

Asia Literacy, Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy and the Australian Curriculum

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Abstract: This article explores how Australian English teachers can thoughtfully and critically address the cross-curriculum priority 'Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia' in secondary classrooms. It builds on our prior research, which highlighted factors that shape teacher attitudes towards addressing this cross-curriculum priority, the perceived evidence of political and economic motivations behind the inclusion of the priority, and the ways English teachers define and conceptualise Asia. We offer case studies of two New South Wales English teachers as they strive to reconcile curriculum requirements with classroom practices and to address the cross-curriculum priority in a way that promotes deep learning and critical engagement for students. This article draws on culturally sustaining pedagogy, highlights the importance of text selection and offers recommendations for high-quality and award-winning films, plays, memoirs, poems and novels that can be readily integrated into the secondary English curriculum.

'Simply to endure is to triumph.'

– Patricia McCormick, *Sold*

Introduction

On my first professional experience placement, I (first author) was given a Year 9 English class at a girls' high school in western Sydney, Australia. The students had just finished their end-of-year exams, and I was told that I could choose what to teach them for the four weeks of the placement, as long as it was aligned with the New South Wales Stage 5 English Syllabus outcomes. As this was an opportunity seldom afforded to pre-service teachers, I considered myself incredibly lucky to be given autonomy over the content and curriculum design. I had just created a unit of work based on the novel *Sold* by Patricia McCormick for a university assignment for my lecturer (second author), and I thought that teaching this class would be the perfect opportunity to put my theory into practice.

A National Book Award finalist, *Sold* is written in free verse and tells the story of a thirteen-year-old Nepali girl named Lakshmi who is sold into sexual slavery in India. My school-based supervisor said that there was a class set of the novel available, although it was not regularly taught. She emphasised that, given the nature of the novel's subject matter, I would need to address this with sensitivity and be aware of any potential triggers. It seemed as though all signs were pointing towards teaching *Sold*.

As someone who is trained in teaching both English and history curriculum, my pedagogy is driven by exploring the sociocultural, historical and geographical frameworks of a text. In light of this, I had planned for the first several lessons for the unit to cover the geographical locations of the countries where the novel is set, the relationship the two countries share and a historical and sociopolitical overview of sex trafficking. My students brought a wealth of languages, literacies and ways of being to the classroom, and I was eager for us to delve into *Sold* together.

I projected a world map onto the interactive whiteboard, and asked for a student volunteer

to point to Nepal. No hands went up; at first, I figured it was due to the fact that I was a new teacher, or perhaps that the students were shy. My next strategy was to ask for a verbal indication of Nepal's location: perhaps 'it's between China and India' or simply 'it's in Asia'. Again, there was silence. As the class stared blankly at me, I hesitated and asked, 'Has anyone heard of Nepal before?' My question was met with murmurs and the shaking of heads. I changed tactics. 'What about India?' Again, murmurs and headshakes.

It was at this point that the link between the introduction of the national cross-curriculum priority 'Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia' and student understanding of this concept became apparent to me. Asia is incredibly culturally, linguistically and geographically diverse, and although the majority of the students in the room had Asian heritage, the novel *Sold* dealt with a specific context that was unfamiliar to most of them. As a teacher striving to address this cross-curriculum priority, I would need to critically consider how my text selection and my pedagogy could fully support my students' learning and engagement.

In this article, we highlight key findings of our study on the attitudes that New South Wales (NSW) teachers hold in regard to addressing the cross-curriculum priority 'Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia' within English 7–10 classrooms (Gauci & Curwood, 2017), and offer case studies showing how two English teachers conceptualised and implemented this priority within their classrooms. As a high school English as an Additional Language/Dialect teacher and a university teacher educator, we explore the issues that teachers encounter with defining Asia, both geographically and culturally, and we share the ways in which their practices can be understood through the lens of culturally sustaining pedagogy. We argue that culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2014) can provide a rich framework to support teachers' work in integrating Asian texts and themes into the English curriculum, and we offer examples of high-quality books, films and short stories that can be used to meet this priority.

Defining Asia: Challenges and opportunities

In Australia, three national cross-curriculum priorities were nominated by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs in the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians and adopted as part of the Australian Curriculum, which was fully implemented

by 2014. The inclusion of a cross-curriculum priority that emphasises Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia is significant. Not only does this reflect changes within Australia, brought on by migration trends and geopolitical forces, it also shows a shift in the conceptualisation of Australian culture. As Ladson-Billings (2014) observes, 'Researchers and practitioners are moving and evolving in new ways that require us to embrace a more dynamic view of culture' (p. 75). In turn, this demands an evolution in English pedagogy in Australia.

It is an arduous and complicated task to define Asia, one made even more so by the multitude of definitions – which are often conflicting – put forward by various scholars and institutions. Salter (2009) provides a variety of criteria by which Asia can be defined, which includes geographic, cultural, religious, historic and linguistic criteria. Similarly, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) states that the region can be defined 'in terms of cultural, religious, historical, and language boundaries or commonalities' (ACARA, 2016, para 7) in addition to geographically.

Whilst ACARA (2016) indicates that there is not one single way in which to define Asia, it does provide an explicit list of countries that 'studies of Asia will pay particular attention to':

- North-East Asia including China, Japan, Mongolia, North Korea, South Korea and Taiwan
- South-East Asia including Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar (Burma), the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam
- South Asia including Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. (para 8)

Our prior work (Gauci & Curwood, 2017) highlighted several key issues pertaining to how definitions of Asia have influenced teachers' choice of texts utilised to address 'Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia'. One recurring issue was that teachers themselves had varying definitions of what constitutes Asia, with many believing that there was a clear 'right' and 'wrong' answer. This was further complicated when teachers expressed their belief that ACARA provided no clear definition of Asia, reflecting an issue with teacher access to information published by ACARA, and potentially by other governing educational bodies.

This brings to light an important point: a

significant number of English teachers are selecting and implementing texts that they believe address the cross-curriculum priority, but that originate from, or are based in, a country or region outside of those listed by ACARA. The core purpose of the priority is outlined by ACARA (2016):

Students will develop knowledge and understanding of Asian societies, cultures, beliefs and environments, and the connections between the peoples of Asia, Australia and the rest of the world. Asia literacy provides students with the skills to communicate and engage with the peoples of Asia so they can effectively live, work and learn in the region. (para 7)

However, because teachers may be drawing on their own definitions of Asia rather than the countries listed above, they are not meeting the requirements of the Australian Curriculum. It is therefore imperative that teachers understand the requirements of the cross-curriculum priority and exercise their agency in selecting high-quality, engaging texts.

Our study

Methodology

We are interested in the 'culture, activity, identity, power, and the sociocultural contexts in which literacy occurs' (Perry, 2012, p. 52). Our study was situated in the Australian state of NSW, and we focused on the teaching and learning of 'Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia' in Year 7–10 English classes. Our methodology considered curriculum development and implementation, and took into account how the school context, teacher knowledge of Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia, and accessibility to texts might shape teachers' attitudes and practices towards understanding and implementing this particular cross-curriculum priority as reflected in the *Melbourne Declaration, New South Wales K–10 Syllabus* and the *Australian F–10 Curriculum*.

Participants in this study included eighty-two NSW English teachers with full-time teaching experience in government, independent and Catholic schools, who took part in a survey with Likert scale and open-ended questions. We sought to have a representative sample of teachers from diverse geographic areas and schooling systems participate in the study. At the conclusion of the survey, seven teachers expressed interest in taking part in an in-depth interview. Sociocultural perspectives on learning and literacy guided our data analysis. Thematic analysis (Gerber, Abrams, Curwood,

& Magnifico, 2017) provided an open-ended approach to exploring how English teachers conceptualised, enacted and reflected upon the cross-curriculum priority. The first cycle of coding used *in vivo coding* that used the teachers' own words as codes, thereby valuing their lived experiences (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013). Following this, the second cycle of coding involved *patterned coding* in order to organise, refine and consolidate codes into emergent themes and concepts (Saldaña, 2009).

In Gauci and Curwood (2017), we reported on key findings from the study. Notably, we found that a majority of teachers saw the value in addressing Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia within the English curriculum in their classes. However, many English teachers seemed to require clarity as to how to define Asia within the context of the cross-curriculum priority, which led to challenges related to text selection and implementation. Despite their desire to explore Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia in ways that enriched student literacy and cultural competency, including in relation to political and economic motivations, they struggled with articulating a pedagogical framework.

In this article, we turn our focus to how culturally sustaining pedagogy and evidence-based text selection can promote the meaningful implementation of 'Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia' within English classrooms. We offer case studies of NSW English teachers and consider: At present, how are teachers engaging with the cross-curriculum priority in the English 7–10 curriculum? How can culturally sustaining pedagogy support teachers' text selection and instruction to ensure that the priority of 'Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia' is enacted with sensitivity, integrity and authenticity?

Case studies

In this article, we have chosen to focus on two teachers who reflect the linguistic and cultural diversity of Australian English teachers and who have significant differences in their experience with programming and classroom teaching. Elaine is a white teacher who teaches English across Years 7 to 12 at an independent girls' school in Sydney's eastern suburbs. With over ten years of English teaching experience across different school contexts, she was closely involved in the programming of the K–10 English syllabus at the school when it was first introduced in 2012. From the outset of the interview, Elaine reflected on what she

perceived to be the bureaucratic nature of the new syllabus, and in particular the inclusion of the cross-curriculum priorities. She highlighted that while there may be some degree of consultation between education policymakers and educators, there was a significant disconnect between the current NSW English syllabus and what is able to be practically implemented and addressed in the classroom. She noted, 'What is fed out to schools to implement clearly shows ... not disengagement, but just a total unawareness'.

Mei is an early career teacher with Chinese heritage who has taught Year 7–10 English for two years at a Catholic girls' high school in Greater Western Sydney. She indicated that she was aware of the significant political and economic motivations driving the inclusion of Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia as a cross-curriculum priority. She emphasised that 'Students need to understand the world around them, and Australia is – and has been now for decades – very closely tied to countries in Asia through migration and trade. I see this priority as a way for teachers to directly address these topics'. While Mei was able to reflect on the social, cultural and linguistic diversity of countries within the Asia region to construct her own definition of Asia, she did not know of the geographical definition put forth by ACARA in relation to the cross-curriculum priority, and therefore did not consider it when reflecting on her process of selecting texts to address Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia.

Asia literacy, text selection, and the Australian Curriculum: English

The following discussion includes key findings from our study that highlight how the case study teachers addressed the cross-curriculum priority in their English classrooms through the teaching of Asia, how they approached making it relevant to all students within their classes and how critical text selection was in this process. Additionally, we reflect on how culturally sustaining pedagogy can be utilised to ensure that the cross-curriculum priority is meaningfully addressed in Australian English classrooms.

Teaching about Asia within the English curriculum

How teachers define Asia, and how they conceptualise the intricate relationship between Asia and Australia, significantly influences the implementation of the cross-curriculum priority in English classrooms. Elaine indicated that she did not have a comprehensive understanding of the concept of 'Asia and Australia's

engagement with Asia', but that the autonomy English teachers were given to choose their own texts at her school meant that they were able to interpret this outcome based on their own definitions and conceptions of Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia. Interestingly, the texts that she mentioned that were utilised to address this outcome in her school – *English For English*, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, *The Little Frog in the Well* and Bollywood films – all originate from the Asian countries listed by ACARA, but they do not examine Australia's engagement with Asia. Consequently, teachers' text selection process often determines both how and whether the second component of the priority is addressed.

Although Mei was also unsure as to how ACARA defined Asia, she felt that she was still addressing the priority by drawing on her own definition of Asia, and she used that as a starting point for selecting appropriate texts. She stated, 'I also think it's simplistic to define Asia, or to limit it to geographical means, because there are communities in Australia, and there are Asian communities in Western cultures that are distinctly Asian, but not geographically part of Asia'. Interestingly, Mei emphasised the relationship between Australian and Asian communities, thereby highlighting Australia's cultural, linguistic and economic connections with Asia.

As a Chinese Australian teacher, Mei shared her belief that the personal contexts of teachers directly impact and influence not only their definitions of Asia, but also their choice of texts when addressing the cross-curriculum priority. When asked how she felt about selecting and teaching Asia-centric texts, she noted that she drew on what she considered to be her own authority as a teacher with Chinese heritage to select and teach texts that focused on the histories and cultures of China. She said, 'I have a slight leaning towards Chinese culture in my choice of text, simply because that's the sort of text available to me and I come from a Chinese background'. This reveals that, in addition to access, the lived experiences of teachers can have an influence over their choices of texts. Mei stated that this was because she 'feels a bit more of a sense of connection. I feel like I have some sort of authority when I speak about the novel or the film or whatever text it is I'm talking about'. This brings to light the question of whether teachers feel qualified – in terms of either learnt or experienced knowledge – to teach texts of Asian origin, and also whether they feel as though they are 'authorised' to do so, should the text

be of a different origin than their ethnicity.

Like Elaine, Mei indicated that she had a high degree of autonomy over the texts she selected to teach, stating that 'If we're doing a unit on film or biography, for example, I have the opportunity to choose a text that can cover the cross-curriculum priority, as long as whatever I choose is at a suitable level for the class'. These case studies indicate that while teachers may be given a high degree of autonomy in their process of text selection, they may not necessarily know how to access and interpret curriculum support documents published by ACARA to inform this process. Importantly, whilst teachers may choose texts of Asian origin, they may not always link them back to Australia or emphasise the cultural, linguistic and economic links between Asia and Australia. As a result, the cross-curriculum priority may not be implemented with fidelity and authenticity across Australia.

Making Asia relevant to students

It is important for teachers to understand the intent driving the inclusion of 'Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia' as a cross-curriculum priority, so that it can be addressed in ways that are not only consistent with the aims of the cross-curriculum priority outlined by ACARA, but also inclusive of the ever-changing diversity of experiences and perspectives of students within Australian classrooms. This raises an interesting point when examining the extent to which the inclusion of the cross-curriculum priorities in the Australian Curriculum are inherently economically and politically motivated. While ACARA explicitly states that the inclusion of the priority 'reflects Australia's extensive engagement with Asia in social, cultural, political and economic spheres' (ACARA, 2016, para 4), it is left to English teachers to translate this into their school curriculum. Elaine understood this to mean that these specific spheres must be explicitly addressed through the texts she selected to address the cross-curriculum priority in her classroom. She shared that it would be 'unethical in an English classroom to push a political and economic agenda of the government'.

Whilst 'Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia' is specified as a cross-curriculum priority, much like 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures', not all students or teachers are from these backgrounds. This then raises the question as to how teachers can address these cross-curriculum priorities to ensure that all students can see how they are relevant to the lives of all Australian school students,

and whether teachers feel confident in selecting and implementing high-quality texts to achieve this aim. While Mei felt the most confident in teaching texts focusing on China, she also wanted to make sure diverse Asian experiences and perspectives were represented through the texts she taught in English. She noted, 'We have quite a few students who have Asian heritage, so for me, it's important that they have the opportunities to see their heritage represented in what they're learning in English. I didn't really have that much when I was in school'. This highlights the importance placed on ensuring that the diverse cultural perspectives and experiences that students bring to their English classrooms are represented through the films, stories and novels they study.

Teachers' commitment to cultural inclusivity and diversity aligns with the curriculum goal that students will 'deepen their intercultural understanding, enrich their own lives and increase the likelihood of successful participation in the "Asian century", for themselves and Australia as a whole' (ACARA, 2017, para 3). This then reflects the idea that, regardless of the cultural and linguistic background of Australian school students, the core aim of learning about Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia is to expand student knowledge of the histories and cultures of Asian countries and regions. This highlights not only the need for teachers to have the authority and autonomy to select texts to address the cross-curriculum priority, but also the importance of their underlying pedagogy.

Applying culturally sustaining pedagogy to Asia literacy

We argue that this cross-curriculum priority is part of an effort to both promote and sustain Asian culture and understand and reflect upon its relationship to Australia. However, our case studies of Elaine and Mei suggest that they struggled to articulate a pedagogical framework that could underpin their conceptualisation of Asia and Australia's increasingly complex relationship with Asia, and how cultural diversity and personal identity are relevant to the English curriculum. Mei reflected, 'I don't approach teaching these texts any differently to texts that focus on other Asian cultures or perspectives. The main difference is that I feel like I have a better understanding of Chinese history and culture, so I'm more confident in teaching what I know'. Although Elaine was able to select a diverse range of texts that she felt addressed the cross-curriculum priority

in regard to Asia, she was unable to expand on her specific approach to teaching them: 'I tend to focus on the historical or cultural context of the text, and then move onto looking at themes and language or film techniques'. While both teachers had the best intentions in terms of their programming and planning, their pedagogy was unable to account for the cultural pluralism of modern Australia. To that end, we believe that culturally sustaining pedagogy can be instrumental for teachers as they seek to understand both why and how this cross-curriculum priority has a place within secondary English classrooms.

As Paris and Alim (2014) explain, 'Culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to perpetuate and foster – to *sustain* – linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling and as a needed response to demographic and social change' (p. 88). The national cross-curriculum priorities came about as a direct result of such change, and the successful implementation of the 'Asia and Australia's relationship with Asia' priority depends on teachers' ability to navigate cultural pluralism in local classrooms. At the same time, teachers need to be cautious in how they are defining Asia – geographically, culturally, and socio-politically – and be mindful not to inadvertently reduce or minimise an incredibly diverse part of the world. Paris (2012) elaborates, 'It is important that we do not essentialise and are not overdeterministic in our linkages of language and other cultural practices to certain racial and ethnic groups in approaching what it is we are seeking to sustain' (p. 95). Because culturally sustaining pedagogy has the explicit goal of supporting multilingualism and multiculturalism in schools, it is critical that teachers are mindful of how they make meaning of educational policy, how they conceptualise Asia, and how they select relevant, thought-provoking texts.

Our research suggests that Australian teachers would benefit tremendously from professional learning that explores how culturally sustaining pedagogy can inform their interpretation of ACARA curriculum documents, their process of text selection and their approach to drawing upon the linguistic and cultural pluralisms within their classrooms as a way to make meaning of Asia and Australia's relationship with Asia. In the following section, we build on our case studies to offer recommended texts for Australian English teachers as they strive to draw on culturally sustaining pedagogical frameworks to implement the cross-curriculum priority.

Recommended texts

It is important to find a wide range of texts that are suitable to differing student contexts and accessible to both staff and students. The Asia Education Foundation website provides a database that teachers can use to find resources based on keywords, key learning areas, year levels and countries of origin. Australian schools can subscribe to the AustLit database, which contains a range of different Australian-based texts, to give teachers access. Suitable texts can also be found in the winners and short lists of each year's New South Wales and Victorian Premiers' Literary Awards, the Miles Franklin Award, the Stella Prize and the Prime Minister's Literary Awards.

Our study indicated that NSW English teachers are still grappling with selecting texts that can be utilised to authentically address Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia. In light of this, we offer a number of diverse text recommendations below for English teachers, thereby allowing teachers to enact culturally sustainable pedagogy to further develop students' Asia literacy.

***Missing her* by Michael Weisler – Tropfest short film (2011)**

The short film focuses on Henry, a young Thai boy who is adopted by an Australian couple from Melbourne after the implied death of his mother. It follows Henry from Thailand to Melbourne, where his adoptive parents attempt to help him settle into his new life in Australia and their family. Henry's resistance to his new life and longing for his mother highlight child experiences of international adoption, and the ways in which it affects children in terms of their cultural identity, customs and sense of belonging. The film provides the opportunity to examine Australia's engagement with Asia through focusing on what it means to be Australian or Asian Australian, and the ways in which children and adults attempt to navigate this concept.

***Lion* – film (2016)**

Based on Saroo Brierley's autobiography *A Long Way Home*, *Lion* depicts the story of Saroo, an Indian Australian man from the Khandwa district in Central India, who was adopted by Australian parents and, twenty-five years later, began the search for his birth relatives using Google Earth, subsequently reuniting with his mother and sister. The film explores Australia's engagement with Asia through the paradigm of how one's identity is shaped through one's ethnicity,

particularly in the case of international adoption. As *Lion* explores Saroo's ongoing effort to develop a sense of identity based on his family, heritage and geographical home, the film sheds light on the ways in which ethnicity, relationships, adoption and geography motivate one's sense of belonging, and the nuanced way that sense evolves over time.

***Single Asian female* by Michelle Law – play (2018)**

The play centres on Pearl, a recently divorced Chinese migrant mother who runs The Golden Phoenix – a dated Chinese restaurant on the Sunshine Coast – and her two daughters Zoe and Mei. The text deftly weaves together themes of culture, gender norms, family tradition, parental expectations, rebellion and belonging to explore the impact of generational differences on one's identity. Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia are depicted in nuanced ways through the characters' different ages and stages in life, and how this influences their identity as Asian Australians. It also highlights how generational shifts for Asian Australians affect their identity, whether that be by holding onto the cultural customs and traditions of their countries of birth, by attempting to assimilate into 'Australian culture' or by striving to achieve a balance between the two.

***We are here* by Cat Thao Nguyen – memoir (2015)**

Cat Thao Nguyen offers a poignant and unflinching memoir of her experiences as a Vietnamese refugee seeking asylum and a new life in Australia, and the complex ways in which her family built lives from themselves in Sydney's western suburbs. Australia's engagement with Asia is explored in an innovative way, through Cat Thao Nguyen's candid recollections of her efforts to overcome the trauma associated with her refugee experiences, adapt to a life in Australia that was often punctuated by racism, and strike a balance between her Vietnamese cultural practices and identity and her new identity as an Australian. The memoir offers the opportunity to examine Australia's engagement with Asia through the lens of Southeast Asian refugees seeking asylum in Australia during the 1980s and 1990s, their struggles to overcome various hardships and the ways in which their identities were thus shaped as Vietnamese Australians.

***Walking free* by Munjed Al Muderis – memoir (2015)**

The memoir *Walking free*, based on the experiences of renowned orthopedic surgeon Munjed Al Muderis,

details his harrowing experiences as a refugee fleeing Iraq after refusing to amputate the ears of army deserters at the order of Saddam Hussein. After crossing the border into Jordan, flying to Malaysia and paying a people smuggler \$2,000 to board a boat to Australia, Munjed Al Muderis spent nine months in Curtin Detention Centre in Western Australia's Kimberley region. The memoir highlights Australia's engagement with Asia through the perspective of refugee experiences and its treatment of refugees, both while in detention centres and during their attempts to adjust to life in a new country. It also offers the opportunity to closely examine the treatment of and attitudes towards refugees seeking asylum through any means necessary, and the way in which this frames Australia's engagement with Asia.

***Laurinda* by Alice Pung – novel (2014)**

Set in the 1990s, *Laurinda* tells the story of Lucy Lam, a fifteen-year-old girl from a hard-working Vietnamese refugee family who attains a scholarship to Laurinda, an exclusive school for girls. The novel offers a poignant insight into Lucy's experiences as she deftly attempts to not only navigate the typical struggles of adolescence, but also construct her changing identity in a place in which she struggles to find a sense of belonging. It focuses on the experiences of young refugees simultaneously coming to terms with their identities as newly arrived Australians and trying to reconcile this with their cultural and ethnic identities. Australia's engagement with Asia can be examined in this novel through the themes of coming of age, socio-economic status, familial obligations and expectations, gender and peer pressure.

***Ken's quest* by Cher Chidzey – novel (2016)**

Cher Chidzey's novel centres on a Chinese man, Wei Da – who goes by the name Ken – and his quest to achieve wealth and a happy life in Australia. A qualified engineer whose degree is not recognised in Australia, Ken's experiences of xenophobia and prejudice are explored against the backdrop of themes including assimilation, underemployment, relationships and belonging. The novel poignantly examines the nuances of racial tension between Asian migrants and Australian-born citizens, and the ways in which this has manifested in Australia over decades. It also highlights the ways in which prejudiced attitudes can be overturned through education, empathy and understanding.

Australia Day by Melanie Cheng – novel (2017)

Melanie Cheng's novel *Australia Day* is a collection of fourteen short stories on the theme of what it means to be Australian. The stories are set in different regions within Australia, and the characters differ in gender, age, socio-economic status and ethnicity. The collection explores Australia's engagement with Asia by examining the ways in which the different characters come to terms with what it means to be Australian based on their individual experiences. Given the nature of the text, the collection supports the notion that Australia's engagement with Asia is a multifaceted and ever-changing concept, and provides the opportunity to explore the ways in which it manifests itself through the perspectives of different characters.

Contemporary Asian Australian poets edited by Adam Aitken, Kim Cheng-Boey, and Michelle Cahill – anthology (2013)

This anthology comprises a range of poetry that intersects the themes of racial, cultural and national identity within the paradigm of Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia. It has a focus on dissecting what it means to be Asian Australian, and the ways in which this concept is becoming more prevalent in contemporary Australian society. The diverse Asian heritages and perspectives represented in the poetry examine the varied ways in which Australia's engagement with Asia is shaped through migration, assimilation, racial prejudice, opportunities, cultural differences and a desire to develop some sense of belonging. The anthology offers the opportunity to explore the ways in which the concept of identity continually adapts and is shaped by ethnicity, gender, cultural customs, socio-economic status and religion, through the lens of the experiences and perspectives of Asian Australians.

Philippines: Cordite poetry review, 85. edited by Mookie Katigbak Lacuesta and Shirley O. Lua – poetry (2018)

Cordite is an Australian-based international journal of poetry reviews, artworks, essays and criticism that publishes a range of themed issues. Issue 85, *Philippines*, contains a curated selection of international poetry framed in the context of the Philippines and its people. The nature of this text offers an insight into the layered, provocative nature of cultural identity and the multitude of ways in which it manifests in perspectives and experiences. Included with each poem is an introduction

to the poet, which may provide contextual information helpful in understanding and analysing the poem. While this text does not explicitly explore Australia's engagement with Asia, it does highlight the perspectives of those from the Philippines, which can be placed in the context of Asia, and with which a significant number of migrants to Australia share their heritage.

Conclusion

Through case studies, this article offers insight into how two Australian teachers have striven to thoughtfully and critically address the cross-curriculum priority 'Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia' within the English curriculum. Drawing from their own cultural experiences, they have sought to understand curriculum requirements and implement texts that encourage students to deeply engage with the cultural and linguistic diversity of Asia. However, they have struggled to select texts that reflect Australia's engagement with Asia and to adopt a pedagogical approach that both embraces cultural pluralism and aligns with the Australian Curriculum's definition of Asia. By arguing for the relevance of culturally relevant pedagogy and highlighting a number of high-quality films, plays, memoirs, poems and novels, this article offers new directions for Australian English teachers. As Elaine shared, 'The way I see it, we teach texts that focus on Asia so that young Australians have a deep respect for the differences of our neighbours, and they are able to earnestly appreciate and celebrate that diversity in the world'.

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