consultation with the tertiary and secondary community in the form of a forum at the ASAL conference in 2008 and an online discussion space on the Teaching Aust. Lit. website also contributed to this research. This multivalent approach was also identified as the most appropriate approach for the project because of the need to reflect the many cross-sectoral issues in Australian literature teaching and to take a long term perspective. The creation of the Teaching Aust. Lit. Resource, based on the work of this first stage of the Survey project, ensures that the project outcomes will have value for the community now and in the future.

The report presents clear quantitative analysis of the Survey data and it also contrasts this with the free-text responses of respondents to questions. An important aspect of this report is that it represents the voices of teachers and students of Australian literature in their diversity and difference. The complexity and contradictions of the experience of teaching and studying literature are frequently elided in curricula documents and course materials. The specificity and richness of student evaluation of units and course experience, for example, is also frequently inaccessible to discussions of broader educational and curricular issues and questions. The selected free-text sections of this report represent the eclectic and individual voices of members of the learning and disciplinary community it surveys and is designed to prompt response and debate.

2.2 Project Management

In the first months (March–May 2008) the scope and intent of the project were announced on sites of disciplinary communication such as the AustLit newsletter and the Association for the Study of Australian Literature (ASAL) email list.

Identified stakeholders were contacted to confirm their interest in the Survey and the outcomes they hoped to see from the Survey. Stakeholders included: ASAL, the Australian Society of Authors (ASA), the Australian Association for the Teaching of English (AATE), the National Library of Australia (NLA), the journals *Australian Literary Studies* (ALS) and *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature* (JASAL), and the International Australian Studies Association (InASA).

Because the Project Directors and the Project Manager were geographically distributed across three, and then, by the end of the project, four Australian states a secure, collaborative site on Google.Docs was used to allow the posting, editing and viewing of documents, spreadsheets and presentations. The Project Manager posted a Project Timeline and Critical Dates file on this site.

The Project Manager established connections with the relevant Ethics Committees and personnel at the University of Tasmania, The University of Queensland and the University of South Australia for the regular and on-going administration of the substantial number of Ethics Approvals generated by the project.

The Directors and the Manager began the three-way teleconferences, co-ordinated from the University of Tasmania, that were usually held on a weekly basis throughout the course of the project. These meetings were an essential part of the project work, allowing team members to discuss, plan and evaluate all aspects of the project's progress.



A forum about the project was held at the ASAL annual conference (June 30, 2008) at the University of Wollongong at which the Project Directors and the Project Manager were able to meet and discuss the progress of the Survey. This forum also allowed the project team to respond to the concerns, some of them unexpected, of the discipline community in the design of the questionnaires and the teaching experience database.

Because the TAL Survey project has the fundamental aim of integration with AustLit activities and developments, in July 2008, Dr Roger Osborne, Project Manager of the Aus-e-Lit project at The University of Queensland, began to engage with the TAL Survey team to discuss opportunities for the TAL Survey project to benefit from the outcomes of the Aus-e-Lit project, a National eResearch Architecture Taskforce funded project, which is a collaboration between AustLit and UQ's School of ITEE to develop tools and services for the Australian literature research communities. (See section 6 below about the envisaged second stage of this project.)

2.3 Questionnaires

From mid-2008 the project team began to design and develop questionnaires for the following groups of people actively engaged in the teaching and study of Australian literature:

- Senior secondary teachers of Australian literature
- 1st-year undergraduate students of Australian literature
- 2nd, 3rd and 4th year undergraduate students of Australian literature
- Teachers and co-ordinators of university level Australian literature study
- Overseas tertiary teachers of Australian literature

These questionnaires were developed against a list of objectives and in consultation with recognised experts in the methodology of surveying (Dr Bruce Tranter and Dr Maggie Walter, School of Sociology and Social Work at the University of Tasmania). The questionnaires were made available to participants online, through the TAL website, and hardcopies were sent to colleagues for distribution to students, or to be filled in by teachers. These questionnaires were designed to elicit in-depth, personally inflected and representative information about the teaching and studying of Australian literature rather than to be statistically comprehensive of the sector, therefore offering a snapshot of teaching experiences.

Senior secondary teachers of Australian literature questionnaire

This was the most challenging of the questionnaires produced by the TAL Survey. The questionnaire was developed by Alice Healy in consultation with stakeholder representatives, Mark Howie, President of the Association for Australian Teachers of English (AATE), and Dr Larissa McLean Davies, a Language and Literacy Education Lecturer in Secondary Teaching at The University of Melbourne. The development of this questionnaire also entailed research in the various English, ESL and SOSE curriculum documents in each state and some review of the media coverage about the English strand of the ACARA National Curriculum. As the majority of the project's key stakeholders are members of the AATE and the state English teachers' associations affiliated with it, it was important to respond to the debates around the National Curriculum published in media releases and on association websites.

Undergraduate questionnaires

The first two questionnaires for undergraduates were developed late in 2008. The questionnaires were released at the end of October and the deadline for submissions was the 20th December 2008. At the close of submissions, we were concerned that we had not received enough responses to the questionnaires to build a general picture of the experience of undergraduate students studying Australian literature. We believe that this was partly due to the release of the questionnaires unavoidably coinciding with the end-of-year and assessment period, which also varied between universities. Accordingly, the revised and updated undergraduate questionnaires were re-released in 2009, towards the end of semester one. We also contacted colleagues then teaching undergraduate courses to assist with their dissemination and to encourage participation.



Teachers and co-ordinators of university level Australian literature study questionnaire

This questionnaire was finalised and released in early April 2009, and produced an enthusiastic response from academics across Australia. To aid the distribution of questionnaires and to encourage a high response rate, the project Directors personally contacted colleagues around the country to invite them to participate.

Overseas academics' and tertiary teachers' questionnaire

This questionnaire was based on the questionnaire for Teachers and Co-ordinators of University Level Australian Literature Study. While this questionnaire shares a common structure and core questions with the Australian questionnaire, some questions were re-worded, deleted or new questions added to ensure the relevancy of questions to the overseas teaching experience. (As a very limited response was received, no analysis of this sector was undertaken.)

Definition of 'Australian literature'

An important issue that arose in the development of the questionnaires for tertiary teachers and for secondary teachers concerned our project's definition of Australian literature. As both of these terms – 'Australian' and 'literature' – have become contested and politicised, especially in the secondary education sector and in the light of the planning for the National Curriculum, we needed to address the question of defining Australian literature for the Survey, without excluding, for example, the comparative importance of teaching film alongside novels, etc. After considerable discussion, the following definition was devised to guide the Survey:

Australian literature/literary texts: the definition of 'Australian' and 'literature' shifts according to current debates and changing reading, teaching and research patterns. The purpose of this survey is not to provide an exclusive definition of these terms but to discover how the study of 'Australian literature' is understood by teachers and others working in the field. For the purposes of the survey, the definition includes Indigenous artistic expression, life-writing, screen writing, novels, plays, short stories, poems, essays, film etc., as well as works of literary criticism as they are included in tertiary-level teaching.

Given the non-prescriptive approach of the project, teachers were provided with the further opportunity to comment on this definition. However, minimal responses were given.

2.4 Results of questionnaires

The results of the questionnaires were collated and analysed using the quantitative survey analysis capabilities of the Drupal platform. Some responses were received only in hard copy and those responses were entered manually by the Project Manager.

Qualitative responses have been reviewed manually but invite further analysis. Representative (selected) comments from the free text fields of the questionnaires are included in section 3 below as part of the summarising of the results. These comments present the direct and personal responses of teachers and students of Australian literature and are an important aspect of the multivalent methodology of this Survey.

2.5 The Teaching Aust. Lit. Resource website (<http://teaching.austlit.edu.au>)

The resource website was designed and implemented in May 2008 by Anna Gerber, Senior Web Developer with the AustLit project. The website was created using the open source content management platform, Drupal, which has the capability of housing and analysing questionnaire forms, as well as providing blogs, online forums and general information exchange about the Project's progress.

In mid-2008 the Project Manager visited The University of Queensland to learn further about the management, administration and maintenance of the Teaching Aust. Lit. Resource website and to workshop the design and development of the resource site with UQ IT and information management experts.



The website, housed on the AustLit server and hosted at and administered from The University of Queensland, was established to facilitate communication with stakeholders and others on the project’s progress, to encourage feedback from discipline community members and to receive interactive responses to survey questionnaires, blogs and forums. The Teaching Aust. Lit. interface design is based on the familiar AustLit visual identity. The distinctive logo and general design has been used on the print versions of the questionnaires and on all communication relating to the TAL Survey project. The Teaching Aust. Lit. website was used to house all five of the TAL Survey questionnaires plus a general feedback and brief questionnaire during the course of the project.

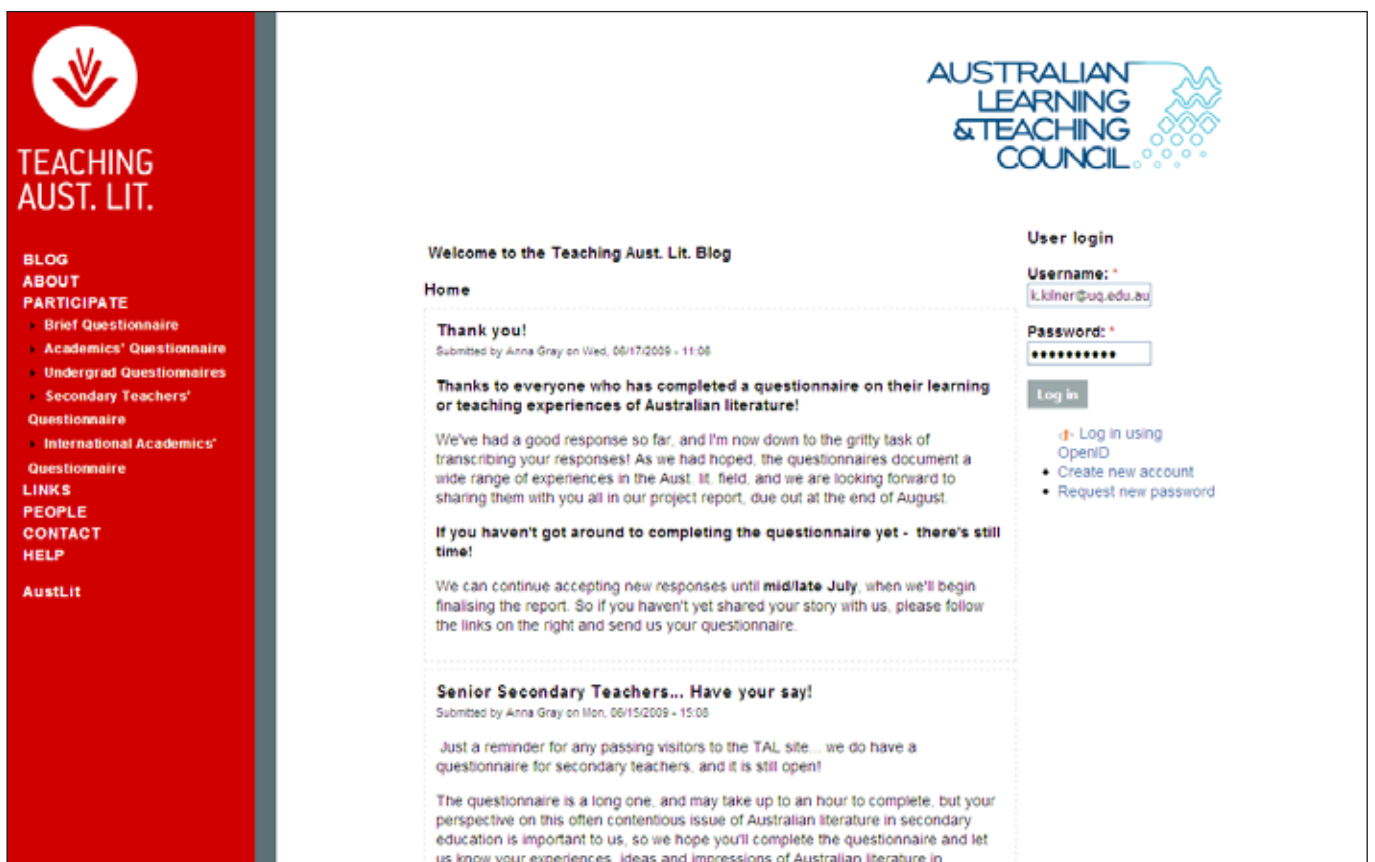


Figure 1: Home page of original Teaching Aust. Lit. website

The Teaching Aust. Lit. forum

In the early phase of the project a multi-topic online forum was established on the TAL website to encourage communication between teachers of Australian literature around Australia and internationally. Although the forum did attract some positive attention and participation from community members, it did not receive enough attention to be sustainable, and was removed from the public site early in 2009 and archived. The forum was replaced with a ‘News’ blog on the TAL homepage to keep users updated with progress about the TAL Survey.

The project team discussed the relatively low uptake of the forum on a number of occasions and attempted to energise the forum through their own participation. Considerations for its lack of success were: academic workload; unfamiliarity with online discussion activities; a reluctance to participate in the particular topics defined; or, perhaps, a reluctance of discussants to identify themselves in what was, at the time, a fairly tense environment. The low uptake may also have been simply a result of establishing the forum too early in the course of the project – before the Survey results and the Teaching Aust. Lit. Resource were available.



Now that the project is more mature and the Teaching Aust. Lit. Resource is established as a space for sharing information and collaboratively building content we plan to investigate methods to effectively promote discussion amongst all those involved in the field of Australian literature or to employ forum technologies in different ways.

2.6 The Teaching Aust. Lit. Resource (<http://teaching.austlit.edu.au>)

Content for the Teaching Aust. Lit. Resource – a purpose-built open access database for the storage of data relating to the teaching of Australian literary texts at Australian and international universities – was gathered simultaneously with the questionnaires. From the beginning of the project, the Project Manager began collating information about current Australian literature teaching from the websites of tertiary institutions in Australia and recording the data in spreadsheets. Information collected included descriptive unit outlines, text lists (where available), assessment details, and other relevant teaching information to build a profile of the tertiary teaching contexts of Australian literary texts.

In consultation with the TAL team, IT Consultant Kent Fitch (Project Computing, Canberra) who has had a long association with the AustLit resource, designed a relational database to store, organise and deliver information about the teaching of Australian literary texts. To supplement the teaching data, this database was designed to capture additional bibliographical, biographical and other information on listed texts and authors from the AustLit database. The Teaching Aust. Lit. Resource is also designed to be sustainable and participatory, to allow teachers and course co-ordinators to update and enter new information about units or courses they teach or co-ordinate, while preserving earlier entries for archival/research purposes.

Once the Teaching Aust. Lit. Resource was functional, course, unit and teaching information from the original spreadsheets was entered into the database, and a new round of data collection was undertaken by the Project Manager and research assistants employed on a short term basis in mid 2009.

The appointment of a new AustLit Web Developer in mid 2009, Jonathan Hadwen, whose time has been diverted to the TAL project, meant that the public interface for the Teaching Aust. Lit. Resource could be completed. The Teaching Aust. Lit. Resource makes available the teaching activities data collected in multiple ways: for example, it is possible to identify the most popular texts and authors in a given year, to see how many Australian literary texts are taught at specific universities and to browse and search for texts taught in specific contexts, whether that is in literary studies, film studies, Indigenous cultural studies, gender studies, journalism or in other contextual or thematically based units. At the click of a mouse, a list of authors and texts taught is displayed, units of study described and categories of teaching defined.

A real-world, use-case scenario for the Teaching Aust. Lit. Resource has already arisen involving an publisher interested in digitising and republishing collections of early Australian literature. The publisher is interested in using the TAL Resource to identify the types of texts being taught in Australian universities and schools in order to select related texts from the range of out-of-print works and make them available for teaching. The TAL Resource can be usefully employed for this sort of purpose.

Underpinning the approach to the construction of the Teaching Aust. Lit. Resource was a desire to enable access to the rich information within the AustLit database and website in ways that would be specific to the teaching and learning experience. Thus, the TAL Resource is designed to enable a seamless transition between information held in the two databases and to be able to build contextual relationships between the content in both databases. This will expand the usefulness of AustLit to teaching communities at both tertiary and secondary levels and, it is hoped, also facilitate student use in the important transition years between secondary and tertiary studies.

Teaching Aust. Lit. home page. Random authors and courses are displayed on refresh.



Home - About - Search - Help - Database Stats - Popular Pages - Contact - Help Us Search

WELCOME TO THE TEACHING AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE RESOURCE

Are you teaching Australian texts in 2010? Help us update the information about your teaching activities in 2010.

The **Teaching Aust. Lit. Resource** is an AustLit affiliated project designed to reveal how and where Australian literary and narrative texts are being taught in universities around Australia and internationally.

Search the **TAL Resource** to discover information about how, and in what context, particular texts are being taught. Search for authors, titles, universities, themes, units or courses.

Read more about the project and how you might use the TAL resource.

Search this site or **explore the statistics** around the teaching of Australian literary texts in 2009.


EXAMPLE CONTENT

Beveridge, Judith

Born: 3 Aug 1956 London, England


Judith Beveridge was born in London, England in 1956 and migrated with her family to Australia in 1960, attending school in the western suburbs of Sydney. She studied communications at the University of Technology, Sydney, and has worked at part-time jobs as a research officer, library assistant, teacher and in the field of bush regeneration. In order to allow herself time to write.

Beveridge has received fellowships from the Australia Council to assist in her poetry writing and her work has




By permission of the NLA


Australian Theatre History [THEA317]
University of New England




A study of trends in Australian theatre over two centuries and the influences on performance styles in Australian theatre. If studied in internal mode there are on average one hour of lectures and two hours of workshops/rehearsals per week.

Texts:

White, Patrick **A Cheery Soul** 1962 **DRAMA** 

Prichard, Katharine Susannah **Brumby Innes : A Play in Three Acts** 1927 **DRAMA** 

Williamson, David **Don's Party** 1971 **DRAMA** 


Lawler, Ray **Summer of the Seventeenth Doll** 1955 **DRAMA** 

Figure 2: Home page of the Teaching Aust. Lit. Resource. Example content changes automatically

Home - About - Search - Help - Database Stats - Popular Pages - Contact - Help Us Search

MOST TAUGHT AUTHORS/EDITORS











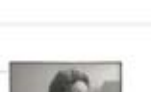





30 Units	Grenville, Kate	
30 Units	White, Patrick	
28 Units	Carey, Peter	
28 Units	Makouf, David	
20 Units	Winton, Tim	
18 Units	Porter, Dorothy	
18 Units	Tsiolkas, Christos	
15 Units	Gamer, Helen	
15 Units	Scott, Kim	
14 Units	Franklin, Miles	
14 Units	Wright, Alexis	
12 Units	Davis, Jack	
12 Units	Jones, Gail	
11 Units	McGahan, Andrew	
11 Units	Prichard, Katharine Susannah	
11 Units	Stead, Christina	

Figure 3: Authors appearing most often on courses teaching Australian literary texts



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Search

TEXTS APPEARING ON THE MOST READING LISTS

21 Units	Grenville, Kate	The Secret River	2005	NOVEL
12 Units	Franklin, Miles	My Brilliant Career	1901	NOVEL
12 Units	Malouf, David	Remembering Babylon	1993	NOVEL
12 Units	Carey, Peter	True History of the Kelly Gang	2000	NOVEL
11 Units	Porter, Dorothy	The Monkey's Mask	1994	NOVEL
10 Units	Broome, Richard	Aboriginal Australians : Black Response to White Dominance 1788-1980	1982	
10 Units	Tsiolkas, Christos	Loaded	1995	NOVEL
10 Units	Lawler, Ray	Summer of the Seventeenth Doll	1955	DRAAMA
9 Units	Garner, Helen	Joe Cinque's Consolation	2004	PROSE
9 Units	Morgan, Sally	My Place	1987	AUTOBIOGRAPHY
8 Units	Wright, Alexis	Carpentaria	2006	NOVEL
8 Units	Prichard, Katharine Susannah	Coonardoo : The Well in the Shadow	1928	NOVEL
8 Units	Givynne, Philip	Deadly, Unna?	1998	NOVEL
8 Units	Garimara, Doris Pilkington	Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence	1996	BIOGRAPHY
8 Units	Winch, Tara June	Swallow the Air	2003	SHORT STORY
8 Units	Scott, Kim	True Country	1993	NOVEL
7 Units	Scott, Kim	Benang : From the Heart	1999	NOVEL
7 Units	White, Patrick	The Aunt's Story	1948	NOVEL
6 Units	Wright, Alexis	Plains of Promise	1997	NOVEL
6 Units	Turner, Ethel	Seven Little Australians	1894	CHILDREN'S FICTION

Figure 4: Most frequently represented texts

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Search

THE SECRET RIVER

Authors:
GRENVILLE, KATE

First Published:
2005

Units teaching this Text: 21

Categories:
Topics: Aboriginal massacres, murders, poisonings, Aboriginal-White conflict, Colonial life, Convicts, Early settlement of Australia, Hardship & deprivation, Landscape & identity, Longing, River boats
Text Setting: Ca.1800 - 1820, England, Hawkesbury area, London, New South Wales
Genres: Historical fiction

NOVEL

Units:
Australian National University
Contemporary Australian Writing 2009 [ENGL2011]
Bond University
Major Australian Writing 2009 [AUST11-100]
Edith Cowan University

Other texts found on the same reading lists

** the larger the font the more often these texts are found on the same reading lists*

Jolley, Elizabeth An
Accommodating Spouse
1999

Jolley, Elizabeth An
Innocent Gentleman
2001

Malouf, David
Antipodes : Stories
1985

Luhmann, Baz
Beattie, Stuart
Harwood, Ronald
Flanagan, Richard
Australia
2008

**Scott, Kim
Benang :
From the
Heart
1999**

Castro, Brian
Birds of Passage
1983

Figure 5: An individual text entry showing units it is taught in and other texts (based on frequency) with which it is taught. The larger the font in the right hand panel, the greater the frequency these texts appear together on a unit.





3. Questionnaires: Summary Findings

This section is an introduction to the key findings and representative opinions derived from respondents to the questionnaires. For the purposes of this report we have collated and compressed the responses to demonstrate the rich material that has become available to us through the TAL Survey project. This data invites a more extensive analysis and the TAL team is working on an article to be submitted for publication in which a full analysis and discussion of the project and its outcomes will be presented.

The report presents clear quantitative analysis of the Survey data and it complements this with the free-text responses to questions. An important aspect of this report is that it represents the voices of teachers and students of Australian literature in their diversity and difference. The complexity and contradictions of the experience of teaching and studying literature are frequently elided in curricula documents and course materials. The specificity and richness of student evaluation of units and course experience, for example, is also frequently inaccessible to discussions of broader educational and curricular issues and questions. The selected free-text sections of this report represent the eclectic and individual voices of members of the learning and disciplinary community it surveys and is aimed at prompting response and debate.

This section is structured to relate, firstly, the information about respondents and then to provide considerable insights into the qualitative information also elicited. Graphs and bar charts are used throughout the section to elucidate the data.

The questionnaires were designed to enhance existing knowledge about the teaching of Australian literature by eliciting information from members of the Australian literature teaching and discipline community, to record teachers' and students' impressions and experiences of tertiary level Australian literature teaching and study. We sought responses to a series of highly detailed questionnaires from students at first year and at second or upper levels of tertiary study, secondary teachers and tertiary teachers. The essential data is reported on here and will be further analysed and expanded upon in a forthcoming article.

In brief, the Survey determined that the assumption about there being a worrying decline in the teaching of Australian literature over the recent past is not strongly reflected in the respondents' answers. Certainly, a change in the way Australian literature is taught was identified but a radical decline was not. Respondents suggested that a shift in disciplinary contexts, in tertiary and secondary environments and in students' learning needs necessitated this change in Australian literature teaching. For example, tertiary teachers registered strongly their sense that students' work responsibilities seriously detracted from their ability to study. The availability of texts for teaching was of greater concern to secondary teachers than tertiary teachers. The increased digitisation of literature and critical material and an 'online clearing house' for texts, resources, bibliographic and teacher material was recommended consistently by both secondary and tertiary teachers.

The small sample group of senior secondary teachers was generally supportive of a national curriculum as long as their freedom to choose texts to design units to suit students' needs and local contexts was not limited. General consensus on the compulsory study of Australian literature in separate units was that it limits students' engagement in Australian literature in a diverse range of contexts. Professional development opportunities for secondary teachers were identified as an important way for teachers, teachers' associations and academics to collaborate.

Responses from students reflected sophisticated attitudes to the importance of Australian literary studies and raised the issue of support for the discipline, culture and publishing industry. This was consistent with assertions from some tertiary teachers that industry and publishing need to be at the centre of the study of Australian literature. Students' responses to questions about the interest factor of Australian literature demonstrated that most found the texts they have studied interesting, relevant, and well-written; the majority of higher level students were adamant that it was not 'boring'. First year undergraduate students consistently asserted how their first year studies changed their general understanding of Australian literature, from the 'bush' stereotype to acknowledging the richness and diversity of contemporary Australian literature. Students also identified the benefits of learning from tertiary teachers whose research interests were incorporated in their teaching practice.



3.1 Quantitative analysis

This section provides quantitative data from questionnaires directed to:

1. Senior Secondary School Teachers;
2. Undergraduate Students at first year and at higher levels;
3. Tertiary Teachers of Australian literature.

- **Senior secondary teachers of Australian literature questionnaire**

This questionnaire comprised the following parts:

Part 1: Australian literature and its resources

Part 2: Teaching methods and teaching contexts

Part 3: Student responses

Part 4: Educational policy and how it effects teaching

Part 5: Who teaches Australian literature in senior secondary contexts?

A total of 25 senior secondary teachers responded to the TAL questionnaire. All of the respondents were specialist English teachers, and some respondents also specialised in History (two respondents), ESL (one respondent) and Music (one respondent). Eighteen respondents (72%) had been teaching for more than 15 years, four respondents (16%) had been teaching for 5–10 years, and three respondents (14%) were early-career teachers who had been teaching for less than five years. While this sample is too small to be representative of the senior secondary sector in its entirety, the detailed answers given by respondents are useful in identifying issues and experiences in teaching Australian literature in secondary schools.

The senior secondary teachers who responded to this questionnaire were teaching at schools in WA (44%), QLD (32%), NSW (16%), and SA (8%) at the time of the TAL project.

Factors influencing text selection

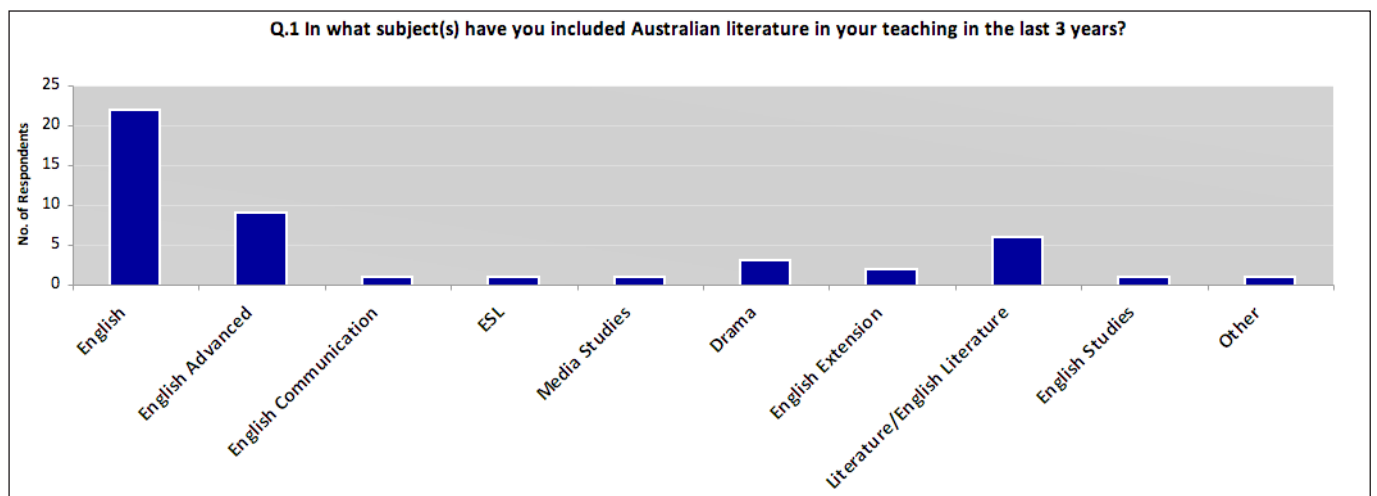


Figure 6: Subjects that included Australian literary texts

In the last three years, 22 respondents (88%) had included Australian literary texts in Senior Secondary English subjects. Eight respondents (32%) had taught Australian literature in Advanced English (in WA, NSW and QLD)



and five (20%) in Literature/English Literature subjects (one English Extension (literature) in NSW; and four English Literature in WA). Respondents also taught Australian literature in English Communication, ESL, Media Studies, Drama, and English Studies subjects.

The senior secondary teachers surveyed strongly indicated that prior study of Australian literary texts did not influence their selection of texts for teaching. In response to a question about their own studies of Australian literature, 15 questionnaire participants indicated that they had studied Australian literature at secondary level. Thirteen had studied Australian literature at 1st-year university level, and 13 at 2nd- and 3rd-year levels. Seven respondents had studied Australian literature at 4th-year undergraduate level, and three at Honours level. Seven respondents had studied Australian literature as part of postgraduate coursework study, one at Teachers College, and two had not formally studied Australian literature. Twelve respondents had also studied Australian literary texts in primary school.

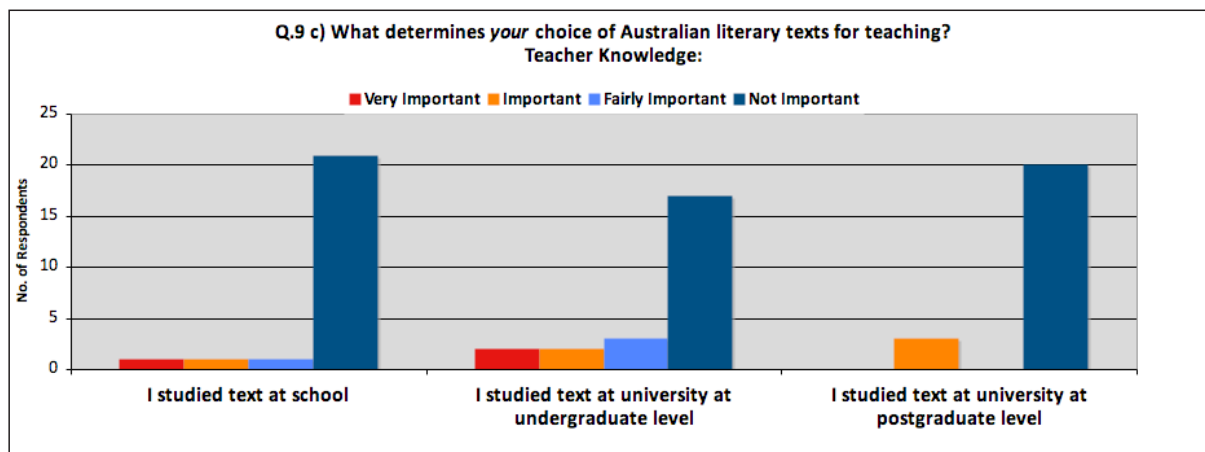


Figure 7: Text selection influences

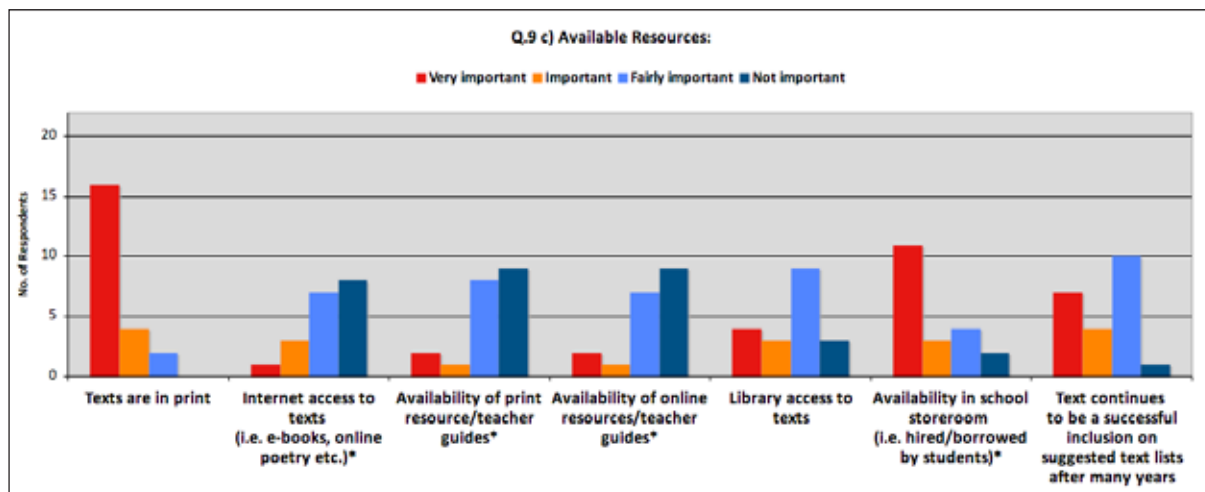


Figure 8: Influences of availability of resources

Issues of availability of Australian texts in print (20 responses indicating important/very important) and availability of texts within the school storeroom (14 responses important/very important) were identified as important to teachers when selecting texts for teaching, as were a text's aesthetic value (20 responses of important/very important) and qualities of language use (22 responses important/very important). Texts exploring questions of identity (18 responses of important/very important) and representing cultural diversity (19 important/very important) were also considered very valuable for teaching at secondary level.

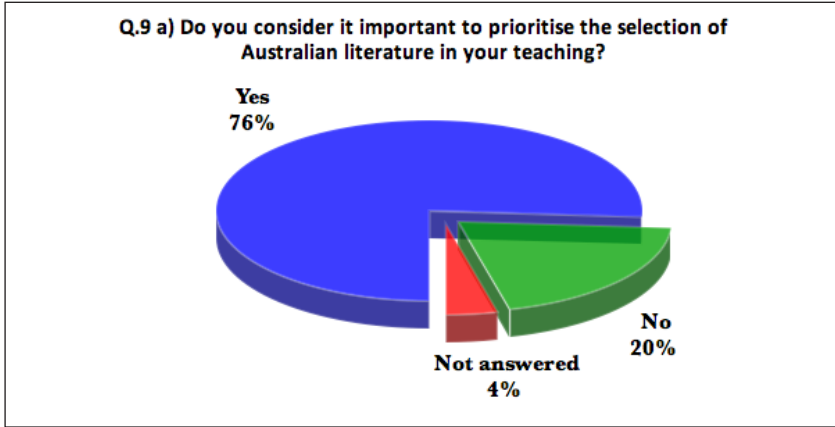


Figure 9: Is Australian literature a priority?

The majority (19 of the 25 respondents) considered it important to prioritise the selection of Australian literature in their teaching, while five respondents did not consider it important.

• Undergraduate questionnaires

This questionnaire comprised the following parts:

- Part 1: Texts read and student experiences of studying Australian literature in years 11 and 12.
- Part 2: Experiences of studying Australian literature as a 1st-year undergraduate student.
- Part 3: How the TAL Survey project might be able to support students of Australian literature.
- Part 4: Who is currently studying Australian literature?

Thirty-eight 1st-year students and 50 2nd/3rd and 4th/Honours year students responded to the TAL questionnaires between November 2008 and July 2009.

Of the respondents to the 2nd/3rd/4th/Honours Year questionnaire, seven were studying at 2nd year level, 24 at 3rd year level, 18 at 4th-year/Honours level and one student specified that they were in the 6th/final year of a combined degree.

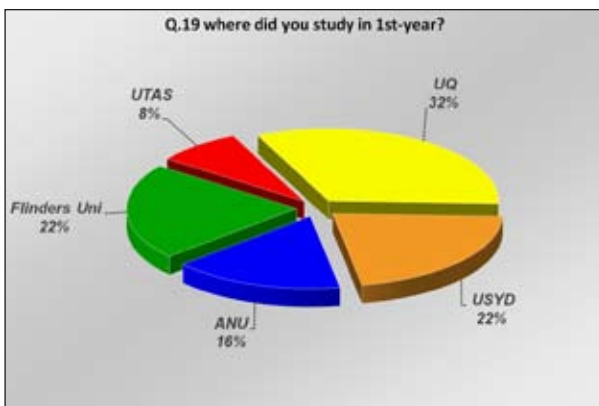


Figure 10: 1st-year distribution by state

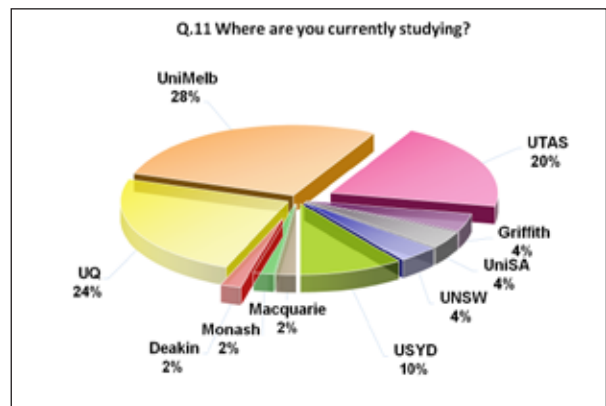


Figure 11: 2nd/3rd/4th/Honours year distribution by state

Respondents came from tertiary institutions across Australia with the majority of 1st-years from The University of Queensland (12 respondents), The University of Sydney (eight respondents), and Flinders University (eight respondents).



Most of the 2nd/3rd/4th/Honours year students came from The University of Melbourne (14 respondents), The University of Queensland (12 respondents) and the University of Tasmania (10 respondents).

Thirty-five 1st-year respondents (92%) were full-time students in 1st-year; 2 were part-time. Amongst the 2nd/3rd/4th year respondents, 41 were full-time (82%) and 9 part-time.

1st-year respondents

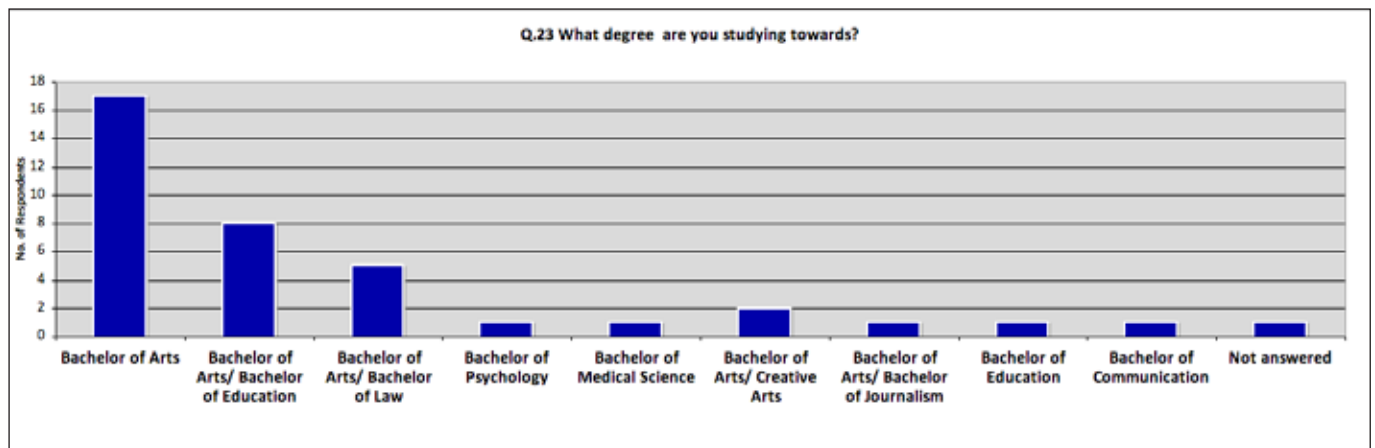


Figure 12: Degrees being studied

Forty-four percent of 1st-year students surveyed were undertaking a Bachelor of Arts, 20% a combined Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Education and 13% a Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Law.

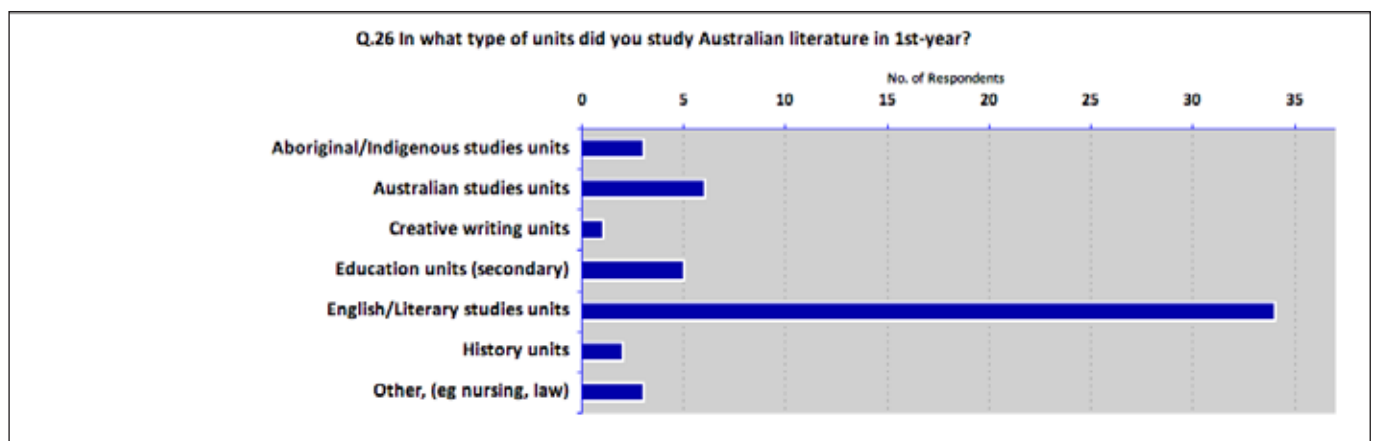


Figure 13: Unit types containing Australian literary texts

Twenty-five 1st-year students were studying towards a major in English/Literary Studies. Three undertook studies in Australian Studies and 4 in Creative Writing and 4 in Education while 6 respondents were majoring in History.

Thirty students (78.9%) specified that they had studied units that focused specifically on Australian literature in first year. Thirty-four respondents (89.4%) had studied Australian literature in English/Literary Studies units, five in Secondary Education units, six in Australian Studies and three in Aboriginal/Indigenous Studies units. One 1st-year student had also studied an Australian text in a Legal Studies unit, and one in Sociology.

Thirty-one respondents (81.6%) had studied more than four complete Australian literary texts during their first year of tertiary study, while eight respondents reported studying more than 10 complete Australian literary texts.



All of the respondents had studied Australian literature at senior secondary level. Thirty-five respondents (70%) of 2nd/3rd/4th/Honours year students had studied Australian literature at senior secondary school. Twenty-eight percent had not studied Australian literature before tertiary level.

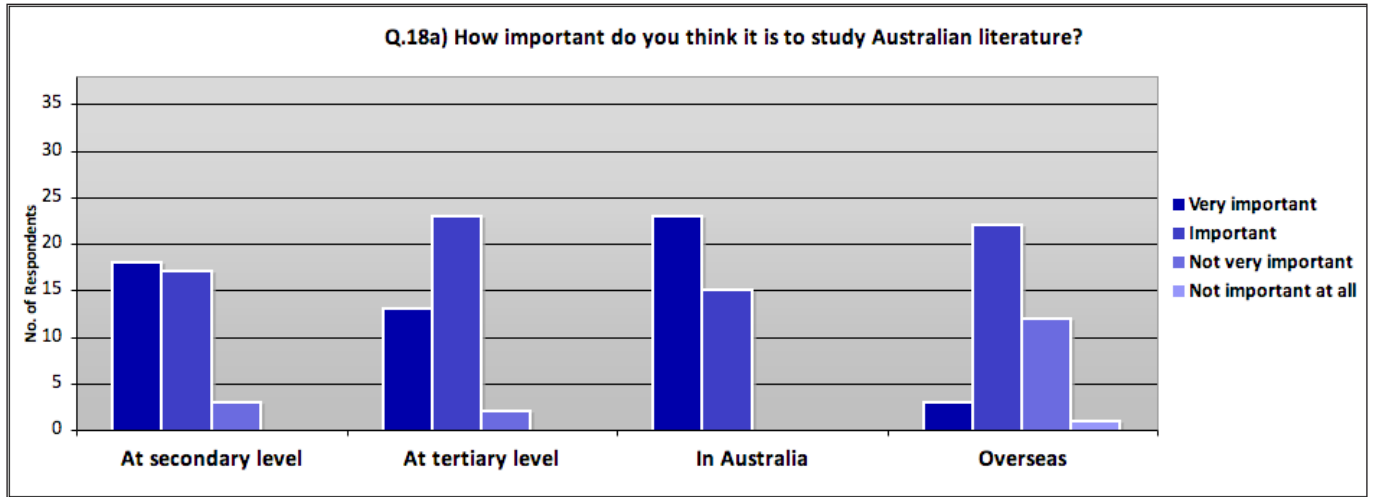


Figure 14: Importance of studying Australian literature

Thirty 1st-year students (86%) responded that they had not found Australian literature at 1st-year tertiary level boring, 12 students also responded that Australian literature study at secondary level was not boring, while only four responded that it was. (22 respondents did not answer this question). Also see section titled ‘Student experiences’ below.

The 1st-year students surveyed strongly indicated that it was important/very important for Australian literary texts to be studied at *secondary level*, *tertiary level*, and in *Australia*, but it was not considered as important for Australian literature to be studied *overseas*.

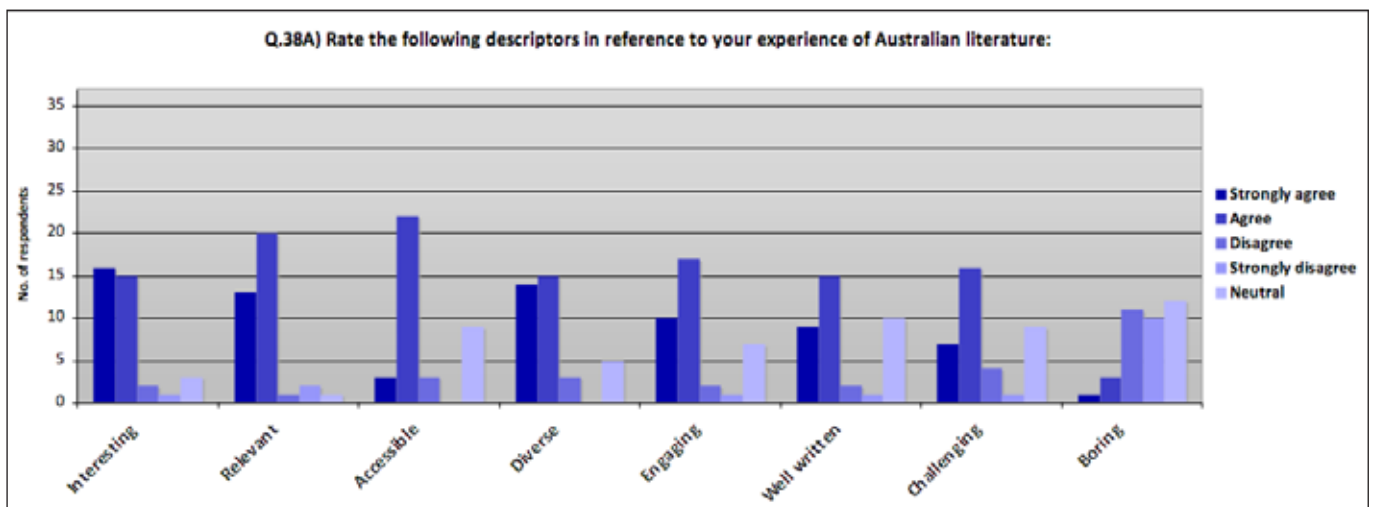


Figure 15: Student experience of studying Australian literature

First-year students also strongly indicated that they had found Australian literature to be *interesting*, *relevant*, and *diverse*, while most found it accessible and not boring.

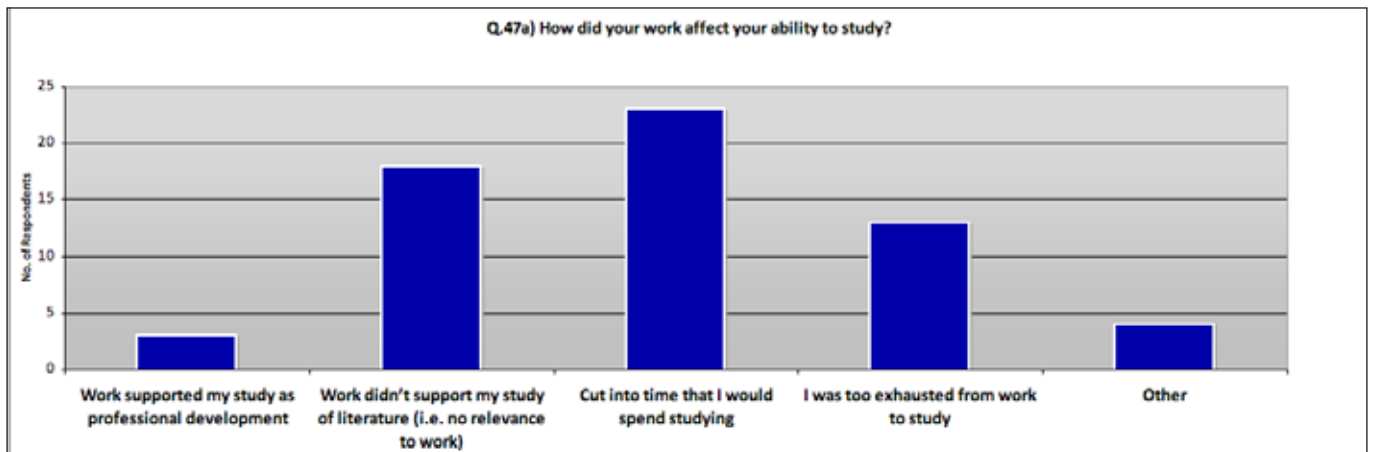


Figure 16: Impact of paid work on students' experience of studying

Seventy-four percent of 1st-year respondents had worked in paid employment during their first year of tertiary study, and 50% found that paid employment had sometimes detracted from their ability to study, while five respondents found that paid work hours detracted often/very often from their ability to study.

2nd/3rd/4th/Honours Year respondents

Forty-six 2nd/3rd/4th/Honours year respondents (92%) were Australian students, and four were international students. Thirty-seven respondents (74%) were female and 12 male. The majority of the 2nd/3rd/4th/Honours year students (34 respondents) were aged between 20–25 years.

Forty-one 2nd/3rd/4th/Honours year students (82%) were undertaking a Bachelor of Arts; four a combined Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Education; one a Bachelor of Arts/Diploma of Education; two respondents a Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Law; one a Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Business; and one respondent a Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Science. Three students specified that they were undertaking a Bachelor of Arts with Honours degree. Forty-three 2nd/3rd/4th year students (86%) were studying towards a major in English/Literary Studies, nine students were majoring in History and five in Australian Studies.

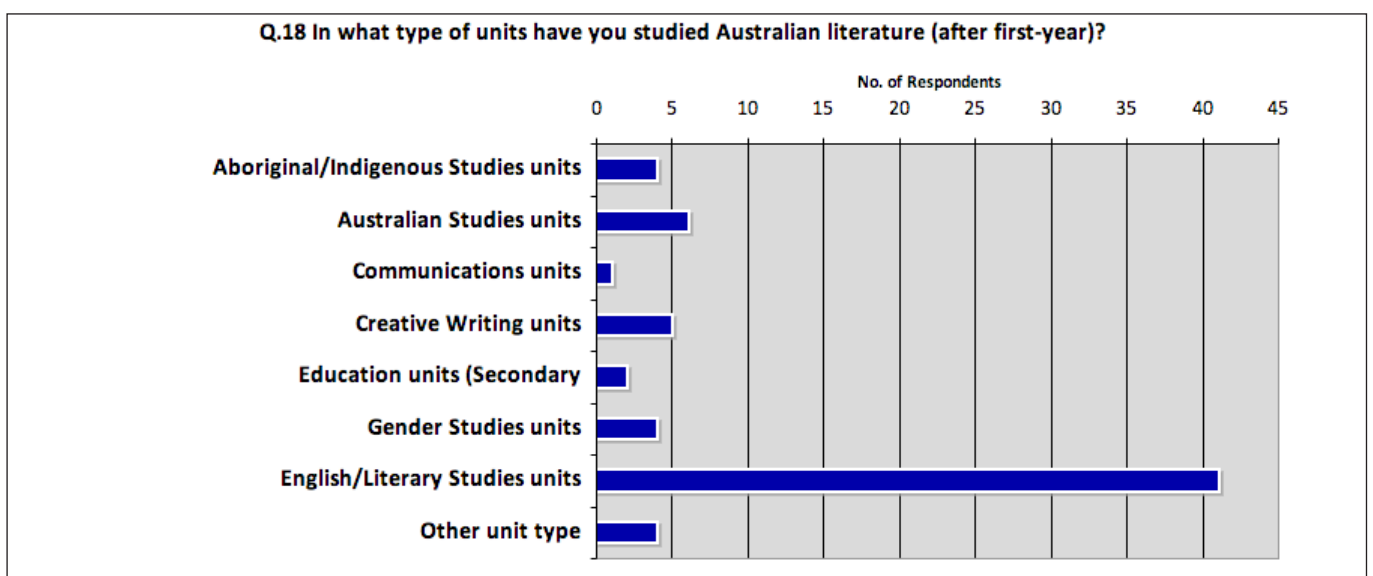


Figure 17: Upper level units with Australian literary texts



Forty-one students (82%) had studied Australian literary texts as part of English/Literary Studies units, six in Aboriginal/Indigenous Studies units; and five in Creative Writing.

Forty-five students (90%) had studied units that specifically focused on Australian literature. Forty-six students (92%) had studied more than four complete Australian literary texts since 1st-year, and twenty-three of those had studied more than 10 texts.

Of the 2nd/3rd and 4th/Honours year students surveyed, 22 (44%) had studied Australian literature in 1st-year; of those, 13 had found that their experiences studying Australian literature at 1st-year level had encouraged them to pursue further study in later years.

During their last two semesters of study, 27% of students surveyed had worked between 10 and 20 hours per week in paid employment. Eighteen percent worked 20 to 30 hours, 6% 30 to 40 hours, and 20% between 1 and 10 hours per week. Twenty-nine percent had had no paid employment during the last two semesters. Forty-four percent of 2nd/3rd and 4th/Honours year students surveyed found that their paid work had *sometimes* detracted from their ability to study. For 22% work had *often* to *very often* detracted from their ability to study.

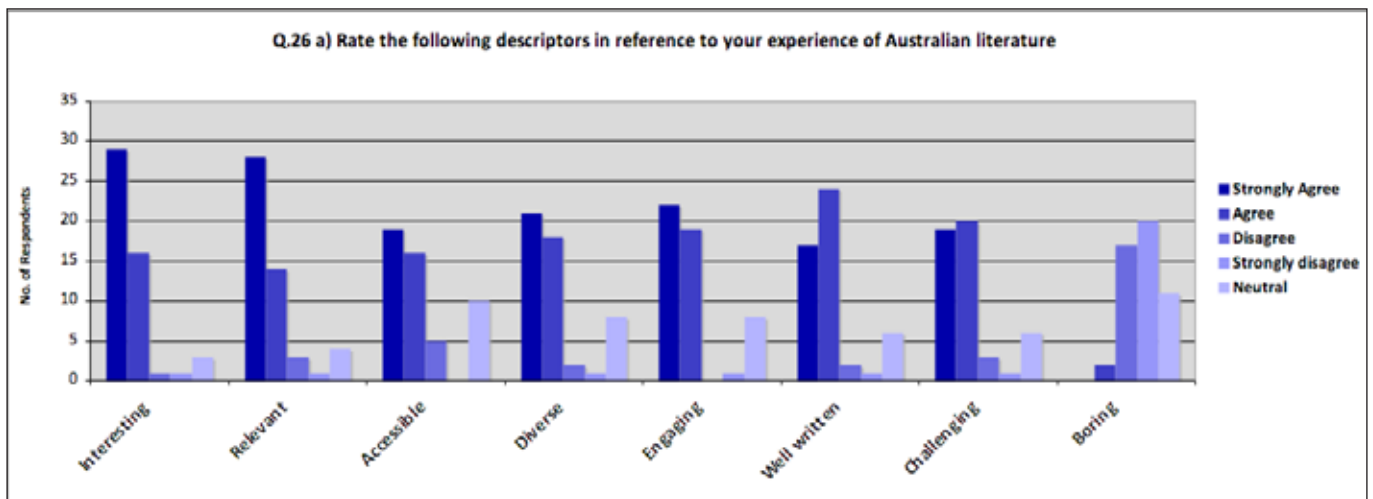


Figure 18: Student attitude to Australian literature

2nd/3rd/4th/Honours year students strongly indicated that they found Australian literature *interesting* (90%), *relevant* (84%) and *engaging* (82%), *well written* (82%), *diverse* (78%) and *challenging* (78%). Thirty-two respondents (64%) specified that they did not find Australian literature boring.

• **Teachers and co-ordinators of university level Australian literature study questionnaire**

This questionnaire comprised the following parts:

- Part 1: Course and subject/unit information
- Part 2: Unit design and development and tertiary teaching
- Part 3: Teaching Australian literary texts
- Part 4: Resources
- Part 5: Student responses
- Part 6: Teachers and teaching experience

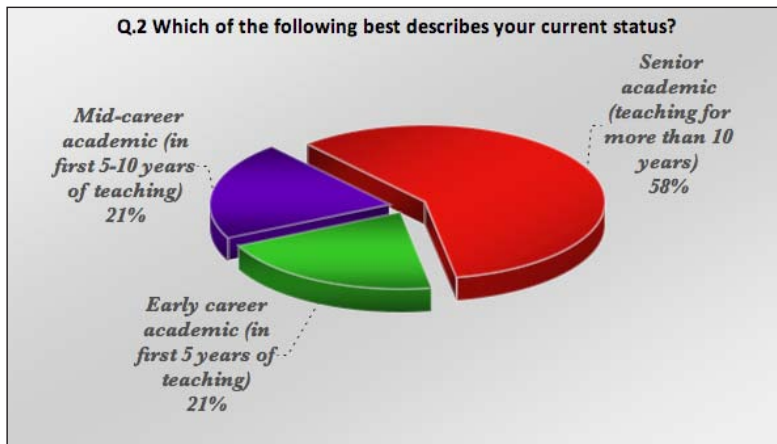


Figure 19: Current status of respondents

Of the 29 Tertiary teachers and academics who responded to the TAL questionnaire, 58% were senior academics, who had been teaching for more than 10 years, 21% mid-career academics, in their first 5–10 years of teaching, and 21% early-career academics, in their first 5 years of teaching.

The majority of respondents were teaching in tertiary institutions in NSW and QLD (25% NSW, 25% QLD) with other respondents also from the ACT, SA, Tasmania, Victoria and WA. In the last five years, 86% of respondents had taught Australian literature in English/Literary Studies fields (14% had not taught Australian literature in these fields). Forty-one percent had taught Australian literature in Australian Studies, 24% in Cultural Studies, and 34% in Creative Writing fields. Twenty-one percent had taught Australian literature as part of Gender Studies courses. Respondents also reported teaching Australian literature, to a lesser extent, in Communication Studies, Drama/Theatre Studies, Education (Secondary), History, Indigenous Studies, Screen/Media Studies, and other fields, including Postcolonial Literatures, Professional Writing, Diasporic Writing (Asian-Australian), and Children's Literature. These results, to a large extent, reflect the group of tertiary teachers who were targeted in the distribution of questionnaires. The academics contacted about the questionnaire were mostly known to be teaching/specialising in English/Literary studies or Australian Studies schools or discipline areas and were usually members of ASAL or colleagues contacted personally by the project directors.

Ninety-three percent of respondents taught at 2nd and 3rd year level, and 7% who had not taught at 2nd or 3rd year level had been teaching at Honours/4th year level and postgraduate coursework. Sixty-seven percent had been teaching at 1st-year level, and 59% had taught at Honours/4th year level. Thirty-eight percent had taught at postgraduate coursework level. Sixty-six percent of tertiary teachers had also supervised students working in Australian literature at postgraduate research levels.

Thirty-four percent had taught Australian literature overseas, 31% at undergraduate level, and 21% at postgraduate levels. Of those who had taught overseas, 50% reported that students they had taught had no previous knowledge of Australian literature, while 40% reported that students had little to some knowledge. Thirty percent of those teachers also found that students had developed an interest in Australian literature that extended beyond their classes to the students' recreational reading and further study choices.

Twenty-six tertiary teachers responded to a question about their own previous studies of Australian literature, demonstrating that 35–46% had studied Australian literature from secondary, through undergraduate, to PhD levels. A small number of teachers had not formally studied Australian literature, while 72% indicated that they had studied Australian literature as part of an academic Literary Studies/English program.

Sixty-two percent of tertiary teachers indicated that their previous learning experiences of Australian literature had encouraged them to pursue their involvement in the field of Australian literature.



Sixty-two percent also indicated that previous teaching experiences had encouraged their involvement in the field of Australian literature. Seventy-nine percent of tertiary teachers indicated that membership of professional associations had encouraged their involvement in the field.

Sixty-two percent found that they generated new research projects in response to their teaching of Australian literature while twenty-four percent of academic respondents had carried out academic research and writing on their own Australian literature teaching.

The decline of Australian literature teaching

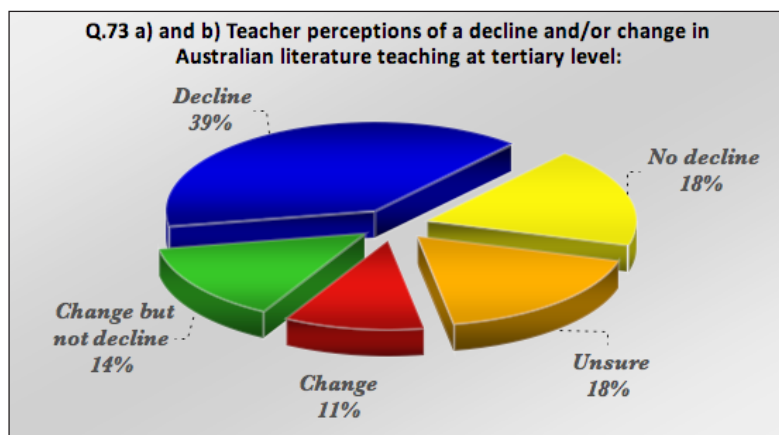


Figure 20: Perceptions of the decline of Australian literature teaching

Twenty-eight respondents answered a question about their perceptions of a decline or change in the recent teaching of Australian literature at university levels. Of those respondents, 39% perceived a definite decline in teaching while a total of 25% reported a change, but not necessarily a decline, in teaching in the field. Eighteen percent of respondents reported that there had been no decline in the teaching of Australian literature. In other words, 32% of respondents thought there had been no decline, or a change but no decline, in the teaching of Australian literature. Also see section titled, ‘The politics of Australian literature teaching’.

- Overseas Academics’ and Tertiary Teachers’ questionnaire**

Bringing this questionnaire to the attention of a representative range of overseas academics and tertiary teachers of Australian literature proved to be beyond the resources of the project and the samples obtained during the period of the TAL were too small to report on.

It is envisaged that a second stage of the Teaching Aust. Lit. project will reach out to overseas teachers of Australian literature more effectively, while the relevance and promotion of the Teaching Aust. Lit. Resource will, we believe, motivate the participation of more international teachers.



3.2 Qualitative Analysis

This section presents a summary of the qualitative content of the TAL Survey questionnaires. This content is derived from the free text responses to questions and represents a considerable diversity of responses.

This summary of the data identifies significant emphases and issues within questionnaire responses. It is hoped that this presentation of major findings will open up future discussion and debate on Australian literature in education. This section is designed to be read in the context of the multivalent approach of the TAL Survey project as a whole, cross-referenced with information collected for the Teaching Aust. Lit. Resource.

Qualitative responses to the questionnaires are summarised under the following broad categories of the TAL Survey:

1. The politics of teaching Australian literature
2. Texts for teaching
3. Teaching, technology and resourcing
4. Teaching methodologies and disciplinary approaches
5. Student experience
6. Teaching-research nexus
7. Education and postgraduate training
8. Australian literature and personal spaces
9. The future of teaching Australian literature

Provided throughout the section below are a combination of statements that summarise the general themes arising in the free-text comments; responses to specific questions displayed as bar graphs or pie-charts, and selected comments that are representative of the responses.

(Please note: quotations used in the following summaries of qualitative survey results have been de-identified. Specific references to people have been replaced by words in square brackets in the selected comments used below.)

1. THE POLITICS OF TEACHING AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE

• The question of the canon

Both tertiary and senior secondary teachers were asked about the influence of assumptions about a 'canon' in their teaching practice. The following graphs present their respective responses to a specific question, while the comments below are representative of the free text responses received.

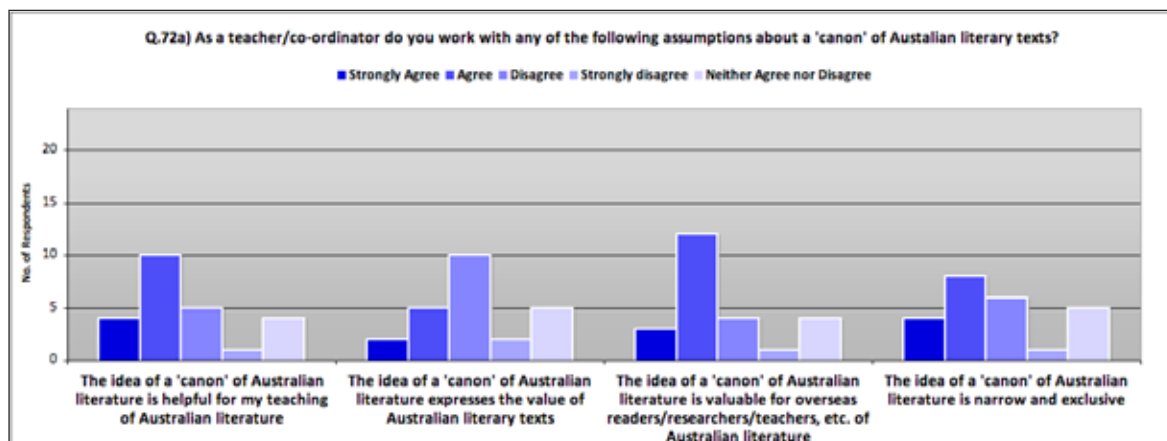


Figure 21: Assumptions about a literary canon: tertiary teachers



Tertiary Teachers see a ‘canon’ as potentially useful for teaching purposes but were inclined to disagree with the idea that canonical works demonstrated their own value.

The free-text responses to the question of the Australian literature canon varied from those specifying canonical authors (e.g. White, Garner, Keneally, Lawson, Paterson, Stead, Carey, Winton, Wright, Kim Scott, Clarke, Hope, Brennan, Rudd, Herbert, Prichard, Slessor, Baynton, Jolley, Richards, Franklin, Malouf, etc.), to comments suggesting that the ‘canon’ is flexible and changes over time, or is restrictive.

Responses vary from identifying the usefulness of the canon in establishing traditions and historicised understanding of a developing nation, to insisting that a/the canon needs to be ‘always transforming’. A few comments identified measuring the traditional canon with a ‘new’ canon, i.e. alternative voices to ‘WASP’ authors. Two responses mentioned the usefulness of a canon to overseas students in understanding the Australian literary tradition.

Selected responses:

- I prefer the term ‘tradition(s)’.
- It’s political and ideological. I try to work against it. One must ask, why do certain texts become ‘canonical’ over others? Who chooses? Often, when talking to overseas academics, there is a sense that they only choose from the Aust. Lit. canon because that is all that is available overseas.
- There is a canon, but it changes as ideas, authors and works are debated and contested. These discussions are crucial to the discipline.
- The idea of a canon, although it probably exists in practice, is very limiting in course construction and conception.
- The canon needs rehabilitation to include the work of non-WASP authors, including Aboriginal ones.
- The idea of a canon of Australian literature is a way of preserving an awareness of literary quality in a situation in which there are many factors tending to relativise or trivialise that consideration.
- The canon is a subject of much debate and contestation – as it should be. It is useful for overseas readers/ students in their initial approach, but always problematic.

- **A canon is necessarily exclusive but still useful for developing a body of texts as a basis for cultural capital or public discussion. Teaching ‘the canon’ has to include discussion of what’s been included, what left out, and why. It remains useful for students, particularly at first-year level, to have an idea of literary importance or heritage.**

- How many other people have been put off Australian literature by the overvaluation of canonical texts?
- A ‘canon’ should be dynamic, always transforming, not fixed. Perhaps that defends the original definition of a canon. I only find it helpful when one compares alternative texts with canonical works.
- In my courses we discuss the evolution of concepts of a national canon (e.g. in the form of anthologies) etc, and critique them.

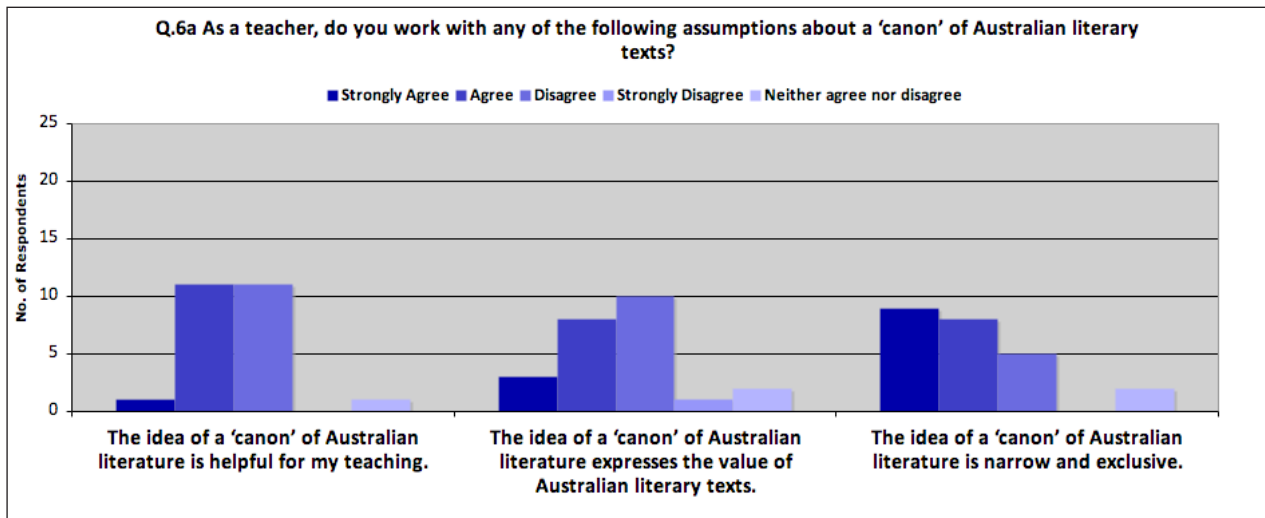


Figure 22: Assumptions about a literary canon: secondary teachers

Amongst senior secondary teachers opinions on the 'canon' and its value were varied, but there was also general agreement that the idea of the canon was narrow and exclusive.

Selected responses:

- [The canon needs to cover a broad spectrum of texts, and this will inspire debate and disagreement. There will be differentiation between essential texts in each state and territory as to what is powerful and relevant to their communities.](#)
- As my comments about the 'alternative' lists to be found in the Gleeson-White book *Australian Classics* hints at, notions of canonicity can be generative or restricting. I was very interested in the way that someone (and a literacy academic at that) could include a cookbook in their list. This points to some interesting possibilities for taking up Australian writing in schools. That said, the idea of the canon is not a particularly useful one in high schools for various reasons. Firstly, the range of students (who have not necessarily chosen to study English) means setting an author such as White, say, for all will be self-defeating. Most will not see the 'greatness' of the work and will be, sadly, unlikely to ever again want to read Australian 'literary' writing. Secondly, time restrictions make it hard to place Australian works in an international context, therefore it is hard to consider what makes a work distinctively Australian. Thirdly, there is some compelling contemporary writing (Nam Le, Tara June Winch, John Hughes's *The Idea of Home*) to which students should be exposed. It is not part of the canon but that does not make it unworthy.
- There seem to be various understandings of what is meant by 'canon'. This causes problems with text choice.
- I both work with and interrogate the concept of a canon.
- So many great texts coming out all the time – why limit it to a few? This is an irrelevant concept and not useful for education today. Especially teenagers who read little! (The canon not always engaging).
- I agree that we do need a shared understanding of a range of texts to be able to communicate in a literary fashion but to stratify this fluid body of work into a canon is to go too far. Great texts do not need to be put on a list to be great! They are great in their own right and people will read and teach them.

- **The importance of Australian literature studies in schools**

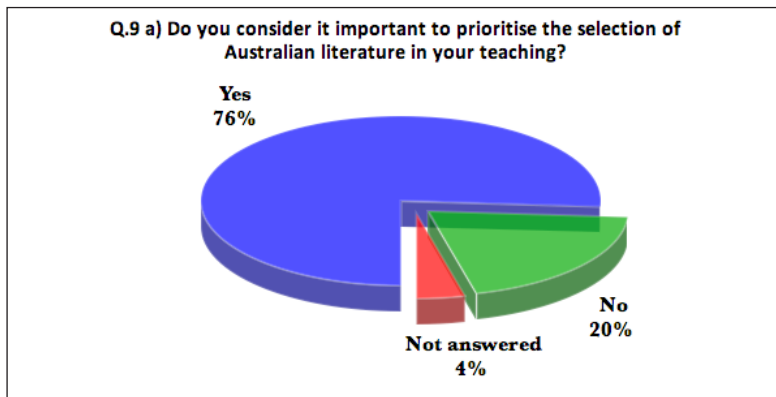


Figure 23: Prioritising Australian texts: secondary teachers

Most respondents (19 out of 24) considered it important to prioritise the selection of Australian literature in their teaching but identified the complex relationship between text choice and curriculum.

Selected responses:

- I consider it essential that students study some Australian texts but I don't think it matters which literary or cultural ideas they consider in relation to which texts, provided their courses 'cover the territory'.
- As with anything there needs to be variety – there are other issues in the world to consider other than our own.
- An issue with NSW is that text form requirements in Yr 12 in the Advanced course (1 novel, 1 poet, 1 drama or film, 1 non-fiction, media or multi-media text) add an extra layer of complexity that can make it harder to choose an Australian work.
- I would not teach Australian literature for a nationalistic purpose. The point is that some Australian texts are likely to engage Australian students because of a familiarity with setting, history, culture etc.
- Over a 5-year course of study there needs to be a balance of texts from Australian and other cultures. School communities need the freedom to choose texts which are suited to their school population and program of study.
- Excellent Australian literature prioritises itself by its excellence.

- **A national curriculum**

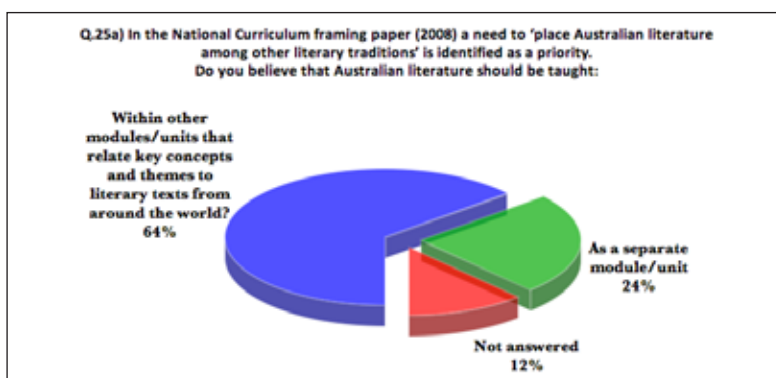


Figure 24: Australian literature in a national curriculum context: secondary teachers



Secondary teacher respondents were also asked to consider the priority identified within the National Curriculum Framing Paper (2008) that ‘Australian literature [be placed] among other literary traditions.’ A clear majority of respondents considered that Australian literature *should* be taught in relation to world literature.

Selected responses:

- If I’m teaching English in Australia I’m automatically teaching Australian literature, including film – not necessarily because it’s Australian but because it’s good! I studied ‘Australian Literature’ 30 years ago at university as a separate subject and have been known to include units (e.g. 25% of a semester course) focusing on Aust Lit to consider cultural questions, but separate units can smack of ‘cultural cringe’.
- Placing it in a discrete unit runs the risk of some students not experiencing any Australian works, if that unit is not made compulsory. That then defeats the purpose of making it ‘special’ in the first place. In a globalised world, in which we need to find what unites us rather than divides us, a separate module/unit does not make much sense. It smacks of over-compensation and insecurity – the ‘cultural cringe’.
- Living in Australia and all that entails should be a natural part of life, not compartmentalised. It is easier to teach Australian texts when Australia is the focus of study in other areas, however.
- Australian literature should not need special assistance. It should stand equally with all Western literature and postcolonial literature.
- I believe students require a solid understanding of Australia and our literary heritage before dealing with the complexity of diverse literature.
- Why not both? There is surely room to do this – if we are serious about the centrality of Aust. Lit. in the curriculum.

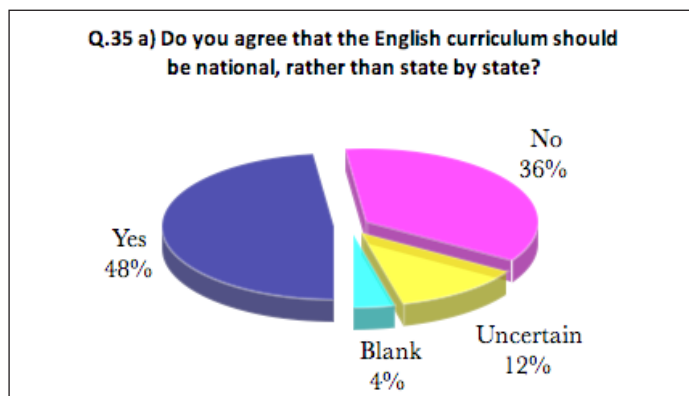


Figure 25: Preference for a national or state-based English curriculum

Amongst senior secondary teachers, opinion was divided as to whether the senior English curriculum should be national or differentiated by state and territory and, while not opposed to greater prescription to ensure some standardisation of student experience around Australia, teachers were most concerned that regional and local differences be recognised and catered for through text selection.

Selected responses:

- Depends entirely how prescriptive it is. I do not believe the curriculum should be limited by one view or model of language, for example.
- There should be consideration of key content relevant to specific states/territories and there should be flexibility to include these.
- It makes sense to avoid duplication of resources. I am also open to a greater level of proscription of Australian literature but would hate to see teachers locked into mandatory texts.



- It depends upon how the curriculum is constructed. As long as it remains flexible and allows for regional/ contextual differences and doesn't seek to homogenise teaching, learning and assessment then I can see merit in a national curriculum.
- Must be recognition that all approaches bring their own cultural biases and ideologies. A return to pure lit crit would just be to maintain conservative status quo. Students should be taught to think about and question values and attitudes rather than be taught to accept 'universal truths'.
- I would hate to lose the freedom to design curriculum to suit our particular student groups.
- Finland got to be one of the countries with the highest level of literacy by abandoning national curriculum and embracing regional difference
- I feel any sense of localised ownership would be completely extinguished. Teachers in the country feel enough disenfranchisement from the Board of Studies in a NSW context, and this could only be exacerbated by a National, centralised curriculum administration. State curriculums allow for more sense of teacher control, that they can actually have (some) ownership of the 'process'.

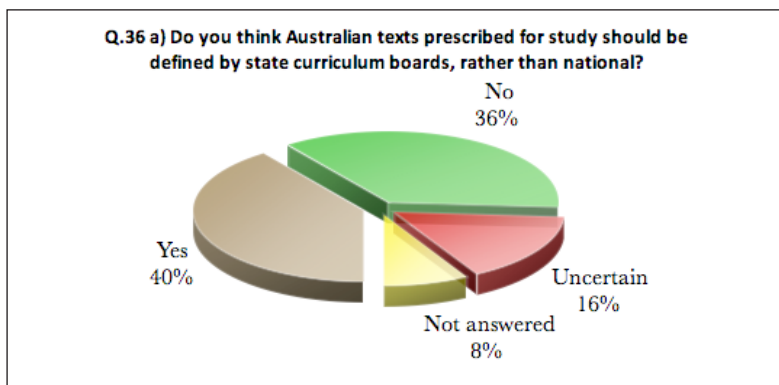


Figure 26: Should texts be prescribed?

There was general consensus that specific local contexts and the variability of student needs should not be overtaken by text prescription in state or national curricula.

Selected responses:

- I don't think there should be specific texts prescribed for study. Extensive lists from which we choose according to our students' and our own interests would be acceptable.
- I don't think there should be prescribed texts at any level except Year 12 and then chosen from a large and constantly revised list.
- A national discussion about this could be very generative.
- I don't think texts should be prescribed. Text lists should allow a large degree of choice.
- Each state is different, each state has a different multi-cultural mix. We need texts that are relevant to us.
- I certainly support the teaching of Australian literature, but I do not want to have my program devised by someone who is not familiar with my students' needs.
- Individual schools should be able to choose texts to suit their cohorts. The 'tasks' determine the levels of challenge as much as the texts. Teachers should be relied upon to choose quality texts.
- Relevance to students cannot be achieved on a national level.

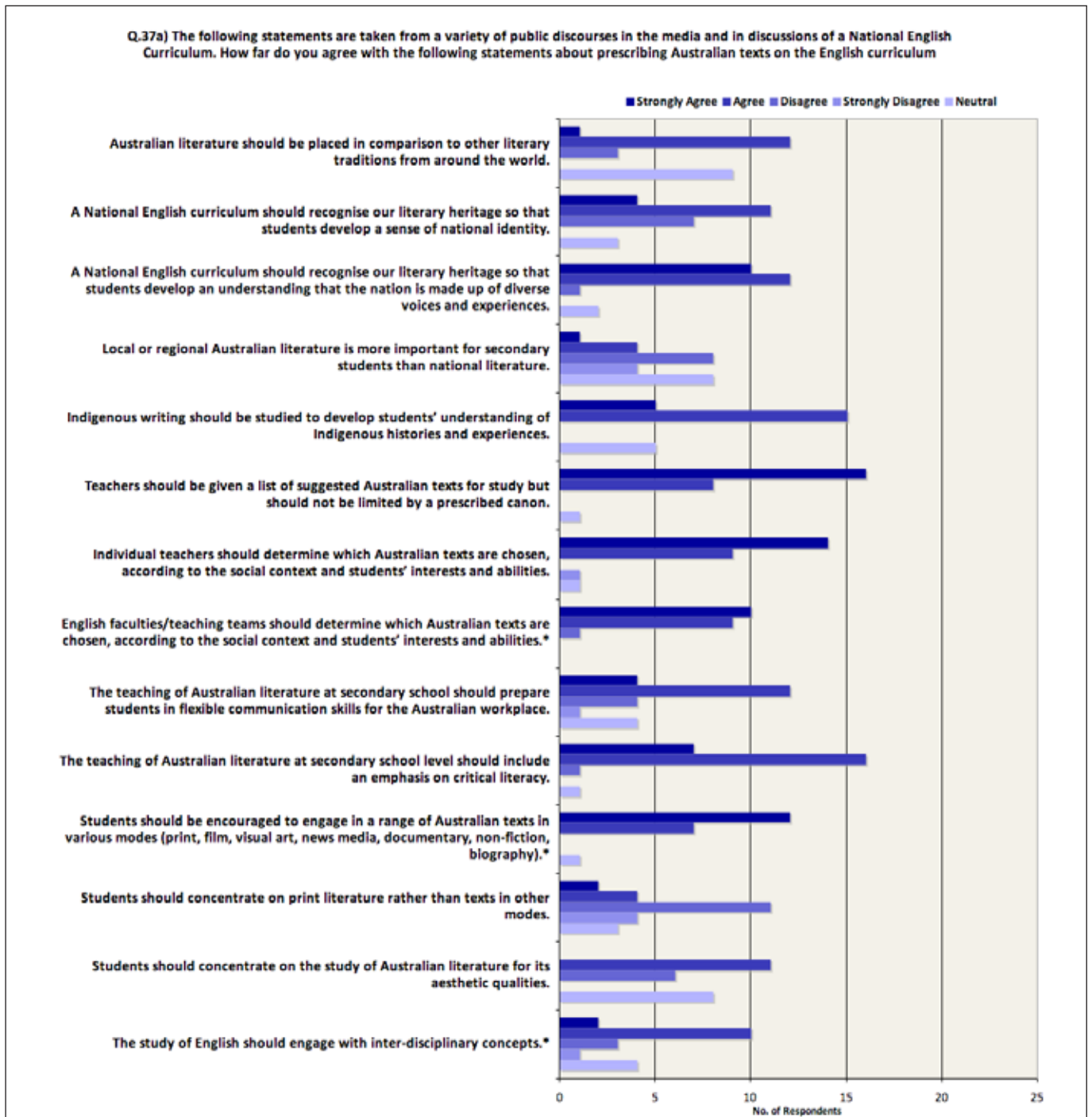
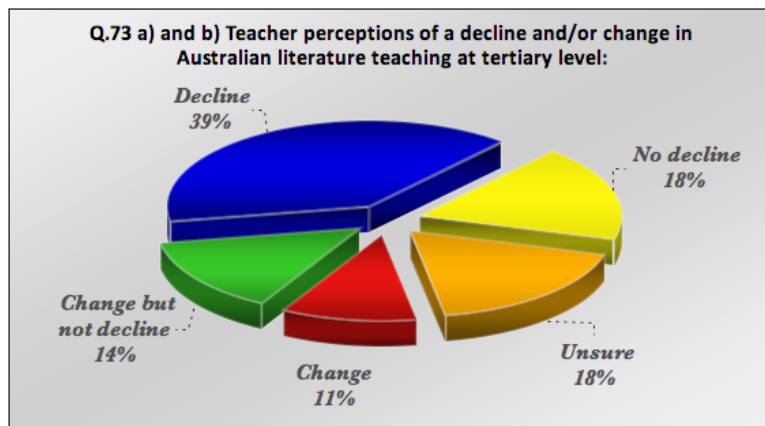


Figure 27: Responses to public discourse

Senior secondary teachers were asked to respond to a variety of statements reflecting recent public discourse in the media relating to the prescription of Australian texts in the English strand of the proposed national curriculum. As with other questions about the national curriculum, teachers were concerned about flexibility and autonomy within certain bounds. Critical literacy and the ability to select from a diverse range of texts available in various media were also identified as important aspects of contemporary teaching practice.

Selected responses:

- An extensive suggested reading/viewing list for Yr 12 seems to me to be the way to go, with some mandating of the number of texts, Australian and otherwise, and text forms to be covered. In years 7–11 text selection is best left to teachers/schools but with set requirements about the number of Australian and other texts, as well as text forms, to be studied.
- Print is dead.
- English is always interdisciplinary – a wide range of texts is important as students can be so diverse. I agree with giving students a chance to read books/watch films, etc. by people from Australia but to see it in relation to the rest of the world (we are already isolated enough) – book lists must be suggested or they will need regular and careful updating.
- Individual teachers should determine what is chosen. [...] English faculties/ teaching teams should develop what is chosen. [...] This is not meant to be at odds here – part of the collaborative process would be for individual teachers to think on this carefully.

Decline or change in Australian literary study at tertiary level**Figure 28: Perceptions of a decline in Australian literary teaching**

Thirty-nine percent of tertiary teachers had perceived a decline in the study of Australian literature, but this was contrasted by a higher number of respondents (43%) who perceived either no decline or a change in the teaching of Australian literature. Eighteen percent indicated uncertainty about any decline and that may reflect the responses of early career respondents. Those who recognised a change in the teaching of Australian literature identified, as reasons for the altered situation, greater levels of interdisciplinary teaching, the prominence of film alongside literary study, the growth of Creative Writing courses, the shift to Cultural Studies and theory-influenced teaching, and the examination of nationhood in a trans-cultural context.

Selected responses:

- No, the 'decline' was a media beat-up.
- Australian literature is 'boring' (no car chases outside of *Mad Max*); does not 'relate' to students' experiences (and they are told at school that this is crucial for their learning); the medicine approach turns them off traditional disciplines (e.g. read this, it's good for you);
- Many people, and even whole departments, have largely shifted to teaching Australian Cultural Studies rather than Australian literature. This reflects theoretical shifts, and a loss of eminence for literature in Australian culture generally.



- Fewer survey or structured courses. Less historical depth or grounding in relevant (contemporary) understandings of literary history.
- Since my undergrad, which had two units on Aust Lit, each a year long, with a historical narrative attached, to now where units are more thematic and dissolve canonical hierarchies and include more global thematics. Aust lit. seems embedded in these, but perhaps curriculum developers need to consciously include Aust texts so it's not dormant.
- Since I studied it seems there are less courses taught at undergraduate level but this is part of a general contraction in humanities teaching and not exclusive to Aus lit. Certainly no decline in the quality of teaching or level of interest at the postgraduate level.
- I feel that since the impact of mass higher education there has been a dumbing down of coursework at lower levels of study.
- Dissolution of canon has been welcome – reason why I didn't study Aust lit as undergrad – a reinvigorated canon is a useful thing for stimulating interest in Australia and overseas.
- Film has also become more prominent, and we now routinely study literature and film together. Also the massive growth of creative writing units and courses has provided a different approach to Australian literatures (I am in favour of both these developments).
- There has been a shift away from the teaching of Australian literature as literature, and towards teaching it as an element of Australian culture, via Cultural Studies methods and assumptions. There has also been a marked increase in theoretically influenced teaching. I don't find these as congenial as I once did, but I'm reluctant to call it a 'decline'.
- I don't know about a decline, but my view is that there has been change, from dedicated 'Aus lit' courses to the teaching of Australian texts across a number of literary and cultural studies sites and levels
- I think there's less focus in the field on teaching an 'Aust. Lit' canon for its own sake and more focus on examining nationhood in a global context.

• The importance of Australian literature study

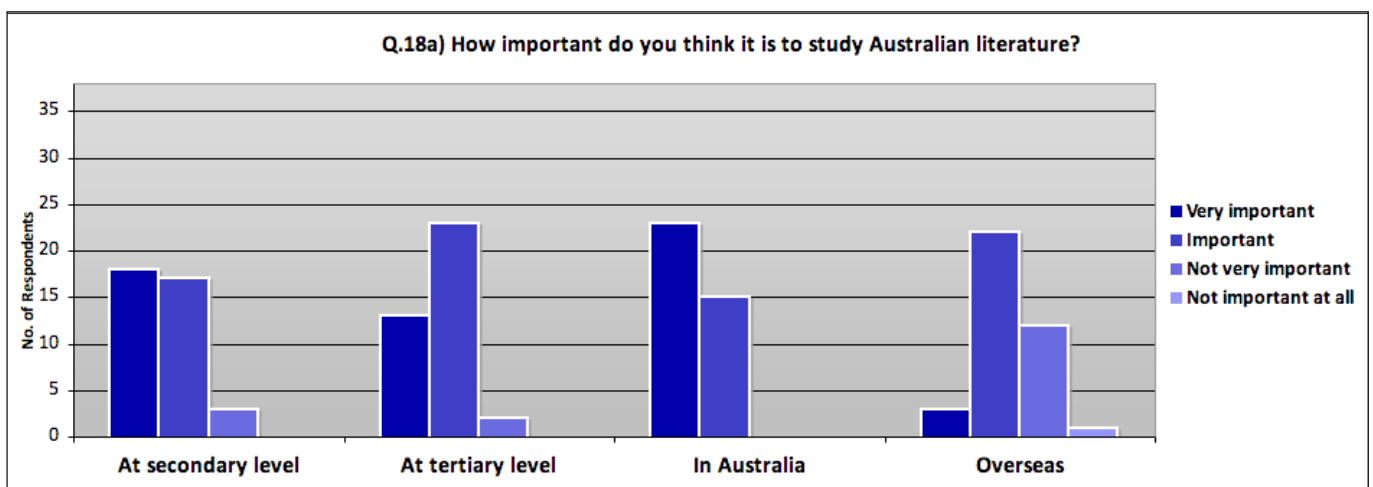


Figure 29: The importance of studying Australian literature: 1st-year students

First-year undergraduates rated the importance of studying Australian literature very highly at both secondary and tertiary levels.



Selected responses:

- Before studying at university, I did not know the names of any Australian authors. I feel that it is very important for students to be exposed to Australian texts at a secondary level in order for them to appreciate the fine writers we have here in Australia. It also gives an insight into what life is like for others in our country, which is something that I don't think Australians really understand.
- I think a love for books and literature is often well grounded by tertiary years. I think the push for Aust lit. should be in secondary years, where young adults are still forming their opinions. In South Australia English is a compulsory topic until year 12, which means a push for Aust. Lit. in year 11 per se would have a numerically larger impact than in a first year undergrad degree.
- It is important to study Australian literature in Australia because it is ours and a part of us, but we need to study other things as well. Australian literature is important for us to study because we are Australians and this is Australia. It is not up to us, however, to enforce, or to think that Australian literature should be enforced, in universities overseas.
- Australian literature is, I believe, the most important literature to study within Australia, it teaches individuals a variety of things particularly in relation to the diverse cultures and life experiences within the country. Overseas I believe reading Australian literature is just as important as reading any other literature, it's about opening people's minds to a world outside of their own and showing off the great talent Australia has.
- During high school in Australia, Aust. Lit. should be mandatory. It is part of our history and can complement history courses. Overseas, it may create awareness of our diversity but it is less important. At university level, Aust. Lit. should not be mandatory, but it should be discussed when relevant in all lit courses.
- Australian literature doesn't have the long, developed history that European literature does, for instance. I don't think it has developed enough, and there aren't enough texts yet to sufficiently represent Australia. So, if it was studied overseas and the students didn't have a proper cultural context to place it in, they might get a skewed idea about Australia. For instance, there aren't many Indigenous texts yet in Australian literature, and I feel that many Australian texts have a very similar feel about them – perhaps because the country, and its literary development is still young. However, I still think it's very important for Australian secondary students to read Australian literature, and for it to be included on tertiary literature courses.
- I feel it is an important part of literature, although the emphasis on Australian Black literature and Aboriginals is too much. It is as if it overpowers other writing, which is not the case.
- At secondary level I think the aim should be to broaden students' awareness of other places and other concepts that they have not come across, later in tertiary years students can focus on interests along with important Australian concepts. There are not enough texts studied in secondary school to incorporate a broad view as well as a more localised one.
- I believe if one is to do a course in literature it would be remiss if Australian lit was not included as it would be negligent not to include Canadian or South African literature – I believe that as much diversity as one can get is great!
- My main concern surrounding the study of Australian literature relates not so much to developing a national identity amongst Australians, but in promoting the many great Australian authors that are grossly under-represented both at home and abroad. As a result of this I believe it is very important that people both from Australia and overseas are encouraged to explore the literature that Australia has to offer so that the writers here get the recognition they deserve.
- Just as we learn about Australia's history at school, I think we should learn about our literature. It is important!
- Australian literature should be studied in the context of English (language) literature anywhere.

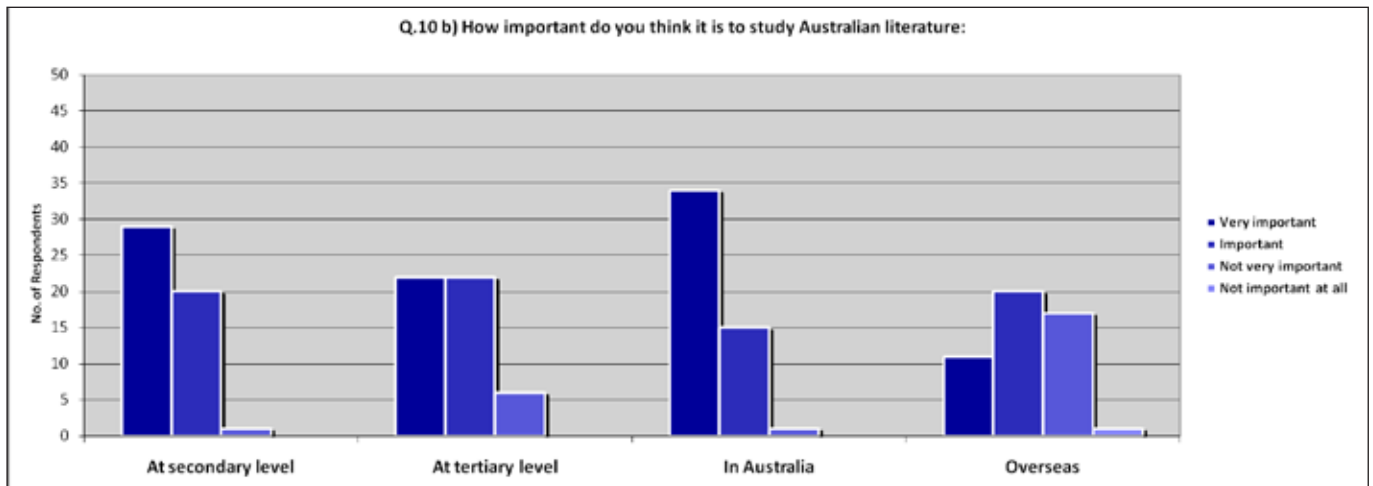


Figure 30: The importance of studying Australian literature: upper tertiary students

Second, 3rd and 4th year undergraduates were also asked about how important it is to study Australian literature. Again, a high level of support for the teaching of Australian literature at secondary and tertiary levels is demonstrated in both the multi-choice question and the comments. The importance of literature in learning about history and cultural change was frequently highlighted in the comments.

Selected responses:

- It is becoming increasingly important as more Aboriginal voices/authors are being published.
- I think that it is important for Australians to study their own literature as well as that of other countries. If we study our own literature then we have some idea of what makes it different from that of other countries. Literature from the past helps us understand what was important to those people.
- It is more important that we read a variety of texts from a range of cultures to foster a cosmopolitan viewpoint. Australian literature should not be used as a tool to foster national identity so much as to critique this nation. It must not become a tool of the Right.
- Currently, the secondary English syllabus places far too much importance on international canonical literature. I think it's really important for young Australians to have a better idea of what has been produced in their own backyard. Prior to university, it had scarcely occurred to me that Australian literature would be any different to British or American Literature, or provide that much of an insight into our heritage. I think Australian literature should be taught alongside history, as it provides a far more colourful exploration of how we came to be the nation we are than a simple history text book.
- It's hard to say if it's important overseas, because countries often want to study their own national literature, and for many countries, sadly, Australia is a distant holiday destination with kangaroos and koalas, not necessarily a country they want to learn about ... but hopefully that will change!
- Australian literature has a great insight into the details of this country's history, people, Indigenous past, nature, wilderness, wildlife and landscape and it should be studied more in order to create greater knowledge and awareness of our relatively small country.
- It needs to be studied at all levels in Australia. The emergence of First Nation people's stories in Australia and other published work has started to enrich (add flavour) to what Australian literature already had. This influx of First Nation people's content in literature has made the future of Australian literature look exciting.
- Perhaps a literary engagement with Australia and its fiction could excite international dialogues. For example, the creation of an Asian-Australian literary culture, yes these worlds sometimes join, in Castro for example, but it doesn't seem to be of interest for Australian literature's pervasive solipsism.



- As long as the literature studied is selected from a range of genres not just the ‘canonical’ texts that are seen to promote an ‘Australian’ identity.
- I didn’t study much Australian literature in high school, which is a shame. In this developing stage of life – where development of identity, culture and awareness of those around you occurs, Australian literature should help reveal the complexities and ambiguities of the country.
- I think the emphasis should be on good quality secondary level teaching: a critical point at which to be engaged and inspired by this field of lit.
- There is a great diversity of Australian literature, the great extent of which surprised me when studying at tertiary level. I think it would be more interesting and engaging to study at secondary school if the ‘themes’ were not just, as they usually are, prescribed, how it is representative of Australia as a nation in simplistic ways. If more of the dialectics are examined.
- Through my Honours subject in Australian Fiction I have learnt the enormous importance of Australian literature, and the way it critiques/supports (or has been critiqued/supported by) various political and nationalist agendas. I have learnt so much about how complex the relationship between literature, politics, and nationalism is and how Australians AND foreigners would have much revealed to them if it were more widely studied.
- If it is not introduced early then students may not even know it exists, and so not seek it out in later years.
- It may seem hypocritical to emphasise the importance of Australian literature as I have (at times!) limited interest: that is I don’t actively seek out Australian literature. But I feel that if it is not pushed, particularly in schools and universities it will die out. Personally I think this is particularly concerning for writers, as it limits the opportunity for Australian writers if there is no such ‘back up’. I think at times I associate Australian literature with boring outback stories (excuse the reduction), and I think this stems from my own ignorance, as I am finding in my current studies less of a stereotypical (yet alien) understanding, or at least an Australia which I can associate with. Basically, if we want to keep the industry, it must be driven somehow, and education is probably key.
- I think it is important to read literature from the culture we live in but not to the extent that other cultural literature is excluded.
- When I went to school and even my children (now 18, 19, 23) say they felt ‘let down’ by education system as they did not ‘know’ about Australian literature ... Reading it has helped to fill in a lot of the blanks ... especially as the history component of their secondary education ‘lacked’ Australian content. The message about Aust. Lit. needs to start at Primary: our kids need to develop more pride about being Australian. Tasmanian literature is helping to fill lots of gaps.



2. TEXTS FOR TEACHING

The questionnaires aimed to discover why certain texts were studied more than others and the reasons for text selection. Across tertiary and secondary teacher responses the availability of texts and specific conceptual and educational imperatives were identified as influential on choice.

• Availability of texts

One aim of the TAL Survey was to gather information about the availability of texts and whether teachers had encountered difficulties in setting texts due to their unavailability (see *Figure 31*).

Tertiary teachers commented strongly on the need for expanding availability of both primary and secondary texts through the digitisation of Australian literary studies journals and the development of ‘print-on-demand’ services for out of print texts, especially canonical and historical texts. (See also the section, ‘Teaching, technology and resourcing’)

Selection of texts was also identified as an issue of significant concern with most consistent comments relating to the unavailability of texts (i.e. out of print), and that longer, older texts are less accessible to students or that they are less inclined to read them. There was also a strong indication that Australian literary texts are being taught within non-Australian literature units.



Figure 31: Availability of texts for teaching: tertiary teachers

In Question 11 (*Figure 32 over page*), many of the senior secondary teachers didn't emphasise *access and availability* as an influence on their text selection, perhaps due to the use of book rental schemes. Instead, the responses above indicate more emphasis on students' learning needs such as the preference for shorter texts. In contrast to the tertiary responses, the availability of film adaptations was not a strong factor on text selection in the senior secondary teacher group. Comparative approaches to other texts from both Australia and overseas were also identified. Question 24 further elaborates on comparative approaches when teaching Australian texts (see *Figure 33 over page*).

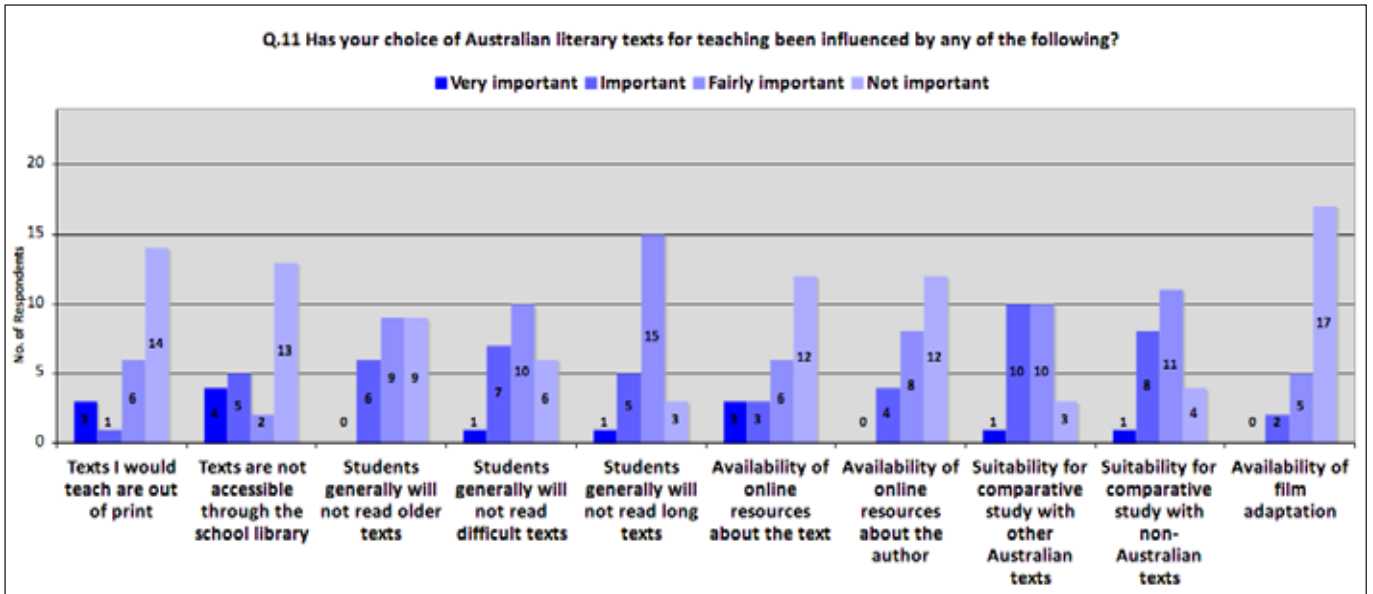


Figure 32: Choice of texts: secondary teachers

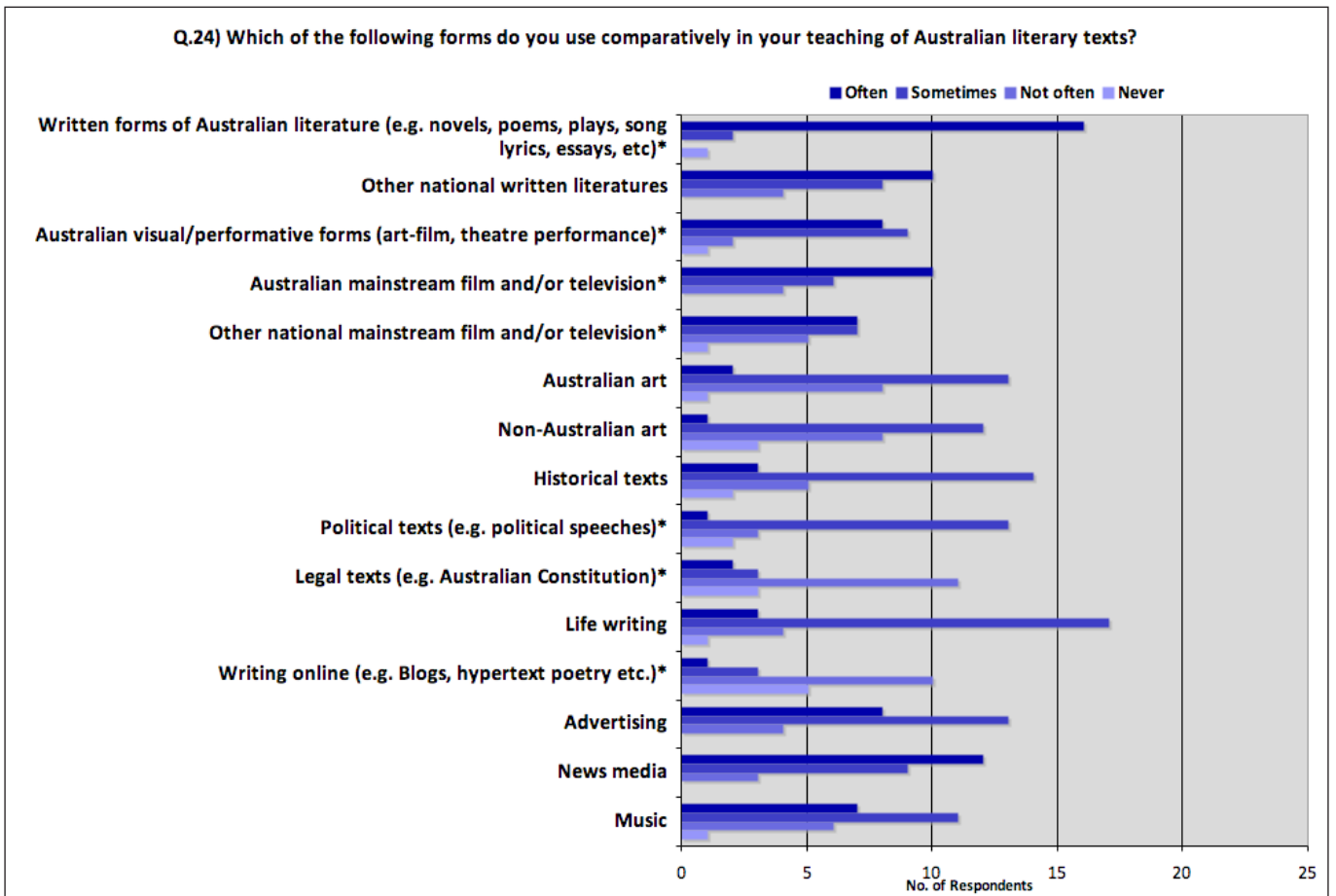


Figure 33: Use of comparative texts: secondary teachers



- Influences on selection of texts (tertiary level)

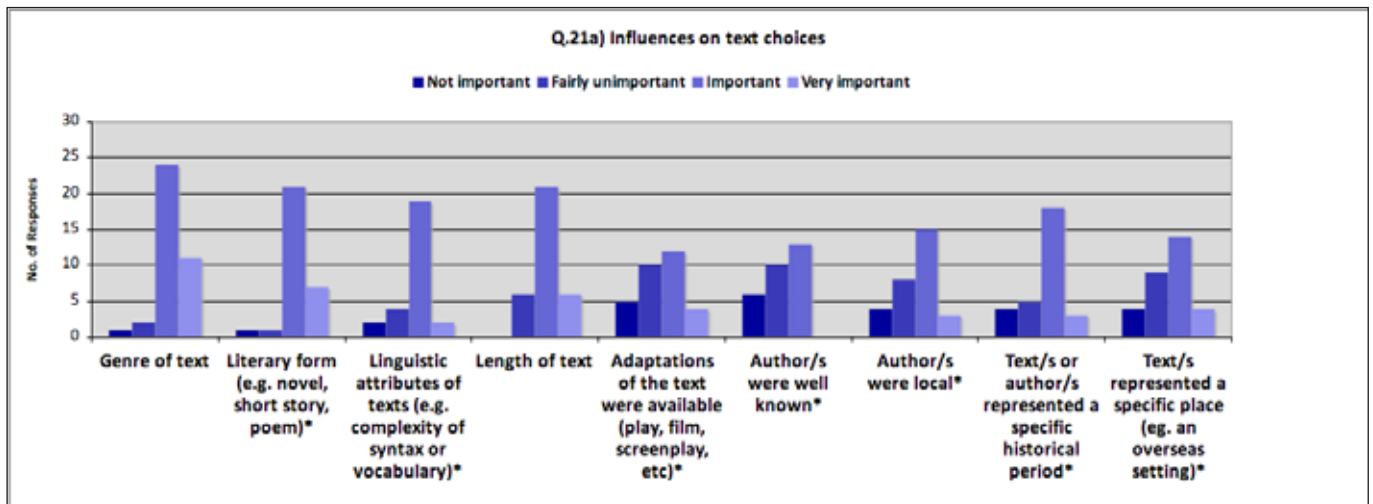


Figure 34: Influence on choices of text: tertiary teachers (1)

At tertiary level, genre and form are the most important factors influencing the choice of texts for teaching, while the length of text and linguistic attributes were also identified as important to selection decisions. Respondents also indicated that the literacy and year level of students influenced the complexity of texts selected. Many respondents suggested that their text selection was made to show different uses of language and styles. Complex texts are sometimes selected alongside more accessible ones.

The general consensus was that shorter texts are preferable for student engagement and because of student workload issues, especially at introductory undergraduate level.

Responses were divided between finding comparative approaches very useful to a unit's aims (and many adaptations were listed) to avoiding books that have film adaptations. Again, the unavailability of texts was a major concern.

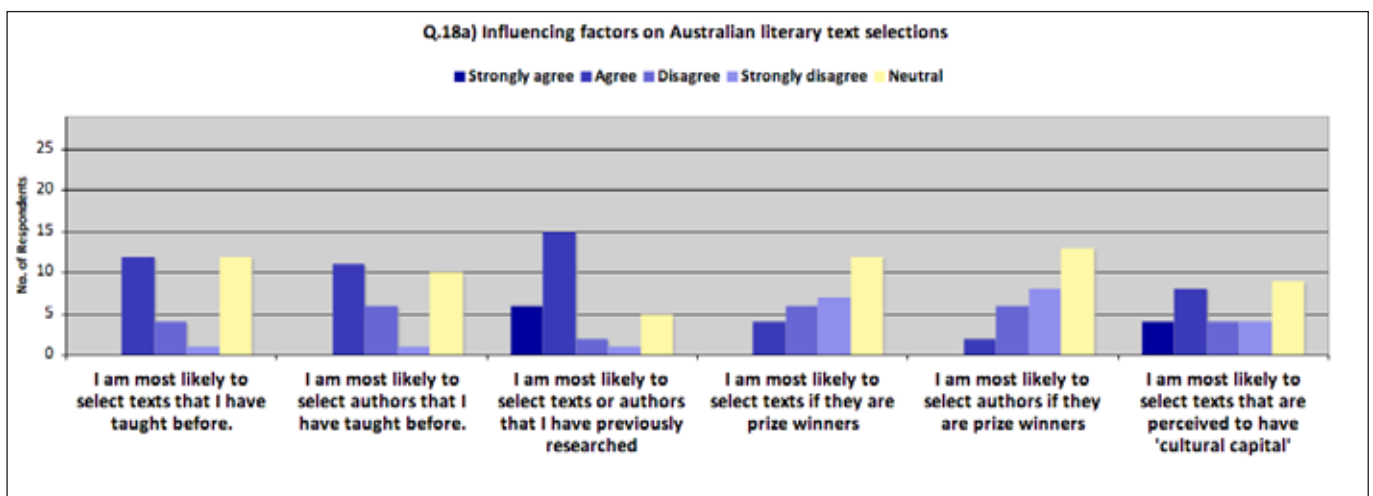


Figure 35: Influence on choices of text: tertiary teachers (2)

The relationship between teaching activities and research practice was highlighted as strongly co-related in a number of areas across the Survey. Here, the selection of texts is demonstrated to have an influence on texts selected for



teaching. Also, a focus on promoting the ‘industry’ by inviting authors into the classroom is also suggested in the text responses below. (See also the section titled ‘Teaching-research nexus’)

Selected responses:

- I like to emphasise diversity and surprise students with texts they have not encountered, so prizes, cultural capital and having featured on a unit before do not necessarily count in a text’s favour.
- I choose texts based on what authors are available and willing to speak to the class; therefore they are usually local and known to me.
- I suspect that my selection differs somewhat from my responses, insofar as I look for authors I have read (film, seen) and which I believe convey an accurate portrait of the varied, ‘chaotic’ nature of Australian literature, old and new.
- The selection is governed by the course structure and focus and the desire to present a range of material and perspectives. This usually means preparing at least some new material. It is also important to teach new and current literature.
- I would want to select texts that have a place in a larger context – a connection to other works, representative status, groundbreaking, controversial, exemplary.
- I’m more likely to select texts that I like or have a curiosity for and would enjoy doing more work on, although I should select texts I’ve worked on before, but this is a dialectic between teaching/research.
- I am very concerned that Australian literature study reflects contemporary practice (Industry focus) and recognition of reader interaction with meanings of text, as mobilised during text production/writing and marketing.
- I don’t choose texts simply because they might be prize-winning but I might want to include a study of prizes as part of Australian literary production and therefore would choose them in that case. There are different kinds of cultural capital and I might choose texts for their different cultural contexts and capital, i.e. bestseller, genre fiction, poetry, non-fiction etc.
- Literacy levels in 1–3 year have declined shockingly in the last 10 years. Complex syntax puts them off, and they drop the subject if too much too hard or else give poor teaching/subject feedback, which early career researchers cannot afford. Also sad.
- In poetry, level of difficulty of diction often needs care; for other writing, I struggle increasingly with the banal deployment of expletives (Peter Carey’s *Theft*, for example).
- *Such is Life* is a good example of a text that explores Australian English.
- I know this is important but I include more complex texts alongside more accessible ones so that the students have a range of modes and registers. There are always conflicting preferences.
- Fine writing is more rewarding to scrutinise.
- Again, to teach different approaches to analysis – of realist texts (how to think about the effects of apparently simple language) to dense or modernist language a la White.
- Only at secondary level do linguistic considerations play the major role in selection due to Education Department rulings and ratings (M etc). In tertiary I attempt to identify early any student needs re-text linguistic difficulty and adapt my lecture/tutorial content and assessment selection.
- I’ve begun with Indigenous life writing works which aren’t linguistically complex, so as to begin to develop students’ reading habit.



- **Influences on selection of texts (senior secondary level)**

In the senior secondary teacher questionnaire, respondents were also asked to identify the main reasons for the selection of texts. Question 7 relates to the selection of suggested texts on the state curriculum. Question 9 asks for reasons behind individual teachers' selection of texts. The differences in answers suggest some interesting variations between 'official' text suggestions by curriculum boards and teacher-specific text selection. The bar charts below outline these differences.

Selected responses:

- Public examination requirements: often it is strategic to choose a text (within an elective) that not many schools take up. The 'freshness' of the students' answers can produce a 'halo' effect.
- I tend to choose lower school texts that are issue based, accessible, entertaining and 'literary' while in upper school texts I look for literary value, challenging concepts.
- There is also a sense that text selection committees play it safe sometimes and newer writing can miss out. (I can, for example, remember when recommending *Romulus, My Father* some years back, not long after it was first published. It is only now, with the release of the film, and a new round of attention, that it has been set.) Australian poetry particularly seems to suffer this way. The same familiar names seem to be constantly recycled.
- Australian texts seem more readily available in lower school as Australian authors seem to represent a strong portion of this section. I find it hard to find Australian texts suitable for lower ability upper school students that are both available and have good teacher resources.
- Restricted by Book Hire Scheme. We must use a text for five years before we are allowed to make changes.

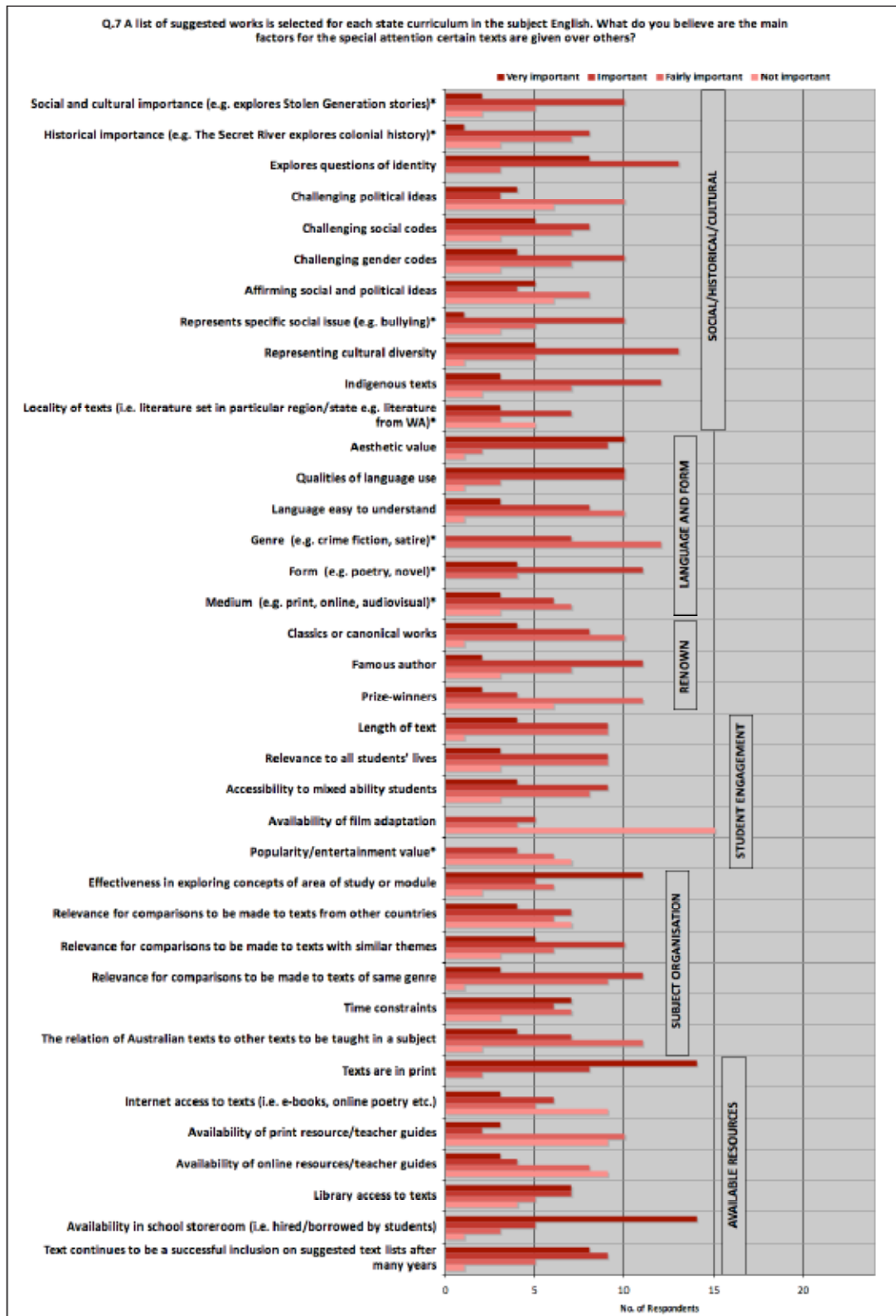


Figure 36: Possible reasons for text suggestions selected by state curriculum boards

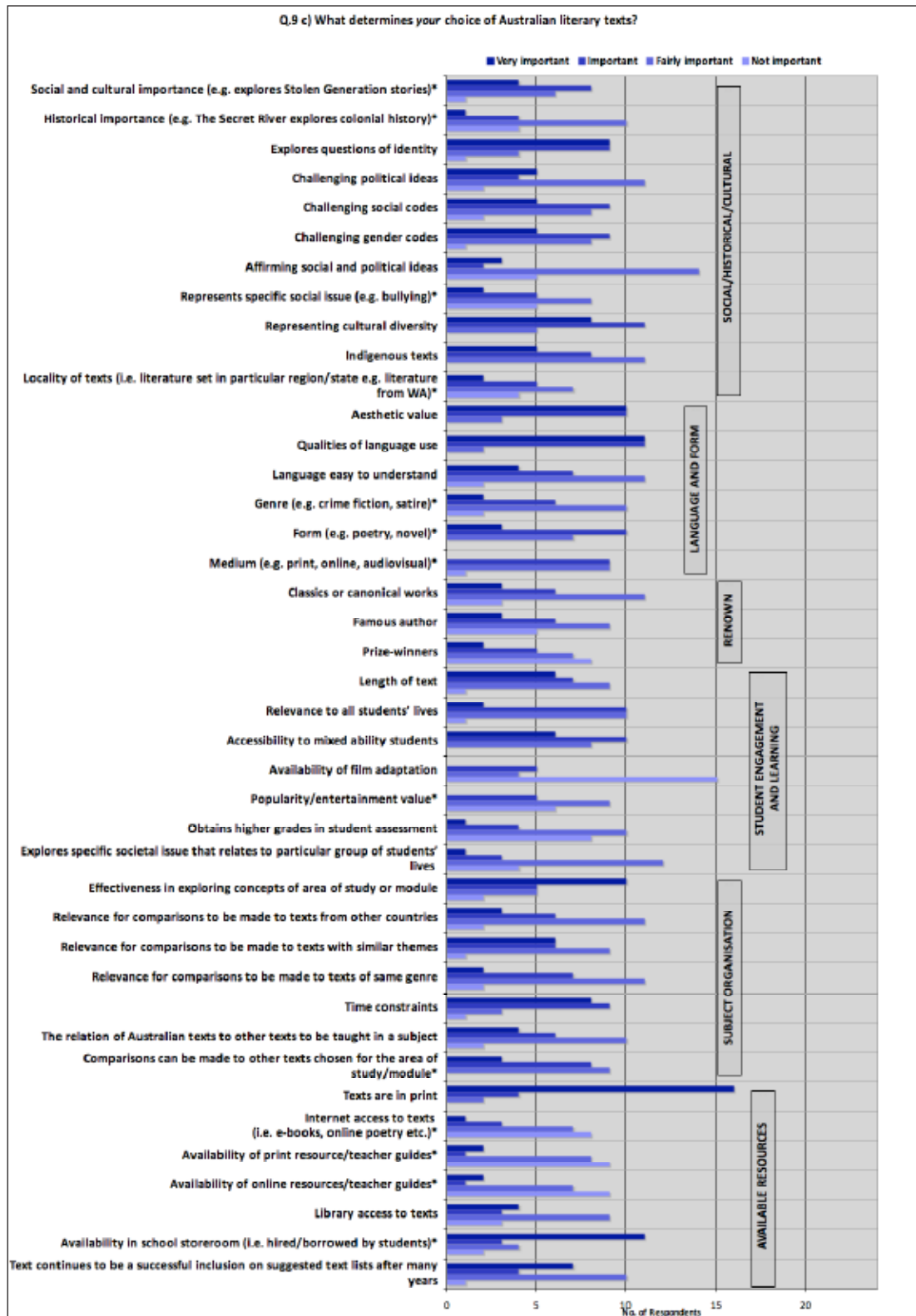


Figure 37: Reasons for text selection by individual teachers



- I think we need to be careful in ‘over-doing’ Indigenous texts – they clearly have a place but I think tend to lose meaning if consistently used – this applies to all genres and authors.
- If there were more upper school Aussie texts about things other than living on a cattle station or being Aboriginal I would use them. These texts are good, but seem better suited to students with a higher ability level (e.g. *No Sugar* is a great Aboriginal text but I can’t see it working with TAFE-bound students, although they need an understanding of Indigenous culture as well).
- I find it difficult to respond about teaching texts. We teach concepts and skills and use texts as a vehicle for this purpose.
- Normally it is the quality of the writing that is the main determinant.
- Better funding of school libraries by federal and state governments because there has been no concentrated funding for all secondary school libraries since the early 1970s. English teachers need to be proactive in working with teacher librarians and state syllabus guidelines need to value these texts.
- Teachers suggest texts that they think will work with students. Some of those texts are Australian; teachers aren’t likely to recommend a text just because it is Australian.
- The better teacher resources are available, and the wider the range of study, the more likely schools would purchase more Aussie texts.



3. TEACHING, TECHNOLOGY AND RESOURCING

Discovering the ways that new and emerging technologies are affecting contemporary teaching practice was one aim of the TAL Survey, as was identifying resource needs and shortfalls. We addressed questions to tertiary and senior secondary teachers on the types of online tools and information services they used and what sort of developments they could identify as useful for supporting teaching Australian literature in the future.

- **The use of online resources and other communication technologies**

Tertiary sector usage:

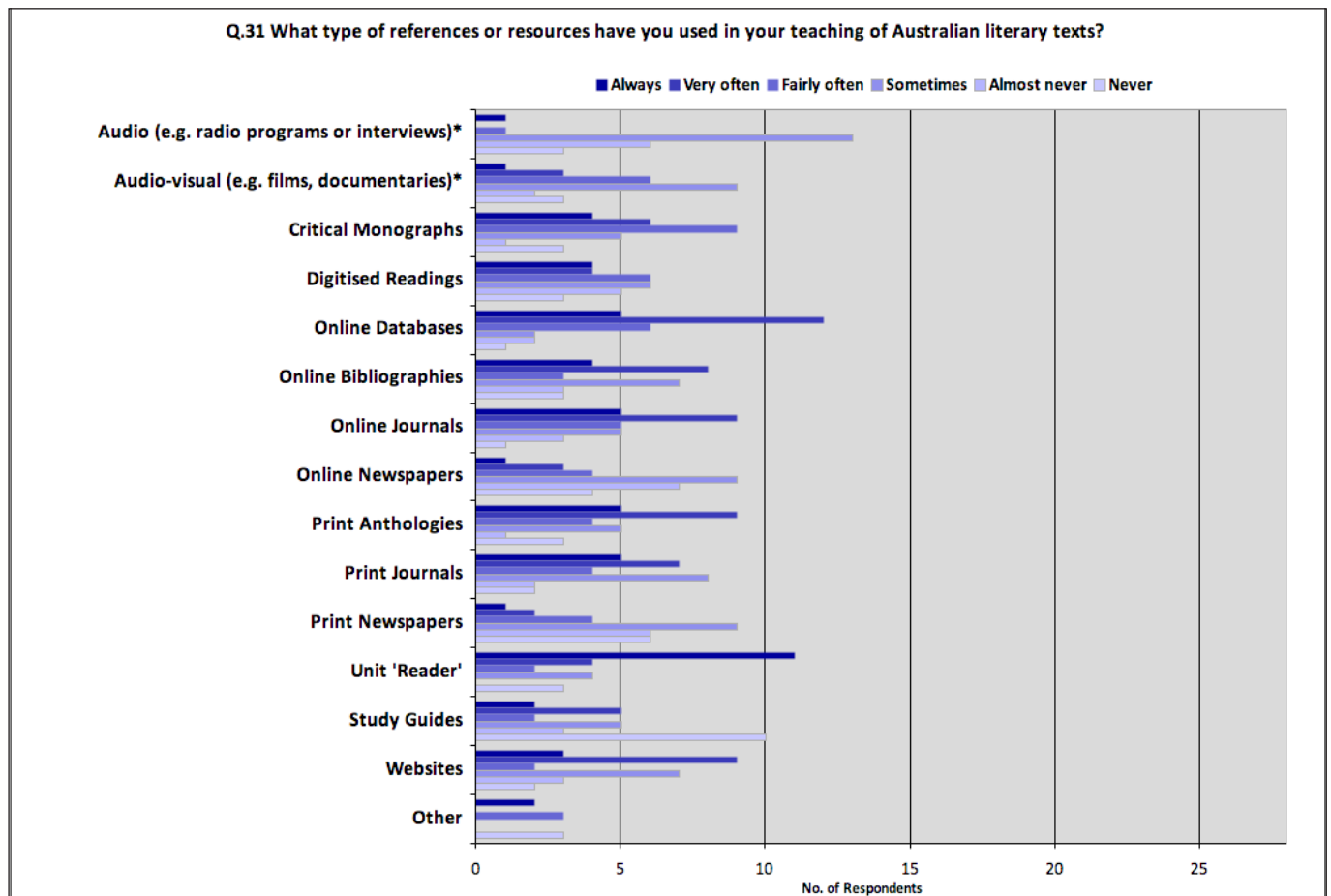


Figure 38: Resource usage

At least two thirds of academic respondents use online resources and technologies in research, assessment design, and for student engagement. Online subscription-based databases and tools, widely available in the tertiary sector, are a central resource for tertiary teachers and academics. Respondents found the Australian literature bibliographical resource, AustLit, the most useful for teaching.

Other resources providing access to full text (SETIS, Gale or Chadwick-Healy databases) were identified as were additional bibliographical databases such as the MLA, APAIS/APAFT and ADB. Discipline journals, literary review magazines and websites that provide access to free podcasts/vodcasts (for e.g. ABC and Australian Screen) were also identified as useful, as were print based reference works such as companions, encyclopaedias and bibliographies.

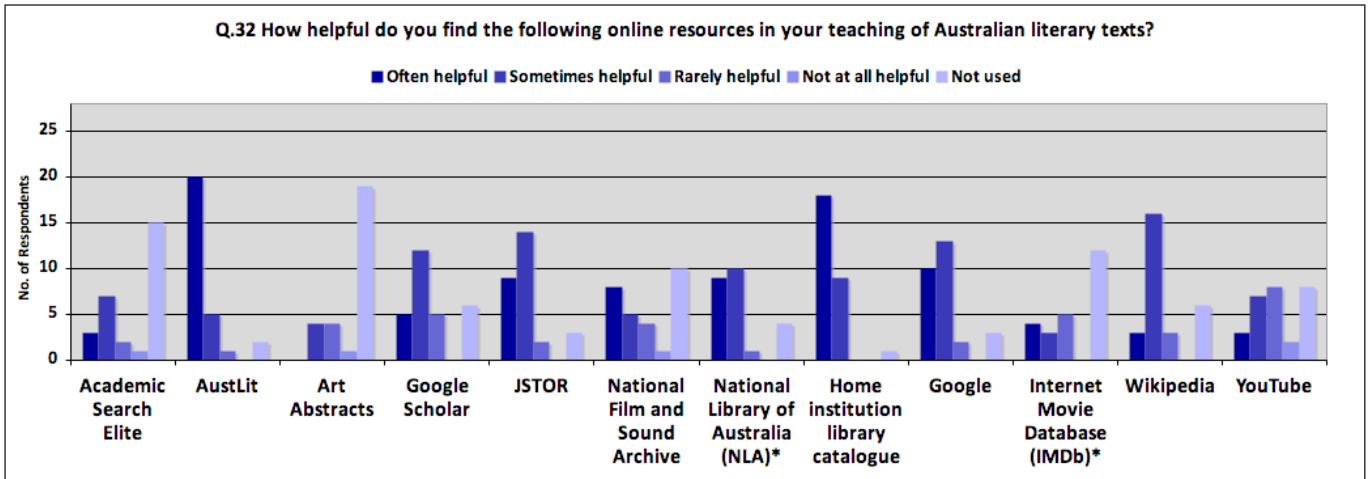


Figure 39: Usefulness of specific resources

Some respondents made observations about the use of technology for flexible teaching and to address equity and accessibility issues.

Respondents were asked about their methods of employing technologies and online tools in their teaching practice. The examples given on the use of Wikipedia, the creation of group wikis or other social networking tools elicited a wide range of responses from the wish to ban Wikipedia and social networking activities to the encouragement of students’ critical reading practices when using such tools and the deployment of library training courses in research to enhance student engagement.

This area warrants further investigation as resourcing for the study of Australian literature is a major issue for both sectors.

Selected responses:

- Ban wikipedia, include library-based web research in research training, use online chat rooms and online tutorials, share resources electronically, use live web sites in teaching.
- Full or partial online courses through WebCt/Blackboard.
- I teach students to read literary texts and associated critical material. Whether they Twitter or Flickr is irrelevant to me, so long as they do their reading.
- Not a fan of such resources so long as students remain untutored in more traditional sources.
- I have recently retreated from investing time in intensive web-based teaching, as too time-intensive at a time when I have young children. I encourage students to become informed and discriminating about online research and while not banning Wikipedia and Google, constantly belittle, chasten and humiliate any putative person who may be solely reliant on them.
- Encourage analysis of Wiki material and cross-checking for accuracy.
- I’m afraid I don’t do any of these things, except allow students to use Wikipedia, which seems to me to be unfairly maligned by some academic historians.
- All students are given guidance in the use of online resources suitable for their level. I no longer ‘bar’ any online source, but try to teach students to handle all information critically.



- **Availability of online resources and technologies**

Secondary school usage:

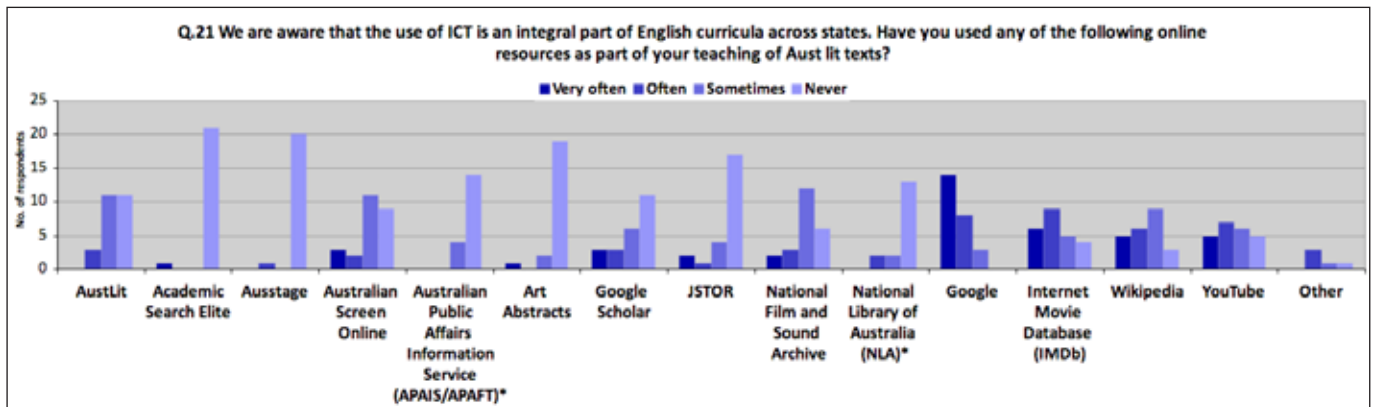


Figure 40: availability of online resources: secondary sector

There is a marked difference in the tools and information services used by senior secondary teachers with the secondary sector apparently relying more heavily on freely available services. A general enthusiasm for accessing and using online material was detected in the free-text comments. YouTube, MySpace and wikis were identified as both resources for teachers in information discovery practice, presentation and sharing information with students. Some use of ICTs and social networking tools in assessment was evident.

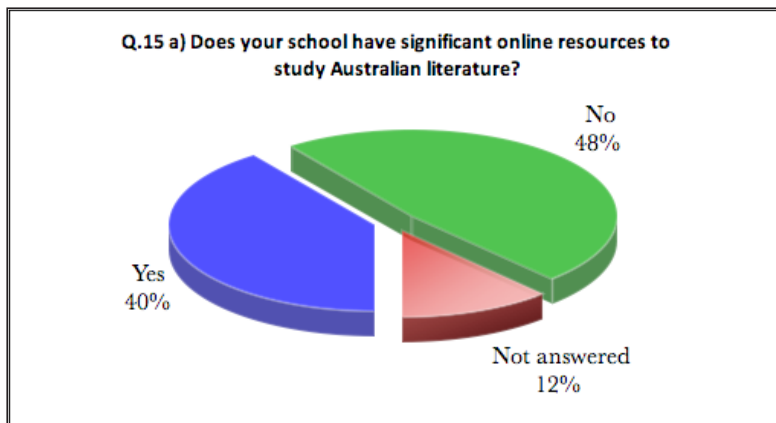


Figure 41: Online resource availability

Respondents in the secondary school sector identified the lack of access to many subscription-based services as a problem. Non-government schools are generally better resourced with online tools and services but a number of comments were made about the restrictions in the secondary sector to free online resources such as YouTube.

Selected responses:

- I'd love to see AustLit, where possible, actually link to digitised resources (academic papers, critical reviews etc.) that are listed as references. I guess this Survey might give some names/works that might be worth starting with. I think schools are more likely to subscribe if this was available.
- I draw on old sets of notes from 30+ years of teaching and engender my own resource booklets. I rely heavily on Google and Wikipedia.
- The public databases may not be as good quality but they are easier to access and sift through. Their search results are more relevant.



- In Queensland, because we have no set texts, there is no market for selling resources, etc., so we have become accustomed to creating our own resources, specific to the needs of our learners.
- We have access to online resources through electronic databases such as 'Literature Resource Center' and other Gale products to which the College subscribes annually.
- A comprehensive database and access to electronic copies of out of copyright texts (e.g. Barbara Bayton's stories) through a repository such as Project Gutenberg would be good.
- I have seen the resources for Aust Lit that many larger 'private' schools have and what public schools have in comparison is embarrassing. The funding model – which has a direct impact on Aust. Lit resources and their availability – negates any hope of parity or equality.
- I use ICT in almost all facets of my teaching. It is rare for me not to use them now. I teach English and Media and am very knowledgeable about forms of ICT and their application. I am very open-minded in my readiness to accept and use new technologies, especially those which help to engage students.

- **One of the things that you haven't specified here as a resource is the use of professional 'human' networks. If I have a query or question about Aust Lit (or other lit) I will ask a colleague or friend more often than not if they can assist. Also, there are things such as writers' festivals; and I also contact writers themselves for information/ etc. In this case I would classify email as an essentially 'human' tool for communication, in much the same way as we used to use the phone.**

- Nothing specific to our school – but growing awareness of what is available.
- Availability is the key factor. I do my own research and determine what would be most suitable and this of course is limited by the time I have to do this but once having decided the most pressing factor is the lack of access to computers/data projectors etc.
- We have no access to computers in our normal English lessons. All computers are in use by Business/Technology classes all day.

- **I use ICT for my own research and lesson planning, esp. for visual stimulus. However, many of the sites are not available on the NSW DET server. And the lack of reliable, efficient and well-maintained computer resources at my workplace render it impossible to have a successful lesson based on ICT... This is a systematic problem in NSW DET schools where IT support is on top of a teacher's load – in non-government schools (most of them... sorry to go on about this!) they generally have dedicated IT support teachers. If I could confidently go to a fully functional ICT space I would use it all the time for lessons, Aust. Lit. or otherwise.**



4. TEACHING METHODOLOGIES AND DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES

We were interested in discovering how Australian literature is being taught in senior secondary and tertiary contexts, and this became a major focus in both teacher questionnaires. Undergraduate students were also surveyed about their experiences in studying Australian literature and the most effective learning models. The purpose of this section is to summarise common responses and point to some particularly compelling examples of teaching that we hope may generate further discussion. By discovering the diverse ways that Australian literature is taught, we aim to open up future possibilities for critical evaluation of Australian literature in education.

- **Disciplinary contexts**

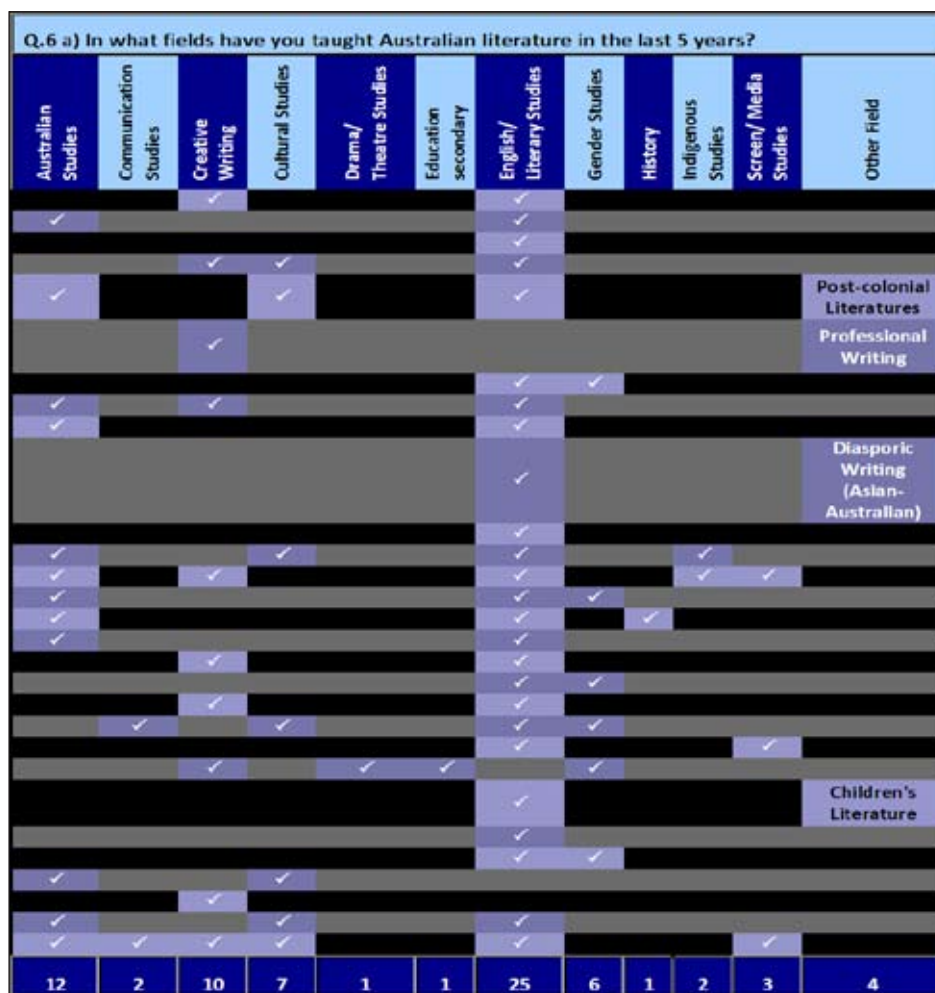


Figure 42: Fields in which respondents have taught

In the tertiary sector, Australian literature is taught across disciplines including English/Literary Studies, Australian Studies, History, Gender Studies, Creative Writing, Indigenous Studies and Drama Studies. The most common interdisciplinary teaching is across Australian Studies and Literary Studies, and Creative Writing and Literary Studies. Also see a more detailed outline in the quantitative section above.

An important finding is the emergence of Creative Writing as a growing branch of Literary Studies. Ten respondents were teaching in both Creative Writing and Literary Studies fields and this points to significant interaction between



teaching and assessment approaches in each field of literary study, including the use of creative response as an effective method of literary analysis. Also, many of the tertiary responses emphasise the importance of the ERA's recognition of Creative Writing in the Arts and Humanities research cluster.

In the tertiary responses, there are varied comments about disciplinary and inter-disciplinary teaching. Some observe the 'shift back to the literary' after Cultural Studies models had moved through the discipline; some observe that these models are still imperative.

Selected responses:

- What I perceive as a shift back towards the literary has been reflected in my teaching ...
- I have developed a stronger sense of the institutional contexts in which 'Australian literature' is produced as a category and tried to build this into my teaching. I have observed students' changing patterns of learning and adapted my methodology accordingly. I now tend to teach literary texts within wider 'Cultural Studies' contexts.
- The major changes for teaching Aust. Lit. texts have been changing degrees of background or familiarity with the material in different student groups, and the development of 'creative response' and other more opportunistic interpretive approaches.

In the secondary sector, respondents were mainly drawn from members of the Australian Association for Teachers of English (AATE); thus the majority are English teachers. Some teachers listed inter-disciplinary approaches such as Cultural Studies, postcolonial frameworks, historical and reception studies. This depends on the level at which the literature is being taught as well as student abilities and knowledge (see comments below). However, in the senior secondary sector, the quantitative data shows an emphasis on teaching approaches aligned with concepts defined by the Area of Study and module. Subjects include English, English Advanced, English Extension (one teacher calls this 'tertiary entrance English'), Literature, Communication, Drama, History, and SOSE. It should be noted that each state curriculum has a different terminology and structure.

Comparative approaches *between* national literatures and genres, and between forms (literature, film, documentary, biography, visual art, music) in the English teaching context is a rich finding in the text field comments. Electives within modules are particularly interesting for understanding how teachers are teaching Australian literature and other literatures. There are broad concepts outlined in state curricula (e.g. NSW has areas of study such as 'Belonging' and 'Experience through Language' and 'Identity'). Respondents allude, however, to relative autonomy in the creation of units within 'Electives' and the selection of texts. Examples are given in the 'selected responses' below. There are some fascinating juxtapositions here between texts and conceptual ideas.

Selected responses:

- I believe Australian literature needs to be part of every English course I teach so when I select texts as a teacher and in my role as English co-ordinator I ensure that students encounter some Australian content whether it be novel, film, short stories or poetry.
- *Facing the Music* (documentary), Advanced English, Year-11, Elective: Comparative Study of Texts and Contexts with the book *Fast Food Nation* in an elective I called 'Liquid Times'
- The elective 'Liquid Times' considers how context shapes meaning at the level of writing/production, by comparing two texts from different cultures or times (etc.). The Australian doco will be paired with *Fast Food Nation*, an American book of investigative journalism. The elective has been called 'Liquid Times' as it draws on some key ideas of Zygmunt Bauman for its intellectual focus. The Life Writing unit is specialised study, in this case of a set genre. (There are other modules and electives available to teachers.) Students are required to study 3 set texts from 4 choices. I have selected Modjeska's work alongside Lowell's *Life Studies* and Auster's *The Invention of Solitude*.
- *Born Sandy Devotional*, The Triffids, English, 12 and 11 stage two, as poetry song lyrics
- Would use The Triffids' CD and Dave McComb's lyrics to look at representations of the Australian landscape with Winton, Stow and others.



- **Teaching methodologies in the tertiary sector**

- i) *Overall aims for teaching Australian literature*

Surveyed on the main aims and objectives of unit design, the majority of respondents' comments focus on teaching students about Australia's literary diversity, placing Australian literature in comparison with other literatures of the world, critiquing national identity, and providing an opportunity for students to hear authors speak about their work. Many respondents suggest that unit design depends on the context in which it is taught and the undergraduate level. Particular emphasis is also made on presenting Australian literature in its stylistic and cultural pluralism.

Selected responses:

- To instil an awareness about great literature that also happens to be Australian literature.
To get students reading more local writers.
To have them understand that literature is not irrelevant to their world, but rather intensely relevant to it.
To allow them to understand that Australian literature has a history.
To allow them to decide for themselves whether Australian texts stack up against the 'great masters'.
- Expose students to the diversity of Australian literary and cultural production; expand their abilities to analyse and assess cultural meaning in an Australian context; demonstrate the development of culture in a national context and in a comparative and postcolonial frame; develop their abilities to research and write about meaning and culture in general.
- Wider knowledge of Australia. Advancement of literary scholarship. General literacy. Skills of cultural analysis. Critical ability. Ability to both read closely and place the text in a broad cultural and historical context.
- Increasing knowledge and sophisticated interpretation of Australian texts and placing them within international/transnational frames – women's writing in particular, but not exclusively.
- These vary a lot from level to level: at first year my aim is to capture attention for Australian texts within a first-year unit that includes texts from English modernist and other sources. At the 300 level my aim has been to introduce students to contemporary Australian writing, nothing older than five years usually. At Honours level I introduce students to theoretical and interdisciplinary texts (like Gibson's *Seven Versions of an Australian Badlands* e.g.) as part of Honours units that aren't exclusively Australian literature ones.
- To critically examine assumptions about national identity and notions of national boundaries and belonging.
- To critically examine trends in publishing in Australia – e.g. what themes and patterns emerge in contemporary writings from and about Australia.
- To introduce students to good literature as a source of personal enrichment and knowledge.
To assist students to improve their skills in textual interpretation, analytical, creative and critical thinking, and writing. To open up knowledge of Australian history and society. To increase students' knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and history.

In response to a question about the most successful approaches to teaching Australian literature, respondents identify textual analysis, independent research projects, creative writing as an interpretative tool, contextual and comparative approaches and research-driven teaching. Two of the comments below also highlight the need to cater to a range of abilities, knowledges and levels.

Selected responses:

- Teaching a course on 'Aust. Lit and Difference', the creative writing was especially good to elicit an understanding of notions of difference from the p.o.v. of individual students living in a strongly multicultural society. Independent research projects worked well at [my university] given the large number of foreign students with limited knowledge about Australia.'



- It is important to have a variety of approaches and methods; and this has always been true. It is not particular to Aust. Lit., but enables students to pursue their own interests and strengths. In recent years I have found it important to relate literature to the contemporary world and have provided a variety of choices in assessment – e.g. asking students to write a talk on the value of studying Asian-Australian literature to be given at a One Nation meeting; allowing creative writing responses in Aust Lit units.
- It needs to be brought up to date with contemporary theories and approaches to literature to distance it from the gumtree clichés and expectations. They need to see its intellectual potential. We spend one 4-week module on Furphy in Honours. This has been fantastic.
- Close textual analysis. Independent research projects, drawing on databases (but framed by agreed topics). Fleshing-out of period cultures via music and video materials.
- This depends on the level of the students. For lower levels we do quite a bit of close textual analysis. I always ‘play’ with different modes of written responses to texts – critical analysis, creative responses, reviewing, annotated bibliographies (the latter at higher levels).
- Creative writing. Where the Australian texts focus issues e.g. historical fiction in the Clendinnen/Grenville exchange. Also as a way of engaging with larger theoretical questions of literary value, nation, originality, tradition, etc.
- Getting the students to attempt their own six-page picture story book and reflect on what they have learned from the exercise is particularly effective.
- Textual analysis in conjunction with analysis of debates in the secondary literature about the politics of national literature and its dissemination (e.g. literary festivals, etc.).

ii) *Influences on Australian literature teaching*

In the teaching methodologies section, respondents were asked about influences on their teaching. Personal academic research, student literacy and student engagement are the most dominant influences. Text comments list particular research interests and how these apply to unit design and teaching approaches such as print culture studies, post-colonial studies, reception studies, popular culture and cultural studies, adaptation, life-writing, trauma and memory studies, and post-modernism (see *Figure 43 over the page*).

While the chart above indicates minimal influence of government education policies, free-text comments reveal some important factors influencing tertiary teaching. These include a growing number of international and equity students, less class time, the influence of ‘learning outcomes’ and ‘graduate qualities’ profiles in several universities, state school curriculum policies, and the positioning of Creative Writing in the federal government’s ERA agenda.

Selected responses:

- In myriad ways, from catering to the changing numbers of international students to shifting the role of first year in a major.
- A more focussed direction towards learning outcomes.
- The main influence derives from the federal government’s restricted funding, with consequences for workloads, contact hours, number of units taught etc. Faculty policies affect the latter too. I do make an effort to show the relevance of literary study – this is in response to 6 above.
- State Education Department school curriculum politics (e.g. crudely politicised English, excessive narrowing of history and its widespread disappearance as a subject in schools) have been opposed and countered in my units.
- Mainly by connecting the teaching to other activities, such as writers’ festivals, and community debates.
- The government’s positioning of Aust. Lit. as part of Creative Industries cluster opens my teaching parameters to link more broadly with professional contemporary literary practice away from canonical studies and post-colonial discourse dominance.
- Graduate qualities profile: vocational skills are pushed, esp. ethical understanding, communication skills, ‘experiential learning’, ‘flexible learning’ (i.e. having well developed online units). By 2010 all programs will have an ‘experiential learning’ component – engage in community.

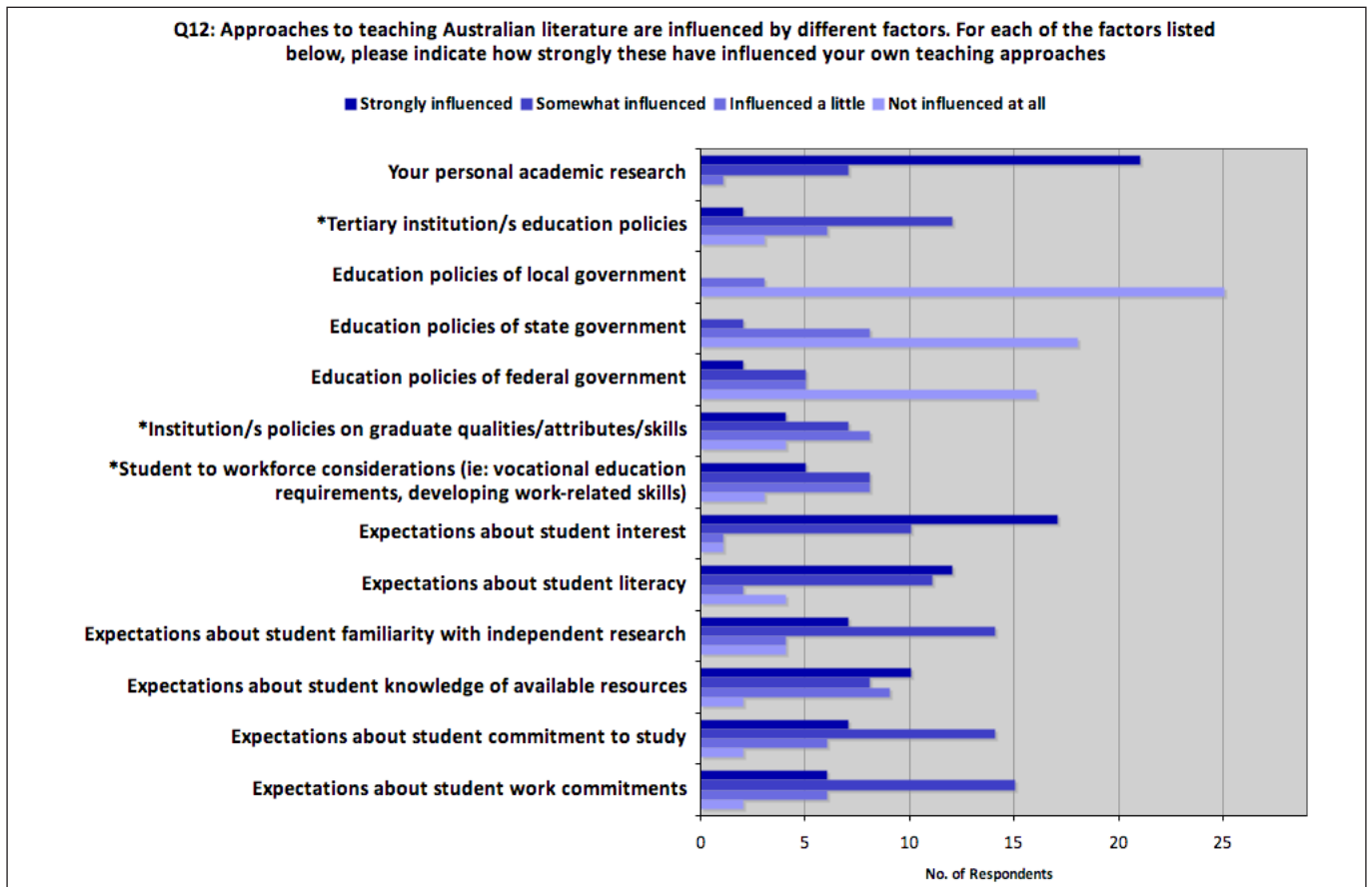


Figure 43: Factors influencing teaching approaches

iii) Changes in teaching approaches and unit design

Tertiary responses in the quantitative section indicate that the main changes to teaching approaches and unit design reflect shifts in educational ideas, changes in technology, and general student ‘literacy’. In the text field, many respondents suggest that technology has changed their approach to unit design and assessment, for example, in the use of MS PowerPoint and in options for podcasting lectures. PowerPoint software has allowed more visual approaches to teaching content, but some worry that it overrides the ‘interpretive’ priorities of literary analysis. It is also noted that if students can access lecture notes and podcasts online, many are less inclined to attend lectures on campus. Other changes, as noted above, include an increasing diversity of students, from a growing international student intake (depending on the university), to more ‘equity’ students. Some respondents also suggested that workload issues and fewer class hours due to a reduction in government funding are also important changes to the quality of teaching.

There is also a significant level of comment relating to accommodating students’ ‘changing patterns of learning’, reflecting changes in technology, school curriculum and student engagement. Most respondents who commented suggested that this influences assessment practices with more use of creative approaches for interpretative analysis, more online, research-based assignments and collaborative projects, and in some instances, a move to ‘student-centred’, ‘problem-based’ learning. This depends on the university context, as the select responses suggest below. Those that perceive a change in reading abilities and learning styles suggest that teaching strategies and assessment practices have changed to accommodate students’ lack of knowledge and experience as avid and skilled readers. As noted in the ‘Texts for teaching’ section, this also means a limitation on the selection of texts, especially on longer and more controversial ones.



Selected responses:

- 1. What I perceive as a shift back towards the literary has been reflected in my teaching.
- 2. The availability of online databases has led to more research-based assessment projects.
- 3. State education department requirements re English and history have led to some merging of the two.
- 4. Decreased student reading competence has led to the study of shorter and more recent books.
- The development of online technology and the recording of lectures has greatly changed the ways in which I deliver content to students; multimedia environments have also expanded options for teaching significantly. Educational ideas have impacted on my organisation of class-room discussion and on means to involve students from diverse backgrounds and who are time poor. Institutional policies in respect of timetabling and facilities impact significantly on teaching methods – sometimes quite negatively. Policies in regard to the enrolment and status of international and study abroad students also impact on teaching methods in Australian units, sometimes quite dramatically and often without warning or explanation. And social shifts and demographic changes have some small impact in my university which services a wealthy part of a major city.
- – Increased emphasis on student centred and problem based learning.
- – Increased use of online media (WebCT etc).
- – Growing emphasis on diversity and difference.
- Increasing number of non-Anglo students mean that certain assumptions and understandings need to be made much more explicit.
- – Have shifted away from canonical to ‘themes and issues’ based approach.
- – Have encouraged students to make full use of research technologies (esp. AustLit database).
- – Have formalised learning outcomes in line with [my university’s] policy.
- – Have attempted greater fit between teaching and research to maximise personal benefit from teaching.
- Changing nature of curriculum for education students.
- Institutional – increasingly harder to explain teaching Aust. literature within national/nationalist models, though may be changing. Social shifts – recently I removed *Dead Europe* (Tsiolkas) from a subject following the Bill Henson controversy and in light of some pretty clumsy critical responses to the novel. 1st-year was not the right setting for that work.
- 1. More basic explaining, descriptive work when teaching in regional [Australia] and [overseas] whereas more ideas/theoretical focus in a Go8 university. Also, [my current university] has a very young school-leaver population, so more contemporary pop culture refs used rather than [overseas or in regional Australia].
- 2. Technological changes have meant teaching online, using PowerPoint, WebCT, blogs, more image-based.
- Over a long period of teaching, technological regimes change quite a lot and one has to adapt to these, I have tended to do so by always minimising the role of technology in learning. On the other hand I am always modifying my teaching according to educational ideas about all aspects of tertiary teaching.
- 1. I have had to accommodate the fact that most students now are inexperienced readers. I find that I must ‘sell’ reading and literature as sources of entertainment and knowledge.
- 2. The advent of PowerPoint has increased the visual content of my lectures. I have to guard against the tendency for visual content to swamp the interpretation of literature – the intellectual content of the teaching.

iv) *Critical approaches to unit design*

In this section of the questionnaire for tertiary teachers, we aimed to investigate the diverse theoretical and critical approaches for the teaching of Australian literature. Text responses vary in disciplinary approaches. Some respondents emphasise the need to bring back strong ‘literary critical’ approaches to teaching texts, thus developing students’ skills in textual interpretation, literary analysis and ‘creative and critical thinking’. Some comments reflect observations relating to a perceived shift to interdisciplinary and Cultural Studies approaches.

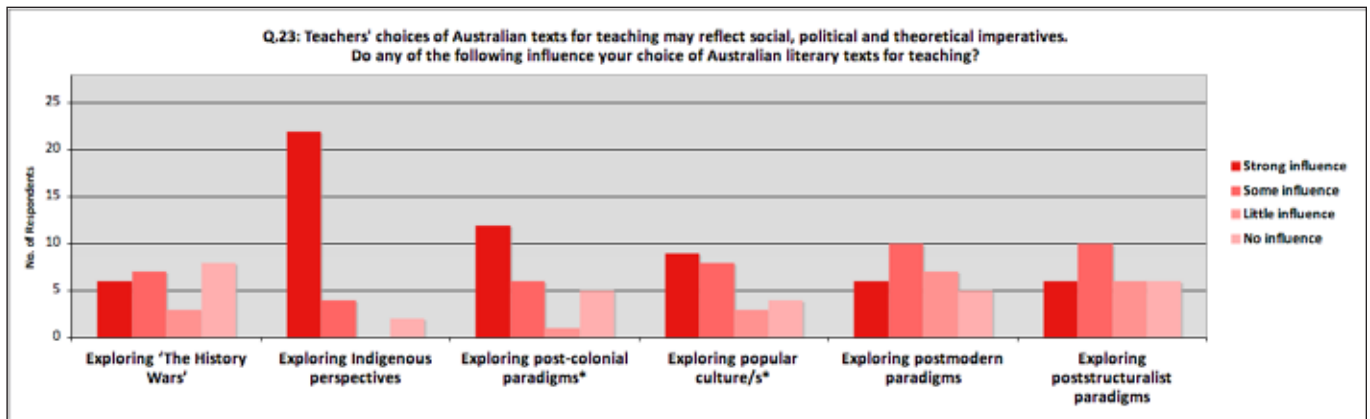


Figure 44: Factors determining teachers' choice of texts

The chart above suggests that 'exploring Indigenous perspectives' is the most significant imperative for a majority of respondents, followed by 'postcolonial' approaches. Those that comment on exploring the 'history wars' are mainly those that aim to critique nationalist paradigms – three comments mentioned the Grenville/Clendinnen debate and the question of historical fiction when teaching late 20th- and early 21st-century novels. In the responses to postmodernism, comments vary between 'socio-political' and 'aesthetic' approaches to teaching literature, from 'teaching contemporary Australian literature, [...] as a means to encounter the re-examination of history' to 'looking at reader/writer as co-producers of meaning'. There is an interesting overlap in the text field comments relating to poststructuralism. Where one respondent describes postmodernist approaches as 'Voices/Aesthetics/Politics', another respondent sees poststructuralist approaches as 'some concern with textuality and constructedness of forms and genres'. Poststructuralist critical texts are used mainly as background resources alongside creative texts.

The use of popular culture emphasises its value in student engagement and in comparison to historical texts and contexts. Other theoretical approaches in teaching particular texts include feminist theory, critical whiteness theory, queer theory, historicism, Marxist theory, performance theory, trauma studies, theories of memory, trans-nationalism and multiculturalism.

Selected responses:

- I used to think Marxism provided a useful theoretical standpoint for literary study, but I don't any longer. The only general intellectual authority that now seems to me to be of much use is Aristotle.
- All of the above – though some eco-criticism is dreadful. Also whiteness theory and transnational perspectives.
- All of the above, plus crosscultural and hybrid writing generally, as part of an attempt to connect the past with the present.
- Feminism, certainly – I teach Baynton and Franklin, in particular, in context of feminist criticism, as well as Lawson. Multiculturalism – looking at ideas about 'mainstream' in Aus (Waten, Le, Tsiolkas).
- Psychoanalytic and Jungian theory.
- Such theoretical frameworks don't necessarily drive my choice of texts, but I do focus on them in the actual teaching – that is, I'm inclined to choose texts and shape units by other imperatives rather than theoretical ones (regionalism, historical period, kinds of texts etc).

v) *Indigenous literature and postcolonial paradigms:*

Tertiary teachers' responses revealed an overwhelming support for inclusion of diverse Indigenous writing, especially in relation to 'post-colonial paradigms'. Twenty-two out of 29 respondents named 'Exploring Indigenous Perspectives'



as a major priority in their choice of texts. A large percentage of tertiary teachers taught at least two to three texts. A diverse range of authors was named, including Alexis Wright, Alice Nannup, Kim Scott, Larissa Behrendt, Lionel Fogerty, Jack Davis, Kath Walker/Oodgeroo and Alf Taylor. Some of the comments importantly emphasise the need to select diverse voices as well as draw on ‘specific cultural knowledges’ through invited Indigenous speakers.

Selected responses:

- This has been a very strong influence: my units include at least three or more texts with Indigenous perspectives, as well as settler texts that engage with representing Indigenous experience of colonisation, whether positively or negatively. This is a key aspect of the attraction of Aust lit for international students and crucial to understanding cultural developments for domestic students.
- Always, though conscious that I am not ‘their voice’. My inclusion of Indigenous texts (texts by) relates to my ability to draw on specific cultural knowledge. At [one university], the support of the school for Indigenous Studies, at [another university] by inviting writers in.
- In the past I have based up to a third of a unit’s content on Indigenous texts. I have also twice co-taught designated Indigenous units.

• **Teaching methodologies in the secondary sector**

In the secondary sector, teaching methodologies vary according to the area of study and level taught. There is a strong emphasis on choosing texts to suit the concept and area of study, rather than studying texts on their own merits, unless taught in ‘Literature’ courses. However, this changes according to the course and level. Overall, senior secondary teachers suggested that greater autonomy in choosing texts and approaches to suit different student knowledges, abilities and school contexts is a priority in the design of curriculum. Most state curricula have ‘suggested texts’ lists designed around modules and areas of study except for Queensland. In some states, at least one Australian text in Senior Secondary English is mandated, chosen from a list of suggested texts.

i) *General learning objectives in teaching English and other Humanities subjects*

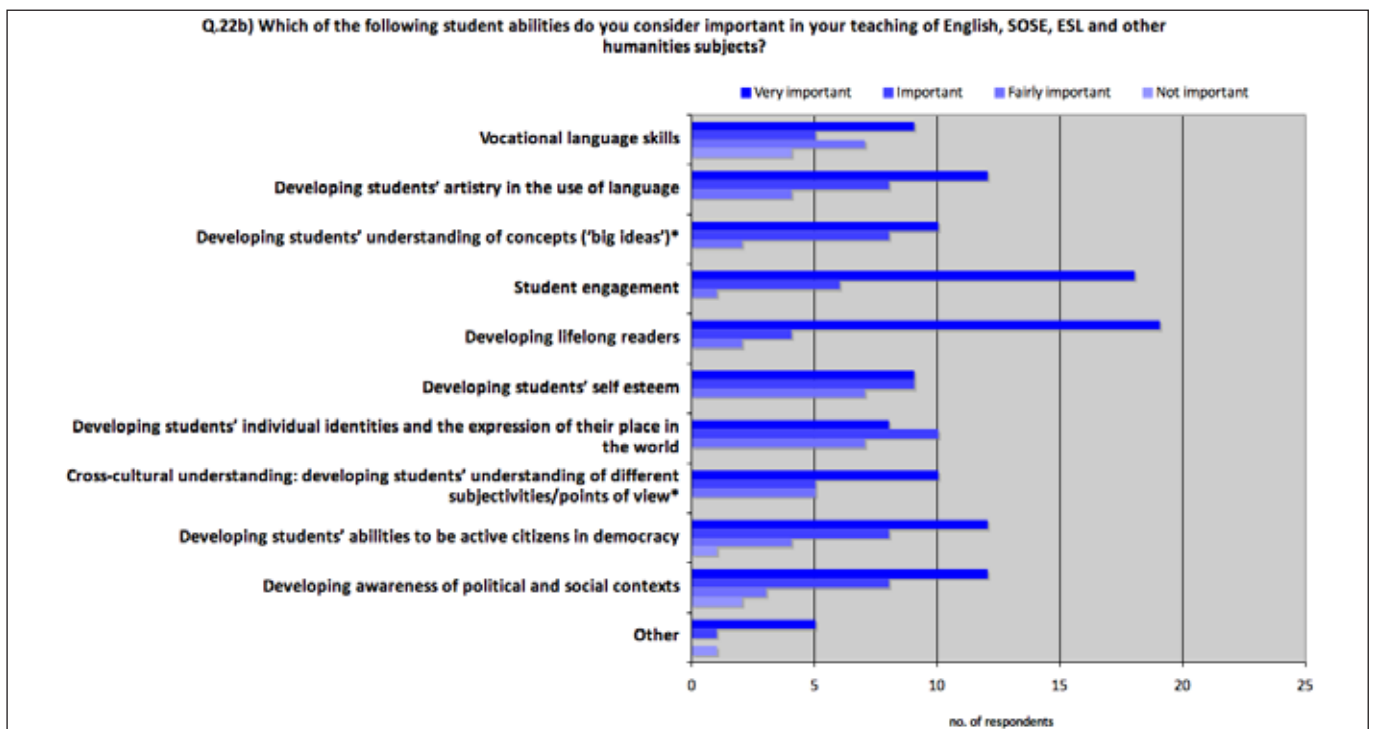


Figure 45: Developing student abilities

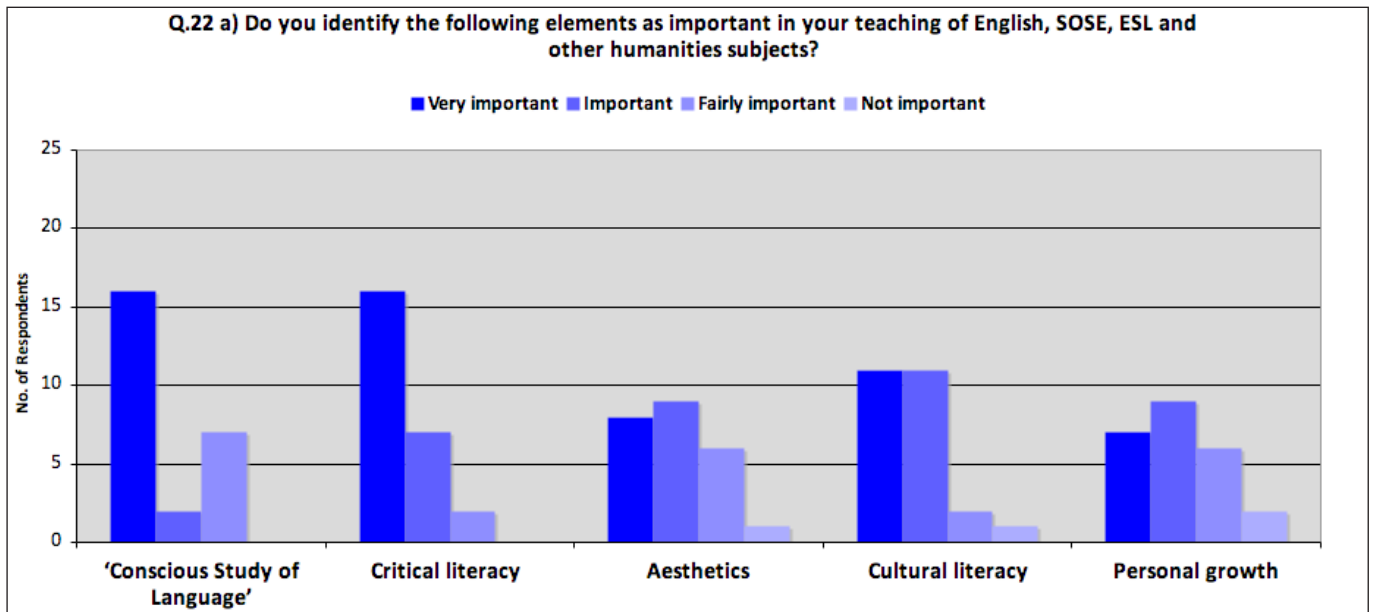


Figure 46: Important elements in the Humanities

An emphasis on teaching secondary students a 'variety of reading practices' is noted in the free-text comments and quantitative responses, as is student engagement and developing lifelong readers. Teaching students about language and developing their understanding of language use is also a significant factor in English teacher responses, as well as 'aesthetics'. This reflects the disciplinary context, but as the responses note, priorities have changed in English Studies in the last 30 years. A variety of approaches are presented below, including studies on the historical and social context of the literature, author biographies, creative responses, and comparison with other genres, media and national literatures. There is an emphasis on student engagement in many of these comments and that cross-media approaches can often present opportunities for students to discover reading.

Selected responses:

'Conscious study of language':

- Interestingly I'd put 'very important' in both ESL and English, but HOW it's studied in the two subjects differs. (I'm a novice at ESL)
- Students need to know what language is and how it is used in different texts in order to use it effectively themselves.
- All the units in our senior school are entitled 'Language and ...'
- There is not enough conscious study of language. This is why many students speak and write badly. Functional Grammar can valuably assist students in expressing themselves in a range of genres.

'Critical literacy':

- Once you come to grips with what Crit. Lit. means, you can't not 'read' in that way. (Not about seeing the bias, but about recognising socially constructed nature of everything.)
- Critical thinking is important but this term 'Critical Literacy' takes up too much time in debate!
- Overkill – in some cases it is done to death.
- I can not see how one could possibly teach English without teaching students to be critically literate.
- Devastated that this is being ideologically attacked and or phased out e.g. in new QLD Senior English curriculum; abhor states which mandate teaching of English without endorsing ideological frameworks.
- In Queensland, this has been part of our approach for many years now.
- Students need to understand that both readers and writers have agendas.



‘Aesthetics’:

- Without enjoyment and appreciation of aesthetics in literature, it is often difficult to engage students.
- The pleasures of text are always a consideration.
- It is still possible to appreciate beauty in literature, as in art and music, even if classical ideas are unfashionable.

‘Cultural literacy’:

- How texts are constructed and how they work is crucial – and not exactly separable from ‘cultural literacy’.
- Students should be learning how to explain their own thoughts and ideas in different forms and to consider this in texts will help them develop skills in this area.
- To read a text with no attention to its cultural context is impossible.
- Texts are created within a context and as such, the cultural context cannot be ignored.
- You don’t need to exclusively read dead middle class Englishmen to be culturally literate.

‘Personal Growth’:

- The focus of English is primarily using and understanding the English language in all its forms of expression (the literary, the everyday, the workplace, etc). This focus is geared towards students learning to participate as effectively as they can in society. This requires them to develop a strong sense of self and how that self is positioned in society.
- Terms used should be related to the lives of the students in terms of relevance.
- On a range of levels, all texts have value in terms of personal growth, even if it is only that of the writer.
- I believe all approaches, except teaching of functional linguistics, have an important role to play but that critical literacy approach is most important of all.
- English teachers have the capacity to draw from various models of English teaching to create meaningful programs.
- Not sure what you mean – recognise that what I do can have a crucial role in the ‘personal growth’ of my students, and often choose texts based on students’ life experiences and issues they may be grappling with.
- Surely we got over this 10 years ago at least.

ii) Specific approaches to teaching English and other Humanities subjects

Selected responses:

According to unit and level:

- It depends on the course. For literature it is more as a text seen within its context but studied in depth on its own – not really intertextually. For most standard English courses we teach the text and relate it to other texts that have been studied – whether Australian or not – perhaps with a common theme or using common conventions etc. For the ESL course there is more emphasis on teaching Australian cultural and social practices and history from texts and so this comes to the fore.
- Varies according to the demands of the elective/module. In 2009, teaching Murray, the focus was on a close reading of the poems and then moving outwards to consider issues of context and critical reception. In the Area of Study the focus is on a particular concept and how it is represented in the set text and a number of other texts.
- In Junior school, usually based on a theme, or a question under investigation. In senior school, we investigate notions of Australian identity as represented in literary texts.

Different reading practices:

- Introducing students to various ways of reading texts is very important.
- Students discuss and research historical and social context, playwright’s biography and writing style, practical exploration of the script through readings and assessable performance tasks, comparative study with other Australian plays contemporary and classic and possible links to current films and TV materials and current affairs.
- Texts lend themselves to particular readings, for example, ‘Mango’ is the perfect site for discussions of



gender, race, post-colonialism, Australian identity and history, satire, intertextuality, representations of sexuality, of love, of happiness, of Indigenous people, of racism, of homophobia, of masculinity, of religion, of conservation, of existentialism, of fate, of landscape, of culture.

Themes, issues, ideas:

- Year 11 English texts are used to examine Australian identities as they are constructed in Australian literature together with an assortment of Australian poetry from various print and online sources.
- e.g. for *Bridge to Wiseman's Cove* and *Looking for Alibrandi* – taught separately with focus on structure, style, how techniques convey ideas – to develop literary analysis techniques; then comparison between the two, about themes.
- 12 Lit – *Cloudstreet*, *No Sugar* are taught, among other ways as postcolonial texts and are linked in this sense to *Heart of Darkness* and in terms of race and alterity to *Othello*.
- Combined with texts by same author/director or similar ideas (e.g. – family secrets, hybrid identity, etc.) from any country or time period.

Juxtaposition of texts and genres in different media:

- e.g. poetry in combination with Youtube videos of things such as 'They took the children away' or 'From little things big things grow'; other texts as stand alone in Australian Jigsaw unit (Year 11). Other Australian novels in use at school too numerous to mention but most notably *Looking for Alibrandi*, *78 Shades of Brown*, *Sister Kate*, *Tomorrow When the War Began*. Also many autobiographies.
- I teach these texts in combination with feature films from other countries and in combination with similar and different genres but similar themes and I also use Australian visual art e.g. Gordon Bennett, Imants Tillers, Nigel Hewitt, Tracey Moffatt, Julie Dowling.
- Texts are taught as an issues or thematic based context for Courses of Study and are usually taught with other genres complementing the study with film, feature article or documentary.
- Visual texts, contextualise and draw out key ideas – study with others, help understand context (so you don't ghettoise the text).
- Film as support, transformation = relevant to students. They tend to enjoy a range of texts e.g. Lawson – modern poets and writers. Students rarely read these days especially novels, poetry, [...] literature not seen as relevant [until it is] explored.

Creative responses/strategies and experiential learning:

- The Australian literary texts used in English Extension (Literature) are used as a basis for an assignment which involves complex transformation of the text to produce a new text.
- Giving students the opportunity to explore Drama texts (ie. apply) in practical terms to develop their own interpretation of a scene and then consider the cultural issues that might be represented in the scene. This process of small group development and then the whole class discussing the interpretation leads to further consideration of different people's own cultural experience and how this might be effected by the situation in the scene. For example the scene about family in *Seven Stages of Grieving* and Exploring mobs and who can and can't marry whom.
- Students will often be motivated through being moved to share my passion for a text, therefore there is a strong performance aspect to my teaching and some of that comes through really researching your material. Manipulating students' interests as a way into a text or lyric.
- In teaching *Cloudstreet*, I have taken students (some from overseas) to the sites of the novel in Perth. Excursions to places that put stories in context and talking about the history helps with orientation. I have used Youtube for interviews and readings of text and biographical information.
- activities encouraging student choice – ownership to work independently.



School contexts and student learning needs:

- So much depends on the specific circumstances involved, such as students, texts, cultural and historical context and so on.
- To begin with I get to know the students and their personal interests and start from there with texts that I think will interest them. For example I had a class recently who were very interested in Australian Rules football and so I used the feature film *Australian Rules* with some success. After working with them for a while I take risks by using texts that are more unfamiliar and less mainstream such as Rachel Perkins' short film *One Night the Moon*. This film incorporates the use of music and limited dialogue and so challenges the students' expectations and understandings while at the same time presenting a sensitive but not simplistic view of Indigenous and Caucasian experience within the Australian landscape in the 1930s. I have found that it is rarely the text itself that 'fails' but rather the approach that is taken when teaching it. I teach within thematic constructs and aim for engagement and challenge but I also must confess that I have trouble teaching texts that I don't particularly enjoy myself and there are so many to choose from that I stick with the ones that I like and then hopefully teach them with some enthusiasm and mostly have success. I also think it is essential to recognise that most students come to class with a range of experiences with Australian texts and that their prior knowledge and contributions need to be acknowledged but capitalised upon in the classroom. Students should also be given opportunities to select their own texts at times.

iii) *Changes to teaching approaches and course design*

In the senior secondary teachers' responses, changes to educational ideas and curriculum policies from mid- and late-career teachers are described in much detail. It becomes apparent that teachers, while adhering to various curriculum assessment policies (e.g. outcomes based learning), determine their teaching strategies according to student cohort, school environment, area of study and a combination of methods that have proven successful from experience. The comments below also show the diverse approaches of each state curriculum. The majority of experienced teachers who were compelled to comment saw education policy as counter-productive to real student learning and as transient factors in their teaching practice. There are, however also some positive comments about the shifts in educational approaches in English Studies, such as the shift from 'Literary Criticism' to 'Critical Literacy' models, the personal growth model for earlier levels, and, when teaching Australian texts, a move from the 'Cultural Heritage' approach to a more contemporary focus.

It is also apparent that technology has allowed some positive changes to teaching strategies, juxtaposition of texts and assessment practices, especially for encouraging students to respond to literature. As already suggested in 'Teaching, Technology and Resourcing' above, schools vary in access to technology and resources. One respondent also noted that more students have started their formal education overseas, thus the teachers 'adapt teaching accordingly from "chalk and talk" to scaffolding, negotiation and collaboration, with students and other teachers'.

Selected responses:

- I have been teaching for 30+ years, 10+ as HOD. When I taught in NSW, it was a matter of cramming kids from cribs etc for HSC. They just had to be able to discuss texts from range of angles. Lots of lit. crit. with crit. lit. beginning to make inroads in late 1990's. In Qld (and WA in 1980s) much freer and better – teach using small group work, speaking protocols, deconstruction, role play, philosophical enquiry, higher order thinking skills, Bloom's Taxonomy etc. The more discussion and activities are mainly student-centred, the better. Also teach using film in conjunction with texts but very few 'canonical' Australian texts have film versions. Use of YouTube helps engage student interest but also problem solving approach. Beginning to use student blogs. High stakes testing kills the English classroom! Need for authentic assessment, rich tasks.
- In thirty years of teaching there have been numerous changes in curriculum policy – movement away from classic to contemporary texts has been a main one, use of visual texts, critical literacy, ICTs are the strongest influences. Valuing of Australian literature rather than the English canon is also a major change.



- I have been teaching for 20 years. For the first decade or so of my career, a personal growth model of English was dominant in 7–10 and hybrid of New Criticism/Cultural Heritage in 11/12. The last decade has seen the growing influence of other ways of reading and responding: Cultural Studies, critical literacy, and various critical theories. I have found this challenging but invigorating. I think that, when taught well by someone who is confident, students would agree. For example, I have very able Yr 12 students completing self-devised projects that are very demanding. One is exploring Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Joyce's *Ulysses* through the idea of the female figure of affirmation. Another is using aspects of speech act theory and ideas derived from Derrida's 'Limited Inc' to critically respond to speeches by President Obama. This is hardly a dumbed down curriculum that eschews classic works. It also involves students in learning that is much more demanding than anything I was asked to do at school, and probably at university (at least until my Hons. year). On the other hand, I am very conscious that they have not selected Australian writing. There are always gains and losses in any decision regarding curriculum. Teachers can't do it all.
- Yes – my standards/expectations have had to be lowered to suit the 'dumbing down' of the curriculum requirements.
- I've adopted a much more conceptual approach, introducing students to strategies they can use to create readings of texts.
- Strategies have had to relate to the increased number of students who have begun education overseas and are completing it in Australia – one cannot assume anymore that a standard Australian system of the late 1900s will provide adequate learning opportunities. I have had to find out more about global education systems and adapt teaching accordingly from 'chalk and talk' to scaffolding, negotiation and collaboration, with students and other teachers.
- [1970s and 1980s personal growth and literary criticism focus; 1990's add critical literacy and text types approaches; 2000s add critical literacy and application of literary theory \(postmodern approaches\), genre study. Try to use range of integrated approaches but strongly endorse new historicist approach of teaching texts within historical time/discourses e.g. Orwell, Ballard – teach history alongside close study of novel in English class room.](#)
- Lots of professional development, more interaction in the classroom, breaking down curriculum, action research and journaling – more discussion of what occurs outside the classroom.
- I have taught Senior English since 1992 and during my career, most new curriculum policies and syllabus changes have little to do with improving student outcomes. Instead, they usually mirror whatever 'school of thought', methodology, or socio/political fashion is ascendant. In Queensland in Senior English we have just jumped backwards from post-structuralism to something akin to New Criticism with less clear terminology simply as a result of some overblown newspaper articles and political posturing. This ensures our English graduates do not even have the basic terminology used in most modern universities in their English and Cultural Studies departments. Most of my colleagues who are successful English teachers have managed to transcend the utter garbage that was fed to them in University Education courses and have developed approaches which achieve solid improvements in critical and cultural literacy. Having developed these approaches, most of us treat the ever hastening onrush of new syllabus documents with the contempt they deserve. We re-write our programs in the latest edu-babble and try to teach well in spite of whatever syllabus is in fashion. At least in Queensland at present, there is some freedom in syllabus implementation and standards are protected by the moderation and verification system. I hasten to add that I totally reject Don Watson's argument in 'Why Our Schools Are Failing'. His misunderstanding of a range of theories is embarrassing. I would advocate that grammar works (systemic functional is best for me), critical literacy can be achieved, cultural literacy can be attained and the aesthetic need not be abandoned.
- Always changing – tend to teach the 'How' rather than the text per se. Often integrated in themes or concepts these days. So much to cover that not seems as effective as in the past – less subject time!!
- More prescriptive and proscriptive curriculum assessment methodologies have made flexible (and especially creative) practices almost obsolete. Interpretive creative writing is almost impossible to get to in the senior years.



- **Undergraduate students' impressions of Australian literature in tertiary study**

2nd/3rd/4th/Honours year undergraduate responses suggested some common experiences in tertiary Australian literature study. When asked, 'In your experience, how effective is the teaching of Australian literature at tertiary level', respondents commented on the minimal amount of choice in Australian literature units offered in particular universities, on tertiary teachers' knowledge and passion, on the 'ineffective' application of theoretical models for critique, and on the lack of choice. Many of the respondents preferred the lecture/tutorial model of learning rather than the workshop model to maximise lecturer knowledge and depth of analysis and context. This seems contrary to much of the literature on student-centred learning, but perhaps reflective of the sample group. Two respondents indicated their interest in Indigenous perspectives acquired through studying Indigenous texts and the 'overlapping of disciplines between Aboriginal Studies and English'.

Selected responses:

- I have experienced two different approaches. In one approach a lot of literary/academic jargon was used which I found really distracting and annoying. In the other, the subject was approached like an exploration of our history through literature which was rewarding and enjoyable.
- Too tied to post-structural critiques. Need to have a return to more traditional ways of exploring national literature, *without* turning it into nationalism. Return to humanist values and universal moral insights, please. Look at the way it is taught in Central Europe – they think post-structuralism has turned Australian and US universities into a laughing stock.
- In my experience, it provided a very wide scope of literature, dealing with different issues and themes from national identity, white cultural legitimacy, Indigenous reactions, white perspectives of Indigenous people, to modernity and the alienating lifestyles of Australian modern life. However, in absorbing such a wide array of literature, it decreased the quality and depth of which we studied each text.
- Mostly very effective, as long as teachers do not get caught up in their own opinion of the text, and the students are able to gain a more solid and independent feel for the text.
- There seems to be a general idea promoted that you need to read through the 'boring' older Aust lit. (and it is pretty dry, just like other eighteenth, nineteenth century literatures) before you can really understand the current culture. I wish this weren't promoted, and we were instead encouraged to dive in at whatever point interests us.
- Mostly effective, except for courses centred on theory rather than context.
- Limited subjects, but often passionate lecture engagement.
- Should be more lecture-style, less workshop-based. Lecturing adds to its credibility! Workshops allow for a lot of ridiculous discussions that lower the standard of the class and students' perceptions of it.
- What little of it there is has been very effective – but there's simply so little range of subjects available.
- Secondary: not very! The only two Australian texts I did in my International Baccalaureate (VCE equivalent) were on a self-chosen independent assessment task. Tertiary: my 4th year subject is amazing but since there is so little of this in earlier year levels, a lot of students miss out.
- In my experience undertaking Aust. Lit. at The University of Melbourne the teaching has been brilliant. I have studied two general Aust. Lit.subjects and an Australian Indigenous lit unit. These three subjects have been my favourite at UoM.
- Good when tute sizes are small enough (often not).
- Not bad, quite easy to avoid if secondary hasn't engaged you. Again, I think a lot comes down to the texts



themselves, and I think that being less self-consciously Australian somehow helps too: I'm not a tourist.

5. STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Section 3 provides information on the data gathered about student experiences of Australian literature from the perspectives of tertiary teachers, secondary school teachers and from students themselves. It includes information on students' experiences at secondary schools and how that affected their tertiary experiences.

• Tertiary teachers' impressions of student experience of Australian literature

This section looks at teachers' expectations of students' knowledge and skills, perceptions of students' attitudes and experiences of Australian literature, and how these factors impact upon their teaching practice.

Tertiary teachers' impressions of the experience of students of Australian literature were varied, but there was a sense that if Australian literature is part of a mandated study at senior secondary level, students generally are negative about encountering it at first-year university. This changes once they encounter the diversity of Australian literature. Many comments suggested that the 'indoctrination' of compulsory canonical Australian literary texts at school needs to be challenged at university.

i) Factors influencing approaches to teaching

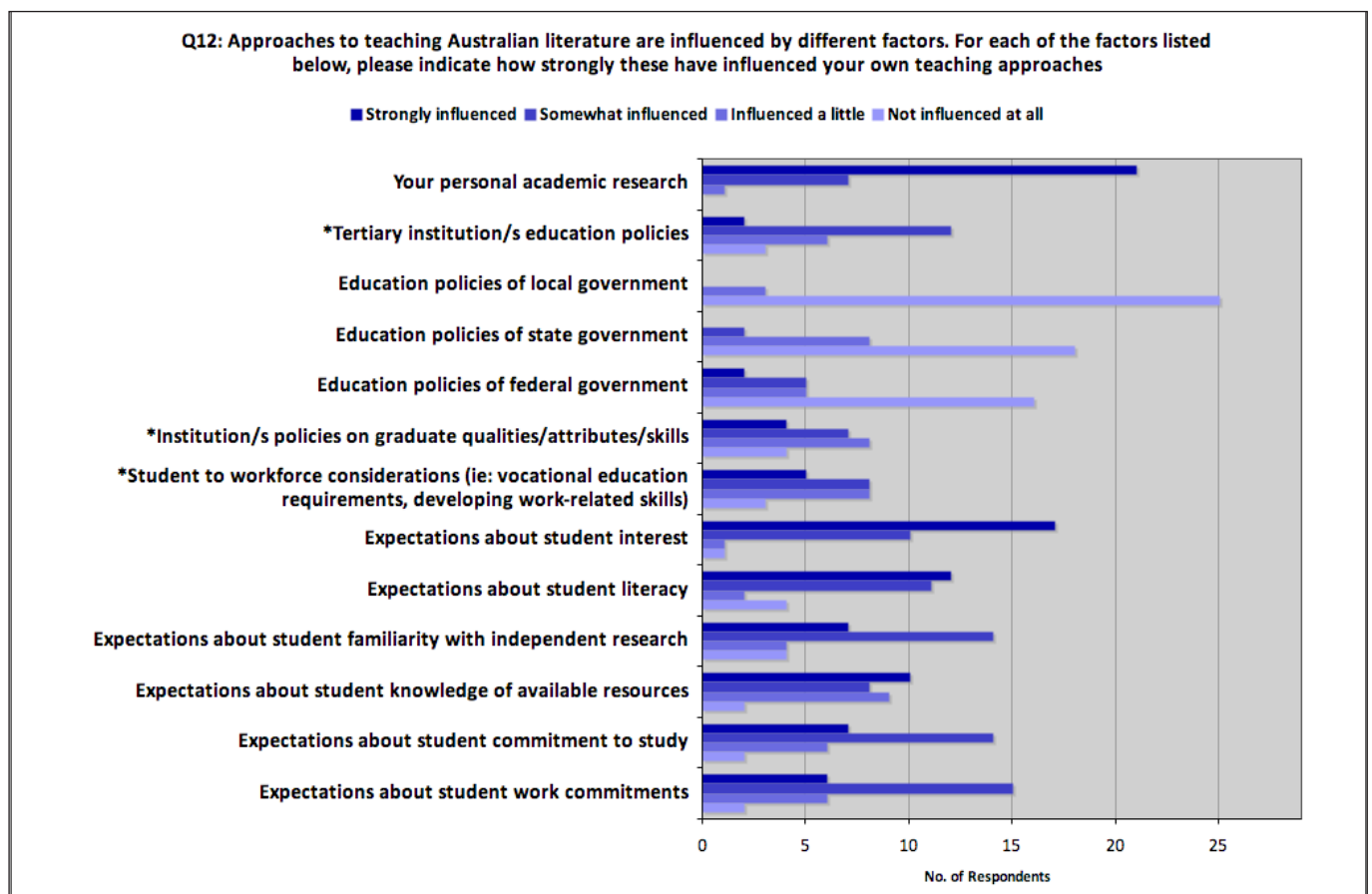


Figure 47: Factors influencing approaches to teaching

Once again, it is evident that personal academic research interests are a strong motivating factor for teachers'



approaches to teaching. Tertiary teachers also take into account their expectations of students' experiences, literacy levels and interest in the subject. They are also aware of how students are less inclined to commit to reading longer texts; perhaps the result of increased demands on students' time from work commitments. Students' presuppositions about Australian literature need to be countered by introducing them to the diversity of Australian texts and by comparative approaches to literary study. The influence of workforce considerations was the least important aspect of teachers' impressions of student experience, while expectations about student interest and commitment were the strongest.

Selected responses:

- Students have changed, and so have the courses we teach them.
- I have consciously sought to choose texts carefully to stimulate student interest, while at the same time risking some attention with relatively heavy reading load and some difficult texts.
- A tired cliché, but literacy is an issue; length of works to be read, rating of films to be shown, even the kind of novels taught. Andrew McGahan's *Praise* (1994) shocks but gets through but I did not have the guts to teach *Dead Europe*, not in light of mass hysteria about paedophilia.
- We now don't teach Furphy, Brennan, Marcus Clarke, because long works and student work hours don't suit semester-length units.
- It has been my experience that the category 'Australian lit' is not particularly important to students, but they enjoy reading Australian texts. On the basis of this, I prefer a comparative focus for my units.
- I like to vary texts, so that larger works alternate with shorter ones. I also try to make teaching materials (outlines, readers, websites) as attractive as possible.
- Students have a certain expectation of Aus lit – it's boring, it's all about the bush – so I aim to challenge this. Student literacy and work commitments limit the length and difficulty of texts I teach.
- At the lower levels of study I expect to have to tailor my choices of text to literacy level more often and select texts according to purpose, exposure versus traditional VCE literature foci. Even in my highest level teaching (MA) I select texts based upon my students' preferred genre of practice and texts that challenge any dominant theoretical limitations they bring to course.
- Students are unwilling to commit themselves to extensive reading, due to many factors. Extracts from novels are given, combined with inclusion of film on similar themes. Students are expected to read full novels for major assignments! 40% seem unable to engage in complex works, esp. longer texts, perhaps due to low TERs and work commitments.
- Creative writing students are almost always very motivated learners and they usually engage with interest in their study.

ii) Tertiary teachers' impressions of students' attitudes towards Australian literature

There was a high level of agreement about student attitudes to studying Australian literature. Most tertiary teachers thought that students were likely to have studied some Australian literary texts at school. Many teachers found that students generally respond well to literary texts that have film adaptations. There was also general agreement that students don't read difficult texts, long texts or older texts. Only a minority of respondents disagreed that students would not read older texts. The responses to the option *Students generally respond well to studying well-known authors* appear closely balanced between 'agree' and 'neutral' (see Figure 48 over the page) .

Selected responses:

- Length of text can be a big problem but I have never had to worry about 'well-known authors' ... they're all equally unknown. Difficult texts require time; Gail Jones' *Sorry* (2008) was one such text.
- Film adaptations can provide a good link into texts for students at lower levels. I tend to avoid long texts at lower levels – not all students will read them.



- Primary consideration is still the text itself, e.g. I would not set *Oscar and Lucinda* over other Carey texts just because there's a film.
- Direct feedback from students indicates they expect Australian texts to be dry, boring, obsessed with national identity and Australian history, and set in the bush. Many of the Australian novels I teach are long and/or difficult which poses challenges for first year teaching.
- I tend not to teach any nineteenth century material or texts at undergraduate level, students tend to find it difficult and uninteresting. I also try to challenge students with texts at upper undergraduate level, but you have to be careful, you can lose whole sections of a class. Teaching *Carpentaria*, e.g. a small number of a 2nd/3rd level unit liked it a lot, the majority were turned off by its difficulty.
- I've found that students will read long and difficult and old texts if the teaching and the experience of fellow students encourages them to try. Texts need to be chosen that are likely to engage the students' existing interests.
- Students like reading about characters they can 'relate to' (seems to be a hangover from school) so I try and include a couple such texts. But (paradoxically or not?) they also enjoy being confronted/challenged – so I try and do this too. I want the students to read all texts – so have to be strategic about assessment to make sure this happens.

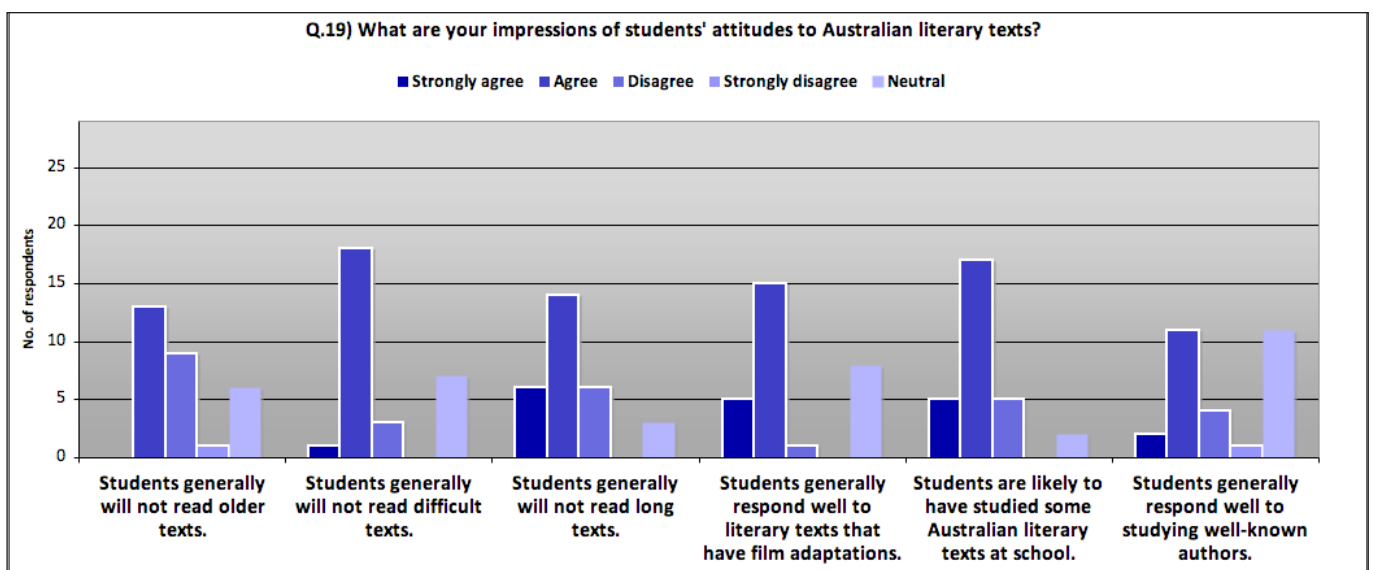


Figure 48: Tertiary teachers impressions of students' attitudes to texts

iii) Tertiary teachers' awareness of student experience

The majority of respondents agreed with all options for this question. A high number of respondents selected Expectations about students' life experiences as important to very important. Considerations of student overall study workload were also important (see Figure 49).

Selected responses:

- I always try to set at least a few texts that have a strong appeal to students because of their contemporaneity and subject matter.
- It is important to teach some work students can relate to – either as young people (e.g. *The Getting of Wisdom*, *My Brilliant Career*) or as contemporary citizens (e.g. *The Slap*). There are limits to students' ability to engage with very long novels.
- I've tended to choose young people's and women's texts, and to replace long works with shorter works and poetry, so as not to over-burden and discourage students.

- More limitations are placed on what we can ‘expect’ at my university, due to this concept of ‘flexible learning’ and equity priorities ... unfortunately.
- I expect students to read texts they don’t necessarily ‘like’. I don’t set too many long texts in a course because I know students won’t read everything.
- We have to develop realistic strategies to hold on to students and to engage them through text selection. Students need to feel they are reading texts/developing skills they can take with them whatever they do.

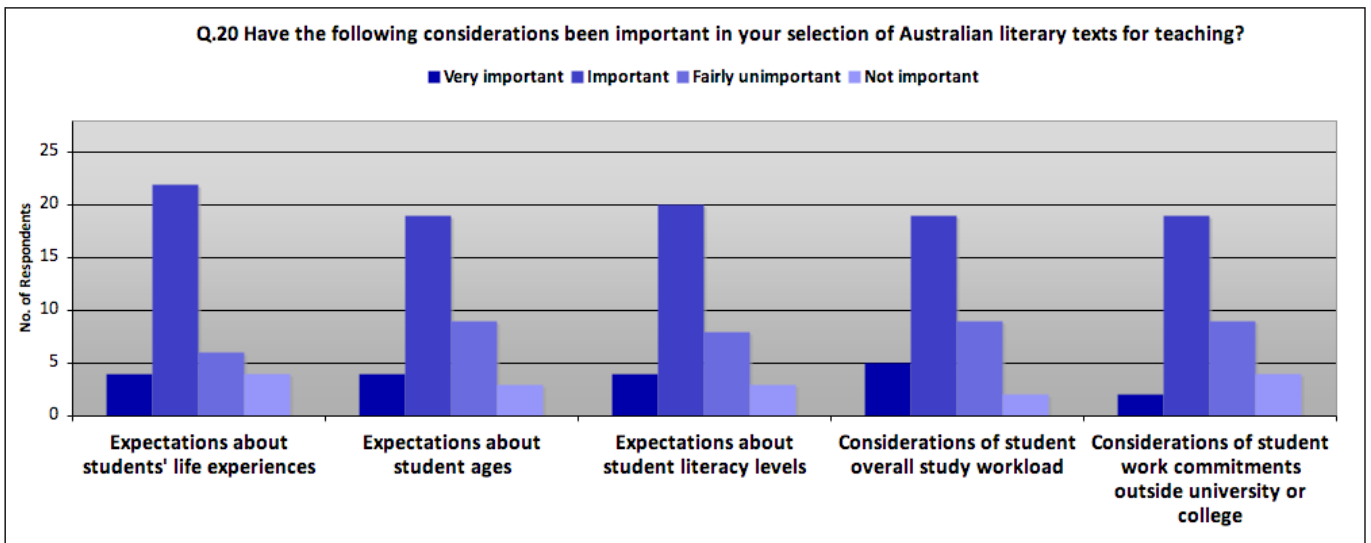


Figure 49: Considerations for text selection

iv) Tertiary teachers' impression of previous student experience of Australian literature

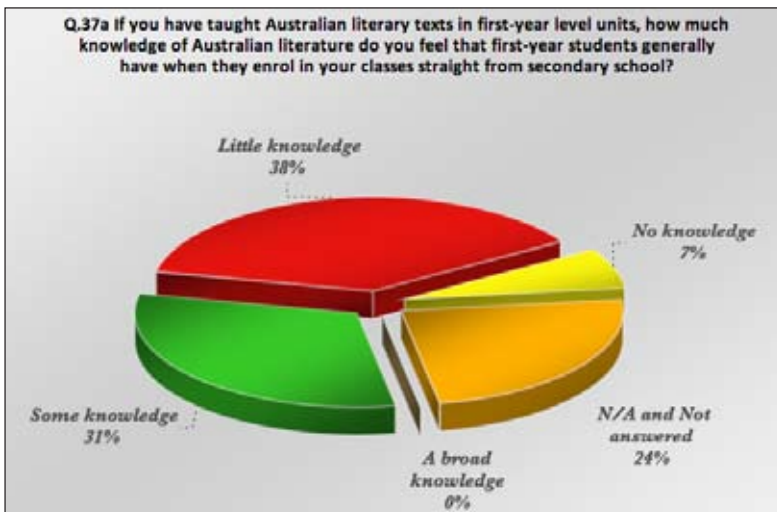


Figure 50: Students' knowledge base relating to Australian literature (see also Figure 51 over the page)

Selected responses:

- The context in which the texts are taught matters strongly. If taught within a ‘national literature’ model, students seem to respond much more enthusiastically – in favour and against various texts. When taught in the context of contemporary world writing, certain texts fare better than others. Grenville does well, Asian-Australian likewise, Carey ‘bombs’.



- Students' reactions are a little more positive with foreign literature.
- Most students enjoy pursuing a primary research project, especially if they feel some individual ownership of it. However, I have to say that often the research process – fascinating as it is – acts as a distraction from their understanding and appreciation of the literature itself. It may be a zero-sum game.
- Once they read the texts they do become enthusiastic. Wonderful responses to Barbara Baynton and Miles Franklin and to very contemporary novels e.g. Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello* and Tsiolkas' *The Slap*. They struggle with Patrick White but feel it's good for them!
- There is a general increase in student apathy over years ... I feel this is because of a devaluation of the Humanities by society in general, reflected in the old joke: 'Describe conversation with an Arts graduate? Do you want fries with that?'
- I wouldn't differentiate between student reception of Australian texts and other literary texts they study.

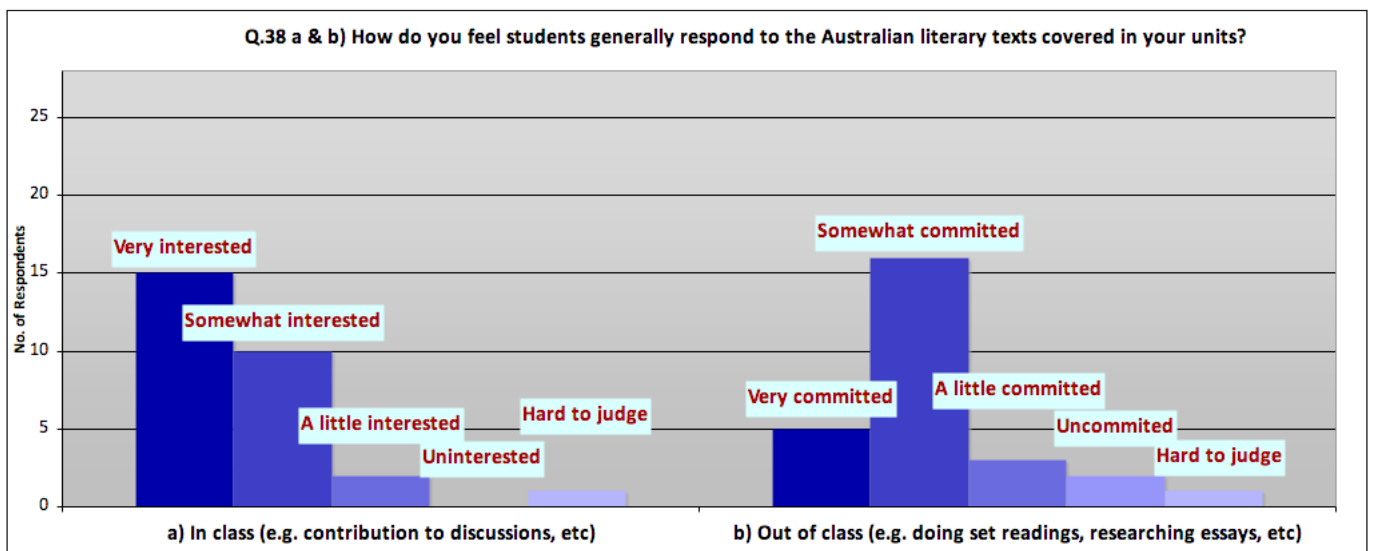


Figure 51: Students' responses to Australian texts in unit context (see also Figure 50 previous page)

v) Tertiary teachers' impressions of student enrolments

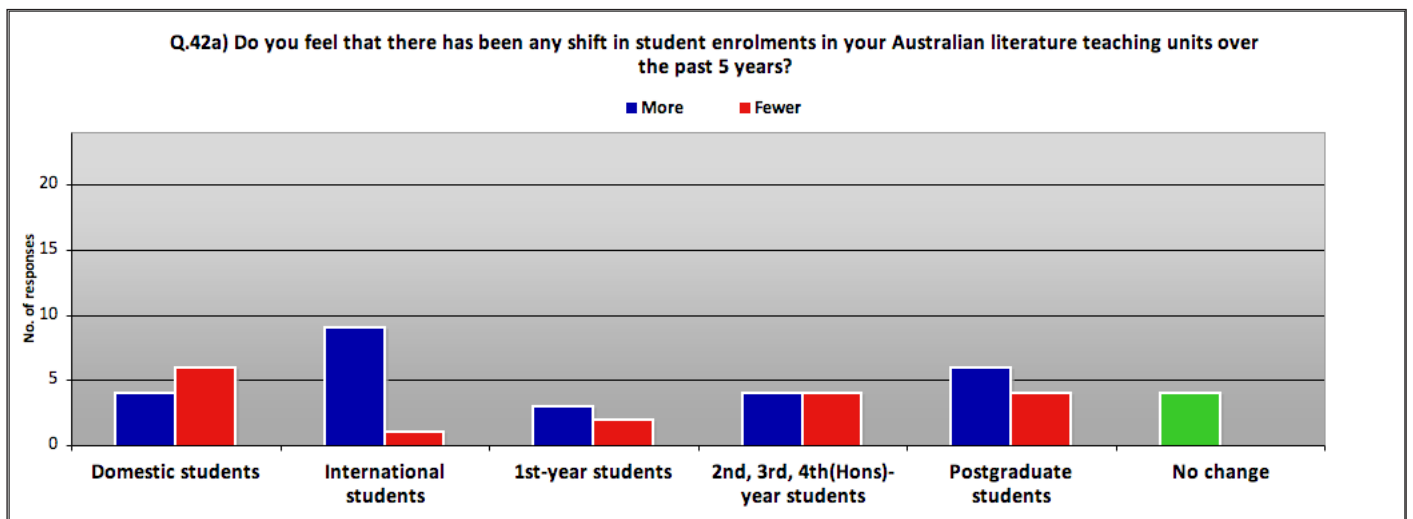


Figure 52: Changes in enrolments



Selected responses:

- Cutbacks in Oz lit units/lecturers in proportion to cutbacks in Lit/Cultural Studies areas: it is a nation-wide problem aggravated by the fact the secondary schools seem to valorise Lit and/or Media Studies rather than Oz Studies.
- Crowded curriculum; everything else is more interesting (i.e. the effects of pop culture).
- More students are interested in Indigenous experience i.e. history, creative writing and film.
- I last taught contemporary Aust. writing in 2005 with an enrolment of about 70; this year numbers are about 50 – not sure of the reason.

vi) *Tertiary teachers’ impressions of how work commitments effect student engagement*

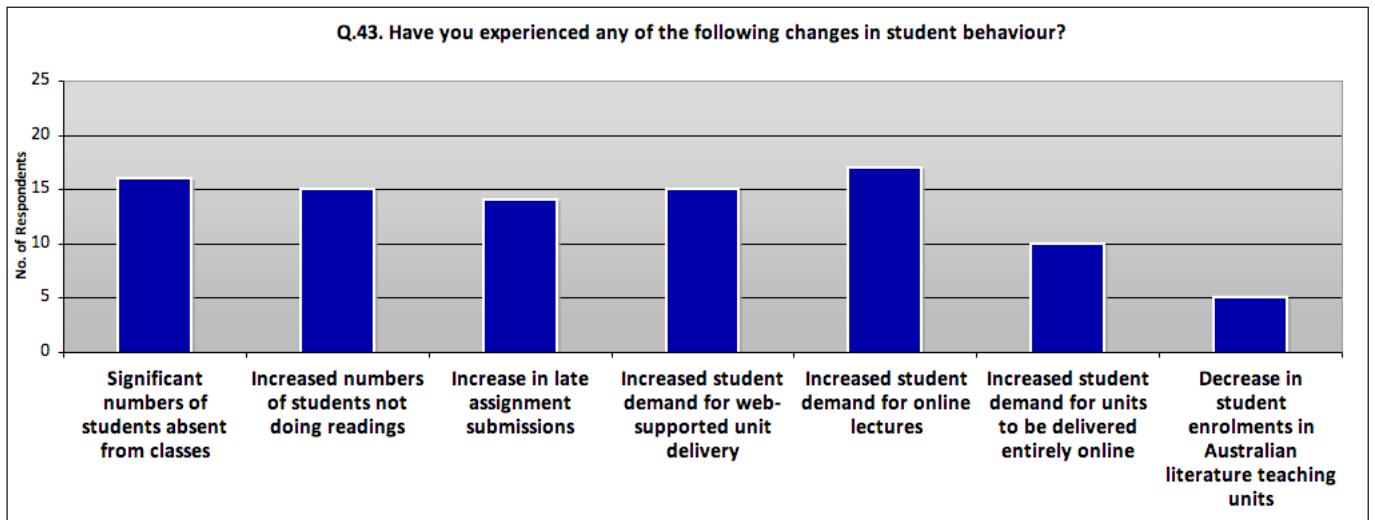


Figure 53: Changes in student behaviour

Although not overwhelming, the increase in demand for online lectures and student absences from classes is noticeable in these responses. Over 50% of the 29 respondents suggested that these were common changes to student behaviour.

Selected responses:

- Obviously linked to cost of studies and need to undertake full-time work for many students. Less clear impact of contemporary educational environment or expectations for ‘packaged’ knowledge.
- There is a high expectation of consumer capacity from students.
- More like survival focus – coordinating jobs and study and family/social life. Also clashes with other faculty units for those doing double degrees or majors.
- General time pressure and pragmatism. Aust. lit. can in fact be seen as ‘vocational’ (for teaching, publishing, arts admin).
- Work commitments make it more difficult for some students to attend class.
- I’d say this is true generally across the tertiary sector and in non-vocational programs like the BA.

Senior secondary teachers’ impressions of student experience of Australian literature

This section relates senior secondary teachers’ impressions of student attitudes and demographics and the way they influence teaching practice.



i) Senior secondary teachers' impressions of students' general attitudes towards Australian literature

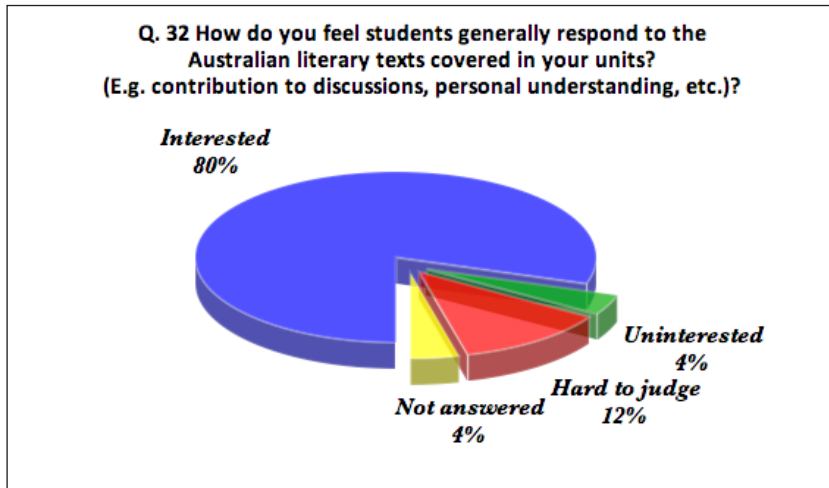


Figure 54: Secondary students' response to Australian texts

Selected responses:

- Adolescents are generally interested to learn about their world.
- It is part of their cultural background and they relate to Australian characters.
- Interested when they can find a personal connection with the content and disinterested when it seems irrelevant to them.
- I believe students are interested in the country they live in because they can relate to that world but that they are also curious and interested in the rest of the world.
- I don't think my students see themselves as Australian in the way that many older 'Australian' texts seem to understand this idea: rugged individualism, steadfast and true women, laconic men and so on (all the stereotypes). On the other hand, more contemporary texts that react against this idea (eg some of Helen Garner's early short stories) seem equally alien to senior students. They are, in the main, very 'conservative' (on the path to dentistry, medicine, accountancy and so on). Anything that smacks of feminism is widely derided by boys and girls alike. My more 'literary' students seem to be drawn to Australian writing that is not particularly Australian (e.g. Nick Cave's novel) or the classics that have broad public appeal: Jane Austen, the Brontës, Wilde and so on. If you can find a way to 'market' someone as the Australian Austen or Wilde, life would be easier for English teachers!
- Students tend to respond reasonably well to print texts but tend to have very poor opinions of Australian films and some Australian television.
- The preliminary discussions held before the text is read puts the story and themes into a context they can understand.
- They seem a little more interested in literary texts they can identify with through recognisable settings than more 'international' offerings.
- I don't think it's about being Australian, I think it's about being well-written, produced etc.
- Sometimes a bit too 'samey' to own experiences, need to shake up the stereotypes and challenge them. They love good stories with surprising endings (e.g. *Bye, Beautiful* worked well).
- They are interested if they are powerful texts. The origin of the text is less important than the quality of the text. If you give students bad material you have no chance of them appreciating it because there is nothing to appreciate.

- They like to identify themselves, or elements thereof, in characters and settings. It really does depend on the text. I have found that students respond poorly to older Aust. texts e.g. Lawson, Paterson, etc. However, there is more engagement with contemporary texts, e.g. Herrick's *The Simple Gift*, across a range of ages (but more males). I find that students respond most poorly to Aust. films, which they see as 'cheap', 'boring' etc, which I put down to the Hollywoodification of teenage film-viewing.

ii) *Senior secondary teachers' impressions of student demographic*

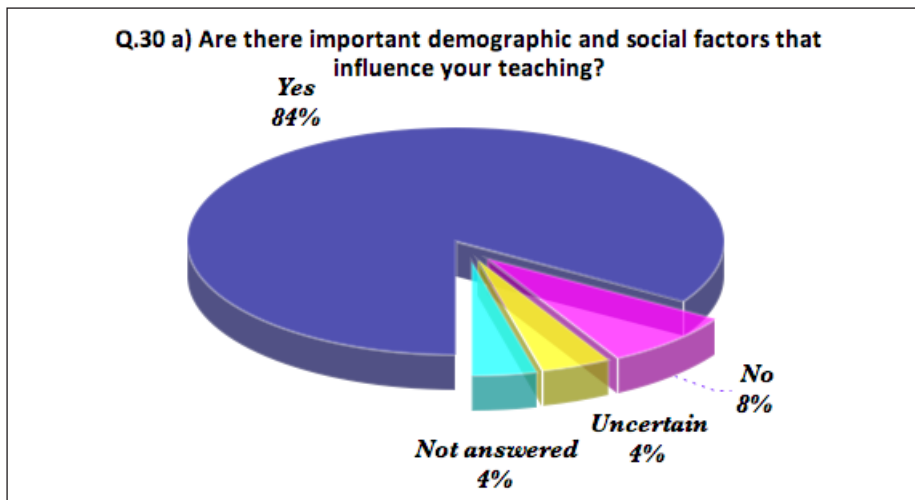


Figure 55: Impact of demographic and social factors on teaching

Selected responses (age group/level):

- The years 7–8 students will respond more readily to stories about differing age groups and issues so long as it is appropriate to their level of comprehension and they can find a connection somewhere. Years 9 and above will be less inclined to try a text unless there is something that they instantly connect with often before opening the book – i.e. author, film connections, storyline, characters.
- There is a plethora of very good Australian YA texts and films. My eight year old really likes the humour of Paul Jennings and Andy Griffiths.
- Older students become more interested and reflective.
- Younger, especially Year 9s seem to enjoy older literature (e.g. Henry Lawson, etc.) and Year 11s seem to like Robert Drewe, Archie Weller (sometimes more complex, mystery, and conflict, etc.)
- Selected responses (socio-economic factors):
- I now teach in a relatively wealthy area where students have a lot of cultural capital, I can assume more / different cultural knowledge accordingly.
- My school community is largely a middle class Anglo community in which you become aware that student experiences need to be broadened to have an understanding of Indigenous issues and multi-ethnicity of the Australian community.
- I teach in a suburban selective high school that is very middle class. I like to challenge students with texts that will require them to think deeply about their existing understandings of the world and consider other possibilities in order that their own views might be problematised. This is not to get them to reject their existing beliefs but to be able to defend them so they choose, in a more informed and confident way.
- My students, in the main, are from relatively privileged upper middle/middle class backgrounds with well educated and motivated parents. It is necessary at times both to tap into and challenge this background.
- Every school has a demographic and social factors that you take into account to some extent; sometimes you have to encourage students to imagine a different (better) demographic for their future.



- I teach in a low socio-economic area (SEI index 1). This has a significant influence on my teaching. Students lack cultural capital, most have not travelled, are disengaged learners with behaviour problems and read very little and view mainstream media only. They arrive at school with poor literacy skills, have poor attendance, limited resources at home and parents who are not actively engaged with their child's learning.
- I teach a lot of UK immigrants, so their interests are not so typically Australian (e.g. not a huge passion for AFL, surfing etc.).
- The student body in our school. We match curriculum to their needs. Each school has their own distinct clientele. We can't have a 'one size fits all' approach to curriculum.
- We have numbers of refugee students so a shared cultural knowledge cannot be assumed. Also, the middle class 'white' students cannot be assumed to possess extensive cultural/historical knowledge.
- Rural, small population – try to give a range of texts and styles as not seen as relevant to their lives. A way to access multiculturalism, urban life, other cultures.
- It is really dependent on the make-up of the individual class, in terms of challenging them, accessing prior knowledge, areas of interest and so on. However, at my last school there was a higher percentage of NESB students, and in using *Dark Dreams – Aust. Refugee Stories* I was able to elicit fabulous and harrowing stories from those who had come from refugee/ OS backgrounds. Moving to a different demographic (more Italian/ Greek migrants, wealthier Chinese, etc.) these stories no longer resonate as strongly.

• 1st-year undergraduate students' experience of Australian literature

In this section the experience of students relating to the methods and effectiveness of Australian literature teaching are outlined. Graphs provided here demonstrate student's experiences at both secondary and first-year tertiary study (see Figures 56 and 57 next page).

i) 1st-year students' experience of Australian literature at secondary school

Selected responses:

- I don't remember lots of it. As a first generation Aussie, I loved *Looking for Alibrandi*, and was moved by *My Place*.
- The texts were never really distinguished as being Australian literature.
- We didn't have the choice to study enough Australian literature.
- Minimal considering it is an Australian school. Should be more Australian authors discussed; instead mundane authors such as Shakespeare and Harper Lee. Their books/plays are excellent, but discussions about them etc. are just common knowledge by now.
- I know we must have learnt more than one Australian text, but I can't remember any other than *Looking for Alibrandi*. I don't think we spent a great deal of time on Australian literature, and I don't remember reading any Aboriginal literature, which is disappointing. However, I still think high school English should have a good balance between Australian and non-Australian literature, because for many students, high school is the only time they will study any literary texts at all. I don't think we had to do further reading in order to write assignments on Australian literature (and literature in general), so now that I'm studying literature at uni, I am finding it difficult to know what sources to use and how to use them.
- I found Australian literature most interesting when the teacher was obviously knowledgeable and taught the content enthusiastically.
- It was poorly understood and the majority of students found it unenjoyable.
- I enjoyed how much Australian literature would often surprise me with its quality.
- It was pretty brief, but I did draw on some Australian authors for my English four-unit major work.
- Wasn't studied as Australian literature but just a critical analysis of Harwood's poems. I would have liked, and think it is important, to have studied more Australian literature.
- Possibly rethink the chosen texts. I feel that there's too much focus on Aboriginal Studies/authors and their novels at school and at university level.

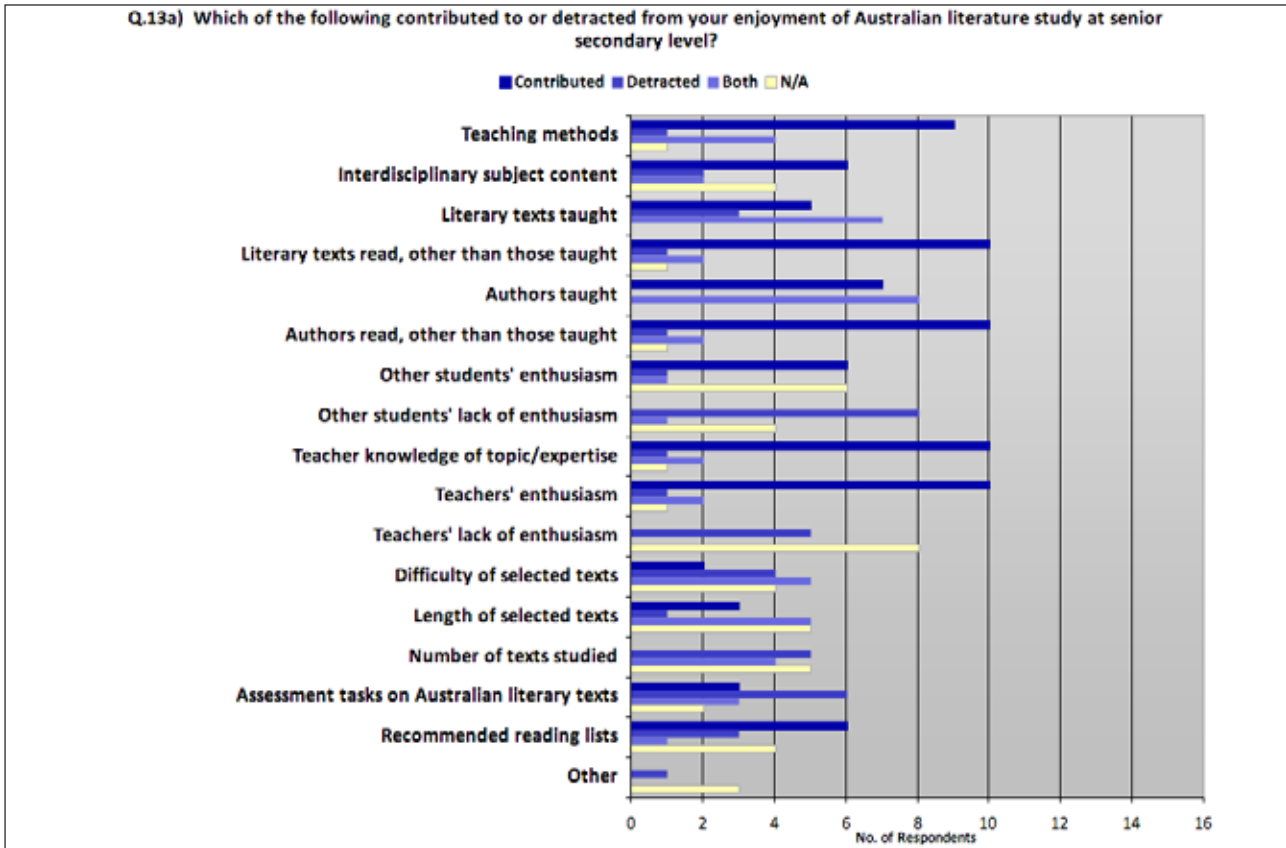


Figure 56: Factors influencing students' enjoyment of studying Australian literature at secondary level

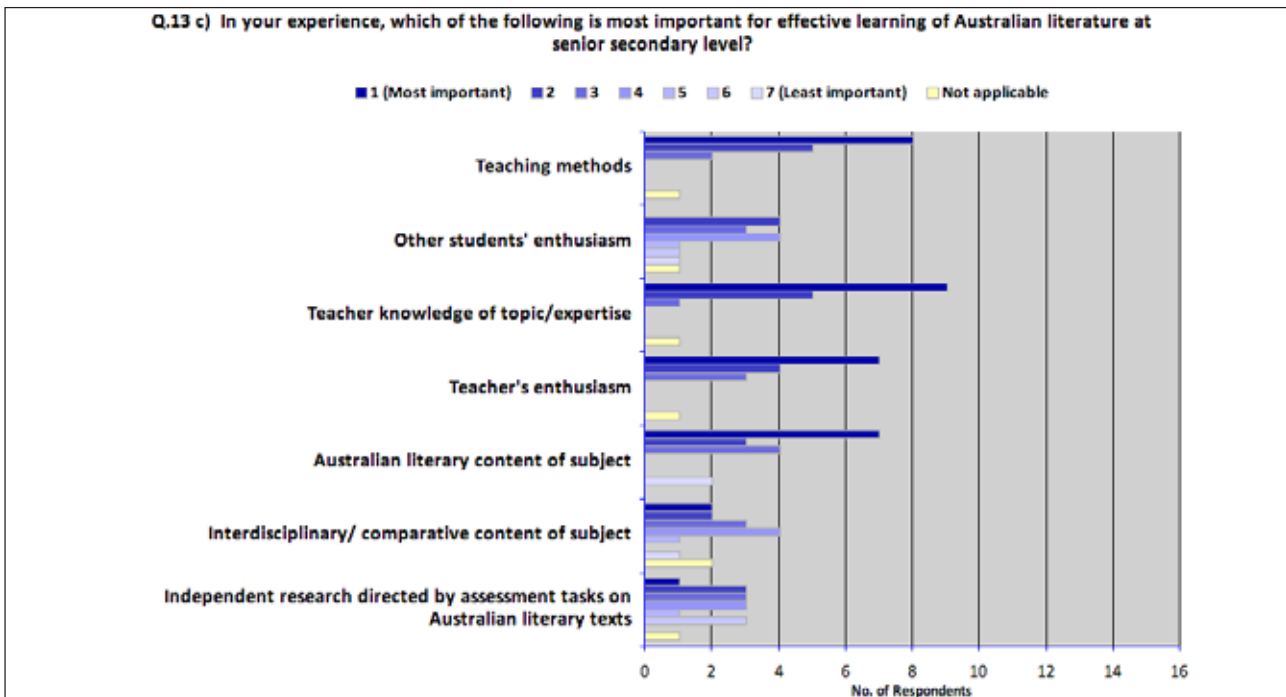


Figure 57: Factors for effective learning at secondary level



ii) 1st-year students' impressions of how secondary study of Australian literature prepared them for tertiary study

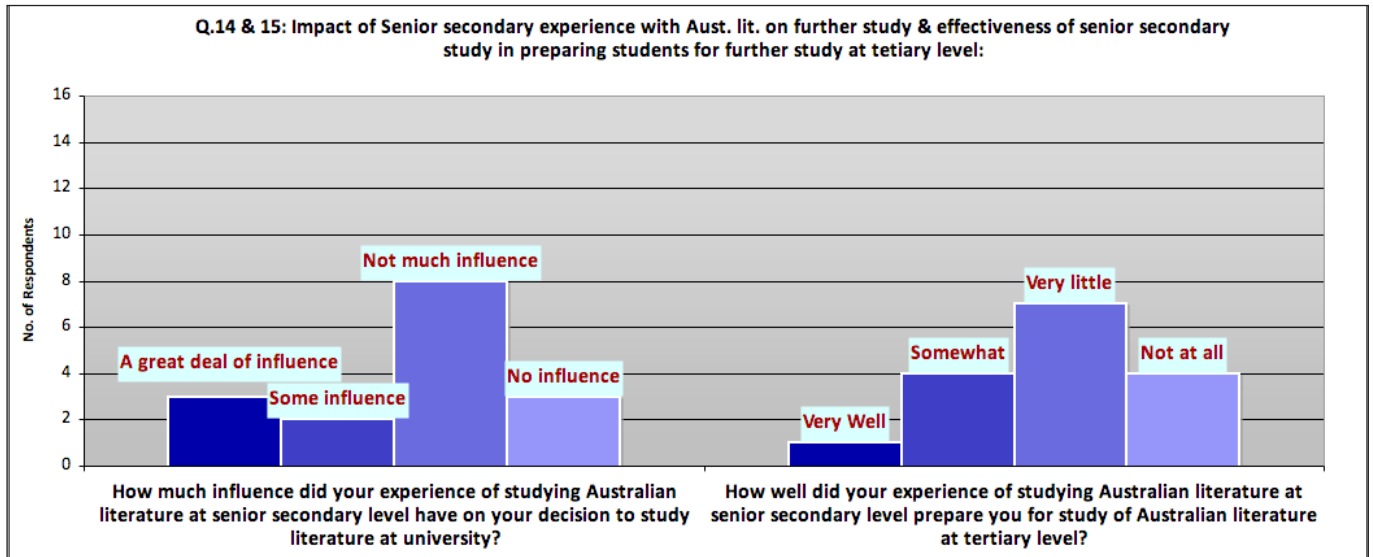


Figure 58: Influence of secondary experience on tertiary studies

Selected responses:

- The Australian texts chosen to be studied are invariably different in genre and type, so my studying of Australian literature at senior secondary level prepared me to learn more about Australian literature at tertiary level.
- Studying at a senior secondary level gave me a basis for my tertiary studies – however I think the ability to study Australian literature in senior secondary is somewhat limited, which meant whilst I did have some basis I do not believe it was particularly sufficient.
- I am used to analysing/close reading but I don't have much general knowledge about Australian literature and history.
- In high school there wasn't enough focus on researching your opinions on Australian literature. Also, we didn't learn a big variety, and we didn't get much of a historical grounding to put the literature in context.
- The level of literature study at school in no way compares to the depth studied in a tertiary environment.
- Studying Australian literature at high school had more of an interdisciplinary focus, while at university it seems to be more about the actual text itself and analysing it only to some extent within social and cultural contexts as we did at school.
- We did so few Australian texts I did not know what to expect from Australian literature at all. I was very concerned that Australian literature was going to be as dull and boring as my previous experience had been.
- We didn't really focus on the 'Australian' aspect of our HSC texts because it really wasn't part of our module (In the Wild).
- We really didn't do much Australian literature at high school. I chose it because I think it's important and interesting.
- We covered a huge number of texts in a very short space of time at university for Australian literature. This detracted from really grasping the contexts and discovering the depths of the works. At high school, you tend to study one text in detail for a while before moving on to a new text. And these texts are always linked to a subject area.
- I took first semester university level Australian literature thinking that it would be completely new. I didn't connect the course to any secondary school subjects.

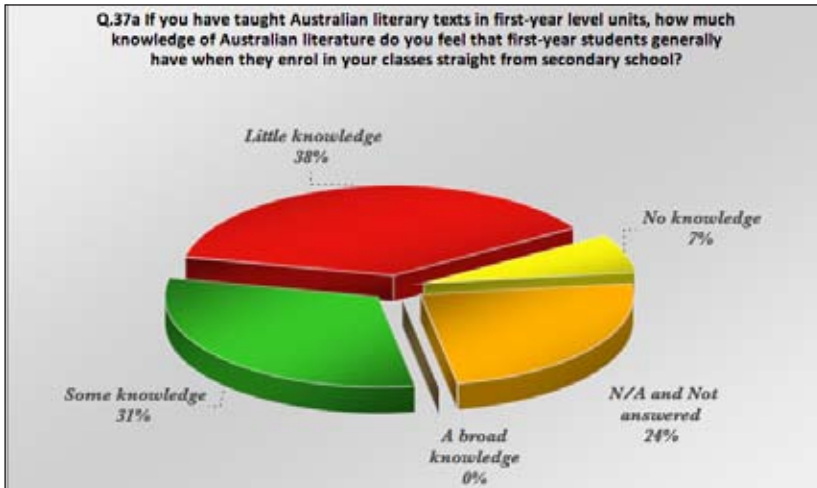
iii) 1st-year students' impressions of their knowledge of Australian literature before tertiary study

Figure 59: Students' perception of their own knowledge base

Selected responses:

- I read some authors before entering university, like Miles Franklin, Tim Winton and Delia Falconer. The titles were suggested to me by Australian friends as representative titles of the kind of literature that people write and read here.
- I read a lot of books, so that always helped. We didn't really study 'Australian literature' at school so it basically came from my parents.
- Reading Australian novels for pleasure, especially Peter Carey, and studying some Australian literature at school (but not in years 11 and 12).
- Some Australian literature in English in High School, but not studied in the context of Australian literature.

iv) 1st-year students' impressions of their interest in Australian literature at senior secondary level

- Nowra (in particular) and Williamson are quality. *Five Bells* is an excellent poem.
- I really love Australian literature and believe it is possibly the most important unit within any English course – however I think its teaching and text choice is often limited.
- Due to the lack of available time any Australian literature (any literature period) read at school was studied at such a shallow level it was impossible to ever be utterly consumed by a text, leading to a sense of dullness during the course.
- I found all the texts interesting to study except for *Gracey* by James Moloney, as it was nowhere near the difficulty level I expect to be taught in senior school. That book didn't interest me at all.
- It was so isolated, we had no point of reference and it felt as if it was added to the syllabus purely because they had to include some Australian Lit. I felt it was badly taught and most students had no idea about the background of Australian Lit and needed to do a lot of individual work to understand the text.
- Gwen Harwood was amazing, it was so interesting and really fantastic to study Australian literature for a change.
- I enjoyed doing Gwen Harwood's poetry, but we really didn't do much else as part of the course.
- Many people around me found it boring, but I have always had an interest in literature, but never much knowledge about Australian literature.
- Although it wasn't studied as 'Australian literature' I just enjoyed Gwen Harwood's poetry and there was an extra appreciation knowing that it was from an Australian author.



v) 1st-year students' impressions of Australian literature study

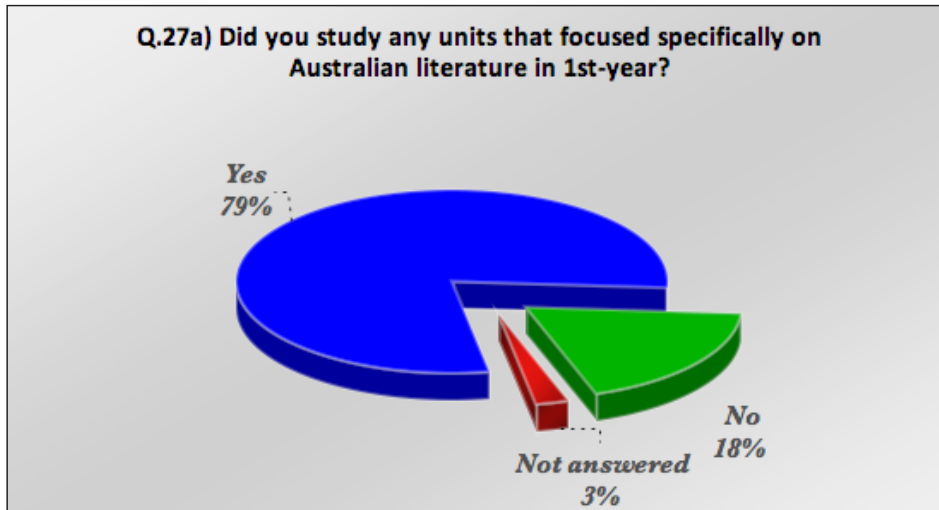


Figure 60: 1st-year students studying Australian literature

Selected responses:

- It sounded the most interesting and didn't have an exam.
- Wanted to learn more about Australian experiences.
- I saw it as a worthwhile opportunity to gain an appreciation and awareness of Australian texts. It is sad when you are an Australian, but you can count the Australian texts you've read on one hand.
- I am studying to become a teacher. I thought it would be helpful to study texts that my students may one day study. I also thought that a study of Australian literature would broaden my understanding of Australia and Australians.
- Recommended for students studying BA Education (Secondary) majoring in English.
- I had plans to study another subject but chose an Australian literature unit because it suited my timetable.
- Because they are compulsory subjects, and because I only just moved to the country: I am interested in local culture and literary production.
- Prerequisite for my extended major in English Literature.
- I've always thought Australian literature to be dull and I thought I'd try to broaden my perspective.
- I was interested in learning more about Australian literature specifically.
- Because I have confidence that Australian literature will continue to be taught in Australian schools, and it would be useful for me to be familiar with it if I want to teach it properly.
- I was interested in learning about how Australian literature interacts with the rest of the world.
- I thought that it is incredibly important for me as a future English teacher to have an understanding of Australian texts.
- Because after briefly learning about it in school, I wanted to go in to greater depth.
- Because I had previously taken an Australian film course at later-year level, so chose to study the Australian lit. course on the strength of the previous course/lecturer.

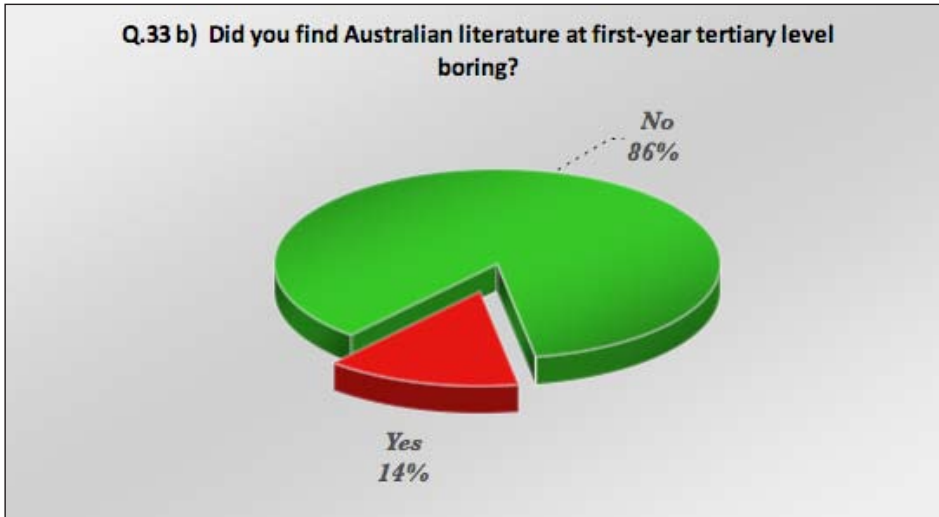


Figure 61: The boredom factor

Selected responses:

- Only one book in the set reading was an Australian novel, perhaps it was a one-off but I found it difficult to get into, let alone not be bored by it.
- While the themes of most texts studied were at times too preoccupied with guilt and regret, they were worthwhile studying as it deepened my knowledge of Australian literature that I would have otherwise been oblivious too.
- It was interesting because it was easy to relate to, and all of the texts studied offered a diverse background on Australia.
- Very interesting to see Australia on the page. You spend so much time studying ‘other’ societies and cultures that you forget your own.
- The texts were very diverse, and the variety made it enjoyable.
- I enjoyed the array of different modern texts presented and the innovative and creative assessment tasks.
- I thought Carey’s novel was the most interesting (out of *Northanger Abbey*, *War of the Worlds*, *Frankenstein* and *The Eyre Affair*).
- We focused on both Indigenous film and Australian poetry, both of which I found hugely interesting and probably my most favourite part of 1st-year university English studies. I think they have more relevance, personally, culturally and politically and make us look at Australia as a strong literary country.
- Because it’s always interesting to learn something new.
- I was fascinated by the ideas presented to us about how Australians interact with the world at large.
- I found each of the texts very engaging and very enjoyable both to read and analyse. It was a rewarding introduction into Australian modernist literature.
- It was so interesting to see the large variety of Australian texts available that I didn’t even know existed.
- Because I enjoyed the reading!



vi) 1st-year students' engagement with Australian literature

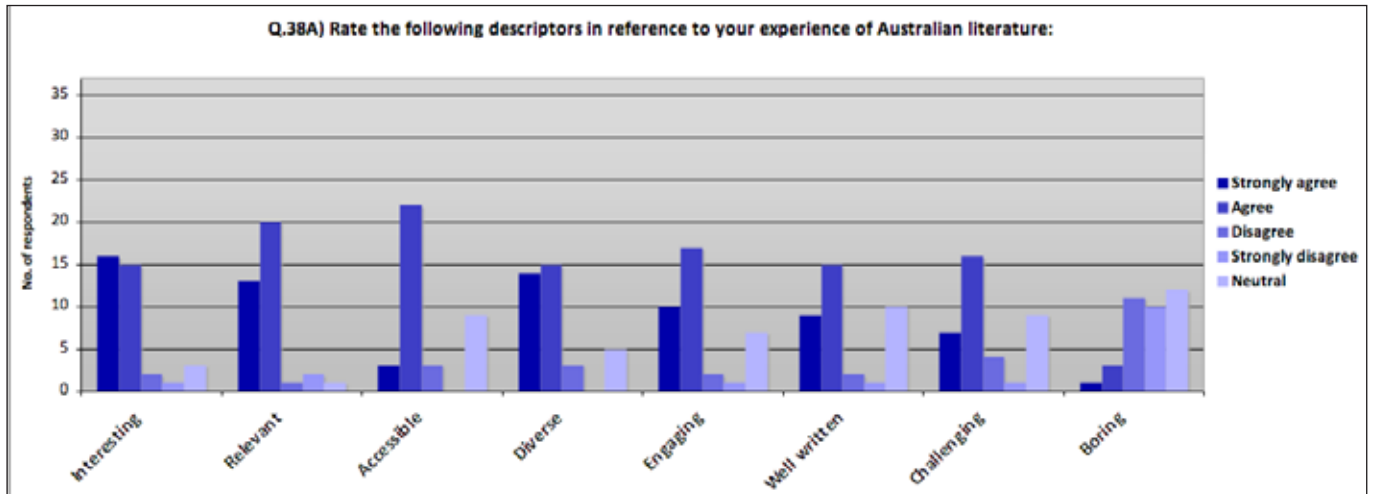


Figure 62: 1st-year students' engagement with Australian literature

Selected responses:

- The texts that we studied covered many different writing styles and subjects. I think that I find Australian literature more interesting than international literature as it is relevant and can easily be related to.
- While some of our set texts were not 'fantastic' texts, they were important texts, e.g. Larissa Behrendt, *Home*. They were not easily accessible, nor were resources for essays, assignments etc.
- Australian literature tends to focus on a very specific version of Australia, which is a larrikin, outback view of the nation, derived from images of Ned Kelly and bushrangers. This, I think, tends to reproduce the same specific images of Australia. Ideally, I'd like Australian literature to be more diverse in the images shown.
- I was amazed about the diversity of topics the texts explored, gender, race, immigration, drugs, sex, family and so many more. So many issues that are real to my life.
- I generally dislike the quintessential man-dog-outback style of writing (such as Henry Lawson's work), but find writers like J. M. Coetzee very interesting.
- Reading about the place that I live in gives me a sense of country pride. It also encourages a social conscience and often has a greater relevance to Australians than non-Australian texts.
- I love Australian literature, I think it is interesting, diverse and engaging particularly because it is often easy to relate to, these are people, places and stories that we may encounter everyday of our lives, otherwise they may just teach us something about Australia's diverse culture.
- I prefer modern Australian literature, such as *Behind the Moon*, to the stereotypical 'outback' settings. Many of the short stories were inaccessible as they were set during early Australia, and were not the most interesting. The novels, however, were fantastic.
- The books we were given to read were badly written; hence it discouraged me from pursuing the study of Australian literature any further.
- I enjoy reading Australian literature, but not so much studying it, I like to think that I have read a lot of it for someone my age and I think that certain texts should be included in studies. Writers such as Andrew McGahan and Tim Winton, students often wouldn't read these writers unless they were to study them and I think these sorts of writers are important for forming an Australian identity.
- I have so far thoroughly enjoyed almost every Australian literary text that I have read. I believe authors deserve a much greater amount of support from both publishers and the public. I myself am disappointed I was not introduced to such texts sooner.



- Some texts are far more difficult than others, which often detracts from the enjoyment of them.
- I think that it is very good. This is because there is no distinction between the quality of Aus. lit. and that of classical English texts. I have also appreciated it more because it appeals to a sense of patriotism and deepens understanding of country and Australia's history.

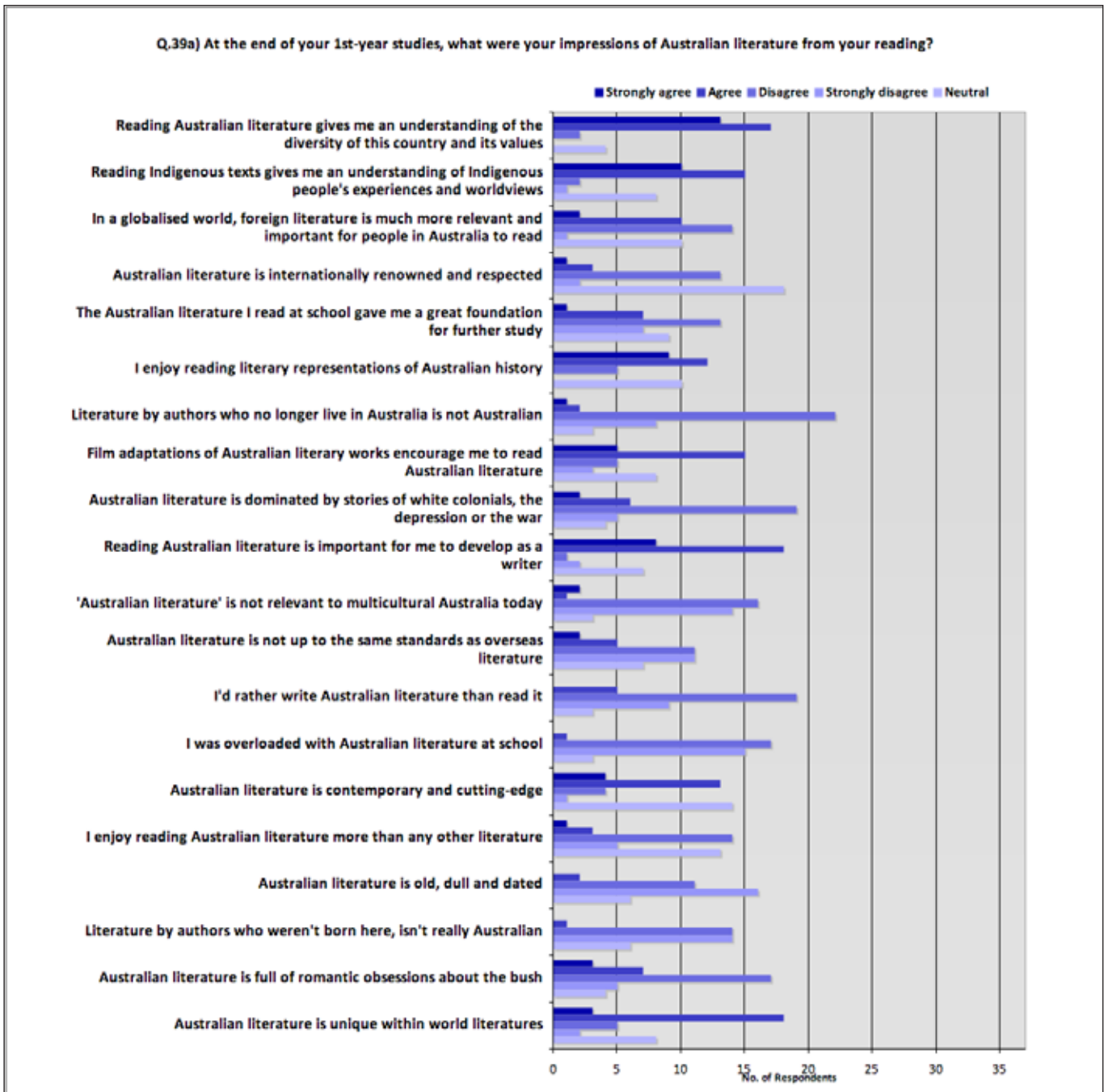


Figure 63: 1st-year student impressions of Australian literature at end of year



Selected responses:

- Don't like romantic notions of landscape, and as such don't read lots and lots of Australian literature. Thea Astley in particular will never appeal, Tim Winton (in novels) is a close second... Those who don't do these things and write about people, I'm very interested to read.
- Australia is a unique country with a unique history, which is added to every day and is absolutely worth reading about. It is the people in Australia that make us different.
- Many of the novels ARE about the bush, which is incredibly irrelevant and somewhat boring now. However the newer novels embracing multiculturalism (or challenging it) are very enjoyable and relevant.
- The literature I was given to study was depressing and much too contemporary.
- I feel that the Australian literature that we are exposed to initially is mainly that of postcolonial Australia and romanticises the bush. I personally do not have a problem with this and would prefer to read that than the supposed comedy regarding Indigenous people. I felt that the majority of texts from the Hergenhan anthology were very similar, all very depressed and all postcolonial. I would like to see other authors, like Grenville, included in the text and other more modern authors so that students could see that Australian lit. is not all about the outback or promoting Australia.
- Although some writers are obsessed with stereotypical romantic fantasies about Australia, there are far more who deal with more engaging and contemporary issues to do with modernity and our role within it.
- Before I began studying Australian literature I held many assumptions about it, particularly that it was dominated by realist and nationalist work aiming at establishing a national identity. After I concluded my first unit of AusLit study however, I realised that contemporary Australian literature was actually very much engaged with the wider world; often seeming to try to break down the cultural hegemony that is often instilled in Australian culture.
- Australian literature is very interesting, and relevant to every Australian.
- I used to think that Australian literature mainly concerned the writings of Lawson and Paterson and did concern the bush. But my course has changed this impression; Aust. lit. is far more diverse and contemporary and relates more to the landscape rather than the 'bush'.
- I used to see Australian Lit. as boring and unimportant. University changed that and I can now see that it is relevant to the Australian psyche.
- Yes, I think that my study of Australian literature has opened my eyes to the wide amount of texts available to Australians.

vii) 1st-year students' impressions of effective learning

Selected responses:

- Wish there could have been more Australian texts as part of the reading list, but this is understandable as the course was not an Australian literature course; rather, it concerned novels in general.
- Studying Australian texts helps to discover and appreciate the diversity present in our culture.
- I sought out other texts by the authors we read during class to find a better understanding of themes I was unfamiliar with. I read about subjects that I had never explored before. I became passionate about themes I discovered in the set texts. I absolutely loved exploring different texts from my usual choices.
- I have a much broader knowledge of Australian literature than before I started university.
- I enjoyed learning Australian literature at a first-year level, however I don't think it was taught broadly enough and it seems that the ability to move on and focus on Australian literature in future years is very limited.
- This course revealed an area of Australian culture to me that can often seem masked by wider society. With a combination of well chosen texts and enthusiastic and knowledgeable teachers I feel I now have a greater appreciation of Australian culture. I found the lectures that were given on foreign language Australian texts and translation were particularly revealing about Australia's cultural landscape.

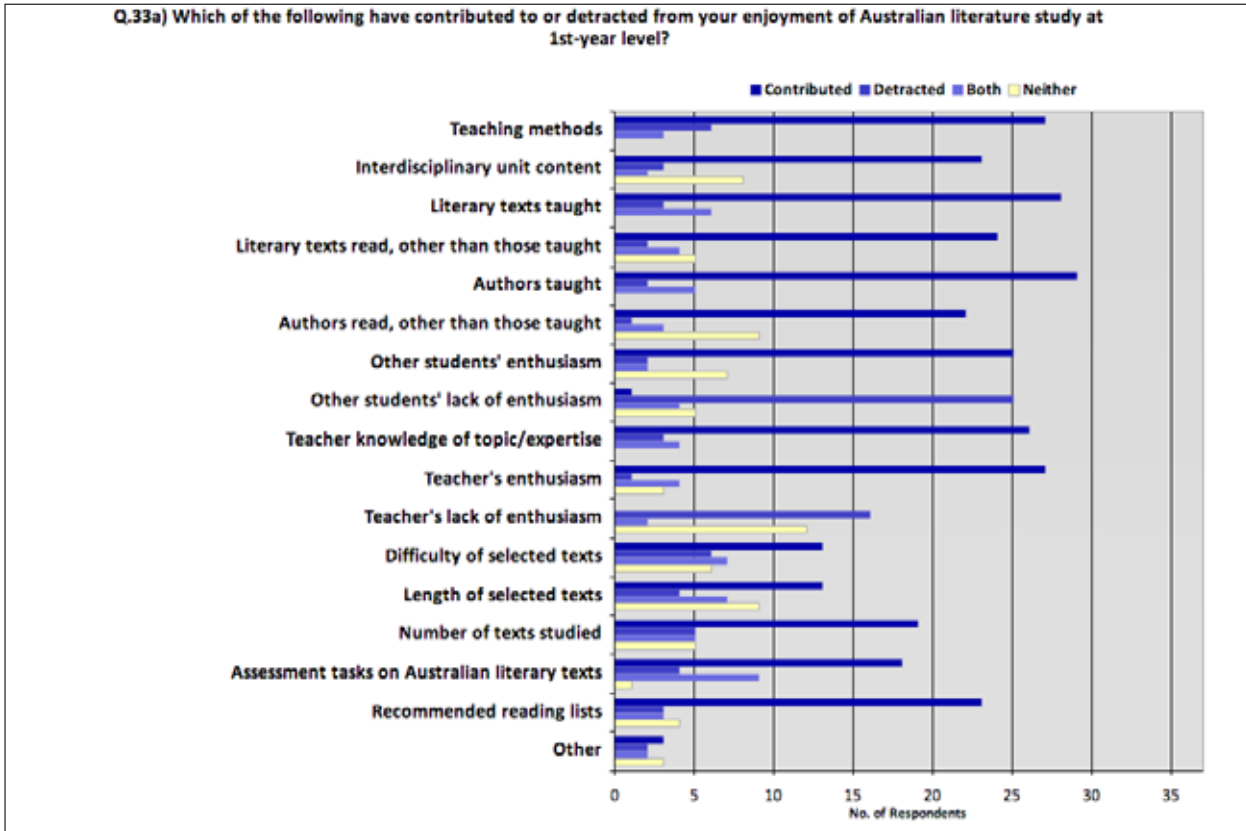


Figure 64: Factors influencing students' enjoyment of studying Australian literature at first-year level

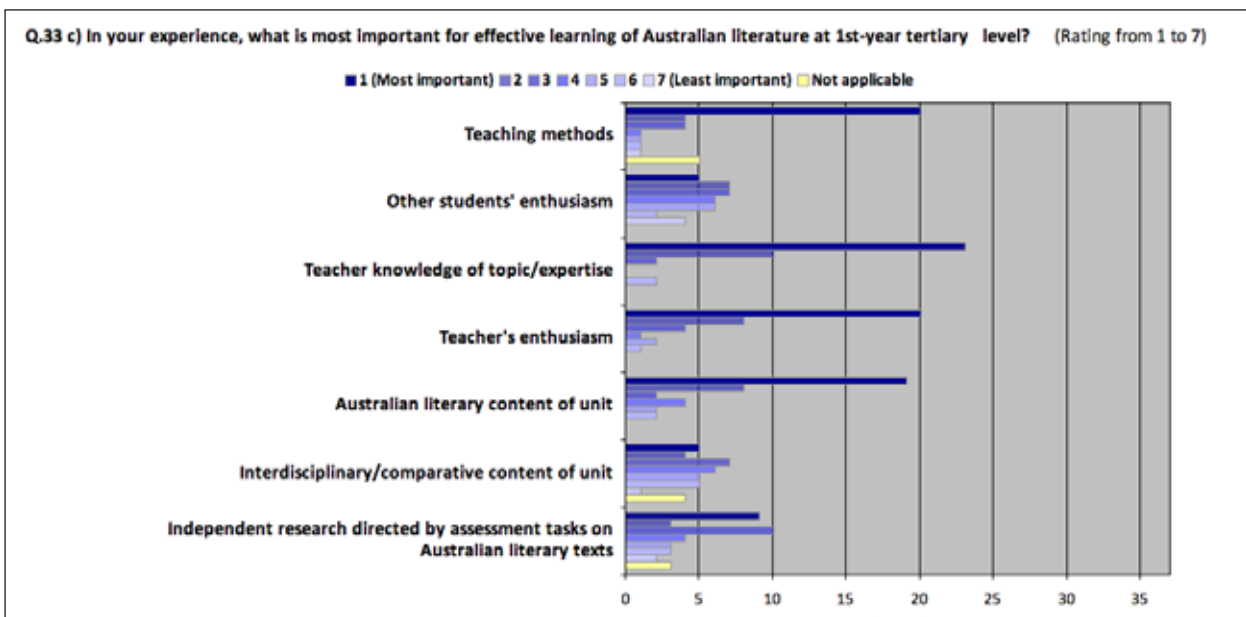


Figure 65: Factors for effective learning at first-year level



viii) 1st-year student familiarity with Australian literary texts prior to tertiary studies

All 1st-year students surveyed indicated they had studied some Australian literature at senior secondary levels, however, only 70% of 2nd, 3rd and 4th year students had studied Australian literature at senior secondary levels.

These students recalled studying the following texts during their senior secondary studies:

Murray Bail – short stories	Henry Lawson – poems
Martin Boyd – <i>The Cardboard Crown</i>	Marua McCarthy – <i>Queen Kat, Carmel and St. Jude</i>
Matthew Cameron – <i>Ruby Moon</i>	David Malouf – <i>An Imaginary Life, Remembering Babylon</i>
Margaret Clark – <i>Fat Chance</i>	Melina Marchetta – <i>Looking for Alibrandi</i>
Bryce Courtenay – <i>April Fool's Day</i>	Melina Marchetta – <i>Saving Francesca</i>
Jack Davis – <i>No Sugar</i>	Sally Morgan – <i>My Place</i>
Bruce Dawe – poems	Les Murray – poems
Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman – <i>7 Stages of Grieving</i>	Kathy Lette and Gabrielle Carey – <i>Puberty Blues</i>
Richard Flanagan – <i>Death of a River Guide</i>	Louis Nowra – <i>The Golden Age</i>
Tim Flannery – <i>Throwim Way Leg</i>	Louis Nowra – <i>Cosi</i>
Miles Franklin – <i>My Brilliant Career Caddy</i>	Banjo Paterson – poems
Peter Goldsworthy – <i>Honk if You Are Jesus</i>	Noel Pearson – speech
Peter Goldsworthy – <i>Maestro</i>	Dorothy Porter – poems
Michael Gow – <i>Away</i>	Peter Skyrznecki – <i>Immigrant Chronicle Frontline</i>
Philip Gwynne – <i>Nukkin Ya</i>	Kenneth Slessor – poems
Philip Gwynne – <i>Deadly Unna Yolgnu Boy</i>	Lisa Temple and Peter McFarlane, eds – <i>Blue Light, Clear Atoms</i>
Jane Harrison – <i>Stolen</i>	Ben Thurley – <i>Dougie</i>
Gwen Harwood – poems	Chris Wallace-Crabbe, ed. – <i>Six Voices: Contemporary Australian Poems</i>
Xavier Herbert – <i>Capricornia</i>	Tim Winton – <i>Cloudstreet</i>
Dorothy Hewett – poems	Tim Winton – <i>Minimum of Two (anthology)</i>
Paul Keating – speech	Judith Wright – poems
Elizabeth Jolley – <i>The Well</i>	Patrick White – <i>A Fringe of Leaves</i>
John Kinsella – <i>The Silo</i>	



- **2nd/3rd/4th year students' study of Australian literature in first year**

Data provided here relates to second and upper level student responses and provides insights into their experiences as 1st-year students and their motivations of studying Australian literature at upper levels.

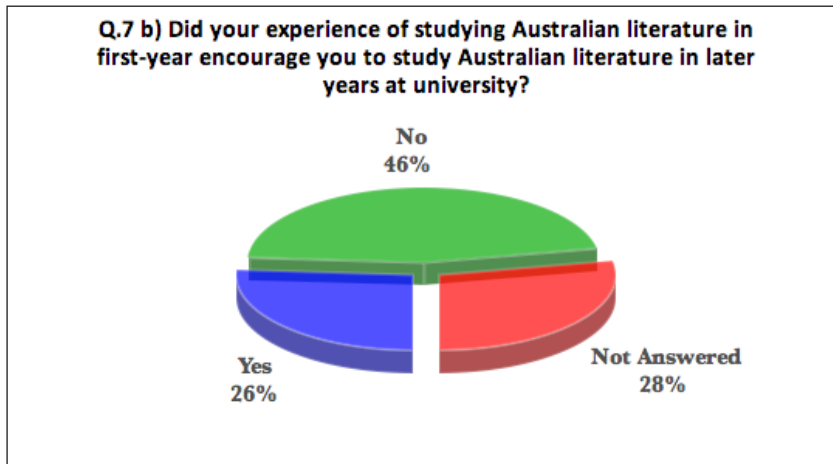


Figure 66: Influence of first-year literature studies on later choice

Selected responses:

- Australian Texts: International Contexts at Sydney University was a fantastic course and made me want to study Aust. Lit. for the rest of my years at university.
- Reading Australian texts in first-year units provided a comprehensive overview of Australian literature, and sparked an interest in post-colonial literature.
- The course I did made me want to find out more about Australian writing and writers.
- Only [studied at first-year level] incidentally, i.e. within a 'Modern literature' course, predominantly European and US texts. It seemed more 'pressing' to read and write on texts from elsewhere.
- The Australian literature we were set to read was, in general, myopic in its imagination, and solipsistically concerned with the Bush and Australian identity. If only I could have read a novel like Stead's *Seven Poor Men* in 1st-year.
- I don't think Aust. Lit. was included in first year syllabus, which it should be if the English Department are at all concerned with promoting our national literature.
- The texts were interesting enough to persuade me to study more: Malouf's *An Imaginary Life* and Peter Carey's story 'American Dreams'.

i) 2nd/3rd/4th year students' motivations for studying Australian literature

- I am interested in Australian History – also a part of my major.
- Because of my degree structure I needed to take one of those units (Australian literature and History). The other (Contemporary Australian Children's Literature) I took because there are not a lot of purely literary units available through OUA.
- I think it is important for an English teacher in Australia to have a fair knowledge of Australian literature. I hadn't studied it in depth before and I also thought it would be interesting.
- Interested in being a writer.
- Chose one just for something different and found it far more enlightening than anything I had studied previously at uni.
- I studied Tasmanian Literature in order to broaden my knowledge of Australian literature in general and



Tasmanian literature in particular. I also chose this unit in the hope it would contribute to my own self understanding as a Tasmanian/Australian.

- As somebody with a vested interest in writing and literature, I took a course that covered Australian literature from 1920–1960 for a number of reasons:
 1. Because I realised I couldn't recognise a single author or poet on the reading list.
 2. Because as a writer and aspiring Australian journalist, I considered Australian literature to be one of the best forums in which to access the history of Australian writing and authors.
 3. I had never taken a course that specifically prescribed several poets, including an entire book of Kenneth Slessor's poetry, and I wished to further my skills in reading and understanding poetry.
- Because I had never read any Aust. Lit. and I wanted to learn more about the country that I have just become a citizen of. I was surprised to find that Aust. Lit. became the focus of my passions at university.
- The unit concentrated on Australian literature of the period 1920–1960 and this is a period I have an interest in (both in terms of history and literature).
- Because so much study is focused on non-Australian, widely known texts, and it is important to know, understand and learn about local and national texts. How can you be a 'real' Australian student if you have no knowledge of Australian literature?
- As a writer myself I was interested to engage with the texts of other Australian writers.
- I wanted a good intro to Australian literature, as we didn't study it in high school at all. I wanted to know what it was about, and how it differed to the literature I was used to teaching.
- Interested in literature of Tasmania and creative writing in particular.
- I chose Aust. Lit. as the final subject of my degree because I felt it was lacking from my tertiary education. I wanted some way in to the creative and critical sphere as it manifests in my own environment, in order to better operate as a practitioner (as a creative writer).
- The first Aust. Lit. unit I undertook was partly out of interest having no prior experience and partly as a core component of my degree. The second and third units were out of pure interest particularly for literary constructions of Indigenous identity and Australian notions of mateship, masculinity, etc.
- Aust. Lit. in 21st Century: the relevance to the 21st (i.e. current) century was particularly appealing. Melancholy in Aust. Lit. Two very interesting and previously unexamined subject areas.
- Because I felt this field of study had been a neglected part of my education, particularly at a tertiary level, and I wanted to engage with more sophisticated texts than are undertaken at a secondary level.
- I wanted to see if they were able to break away from the stereotypes and themes repeatedly used in Australian film (always focusing on low class society, bad fashion, over-casual drugs, etc.)
- I completed 3rd-year English research subjects that included researching Australian antipodean theory. Thus sparking an interest in Australian literature.
- Because I had never undertaken a subject that solely looked at Australian literature before.
- I was interested in knowing about a broader range of Australian authors and their works than what I had previously read.



ii) 2nd/3rd/4th year students' engagement with Australian literature

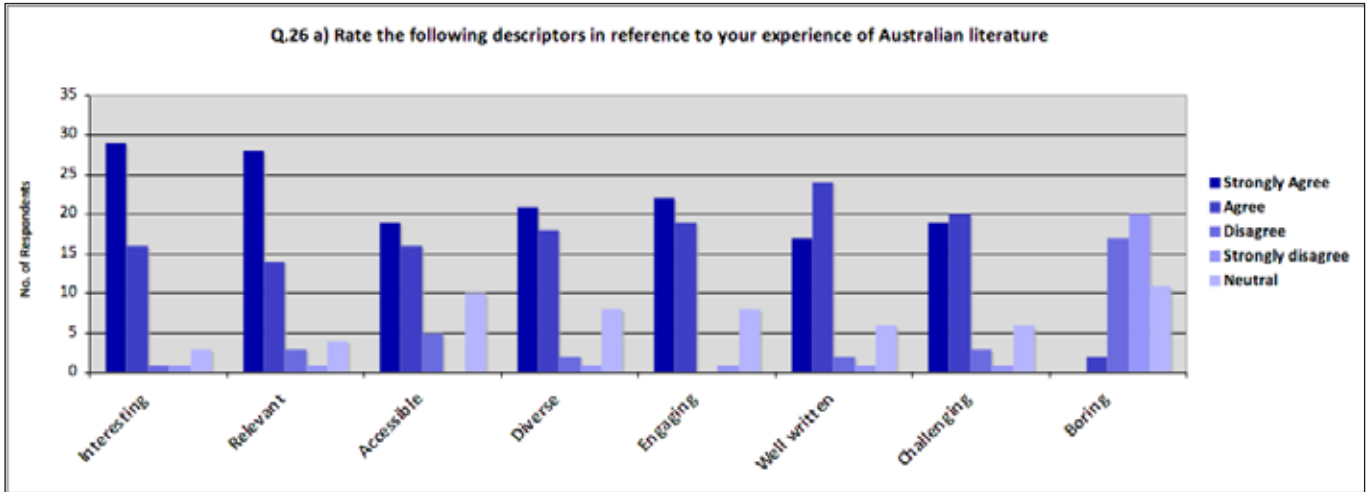


Figure 67: Upper level students' experience of Australian literature

Selected responses:

- Australian literature has been a pleasant surprise. I really enjoyed the comparison between Paterson's view of the bush and Lawson's. I think it helped to come to these texts without having studied them previously.
- The post-colonial Australian writers have not made any impact upon the world. Aside from Flanagan and Winton, no one is making any impact. Lack of profound thought and inherent drama in these texts. Not really representative of 'my' Australia at all.
- I think Australian authors have suffered from little-man-syndrome for quite some time. Our identity as a nation has never been particularly clear-cut, and this has taken its toll on the ambitions and intentions of our local literature. Our country has placed very little importance or funding into the arts, as sport continues to reign as the most popular cultural domain. This has often led to Australian artists moving to other parts of the world to have their craft taken more seriously. However, with the rise of POD publishing and the industry of online books, I think Australian authors will start to find it easier to have their work read and assessed by people outside their local readership, and this will hopefully start to develop a new kind of international identity.
- I find Australian literature so engaging because of the underlying anxiety of 'belonging' or cultural legitimacy that you find in so many texts. Even if these issues are not the text's main concern, you often find it is harnessed through the landscape or structure of the text. Australian literature makes you think outside the social/cultural/economic background you may be from and really consider the notion of what it is to 'belong' to such a young country, to belong to some of the most moving and diverse landscapes in the world and to essentially live on stolen soil. The reader cannot escape questioning these notions, even if they are not Australian.
- It's distinctly different from most mainstream literature available at bookstores, which tend to be mostly American or English. Australian literature is definitely weirder.
- To elaborate on earlier comments, I find the most interesting Australian literature to be almost forgotten by the establishment, too peculiar by Aust lit standards or under appreciated. My literary studies' career has been for the most part an exploration of world literatures, of different time periods and collectives, Aust lit has in the past meant conservative or bound to Australian subjects. Only now am I really discovering the diversity at work that is uniquely Australian.

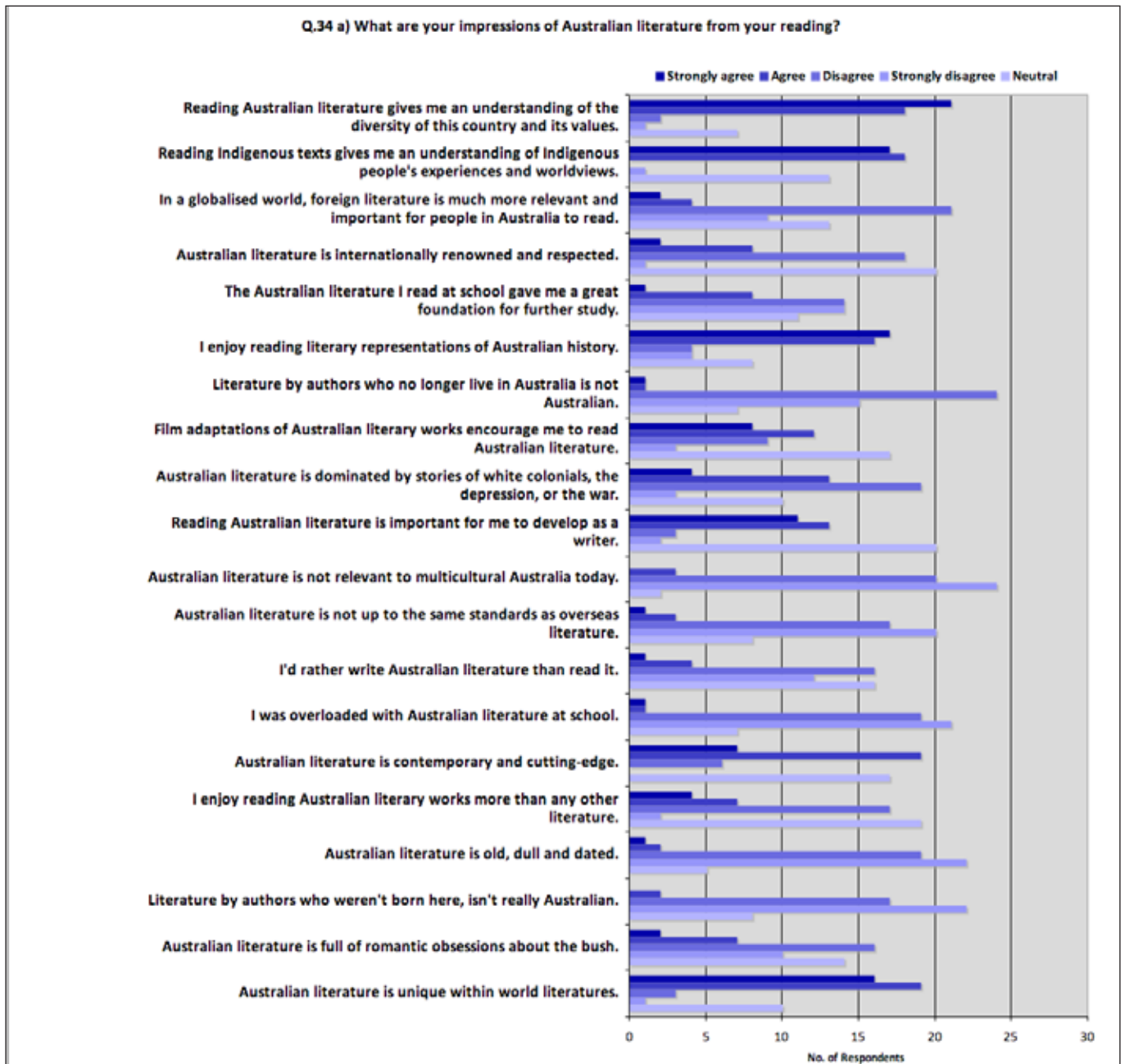


Figure 68: Upper level students' impressions of Australian literature following study

Selected responses:

- I think that you can perceive diversity in Australian and Indigenous experiences through reading but to understand it requires in-depth study.
- Australian literature does not yet reach the heights of, say, the great British novelists, even allowing for the fact that we live in a different culture at a different time. On a positive note, unfortunate and distasteful preoccupations with the 'bush' and especially 'war' are thankfully being left behind.



- Australian literature is still relevant to our self-understanding. Despite the apparent diversity and divergence of our culture and its writings the concept of Australian literature is still a useful one. This is attested to not only by the obvious existence of some unique and shared tendencies that come under the rubric of this concept but by the productive way in which the very differences and antagonisms within Australian texts can be traced together.
- Australian literature really surprised me considering the generalisations people made about it.
- Australian literature is relevant in multicultural Australia today, as it presents various ways that those in the past and present have viewed and reacted to racial difference, and this is important to have a knowledge base of. Literature by authors who were not born here is technically not truly or completely Australian, however once a person has lived here for a significant period of time the land, the people, animals, landscape and weather (especially the cold and hot variations) seep into their being and I'm sure many feel as if they have been here all their lives. Anyone who spends time letting this country absorb into them can write some aspect of Australian literature with conviction and truth.
- My experience of Australian literature has helped inform my understanding of our relationship with global communities for e.g. how Australian 'Bush' Romanticism followed several decades after British Romanticism. The chronological/historical/socio-cultural understandings of our common literature (particularly in postcolonial fields) is definitely interesting, even though my main research interests are Gothic and Romantic literature.
- We probably need to be careful about defining a 'national' literature; and about assuming that texts which deal with Indigenous issues in fact represent an Indigenous experience/voice. Does some contemporary Australian lit. dwell too exclusively/obsessionally on 'inward looking' concerns? Texts by authors such as Coetzee and Castro seem to re-enliven our lit. by being both globally engaged and interested in what it is to be Australian.
- I think the way Aust. Lit. is taught in high school can promote a certain type of literature that may 'romanticise the bush' and so forth; but that in reality, Australian literature can be challenging, politically cutting edge. A lot of students don't realise this because they are not exposed to a wide-enough range of texts.

• **How commitments outside university affected student experience of Australian literature**

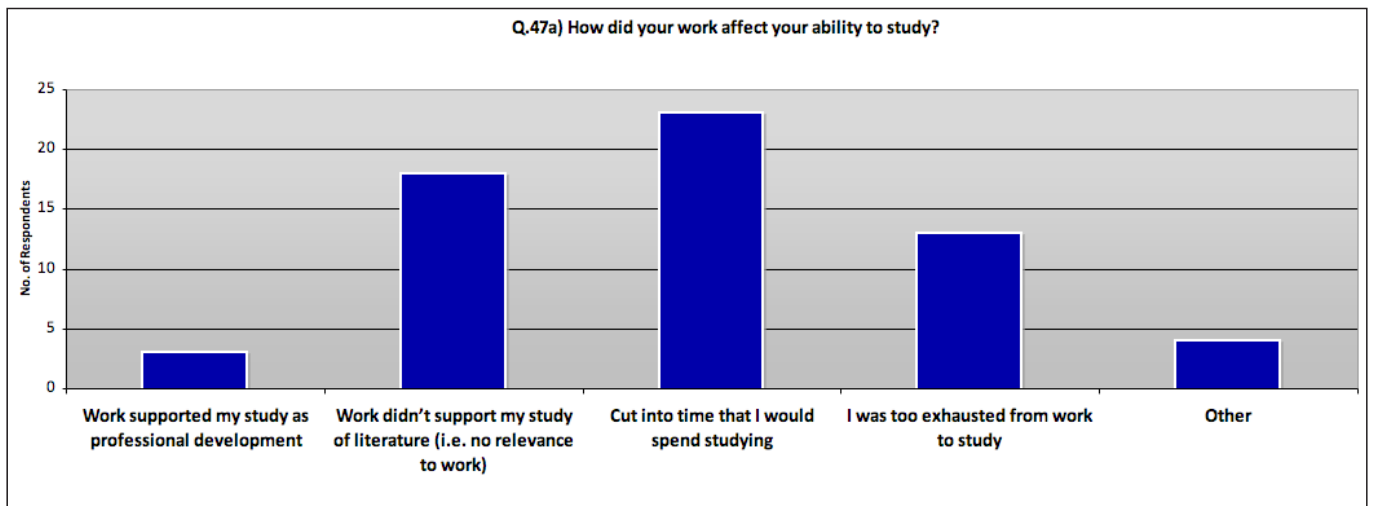


Figure 69: Affect of work demands on 1st-year students' experience of Australian literary studies – 1

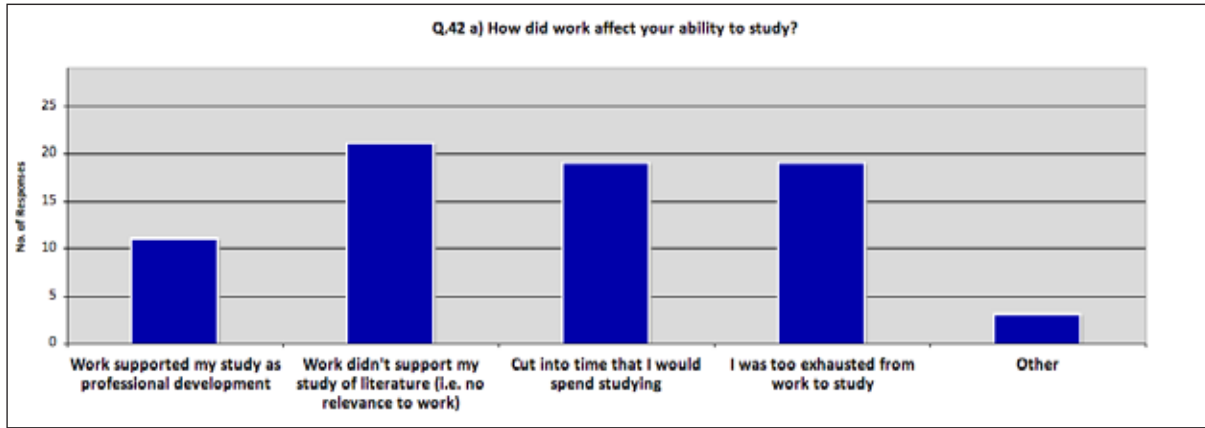


Figure 70: Affect of work demands on 1st-year students' experience of Australian literary studies – 2

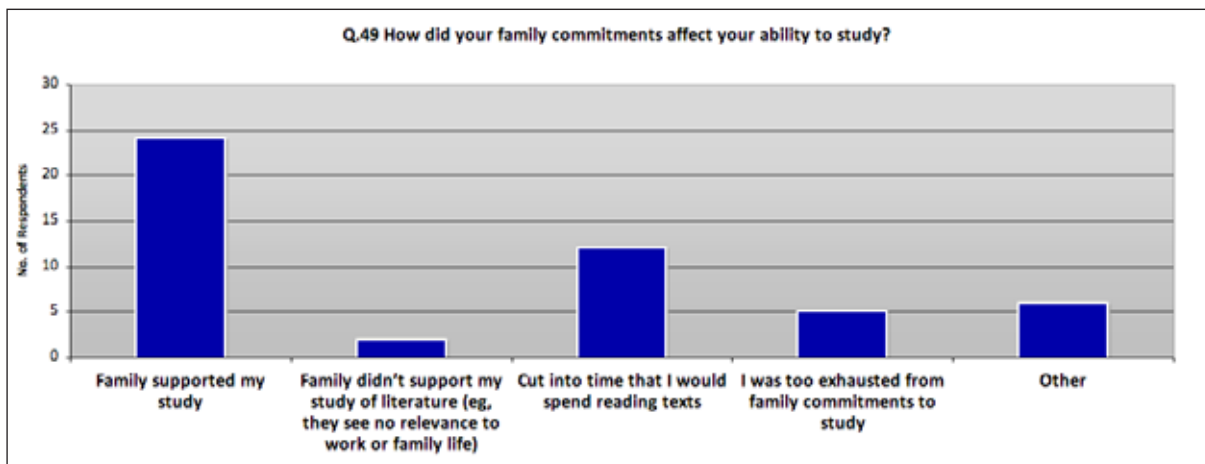


Figure 71: Affect of family commitments on 1st-year students' experience of Australian literary studies – 1

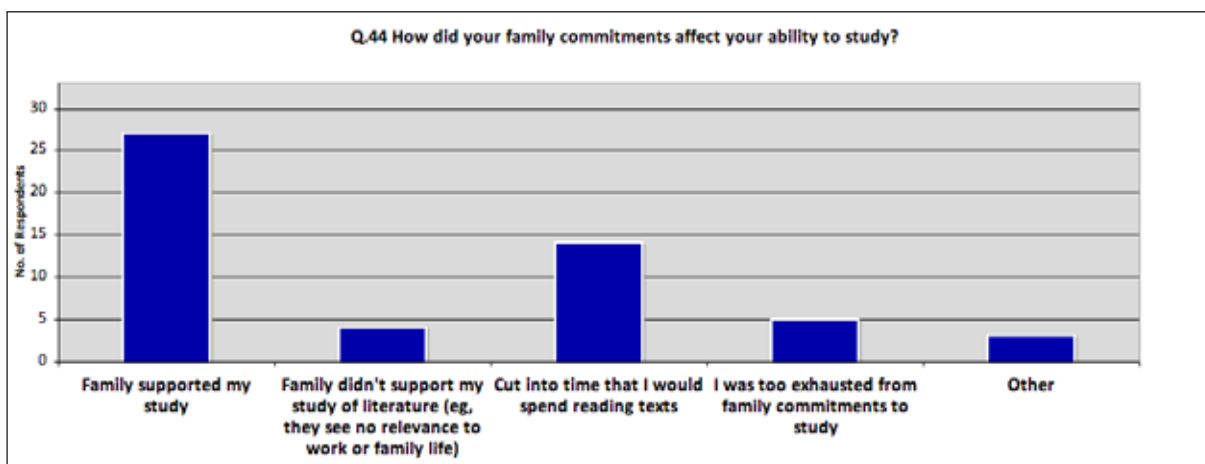


Figure 72: Affect of family commitments upper level students' experience of Australian literary studies – 2

6. TEACHING-RESEARCH NEXUS

An important outcome of the Survey was the finding that both tertiary teachers and their students placed a high value on what we have called the ‘teaching-research nexus’. Tertiary teachers comments indicated that text selection and teaching practices were influenced by their personal research interests and activities, while students commented warmly on the benefits of engaging with teachers who brought their expertise and research based knowledge to the classroom.

- **The influence of research activities on teaching practice**

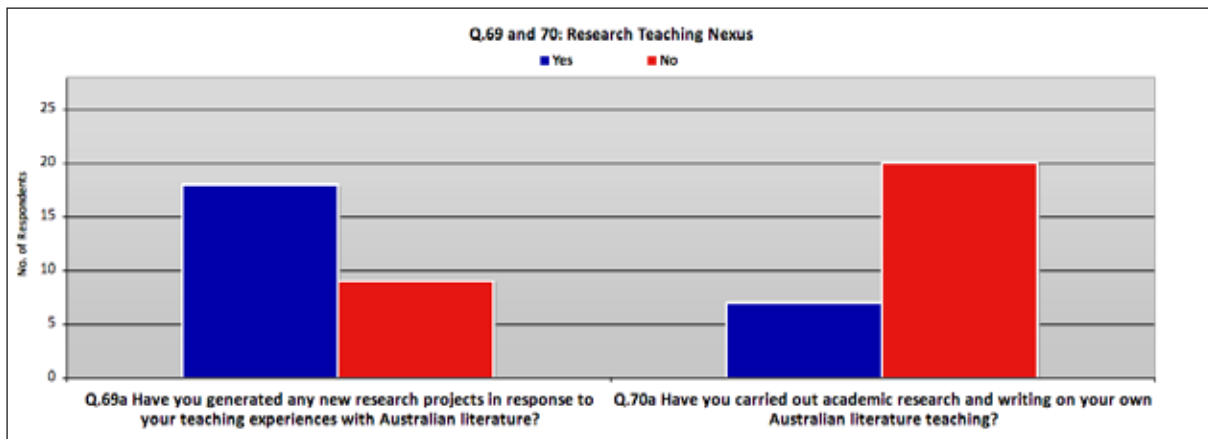


Figure 73: Research and teaching nexus – 1

A significant number of academic respondents bring their research knowledge and expertise to bear upon their teaching practice, citing it as the strongest influence above tertiary education policies, while a small number of respondents had undertaken research on the practice of teaching Australian literature.

Specialisation in areas as diverse as gender studies, print culture studies, multiculturalism, regional literatures and general Australian Studies were identified.

Research-based knowledge was identified as the source for ideas and enthusiasm in relation to some aspects of tertiary teachers’ teaching responsibilities. Student respondents placed a high value on the expertise and enthusiasm that research-based teaching gave them with some stating that the enthusiastic research-informed teaching had a transformative affect on their engagement with the subject.

The value of interdisciplinary research practice

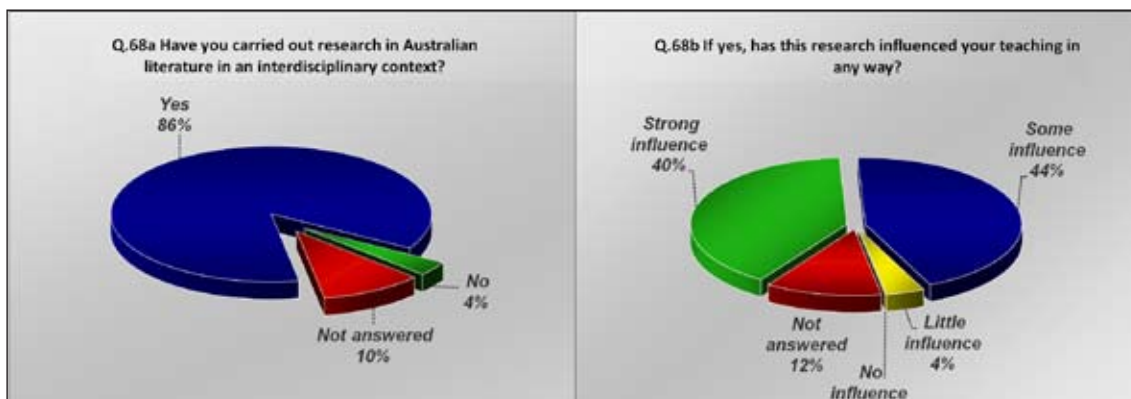


Figure 74: Research and teaching nexus – 2



Considerable reference was made to interdisciplinary frameworks offering opportunities for teaching Australian literature within historical, political and wider cultural contexts. The importance of seeing and teaching Australian literature within a wider frame of cultural studies was evident at both secondary and tertiary levels.

Senior secondary teachers were also asked about their academic and research background. A small number had undertaken postgraduate courses in areas relevant to their teaching practice. They were also asked to reflect upon their own learning experiences in Australian literature. Their responses reflected a range of levels of engagement from declaring it a boring, uninspiring aspect of their own education at both secondary and tertiary levels, to being virtually non-existent. Again, their comments aligned with those of current undergraduates who identified the benefits of enthusiastic teachers influencing their engagement with Australian literature.

Selected responses (tertiary teachers):

- Interdisciplinary research in gender studies has influenced my teaching – which has also crossed into teaching in the field. And research in Australian historical studies and Australian Studies has also been strongly influential, including cross teaching with colleagues into those disciplines.
- Asian Australian writing. Australian lit. and public culture. Multiculturalism and children's literature.
- Probably my major interdisciplinary connection has been with Cultural Studies and education and the research into pedagogy of literature teaching, and the area of fictocriticism within Cultural Studies
- My research is often concerned with the social effects of particular practices, this is also often an emphasis in my teaching.
- It has been in Australian Studies more broadly, and in relation to political issues, especially refugees.



7. EDUCATION AND POSTGRADUATE TRAINING

Questionnaires for senior secondary and Tertiary teachers asked for suggestions on sustaining and strengthening the study of Australian literature. Senior secondary teachers were asked about their educational background and research interests, as well as the usefulness of various forms of professional development. The variety of responses suggests that much more needs to be done to resource and sustain Australian literature in education, including the development of teacher-focused units in Australian literature at universities, continued support for teaching workshops run through English teachers’ associations, online resources, and more opportunities for cross-sectoral collaboration.

- **Secondary teacher educational background and research interests**

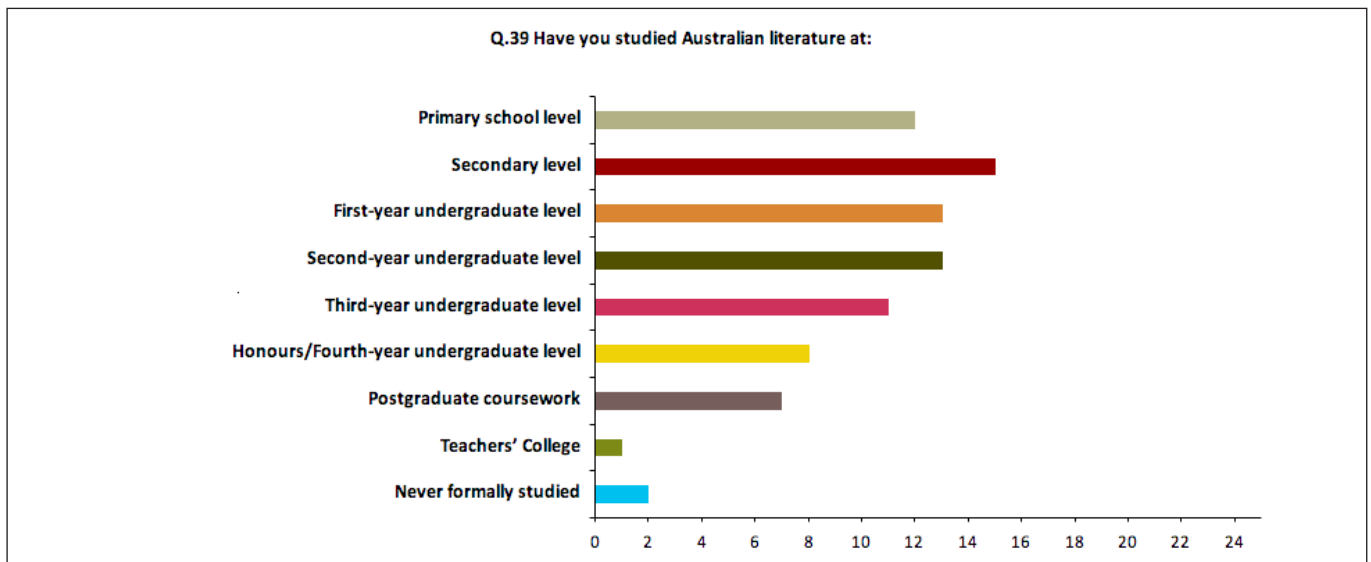


Figure 75: Secondary teachers’ prior experience of studying Australian literature

Secondary teacher respondents revealed a variety of research and educational backgrounds in addition to their teacher training, including undergraduate and postgraduate studies in curriculum leadership, ‘learner approaches’, literacy, critical literacy, language acquisition, critical theory, Cultural Studies, literary theory and children’s literature. Respondents also indicated that interests in social justice, multiculturalism, Indigenous Studies, identity, philosophy and Gender Studies were developed through ‘informal, wide reading’.

The chart above reveals that over half of respondents studied Australian literature in their formal school education and at undergraduate level. Nine respondents had studied Australian literature in some form of postgraduate coursework. Again, this may reflect the small sample group rather than be indicative of the larger sector of secondary English teachers. When asked to describe their student experience of Australian literature from secondary schooling to university, respondents consistently identified the selection of a diverse range of texts and methods of teaching as factors. This varied according to the period respondents received their formal education.

Selected responses:

- Straight reading and comprehension had a negative effect for me. I preferred exploration, interaction, creative responses and dramatic interpretations.
- It always seemed to be an ‘add on’ to the main game: the ‘canon’ in a Leavisite sense. (For example, studying Herbert’s *Capricornia* as the only Oz text (that I can recall) in a 1st-year survey course at The University of Sydney in the mid-1980s.



- I have studied Australian and World Literature at a tertiary level and have come to understand the place that all lit. has and that without variety we become sheltered and lack understanding of peoples other than ourselves. One-dimensional learning can breed ignorance. We should read African, New Zealand, Indian, German, British, Chinese texts – provided they exhibit sound literary merit. Students need to be pushed out of their comfort zone – there is no point in always giving them easy stuff – they need to be challenged.
- My schooling saw some experience of Australian texts, as did my university experience. I became most interested in Australian literature as I grew older and reflected on my own and my family's context as Australians. I became especially interested in West Australian literature through the way it represents landscape and my own experiences of this shared landscape. I am also interested in the way Australian literature works as a responder to as well as a shaper of the society it works in.
- I became an English teacher almost solely due to the significant influence of my high school English and Literature teachers.
- My early experience, from primary through to secondary school, was excruciatingly dull and excluded all Indigenous and (non-British) migrant voices and included very few women. I found pleasure in Banjo Paterson and Henry Lawson but very little else. I attribute this to the lack of diversity and the dreadful teaching which amounted to 'read the story and answer these questions'. There was certainly no critical literacy. It was expected that we would all accept without question all that was put before us and our job was to read (sometimes aloud to the class), appreciate and regurgitate. Opinions were not welcomed especially not from females in the class, study of texts involved aesthetics only. University was altogether different. This was where I was first exposed to multiple voices and views and critical literacy. Language came alive as a dynamic rather than a static experience and I loved it and decided I wanted to teach so that I could share some of this excitement.
- I don't remember many Aussie texts in high school – I didn't study any until I started English literature in Year 12 and I loved those but anything I picked up of my own accord in the library was so boring! I studied Australian literature in University only because I had to, and I found most of it boring, except for *The Australian Fiancé* by Simone Lazaroo.
- I loved it and my teachers exposed us to heaps of different texts. From different times and places. I realised you need to be passionate about the texts you are teaching or it is very difficult.
- In high school I studied *Voss* and *The Tree of Man* with a teacher who was passionate about Patrick White, and of course Australian poetry and drama. At university I studied Australian literature for two years and Australian Drama as a separate two units. I loved it all!
- Hated Henry Lawson in high school; despised Henry Handel Richardson at uni; 3rd and 4th year courses did not choose Aust. Lit courses. During MA research project I did a lot on Indigenous representation by white authors – this encouraged me to do more, removed an element of cultural cringe (or something akin to that). One of the main things that altered my perceptions of Aust Lit was teaching John Tranter and Gow's *Away* in about 1993 with an experienced teacher – really opened me up to the possibilities of connecting to student experience. My areas of passion at uni were post-modern/modern Americans; they still are, but so is contemp. Aust. Lit. [...] hated '17th Doll' – god! – in Yr 11 and first year uni. Did not speak to me at all.



- **Professional development for senior secondary teachers**

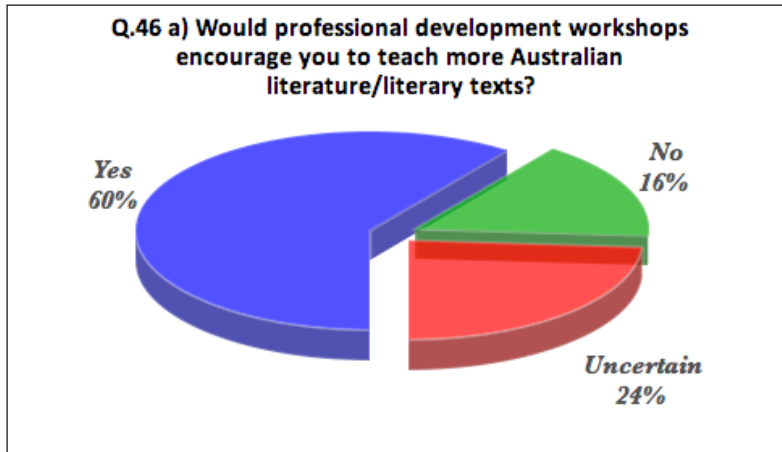


Figure 76: Professional development for secondary teachers

Fifteen senior secondary teachers responded positively to a question about the usefulness of further professional development in Australian literature teaching, making up 60% of respondents. Responses below indicate that professional development should come from all sectors, through writers’ festivals, English Teachers’ Association workshops, and university courses run by Australian literature specialists. Many comments mention the usefulness of ‘summer schools’ and online units. There is an emphasis on ‘practical’ workshops as a space for teachers to share ideas.

Selected responses:

- University Certificate course with small group with practical experience and a mix of resources being demonstrated; online resources.
- [I think there is a need to bring Oz lit academic specialists together with innovative school teachers \(via the professional associations\) to work together on developing professional development activities and resources. It should not be forgotten that A. D. Hope was the first AATE President.](#)
- A series of one-hour lectures over a day at universities ala the Curtin model is very effective.
- Summer school and holiday pd’s. Wouldn’t mind giving up a couple of days to learn something away from the grind and glare of school.
- State association workshops – practical focus of activities/support resources used by others in classrooms.
- Writers’ festivals, ‘summer schools’, AATE/state workshops would be great.
- I find ETAQ, ALEA, AATE workshops very useful. I attended the Summer school for English teachers and found that beneficial.
- Good scholarly writing. I can work out the classroom learning experiences myself.
- On-line units – teachers sharing; the opportunity to hear from more authors.

- **Sustaining and strengthening Australian literature teaching**

Tertiary teachers were asked, ‘What do you believe is needed to support and strengthen the teaching of Australian literary cultures?’. Responses consistently made the following suggestions: text availability; greater dialogue between secondary and tertiary sectors and curriculum developers; a return to the ‘literary-critical’ model; a recognition that Australian literature study needs to appeal to student experience and ‘contemporary life’; more vigorous promotion of the diversity of Australian literature in the community (especially through writing events); and, ‘continuing post-graduate research’. There was also an emphasis on sustaining ‘committed and well trained teachers of Australian literature’.



Selected responses:

- More sharing of resources; change the school curriculum for lit. and Aust. Lit.; make reading cool ...; support publishing.
 - Blinkers off – find texts with more relevance to contemporary audiences.
 - A theoretical shift back to concentration on works themselves, in the sense of words on the page, rather than their contents – I don't mean completely, and would never want a return to New Criticism, but a bit of movement back to attention to language would increase respect for what can be learnt from literary study. We also need more outreach to the general public, and a valuing by universities of such work.
 - A nexus of the academy and schools, government and publishing to recognise its diversity and its necessity.
 - By whatever combination of means, to try to reclaim the 'literary-critical' dimension in the teaching of Australian literature, if necessary at the partial expense of the political, the sociological and even the philosophical.
 - Access to primary and secondary sources. More sensitive approaches at secondary levels. Well trained and enthusiastic teachers. Support for Aust. lit. in the wider culture and community.
-
- [1. Reconnecting secondary and tertiary teaching of \(Australian\) literary texts.](#)
 - [2. Better, more coherent and helpful resources.](#)
 - [3. A new articulation of the relevance of Australian literary culture to contemporary life.](#)
-
- Good teaching of interesting Australian texts at secondary school level. A strong and diverse publishing industry. Vibrant and informed public discussion of literature in general and Aus lit in particular (through media forum, online, literary festivals, etc). Better funding for Humanities teaching at tertiary level (and, along with this, career options for specialist Aust. lit. teachers, who often end up on casual or sessional contracts, like me!)
 - The fall-off occurs between great primary literary education and texts and the middle years of secondary teaching due to higher literacy problems in that age demographic at state-funded institutions.
 - Keeping books in print; making sure that Australian books are appropriately included in genre courses.
 - Advertising and promotion of the discipline, beginning at primary school level. Include Australian literary studies and literature in general in training of teachers at all levels.
 - A greater focus on dialogue between various practitioners – academics/scholars, postgrads, secondary teachers, authors, publishers, booksellers ... etc.
 - Recognition of writing produced in the academy by new writers in creative writing courses as an integral part of contemporary Australian literature.

8. AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE AND PERSONAL SPACES

As the TAL Survey project is part of a larger initiative to sustain and develop a community of readers of Australian literature and support the Australian publishing industry, the Survey also aimed to discover the extent to which Australian literature is read outside of education contexts, both in leisure time and for professional development. These questions appeared in the senior secondary teachers' questionnaire and both undergraduate questionnaires. In the sections above, there is also some reference to encouraging 'lifelong readers' as a key objective in senior secondary teachers' approaches. (See sections titled 'Teaching methodologies' and 'Student experiences'.)

- **Extent to which Australian literature is read in leisure time**



Figure 77: Reading Australian literature in leisure time – secondary teachers

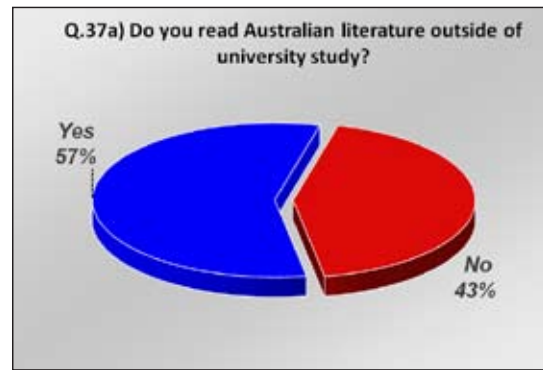


Figure 78: Reading Australian literature in leisure time – 1st-year students

Twenty senior secondary teacher respondents answered 'yes' and five respondents 'sometimes' to the question, 'Do you read Australian literature for leisure', showing that the sample group were avid supporters of Australian books and authors. This, of course, reflects the small sample of senior secondary teachers and is not necessarily representative of the wider community of English teachers. When undergraduate students were asked whether they read Australian literature in their leisure time, the majority of respondents also answered in the affirmative and listed favourite authors and texts. These were mostly prose fiction, although some respondents listed poetry, biography and a couple of non-fiction books. The most common authors listed were Tim Winton, Richard Flanagan, Peter Carey, John Marsden, Helen Garner, Marcus Zusak, Melina Marchetta, A.B. Paterson, Miles Franklin, Andrew McGahan, Peter Goldsworthy and Sara Douglass. A few respondents in the undergraduate questionnaires listed Indigenous biographies and novels such as Sally Morgan's *My Place*, Doris Pilkington Garimara's *Follow the Rabbit Proof Fence* and Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria*. In the undergraduate text responses, there was a sense that 'nationality' was not a strong consideration when selecting books to read for leisure. The only exception to this was from students who had an interest in historical texts or students who were pursuing other work by authors studied in Australian literature units (see Figure 79 next page).

- **Motivators for reading Australian literature outside the education context**

In the senior secondary teacher questionnaire, 25 quantitative responses indicated a strong motivation for reading Australian literature, especially to pursue the work of particular authors and genres, to discover new texts to teach, and to follow the recommendations of friends and colleagues. 'An ongoing interest in Australian literary culture' was also a significant motivator, again reflecting the sample group. Text responses suggested a variety of 'motivators', including writers' festivals, television and radio coverage, book clubs and personal networks. Other motivators included evaluating 'prize winners' and a commitment to supporting local and small publishers (see Figure 80 next page).



Selected responses:

- A feeling that Australian authors and (small) publishers should be supported.
- Hearing about them in the media – e.g. First Tuesday Bookclub on the ABC.
- Always recommendations, favourite writers/directors etc, or prize winners (to see what the hype is about).
- Prize-winning books often unreadable (adult category) or completely out of touch with teens (older student categories); fewer students capable of sustaining concentration in order to read a novel than in 1990s; for many, reading literature is simply irrelevant to the pace of their lives. Occasionally best-selling series will ‘wake them up’ but we haven’t had Aust. best-sellers for teens since Marsden in 1990s (perhaps Emily Rhodda?) Ironically, poetry is now the most accessible form of Australian literature but best taught with visual stimuli and within historical context.

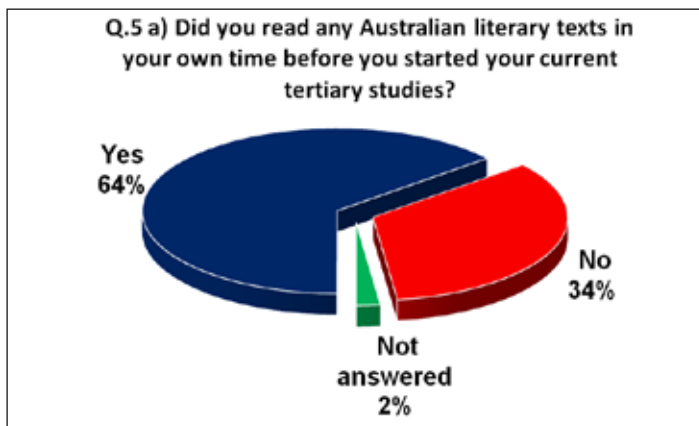


Figure 79: Reading Australian literature in leisure time – upper level students

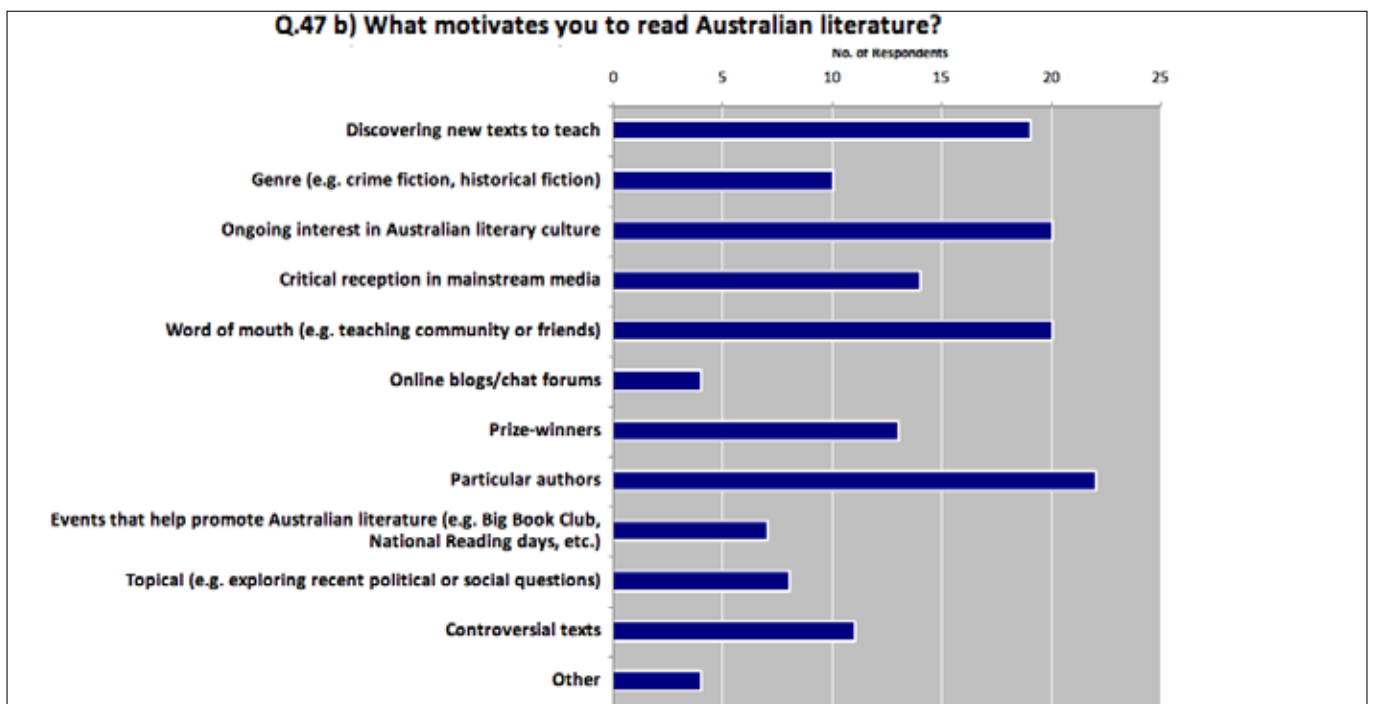


Figure 80: Motivation for reading Australian literature



9. THE FUTURE OF AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE TEACHING

The Survey sought information from tertiary teachers, senior secondary teachers and undergraduate students on ways that Australian literature teaching and learning could be defended and developed. The information below outlines the key responses from the tertiary teachers and undergraduate students, followed by those from senior secondary teachers.

• Resources to support Australian literature teaching

Tertiary teachers were asked for their opinions on:

- what resources were required to support the teaching of Australian literature in the future;
- the usefulness of a specialist Australian literature teaching website, integrated with the AustLit resource, where students could use innovative digital tools in coursework and research; and,
- the value of the Teaching Aust. Lit. Resource to their teaching practice and what specific services would be desirable.

Given their front-line perspective on the subject, the responses provide extremely useful guidance for planning of the proposed second stage of the TAL Survey project.

A mixture of philosophical and practical suggestions were offered ranging from a desire to increase the ‘literary-critical’ or ‘words on the page’ style of teaching through enhanced teacher training in Australian literature, greater levels of dialogue between secondary and tertiary teachers, the encouragement of a ‘vibrant’ discussion culture around Australian cultural production, to identifying the types of texts and specific textual resources needed for teaching.

Students’ responses indicated an interest in gaining easier access to full text of both primary and secondary works. Greater levels of diverse Australian literature teaching at secondary schools was also identified as desirable, while a number commented on the need for passionate teachers to inspire students’ engagement with Australian literature (see also ‘Student Experiences’ above).

i) Resources – texts and tools

Significant numbers of individual comments were made about increasing the availability of textual resources – both primary and secondary texts. The concern about texts being out of print and thus unavailable for teaching lists was mentioned in various survey responses.

The academic respondents expressed interest in the following areas to support teaching:

- Greater levels of online full text material, including the digitisation of discipline journals (including their back-runs) and other critical material to encourage student engagement in critical writing;
- The development of print-on-demand publishing for out-of-print primary texts;
- More anthologies of primary texts (large and unthemed);
- The digitisation of archival material;
- Resource packs for downloading – these would be thematic and include primary material, podcast lectures and other secondary material;

Selected responses:

- Greater digitisation of Aust. Lit. journals (esp. the back catalogue, a la JSTOR).
- AustLit is crucial and more full text material there would be very valuable.
- Text availability, the expansion of the AustLit project.
- More large, and un-themed, period anthologies of literature. [...] More, and cheaper, single-author critical monographs. Ever more digitised and searchable ‘archives’.
- It would be helpful if there were more journal articles available online. This would mean digitising whole runs



of *Southerly*, *Meanjin*, *ALS*, etc. AustLit already gives links to some online material (notably *Westerly*). Some older critical and biographical works could also be made available online (some already are through AustLit, though the list could be extended).

- 1. A comprehensive and affordable and reliable Australian Classics series.
- 2. Public lectures (Podcast DVD) to inform and revive community interest and engagement.
- 3. Coherent, flexible national secondary curriculum.
- 4. Secondary teacher support and training.
- A willingness for the academy to recognise the importance of the Creative Industries in Australia as source of national and international identity construction and necessity for developing critically reflective practitioners and members of society.
- It would be much appreciated if children's literature and genre fiction were taken more seriously by those assembling Australian literature databases.
- Downloadable, reputable Aust. Lit. literary and drama texts. Performance of plays available online. Studies/lectures available on line, complete with images and other illustrative material.
- Resource 'packs' (online) around central themes, e.g. Asian Australian writing. Would include: *bibliographic material,* links to online essays *audiovisual materials,* suggestions for teaching.

ii) Training of next generation students and teachers

A number of comments were made about the need to ensure that there was enough appropriate (contemporary, canonical, diverse) teaching of Australian literature being done at pre-tertiary levels and that teacher training should include a focus on Australian literature.

There was a strong representation of comments relating to the relationship between schools, universities and government policies with a sense that the development of better dialogue between these sectors was important (see also under Education and Postgraduate training).

iii) Teaching Australian literature online facility

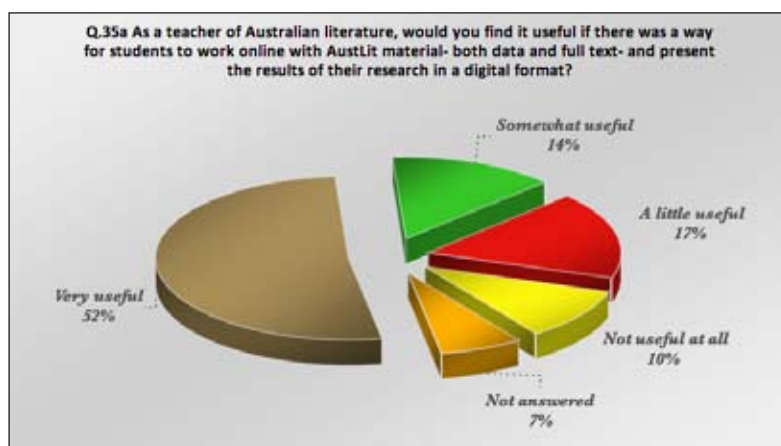


Figure 81: Usefulness of online environment for Australian literary studies

The idea of developing a Teaching Aust. Lit. webspace, integrated with the AustLit resource, to support online assessment tools was regarded generally as a 'useful' to 'very useful' option by the majority of tertiary respondents. Some concern about the duplication of existing resources was noted but its integration within AustLit was seen as a good idea.



Selected responses:

- This suits students' time and workload requirements and better matches their increasing internet familiarity.
- I'd probably use it for independent research work; I'd also consider folding it into assessments, as time to mark essays becomes increasingly hard to come by in tutorials/seminars of 20/25 students.
- My students work with AustLit – I could imagine an online format for their work might be useful, especially at higher levels, but I'm not quite sure how it would function.
- Call me old-fashioned, but I don't think digitising material is necessarily the answer to all problems – especially (or particularly) those relating to the availability of primary literary material. Experience with WebCT and digitised delivery of primary texts tells me that students prefer hard copies. (The case for online delivery of critical material is a different issue.)
- But also interpretive research – new ways of reading and responding to texts. Aust. lit. blogging!
- It would be great to have interesting and challenging ways to encourage 1st-year students to engage with critical material.
- AustLit is not yet very helpful in terms of Australian fantasy and picture story books.
- However, sometimes I think that it's easy for students these days as resources are given to them, rather than having to go out and find resources. This needs to be factored into future resources through AustLit – teaching students the 'process' of research.
- Sounds like an excellent idea/use of resources and that would allow students to practice useful skills.

iv) *Teaching Aust. Lit. Resource*

Comments about the value of the Teaching Aust. Lit. Resource (<http://teaching.austlit.edu.au>) were generally positive with warm responses to the ability to share information, resources and ideas on teaching particular texts/authors/themes as well as including an awareness of the resource's potential as a research tool. Some tertiary teachers thought it would also be engaging for students.

Concern was expressed about the need to keep such a resource up-to-date to maintain its usefulness.

Selected responses:

- Useful for resources and ideas. It would be particularly useful if resources of various kinds (print, digital, audio, visual) were arranged around or at least searchable in particular themes and issues.
- It would be great to have access to lists of further recommended readings in other courses, as well as text lists, course outlines, etc. It is always helpful to see how other lecturers are teaching particular texts and get ideas for the kinds of combinations and connections they make.
- We need more of this kind of resource. I recently spoke at a secondary teachers' day and they are so starved of resources.
- Possibly useful – though I suspect most teachers prefer to create their own contexts.
- It would be invaluable to see what texts are being taught elsewhere and how – this could promote further collaboration and opportunities to both consolidate an Aust. lit. canon (in useful ways) and broaden it. This could also provide frameworks to extend the impact of research-led-teaching.
- Most useful would be to see students responding to and interpreting texts in new ways – maybe rating them.
- It means that each academic does not have to develop complete units in isolation and given the likelihood of more casualised teaching workforce on sessional pay-rates it is unrealistic to expect these teachers to update complete units for (and within) the hours they are employed.
- I think the most useful thing about this Teaching Aust. Lit. Resource will be its up-to-dateness, that is, if it is regularly updated then it will provide a great resources for the sharing of teaching ideas and for teachers around the country to be informed about the kinds of teaching that are going on



- Yes. (a) Access to bibliographic info surrounding texts, (b) Comparing one's approaches to teaching certain texts or certain theoretical approaches with others, (c) Access contact name and email of colleagues interstate teaching similar courses (d) This will set up networks surrounding 'Teaching' Aust lit. as an analytical research area and (e) Possibly lead to academic journal articles on Teaching Aust Lit and student engagement. And so on ...
- It would be useful if the database contained current new writing and writing produced in the academy in writing courses and as postgraduate theses.
- Syllabus information. Tips on teaching Australian texts. Scholarship/publications.

- **Senior secondary teachers**

Senior secondary teachers were asked their opinions on:

- requirements for increasing resources in schools; and,
- on the professional development opportunities that would support them in teaching Australian literature.

i) Resources to support Australian literature teaching

Comments were strongly focused on the financial support for libraries in order to provide access to books and other resources such as online databases.

Selected responses:

- I'm privileged to work in a school with reasonable resources.
- Better funding of school libraries by federal and state governments because there has been no concentrated funding for all secondary school libraries since the early 1970s.
- Better funding for text book lending schemes within schools.
- National curriculum prescriptives, texts that have longevity for students interest and FUNDING.
- English teachers need to be proactive in working with teacher librarians and state syllabus guidelines need to value these texts.
- Larger budgets!
- Teachers suggest texts that they think will work with students. Some of those texts are Australian; teachers aren't likely to recommend a text just because it is Australian.
- Suppliers need to make librarians aware more of their availabilities and not just the prize winners.
- The better teacher resources are available, and the wider the range of study, the more likely schools would purchase more Aussie texts.
- Money and time! Especially for Australian films – staff need time to look for and read/view Australian texts.
- Clearer guidelines on canonical texts would be good.
- More funding for school library and English budget.
- They cost money and with books being lost, damaged and then going out of print it can be hard to keep class sets up to date and ready for use.
- Should be government subsidised.
- Most schools are relatively well stocked (depending on resourcefulness of librarian) but less so with recent releases.
- There is such a wide range of resources required and only limited funding available.
- More funding is required in 'public' education.
- More of the above! You can usually find resources if you 'just google it' but a well-publicised clearing house or site that gave links to what other teachers do, to which we all contributed, would be useful. Would need past exam papers etc too.



- The more critical material the better.
- Copies of poems online.
- More time for reading and less time doing tedious paperwork at school. This document excepted of course!
- Wider thematic guides, i.e. linking a range of texts.
- Time – to develop a knowledge of what is available.
- Funding.



4. Survey Achievements and Limitations

Project Manager

This project was especially fortunate in its Project Manager, Anna Gray, who ensured the success of the Survey in every aspect: in terms of computing and analytical skills, organisational initiative, interpersonal communications, secretarial support, and conceptual understanding of the scope, methods and aims of the project. Anna's exemplary work as Project Manager was the single most crucial factor in the overall success of the Teaching Australian Literature Survey.

ASAL and AATE support

Support from the Association for the Study of Australian Literature and from the Australian Association of Teachers of English was also crucial to the success of the project. A number of individuals within these associations assisted the project significantly in the development of its methods, in its ability to connect with the discipline community and with advice about questionnaire design and distribution (see Acknowledgements).

AustLit support

The AustLit resource and its existing centrality to the place of teaching of and research into Australian literary cultures was also a critical factor in the success of the project. The IT and personnel resources that AustLit was able to provide greatly enhanced the ability of the project to achieve its goals of surveying and building a sustainable teaching experience database. It might have been more effective if a web developer had been able to be employed to work solely on the TAL project but funds were not sufficient to enable that. Using AustLit development staff, however, meant that they were well informed of the possibilities of interoperation and extending the collaborative potential.

Questionnaire distribution

The release and distribution of questionnaires to tertiary teachers, tertiary students, senior secondary teachers and overseas academics presented complex challenges of timing. Ensuring that questionnaires were distributed at a time that would encourage teachers and students to reflect on their recent experiences of studying and teaching Australian literature and yet allow them time to respond to the questionnaires involved some experiment with release, distribution and follow-up in relation to the educational cycles of the secondary and tertiary sectors. Communication with overseas academics proved especially difficult despite internet communications and website access.

Drupal

Creating such long questionnaires on the Drupal platform was a challenging and complex task. The memory of the website had to be greatly expanded, and the questionnaire forms were long and complicated structures. Each question of the questionnaires was made up of several components and fields, and these had to be closely scrutinised to ensure that the correct settings were enabled. Although, for the most part, the online questionnaire set-up was accurate and efficient, some mistakes in questionnaire settings for individual components did result in a small loss of data. In total, five responses from the senior secondary teachers' questionnaire and five from the tertiary teachers' questionnaire were affected. The senior secondary teachers' responses were the most significantly affected, as they had a lower response rate and a greater number of submissions were made online before the problem was addressed. It must be noted that despite the small losses, the online availability of the questionnaires did encourage respondents, and we are confident this availability resulted in a higher response rate than hardcopy alone would have allowed.





5. Implementation of Survey Outcomes

The Teaching Aust. Lit. (TAL) website and the Teaching Aust. Lit. Resource are embedded within, and available from, the AustLit resource and as such are linked to the most used and trusted resource of information about and resources for the teaching of Australian literary texts. All Australian universities use AustLit and many international universities also subscribe to AustLit. Thus, there are many opportunities for the promotion of TAL Survey activities and outcomes throughout the discipline community in Australia and internationally in order to implement desired changes in teaching practices.

From the first phase of the TAL Survey project an understanding of the empirical state of teaching at Australian universities has been derived, along with a qualitative survey of teachers' and students' perceptions and experiences of teaching and learning Australian literature in upper secondary and lower tertiary studies.

The Teaching Aust. Lit. Resource provides a platform upon which to build a long term analysis of the changes to Australian literature teaching while providing a discovery resource for the discipline community to share knowledge about their experiences of teaching of Australian literature.

The strategy for the establishment of the Teaching Aust. Lit. Resource as an updatable resource is to encourage 'ownership' by the departments and schools where Australian literature is taught and through the support of the peak body, ASAL. The TAL resource has the capacity for teaching staff or administrative staff in schools to submit information on the courses/units being taught so that in each semester/year the information is up to date while retaining details of past years' teaching activities. The final stage of the current project includes concerted and strategic communication with university staff – Heads of School/Discipline and Course Co-ordinators, e.g. – and using ASAL channels to promulgate engagement with the resource.

AustLit staff will also be involved in the ongoing maintenance of the content as it is in the interests and remit of that resource to serve the teaching community.

Use-case scenarios for the Teaching Aust. Lit. Resource include:

- the ability for teachers wishing to use a particular text in a course exploring the resource to discover how it is being used in other units and courses around Australia;
- to consider the types of assessment being used; and,
- to discover complementary texts and secondary texts in a given context.

The Teaching Aust. Lit. Resource will allow teachers of Australian literature to draw on a broad knowledge of the community's experience of unit and course design and to contribute, interactively, to the development of that sharing of teaching experience.

There is a significant further capacity to build on the work undertaken during the course of this project and it was initially designed to serve as the first phase of a multi-step project to develop tools and services to support the teaching of Australian literature. Longer term aims include the development of curriculum content based on needs identified from the Survey work undertaken here that would incorporate digital humanities practices such as online textual comparison and annotation, collaborative research activities and the use of tagging, mapping and graphing of content made available through AustLit. This sort of work will go some distance towards incorporating new technologies and new forms of analysis into the teaching of Australian literature.





6. Sharing Survey Outcomes across Sectors and National Boundaries

The results of the TAL Survey will be available on the AustLit Teaching Aust. Lit. Resource and in the form of this report to the ALTC, available through the ALTC Exchange. Links to the ALTC Exchange and the AustLit pages will be promoted through the AustLit newsletter and on the ASAL email list.

The Project Leaders will also present results and issues arising out of the Survey at relevant forums such as the national summit on university teaching of Australian literature being planned for mid-2010.

The Project Leaders and the Project Manager intend to publish a co-authored article that extends the analysis of the Survey results.

Discussion and planning is underway for the submission of an application for a proposed second stage of the Australian Literature Teaching project. The project team aims to build on and utilise the learnings achieved through this project by analysing the needs of the teaching community and to engage with IT specialists currently working on a National eResearch Architecture Taskforce (NeAT) funded project called Aus-e-Lit, developing tools and services to extend TAL's utility to researchers of Australian literary and narrative cultures. This three-year project between The University of Queensland's eResearch lab at the School of IT and Electrical Engineering, is focused on research activities; however the TAL team believes that, with further funding, the benefits to researchers that the Aus-e-Lit project will bring can also be adapted and deployed as tools for the teaching of Australian literature at undergraduate level particularly. After all, today's undergraduates are the next generation of teachers and researchers. Strengthening their engagement with Australian literature with new technologies and new analytical research methodologies will defend and enhance the place of Australian literature at university level.





7. Disciplinary and Sectoral Links

Apart from the various stakeholders in the Teaching Australian Literature Survey project – ASAL, AustLit, *Australian Literary Studies*, AATE, The National Library of Australia, the Australian Society of Authors, the Literature Board, Australia Council, the American Association for Australian Literary Studies, and the International Australian Studies Association – who have all expressed an interest in the on-going conduct of the Survey and in its results, the project is specifically linked to the development of the National Curriculum through the contribution of the Project Leader.

The project is also linked to the ALTC priority of early-years tertiary student experience. The Survey had an emphasis, in the surveying of tertiary students, on the experience of the 1st-year student in the study of Australian literature (see section 5.3).

There is also a specific link from the tertiary Education field, in connection with the *Macquarie PEN Anthology of Australian Literature* (General Editor, Nicholas Jose) project, which has coincided with the TAL Survey and which was published in 2009. Dr Donna Gibbs and Dr Kerry-Ann O’Sullivan, Education Advisers for the Macquarie PEN anthology, have an on-going role in the reception and design of Australian literature teaching materials to which the TAL Survey will contribute.

It is envisaged second stage of the TAL Survey project will build on the relationships made and enhanced during the course of this first stage of the project and be able to engage closely with the discipline community and the stakeholder groups to ensure the outcomes achieved are appropriate to the discipline’s needs and become embedded in the delivery of services for Australian literature teachers and students to the benefit of those teachers and students.





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Appendix: Questionnaires

Senior Secondary Teachers of Australian Literature questionnaire
<http://teaching.austlit.edu.au/?q=secondary>

Undergraduate questionnaires
<http://teaching.austlit.edu.au/?q=undergradquestionnaires>

Teachers and Co-ordinators of University Level Australian Literature Study questionnaire
<http://teaching.austlit.edu.au/?q=tertiaryquestionnaire>

Overseas Academics' and Tertiary Teachers' questionnaire
<http://teaching.austlit.edu.au/?q=international>