

**English Matters**

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Garry Collins

ETAQ President

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**Australia Day honour for Paul Sherman**

ETAQ foundation member Paul Sherman was awarded an **OAM (Medal of the Order of Australia)** in the 2014 Australia Day Honours list. The citation read: “For service to the arts as a poet and playwright, and to education.”

Hearty congratulations are extended to Paul and to those who initiated his nomination which ETAQ was delighted to have the opportunity to support.

The Management Committee decided last year to acknowledge Paul’s long service to English teaching in Queensland by awarding him **Life Membership** of ETAQ. It is anticipated that this decision will be ratified at the AGM in March and the presentation made at the state conference in August.

**Renewal of membership**

By the time you read this invoices for renewal of membership should have reached you. Please remit payment promptly as issuing reminders is a time-consuming drain on our limited administrative resources.

Remember that personal expenditure on ETAQ dues constitutes a legitimate tax deduction. Another point to bear in mind is that, in line with the practice in recent years, ETAQ will this year be providing financial support to selected members to attend the national conference. Other things being equal, preference is given to Full (ie personal) members in making these awards.

According to our Rules, annual membership fees are due on 1 January and those who have not paid their dues by 31 March are deemed unfinancial and cease to be members. If you did not receive a renewal notice, please e-mail our Admin Officer at trish.purcell@bigpond.com .

**Changed email address?** If the contact person for a school corporate membership has changed because of transfer, retirement etc, please send us a new email address so that the school can continue to receive our regular ETAQ E-pistle member email bulletins.

**New website**

It’s a new year and ETAQ has a new website. If you haven’t yet had a look at it, I recommend that you do so. The URL is the same as previously: [www.etaq.org.au](http://www.etaq.org.au)

Apart from the new look, which we hope members will find attractive, the site now has important **new functionalities**. In future, you’ll be able to register and pay for PD events via the website.

Another aspect of the new look is the **new logo** which you can see on the website and also at the head of this page.

Be sure to look regularly at the blog entries on the Discussions Page.

**Review of the Australian Curriculum**

By now I’m sure that all members would be aware that the federal Education Minister, Christopher Pyne, has directed that there be a review of the Australian Curriculum. He has appointed a 2-man panel to carry out this task: Professor Kenneth Wiltshire from the University of Queensland and education commentator and consultant Dr Kevin Donnelly.

Submissions can be made to this review up to 28 February. ETAQ will be making a submission and also contributing to an AATE one.

The following points are some initial starting points for the ETAQ submission. **Members are invited and encouraged to send their ideas** about what should be included to me gazco48@bigpond.net.au. I would need to have any such material by the middle of February. Yes, the timelines are ridiculously short!

1. The submission would relate mainly to the English Curriculum but also touch on the General Capabilities (in particular, literacy) and the Cross Curriculum Priorities.
2. The current Australian Curriculum: English (AC:E) does not represent everything that ETAQ and AATE wanted but it has much of value and we acknowledge the efforts of ACARA to reconcile competing views by stakeholders.
3. The AC:E has not been in steady state implementation for long enough for a review to really be of value. Accommodating further changes before the current ACARA document has properly been tested would be wasteful of teacher time and effort that could better be spent on extracting the maximum value from the current document.
4. Because of the work already invested by teachers and schools across the country, any changes to the AC:E and literacy General Capability should be minimal.
5. Curriculum documents need to be reviewed on a regular basis but too much change in too short a time is wastefully disruptive and impede the efforts of schools to deliver quality education.
6. The interests of students are not best served when teacher time and effort are absorbed in accommodating too many changes in too short a period.
7. It will not be putting students first to simply rename some elements that remain essentially the same. In an opinion piece in The Oz on 10 Jan Minister Pyne wrote: “It (the curriculum) must be both content-rich and, importantly, focus on the 21st-century skills of critical thinking, team work, problem solving, creativity, analytic reasoning and communication.” These sound remarkably like the existing General capabilities.
8. It is too soon for recent results in PISA and the like to be attributed to the Australian Curriculum. It simply has not been in use for long enough.
9. The Australian Curriculum has been developed based on the Melbourne Declaration. It is not true to say, as Ken Wiltshire has done, that it is not based on any discernible values.

**Some recent letters to the editor** relevant to the review are shown below.

**General capabilities in the Australian Curriculum**

Before Kevin Donnelly and others get too worked up over the General Capabilities in the Australian Curriculum (“Question of capabilities is more than academic”, 4/12), they should perhaps note that the first two of these are literacy and numeracy, which pretty well everybody acknowledges (most acknowledge) to be the foundation of academic achievement.

In high schools, these can certainly be seen as the primary responsibility of English and maths teachers respectively, but the best whole-school results are achieved when teachers of all subjects accept it as part of their role to teach the forms of literacy particular to their disciplines.

In addition, many subjects utilize (use) numeracy and it is unhelpful if students view this as something which belongs solely in the maths classroom.

(**✓** **published** in *The Australian*, Fri 6 December 13 with the underlined words deleted and the bracketed ones inserted. My capitals for General Capabilities and Curriculum in ‘Australian Curriculum’ were changed to lower case. In the version I submitted the final two paragraphs above were combined into one. The paper’s heading for a collection of five letters in the Talking Point section was “**There is a lack of genuine respect for learning**”.)

**Curriculum change**

Some members of the general public (people) might naively think that a new curriculum document can be approved one week and, in response, what happens in classrooms will start to change the next. It just doesn’t happen like that.

It takes considerable time for teachers to properly get their heads around the new requirements, to review their current programs in light of them, and then to make appropriate alterations to year plans and units of work. Long term change to routine classroom practice takes longer again.

Steady state teaching in schools is already a demanding full-time job. Accommodating change to the curriculum documents that frame (frames) teachers’ planning must come on top of that, or detract time and energy from the core job of actually teaching students.

The current Australian Curriculum was developed over years and involved extensive consultation with education stakeholders. Any curriculum needs to be reviewed on a regular basis but the Australian Curriculum (national curriculum) could (is) not yet really be said to be fully understood and properly bedded down in schools across the nation.

Because of this, a review of the school curriculum by the Abbott Government would more appropriately take place in the latter half of its second term.

Another problem is that Kevin Donnelly is not a person able to command the confidence of the majority of the education professionals who must enact any curriculum approved by politicians.

Minister Pyne says that the current review is about putting students first. Many of those who work in schools will see it as a cynical case of putting politics first.

Garry Collins, ETAQ President

(**✓** **published** in *The Courier-Mail*, Mon 13 January 14 with the underlined words deleted and the bracketed ones inserted. The paper’s heading for a collection of four letters was “**Review of curriculum motivated by politics**”.)

**Dr Donnelly's institute**

The author information for Kevin Donnelly’s regular opinion pieces on education in this paper routinely identifies him as Director of the Education Standards Institute.

This sounds quite impressive: a whole institute devoted to standards in education and Dr Donnelly has been chosen to be its director.

Now that Donnelly has been appointed as half of a two man panel charged with reviewing the national curriculum, perhaps *The Australian* could provide some further details on this apparently prestigious position. I’m sure quite a few readers would be interested to know who appointed him as this institute’s director and how many professional staff he supervises in that role.

A look at the organization’s website does rather suggest that this so-called institute is just Donnelly himself. If this is indeed so, should the use of such a grandiose title for a one man business be applauded as clever marketing or deplored as misleading?

(**🗶 not published** in *The Australian*, Thu 16 January 14.)

**Bantick's analysis of the curriculum review**

In a letter to another paper on Tuesday I had some disparaging things to say about a recent piece by Melbourne teacher and occasional education commentator Christopher Bantick.

Now I am pleased to heartily applaud his sensible, teacher-perspective criticism of the recently announced review of the national curriculum (“Plenty to opine about the national curriculum review”, 15/1).

He starts by unequivocally asserting that the curriculum does not need to be reviewed at this time and then convincingly supports this contention.

Garry Collins, ETAQ President

(**🗶 not published** in *The Courier-Mail*, Thu 16 January 14.)

**General Capabilities in the national curriculum**

In discussing the General Capabilities component of the national curriculum, Bernard Lane concedes that literacy and numeracy are legitimate concerns across subject areas but is dismissive of others such as creative thinking, describing them as “funkier” (“Once more unto the breach”, 18-19/1). The item listed on the Australian Curriculum website is actually “critical and creative thinking”.

In a recent opinion piece in this paper Minister Pyne wrote of the curriculum that “It must be both content-rich and, importantly, focus on the 21st-century skills of critical thinking, team work, problem solving, creativity, analytic reasoning and communication.” (“Putting critical content back into curriculum”,10/1).

Is the Minister being faddish and funky here or is Lane’s implied criticism misplaced?

(**🗶 not published** in *The Australian*, Mon 20 January 14.)

**National curriculum does not dictate teaching approaches**

Stephen Elder argues that one of the reasons the recently announced review of the national curriculum is necessary is that a constructivist approach to teaching predominates and the curriculum is therefore imbalanced (“Review will add missing balance to curriculum”, 20/1).

Some previous state and territory syllabus documents may have been based on a preferred approach to teaching but ACARA’s Australian Curriculum details only what students should learn. How the material is to be taught is left to teachers and schools.

According to Elder, constructivist approaches are characterised, in part, by students being “centre stage”. This does sound rather like Minister Pyne’s requirement that the curriculum should place students first.

Elder writes that ad hominem attacks in relation to the review are wasteful. Perhaps he should in turn be cautioned about straw man arguments.

Garry Collins, AATE President

Note: Stephen Elder was identified in the paper as executive director of Catholic Education Melbourne.

(**🗶 not published** in *The Australian*, Tue 21 January 14.)

**2014 AATE/ALEA Joint National Conference**

This year’s AATE/ALEA joint national conference will be held in Darwin in the second week of the winter vacation for EQ schools. The conference will be held at the harbour-front **Darwin Convention Centre** over the period **9-12 July**.

The **theme** is “**aNTicipating new territories: building strong minds, places and futures**”.

The conference begins with a welcome reception on the evening of Wednesday 9 July with the formal program commencing on the morning of Thursday 10th. There will be a program of **pre-conference workshops** on Wednesday 9 July.

A **key date**: Early Bird Registration closes 30 April

**Need for early bookings** When the NT organizers formally launched their conference in the closing session of our own 2013 “Brave New World” event, they were at pains to remind people of the need to book both flights and accommodation as soon as possible. July is peak tourism season in the Northern Territory and both travel and accommodation will be hard to arrange if people leave it till the last moment.

I will certainly be attending this year’s Darwin conference. Since I am now AATE President, I pretty much have to, but I will also be presenting a workshop session, an adaptation of one I have previously run at an ETAQ seminar. I hope to see lots of other Queenslanders there as well.

The conference website can be found at: [www.englishliteracyconference.com.au](http://www.englishliteracyconference.com.au) Should you forget this URL, the site can be readily accessed via the AATE website.

If you’ve not yet been to the Top End, this could be an ideal opportunity to combine discovering more of the country with quality professional development.

**Assistance to attend the national conference**

ETAQ will provide **financial assistance** to selected members to attend the national conference, with some of the awards reserved for country members.

The award will cover the cost of **earlybird registration** plus, in the case of country members, $200 towards the cost of travel and accommodation.

What will be required in return is:

* An article on some aspect of the conference experience for publication in *Words’Worth*
* Participation in the Future Leaders Forum session at the conference

If you would like to be considered for one of these awards, email me at gazco48@bigpond.net.au explaining your teaching situation and why you think you would be a suitable recipient. So that the earlybird registration can be utilized, applications are required **NLT Friday 28 March**.

Other things being equal, preference will be given to individual members but those covered by school corporate membership may still apply.

**Brisbane March seminar**

Elsewhere in the current mailing is the flyer for a half-day seminar to be held at Corinda High School on Saturday 15 March. We hope to see a big roll-up.

**Annual General Meeting**

Members are advised that ETAQ’s annual general meeting for 2014 will be held in conjunction with first Saturday seminar for the year to be conducted on **Saturday 15 March** at **Corinda SHS**.

Most members of the current Management Committee have indicated their willingness to nominate for another term but if you are interested in getting involved in this aspect of ETAQ’s operations, please let me know via an email to gazco48@bigpond.net.au.

A **nomination form** for the Management Committee can be downloaded from the ETAQ website.

I will not be nominating for another term as ETAQ President and anticipate that I will be succeeded in this role by Fiona Laing, the current Membership Secretary.

By the time you read this newsletter the **Secretary’s Report** on ETAQ’s activities in 2013 should be available on the website.

The AGM is scheduled to run before the main program for the day and will commence at 8:45 am. There are no grounds for fear of being press-ganged into a job you don’t want, so please plan to attend so that we have the necessary quorum.

**Literary & Digital Story Competitions**

Members are reminded that the usual **Literary Competition** will be conducted again this year.

Entry materials will be distributed to schools by the Independent Education Union during Term 1 but teachers don’t have to wait for their arrival to start encouraging talented student writers to plan to enter one of their poems and/or short stories. For years 11 and 12 there is an additional non-fiction prose section and teachers can also enter short stories.

There’s also the **Digital Story Competition**. Submission deadlines for both competitions will be in Semester 2 so the first half of the year is available to foster participation.

**AATE 50th jubilee**

The Australian Association for the Teaching of English (AATE), the national English teacher body of which ETAQ is a member, will celebrate its 50th birthday in 2014. When it was formed in 1964, the first national president was poet and English academic, Professor A.D. Hope. ETAQ was not formed until 1967 and so we will have to wait until 2017 for our own 50th jubilee.

**English in the Media**

**(& related educational matters)**

**Making teachers' lives tolerable**

Rob Barden (Letters, 22/10) writes that spending which makes teachers’ lives tolerable has been misdirected.

Is he seriously suggesting that intolerable working conditions for teachers would improve the school system?

(**✓** **published** in *The Australian*, Wed 23 October 13 in the “Last Post” sidebar. The paper saw fit to combine my two sentences into a single paragraph.)

**Independent state schools**

Your editorial reminds readers that the Abbott government has promised to transform one in four schools into independent state schools (“Targeting school spending”, 23/10).

Does it have any business meddling in what is constitutionally a state matter? The federal government itself runs not a single school. And then there is the inconvenient lack of convincing evidence that greater school autonomy will improve educational outcomes overall.

(**🗶 not published** in *The Australian*, Thu 24 October 13.)

**Independent public schools based on ideology rather than evidence**

Your editorial (“Indie schools plan a winner”, 20/10) enthusiastically supports the notion of independent public schools and expresses difficulty in understanding how teacher unions could possibly have any reservations about (it) what you present as such an obviously good idea.

Your view is that of the state LNP government and both major parties at the federal level. You are also similar to these political groupings in that (Similarly) you fail to cite any convincing evidence that this change will produce significant overall improvement in the (students’) education received by Queensland school students. The Grattan Institute has been unable to find any.

I have little doubt that the schools that have thus far succumbed to pressure to join (joined) the scheme will report initial satisfaction. But that is a far cry from things (it) being better for all children in the state.

Like the scheme’s political supporters, your editorial (you) gave no explanation of how those schools which are currently difficult to staff because of remoteness or (an area’s) social characteristics of the catchment will receive their fair share of quality teachers under these arrangements. As more schools are removed from the transfer system, it must necessarily be more difficult for teachers to be relocated after a stint in a remote or difficult school.

If local autonomy automatically leads to better quality service, why are (aren’t) you not also advocating independent police stations?

And you must have greater faith in politicians than most of your readers if you don’t acknowledge that making state schools independent will, down the track, be a convenient excuse when insufficient funds are provided. Governments will have the ready explanation that funding was indeed adequate but that it was mismanaged at the school level.

(**✓** **published** in *The Sunday-Mail*, Sun 27 October 13 arranged as a single paragraph and with the underlined sections deleted and bracketed words inserted. The paper’s heading was “**Change will not help all students**”. With the amount of editing involved I suppose I should be grateful that it was published at all.)

**Timely reminder about school choice**

Kevin Donnelly is to be thanked for bringing Professor Alan Reid’s comment about school choice to the attention of readers (“Conservative values deserve championing”, 26-27/10).

Reid’s view that school choice represents a “culture of selfish individualism where the dominating motif is competition and greedy self-interest rather than co-operation and mutual benefit” is as true now as it was when penned thirteen years ago.

To achieve what is best for the nation as a whole, we need to move beyond the prevailing obsession over choice. It’s worth remembering that in Finland’s world leading education system, school choice is a complete non-issue.

(**🗶 not published** in *The Australian*, Mon 28 October 13.)

**Class size**

It is a pity that educational issues are all too often presented in the media as simplistic either-or alternatives. In relation to the initial teaching of reading, it’s apparently just a matter of choosing between phonics and whole language and, more recently, quality teaching is being presented as the alternative to class size. The real world tends to be more complex than these artificially polarised debates would suggest. What is usually needed is sensible balance.

Research does seem to indicate that, beyond a certain point (and that point will probably vary from culture to culture), further reduction in class sizes will not be the most cost-effective way to spend funds available to the school system. But this does not mean, as some commentators now seem to be suggesting, that class sizes matter not at all.

If this is genuinely the case, then these experts could be given classes or a hundred or so in school halls and invited to demonstrate by personal example just what a breeze it is.

(**🗶 not published** in *The Australian*, Tue 29 October 13.)

**Accurate information about the Australian Curriculum**

The letter by ACARA chief executive Robert Randall (29/10) provides clarification about the Australian Curriculum and suggests that *The Australian* is doing a disservice to its readers and the nation by continuing to publish Kevin Donnelly’s ill-informed edu-rants. Productive debate needs to be based on accurate information.

(**🗶 not published** in *The Australian*, Wed 30 October 13.)

The letter I was responding to above was as follows:

**Curriculum teaching**

KEVIN Donnelly says "every subject has to be taught through environmental, indigenous and Asian perspectives" ("Conservative values deserve championing", 26-27/10).

That is not so. They are identified as issues that should be addressed but only where relevant and as part of the teaching of the traditional disciplines.

He says "the English curriculum adopts a definition of literature where classic works jostle for attention alongside SMS messages". The English curriculum says literature involves "past and present texts across a range of cultural contexts that are valued for their form and style and are recognised as having enduring or artistic value". It does not suggest that SMS texts meet this definition.

Donnelly also confuses curriculum with teaching methods. The Australian curriculum sets out what young people should learn. It does not specify how students should be taught.

In early-years English, the curriculum says students should be taught phonics as well as spelling, grammar, punctuation, vocabulary and comprehension. Instruction is a matter for teachers and schools.

It is in everyone's interests to improve the national curriculum. The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority continues to seek and welcome feedback from all quarters.

Thousands of teachers, academics and members of the community participated in the development process and none of it became the Australian curriculum until the federal, state and territory education ministers endorsed the final products.

Robert Randall, chief executive, ACARA, Sydney, NSW

**School autonomy and effective educational spending**

Gonski panel member Ken Boston makes a crucial point in his advice to federal Education Minister Christopher Pyne (“Pyne must re-engage with Gonski to assist schools”, 1/11).

This is that “school governance is a peripheral distraction with no real bearing on student outcomes”, a view that is supported by the Grattan Institute.

Unfortunately, because of ideology or wishful thinking, both major political parties advocate greater school autonomy and studiously ignore the lack of evidence to support its efficacy.

Most would agree with Boston that funds need to be spent on the right things if they are to make a significant difference. If schools are given high levels of local autonomy, how can any government guarantee that public money is spent on what matters?

(**🗶 not published** in *The Australian*, Mon 4 November 13.)

**Ill-considered changes to state school system**

(I write in regard to the ill-considered changes to the state school system under the Great Teachers = Great Results proposal (C-M, Nov 11).)

The state government seems pig-headedly bent on pushing through significant changes to the way that the state school system is run (“Teachers preparing for strike”, 11/11).

These changes are not the product of any meaningful consultation with teachers and are opposed by the majority of them, as represented by their union which has over (more than) 90% member density (as members).

On the one hand, we have the Minister for Education (Education Minister John Paul Langbroek), a former dentist who once attended school himself and who apparently thinks that education (in Queensland schools) will be improved if schools (they) are run like car sales yards.

On the other (hand), we have thousands of qualified professionals with (many) years of experience in classrooms and school offices.

I know whose view I would trust.

(**✓** **published** in *The Courier-Mail*, Wed 13 November 13 with the underlined sections deleted and the bracketed words inserted. The first paragraph above was not in my original. In addition, the version that I submitted was arranged into only two paragraphs. Sometimes they combine paragraphs, sometimes they split them. The paper’s heading was “**Talk to teachers on reform**”.)

**Reporting percentages**

James Cook University physics professor Peter Ridd discusses a range of aspects of school assessment and reporting in his opinion piece on potential changes to the Queensland Studies Authority (“Rethink of Queensland Studies Authority approach adds up”, 20/11).

One of these is to suggest that schools might return to the use of percentages in reporting. If this is a good idea, I wonder whether his university will be doing likewise. Somehow I suspect not.

(**🗶 not published** in *The Courier-Mail*, Thu 21 November 13.)

**Education Minister's about face on competition**

Shortly after he became Education Minister, John-Paul Langbroek spoke briefly at a Queensland Studies Authority conference. He followed an international keynote speaker, a successful principal and school improvement consultant, who had finished with the emphatic assertion that it was collaboration rather than competition that had the most potential to improve educational outcomes for all students.

In the question session that followed I asked the minister what he thought of that proposition. He said that he substantially agreed, perhaps because it had been so enthusiastically received by the largely teacher audience.

Given the elements of dog-eat-dog competition to be found in the state government’s flawed “great teachers = great results” plan, he seems to have changed his mind. Either that, or he was not really speaking the truth that day at the Convention Centre.

(**🗶 not published** in *The Courier-Mail*, Fri 22 November 13.)

**Academic standards**

In making some sound points about university entrance and academic standards, Judith Sloan recounted high failure rates in undergraduate economics courses that she used to teach (“Demand-driven uni places lowers quality standards”, 23-24/11).

I couldn’t help thinking that, if this situation had occurred at the school level, the proponents of performance pay would probably have concluded that she was an incompetent teacher who needed to be managed out of the system. And greater autonomy for principals would have enabled her to be easily sacked.

(**🗶 not published** in *The Australian*, Mon 25 November 13.)

**Doing what you love**

If James Adams (Letters, 25/11) expected to become a world-changing celebrity by the time he was 30, then his personal aims were probably a tad unrealistic. And if he had truly achieved maturity, he would be accepting personal responsibility for this instead of blaming it on well-meaning advice from teachers.

The community (We) would be justifiably concerned if teachers routinely discouraged young people’s ambitions. However, students should also be advised to make the best use of the talents they have and to develop the resilience to cope with disappointment if initial aspirations fail to materialise. Most important is to have the spirit to try. Too many people tolerate jobs that they don’t particularly like and largely live for the weekends.

(**✓** **published** in *The Australian*, Tue 26 November 13 with the underlined words deleted and the bracketed ones inserted. The paper’s heading was “**Unrealistic expectations**”.)

**Snail mail letter in response**

The letter above elicited a snail mail letter from Mr Adams who explained that he had found my home address via a Google search. My reply to his letter is shown below.

Hi James

Thanks for taking the time to communicate via snail mail after my letter in *The Australian* in response to your earlier one. I am happy to share some thoughts on the subject matter of our two contributions.

As is usually the case, my letter was also edited. The full version is as follows. (*Here I provided the letter text above.*)

I think we can agree on some things but not on others. You draw a distinction between things that people love and those that they’re good at. My life experience tells me that it is common for people to like what they are good at and to dislike or give up on activities at which they do not experience success.

Some young people (and some not so young) have unrealistic expectations about their occupational futures. I taught in high schools for 35 years and cannot think of any instances when this was mainly generated by teachers. Often teachers get it wrong the other way. Winston Churchill’s teachers at Harrow apparently did not think he would ever amount to much. While teaching on exchange in Oregon in 1991 I had a Year 9 student who was convinced that he was going to earn millions as a major league baseball player. As a result, he put little effort into school work that he largely saw as irrelevant. As far as I could see, teachers had in no way contributed to his expectations. For my part, I tried to encourage him to prepare for the eventuality that he would not make the grade in top level professional sport.

The schools I have worked in have usually benefitted from having some teachers who had worked in other occupations (I mainly have manual arts teachers in mind here) but, as the sweeping generalisation that you present, I reject your comment about teachers needing more “real-world experience”. Your reference to “cossetted public service lives” is insulting to the hundreds of conscientious colleagues that I have had over the years and indicates a prejudice that has the potential to prevent your children from getting the best value from their educational opportunities. If you have never worked as a teacher yourself, how can you really know what is involved?

In addition to teaching, I had a parallel 30-year part-time career in the Army Reserve. Have you ever done any military service? If not, then there is chunk of the so-called real world of which you are ignorant. Besides Australia, I have worked in the USA, Canada and the UK. Have you ever worked overseas? If not, I would again ask what you truly know of the real world. I have worked as a cab driver. If you have not, what do you know of the real world that I have inhabited?

I do agree that parents have a primary responsibility for the moral education of their children. Unfortunately, some parents do not do a particularly good job in that regard. However, I do not agree that moral issues should be off-limits for schools. One of the “general capabilities” to be developed under the new Australian Curriculum is “ethical understanding”. I think that is entirely as it should be. My subject was English and when literary texts such as novels and plays are studied it is almost inevitable that questions of morals/ethics will present themselves for consideration. To avoid such discussions would be to deprive students of the rich education to which they are entitled.

I agree that students should not be indoctrinated by teachers and, in my experience, this seldom happens. It is also true that parents should educate rather than indoctrinate their children. I believe that your references to “socialist half-truths, outright feminist lies and green religion” misrepresent the situation and are insulting to the teaching profession as a whole.

I did not receive any subsequent communication.

**Brisbane PD dates for 2014**

ETAQ’s current schedule of PD events in Brisbane for 2014 is as follows. Please note the dates in your planning.

* Saturday 15 March – Seminar 1 & AGM
* Saturday 10 May – Beginning Teachers’ Day
* Saturday 31 May – Seminar 2
* **Saturday 16 August – State Conference**
* Sunday 19 October – Literary Breakfast

**Branch news**

**Cairns**

After something of an hiatus in our activities during 2013 - while we digested the question of "to C2C or not to C2C", (or even, "how much to C2C?"), Anne and I are hoping that 2014 will be a year in which we can again get the conversation going among English teachers in the far north.

We propose two meetings, one in early May, the second in August, perhaps mirroring, on a smaller scale, the way in which ETAQ seminars run in Brisbane with a keynote and some workshops.  An email, with proposed topics, and a call for workshop presenters, will appear in your inboxes by week 4 of this term.

Best wishes for an engaging and rewarding 2014,

Anne Leeson and Stephanie Wheeler-Sokolich

**Townsville**

We usually hold 3-4 meetings a year one in each term. I am on leave for the first part of this year and will be travelling overseas. I am happy to pick up the reins again in July but unless other members of the executive feel inclined to call meetings, we will see you all in second semester.

Heather Fraser, President, Townsville Branch

**Toowoomba**

The branch’s first PD event for the year will be a breakfast function to be held in conjunction with the branch AGM. Date and venue TBA.

Donna Jones, President, Darling Downs Branch

**Conclusion**

With a review of the Australian Curriculum and possible changes to senior assessment procedures in Queensland, 2014 promises to be another eventful year in education. What is that Chinese curse – may you live interesting times.

I wish all members well in their English teaching endeavours and hope to see many of you at PD events during the year.

While I hope to continue to contribute some material, this is probably the last edition of *English Matters* that I will issue as president. It’s been fun!

Garry Collins

ETAQ President gazco48@bigpond.net.au