

Innovation and change in the 1999 NSW HSC English syllabus: Challenges and problems

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

This is to certify that:

- I. this thesis comprises only my original work towards the Doctor of Philosophy Degree.
- II. due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used.
- III. the thesis does not exceed the word length for this degree.
- IV. no part of this work has been used for the award of another degree.
- V. this thesis meets the *University of Sydney's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) requirements for the conduct of research.*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AATE	Australian Association of Teachers of English
AOS	Area of Study
BOS	Board of Studies
ETA	New South Wales English Teachers' Association
HSC	Higher School Certificate
NSW	New South Wales
UAI	Universities Admission Index

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this doctoral research is to analyse the 1999 NSW HSC English syllabus through the lens of its reception and implementation, to produce an account of the theoretical changes that are embedded in the syllabus documents and the impact that these changes had on selected stakeholders. The findings made about the 1999 HSC English syllabus are discussed in relation to Hunter's genealogy of the functions of schooling (1993), to explore the desired purposes of schooling reflected in both the English curriculum, and in stakeholder's attitudes. Using grounded theory methods in a qualitative approach to exploring the experiences of teachers at two schools through interview and observation data, as well as an analysis of the reactions represented in the public through newspaper publications from 1995-2005, core categories of experience and concern are identified relating to the implementation of the mainstream mandatory courses in English for the HSC. These core categories are used as a basis for a content analysis of key extracts of the English syllabus, with the finding that curriculum changes such as the inclusion of visual texts and language modes constituted an important theoretical shift in the content and objectives of English as a school subject. Also, while some challenges faced by stakeholders are seen to arise from problematic constructions of English in the syllabus itself, other tensions can be seen to be based on the particular demands of the local school contexts, and intensified by pressure from largely negative newspaper portrayals of English teachers and curriculum.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Scope

The topic of this research is the Higher School Certificate (HSC) English syllabus in New South Wales (NSW), Australia that was published in 1999, and its focus is the nature of the change in English in the NSW context. The HSC is the highest credential available in the NSW secondary school system, and is obtained by students upon successful completion of their final year of schooling, Year 12. The study of English is mandatory in NSW in every year of formal schooling up to and including the HSC, and as such the changes to the syllabus in 1999 influenced the experience of every student completing Year 12 in the state. The specific purpose of this research is to analyse the questions: “What are the innovations, challenges or problems that have shaped the construction and implementation of the syllabus?” and “What is the nature and extent of the resulting theoretical shift in the underlying philosophies of the subject?”

The goal of this research is to document the movement from the ‘official curriculum’ to the ‘enacted curriculum’ in the case of HSC English. The syllabus analysed here is one that I did not study myself in high school, but one that I came to work closely with in the coming years as a practicing teacher and a volunteer on the Committees and Councils of the English Teachers’ Association. It was introduced as I completed an undergraduate degree in Education. What I was continually confronted by, and what served as a major motivation for the direction of this research, was the ways in which the contents of the syllabus document were being distorted, by all of the stakeholders, for a variety of reasons. The position taken in this study is that, in a context in which education is understood as a public good, the understandings and reactions of public (in

addition to professional and institutional) stakeholders ought to be taken into account when evaluating the impact of curriculum change. It is for this reason that this study sought to establish the experiences and attitudes of both professional and public stakeholders, through the observation and interviewing of teachers in their school environment and the textual analysis of newspaper reports, before returning to a discourse analysis of a corpus of curriculum documents.

After researching students' perception of knowledge and its relationship to their subject choice in Year 11 for my Honours thesis (McGraw, 2002), I was eager to research further the role of official and unofficial curriculum in the construction of knowledge, and the belief that school subjects perceived to have high in utility value were 'essential to learn'. I had been able in that research to witness some of the difficulties teachers faced in implementing the English syllabus, and further investigation of the syllabus and its development and support documents uncovered a range of features that would challenge teachers faced with preparing students for external examination in a new curriculum. Although many teachers welcomed a new assessment regime of standards-referenced (rather than norm-referenced) HSC award calculation, they then found the higher 'Bands' of achievement almost impossible for their students to attain. Others wary of the introduction of visual language and addition of media and multimedia texts as mandatory in all courses were supported by negative media attention that more often than not was critical of how English had 'gone soft'. Those desiring to engage with the new material faced a context of scarce professional development and resources. In front of me I could see a syllabus containing some revolutionary new ideas about using language to construct meaning, but come exam day, still all I saw there were armies of students cramming a last few quotes from Shakespeare to show off in the text paper.

Given such experiences I chose in this research to utilise grounded theory methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to code and analyse a corpus of newspaper texts and teacher interviews in order to draw upon my knowledge and subjectivities in this area as a ‘connoisseur’ (Eisner, 1998), rather than try to ‘control’ for my prior knowledge. Existing models, such as Reid’s ‘curriculum grammars’ (2004a), are used in this thesis to frame the discussion of results, however by seeing myself as a valid instrument of analysis I have attempted to trace the web of themes and concepts that shaped the implementation of the 1999 HSC English syllabus, and in doing so uncover a clearer picture of the demands on the enacted English curriculum in the final year of schooling in NSW.

Grounded theory methods are used in this research to generate a model of the **core concepts** and opinions that are used in public and professional sites to construct discourse relating to the HSC English syllabus. Using a process of ‘open’, ‘axial’ and ‘selective’ coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) the document analysis established themes that could be validated and used as a basis for going back to the syllabus document and asking questions about it. (These processes are detailed in Chapter 4: Research Design.) It became clearer as the coding of the newspaper and interview data was finalised the exact places in the curriculum that held important answers about what English was supposed to be about and contain. The core categories of concern about curriculum observed in teachers’ experiences and media representations are as such used as a lens to identify and relate the discourses in the official curriculum (Board of Studies, N.S.W., 1999) to interrogate the philosophies that underpin secondary school English.

The choice to begin the study with the situated experiences of stakeholders and work back toward and into the syllabus, rather than starting with the official curriculum document and then moving to the enacted sites, is important in that it enables the

capacity of this methodology to see the curriculum through stakeholders' eyes. This thesis adopts a social constructionist (Goodson, 1996) approach to the study of HSC English, recognising the impact that historically constructed and socially reproduced ideas about knowledge and curriculum have had on subject pedagogy. The findings of this study are significant to understanding the multiple discourses at play in the formation of theoretical understandings and ideals about English curriculum generally and in particular relation to the history of English in NSW.

This study explores the ways in which the interpretation and implementation of the syllabus is constructed by individuals and contexts, as well as the nature and extent of the theoretical shift in the underlying philosophies of the subject. A decision to explore both 'external' (public/media) and 'internal' (institutional/professional) pressures, as well as the relationship between these spheres forms a key element of the framework of this inquiry, and a variety of qualitative methods are used to gathering and analysing evidence. In order to understand more deeply what is being constructed as 'English' in the context of this research, frameworks addressing the purposes and events of schools more broadly are also utilised. Using Hunter's (1993) categorisations of the major 'functions' of mass schooling, in combination with the possible future scenarios for schooling produced by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2001), I relate discussions of what English is supposed to be as a school subject to the broader context of how schools operate as institutions that have social, cultural and economic functions.

In summary, this research project aims to make a contribution to the field of English education by providing a deeper understanding of the constructions and lived realities of English teaching. My purpose is to illuminate the interrelatedness of the historical, cultural, political, technological and ideological nature of teaching by identifying the

sources of and exploring the grounds for resistance to innovation and change in the English curriculum. The implications for professional practice and policy formation are particularly timely, given the current development of an Australian Curriculum for English that is due for implementation across the country in 2012.

1.2 Overview

In the next chapter a background is provided to the study including an overview of influential English curriculum philosophies and the territory that is most frequently contested in the contemporary context. The influence of the canon, as well as multiliteracies and critical literacy will be explored, as well as the relationship between ‘English’ and ‘literacy’, the effect of the postmodern turn in literary theory, and the examination and assessment of English. An outline of different conceptualisations of the purpose of schooling and the ideal student is also provided, most notably of Hunter’s (1993) genealogy of the functions of schooling, in order to place historical understandings of English curriculum within the context of broader ideologies in education.

Chapter 3 consists of a review of the research literature pertaining directly to 1999 HSC English. This includes survey data collected in 2002 by Manuel and also by the English Teachers’ Association, which indicated teachers’ satisfaction with the content, philosophy and structure of the syllabus, as well as its initial implementation and examination. Along with this, O’Sullivan’s (2005) research into English teachers’ experiences of curriculum change provides insight into the importance of listening to teachers’ voices and considering how teachers construct their professional identities in order for curriculum change to be successfully adopted.

The choice in this thesis to combine research on the experience of teachers with research on the reception of the syllabus in the public domain is described and explained in Chapter 4, along with the key research questions and research framework devised for this study. By analysing material about HSC English represented through newspaper coverage as well as teacher observation and interview data using a grounded theory approach, the core substantive concerns of each group can be identified and explored without restricting the analysis to a pre-determined theoretical framework. By exploring newspaper representations and teacher experience, this research sets out to consider the nature of curriculum change represented in the 1999 HSC English syllabus through the lens of the lived experience of the syllabus, and the importance of adopting a social constructivist approach in considering the syllabus as a 'pre-active' stage of the shared and negotiated classroom experience is made clear in this chapter.

Chapter 5 is the first of three chapters in this thesis that report data analyses. In Chapter 5 the representations of HSC English made in newspaper articles from 1995-2005 are analysed using grounded theory methods to locate key themes rather than imposing an existing theoretical framework. After locating initial themes and examining more closely the dramatic increase in newspaper coverage in 2005 the core concerns represented in the media are identified, and these are used later in the study to reflect on the contents of the syllabus document.

In Chapter 6 the data collected from case studies in two Sydney metropolitan schools is analysed, again using grounded theory methods to locate initial themes in both schools before constructing core categories that identify the factors that place pressure on implementation of the syllabus in the school context. While limiting the study of teachers' understanding and practice to two schools restricts the extent to which the experiences of these teachers can be viewed as typical of NSW English teachers

generally, the interview and observation data collected in both schools over two school terms enables analysis in this chapter to drill deep into the lived reality of the syllabus and explore the challenges faced in the context of day-to-day school life.

Chapter 7 consists of a content analysis of key extracts from the 1999 HSC English syllabus that are selected because they relate to core concerns and pressures identified in the newspaper and case study data using the method of theoretical sampling. By using the perspectives of stakeholders as a lens to explore the syllabus, the innovations and changes contained within it can be viewed in relation to challenges observed in its implementation. In this chapter the introductory section of the syllabus, as well as selection of the Standard and Advanced English courses and information about assessment and examination are interrogated to ascertain possible sources of tension in the syllabus that could obscure or problematise the realisation of its aims. This also enables a test of the validity of the concerns of stakeholders in terms of the 'evidence' provided in the syllabus about the nature and scope of theoretical changes.

Finally, in Chapter 8 conclusions are drawn about the innovation and change represented in the 1999 NSW HSC English syllabus, as well as the challenges and problems that had an impact on its implementation. The implications of these findings for research methodology, curriculum theory, professional practice and policy are also discussed, and directions for future research are suggested based on the findings and limitations of this study.

Chapter 2: Background

A substantial exploration of any curriculum document will necessarily involve an analysis of the theoretical positioning and history of that document – not only in terms of the ‘immediate’ history of who created it and why, but also in terms of placing it within broader theoretical conversations and educational contexts. In this chapter I describe some key positions relating to the purpose and future of schooling, as well as important theoretical positions that inform our understanding of the educational context within which the NSW HSC English syllabus is located. This will provide a general background to the current study; in the following chapter the research projects, position papers and commentaries that have specifically reported on aspects of HSC English in NSW will be reviewed.

2.1 The purpose of schooling and the ideal student

Before moving to a discussion of the English curriculum more specifically, I explore some broader frameworks for considering the nature and purpose of schooling. Using Hunter’s (1993) categorisations of the major ‘functions’ of schooling, in combination with the possible future scenarios for schooling produced by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2001a), I relate discussions of what English is supposed to be as a subject to broader understandings of how schools operate as educational institutions more generally. These frameworks will also lead to a consideration of the nature of democratic educational practices, and the ways in which our current practices reflect the ideal student we are trying to create.

In his genealogical account of schooling, Hunter (1993) outlines what he sees to be the major functions of schooling, and contends that these intersecting and competing functions are the necessary product of a mass schooling system that evolved out of both existing child-centred ‘pastoral’ pedagogy inherited from the Christian church (Hunter, 1988), as well as the imperatives of Western governments to promote state security, prosperity and productive national industry. The contemporary economic, cultural and social conditions at play in the society at large are reflected in the ways that these functions and their proponents gain attention and ascendancy at any given time.

Function	Principles and goals
Pastoral	Children should be given caring and humane environments in school in which to grow and develop
Skilling	Schools have a significant role in the production of a skilled and competent workforce
Regulative	Schools transmit forms of orderliness and control to an otherwise disorderly populace
Human-capital	Investment of effort and money in schools should directly enhance economic productivity
Individual expression	Schooling is properly the context in which individuals can learn to explore, develop, and express their personal goals and aspirations
Cultural-heritage	People, especially young people, should be introduced to the ways of thinking and acting that have existed and been valued over time – cherished art works, and disciplines of scientific inquiry
Political	Schools produce a citizenry dedicated to the preferred political principles of the society

TABLE 1: FUNCTIONS OF MASS SCHOOLING (Hunter, 1993)

Hunter rejects the notion that schools have ever served, or even aimed to serve, a singular, unified function in society. Rather, the various functions described in the table above are contested and emphasised more or less at different points in history based on the political, cultural and economic imperatives of the time. Hunter describes schools as ‘pastoral bureaucracies’, which blend dual foundations of bureaucratic organisation

and pastoral pedagogy, and argues that modern education systems cannot be held up to abstract schema and ideals, and that educationalists should relinquish their distrust of the instrumental functions of schooling (e.g. skilling and regulating the population).

Some reviews of Hunter's work have criticised his anti-theoretical stance, arguing that it is a paradoxical view to hold when *engaging in* educational theory (Maddock, 1995); his lack of engagement with practical solutions has also been criticised, along with the danger he runs of "sounding like an apologist for the free market" (Leonard, 1994, p.572). Hunter answers these critiques by reinforcing his message – which is not that human beings are "incapable of constructing true discourses in various domains" (Hunter, 1995, p.440), or that it is acceptable for the state to pursue monstrous ideals. His argument, conversely, is that "the ends adopted for government were [historically] derived not from moral truth but from the need to allow groups committed to conflicting moral truths to live together in peace" (ibid.). Hunter refuses to "treat the school system – and government more generally – as the (potential) expression of 'truth', and conjectures that "attempts to base civil governance on a single mode of acceding to the truth [may] result in civil intolerance" (ibid).

From these clarifications we can return to Hunter's description of the functions of schooling and see that while he is asking us to accept that schools have evolved to serve multiple and intersecting functions (pursuing pastoral, skilling, regulative, and political objectives as well as human-capital, individual expression, and cultural-heritage), that he is also offering this as a lens to examine the discourses that are at play within school communities. Rather than viewing 'the state' as monstrous, its multiple functions are viewed as necessary, and desirable – it is the role of the 'subjects' of the state, not the state itself, to pursue 'truths' and 'ideals' within their own domains of discourse.

Meredyth (1997) refers to this position in relating Hunter's work to questions of citizenship, drawing on his genealogy of schooling functions in her exploration of how post-compulsory schooling in Australia aims to ensure self-actualisation, competence and social rights outcomes for citizens:

Current claims made upon schooling in the name of social rights – including the claim to egalitarian outcome from schooling, to community-based decision-making or to increased educational participation – are unthinkable *in the absence of* a commitment to commonality and to accountable institutional differentiation. For these reasons, the education system's commitment to co-ordination and to commonality should be respected. (Meredyth, 1997, p.290-291, my emphasis)

In making these claims for the *positive* effect of commonality and bureaucratic co-ordination on ensuring social rights and other outcomes relating to democratic citizenship, Meredyth's work is qualifying the political discourse in operation in Australian as a democratic, social welfare state. Thus, the political function of schools in Australia (in Hunter's framework, to produce a citizenry dedicated to the preferred political principles of Australian society) operates to construct a certain kind of democratic citizen.

The balance of these various functions for schooling and its relation to social conditions clearly do not remain static over time, nor are they the same for individual states or educational jurisdictions. One attempt to map the various directions schooling is taking in nation states such as Australia are the scenarios for the future of schooling constructed by the OECD (2001a). These scenarios provide a powerful resource for envisaging how schools might operate to develop the kind of society and citizen that we desire. The scenarios explore six different descriptive pictures of the future of schooling based on national and global trends identified by the OECD such as: the

extended length of adolescence; the growth of the knowledge economy; social inequality; and changes to family and community life, including the decline of the conventional nuclear family and dispersed or transient neighbourhood structures (OECD, 2001a). These concerns within OECD member countries, as well as broader global trends such as the widening inequality between rich and poor, and population growth and change resulting in increased ethnic and cultural diversity, form central issues for schools. The future scenarios present a range of configurations where either the status quo is maintained (scenarios 1a, 1b) or an agenda of ‘re-schooling’ (scenarios 2a, 2b) or ‘de-schooling’ (scenarios 3a, 3b) is pursued:

OECD Scenario	Description
<p><i>Maintaining the status quo:</i> (Scenario 1a) Bureaucratic school systems continue</p>	<p>This scenario is built on the continuation of powerfully bureaucratic systems, strong pressures towards uniformity, and resistance to radical change. Schools are highly distinct institutions, knitted together within complex administrative arrangements. Political and media commentaries are frequently critical in tone; despite the criticisms, radical change is resisted. Many fear that alternatives would not address fundamental tasks such as guardianship and socialisation, alongside the goals relating to cognitive knowledge and diplomas, nor deliver equality of opportunity.</p>
<p><i>Maintaining the status quo:</i> (Scenario 1b) Teacher Exodus – the ‘meltdown scenario’</p>	<p>There would be a major crisis of teacher shortages, highly resistant to conventional policy responses. It is triggered by a rapidly ageing profession, exacerbated by low teacher morale and buoyant opportunities in more attractive graduate jobs. The large size of the teaching force makes improvements in relative attractiveness costly, with long lead times for measures to show tangible results on overall numbers. Wide disparities in the depth of the crisis by socio-geographic, as well as subject, area. Very different outcomes could follow: at one extreme, a vicious circle of retrenchment and conflict; at the other, emergency strategies spur radical innovation and collective change.</p>
<p><i>Re-schooling:</i> (Scenario 2a) Schools as core social centres</p>	<p>The school here enjoys widespread recognition as the most effective bulwark against social, family and community fragmentation. It is now heavily defined by collective and community tasks. This leads to extensive shared responsibilities between schools and other community bodies, sources of expertise, and institutions of further and continuing education, shaping not conflicting with high</p>

	teacher professionalism. Generous levels of financial support needed to meet demanding requirements for quality learning environments in all communities and to ensure elevated esteem for teachers and schools.
<i>Re-schooling:</i> (Scenario 2b) Schools as focussed learning organisations	Schools are revitalised around a strong knowledge rather than social agenda, in a culture of high quality, experimentation, diversity, and innovation. New forms of evaluation and competence assessment flourish. ICT used extensively alongside other learning media, traditional and new. Knowledge management to the fore, and the very large majority of schools justify the label "learning organisations" (hence is equality of opportunity the norm), with extensive links to tertiary education and diverse other organisations.
<i>De-schooling:</i> (Scenario 3a) Learning networks and the network society	Dissatisfaction with institutionalised provision and expression given to diversified demand leads to the abandonment of schools in favour of a multitude of learning networks, quickened by the extensive possibilities of powerful, inexpensive ICT. The de-institutionalisation, even dismantling, of school systems as part of the emerging "network society". Various cultural, religious and community voices to the fore in the socialisation and learning arrangements for children, some very local in character, others using distance and cross-border networking.
<i>De-schooling:</i> (Scenario 3b) Extending the market model	Existing market features in education are significantly extended as governments encourage diversification in a broader environment of market-led change. This fuelled by dissatisfaction by "strategic consumers" in cultures where schooling is commonly viewed as a private as well as a public good. Many new providers are stimulated to come into the learning market, encouraged by thoroughgoing reforms of funding structures, incentives and regulation. Flourishing indicators, measures, and accreditation arrangements start to displace direct public monitoring and curriculum regulation. Innovation abounds as do painful transitions and inequalities.

TABLE 2: SCHOOLING FOR TOMORROW: OECD SCENARIOS (OECD, 2001A)

While the OECD does not identify any one of these six scenarios as a preferred model, important negative aspects are described in the first two scenarios where the status quo is maintained – such as the failure to ‘deliver equality of opportunity’ in scenario 1a and the ‘meltdown scenario’ of teacher ‘exodus’ from the profession in scenario 1b. We can hypothesise, therefore, that while Hunter’s genealogy of schooling explains how

schools as ‘pastoral bureaucracies’ came to be and are maintained, that the OECD scenarios provide us with models for **re-schooling** or **de-schooling** as the preferred discourses for imagining how the ‘functions’ of schooling identified by Hunter might be best realised in the future.

As well as imagining the possible futures of the school system, it is worthwhile considering more specifically the ideal student that is constructed as part of these systems. In an examination of the relationship between academic success and social power, Teese argues that “syllabus writers have an implicit view about the ideal student, and the pursuit of this ideal governs their choice of content, the relative stress placed on different tasks, the compression of the content and the implied pace of teaching” (2000, p.4). Teese argues that these ideal qualities of the learner are a more powerful force than shifting beliefs about ideal curriculum content:

...the specific content of subjects – which may shift a lot over fifty years – is always subordinated to deeper and more continuous demands on the qualities of the learner. Powers of abstraction and concentration, sensitivity to form and structure, logical and retentive abilities, language and communicative skills, personal organisation, intrinsic motivation, self-confidence and maturity of perspective and argument are the characteristics of the ideal student that the academic curriculum has sought to inculcate through all the surface changes in material... (Teese, 2000, p.194)

All of the work referred to in this first section, of Hunter, Meredyth, Teese and of the OECD, has in common a focus on the structure of schooling – actual and ideal – and on the discourses that shape this. In the following two sections of this chapter I overview the philosophies that have been most influential specifically in shaping English curriculum, and discuss the major points of contention that affect the landscape of English in the contemporary Australian context. Throughout this thesis however, and in

later discussion of the research findings in particular, I will return to these overarching discourses relating to the functions of schooling and its possible future, using these to place challenges and innovations in the NSW HSC English syllabus within the broader context of schooling and its desired ends. In doing this I aim to illuminate some important underlying beliefs and points of difference that have shaped the ways in which the syllabus was responded to and implemented.

2.2 Influential English curriculum philosophies

In all curricula there can be seen underlying philosophies that inform not only what is selected as content, but also the processes and practices of pedagogy and assessment. For this reason any definition of what English is, as a subject or discipline, must be recognised as conflated with associated views about the reasons why English needs to be studied. Put another way, the question ‘*what* is English?’ must be asked alongside the question ‘*why* study English?’ Since the emergence and growth of English as a discrete school subject in the early 1900s, answers to these questions have changed along with changing views of the purpose of schooling more generally. Conceptions of school English from overseas, most notably from the U.K., have had significant influence on the construction of the subject in Australia, and in this section the major philosophies that have influenced English curriculum in Australia will be explored.

2.2.1 The early 1900s

One of the most influential debates about what ought to be taught in English has been over whether the subject ought to be focussed on cultivating a specific knowledge of the English **language**, or on the analysis of works of **literature**. While these two endeavours are certainly not mutually exclusive, a focus on one aspect over the other is one indicator of a person or group’s view on the purpose of English as a subject. As

English developed in the early 1900s as an identifiable subject, separate from the Classics, an emphasis remained clearly on the teaching of English grammar. As Ball explains in his historical account of the subject in England, *English for the English since 1906*, English in the 1910s and 1920s was characterised by two sources of tension – by the pressure to teach ‘correct’ grammar through systematic instruction (as was the practice in teaching Classical languages and grammar), and by disputes about whether English curriculum should focus on the study of grammar or on the study of literature and pupil expression (Ball, 1985, p. 54).

However, while the teaching of grammar remained strongly enshrined as a core element of English study, advice in England from both the Board of Education and the English Association emphasised the importance of teaching grammar as it naturally arose in reading and composition lessons, rather than being treated as an isolated, abstract exercise. Ball notes this important shift “from a subject-centred to a child-centred approach to English language [where] emphasis is given for the first time to naturally occurring language” (Ball, 1985, p.58). The shift toward a conceptualisation of English as comprising primarily of the study of ‘literature’ was clearly advocated in the Newbolt Report entitled *The Teaching of English in England* (1921). The report was heavily influenced by those associated with the ‘Cambridge School’, who under the intellectual leadership of F.R. Leavis adopted an Arnoldian approach to English, and also by members of the English Association such as George Sampson and Arthur Quiller-Couch, who advocated the study of literature as essential to the development of English as a discipline (Ball, 1985, pp.62-65).

The trend away from the teaching of grammar for its own sake, and the belief that English expression should be taught through the reading of ‘good’ literature was echoed in the Australian context. ‘Tripod’ English – a combination of grammar, composition

and literature – formed the basis of both the syllabuses of 1911 and 1944, but while the 1911 syllabus made it “unequivocally clear that the teaching of formal grammar was to be given only minor and incidental importance”, the 1944 syllabus returned a greater emphasis to explicit grammar teaching in the early years of schooling (Brock, 1996, p.47). The ‘Newbolt model’ of integrating the study of grammar and the study of literature, and of using grammatical understanding for effective expression and comprehension (rather than studying grammar in isolation) was more clearly seen in NSW in the 1950s, with the 1953 syllabus prescribing the study of ‘Literature’ alongside ‘The Expression of Thought’ and ‘The Comprehension of Thought’ as the three main categories of learning in English (Board of Secondary School Studies, 1953). Belief in the power of literature to transform the individual was also evident in the 1953 syllabus, although David Homer argues that in Australia there was less of a focus on nationalism as the purpose for this, and more of a desire to cultivate the ‘literary tastes’ of Australian students (Homer, 1973, p.84).

The early 1900s can therefore be seen to contain differences in belief about whether to explicitly teach grammar and if so, how best to do so, as well as a growing emphasis on the importance of studying literature to both cultivate individual values and ‘taste’ and strengthen the place of English as a subject. What all of this has in common is the utilisation of transmission approaches to pedagogy, and an emphasis on correctness of expression and analysis. The 1960s would see a different approach gain momentum both in the US and UK, and in Australia.

2.2.2 Dartmouth and beyond

By the 1960s, arguments about the need for systematic grammar instruction and about the role of literature in cultivating knowledge and values befitting a civilised member of society had not disappeared, and tensions over the role of both language and literature in the English curriculum continued. However these arguments were reshaped as support grew for a model of English curriculum that was focussed on the ‘personal growth’ of students, rather than their enculturation. John Dixon’s report of the Dartmouth conference in 1966, *Growth Through English*, is widely acknowledged as having significant influence on subsequent English curriculum theory and practice. In his report Dixon identified the established approaches to English that promoted either the acquisition of language ‘skills’, or the serious study of literature to ensure the learning and adoption of the ideals and values associated with students’ ‘cultural heritage’. Dixon also argued for the need to pursue a new model of English for ‘personal growth’, which had been the subject of much discussion at Dartmouth.

According to Dixon, a student-centred approach to teaching English that valued the experiences, home language and personal expression of the student was needed to redirect the existing focus on *teaching* English toward a focus on students’ *learning* in English. Dixon reasserted the primary objectives of language as being to **share experience** and **promote interaction between people**; he criticised the skills model as idealising pupils as “copy-typists”, and the heritage model for its “stress on adult literature [which] turns language into a one-way process: pupils are readers, receivers of the master’s voice” (1975, p.6). Dixon championed writing, drama and talk in the English classroom as more appropriate than language drills or clinical literature study, as fruitful methods for students to negotiate and articulate their recognitions and perceptions of the world around them. His belief that “language is learnt in operation,

not by dummy runs” encouraged teachers to value literature as “bringing new voices into the classroom, [adding] to the store of shared experience” and to value skills in reading and writing as a means of building a student’s own representational world, rather than as an end in itself (1975, p.13).

The rise of the personal growth model of English following the Dartmouth conference is recognised in two influential reports on language and English teaching in the U.K., the 1975 Bullock Report and the Cox Report of 1989:

Author/Publication	Philosophies identified
John Dixon’s report of the Dartmouth Conference: <i>Growth through English</i> (1967/1975)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural heritage • Skills • Personal growth
Alan Bullock’s report to the UK government considering the teaching of language: <i>A language for life</i> (‘Bullock Report’ 1975)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills • Personal growth • English as an instrument of social change
Brian Cox’s report to the UK government informing the National Curriculum on the teaching of English: <i>English for ages 5-16</i> (‘Cox Report’ 1989)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal growth • Cross curricular • Cultural heritage • Adult needs • Cultural analysis

TABLE 3: INFLUENTIAL CATEGORISATIONS OF PHILOSOPHIES OF ENGLISH IN THE MID-LATE 20TH CENTURY

The categories of approaches to English curriculum identified by both the Bullock Report (Department of Education and Science, 1975) and the Cox Report (1989) reflect the emergence in the early 1970s of another approach, inspired by the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. In his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) Freire advocated a social justice pedagogy in the teaching of language and literacy, where texts are examined, analysed and deconstructed to discover the ways in which disempowered communities are positioned and thereby oppressed by texts that construct and enforce a

dominant culture. The resulting model in English studies is that of ‘critical literacy’, identified by Bullock as ‘English as an instrument of social change’ and by Cox as ‘cultural analysis’. While Freire’s approach to education emphasised the need to dismantle oppressive political and social structures by engaging in *social action* (reflected in the label ‘English as an instrument of social change’ chosen by Bullock), elements of critical literacy were also adopted more broadly as reflected in Cox’s chosen term ‘cultural analysis’.

The general objective of critical literacy, which has retained popularity in contemporary English classrooms and will be discussed at greater length in section 2.3.4 of this chapter, is to ask “certain (different) kinds of questions about texts [and to] value kinds of knowledge which may be different from those promoted by literary and cultural establishments” (Morgan, 2004, p.104). One perspective on critical literacy is therefore that it is very much aligned with the ‘progressive’ agenda of personal growth advocates (Morgan, 2004, p.104), with cultural ‘heritage’ approaches of the early 1900s now balanced by a more *critical* cultural ‘analysis’ of texts in order to return power over language to the student reader. Reader-response theorists (cf. Iser, 1978) also brought significant value to critical reading as a means to recognising the reader as an active agent in the construction of meaning, and for reflecting on the relationship between meanings that are intended in a given text, but which may be interpreted and responded to differently by different readers depending on the experiences that they bring to bear on the work. Theorists such as Eagleton (1976), however, align the critical literacy agenda more closely with neo-Marxist approaches to literary studies, applying theory to texts in order to expose the construction of ruling class ideology as normative and dominant. While these multiple conceptualisations of critical literacy continue to influence curriculum in Australia, it has arguably been employed for more progressive

means of student growth, rather than as a radical tool for social change (Green, 1995, p.405).

In an Editorial in the Australian journal for English teachers, *English in Australia*, Sawyer and Meiers describe the popularity retained by the personal growth model in Australia that was reflected at the conference of the International Federation for the Teaching of English:

In 1980 IFTE at Sydney English as a subject seemed to be unified – unified by something like a grand theory developing from the work of Dixon, Moffett, Barnes and Britton, who attended the conference. Their work had become influential in Australia in the 1970s. English was about 'growth', but it was also about the use of language. Australian English teachers were moving away from 'dummy run exercises', and beginning to think more about purpose and audience. At this stage, advocacy of practices such as imaginative recreation was seen as cutting edge. (Sawyer & Meiers, 2003/4, p.2)

As well as confirming the endurance of the personal growth model, this description also confirms the prominence of critical literacy practices in the Australian context, as signalled by Sawyer and Meier's reference to English teachers "beginning to think more about purpose and audience". This, however, was a reflection on Australia in the 1980s, and at the time of writing the editorial Sawyer and Meiers saw the characterisation of English as less unified:

In 2003 there is greater diversity, and no semblance of a unifying theory anymore; English is characterised by diversity, and it is hard to pinpoint any particular theorists whose work holds the subject together. Peter Medway in a recent NATE journal article even suggested that the subject hasn't been theorised since Britton's work. (ibid.)

The following section of this chapter will overview some of the current theories about English curriculum, and locate more recent attempts to 'hold the subject together' in a

time that has been particularly marked by increased globalisation and rapid technological change.

2.2.3 Contemporary views

In a paper presented during the development of the 1999 English syllabus at the Stage 6 English Forum in 1998, the NSW Board of Studies continued to give recognition to the Personal Growth model of English as one of the four “most significant views of English affecting curriculum development” (Board of Studies NSW, 1998a). This paper acknowledged the variations in terminology that had been ascribed to a range of philosophies, and situated the variations of perspectives under the headings:

- Cultural Heritage
- Personal Growth
- Cultural Analysis, and
- Literacy Development

While Sawyer and Meiers noted the absence of any *one particular* theorist or theory around which English curriculum was being organised in the twenty-first century, it is clear that Board of Studies recognised the impact of a collection of familiar twentieth century philosophies in their theorising of the new Stage 6 English syllabus. While the terminology may have varied, and the relationship between the (at times oppositional) approaches had fluctuated over time, the Board clearly signalled the continued presence of each theory in the minds of syllabus developers in NSW at the turn of the century.

The shift from the label of ‘skills’ models used by theorists such as Dixon and Bullock to a model labelled ‘Literacy Development’ is significant here, and marks the contemporary shift toward views of language learning that see the acquisition of technical skill in codifying and decoding written language as just one element of literacy. The broadened scope of literacy to include multiliteracies is signalled here, as

are models of literacy that go beyond skills development, such as the highly influential ‘four resources’ model created by Luke and Freebody (1990) that theorise how technical language skill *interacts* with critical-cultural, growth and heritage approaches to English teaching. The relationship between the concept of ‘literacy’ and the subject ‘English’ will be discussed at greater length later in this chapter.

While familiar, well-established philosophies may still have been appearing in policy and research as the most influential views in English curriculum development however, this did not necessarily mean that the practices and beliefs associated with all four philosophies were appearing in teachers’ work. In her ‘Unofficial Guide’ to the philosophies of English teachers, Bethan Marshall explains that many views on what constitutes English teaching are not held by teachers themselves, but “are often articulated to counteract the perceived practices of English teachers” (Marshall, 2000a, p.4). Marshall cites research undertaken by Goodwyn (1992) after the release of the National Curriculum in the U.K., which showed that although the models identified by Cox were appropriate for describing the historical range of beliefs about teaching English, the 46 practicing English teachers in the U.K. surveyed by Goodwyn were found to overwhelmingly hold only two of the five philosophies. The *personal growth* model, which values the growth of the individual through language use, was the dominant model subscribed to by teachers and was seen as the most important and influential model of the five described by Cox. *Cultural analysis* was the other model that was seen as being increasingly adopted, and Goodwyn suggests that together the personal growth and cultural analysis models were “developing into a composite of both” (1992, p.9).

In light of such research Marshall sought to identify the philosophies of English teaching that were actually held by practicing English teachers. Taking into account the

history of the subject, the existing literature that theorised the views of English teaching, and her own teaching experience, Marshall created a booklet of descriptions of five different philosophies of English teaching, and used this as the basis for her research on the philosophies currently held by English teachers. She constructed five categories, which were derived from the five models defined in the 1989 Cox Report:

Philosophical grouping	Characteristics
Technicians	Emphasis is on developing language ‘skills’ in grammar, spelling and comprehension. View of knowledge as something that is acquired, not challenged or explored.
Old Grammarians	Belief in the improving and civilising qualities of literature. Closely aligned with liberal arts and ‘heritage’ models.
Liberals	A liberal humanist approach to teaching English aligned with ‘personal growth’ models, using literature to illuminate social and personal themes. Values the perspective and experience of the student.
Critical Dissenters	Focus on analysing the links between literature and culture, and on critical reading of texts. Radical and dissenting position on education.
Pragmatists	Interpretation of critical theory is less oppositional than ‘dissenters’. Focus on cultural analysis, while preparing students for the practicalities of the world, including preparation for success in testing and school assessment.

TABLE 4: FIVE PHILOSOPHIES OF ENGLISH TEACHERS IDENTIFIED BY MARSHALL (2000A, 2000B)

The classification of the 75 English teachers in Marshall’s research sample (Technician [19]; Old Grammarian [11]; Liberal [8]; Critical Dissenter [19]; Pragmatist [15] and undecided [3]), are of note, not only because they show many teachers subscribing to philosophies of English that go beyond the focus on the individual in the curriculum model of ‘personal growth’ – both the Pragmatist and Critical Dissenter share an engagement with critical literacy and can be categorised as “cultural theorist” positions, rather than “liberal humanist” ones – but also because these findings show that English

teachers in the UK overwhelmingly identify with philosophies and practices that place them “in direct opposition to government policy” that had embraced the approaches more closely aligned with Technicians and Old Grammarians (Marshall, 2000b, p.39).

In research comparing English teachers’ rhetoric about English curriculum to their observed practice, Bousted also discovered that teachers were “discontent[ed] with the revised (1995) National Curriculum” (2000, p.14) in the U.K., and that their rhetorical views about English stood in contrast to those constructed by curriculum prescriptions. In particular teachers were unhappy with exam-based modes of assessment, which they saw as narrowing the curriculum and encouraging rote learning, as well as the content of the curriculum, with the works of literature prescribed in the document seen to be “elitist and irrelevant to their pupils lives and interests” (Bousted, 2000, p.14). The renewed emphasis on spoken Standard English and on the pre-twentieth century canon was seen as a reflection of Conservative administrators, divorced from student experience, and motivated by nostalgia for traditional, middle class British values and culture.

Despite holding these strong rhetorical views, however, Bousted observed in teachers’ classroom practice a tendency to adopt what she termed ‘mediating practices’, which allowed for more teacher-directed and content-driven pedagogy to be utilised in order to meet the demands of the curriculum. Teacher direction and control of process-based activities, such as group work and student discussion, as well as reinforcement of standard English, intensive training in formulaic literary critical essays, and teacher judgements about the ‘relevance’ of texts were practices that were identified as providing “some balance between the apparently opposing forces of a content-based National Curriculum and the process-based ideals of the teachers” (Bousted, 2000, p.15).

One model that has emerged in Australia to meet the challenge of integrating a range of historical approaches in a meaningful and generative way has been developed by Mark Howie, and is based on the use of the theoretical ‘frames’ found in the NSW Visual Arts syllabus. This model acknowledges and draws together the plurality of practices utilised by English teachers, and integrates them in a way that is “less strident and more fluid in [the] allegiance to particular theoretical models and perspectives” (Howie, 2005b, p.58). Howie’s ‘transformative’ model of curriculum planning seeks to fulfil the English literacy ‘project’ established by Green – the transformation of the self – by guiding students through *subjective*, *structural*, *cultural* and *critical* ‘frames’ to explore how meanings are formed through language and texts.

Frame	Description
Subjective frame	Draws on the personal growth model of English, and the familiar practices of reader response theory and ‘writing for understanding’. Students explore their personal understanding of texts, explore culturally dominant and accepted readings, and recognise how texts work to ‘invite’ particular readings.
Structural frame	Draws on the social view of language in working to extend students’ understanding of the structures and processes of language and text and how they work to make meaning. Students increase their mastery of the use of language in a range of contexts alongside the valuing of personal experience.
Cultural frame	Highlights for students that their processes of responding and composing are culturally situated. They begin to acquire knowledge, skills and understandings of texts as socio-cultural constructs; other ways of responding to the texts are explored and other meanings are generated.
Critical frame	Promotes critical literacy as a differentiated reading practice, allowing students to challenge and/or resist particular ways of reading a text. It requires students to interrogate their initial responses generated within the subjective frame. Post-structural and post-modern are also drawn on to give students the freedom to ‘play’ with and transform texts, including their own.

TABLE 5: APPLYING THE METAPHOR OF FRAMING FOR A TRANSFORMATIVE MODEL OF CURRICULUM PLANNING (Howie, 2005b)

While this model of framing still foregrounds the personal growth of students (rather than the transmission of defined and unquestioned knowledge to them), it provides English teachers with a way in which to combine a range of practices to develop students' understandings of themselves and their place in the world "with an emphasis on such understandings being socially and culturally situated, and their developing knowledge, understanding and mastery of language use" (Howie, 2005b, p.61).

It can therefore be seen that much progress has been made in the contemporary context of English curriculum to utilise and integrate past approaches to language, literature and literacy in English as a school subject. Concerns about student ability and progress however, as well as about the ability of English teachers to maintain balance in their repertoire of practices, have ensured that both long-standing and newer debates about English teaching continue into the new millennium. At this point, therefore, I turn my attention from the historical construction of the subject to the areas of literacy, multiliteracies, critical literacy, postmodernism, the recognition of a literature 'canon', and the impact of examinations on curriculum realisation, which stood out in the background literature as the major areas of contention for English education in Australia today.

2.3 Contested Territory

In her 'Unofficial Guide', Bethan Marshall describes English as "a subject which is apparently so amorphous that it elides definition and yet it is sufficiently hard edged to provoke bitter controversy" (2000a, p.2). A decade before this Peter Medway, in writing about the history and politics of English as a school subject, argued that the reason why "English is special [is because] certain characteristics generally attributable

to academic subjects are notably lacking. The most obvious example is that English does not comprise a body of facts and concepts to be communicated” (Medway, 1990, p.1). This lack of a “body of facts and concepts” and the resultant “amorphous” nature of English as a school subject has indeed ensured that both the purpose and context of the subject continue to be hotly debated. This section will provide an overview of the ‘sticking points’ that have shaped contemporary debates and which endure in current debates about English, and the various (at times competing) demands that are placed on English as a subject area in contemporary NSW schools.

2.3.1 ‘English’ and ‘Literacy’

Beyond the historical tensions between definitions of ‘English-as-Literature’ and ‘English-as-Language’ is the increased focus in more recent times on the role of English in developing students’ ‘literacy’. In the contemporary context, conversations about *language* have been largely overtaken by conversations about *literacy*. While literacy has traditionally been defined as “the ability to read and write the language” (Misson, 2005, p.38) the growing recognition of electronic, visual and multimodal elements in texts has led to a definition of literacy that expands beyond the written, printed word. In a large scale literacy review for Education Queensland, literacy was more broadly defined as “the flexible and sustainable mastery of a repertoire of practices with the texts of traditional and new communications technologies via spoken language, print, and multimedia” (Luke & Freebody, 2000, p.9). This conceptualisation of literacy as ‘repertoires of practice’, and of the literate person as what Misson describes as having learned “skill to crack particular codes” has made it easy to adopt metaphoric uses of the word literacy, such as in the terms ‘visual literacy’, ‘musical literacy’, ‘computer literacy’ and ‘emotional literacy’ (Misson, 2005, p.38).

A recent report by the NSW Audit Office describes how in the past decade the NSW Department of Education and Training has spent a significant amount on programs designed to improve students' literacy and numeracy, tripling its 1998-9 levels of program funding to a total \$157 million in 2006-7 (2008, p.2). In NSW there can be seen an emphasis on teaching literacy skills to prepare students for literacy testing through external examination such as the *Basic Skills Test* that was conducted in NSW primary schools in years 3 and 5, and the *English Language and Literacy Assessment (ELLA)* exam paper that was mandatorily undertaken by NSW high school students in Year 7, and optionally taken again in Year 8. These external tests have now been replaced by the *National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)*, a similar diagnostic test that is now sat by students across Australia, not just in NSW. This focus on raising standards of literacy (along with numeracy) and the associated focus on literacy assessment in NSW echoes the international shift toward government policies that demand higher success rates in literacy assessment, for example the *No Child Left Behind* policy in the U.S. and the *National Literacy Strategy* in the U.K.

However, while literacy has grown as a priority for policymakers in Australia and internationally, the relationship between literacy and the subject English and the role of English teachers in ensuring and maintaining standards of literacy is uncertain. In recent decades education policy in Australia has positioned literacy as a cross-curriculum issue with teachers in all subject areas given responsibility for the teaching of skills in reading and writing as part of their regular classroom work. However the movement to promote curriculum learning areas as having a vital role to play in students becoming literate “appears to have been largely unsuccessful”, with many teachers withdrawing from seeing literacy teaching as part of their responsibility (Yaxley, 2002, p.27). This is arguably due to the fact that most teachers in other

curriculum areas have not had access to high quality professional learning in the teaching of reading (Australian Association for the Teaching of English, 2005, p.26).

Furthermore, more recent research has shown that while teachers in subject areas other than English have not generally engaged with a focus on literacy, that schooling success may in fact depend more on the ability of students to cue themselves into particular 'curriculum literacies'. One of the recommendations of research undertaken by Cumming and Wyatt-Smith et al. (1998) was that schools "move away from the notion of 'literacy across the curriculum'" and instead, engage students in learning "the accepted subject- and context- specific ways of reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, doing and thinking, and how they can be combined, as occasion demands" in different subjects (Wyatt-Smith, 2000, p.76). Although this new understanding of the function of curriculum literacy may eventually see teachers across the curriculum engaging with certain acts of what they see as more relevant, subject-specific literacy, extra pressure has been returned to English teachers to again take responsibility for developing students' general literacy skills. This may seem logical to some given the language-based subject matter of English, however Green argues that "English should not be seen as the sole curriculum area charged with responsibility for literacy; rather, it has its own substantive curriculum concerns, as indeed does each and every subject" (Green, 2002, p.27).

Useful and enduring models for conceptualising the place of literacy within English as a discrete subject have been proposed by Freebody and Luke (1990) as well as Green (1988a). Green offers a model of literacy that draws on the discourses of functional literacy, cultural literacy and critical literacy to delineate three dimensions of literate practice and learning: the 'operational', the 'cultural' and the 'critical' dimensions of literacy. While Green explains that students can take any of these dimensions as a

starting point (as long as all three dimensions are taken into account) he also contends that there is pedagogical value in starting with the cultural dimension and “drawing the critical and the operational in organically, as the need arises” (2002, p.28). Using this model Green proposes a special ‘literacy project’ for English as a school subject, where various domains of text – literature, media and everyday texts – provide content that is not covered elsewhere in the school curriculum, and which allow attention to be paid to all three dimensions of literacy. The focus of such a literacy project is the exploration of **meaning-making**, “in a complex sense that brings together structure and agency, discourse and event, content and text” (2002, p.29).

The ‘four resources’ model developed by Luke and Freebody, which was referred to earlier in this chapter, provides a similar model of similar inter-related dimensions that has become influential in Australian curriculum policy and design. This model provides a framework for understanding how effective literacy “draw on a repertoire of practices” that allow learners to engage with print and multi-media texts as ‘code breakers’, ‘text participants’, ‘text users’ and ‘text analysts’. These resources are described in

Table 6 below:

The Four Resources	Description of practices
Code Breaker	Breaking the code of texts involves recognising and using the fundamental features and architecture of written texts including: alphabet, sounds in words, spelling, conventions and patterns of sentence structure and text. It involves knowing the relationship between spoken and written language and the interpretation of graphic symbols and their contexts of use.
Text Participant	Participating in the meanings of texts involves understanding and composing meaningful written, visual and spoken texts from within the meaning systems of particular cultures, institutions and communities. It requires knowledge of the patterns operating within texts.
Text User	Using texts functionally involves traversing the social relations

	around texts; knowing about and acting on the different social and cultural functions that various texts perform both inside and outside school and knowing that these functions shape the way texts are structured, their tone, their degree of formality and their sequence components.
Text Analyst	Critically analysing and transforming texts involves understanding and acting on the knowledge that texts are not neutral, that they represent particular points of view and silence other points of view, influence people’s ideas, and that their designs and discourses can be critiqued and redesigned in novel and hybrid ways.

TABLE 6: REPERTOIRES OF PRACTICE IN THE ‘FOUR RESOURCES’ MODEL (LUKE AND FREEBODY 1999)

As with Green’s *operational*, *cultural* and *critical* dimensions, it is imperative that the four resources in Luke and Freebody’s model are seen as inter-related and interdependent. Such models provide English teachers with a rich framework that goes beyond the decontextualised language drills that were resisted during the twentieth century, and positions literacy as a set of embedded (rather than competing) practices within the English curriculum.

2.3.2 Multiliteracies

In addition to theorising the teaching of literacy, Green argues that “there are two particularly insistent matters that need to be engaged in thinking about the contemporary situation of English teaching...these are the question concerning literacy, on the one hand, and the question concerning technology, on the other” (Green, 2004, p.292). The increasing integration of ‘information and communication technologies’ (ICTs) into the workplace is one of the key influences identified by the OECD (2001a) as signalling the growth of the knowledge economy and the related demand for multiliterate knowledge workers. As has just been discussed, ideas about what it means to be literate have developed over time, so that the concept of literacy now extends beyond breaking the codes of written words, to also encompass an understanding of conventions and discourses. Literacy is no longer limited to the physical and

mechanical processes of reading, and in technologically rich world of the 21st century, it is also no longer limited to reading printed materials.

The term ‘multiliteracies’ began to be widely used after the first meeting of the ‘New London Group’ in 1994, who used the term to refer to the contemporary need to engage with not only the grammar of written language, but also the grammars of still and moving images, music and sound. However, the need to extend the concept of literacy beyond print literacy was just one aspect of what multiliteracies would entail – it also meant the application of established literacy practices, such as engaging critical literacy, to a wider range of semiotic systems. In a paper co-authored by a number of scholars including Bill Cope, Mary Kalantzis, Norman Fairclough, Jim Gee and Allan Luke, the manifesto of the New London Group proclaimed the authors’ twin goals for literacy learning to be: “creating access to the evolving language of work, power, and community, and fostering the critical engagement necessary for them to design their social futures and achieve success through fulfilling employment” (Cazden et al., 1996, p.60).

In an online article for the Curriculum Corporation’s 2007 conference *Multiliteracies: Break the Code*, Geoff Bull and Michele Anstey lament that “in the media, the teaching of multiliteracies is often trivialised and caricatured: portrayed, for example, as the study of SMS text messaging in place of the plays of Shakespeare. For all their weaknesses, such arguments can still influence members of the public, most of whom do not have direct knowledge of the topic of multiliteracies from their own years at school” (Bull & Anstey, 2007). What is ignored in such “trivialised” portrayals of multiliteracies is the very real impact that technology has had on society, and the culturally and linguistically diverse environment of today’s globalised world. It is these two important factors that the notion of multiliteracies addresses, by supplementing

traditional literacy pedagogy in order to engage with “the multiplicity of communication channels and media”, and with “the increasing salience of cultural and linguistic diversity” of the contemporary society in which our students will grow up, live and work in (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 5).

There is no argument in any of the research literature that ‘linguistic’ semiotic systems and learning to code and decode written language do not constitute a key facet of literacy, however literacy across *multiple modes* – identified by Bull and Anstey as ‘linguistic’, ‘visual’, ‘gestural’, ‘spatial’ and ‘aural’ (2007) – is widely acknowledged as being required in contemporary society. The question therefore is one of balance, and debates about the balance of attention given to various semiotic systems in the English classroom can be seen to align with broader debates about what the function of schooling should be in the 21st century. While the ‘cultural-heritage’ function of schooling identified by Hunter that was discussed at the outset of this chapter may appear compromised in an English curriculum that embraces multiliteracies, as traditional content is lessened to make way for newer content, the role that schools play in providing ‘human-capital’ and a ‘skilled’ workforce is also reflected here. Although “moral panics proliferate about the perceived loss of foundational skills in the net generation” (McWilliam & Dawson, 2008, p.4) the growth of the knowledge economy and the increasingly iconographic and screen-based nature of everyday reading (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, p.14) demands an increase in skills across multiple literacies. In the next section I discuss in greater detail the nature and influence of the traditional western literary canon, and how debates over its role and importance in the curriculum intersect with these wider concerns about literacy and text.

2.3.3 The influence of the canon

The extent to which curriculum content should focus on the teaching of literature that has been officially acknowledged for its ‘greatness’, such as from a recognised list, or ‘canon’ of work is a prominent area of contention relating to the content of English curriculum, whether framed as a factor in finding a balance in content, or as a means for enculturation that will ‘regulate’ the populace. Mathew Arnold famously argued that we could escape our difficulties by pursuing “culture”: that as a society we could pursue “total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world” (Arnold, 1869, Preface). Such a pursuit, however, demands that choices be made about what constitutes the body of works that exhibit ‘the best which has been thought and said’, and the development of such a canon involves people or groups exercising their power and authority in determining what is worth reading and knowing about. While the term ‘canon’ was originally used to refer to books that had officially been chosen by the Church for inclusion in the Bible, the source of authority for a ‘literary canon’ is not as clear-cut. As Eagleton puts it, “the so-called ‘literary canon’, the unquestioned ‘great tradition’ of the ‘national literature’, has to be recognised as a *construct*, fashioned by particular people for particular reasons at a certain time” (1983, p.11).

Notable attempts to create literary canons (for example, Bloom, 1994) have been criticised for their narrowness, particularly their lack of contributions by and representation of the perspectives of the lower classes, women and non-white authors (Maybin, 2000). Attempts to come to terms with the limitations of a canon are reflected in the way in which the term ‘literary canon’ is often further qualified as being a ‘western literary canon’, to acknowledge the deliberate lack of cultural diversity in a list that is intended to be representative of the key ideas and attitudes in western (often

English) history. In addition to criticisms that the canon is too culturally exclusive, the confinement of the canon to traditional textual forms (in particular to written works of fiction, drama and poetry) has also been met with disapproval from those who value a wider variety of textual forms. With the rise of electronic media over the past few decades and the growing acceptance of multiliteracies in the English classroom, the traditional composition of the canon as being exclusively of printed material has also been challenged.

It is for these reasons that, in his overview of the concept of the canon, Pope (2002) describes the “assumption or assertion that ‘the canon’ (singular and definitive) has always simply been ‘there’, a universal and timeless entity, is a convenient but misleading myth” (p.187). Prescribed reading lists, however, continue to feature works from the western literary canon in the English curriculum both in Australia and abroad. In his discussion of the prescribed reading list in the U.K. National Curriculum for English, Benton describes how “school English has been corseted in a National Curriculum which has no qualms about spelling out who it regards as the ‘major’ and ‘high quality’ authors worthy of study” (2000, p.269). This is despite long standing recognition that “any definition of literary heritage in terms of specific books or authors distorts the cultural significance of a literary tradition by failing to recognise that what the Great Books offer is a continuing dialogue on the moral and philosophical questions central to the culture itself” and the proposition that “contemporary thought is of foremost importance” (Applebee, 1974, pp.247-8)

In her account of the historical construction of and contemporary challenges to the canon, Maybin (2000) explains the impact of the Leavisite model on extending the canon to the prose novel, which, until Leavis’ publication of *The Great Tradition* (1948), had “held a rather tenuous place in the literary heritage, in comparison with

poetry and drama” (p.185). Although a tracking of English curriculum theory since the rise of Leavisite literary criticism reveals a move away from philosophies that treat literary texts as “independent, self-contained objects, with a fixed meaning and literary essence waiting to be discovered by the skilful reader”, Maybin argues that “The [Leavisites] most significant contributions to the development of the subject were their establishment of a canon that has influenced syllabuses ever since, and a form of literary criticism that has become the chief method for studying literature in school and university” (2000, p.185). However, while acknowledgement of the novel as a valid literary form and the use of literary criticism might persist in the academic disciplines this legacy must be reconciled with knowledge about the need for curriculum to operate as what Applebee (1996) calls culturally significant ‘domains of conversation’. That is, when curriculum is viewed as a process of conversation between the individual and various traditions of knowing, then potential fields of activity (such as literary criticism) must “foster students’ entry into living traditions of knowledge-in-action rather than static traditions of knowledge-out-of-context” (Applebee, 1996, p.5). This ‘knowledge-in-action’ requires more than an adoption of respect for the prose novel and methods of literary criticism; because knowledge-in-action requires ‘tacit knowledge’, students must be empowered to become involved with the traditions themselves, to speak back to them, and to become participants in the formation of discourse.

Much work has been done on the relationship between knowledge and power, and the ways in which the sanctioning of ‘official’ knowledge has led to the endorsement and perpetuation of dominant discourses in education and society. Poststructuralist theorists (see for example Foucault 1969) as well as sociologists of education (see for example Apple, 1997; Teese, 2000) have argued that social oppression is perpetuated through the silencing of ‘other’ knowledge and the limitations placed on people’s capacity to

explore multiple understandings of mainstream knowledge. Foucault's call to "question those divisions or groupings with which we have become so familiar" (Foucault, 1969) invites an exploration of the 'familiar groupings' that are found not only in the actual 1999 HSC English syllabus (in terms of its rationale, objectives and outcomes), but also in the related curriculum materials including the prescribed text list.

While debates about which texts should be considered for inclusion in a literary canon will continue to take place, discussion of the way in which these texts are then treated as part of an English curriculum should be framed by more explicit thinking about the necessary and desired functions of schooling, such as those identified by Hunter earlier in this chapter. While the *cultural-heritage* function of schooling, for example, may call for young people to be introduced to the ways of thinking and acting that have existed and been valued over time, the *pastoral* function of schooling also calls for caring and humane environments in school in which to grow and develop (which may imply in this case the use of texts from children's own experience, and which they will enjoy), and the function of developing *individual expression* requires schooling to provide a context in which individuals can learn to explore, develop, and express their personal goals and aspirations (which may not relate to their cultural heritage).

Attention must be paid to this diverse range of functions when considering the selection of texts for study in the English classroom, in order that judgements about 'worthy' or 'valuable' texts are closely linked to visions of the type of schooling we are aiming to provide, rather than decontextualised arguments about the nature or value of the literary canon itself. It is also essential to consider the relationship between content and pedagogy – while texts from the canon might provide students with a means to access 'cultural heritage' this is not necessarily to say that their study of canonical (or any other) texts should be uncritical. In the following section of this chapter I discuss the

significance of critical literacy pedagogy, and explore some of the ways in which it has been conflated with ideas about postmodernism and ‘the aesthetic’.

2.3.4 Critical Literacy

The notion of promoting *critical literacy* and the adoption of various forms of critical classroom pedagogy has proven a controversial issue for critics of contemporary English teaching, and for educators working in the field of English curriculum. Borne out of the emancipatory counter-culture of the post-1960s (Medway, 1990) and related concerns about the socio-cultural dimensions of schooling, the practice of critical literacy involves the analysis of discourses within a text and the adoption of a questioning attitude toward these. In this review of background literature relating to critical literacy I explore the inter-related relationship of ‘critical’ literacy to other constructions of literacy, identify the position of critical literacy in the current NSW curriculum, and address the main criticisms of this discourse that have been put forward.

In an analysis of meanings of literacy in North America, Britain and Australasia, Lankshear (1998) describes major constructions of literacy that appear in contemporary educational reform proposals. The first two categories of literacy construction identified – what Lankshear terms the ‘lingering basics’ and the ‘new basics’ – reflect ideas and debates that have been discussed here in previous sections on literacy and multiliteracies. While *lingering* basics (or ‘basic literacy’) is “framed in terms of mastering the building blocks of code breaking”, *new* basics approaches recognise the insufficiencies of decontextualised functional competencies in a post-industrial, information/services economy. More sophisticated, “abstract, symbolic-logical capacities” are seen as more necessary than in the past, and this includes the capacity to use higher order skills to think critically for the purposes of “analysis, solving problems

and drawing conclusions” (Lankshear, 1998, pp.357-359). Here the concepts of critical thinking and communication are intertwined.

In another category of literacy construction termed ‘elite literacies’, Lankshear explores further the conceptualisation of critical literacy within educational reform. Elite literacies are described as comprising “high level mastery of subject or discipline literacies” and the resulting “command of the language and literature of subject disciplines enables critique, innovation, variation, diversification and refinement when applied to work” (ibid. p.360). One feature of critical literacy viewed as a component of *elite* literacy, however, is that:

...the *critical* dimension of knowledge work is valued mainly, if not solely, in terms of value-adding economic potential. This, however, is critical analysis and critical judgement directed toward innovation and improvement *within* the parameters of a field of enterprise, rather than criticism in larger terms that might hold the field and its applications and effects, or an enterprise and its goals, up to scrutiny. (Lankshear, 1998, p.361)

In making this observation, Lankshear identifies a major point of difference that arises in debates about critical literacy. While the notion of critical *thinking* in itself is seen as a positive skill to develop, other meanings and intentions that are attached to critical literacy theory can be viewed as either liberating and empowering, or alternatively, as inherently ‘left-wing’ threats of resistance against established institutions and dominant cultures.

The act of challenging the meaning of a text through critical reading takes the form of textual deconstruction, where readers identify the presumed centre of a text – the values and ideologies displayed by the author – and then ‘decentre’ these to draw attention to figures, events or materials that have been marginalised or ignored. Pope explains that:

There is, strictly, no ‘end’ or ultimate ‘point’ to the process of de- and recentring: there are always multiple absences which will help us realise a presence. Nor is there just one gap or silence which can be detected within the noisy fabric of a text. The value of such an activity, however, is that it encourages us to grasp texts **creatively** as well as critically. We weigh what they are or seem to say in relation to what they are not or might have said differently. (Pope, 2002, p.169)

Such acts of reading encourage the development of what Graham Parr has called a ‘culture of critique’, where a diversity of approaches and interpretations “open up interactions rather than...close down or simplify meanings” (Parr, 2001, p.159).

You will recall the explanation in section 2.3.1 that contemporary models of literacy involve the necessary inter-relation of critical dimensions of literacy with resources that engage operational and cultural practices (as theorised by Green, 1988/2002; Freebody and Luke, 1990/1999). Therefore, in addition to promoting a ‘culture of critique’, another advantage of critical literacy practices that has been theorised is their potential to draw in other aspects of learning about language. As Janks further argues, close critical reading involves the use of discourse analysis, which is not possible without explicit engagement with grammar in context (Janks, 2005). While operational and critical literacy can theoretically be combined in literacy learning however, teachers taking up a critical literacy approach “evidently feel marginalised by the reductivist strictures of mass standardised literacy testing” (Howie, 2002, p.46). This experience in Australia is also reported abroad, for example in the U.K. where “exam-based assessment, the teachers argue, has led to a narrowing of the curriculum and the adoption of pedagogical practices...which are inimical to the teachers’ conception of ‘good practice’ in English teaching” (Bousted, 2000, p.14).

Reviewing the ways in which critical literacy is actually represented in the official English curriculum documents from six Australian State Education Departments, Winch (2007) establishes that all states consider ‘literacy’ as *including the ability to respond critically to texts*, although some avoid direct use of the term. NSW is one state that was found to engage directly with critical literacy, naming it clearly and justifying its value at all stages of schooling. The NSW K-6 English syllabus for example mandates that students are involved in “questioning, challenging and evaluating texts” in order to “perceive how texts position readers to take particular view of people and events” (Board of Studies NSW, 1998b, p.5). The NSW 7-10 English syllabus similarly details that critical literacy involves “an understanding of the ways in which values and attitudes are communicated through language, including how subject matter, point of view and language embody assumptions about gender, ethnicity and class” (Board of Studies NSW, 2002, p.79). The inclusion of such descriptions show that “while there is debate about critical literacy in the public domain, the relatively private domain of curriculum statements has accepted that students need critical literacy skills to develop their ability to read well” (Winch, 2007, p.53). Such descriptions also show that, in the stated curriculum at least, critical literacy in Australia is conceptualised as more than what Lankshear would term an ‘elite literacy’ practice, but as an empowered way of reading where cultural constructs, gaps and silences are questioned and challenged.

More recently, concerns about the classroom experience of critical literacy have been articulated by Wendy Morgan and Ray Misson, theorists who have historically been influential advocates of critical literacy in Australia. These theorists share a concern that, while the aims of critical literacy pedagogy remain sound, the lived reality of critical literacy in the classroom has led to a neglect of the ‘aesthetic’ – of both aesthetic texts and aesthetic reading practices – and a neglect of the development of readers who

are disposed to receive and take pleasure in aesthetic works. While critical reading involves the reader adopting a questioning attitude, Morgan and Misson argue that this has seen to be unfairly applied to texts, in particular to poems, that are intended to be received aesthetically, explaining that when “a text has features that are characteristic of the aesthetic [these] become significant only if a reader comes along who recognises the signals and so undertakes a particular reading of the text” (2006, p.39).

In response to such claims that critical literacy has diminished or compromised engagement with aspects of the aesthetic, including reading for pleasure, Howie recounts experiences from his own classroom, explaining the pleasure that students took in exploring intertextuality and exercising Bakhtin’s notions of the dialogic nature of language (2008, p.70). Howie also refers to Pope’s definition (cited earlier in this section), which frames critical literacy as a means to ‘grasp texts **creatively** as well as critically’, by opening up possibilities for reading, and argues that Morgan and Mission’s denigration of critical literacy is inadequate as it denies the realities of curriculum realisation. In doing so their criticism of aesthetic neglect places the supposed ‘failings’ of critical literacy on teachers’ ‘clumsiness’, ‘misunderstanding’, political dogmatism and lack of comfort with traditional literary works (Howie, 2008, p.74). Howie argues that this view of a failing critical literacy project, neglectful of the aesthetic, is a manifestation of “a familiar and conservative trope: the spectral notion of a ‘golden age’” (ibid) which engages a misplaced sense of mourning and does little to take into account the voices and realised experiences of teachers and students.

In focus group discussions with literacy teachers Graham Parr encountered another tension, also related to classroom practice within democratic critical pedagogy, where teachers struggled to negotiate a curriculum approach that was open to different ideas and perspectives, but within which the teacher’s position in the classroom remained one

of authority and strong influence. However, while Parr acknowledges “the risk of talking democratically and acting autocratically”, he also makes a strong argument for the need to nevertheless “resist the seduction of certainty as a refuge for intellectual engagement” and to “refuse the call to accept reductive versions of literacy” (Parr, 2001, p.159). It is this ‘seduction of certainty’ which, fundamentally, critical literacy development enables students and teachers alike to resist, and in doing so it is linked closely with the *post-modern* agenda of breaking down boundaries, exploring intertextuality and problematising subjectivities (Green, 1995). In the next section of this chapter I discuss more closely the impact of postmodern theory on the English curriculum, in particular in relation to the use of literary theory, which has emerged as a widespread tool for critical reading in the senior curriculum especially.

2.3.5 Literary theory and the postmodern turn

As explained above, critical reading was one of the significant additions to the study of texts in post-1960s English curriculum, and one that came about as a means for problematising subjectivities, usually through the analysis of dominant discourses in texts and the ways in which these might operate to suppress or devalue marginalised discourses. One of the tools for such analyses is the engagement with various literary theories and the method of ‘reading’ a text through certain theoretical lenses:

Feminist and post-colonial readings and writings have called into question the Leavisite canon’s assumptions of cultural and moral excellence, its view of literature and its promotion of particular ways of reading. Their arguments about the importance of readings ‘against the text’, reflect a more general shift in ideas about communication, which has been occurring over the last thirty years, alongside widespread questioning of established notions of culture, value and tradition. (Maybin, 2000, p.190)

Green attributes the post-1960s growth of interest in marginal constituencies (such as the feminist movement and various ethnic groupings) to the development of new forms of identity, the “release of hitherto suppressed and constrained social energies”, and a new “politics of subjectivity” (Green, 1995, p.393). The emergence of ‘youth’ as a distinctive social force also contributed to the change in identity politics, and Green cites Medway’s account (1990) of how the resulting “increased focus on the media and the peer group as in influential forces in socialisation”, which were and remain “oppositional...to mainstream culture and the established social order” (Green, 1995, p.395) were viewed as dangerous and threatening due to their role in realigning social relations of power. These significant social, cultural and political shifts were reflected in the school system at large, and in the English curriculum specifically by the shift away from traditional *literary* studies toward a model of *cultural* studies that involved a heightened engagement with notions of rhetoric and textuality as well as an increased valuing of popular culture texts.

The broadening of the content to be studied in English from the traditional, canonical definition of ‘literature’ to encompass ‘texts’ from the media, from youth and popular culture, and other everyday contexts can therefore be viewed as a response to changes in more general social beliefs about the functions of schooling, such as those referred to earlier in this chapter. In particular this would have involved significant shifts in discourse surrounding what Hunter terms the ‘regulative’ and ‘political’ functions of schooling, as the ‘preferred political principles of the society’ and the type of citizen and populace that schools were aiming to produce underwent radical change. Hunter’s framework asserts that schools in Australia historically have had a regulatory function requiring the transmission of forms of orderliness and control, and in this light the adoption of cultural studies within the English curriculum reflects the *negotiation* of

control within new paradigms, rather than an *abandonment* of control and orderliness. The interrelation between functions of schooling is also demonstrated in this case, as changes to the dominant discourses of control were adapted to accommodate a new set of political principles, including an explicitly egalitarian approach to pleasure and empowerment.

In his explanation of the ‘point’ of literary theory, Thomson claims a need for teachers to “ask questions about the purpose and value of the things we habitually do in classrooms”, which includes interrogating our naturalised “intentions with our students in teaching literature the way the Higher School Certificate English papers direct us to” (Thomson, 1992, p.7). To further his argument that everything that a teacher does is informed by some theory of learning, whether they realise it or not, he cites Selden:

Readers may believe that theories and concepts will only deaden the spontaneity of their response to literary works. They may forget that ‘spontaneous’ discourse about literature is unconsciously dependent on the theorising of older generations. Their talk of ‘feeling’, ‘imagination’, ‘genius’, ‘sincerity’ and ‘reality’ is full of dead theory which is sanctified by time and has become part of the language of common sense. (Selden, 1985, p.3)

Thomson goes on to provide an overview of what he identifies as the major contemporary literary theories that have significance for use in the English classroom; Expressive Realism (including ‘Leavisite’ criticism), New Criticism, Reception Theory, Psychoanalytical Theory, Structuralism, Post-Structuralism, Feminism, and Political Criticism. Using classroom examples Thomson shows how these theories can act as lenses, not only to enable students to *read against* the text and de-naturalise the discourses presented, but also through which students can gain a *reflexive understanding* of their own reading processes. Recalling concerns presented by Morgan

and Misson in the previous section of this chapter, this argument by Thomson forms another explanation as to how critical reading and a postmodern focus on textuality can result in an enhancement of the reading process, even of taking pleasure in the aesthetic, as students develop reflexive reading practices rather than unconsciously adopting ‘dead theory’ merely because it has been ‘sanctified by time’.

The application of critical readings to texts set for study appears in the HSC English syllabus for the Advanced course in Module B: ‘Critical study of texts’. Although the critical study of a variety of perspectives is not mandated in the Standard English course, critical readings of this nature may be applied at point of need throughout junior and senior English studies as a means to meet other overarching learning outcomes. The difficulty, however, that many teachers of the HSC Advanced course experienced in applying a perceived number of readings to a set text within the time frame set for study of Module B is documented in an official statement by the English Teachers’ Association in NSW (2007), who described the issue of critical reading as being “fraught with controversy” due to incorrect perceptions about there being a number and type of readings that must be covered. The ETA statement refers teachers to sections of the syllabus and to excerpts from examiners reports to show that “the notion that a set of potential readings of the text based on specific ideological approaches (Marxist, feminist etc.) is being encouraged by the course is specifically contradicted by both the syllabus and the examiners’ reports” (2007, p.2).

Misunderstandings about how literary theory could be applied in Module B of the HSC Advanced English course were significant enough to require an official response from the NSW Board of Studies, who state clearly that Module B principally “is designed to nurture enjoyment and appreciation of significant texts” and that practices that involve “discussing and evaluating notions of context and the perspectives of others amplifies

the exploration of the ideas in the text, enabling a deeper and richer understanding” (2008, p.1). In response to difficulties faced by teachers attempting to develop their critical pedagogy in a way that does not restrict deep, personal engagement with the set text – the very issue that Morgan and Misson had found to be problematic – the ETA official statement offers a model very similar to Howie’s framework (2005b) that applies the concept of frames, in order that research into the perspectives of others is always returned to further inform a *personal* reading of the text.

The constant reiteration from both the ETA and the Board of Studies, however, that Module B is clearly described in the Advanced English syllabus as requiring the rigorous development of a personal perspective on the integrity of a text might suggest that pressure felt by teachers to ‘cram in’ or ‘tack on’ a number of predefined literary theories had come from other areas of the curriculum. Specifically, the fact that six out of the ten pages of the Board of Studies support document is dedicated to an Appendix modelling the assessment of student work in Module B signals that issues relating to assessment provided a significant amount of pressure. In the following and final section of this chapter I turn to the examination and assessment of English and explore the impact of issues in this area on shaping content and pedagogy.

2.3.6 Examination and Assessment

While our definitions of what the subject ‘English’ is have shifted over the years, it is worthwhile considering whether attitudes to examination and assessment have shifted as much, especially considering the reported impact of standardised exam-based assessment on the realised delivery of the intended curriculum and the construction of student identity (cf. Gale & Densmore, 2000; Kohn, 1999). The assessment and reporting of learning is one major way in which the school system retains power over the knowledge that students are deemed to have acquired (Foucault, 1977), in particular

when ‘technicist’ forms of assessment such as traditional written exams are employed as these tend to “concentrate upon a narrow view of student achievement” (Marsh, 1997, p.56). In this final area of commonly contested territory I overview these broad ideas about the role of assessment and examination in the school system, as well as more specific thinking about the NSW curriculum landscape and about assessment in HSC English.

In a research project looking at the link between examinations and inequality in Australia in particular, Teese (2000) explores the ways in which choices about syllabuses and their examination result in increased social power for a privileged group that are more likely to gain academic success. The research project documented the way in which students with the “fewest family advantages entered schools with the fewest facilities and encountered the least experienced staff” (p.31) resulting in a low level of academic security for such students. Teese also argues the existence of a ‘curriculum hierarchy’, in which it is not just “any subjects that occupy the top levels of the curriculum, but those that give the greatest play to the economic power, cultural outlook and life-styles of the most educated populations” (p.197).

In the specific case of English, and of particular interest for research examining the NSW HSC English syllabus and its inclusion of a broader range of texts for study, Teese argues that the removal of canonical texts from the curriculum does not “free students from the cultural world in which Shakespeare was venerated” (p.45). Examination requirements themselves can also be seen as discriminating between “sophisticated” and “pedestrian” styles of written response (a phenomenon that is also explored in the work of Rosser, 2002), preferring responses that demonstrate not just a mastery of skills and content knowledge, but also showcase creativity and moral sensibility. Green makes a similar point in his discussion of the influence of

postmodernism on advancing English teaching for critical consciousness and change, explaining that “the emergence of a more radically and socially-critical version of English teaching along these lines is still linked to particular, and arguably limited, understanding of culture and society” (Green, 1995, p.405).

Resources such as the OECD scenarios for future schooling discussed at the outset of this chapter provide one avenue for holistically pursuing curriculum change that is firmly embedded in a larger plan for system-wide change. Each of the six scenarios created by the OECD include description of four integral facets of schooling: ‘learning and organisation’; ‘management and governance’; ‘resources and infrastructure’; and ‘teachers’. Decisions relating to assessment in schooling fall under the area of *learning and organisation*, and systems where “curriculum and qualifications are central ideas of policy, and student assessments are key elements of accountability” (OECD, 2001b, p.1) are described as part of the bureaucratic school system that forms the ‘status quo’ (scenario 1a). In this scenario the bureaucracy encourages uniformity, and is resistant to radical change – this is consistent with the findings of Green and Teese who identify curriculum hierarchies surrounding both content and assessment as barriers to realising change in the English curriculum.

While technicist forms of assessment such as traditional written examinations and mass standardised assessment are currently embedded in the educational landscape, diversity in student achievement is recognised through other discourses in assessment policy, for example in employing a distinction between *summative* and *formative* assessment. NSW curriculum and policy documents refer to these as ‘assessment *of* learning’, and ‘assessment *for* learning’ respectively and these terms are defined by the Curriculum Corporation:

Assessment of learning is assessment for accountability purposes, to determine a student's level of performance on a specific task or at the conclusion of a unit of teaching and learning. The information gained from this kind of assessment is often used in reporting.

Assessment *for* learning, on the other hand, acknowledges that assessment should occur as a regular part of teaching and learning and that the information gained from assessment activities can be used to shape the teaching and learning process.

(Curriculum Corporation, , website accessed May 18, 2006)

This distinction however, while shifting the focus of certain forms of assessment to acts of learning rather than accountability, does not address concerns about curriculum hierarchy, or of narrow (academic) visions for the aims of schooling.

Another important contribution to the field of assessment discourse is the notion of authentic learning, or authentic assessment. In exploring what implications this approach has to curriculum, Marsh explains that “authentic assessment encompasses far more than what students learn as measured by standardised tests or even by ordinary teacher-made tests. Authenticity arises from assessing what is most important, not from assessing what is most convenient.” (1997, p.56) Students who are learning in an environment of authenticity will undertake tasks that are more context-bound and more practical than formal exams, and which focus on challenging students by requiring analysis, integration of knowledge and invention (Darling-Hammond, Aness, & Falk, 1995). Authentic assessment practices most closely align with the learning and organisation features of the OECDs scenario of ‘Re-schooling’, where more explicit attention is given to non-cognitive outcomes, and there is a strong emphasis on non-formal learning (scenario 2a) and quality norms replace regulatory approaches (scenario 2b). It also features in the first ‘De-schooling’ scenario (3a) where learning networks

are focused on local community needs, however social inequalities are predicted in the second of these scenarios (3b) where the market determines a new educational hierarchy.

In NSW the *Quality Teaching Framework* is provided as a model for planning and reflecting on curriculum content choices and pedagogy. The framework, which was largely derived from the ‘Productive Pedagogies’ that were developed and implemented in Queensland as a result of longitudinal research on school reform, formally underpins teaching practice in NSW public schools by guiding teachers in the incorporation of a range of pedagogical elements in their ‘Quality Teaching’ practice by focussing on the intellectual quality in a lesson, the development of a quality learning environment, and the significance of the material learned to the lives of students. While the Quality Teaching Framework is presented as a guide to pedagogy, the implications for assessment are that although technicist forms of assessment are not precluded, pedagogic elements such as providing ‘problematic knowledge’, ‘engagement’, ‘student direction’, ‘cultural knowledge’, ‘inclusivity’ and ‘connectedness’ are more closely aligned with authentic assessment practices that flow from authentic, context-bound learning.

Quality Teaching Dimensions	Elements within each Dimension
<p><i>Dimension 1:</i> Intellectual Quality</p>	<p>1.1 Deep Knowledge 1.2 Deep Understanding 1.3 Problematic Knowledge 1.4 Higher-Order Thinking 1.5 Metalanguage 1.6 Substantive Communication</p>
<p><i>Dimension 2:</i> Quality Learning Environment</p>	<p>2.1 Explicit Quality Criteria 2.2 Engagement 2.3 High Expectations 2.4 Social Support</p>

	2.5 Students' Self-Regulation 2.6 Student Direction
<i>Dimension 3:</i> Significance	3.1 Background Knowledge 3.2 Cultural Knowledge 3.3 Knowledge Integration 3.4 Inclusivity 3.5 Connectedness 3.6 Narrative

TABLE 7: DIMENSIONS AND ELEMENTS WITHIN THE QUALITY TEACHING FRAMEWORK (NSW DET, 2003)

Such aims to provide a quality learning environment in NSW stand in stark contrast to accounts of high-stakes testing in international contexts. In an account of assessment in the context of the 1970s, Dixon explains that in the U.K. especially “the tradition...is for preparation for the specialised uses of language demanded by the examination to be fed back into the normal course...the examination itself begins to look quite normal, and English becomes a weird kind of game”, and he also quotes an observation made by Walter Loban at the 1966 Dartmouth Conference: “the curriculum in the secondary school inevitably shrinks to the boundaries of evaluation; if your evaluation is narrow and mechanical, this is what the curriculum will be” (Dixon, 1975, p.93).

In more recent research on English teachers' rhetoric and practice, Boustead confirms that English teachers in the U.K. continue to view timed examinations as “[limiting] the opportunities for pupils to formulate a personal response to a literary text” (2000, p.13). Teachers interviewed and observed for the study also argue that exam-based assessment had led to the adoption of poor pedagogical practices, such as rote learning and the concentration on a narrow range of curriculum content (2000, p.14). Research by Darling-Hammond in the U.S. found that even when authentic assessment practices such as *performance-based* rather than standardised testing were employed, the continued use of assessment results to ‘sort students and sanction schools’ rather than to

‘support student-centred teaching’ resulted in the perpetuation of social inequity (Darling-Hammond, 1994, p.25).

Whether authentic learning and assessment, and a balance of assessment *for* and *of* learning is something that is realised in the NSW HSC English classroom to support student-centred teaching is one aspect of the curriculum explored later in this dissertation through analysis of the collected data. Recent research on Year 12 students in NSW by Ayres, Sawyer and Dinham suggests that high-stakes examinations do *not* inhibit best-practice teaching, as generating understanding of the subject remains teachers’ paramount concern. This research however only involved the observation and interview of teachers of high-achieving Year 12 students (those scoring in the top 1% of the state in particular subjects), therefore, while it may be concluded that effective teaching takes place in NSW despite the high-stakes assessment environment, it is essential to consider the effects of this environment on students who do not achieve as highly.

In relation to English specifically it is significant that an account of English examinations such as Dixon’s from over 30 years ago would still come close to accurately describing the current HSC English exam, in which students complete six questions over two written exams lasting two hours each:

The range of English activities covered by present methods of examining in the U.K. and the U.S. is extremely narrow: talk and listening is often simply excluded, and drama almost always omitted...literature is examined but the texts are not available, unseen poems may not be read aloud, an eighteen-year-old in the U.S. is given 20 minutes for a composition and in the U.K. three major essays are demanded in three hours. (Dixon, 1975, pp.92-93)

Concerns about assessment and examination therefore must be considered both in relation to their impact on pedagogy, and in terms of the adequacy of the actual examination methods utilised in realising the stated purposes of the English curriculum in the senior years of high school.

To conclude this section I return to Teese's observations of the ways in which perceptions about the ideal student are shaped by the demands of the formal examinations they are required to take. Teese argues that formal exams in Australia have required students to 'project an image...of the young scholar-intellectual' (2000` p.4) as "examiners have unfailingly demanded [academic] qualities [e.g. abstraction and concentration, sensitivity to form and structure, logical and retentive abilities, and maturity of perspective and argument], whatever the circumstances under which real students have learnt" (2000, p.194). His findings also show a relationship between the image of the ideal student informing the nature of school examinations and attributes of higher socio-economic status, as "...elements of the scholarly disposition...are linked closely to an educated life-style and arise from the continuous and informal training given by families rather than explicit and methodical instruction in school" (2000, p. 5). By interrogating ideals that are constructed in both public and professional discourses, the research in this thesis will reflect on the functions of schooling and possible futures that are implied in the current HSC English curriculum.

2.4 Conclusion

This overview of the historical and theoretical positions and tensions that shape English curriculum and pedagogy has identified the key areas of continuity and change within the subject since its formation over a century ago. It can be seen that views about *language*, *literature* and, more recently *literacy*, heavily intersect, and that productive and generative models have been theorised to provide English teachers with a repertoire

of practices to engage students in reflecting on, sharing and imagining experience, as well as promoting positive interaction and social change. Contemporary perspectives on English situate the subject as “not so much an identifiable field of study but a range of practices which contribute to the formation of a particular kind of person that societies have found they needed, and which English is able to help produce” (Peel, Patterson, & Gerlach, 2000, pp.17-18).

In the next chapter I will review of research literature that deals specifically with the 1999 HSC English syllabus, in order to locate dialogue and debate that has already taken place about the version(s) of English that are constructed in the syllabus, and identify areas that will be explored in my own research and reported on in this thesis.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

The HSC framework for teaching and assessment in Stage 6 (Years 11 and 12) has been in place in New South Wales within wider reforms to secondary school curricula and examinations since the implementation of what is popularly known as the Wyndham scheme. Since its official approval in 1965, the Wyndham HSC syllabus – and the modifications made to it, most notably in 1974/6 and 1988 – has been analysed and reviewed by many researchers, most comprehensively in the doctoral theses of Brock (1984) and Michaels (2001a). A significant contribution to the study of the secondary English syllabus was also made by Sawyer (2002a) whose doctoral thesis focused on the year 7-10 syllabus. These analyses have involved complete investigations of broad issues concerning syllabus development and content, such as those discussed in the previous chapter. To date, however, there have only been a few reviews taken of the 1999 HSC English syllabus, all of which have been limited in scope, and it is filling this perceptible gap in the literature that the present thesis will take up as its primary objective.

This literature review describes the findings of other research projects, position papers and commentaries that have reported specifically on aspects of HSC English in NSW, in order to locate this dissertation within the existing research. The primary focus in this chapter will be to review the contributions made by O’Sullivan, Manuel, and the NSW English Teachers’ Association (ETA) to the current understanding of the 1999 HSC English syllabus. This will be followed by an account of other pieces of research and response that deal with isolated aspects of the syllabus, and a review of other research in

the field pertaining to general questions of text selection and assessment practices in the HSC.

3.1 Significant reviews of the 1999 HSC English syllabus

While there has been a small amount of literature produced that assesses the ‘New HSC’ as a whole (the largest of which is the ACER-led *Masters Review* of HSC examination procedures conducted in 2002), there has been a stark absence of comprehensive work produced in response to the 1999 HSC English syllabus as a specific subject. This trend is of great concern especially considering that English remains the only compulsory subject for study in the senior years of high school in NSW. At the time of writing twelve years have passed since the introduction of the syllabus, but, with the exception of some attention by O’Sullivan (2005), no extensive investigations have been made in relation to the philosophy that informs the syllabus, the teaching and learning strategies embedded in it, or the implications of the assessment and examination procedures required within it.

While the thesis produced by O’Sullivan (2005) has provided insight into teachers’ perceptions and practices in relation to the HSC syllabus, there remains a need for a broader exploration of the pressures that were and continue to be applied by various stakeholders to the development and implementation of the syllabus. Given Hunter’s research on the genealogy of schooling functions discussed in the previous chapter, such a broad exploration is desirable not only as a way of ascertaining the contemporary economic, cultural and social conditions that are reflected in the syllabus, but also as a means for reflection on whether the syllabus forms part of a curriculum for English that meets the needs of students and society more generally. Although some contributions

have been made by way of submissions to professional journals and the presentation of conference papers, there have been only two other reviews besides that undertaken by O'Sullivan's of the impact of the syllabus in either the theoretical or practical sense. These are a survey of members that was administered by the NSW English Teachers Association, and a state-wide survey of English Head Teachers conducted by Manual, both of which were reported on in 2002.

3.1.1 O'Sullivan's research into English teachers' experiences

The most thorough study that has been conducted to date on any area of the 1999 HSC syllabus is the doctoral research completed by O'Sullivan in 2005. O'Sullivan's research method used grounded theory to analyse a combination of survey and interview data collected during 2001 of teachers' perspectives on the new syllabus to investigate "the nature of the discourses and practices of teachers" who were implementing the new syllabus, as well as "the implications of [her] analysis for theories of curriculum change" (O'Sullivan, 2005, p.1). O'Sullivan cites Hargreaves in arguing that "in much of the writing on teaching and teachers' work, teachers' voices have either been curiously absent, or been used as mere echoes for preferred and presumed theories of educational researchers" (Hargreaves, 1994, p.4), and it is important to note that one of her key findings was that "closer attention needs to be paid to teachers' voices, and how they view their subject and their sense of self in relation to it" (2005, *abstract*) in order for curriculum change to be successfully adopted.

One of the most important findings in O'Sullivan's research regarding teachers' discourses and practices in relation to what was at the time a very new HSC syllabus was that "teachers' impressions that they were implementing the new syllabus often concealed the fact that they were actually just adopting appearances of change" (p.304). High levels of anxiety caused by the introduction of so many new concepts appeared to

have resulted in teachers clinging to older, more familiar practices that were more connected with their professional self concept, while adopting on a superficial level the mandatory requirements for change in the new syllabus. What was interesting about this was that English teachers in this study were also found to have embedded themselves even further in previous discourses and practices the more they tried to come to terms with the curriculum change.

English teachers in the study were also found to have become “depend[ant] on the authority of others to provide practical solutions to alleviate their stress” (p.307) as a reaction to the pressure of coping with the mandated changes to the landscape of their subject. While on one hand their confidence in their own subject pedagogy remained very strong, teachers “desperately [sought] resources authorised by others” (p.277). Such paradoxes were the fundamental findings in O’Sullivan’s work, which recommended that further research ought to be conducted in the area of teachers’ subject constructions and their responses to change, in particular into the way in which teachers “negotiate their own meanings through their personal understandings about what English is as a subject for them, through what the syllabus represents English to be, and through listening to what others have to say about the subject” (p.312). With further research conducted in this area a better understanding of the nature of teachers’ professional identities and the impact of those (constructed) identities on teachers’ work, specifically in the area of curriculum change could be generated.

3.1.2 The NSW English Teachers’ Association (ETA) review

Using a survey that was sent to its members in November 2001, as well as a follow up survey in January 2002, the NSW English Teachers Association (ETA) composed a submission to the review that was being undertaken by Geoff Masters on behalf of the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). Responses to the survey, which

was sent to a membership of approximately 2000 English teachers, demonstrated a great deal of anxiety about the examination of the new English courses. The ETA Response (NSW English Teachers Association, 2002), while acknowledging the difficulties inherent in the administration of a state-wide examination for new courses, especially in their first year of implementation, categorised the most significant problems identified within three key areas of concern:

1. the setting of examination papers;
2. the marking processes; and
3. the calculation of exam results.

While the submission dealt with all levels of the English syllabus – Standard and Advanced, as well as Extension 1 and 2, and English ESL – many of the problems identified were able to be generalised across all of the levels of study.

In relation to the setting of examinations and developing marking guidelines in the new standards environment, the ETA called for the processes used to select Examination Committees and assessors to be made public. Members had particularly expressed a conviction that the proportion of teachers on the Examination Committees should be greater than that of academics, and that the Chair of the Examination Committee should be a practising school teacher, as teachers perceived that “the choice of an academic as Chair of the Committee assumes that teachers are unable to rise above the level of the academic sophistication of their Year 12 students” (pp.1-2). The difficulty of the Standard English examination paper and the parity of questions in Paper 2 of the Standard and Advanced courses were also cited as areas of concern. While the consensus was that Paper 2 of the Standard course was “beyond the capabilities of students undertaking the Standard course” (p.2), teachers also expressed alarm at the inequity *within* the set of questions, with some texts seen as easier to write about than

others, and some questions requiring a more multi-faceted response than others within the same elective.

The procedures for marking the examination and determining the standard of achievement students had demonstrated was the second broad area reported on in the ETA Response. The ETA acknowledged that the “size of the English candidature, the length of the examinations and the nature of the examination answers in English” necessarily made the marking operation “the most complex, fragmented and widespread in the state” (NSW English Teachers Association, 2002, p.5). However, members had criticised the management of this “fragmented” operation, claiming that inconsistencies between marking centres – including the “rigid” application and “narrow” interpretation of marking guidelines in some centres – had resulted in unfair marking of students’ work as well as a diminished credibility for the standards of achievement. Markers spread over 13 marking centres were not given any opportunities to reshape marking criteria that some members argued was not aligned to the assessment rubrics contained in the exam that would have been used by students to identify the criteria required and shape their responses accordingly. Members also expressed concern that personnel from the marking centres had had no input into the development of the assessment guidelines, and that Supervisors of Marking had no formal processes established to meet and ensure the uniform application of those guidelines in the centres. The appropriateness of daytime marking was also questioned, with members expressing concern over the accuracy of marking undertaken by “new and inexperienced markers” (p.7) that had to be employed due to the difficulty staffing daytime positions.

The final broad area of concern identified by the ETA in its response was the issue of the Board’s quality assurance procedures for developing the examinations, marking examination papers and validating results. Many teachers expressed distress and

outrage at the low achievement levels awarded in the Standard course, and at the low numbers of students achieving Band 6 of the Advanced course, especially in light of the high levels achieved by the same students in the Extension 1 exam. Attention was also drawn to the poor achievement levels in English relative to other subjects, citing the 4.35% of students taking the English Advanced course receiving a Band 6 award compared to 11.79%, 8.35%, 11.24% and 81.81% of students achieving Band 6 awards in 2 Unit Mathematics, Modern History, Economics and Classical Greek receiving respectively. In addition to this, the view put forward by members through the ETA was that students had seemed to be rewarded for attempting a higher level of English (the Advanced course) with at least a Band 4 award, whereas too many students of widely varying performance taking the Standard course seemed to have been “pulled down to a Band 3” (p.8).

The concerns raised by the teachers surveyed by the NSW ETA serve not only to demonstrate the level of engagement by teachers in relation to the logistics of external examinations and marking, but also to draw attention to the claims that were being made by English teachers about the lack of fairness and parity in the HSC exams for English. It is of particular significance that this ETA Response to the Masters Review, the first official response to the English syllabus of any kind since the introduction of the ‘new’ HSC, was concerned with matters that could be described as largely industrial in nature, focusing on work and employment conditions of those involved in marking and marking supervision, or on technical aspects of the calculation of students marks. Issues of pedagogy or theoretical and philosophical direction in the examinations are not discussed in the ETA Response – although it must be recognised that the nature of the Masters Review would certainly have required the ETA to tailor their response to the purpose of the review.

3.1.3 Manuel's survey of English Teachers

In a study that collected survey responses from 102 Head Teachers of English in New South Wales (Manuel, 2002), a range of teachers offered differing opinions of the syllabus' relative merits. The Head Teacher responses, which represented the views of over 500 classroom teachers, showed that while overall the majority of teachers (55%) surveyed were either 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the content and philosophy of the syllabus, only 35% were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with its structure (p.75). Respondents frequently commented at any question that allowed them the opportunity that the mandatory requirements for studying prescribed texts resulted in a very limited text choice, as restrictions on the types and number of texts studied in each module effectively cut off many texts from being selected. Criticisms were also made regarding the heavily teacher-directed learning that was necessary as a result of rigid assessment structures and 'content-heavy' courses.

Another common criticism was of the difficulty of the Standard English course, especially for students who would have studied the 'Contemporary' course under the previous syllabus structure. Only half of the respondents indicated that they thought the new syllabus better met the needs of their students, with most of the criticism centring around the difficulty of the Standard course – in terms of the difficulty of the course modules and the texts themselves, as well as the “‘content-heavy’ nature of the syllabus” (p.73). Many again complained that they were “limited in choice by the mandatory requirements for studying the prescribed types of text” (p.72), and although respondents were generally happy with the 'challenging', 'rewarding' and 'rigorous' nature of the Advanced course, some teachers commented that the choice of texts had generally remained too conservative.

The inclusion of film, media and multimedia as text types for study was one of the key changes to the HSC English syllabus, and carried with it both theoretical and practical problems that are reflected in the responses to Manuel's survey. While 97% of respondents indicated they were teaching a range of film and media, most teachers had chosen not to select a multimedia text for study, citing a lack of expertise in the area of teaching multimedia as well as uncertainty about examination expectation. Other respondents who indicated they were *not* offering a film, media or multimedia text cited a lack of school resources and a lack of staff expertise as the primary reasons. The problem of staff expertise here presents as a significant problem, not only in terms of learning the shape and content of a new subject paradigm, but a complete re-skilling of many teachers to be able to deal with new media and new technology.

Although many teachers in Manuel's study found the new syllabus exciting and challenging, there was a definite perception of a lack of sufficient support in terms of professional development and resources, as well as a rushed implementation process. Here again we see teachers' responses to the syllabus entering into the area of industrial issues, with teachers' engagement with theoretical syllabus issues restricted by pressure to implement a new syllabus in a short timeframe with limited resources. While resources were provided by the NSW Board of Studies as well as the Department of Education and Training, teachers reported in the survey that they considered the syllabus support materials to be inadequate, with 65% of respondents expressing a belief that they had been either 'poorly' or 'very poorly' equipped with syllabus support materials. Teachers from rural schools in particular complained of a lack of access to professional development opportunities and material resources.

Teachers responding to Manuel's survey reported a high level of anxiety and uncertainty in particular about having a lack of clear knowledge in relation to the

external examination. With the HSC examination operating in many ways as a “public manifestation of teacher competence” (p.70), teachers had to rely heavily on support materials provided by the Board of Studies and the Department of Education and Training to compensate for the sudden loss of old examination knowledge and experience. This drop in ‘subject capital’ resulted in fear for many teachers that they might not be “teaching the right way” and perhaps letting students down, as well as concern from students over being the “guinea pigs” on which a new and more challenging syllabus was being tested (p.73). This reliance on external resources is interesting to note in conjunction with the finding that teachers surveyed found those resources to be inadequate for supporting the transition or for professional development. In reference to this, Manuel notes that teachers surveyed found the professional development and support materials provided by the professional association (the ETA) played a significant role in preparing teachers for the new courses (p.70).

It is the case that these pieces of research have all provided invaluable insights into the perceptions and practices of teachers, and therefore the usual concern that teachers’ voices are not being heard in educational research has, in the case of the 1999 HSC English syllabus, been avoided. However, what is also clear from the results of these three pieces of research is that industrial issues such as consultation, workload, the provision of material and human resources, professional development and the speed of implementation feature highly on the list of concerns that teachers have reported having about the syllabus. Concerns about the underlying philosophies of English represented in the syllabus, or about the capacity of the syllabus to fulfil broader purposes of schooling, has been neglected. Overall, there is little in the existing research to connect deeper theoretical, philosophical and political issues with the evidence that has been collected of teachers’ practices and beliefs. While teachers as stakeholders have been

the subject of the early research conducted on this syllabus, a consideration of other stakeholders both within the school and the wider community has also been lacking, as has been an exploration of the interplay of public and political pressures on both the development and the implementation of the syllabus. It is these issues of the interplay between different philosophies, interests and pressures that this thesis will seek to examine in an analysis of the HSC syllabus.

3.2 Observations on isolated aspects of the syllabus

In addition to the more comprehensive studies of the NSW ETA, O’Sullivan and Manuel, there are some researchers who have undertaken varying levels of analyses in relation to particular aspects of the 1999 syllabus. While some of this analysis takes place within the context of journal articles written to provide overviews or reflections on more theoretical aspects of the syllabus (Kruse, 2001; Wayne Sawyer, 2002b), one study did conduct a research project to analyse the role of composition in the syllabus (Michaels, 2004). These analyses and observations do not claim to constitute ‘comprehensive’ research findings on the syllabus as a whole, however they do offer some important insights and commentaries on isolated aspects of the new HSC syllabus.

3.2.1 Commentaries on the literary theory reflected in the syllabus

While much of the media debate over the HSC syllabus has been based on the relative merits of the adoption of certain literary theories – in particular on arguments of whether the syllabus has embraced postmodernist philosophies of knowledge – there has been very little engagement on the research front in unpacking the epistemologies that are inherent in the new syllabus. The introduction into the new syllabus of new types of text for study (film, media and multimedia) and the construction of the courses around contextualised studies of thematic ‘modules’ constitute real and significant shifts in the definition of what is studied in English as a HSC subject in NSW. Despite these

theoretical changes, the research conducted to date has focussed largely on issues of practical implementation, and debates about the success or even the nature of the redrawing of theoretical boundaries has been lacking.

In an overview of the separation and assessment of 'English' and 'literacy', Sawyer does observe that "the new [HSC] syllabus broadened the conception of English to include a **cultural studies model** with an accompanying **critical literacy pedagogy**, while retaining the **traditional emphasis on close textual study**" (Wayne Sawyer, 2002b, p.15 my emphasis). Sawyer also describes the "equality" given to the students' 'composing' and 'responding' as a "welcome development", before outlining the objections that had been made by critics of the syllabus, including claims that there had been a "downgrading of the canon" and an "influence of trendy literary theory" (p.15). However, despite the usefulness of Sawyer's descriptions of these changes and challenges to the conception of English, such identifications of the new theoretical framework need to be extended beyond the descriptive. There remains a need for more complex analyses of the way this construction the study of English is reflected in the actual syllabus prescriptions, and of what this construction says about the underlying (albeit renewed) epistemology of the subject.

Another article, written by a member of the Department of English at the University of Sydney, takes up the subject of the effect of postmodern theory on the HSC syllabus in arguing that the New South Wales education system has been very slow to respond to social and cultural change and "catch up with postmodernism" (Kruse, 2001, p.92). Kruse suggests that there ought to be a greater focus on the explicit teaching of literary theory and cultural context to improve students' grasp of the syllabus content, and emphasises that "the rise of theory [in] postmodern culture ... has been essential for the

development of the study of literature as more than an exercise in taste, social status, and uncertain notions about wisdom and illumination” (Kruse, 2001, p.93).

This call for a greater focus on theory is interesting to note, as many of the public critics of the syllabus have objected to the introduction of theory into the HSC English syllabus at all, with many citing the phenomenon of teachers superficially drilling students on ‘Marxist’ or ‘feminist’ readings (for example) to reproduce in their HSC exam. Given the research conducted by O’Sullivan (2005) and Manuel (2002), however, it may be the case that the explicit teaching of theory and theoretical readings has not sat well with a profession that was given so little time to adopt and embody this new approach to the critical study of text. Further study of the content of the syllabus and the practices of teachers in their school context may provide some answers as to whether the syllabus is indeed in need of more theory, as suggested by Kruse (2001), or whether there is enough of a focus on theory in the syllabus, but that it perhaps has not been accessed and implemented by teachers.

3.2.2 The place of composing

One of the central features of the 1999 HSC syllabus was the reframing of the ways in which students and teachers were to think about text through the introduction of the terms *composing* and *responding*. The term ‘responding’ was to refer to the act of reading, listening and viewing, while ‘composing’ described the creation or production of written, spoken or visual texts (Board of Studies NSW, 1999a, p.7). In a study of the Standard and Advanced courses in the 1999 HSC syllabus, as well as the 1999 Extension 2 course and the 2001 Years 7-10 syllabus, Michaels (2004) found that the act of responding was “valorised over composing”, and that composition was “constituted as a mechanical act of production rather than an act of creation” (p.8).

In Michaels' study a content analysis of the syllabus documents found that when the verb 'composing' was used, it was often effectively used to describe a 'response' based activity (for example, the writing of an essay about *King Lear* would be defined as 'composing', when in fact the activity centres around presenting a 'response' to the text). The analysis also found that spoken and visual composition tended to be marginalised, and that of the written forms of composition *personal compositions* in particular did not feature prominently in the Stage 6 syllabus. Even though the word 'explore' was used in the syllabus definition of composing, Michaels found that there was "little [in the syllabus] to stimulate students' use of writing to *explore*, rather than simply *reflect*, their understandings of themselves and their world, and little to encourage originality of composition" (authors italics, p.5). This apparent incongruence between the stated definitions of the syllabus and the actual content of the objectives and outcomes is certainly a cause for concern.

In drawing conclusions Michaels invoked many arguments used by Abbs in promoting the position that the reduction of creative elements in student compositions to functional purpose-driven formulae has led to "a suppression of the spiritual and transcendent", "a suppression of values connected to the common realm", and "the loss of any binding notion of ethical or aesthetic value" (Abbs, 2003, pp.2-3). Such arguments, however, do not seem to necessarily follow, and the desire for a 'binding notion of ethical or aesthetic value' in particular does not seem to be in line with current theory about the interconnectedness of creative and critical endeavour, as I explored in the previous chapter. While Michaels' findings in relation to the privileging of responding over composing and the marginalisation of spoken and visual composition are indeed significant and undoubtedly important to note, it does not necessarily follow that the syllabus is failing to promote the exploration of the ethical, the moral or the spiritual.

Such an argument seems to reinforce traditional binary oppositions where creativity is aligned with processes and with the personal and emotional, while the analytical is aligned with formula, products and a lack of enjoyment. It also seems to align with a ‘cultural heritage’ framework for the study of English that goes beyond the belief that there is good sense in studying the progress and growth of texts and moves into more extreme beliefs about the need to transmit a predetermined set of knowledge and values for students to better themselves.

3.3 Research on texts available for selection

While arguments abound in the media and amongst teachers about the texts that are made available for study in the HSC, only a small amount of research has been conducted that explores the nature of the texts prescribed for study in English. Of the research that has been conducted in the area of HSC text prescription and selection, none of the material to date includes an analysis of the texts prescribed since the implementation of the 1999 syllabus. The findings of research on earlier text prescriptions can, however, provide some insights into what implicit or explicit meanings we might look for in current syllabus documents and classroom practices.

3.3.1 Ideas about what is ‘literary’

In a doctoral study completed in 2000, Rosser conducted an analysis of the HSC texts that were prescribed in syllabi from 1965-1995. The analysis, which included a study of the texts chosen, the approaches to reading and criticism embedded in the syllabus documents, and the values and practices that were reinforced through the HSC exam, concluded that during the 30 years under analysis the syllabus was heavily influenced by ‘Leavisite’ and ‘New Criticism’ perspectives on what constituted valuable literary

works. In relation to the prescribed texts available for study during the period 1965-1995 Rosser's study concluded that the HSC prescribed texts for English were:

but a singular expression of broad cultural and institutional phenomena. Their selection and how they are studied conceal an array of power plays and ideological standpoints that go to the heart of our understanding of what is 'literary' and why it should be so. (Rosser, 2000, p.8)

While this study did not include any exploration of the new HSC or the texts prescribed for the 1999 syllabus, the analysis of what was understood in previous syllabuses to be worthy of study (and of what ways of reading and criticism were considered most valuable) is interesting to note, especially when taken together with Teese's argument that English curricula contain implicit notions of what the 'ideal' English student should be able to do, and in light of his interest in the class implications of such notions (Teese, 2000). If we consider such research, which argues the presence of strong and embedded concepts of the learner and of what is most valuable to learn, we cannot ignore the presence of such ideologies in the current syllabus.

We also cannot ignore that in English, where different texts are prescribed for the Standard and Advanced course, that there could be a perception of hierarchies of texts, and therefore of students and their statuses – that the texts on offer can give us an insight into not only what kind of 'ideal student' is being imagined, but also into the differences between the 'ideal Standard English student' and the 'ideal Advanced English student'. While these concepts will enter into later discussion of text choice in HSC English, what remains is to conduct further research beyond the scope of this thesis to increase the transparency of underlying value systems, and to promote active reflection on (and where necessary, to change) the 'hidden curriculum' of text prescriptions in the new HSC English courses.

3.3.2 Text prescriptions and gender in the new HSC

Another perspective on the selection of texts prescribed for study in the HSC year is offered by Michaels (Michaels, 2001a, 2001b). While Rosser's analysis of HSC texts prescribed from 1965-1990 illuminates the "array of power plays and ideological standpoints" that have acted on our perception of what constitutes a 'literary' text, Michaels' research more specifically explores the gendered nature of pedagogical practice inherent in the different levels of HSC English course from 1953-1994. By applying the two categories of "hegemony" and "subordination" from Connell's framework for categorising different types of masculinity ("hegemony", "subordination", "complicity" and "marginalisation" – (Connell, 1995), Michaels argues that a gendered divide has been evident in the study of HSC English.

As the higher level English courses from 1953-1994 were found to contain more canonical texts for study, Michaels argues that these courses had become constructed as 'feminised' due to the fact that "literary study is perceived as 'unmasculine'" (2001b, p.24). This gendered divide was evident in the ways in which students in higher level courses dealing with more canonical texts were involved in "feminised educational practices" such as taking a compliant reading of the text and self-sacrificing any non-conformist personal reactions to the text (p.29). Conversely, students in lower level English courses were found to be involved in educational practices that more closely aligned with hegemonic masculinity, such as practical and instrumental activity, focusing on public knowledge and allowing for the learner to take control of understanding and constructing meaning from the text.

Michaels reflects on the implications of this research for exploring the perpetuation of this gendered divide through, among other things, the texts that have been prescribed for study under the 1999 HSC syllabus:

An initial glance suggests that while [a semiotic/cultural studies] view of English informs all courses, the differentiation of material in courses in terms of level of difficulty still incorporates some of the notions of the high culture/popular culture divide of the previous syllabuses. This means that knowledge is differentially distributed to the differently constituted groups of students. Thus, for instance, in the Advanced course there is a requirement to study Shakespearean drama but this is not required in the lower courses. (Michaels, 2001b, p.32)

Michaels goes on to suggest that “detailed analysis of the syllabuses will reveal the patterns of distribution of knowledge and its significance both in terms of class and gender”, but that further research needs to be done on the new syllabus to reveal the ways in which students in each of the different HSC courses are subjectified.

3.4 HSC assessment practices, past and present

In any investigation of the curriculum, it is essential to consider the epistemological underpinnings and political ideologies not only of what has been identified in syllabus documents as important for students to be taught, but also of what practices have been constructed to assess student learning. As the 1999 HSC assessment framework represents a significant paradigm shift in terms of moving away from a norm-referenced approach to a standards-based approach, it is worth considering the existing research and debate surrounding the nature of assessment in English, and in particular the assessment practices under both previous and the current HSC syllabuses.

3.4.1 Privileged linguistic styles in previous HSC examinations

In a comprehensive study of HSC examination questions under the ‘pre-2000’ English syllabuses, Rosser (2002) argues that certain linguistic styles in students’ responses to exam questions have always been privileged by HSC markers, and believes that his

research shows some of the ways in which “HSC English marking criteria is more about sanctioning particular enculturation than it is about writing competency” (p.91). Using categories of literature response developed by Purves and Rippere (1968), Rosser analysed the HSC English exam questions from 1980-1989 to determine how many of the questions fell into the overarching categories of Engagement, Perception, Interpretation and Evaluation.

After coding the exam questions from the nominated time period and cross checking this coding with the examiners’ reports, it was established that 69% of exam questions required students to respond within the category of *Perception*, asking students “to analyse, as impersonally and objectively as they could, formal aspects of texts such as content, structure and language” (p.99). In comparison to this, what can be seen as the more subjective forms of response received lower frequencies; questions asking for an *Evaluation* response (‘what was the student’s summary judgement of the text?’) occurred 14% of the time, *Interpretation* (‘what meaning did a student glean from a work?’) and *Engagement* (the student’s ‘subjective experience of the text’) received 8% and 4% of responses respectively, and 5% of responses fell into a ‘miscellaneous’ category.

In contrast to the actual exam questions, an analysis of the examiners’ reports showed that markers were looking for more than objective, perceptive answers from the more able students, indicating that “sophistication and flair, and a controlled, but stylish writing style” (p.103) was desirable for a higher grade to be awarded. Rosser notes “an obvious disparity between what is called for in Exam questions and what is, in fact, expected in responses”, as well as arguing that “writing that displays characteristics of reader response theory...[did] not score as well as that based on conventional reading regimes” (p.103). While Rosser’s conclusions may be representative of the tendency in

previous syllabuses to preference certain literary styles, his study has not been extended to explore whether this tendency has been maintained under the new syllabus.

In addition to this, Rosser's conclusion that the examination questions implicitly call for a certain type of response has not been tested against the syllabus itself to explore whether visions of a certain type of student and certain types of responses were implicitly called for at the syllabus level. While an exam question may have literally asked for a certain type of response, for example, it would be interesting to explore whether the elevation of objective, analytical writing was reflected in syllabus outcomes or content descriptors, or whether this was a notion of the ideal student 'writer' that was more pronounced at exam time. Also significant here is Teese's concept of an 'ideal student' forming a key part of the hidden curriculum of schools and the role of examinations as subject capital, benefitting those with well-developed curriculum literacy, as well as in shaping the interpretation of the syllabus.

3.4.2 The impact of HSC assessment on students

While some researchers have focused on conducting both qualitative and quantitative analyses on the content of the syllabus, assessment and examination documents, other researchers have instead focused on studying the *impact* of the HSC assessment and examination process *on students*. Looking at the impact of students' negative affective responses to examinations during the senior years, Smith and Sinclair (2000) report that "on average, more than 40% of year 12 and 25% of year 11 students in [their] study [reported] symptoms of depression, anxiety and/or stress which fall outside the normal range" (p.67). In a questionnaire package that sought to measure students' goal orientation and levels of self-efficacy, the researchers found that there were statistically significant positive relationships between performance-avoidance goals (doing something through fear of being embarrassed or 'shown up') and negative affect (stress,

anxiety etc.) for males, and mastery goals (intrinsically motivated to develop competence in an area) and self-efficacy (perceptions of ability) for females.

While the researchers here concede that a larger sample would be necessary to generalise the results of the study, their initial findings were unsurprising when psychological theories of goal orientation and negative affect were taken into account. Smith and Sinclair stress their concern at the lack of consideration that seems to have been taken by policy makers in regards to the need for students to feel high levels of self-efficacy in order to achieve at a higher level when developing the new HSC structure. It is suggested “classroom practices that advocate learning for learning’s sake, academic self-confidence, and teacher-pupil relationships [would] do more to reduce stress and improve achievement” in the senior years (p.77).

3.4.3 The constraints of HSC credentialing

In a major Australian research study examining the literacy demands of curriculum in senior schooling, Wyatt-Smith and Cumming (2003) found that there has been a general lack of consideration of the power of curriculum literacy as a factor in determining success in the senior school. As discussed in the previous chapter, the term ‘curriculum literacy’ is used to describe the awareness that each subject classroom is a “complex environment in which students must learn to adapt and manipulate their behaviours in order to develop curriculum domain knowledge” (p.57). In many classrooms the researchers found only limited evidence of “teacher modelling of curriculum literacies and curriculum specific metalanguage for either subject-specific learning or assessment”, which is of great concern in the senior years when an awareness of the nature of subject-specific assessment especially is heightened by the focus on exit credentials such as the HSC.

Wyatt-Smith and Cumming also found in specific relation to the assessment discourses of the classroom, that there was a sense that rather than being relevant, interesting or connected to the real world, “learning was rehearsal for examinations”. Research conducted by Gerot (2001), which constituted part of the wider study undertaken by Wyatt-Smith and Cumming, elaborates that “one of the most striking features of the English classes viewed...was the extent to which curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation alike were driven from top to bottom by the impending Higher School Certificate [exam]” (Gerot, 2001, p.47).

The research into curriculum literacy in the senior school also found that there was a lack of explicit teaching of curriculum literacies despite many assessment activities implicitly testing for students’ ability to demonstrate subject-specific literacy practices. Wyatt-Smith and Cumming suggest that students could experience more success in classrooms where curriculum literacies were explicitly taught, and students had opportunities to work through writing tasks that were modelled by a teacher and were not being assessed. This suggestion, however, seems at odds with their questions about the nature of assessment in the senior years, and the inadequacy of centrally controlled assessment systems in examining critical thinking and open thought in students. If a controlling assessment framework is found to be stifling the aims of the curriculum – to create critical and creative thinkers – then the explicit teaching of subject-specific assessment literacy could lead to the compliant adoption of an assessment discourse that may not be in the learners’ best interests.

In an analysis of her own professional practice, Fogarty (1997) takes up these questions of the ways in which the constraints of high-stakes exit credentialing impose on her teaching and on her students’ learning. Although Fogarty wrote in reference to the previous syllabus, the analysis in this case remains applicable, as the general structure

of the HSC examination did not change with the introduction of the new syllabus. As the students' school assessment mark is still moderated against their exam mark in the new HSC, Fogarty's concern for the pressure on her to 'teach to the exam' and use assessment tools that mirror the external exam ought still to ring true. Fogarty cites Barnes and Seed in lamenting the way in which:

Examination papers offer to teacher and taught the most persuasive arguments about what model of the subject is appropriate, what should go on in lessons, what knowledge, skills and activities should be emphasised and what can be safely ignored. (Barnes & Seed, 1984, p.263)

As the competitive nature of the HSC credential also has not changed, Fogarty's unease at her students' rejection of activities such as group work and team teaching as a 'waste of time' would still apply to the classes taught under the new HSC syllabuses. The continued emphasis placed on analytic written work in the HSC exam also could be seen to undermine other curriculum content and objectives as the preparation of students for success in timed analytic writing gains the most prominence in the curriculum for English. Finally the pressure on teachers that is described in terms of producing school-based marks that closely fit students' exam marks, as well as the pressure to achieve the highest mark possible for each student, would undoubtedly remain a feature of teacher reflections of the kind produced by Fogarty.

3.5 Overview

This review of literature shows that there is still much work to be done in exploring the 1999 HSC English syllabus. While it can be said that research has adequately covered initial teacher responses to implementation of the syllabus (cf. Manuel, 2002; NSW English Teachers Association, 2002), there has been a general lack of analysis of the

perspectives of other stakeholders, as well as a lack of engagement with the actual content of the syllabus. Research in the field of HSC examination and assessment structures has argued the existence of an assortment of negative effects within the HSC assessment structure; however no research to date has explored whether the ‘new’ HSC framework represents an improvement on previous constraints and pressures on students, teachers or communities. The structure, content and timing of students’ study in the HSC year has attracted little research attention, and although O’Sullivan provided significant and valuable information on teachers’ experiences of implementation, there has been a lack of theorising about the ways in which the apparent paradigm shift represented in the syllabus has impacted on public and professional perceptions of English and of education. These are the areas that this thesis will explore, using a variety of methods to analyse the pressures that have shaped the development and implementation of the new HSC English syllabus.

Chapter 4: Research Design

4.1 General research issue and key questions

At the time of writing this thesis, the 1999 HSC English syllabus is in its twelfth year of teaching and had undergone its tenth year of public examination. In these years, as outlined in the previous chapter, only limited research has been conducted into the theoretical underpinnings of the syllabus. The research that has been conducted in this area has been limited in its theoretical scope, focussing on generating an account of teachers' perspectives and experiences of the syllabus implementation process. As valuable and timely as these pieces of research were, they offered little depth in their examination of the complex factors that had shaped and were continuing to shape discourses of English teaching and learning under the new syllabus. The research carried out by O'Sullivan (2005), while more theoretical in its approach, also explored the syllabus using a study of teachers' experiences. While O'Sullivan acknowledged that teacher voices are often absent in the work of educational researchers and her research provided an exemplary analysis of teachers' perspectives, this thesis aims to fill the significant gap that has been left as a result of research to date focussing exclusively on the perspectives and experiences of practicing teachers.

With this in mind, the need to conduct a larger study of the newest HSC English syllabus and the discourses embedded within it has become most pressing. While it is essential, as O'Sullivan (2005) argues, that a piece of educational research such as a study of the syllabus takes into account the lived reality of syllabus implementation, this thesis will combine a study of teacher perspectives with a study of how public representations of the syllabus shape teacher experiences as well as political discourse, and an analysis of the actual syllabus text. In general terms, the purpose of this research

project therefore is to analyse the 1999 HSC English syllabus, as well as its reception and implementation, in order to produce an account of the theoretical changes and innovations that are embedded in the syllabus documents, and challenges and problems that continue to shape the way it is perceived by a variety of stakeholders and delivered in the classroom. With only a limited amount of research to date completed on the syllabus, the need for such an account has continued to grow as the syllabus becomes more firmly established and attacks against it that emerged during the development phase appear to be ongoing.

A secondary purpose of this research, however, is to make an evaluation of whether the syllabus, both in its intended and implemented forms, represents a significant theoretical shift in the conception(s) of what English as a school subject ought to 'be about'. In his analysis of the development of NSW secondary English syllabuses from 1953 – 1976, Brock (1984) concluded that each new syllabus had constituted a 'new beginning' for English as a school subject. This research project sought to reflect on Brock's theoretical line to explore whether the 1999 syllabus could also be classed as a 'new beginning', and if so, whether that 'new beginning' has consequently amounted to the telling of a 'new story' – whether any theoretical shifts that are apparent in the syllabus are making an impact on delivering a new kind of English curriculum in practice.

The key research questions for this study, then, are:

1. What are the innovations, challenges or problems that have shaped the construction and implementation of the syllabus?
2. What is the nature and extent of the theoretical shift in the underlying philosophies of the subject?

Later in this chapter, these questions will be problematised and extended, based on both the theoretical orientation of the study and the proposed research framework. Throughout the study, however, these research questions will provide a focus for the analysis and discussion of each of the three sets of evidence collected, and to enable the construction of a position in relation to each key question that will form the conclusion of this research.

In this research design distinctions between the concepts of ‘theoretical orientation’, ‘methodology’ and ‘methods’ have been drawn clearly to allow each element of the research design to be reported on thoroughly, and for the role of each interrelated element to be explained. In addition to this, a ‘research framework’ has been constructed to highlight the connectedness between the three sets of evidence that will be analysed, and to ensure that the relationship between the evidence and discussion is informed by the theoretical orientation of the project.

In section 4.2 the **theoretical orientation** for this thesis is put forward, and the need to think ‘historically’ about the constructedness of the syllabus is emphasised, along with the need to study both the written curriculum (the syllabus and related curriculum documents) and its interactive negotiation in lived contexts. In section 4.3 this theoretical orientation is used to construct the **research framework** for identifying and integrating three key focus issues in this study – the internal or ‘theoretical’ pressures that arise out of the syllabus text, the external or ‘practical’ pressures that arise out of school and public contexts, and the interface between these theoretical and practical demands. Issues of **methodology** are discussed in section 4.4, providing a justification for the selection of qualitative **methods** of collecting and analysing evidence that will best illuminate the issues embedded in the research framework. Later the evidence collected using these methods will be examined using the lens of the research

framework as described in section 4.3. In this way the research framework serves as both a point of reference for selecting methodology and methods that are aligned with the theoretical orientation of this thesis, as well as a lens for constructing conclusions about the relationship between different pieces of evidence in the dissertation as a whole.

4.2 Theoretical Orientation

This thesis is positioned within the broad field of curriculum studies, in particular within the field of curriculum history. Specifically, this research project takes as its point of departure the position that an understanding of the history of a syllabus document is not only paramount to developing a rich understanding of its context, but that this historical analysis must be positioned to broaden our understanding of the various constructs (e.g. knowledge, belief and practice) that exist in the present. To say that this thesis is constructed as a curriculum history, however, is not to say that the object of the thesis will be to provide a chronological account nor an exhaustive record of the changes in post-compulsory English. Not least because very good analyses of previous syllabuses have been undertaken by Brock (1984) and Michaels (2001a), this thesis is theoretically oriented to a position on curriculum studies that values not only the analysis of evidence from the past, but also an historical analysis of the way discourses of the present and the future are constructed. The remainder of this section will be used to discuss the various elements of this perspective, particularly the need for evaluating the constructedness of the present and speculating about the future when thinking ‘historically’ about the curriculum.

4.2.1 Poststructuralist influences in curriculum history

The concept of working with poststructuralist – specifically Foucauldian – philosophical underpinnings in the field of curriculum history is discussed by Green (2005) in his preface to a collection of papers on curriculum history in the journal *Curriculum Perspectives*. The theme of Green’s preface, and an ongoing theme in the special collection of papers, was that of developing “new understandings about the constitution of knowledge arising out of poststructuralist conceptions of discourse and, following Foucault, about the links between power and knowledge...” (Cormack, 2005). This focus on the ‘historical’ as being a study of the construction of discourses, rather than an account of the temporal progression of events and influences marks a significant new definition of what contemporary curriculum history aims to explore.

In writing about this further, Green argues that

Thinking historically about curriculum inquiry and curriculum work...means not just looking back, learning lessons from the past, and hence ‘putting our past to work...’ (Green, Cormack, & Reid, 2000)... it [also] means re-assessing our present, as an always-already problematic form of presence, and it also means speculating on the future, as a space of difference and danger, promise and (im)possibility. (2005, p.51)

This argument for problematising the present is evocative of Foucault’s assertion that “we have to know the historical conditions which motivate our conceptualization. We need a historical awareness of our present circumstance” (1982, pp.208-209). What Green adds to this philosophy in his paper is an inclusion of “curriculum futures” for consideration as a means of further recognising the constructedness of the present and of working productively in the field of curriculum studies. Green’s argument against “[assuming] a single identity, a single linear history” (2005, p.52) therefore builds on the arguments of Gough (1989) for extending our pluralisation of the past to include the

consideration of multiple ‘presents’ and ‘futures’. This thesis will include a discussion of the evidence collected in this research in light of these poststructuralist notions of recognising “competing or contesting visions and versions, conflicting as well as congruent stories” (Green 2005 p.52) when ‘historically’ exploring the present/future of the HSC English syllabus. In particular the genealogy of the functions of schooling constructed by Hunter (1993) and the OECD (2001) scenarios for future schooling previously described in chapter 2 will later provide a context for thinking about the present and possible future constructions of English curriculum in Australia.

4.2.2 Goodson’s ‘social constructionist’ perspective

In addition to being influenced by poststructuralist approaches to researching curriculum history, this thesis is also theoretically positioned as an application of Goodson’s work on the sociological perspectives of curriculum construction and classroom implementation. Goodson argues that school subject knowledge needs to be examined using methods that go beyond analysing the negotiation of knowledge in the classroom, and that “the definition of subject knowledge that precedes interactive negotiation and redefinition in the classroom....must be studied in its own right” (1996, p.4) The benefit of examining the historical, social and cultural constructions of knowledge in conjunction with subject pedagogy in the present is proposed by Goodson in his arguments for the study of the ‘preactive’ as well as the ‘active’ stages of the syllabus in the field of curriculum studies (cf. Goodson, 1992, 1994, 1996). By examining the subject definitions and traditions evident in the preactive stage of the written curriculum in conjunction with any analysis of subject pedagogy, researchers of curriculum and of school subjects can more fully grasp the school subject as constructed social phenomena.

This research on the 1999 HSC English syllabus will therefore combine an analysis of the syllabus implementation and reaction to the syllabus in newspaper texts with an analysis of the subject definitions and traditions that are evident in the actual syllabus document. This study of the syllabus document will enable a social constructionist approach to the study of HSC English, recognising the impact that historically constructed ideas about knowledge and curriculum have had on subject pedagogy. Discussion of the various evidence collected and analysed in this research will also explore the possible impact of imagined futures on the development of the syllabus – whereby the traditions that have been either redefined or retained in the syllabus may have been shaped by public and professional reactions that were imagined for the future.

4.3 Research framework

Research on syllabus change, especially when conducted within the broader framework of examining a curriculum history, often takes as its focus the study of syllabus documents and other primary sources of historical data that inform a broader understanding of the conditions in which change occurred (for example Brock, 1984; Michaels, 2001a; Wayne Sawyer, 2002a).

The degree of change that is promoted in a syllabus document however, can be seen from an entirely different perspective when examined in relation to its public and professional reception, as well as its practical implementation. As argued by Goodson, there is a clear need to examine the historical, social and cultural constructions of knowledge, as well as subject pedagogy in the present (cf. Goodson, 1992, 1994, 1996). By collecting evidence of actual changes that take place in classrooms, of professional reaction and dialogue, and of public responses, we can expand our understanding of the

construction of change beyond an analysis of any theoretical paradigm shift documented in the written curriculum. It is with this in mind that the following research framework was developed for use in this project, to enable the consideration of both internal and external pressures, *as well as* the ways in which those (often competing) pressures and demands are resolved:

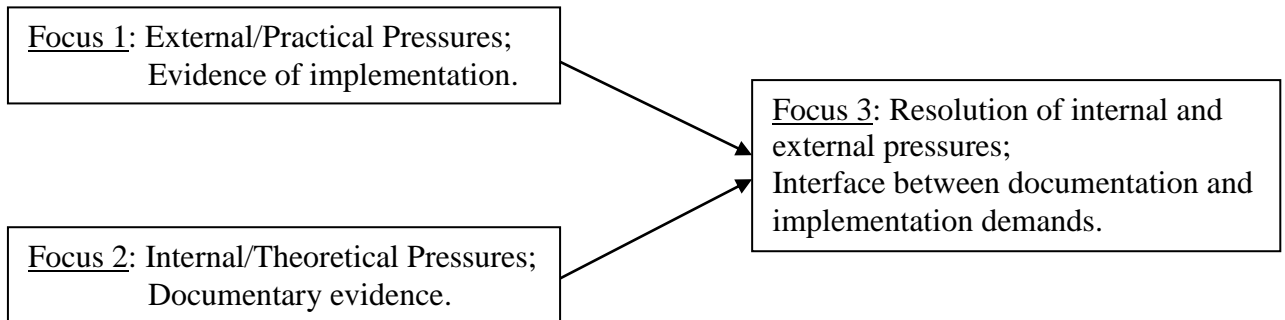


FIGURE 1: FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSING THE COMBINED EFFECT OF THEORETICAL AND EXPERIENTIAL PRESSURES

A framework such as this is essential for the purposes of this research. A study of curriculum change needs to recognise that change is complex – it does not just happen in black-and-white documents, nor does it exist purely as a lived experience that is divorced from constructed discourses. Similarly, curriculum change does not only affect professional stakeholders. If education is to be viewed as a ‘public good’, either in an economic sense (as argued by free-market capitalists such as A. Smith, 1778), or as something that is essential to the operation of a free and just democratic society (as argued by Progressive educationalists such as Dewey, 1916), then the understandings and reactions of public stakeholders ought to also be taken into account when evaluating the impact of curriculum change. Some of the most immediate stakeholders include students and their parents, but a study of the responses of the wider community is also necessary if we are to understand the ways in which changes to the curriculum are received by the members of the society for whose benefit schools are intended to

operate. In this study, newspaper representations of wider community discourse will provide the source of data for this aspect of curriculum analysis.

Although the study of curriculum documents and theoretical pressures is integral to an understanding of a syllabus' development and implementation, as Reid argues the “tangled relationship between curriculum and democracy means that curriculum cannot be understood in isolation from the political, economic, social and cultural conditions in which it is produced and practiced...” (Reid, 2004b, p.59). This view of curriculum as embodying an intrinsic link between theoretical changes as represented in syllabus texts and external conditions of production and practice demands that a study of curriculum documents and theoretical influences is combined with a study of external and practical pressures, both in society in general and within the context of schools and classrooms.

An exploration of both internal and external pressures therefore forms a key part of this framework. In addition to this, the final focus of the research framework consists of an analysis of the ways in which these pressures are resolved; or as the case may be, of the way in which conflict and tension continues in areas where resolutions have not been found, or continue to be problematic. In this sense the framework for this project recognises that development and implementation are not isolated acts, and endeavours to break down traditional binaries such as past/present and policy/practice. The aim therefore is to produce a richer exploration of the way in which different factors continue to play off against each other and as such are no longer discrete, but are woven together to influence the constructed, lived experiences of the 1999 HSC English syllabus.

4.4 Methodology

In an analysis of the research design process, Creswell describes research methodology as being the “strategy or plan of action that links methods to outcomes [and] governs our choice and use of methods” (2003, p.5). As this research project sought an outcome of illuminating two key research questions about the challenges and problems that have shaped the construction and implementation of the syllabus, and the analysis of the nature and extent of the theoretical shift in the underlying philosophies of the subject, there was a need to select a variety of sources and methods for examining those sources in order to paint the fullest picture possible. In this section the methodological perspectives that informed the selection of each of these sources will be detailed, as well as the techniques and procedures chosen for their analysis. In addition, this section will describe the strategies and selection of methods used by previous researchers in the area of NSW English curriculum research.

4.4.1 Applying qualitative research methodology

A qualitative methodology has been selected as being best able to serve the specific needs for the collection and analysis of data in this research. Because this research seeks to engage with research questions by employing a research framework that includes consideration of theoretical and practical pressures, as well as of the ‘preactive’ and ‘active’ stages of the syllabus, a variety of data sources and methods of analysis appropriate to those sources will need to be selected. In their description of the qualitative researcher as **bricoleur**, Denzin and Lincoln assert the capacity of the qualitative researcher to make selections from the tools available to them to form a montage or ‘bricolage’ – a “pieced-together set of representations that are fitted to the specifics of a complex situation” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p.4). Referring also to this description of the researcher as bricoleur, Coffey and Atkinson reinforce the key

characteristic of qualitative research as being their ability to “employ a variety of strategies and methods to collect and analyse a variety of empirical materials”, in particular “meaningful talk and action” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p.4-5).

As well as providing a methodological approach that enables the contextual analysis of a variety of sources using a variety of methods, the use of qualitative research is also aligned with the theoretical orientation of this research in that it places a higher value on “the reasons that people offer for what they do and the ways in which the meanings they use make sense of their lives” than on discovering “whether the basis of their beliefs are true as such” (Williams & May, 1996, p.142). Because this research seeks to explore the ways in which the interpretation and implementation of the syllabus is *constructed* by individuals and contexts, as well as the *nature and extent* of the theoretical shift in the underlying philosophies of the subject, the methods employed must reside within a qualitative approach to methodology that emphasises the construction of meaning through a range of contexts, whether historical, social or cultural. To say that qualitative research focuses on ‘meanings’ or ‘constructions’ in the social world, as is the aim of this research, is to emphasise “the validity of multiple meaning structures and holistic analysis, as opposed to the criteria of reliability and statistical compartmentalisation of quantitative research” (Burns, 2000, p.11).

Specifically, a grounded theory approach will be used in this research to examine the various data sets, as well as the relationship between the perspectives represented in the data. That is, a theory of how an understanding of the 1999 HSC English syllabus is constructed by teachers in schools and by members of the public will be conceptualised based on what is learned from an examination of those sources. This is in contrast to approaches to research that enter the research situation with prior theoretical preconceptions and interpret what they find by forcing it into an existing theoretical

framework (Burns, 2000, pp.433-434). The broad methodological orientation of this research therefore can be described as using **qualitative** methodology that is informed by the epistemology of **grounded theory**, but which will utilise a variety of qualitative techniques and procedures (described below in section 4.5) selected to most appropriately collect and analyse different sets of evidence of how the 1999 HSC English syllabus is constructed in the “subjective, experiential ‘lifeworld’” (Burns, 2000, p.11) of the human beings that use it.

4.4.2 Subjective selection of data sources

One methodological rationale for the selection and analysis of data sources is taken from Eisner’s work on the use of “connoisseurship” in the selection and “criticism” of evidence (Eisner, 1998). Of the methodology of educational connoisseurship, Eisner writes that educational connoisseurs “must attend to everything that is relevant either for satisfying a specific educational aim or for illuminating the educational state of affairs in general” (1998, p.71). This methodology recognises the expertise of the researcher as a valid instrument of analysis, and trusts their capability in selecting evidence and disclosing what they have observed of that evidence (providing ‘criticism’) to ‘illuminate’ a problem or situation. The epistemology that informs such an approach is one which denies the capacity of researchers to collect data or present findings objectively, ‘untainted’ by the researcher’s perspective and context. A methodology of connoisseurship instead takes a constructivist view of knowledge and as such prefers to harness the researcher’s subjectivity as a valuable research tool (rather than a research liability), validating the ‘criticism’ using methods such as:

- *Structural Corroboration* – using triangulation and support from other types of data
- *Consensual Validation* – agreement among “competent others”

- *Referential Adequacy* – the degree to which the criticism illuminates what would have been missed without the critic’s observations (Eisner, 1998, pp.110-114).

In contrast to Eisner’s “connoisseurship”, some curriculum theorists in Australia have preferred to select data sources based in a methodology that takes ‘slices of time’ and examine every possible data source available, rather than making any personal value judgement about the kinds of evidence or data that will yield the most useful information. Sawyer (2002a) is one recent curriculum theorist who used Medway’s (1990) methodology of selecting ‘slices of time’ for analysis in a study of social phenomena. In using this methodology “breadth and continuity” were sacrificed, but “greater depth in the examination of evidence” were gained (Sawyer, 2002a, p.41) in Sawyer’s analysis of the relationships between the concepts of ‘English’ and ‘literacy’, and the definition of the subject ‘English’ in NSW in the early 1970s and the early 1990s.

While both methodologies have their merits, the nature of this research project required an approach that allowed for the interaction of a range of forces to be examined over a period of time. Although Medway’s methodology of examining all sources within a ‘slice of time’ in depth could have been employed to in effect measure any changes in approach or attitude over time, it would not have allowed for the *processes* of change to be investigated. The work of other researchers of NSW English syllabuses can be considered here as providing a precedent for the choice of methods that do provide “breadth and continuity”, specifically Brock (1984) and Michaels (2001a). Michaels’ thesis demonstrates the capacity for a researcher to select relevant sources to ‘illuminate an educational state of affairs’ – in Michaels’ case, the selection of syllabus documents as sources for a study of conceptions of English in syllabus documents over time. Brock’s thesis cites Eisner’s methodology of connoisseurship as a rationale for the

selection and analysis of sources that would allow him to account for the development of syllabuses from 1953–1976.

4.4.3 Selecting methods of data collection and analysis

In order to produce a curriculum study that integrates a study of both the preactive and interactive stages of the 1999 HSC English syllabus, and that generates an analysis of both internal and external pressures as proposed in the research framework, this doctoral thesis will undertake an analysis of sources that have been selected by the researcher to best represent the areas in which discourse about this syllabus is created and contested. Because this study aims to provide an assessment of the ways in which the demands of syllabus documentation and implementation interface and are resolved, the techniques and procedures chosen for the collection and analysis of three sets of data will enable an exploration of the ways in which curriculum is constructed through the preactive syllabus text as well as in how it is understood in public and professional contexts. The particular details of these will be elaborated on in section 4.5.

With development of the newest HSC English syllabus beginning in 1995, a ten year period is available for analysis. In contrast, however, to curriculum studies that have researched a defined ‘slice of time’, or which have sought to research a period of time in its entirety, this research is less concerned with using temporal factors to restrict the collection of evidence. Instead, as the focus of this research is a single syllabus rather than a period of curriculum development, Eisner’s methodology of connoisseurship has informed decisions in this research to select evidence that ‘illuminates’ particular aspects of the syllabus in its preactive and interactive forms.

While the methodology of this thesis has called for an examination of curriculum construction that goes beyond the study of teachers' perceptions, interview and observation data from two Sydney high schools will provide a source of evidence regarding the ways in which school context contributes to constructing the lived experience of the syllabus. The study of how the syllabus was implemented in two different schools will provide insight into challenges that are encountered in the interactive stage of a syllabus, and will be compared and contrasted with evidence of public debate surrounding the development and implementation of the syllabus as evident in newspaper texts from the ten year period of 1995-2005. Finally, while this thesis does not seek to provide either an exhaustive or a definitive assessment of the relative merits of the 1999 HSC English syllabus, the syllabus text and related documentation (the *Introduction to English Stage 6 in the new HSC* as well as the *English Stage 6 Prescriptions*) will be explored in the context of providing evidence of the internal, theoretical pressures that are embedded in the syllabus. The syllabus text, therefore, will be introduced as a means of problematising the lived construction of HSC English, where the public and professional constructions of the syllabus aims, content and assessment will frame an exploration of how we might define the theoretical intentions of the 1999 HSC English syllabus.

4.5 Methods

A variety of qualitative methods, or "techniques and procedures" (Creswell, 2003, p.5), for gathering and analysing evidence have been selected for this research, based on the three focuses that have been developed as a framework for the study. In Figure 2 below the evidence and methods of analysis that have been selected for this research are aligned with the two initial focuses.

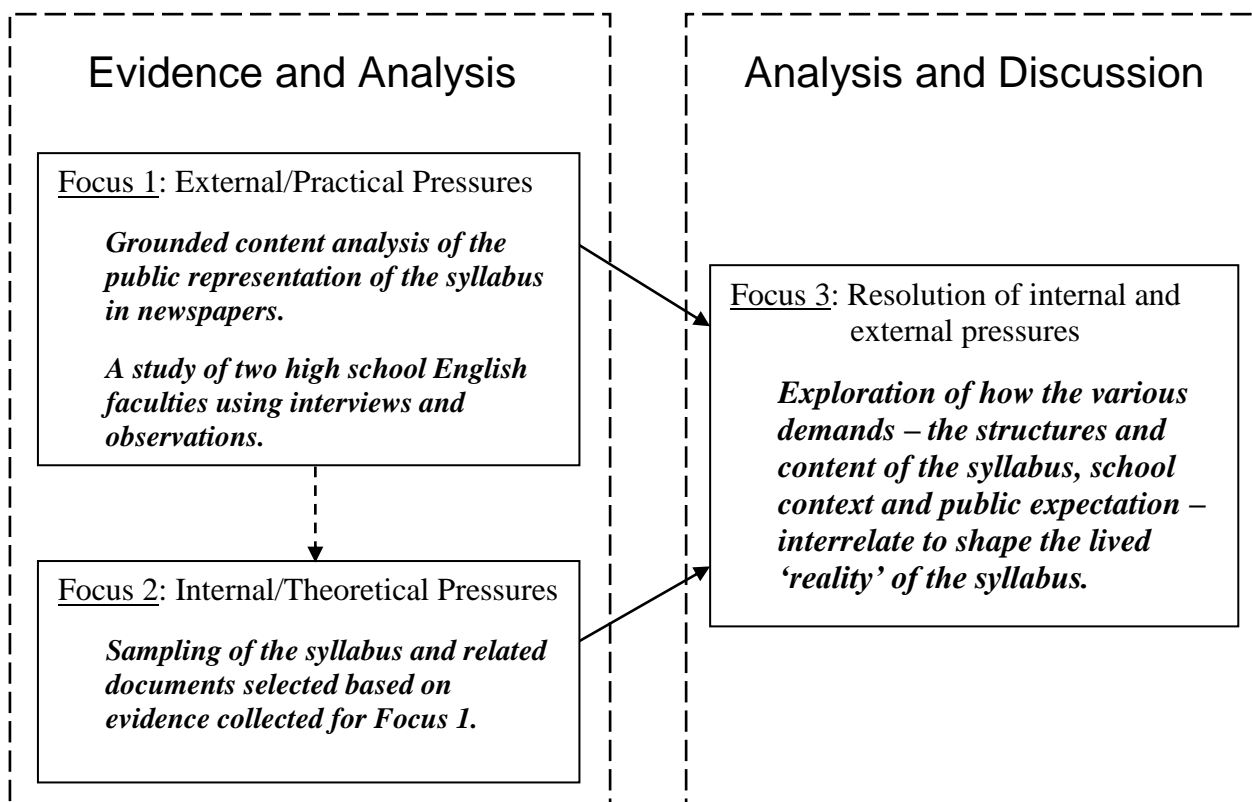


FIGURE 2: PLANNED METHODS OF COLLECTING, ANALYSING AND DISCUSSING EVIDENCE IN RELATION TO THE RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

It can be seen that the nature of the external / practical pressures on the syllabus implementation (Focus 1) will be explored through a grounded content analysis of the public representation of the syllabus in newspaper texts, and through the study of syllabus implementation in two high school English faculties, while the internal/theoretical pressures on the syllabus (Focus 2) will be explored using an analysis of the syllabus documents. A broken arrow leading from Focus 1 to Focus 2 (that was not shown in Figure 1) has been added to this depiction of the framework to represent the influence of the attitudes and beliefs discovered in the study of English faculties and newspaper texts on the sampling of the syllabus documents. This technique of ‘theoretical’ or ‘selective’ sampling will be discussed at greater length in section 4.5.3 below, and has been chosen based on the theoretical orientation of this

research to exploring the nature of the lived experience of the syllabus, in particular the ways in which an understanding of the syllabus text is constructed by two types of stakeholders.

Figure 2 also features an additional two broken rectangles that did not feature in Figure 1, overlaid on the original framework to clarify the role of *comparing the relationship between all three pieces of evidence* – the interviewing and observation of the school faculties, the newspaper content analysis and the exploration of the syllabus text – in illuminating Focus 3. While the analysis of school, media and syllabus contexts will be important to this research in their own right for answering questions about the nature of different (and at times competing) pressures on syllabus interpretation and implementation, the exploration of the interface between these various pressures is also of particular interest.

4.5.1 Public representations of the syllabus in national and state newspapers

One source of evidence that was compiled for this research was a comprehensive collection of all newspaper materials – editorials, news articles, opinion pieces and letters – written on the area of HSC English during the period 1995–2005. Newspaper texts were chosen as a data source for this study as they provide an overview of a wide range of public perspectives, as well as having extensive and accessible archive resources to gather content for exploration. The time period for analysis was set as beginning in 1995 as this was the year in which the process of drafting a new Stage 6 English syllabus began, and was initially ended in 2004 to enable data analysis to be complete in time for the writing of this thesis. The initial period of 1995-2004, however, was extended to include 2005, as during that year a significant attack was waged on the English curriculum, most prominently in the national newspaper *The*

Australian (Freesmith, 2006). The newspaper content in 2005 became a special focus for the study, as a number of significant illustrations of public opinion were seen during this year, and these were expected to be particularly enlightening in terms of exploring the ways in which key events and public figures were represented in the media, and how material published in the preceding years had constructed a dominant public representation of the HSC English syllabus.

The analysis of the newspaper texts from 1995-2005 will be undertaken using a grounded theory approach to coding data. Grounded theory, a qualitative research strategy that emphasises the potential for generating theory from data rather than ‘tacking-on’ theoretical explanations to add significance to data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.4; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), is used in this research to generate an account of the core concepts and opinions that are used in newspaper texts to construct discourse relating to the HSC English syllabus. As Strauss and Corbin describe, in grounded theory “one does not begin with a theory, then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge” (1990, p.23). While the methodological approach of grounded theory – ‘allowing what is relevant in an area of study to emerge’, rather than starting out with a theory or hypothesis – reflects the epistemological position of this entire research project, the specific tools of grounded theorists to **code** the collected material will be used in the analysis of newspaper texts and school case studies only, with different methods for analysis being applied to the syllabus content.

The first analytical tool to be applied to the newspaper texts will be use of “open coding” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to identify initial concepts and potential themes from texts appearing in the period 1995-2004. This open coding allows for the uncovering, naming and development of concepts by opening up the text to “expose the thoughts,

ideas and meanings contained therein” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.102). After an application of open coding to break the text down into discrete parts, further analytical tools of “axial” and “selective” coding will be used to reassemble the data in way that enables more abstract theoretical categories to emerge from the initial categories and also generates theory about the relationship between categories. To examine the newspaper texts appearing in 2005, a comparison will be made to the categories identified in the texts from 1995-2004 to establish whether material in the newer texts conforms to the central tendencies of the earlier ones, or whether they constitute ‘negative cases’ – cases that represent exceptions to what has been established as ‘the norm’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p.280). The theory that emerges from the newspaper data will be presented in the form of a concept map of the major categories and the relationships among them, an accepted method of displaying the results of grounded theory research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p.280). As the methods of grounded theory are highly iterative and inductive, the resulting theory will be internally validated using validation tools such as consensual validation (confirming the strength of the theory by presenting it to ‘competent others’ for assessment) and the examination of negative cases (in both the 1995-2004 and 2005 specific texts) to ensure that relationships between concepts are firm and support the final theory presented.

4.5.2 English faculty interviews and observation

While existing research on teachers’ experiences of the 1999 HSC English syllabus report on the teachers’ perspective with varying degrees of depth, a social and cultural analysis of curriculum also calls for the exploration of the impact and interplay of factors such as situational context, institutional structures and the cultures of staff, student and parental groups. While survey methods were used successfully in other recent studies of HSC English (Manuel, 2002; NSW English Teachers Association,

2002), the success of these methods lay in their ability to collect a ‘snapshot’ of teacher opinion on an assortment of issues. This doctoral research aims to build on the work of other researchers by gaining an insight into way in which different contexts and influences shaped those opinions, and better understand the challenges and problems that are faced in schools implementing the syllabus. As this research takes as its point of departure an adoption of poststructuralist and social constructivist perspectives on curriculum, interviews and observations were selected as a means of gathering evidence of the complex and constructed nature of syllabus implementation, and the interplay between the factors that affect learning and teaching in schools.

The decision to conduct interviews and observations in just two schools, rather than apply other methods such as a survey to a larger sample was based on the need to generate a rich understanding of the role of school context in constructing curriculum. While interview data alone could have been gathered from a wider range of schools, recognition that interview transcripts will not necessarily be a true reflection of an external reality is essential in a research project that is theoretically aligned with the view that knowledge is socially constructed. As Rapley argues, “interview data may be more a reflection of the social encounter between the interviewer and interviewee than it is about the actual topic itself” (2004, p.16). It is for this reason that, rather than seeing interviews as providing “an authentic gaze into the soul of another” (Silverman, 2003 p. 343), observation of the English teachers in two school faculties were used as a means of both establishing rapport with the interviewees, and enabling interview responses to be checked against what had been observed in the teachers everyday work practice.

Rapley (2004) draws on Seale’s (1998) distinction between “interview-data-as-resource”, where data collected is seen as reflecting the interviewee’s reality outside the interview, and “interview-data-as-topic”, where data collected is seen as reflecting a

reality jointly constructed by the interviewee and interviewer. Rapley describes critiques that have been made of the data-as-resource approach, largely due to the lack of consideration given in this approach to the inherently interactional nature of interviews, as in any given interview the speakers will “mutually monitor each other’s talk (and gestures)” making the talk “locally and collaboratively produced” (Rapley, 2004, p.16). The choice of semi-structured interviews was made with this in mind, as such an approach allows for the researcher to gain information on issues that have been identified as significant to the research without denying the collaborative nature of conversation, or the uniqueness of the schools’ or the individual teachers’ contexts. Also, the use of observation data again plays an essential role in this aspect of the research, allowing the interview data to be treated as a ‘topic’, rather than a decontextualised ‘resource’, and analysed in relation to what is also observed in teachers’ everyday talk and practice.

To say that the use of interviews and observations will allow for a contextual analysis of situational factors in two schools is not to say, however, that the insights gained through an analysis of those two schools cannot contribute to a more generalised understanding of the ways in which curriculum discourse is constructed in schools. In an analysis of the differences between ‘scientific’ and ‘artistic’ research methods, Eisner asserts that one of the ten dimensions that define an artistic approach to research is an “attempt to shed light on what is unique in time and space while at the same time conveying insights that exceed the limits of the situation in which they emerge”, as opposed to the scientific inclination to seek generalisation through the elimination of uniqueness and the detection of trends, central tendencies and statistical significance (Eisner, 1981, p.7). The non-random choice of two schools in which to conduct interviews and observations will serve the purpose of grounding this research in the highly contextual practice of

teachers, as well as providing material for later analysis of the material and theories extracted to compare with the evidence from newspaper texts and the syllabus itself. It is through this analysis, using the research tools of connoisseurship and criticism that the unique insights gained through these case studies will “exceed the limits of the situation in which they emerge” (Eisner, 1981, p.7).

English faculties from two schools within the Sydney metropolitan area were selected to provide material for interviews and observations – one selective boys’ high school and one comprehensive coeducational high school. The demographics and contexts of the schools will be described at greater length in chapter 6, but the goal of choosing these schools in particular was to provide insight into how schools operating in very different contexts had experienced the implementation of the syllabus. The selective boys’ high school presented an interesting case, not only in light of issues that could arise surrounding boys’ experience of English, but also because it was known that the school only offered the Advanced English (not the Standard course at all) to students. The comprehensive school chosen serves a local area that experiences significant socio-economic disadvantage, and has a much higher staff turnover rate causing some instability in the school. The contexts and policies of these faculties were known to the researcher prior to the study, and it was because of the significant contrast in their contexts that they were chosen, in order to provide a spectrum of experience despite problems of generalisability when just two schools are analysed.

A grounded theory approach to data collection was taken during the fieldwork phase of the case studies, and specific coding tools used by grounded theorists as described in section 4.5.1 were applied in the analysis of interview transcripts and observation notes. ‘Field days’ were scheduled in each school for one whole day each week over two terms in 2004, during which time teacher observations and interviews were available to the

researcher and were conducted in a manner that used a grounded theory approach of paying attention to all possible sources of evidence, but also of analysing the evidence from the very onset of collecting it, to enable theoretical “cues” to develop and thereby inform subsequent interviews and observations (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p.6).

One of the limitations of using teacher interviews and observations, and of qualitative methods in general as discussed by Burns, is that:

the promise of anonymity, which often serves as the basis of trust, in concert with the requirement for authenticity, makes the qualitative evaluator’s task particularly difficult in terms of the preparation and presentation of the results. (Burns, 2000, p.13)

In this case, although providing information about the identity of the schools selected and of the teachers from those schools that participate might increase the authenticity of the findings – by allowing others with knowledge of the particular schools and teachers to verify the ‘truthfulness’ of the descriptions and analyses provided – there are other tests for validity that can be applied to this data. In particular, the methods of *structural corroboration* and *consensual validation* (Eisner, 1998, pp.110-113) will be used to validate research findings in relation to the school case studies. Structural corroboration will be accessed by comparing field notes of researcher observation with interviews with teachers about their assessment of their own beliefs and the practices of their faculty, and consensual validation – while impossible to achieve using external sources due to the need to preserve the identity of the school and teachers – will be accessed by asking the teachers in each faculty to respond to written reports reflecting the researcher’s findings. In this respect the teachers themselves are regarded as the ‘competent others’, and will assess the ‘truthfulness’ of the researchers’ findings. This process of allowing the teachers to reflect on the meanings that were constructed in their

interview also ensures that the collaborative nature of the interview text does not lead to a distorted communication of some ideas or perspectives, as teachers are allowed time to consider the opinions that they presented during formal interviews and add to or clarify them during informal conversations on field days.

Using participants as a source of consensual validation is an established method of ensuring the accuracy of interpretation and analysis in case study research, and this is described by Stake (1995, p.115) as a process of “member checking”, whereby participants are “requested to examine rough drafts of writing where the actions or words of [the participant] are featured, sometimes when first written up but usually when no further data will be collected from him or her” (Stake, 1995, p.115). This process of “member checking” and the triangulation of interview and observation data will form the validation techniques in the analysis of the perspectives and experiences of teachers from the two schools chosen for the study.

4.5.3 Analysis of the 1999 HSC English syllabus

As this thesis seeks to explore the ways in which various challenges and problems have shaped the construction and the implementation of the syllabus, as well as the nature and extent of the theoretical shift in the underlying philosophies of the subject, the analysis of the syllabus text will not aim to generate an objective or definitive account of the ‘essence’ of the syllabus. Because this research adopts a ‘social constructionist’ view of exploring the preactive and active stages of the curriculum, as well as a poststructuralist orientation to examining the effect of various historical, cultural and social contexts on curriculum construction, the syllabus text will not be subject to an analysis that is decontextualised from the other two data sets. Instead, the syllabus will be explored in a way that enables the theories that emerge from the analysis of professional and public discourse to be tested against the syllabus text to further refine

the conceptualisation and develop the theoretical findings. To this end, the tool of *theoretical sampling* (cf. Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) will be used to locate evidence within the syllabus text that can illuminate the possible bases for the professional and public understandings that are identified.

The tool of theoretical sampling is based in the methodology of grounded theory, where new research cases or research sites are selected in order to extend the initial theoretical analysis elicited by coding data within a range of categories. In their seminal work on grounded theory Glaser and Strauss identify the basic question in theoretical sampling as “*what* groups or subgroups does one turn to *next* in data collection? And for *what* theoretical purpose?” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.47). While an analysis of the representation of the HSC English syllabus in newspaper texts can provide us with an understanding of the pressures that are placed on syllabus implementation by the public context and of the ways in which the authors of these texts are constructing a public picture of the English curriculum, it is helpful for the data collection to turn next to the location of evidence from the syllabus text itself that will enable the refinement of theory to explain the bases on which those representations are being made. Similarly, an analysis of how the syllabus is interpreted and implemented in two specific school contexts will benefit from turning next to the syllabus text to locate the ways in which professional understanding may have been shaped by the construction of the subject in the ‘preactive’ stage of the written curriculum. The theoretical purpose here is to ensure that any analysis of the lived construction of the syllabus is examined within the context of the historical construction of the subject, and conversely to ensure that any analysis of the syllabus text is not divorced from a consideration the external contexts and pressures that shape the ‘lived reality’ of the syllabus.

The selected elements of the syllabus will be analysed against the experiences of stakeholders to ascertain the ways in which traditional ‘curriculum grammars’ have been either sustained or challenged, and to do this I use Reid’s (2004a) four categories of curriculum grammars – purposes, view of knowledge, view of curriculum and its organisation, view of students and teachers – to connect material from the syllabus with the core concerns and influences of stakeholders. By orienting my analysis of the syllabus around the curriculum grammars that have been employed, I will be well placed in later discussion to evaluate how all three data sources can ultimately inform us on the nature of change to the English curriculum represented in this syllabus, as well as how this might reflect on wider notions of the function (and future) of schooling.

Chapter 5: Newspaper Data Analysis

5.1 Introduction

Curriculum change does not just happen in black-and-white documents – nor does it only affect professional stakeholders. If education is to be viewed as a ‘public good’, and as something that is essential to the operation of a democratic society, then the understandings and reactions of public stakeholders ought to be taken into account when evaluating the impact of curriculum change. Some of the most immediate stakeholders include students and their parents, but a study of the responses of the wider community is also necessary if we are to understand the ways in which changes to the curriculum are received by the members of the society that schools operate for the benefit of, as well as the social climate in which syllabus reform and implementation takes place.

Of these different aspects, this chapter will focus on the public reactions to the syllabus change, and public understandings of the curriculum as represented through print news media coverage during the syllabus development phase, at the time of its final release, and after its first examination. While newspapers and other media sources are widely known for their ability to sensationalise and polarise issues surrounding education, it is exactly this characteristic that makes their material so interesting to study as the spectrum of issues represented in newspaper contributions and responses can be contrasted with the dialogue occurring in other areas at the time.

5.2 Analysis of newspaper content

This chapter will deal with the comprehensive collection of all newspaper materials that were compiled for this Doctoral research – editorials, news articles, opinion pieces and letters – written on the area of HSC English during the period in question. Most of the articles were found in the *Sydney Morning Herald (SMH)*, though many were also located in the *Daily Telegraph* and *The Australian*. News media – specifically, print news media in the form of newspapers – was chosen as a data source for this study as it was determined to be a large enough field to gather a wide range of public perspectives, as well as having extensive and accessible archive resources to gather content for exploration. While there are certainly reliability issues with treating newspapers as an accurate representation of public opinion due to the nature of editorial choices and the limited number of opinions sampled, perceptions about English curriculum that are represented in the media are ones which are propagated, circulated and therefore perhaps strengthened within society at large. It is also for this reason that news media was chosen to provide insight into the public interpretation and construction of English in the HSC.

Newspaper materials were collected from high-circulation broadsheet and tabloid newspapers that were deemed to best represent the news produced in relation to events and ideas in NSW. The two primary newspapers in NSW – the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Daily Telegraph* (and their weekend counterparts, the *Sun Herald* and the *Sunday Telegraph* respectively) – were selected, as well as *The Australian*, which is the primary national newspaper covering news items from all states and territories, with its weekend counterpart, *The Weekend Australian*. Editorials, news articles, opinion pieces and letters were found using online archive search engines on the websites of each newspaper, as well as the *Factiva* database of overseas and Australian newspaper and

newswire publications. The words ‘HSC’, ‘year 12’ ‘English’ and ‘syllabus’ were used alone and in combinations in the initial searches, and a variety of keywords (‘postmodernism’, ‘critical literacy’, ‘outcomes’, ‘texts’, ‘Shakespeare’, ‘popular’, ‘curriculum’) and their variants were added to later searches as some key themes began to emerge.

While some media coverage of HSC subjects and examinations appeared in 1997 after the release of the McGaw report, *Securing Their Future*, which made recommendations on the reformation of the HSC structure, there was little direct coverage of issues relating directly to the subject English at this time. Prior to the release of the McGaw report, the NSW Board Of Studies (BOS) had attempted during 1995 to compose a draft for a new HSC syllabus, and though this draft syllabus was not passed (but put aside when the government commissioned the McGaw review), some media coverage of changes to HSC English can therefore be found as early as 1995. Newspapers began to more attentively and specifically cover the topic of possible changes to HSC English in 1998 with the release of the post-McGaw Stage 6 English draft syllabus, and attention continued in 1999 with the approval and release of the final syllabus document. With the exception of the year 2000 during which Year 12 students continued to study the old syllabus, regular media appearances have ensued in each following year, most regularly after HSC examinations are held and the questions set for each paper become known to teachers, parents and journalists.

Year:	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Freq.:	2	8	9	17	14	3	17	18	10	22

TABLE 8: FREQUENCY OF PUBLISHED NEWSPAPER PIECES BY YEAR (1995-2004)

The news pieces in the period of 1995-2004 that were found in this data collection were subjected to a content analysis using a grounded theory approach to elicit key themes, ideas and perspectives. As explained in the previous chapter, grounded theory was chosen as the most desirable methodological approach to analysing the content rather than applying a pre-existing set of coding devices, as this would allow the themes and core concepts communicated to the public through the news media to be elicited and explored. The original intent of this research was to limit the data collection to the ten year period of 1995-2004 – four initial themes were identified in this material and these will be described in section 5.3 of this chapter. However, during 2005 when collection and analysis of the content of newspaper materials was due to be complete, opponents of the HSC syllabus and of the educational and literary theories it was perceived to contain launched a sustained assault on the subject English and on contemporary education in general. As a result, the decision was taken to extend the period of newspaper analysis to include 2005, and also to study this year in particular depth, given the significant increase in media attention (for the increase in frequency see Table 9 below).

Year:	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
News articles, opinion and editorials:	2	7	9	16	11	3	9	14	7	17	116
Letters to the editor:	0	1	0	1	3	0	8	4	3	5	50
TOTAL:	2	8	9	17	14	3	17	18	10	22	166

TABLE 9: FREQUENCY OF PUBLISHED NEWSPAPER PIECES BY YEAR AND TYPE (1995-2005)

Undertaking research for this thesis during 2005 enabled the methodology of connoisseurship to be employed even further than originally intended, as links between

pieces published by the newspapers (news articles, opinion pieces and editorials), letters sent in from readers, as well as formal responses from notable politicians and public figures could be recorded and related as they appeared. Eisner's notion of the educational connoisseur as attending to "everything that is relevant either for satisfying a specific educational aim or for illuminating the educational state of affairs in general" (1998, p.71) resulted in the inclusion of material that did not always pertain directly to the new HSC syllabus, but which at times referred more generally to the nature of English teaching and curriculum. In section 5.4 of this chapter, following the analysis of themes in the initial research period of 1995-2004, the themes that arose during 2005 will be analysed in the chronological order in which they were found to arise, before finally turning in section 5.5 to an exploration of how all of this evidence can be related by identifying the core categories of discourse used in newspaper representations of English curriculum and public debate.

5.3 Representations of the HSC English syllabus 1995-2004

After conducting an initial content analysis on the newspaper articles concerning HSC English that were published from 1995–2004, four initial themes emerged to describe the opinions being expressed and messages that were being reinforced through the newspaper materials. Commentary on the HSC English syllabus fell largely into categories of material that argued either 'for' or 'against' the syllabus in general, as well as material that discussed the list of prescribed texts that had been provided to select from for study, and material where arguments were made about ideas about education beyond the syllabus itself such as the nature of the learner and the purpose of education. While there were several news articles written for the purpose of presenting objective accounts of student experience of the HSC, especially at the time of examination, most

newspaper pieces relating to the HSC English syllabus during both its development and implementation tended to consist of subjective and often impassioned commentary. Favourable attitudes toward the syllabus tended only to be expressed as defensive positions, and were less frequently expressed than critical attitudes toward syllabus content and the practices of English teachers.

5.3.1 Postmodernism denying ‘real meaning’

Of all the material that appeared in the media since the McGaw review and the subsequent release of the draft and final versions of the HSC syllabus, an overwhelming amount of it was aimed at discrediting the new approach to English represented in the syllabus and the list of prescribed texts. While material relating to the selection of texts has been explored as a separate theme in this analysis, this section contains an account of the negative views expressed about the theoretical perspectives that were perceived to underpin the syllabus.

In an article promoting a newly released book titled *Education and the Ideal* (edited by a popular advocate for the cultural heritage model of English, Naomi Smith), columnist Miranda Devine celebrates the book as being symbolic of the ideological pendulum being “yanked” back away from the “amorality and permissiveness” of the 1960’s (Devine, 2004). Devine pays tribute to the book as “[charting] the poisonous impact on young minds of modish educational ideologies of the past 30 or 40 years”, and more specifically focuses on contributions to the book made by Dr Barry Spurr that bemoan the way in which “Postmodern relativism so influences the curriculum we cannot rank a work of art based on artistic value because that would be ‘elitist’.”

The theme of postmodern influences in the syllabus being equated with a kind of extreme relativism had appeared prior to this, however, and quite famously so in a *SMH*

article by Dr Barry Spurr himself in 2001 (Spurr, 2001). In this article Spurr is also heavily critical of the way in which the “breadth of human experience [had been] increasingly narrowed to what a politically correct Australian might think in 2001”. Echoes of this fear of political correctness are found in Devine’s article three years later, with Spurr again cited as arguing that “some of the texts prescribed for study have obviously been chosen primarily because they advance the politically correct social theories of today”.

A more direct attack on relativism is made by Naomi Smith:

It is wilfully short-sighted to base a State-wide secondary syllabus on a body of theory which denies the concept of real meaning, the existence of an essential self untouched by ideology, the existence of objective truth, and the possibility of adhering to ethics and principles intrinsically worthwhile and which do not merely serve the interests of the dominant group. (N. Smith, 2001)

The idea that the new syllabus is based on a denial of “the concept of real meaning” is one of the most frequently utilised arguments in articles that expressed a negative attitude toward the new HSC syllabus, and relates to another area of criticism (discussed as a separate theme in section 5.3.3) that the inclusion of film and multi-media texts would adversely affect reading ability and had provided students with a ‘soft option’ for study.

5.3.2 Countering claims of ‘dumbing down’

Articles that argued in favour of the new approach to English represented in the syllabus were usually framed as reactions to other articles, or as defensive positions against a variety of negative views. One of the most frequent defences of the new syllabus became the defence of film and multimedia as valuable text types. Susan Gazis, who

was President of the NSW English Teachers' Association (ETA) at the time, was quoted as denying that the study of film was a "soft option" for students:

'It is not a dumbing down at all and anyone who thinks that is probably underestimating the skills needed to study film and has not understood the syllabus or text requirements,' she said. (Jamal & Raethel, 1999)

Another writer applauded the films prescribed for selection by the Board of Studies, arguing that although

Fred Nile and his ilk might wince at the odd moments of nudity, destruction of property, swearing, dope smoking, cross-dressing and disrespect for authority... Those students who manage to see and discuss all 18 films will emerge critical but not cynical about the way film-makers manipulate our emotions, and enthusiastic but not gullible about films as a form of literature. (Dale, 1999)

Another argument that refuted claims that the new courses represented a 'dumbing down' of English was that the Standard course in particular had proven difficult for many students who struggled with the demands of the material covered. One article refers to a teacher that had taught for 75 years, who believed that "there had been an increase in discipline problems from students struggling to cope with the new Standard English course" (Noonan, 2001a). In another article later in 2001, Noonan acknowledges that "the intention [of making the Standard course more difficult] was, in part, to deter the better students from lazily choosing a soft option", but reflects that the effect of this "was to raise the bar for everyone." (Noonan, 2001b).

One particularly strong article that came out in 2002 was an Opinion piece contributed by Wayne Sawyer, who that year had succeeded Sue Gazis as the President of the ETA. The Opinion piece was a response to a scathing article that had been published two days beforehand by Brenton Boswell, an English Teacher in the Sydney area, who had

claimed that HSC English had “gone off the rails”, that it included too much material to be covered adequately in the HSC timeframe, and that the syllabus was a “dumbing down disguised as a smartening up” (Boswell, 2002). Sawyer responded to these claims by highlighting the inconsistency of a perspective that simultaneously viewed the syllabus as being a “dumbing down” at the same time as being too demanding. Sawyer also contended that many criticisms of the HSC were a reflection of ignorance about the real issues, and that they “[emanate] largely from a misplaced sense of nostalgia, and the sense that ‘that's not how we did English in my day’” (2002).

Interestingly, one of the few letters that were sent in to the *SMH* in support of the new approach to English that was *not* framed as a response or rebuttal to someone else’s criticism was written by a year 12 student, who claimed that:

The creators of the new English curriculum have rightfully acknowledged that the world has changed since Shakespeare and in 2001 we, too, have rich and valuable texts, such as *Frontline*. The courses still recognise the traditional value of Shakespeare and Austen, and while we are encouraged to examine the literary qualities of these texts, we are also asked to examine how they are received among different audiences...Perhaps those who feel uncomfortable with the new courses are actually a little afraid to move away from the safe, mediocre opinions of a few study guides and to actually think for themselves. (McDonald, 2001)

This letter represents a significant source of support, as it gives rise questions about the extent to which HSC students are thinking about the purpose and value of their learning, and the interest that they may take in the epistemological underpinnings of their own syllabuses.

5.3.3 The literary canon versus visual texts

The most frequently used cliché that was invoked by critics of the texts prescribed for selection in the HSC syllabus was undoubtedly the binary opposition that was repeatedly drawn between the study of Shakespeare and the study of Spielberg, or of *Star Wars*. Being more than a nice piece of alliteration to catch the reader's eye, these comparisons were constantly used in an attempt to shock readers into comprehending the gravity of the damaging affect of mixing high and popular culture. As Catherine Armitage explained, "what riles the critics is the idea that Luke Skywalker and Princess Leia could line up beside Othello and Desdemona as iconic characters of the western literary tradition." (Armitage, 1998) Very little attention was paid to the facts of the situation, which are that it would still be compulsory for all students in the Advanced course to study a Shakespearean Drama, and that Shakespeare's plays are available for students in the Standard course to choose from as well. Instead, outlandish claims such as that "it is no longer necessary to read any Shakespearean drama for the HSC" (Spurr, 2001) were continually made.

Some contributors, in an attempt to support the direction of the new syllabus, implicitly reinforced this valuing of canonical texts over 'popular' texts. One editorial aiming to balance criticism of the inclusion of film texts with support for the syllabus, for example, reassured readers that "more students, as well, will study a play by Shakespeare than under that old course. This is a good sign" (Editorial, 1999). Those that contributed newspaper articles, letters or opinion pieces defending the syllabus, however, never really went so far as to publicly question whether the study of Shakespeare was necessary at all. A reflection on the relevance of Shakespeare and the context in which his plays ought to be studied was evident in some contributions, with one writer pointing out that "we forget too easily that Austen and Shakespeare

contributed to the popular culture of their own time, in the media available to them...” (Sharrock, 2002). Another writer argued for the study of the classics in a way that made them relevant and therefore important to the lives of students:

The new syllabus puts these classics into contexts that are relevant for those young people. They are not some distant authority to which students must submit, but the great works are woven into their experience. (Gold, 2002)

Aside from the criticism that film and multi-media texts are a ‘dumbing down’ of the subject, with more Shakespeare framed as the obvious alternative to the ‘fad’ of visual literacy, the other most prominent argument made in relation to text selection related to theme of postmodern theory and relativist values. Glover (2002) neatly describes the syllabus as promoting the view that “a bus ticket is as valuable a text as Chaucer”, while Devine elaborates at length:

The criticism of the new post-modern English syllabus is more than just that it’s been dumbed down, with *Star Wars*, *Frontline* and the ATSC Web site among prescribed texts. It is more than the fact that the 2001 HSC English exams were riddled with political correctness, that Natasha Stott Despoja’s maiden speech was reprinted in all its glory, or that, of 12 ‘great speeches’ students were offered for ‘critical study’, the only Australians founds were Paul Keating and Noel Pearson...It is that even if students do study Shakespeare and Keats, they are being asked to do so with the postmodern tongue in the cheek and through the prism of extreme scepticism the theory requires. They are expected to absorb postmodernism’s core belief, that there is no absolute truth, that all facts are relative. (Devine, 2002)

On the whole there were a greater number of contributors expressing dissatisfaction at the texts available for selection, and much of the argument centred on historical points of difference regarding the importance of the canon, such as discussed in chapter 2. Films were contrasted repeatedly with traditional canonical literature, in particular with

pre-20th century English novelists and with Shakespearean drama, often within a broader framework where visual literacy was played off against written literacy. Most of these criticisms were further tied in with references to relativism and postmodern ‘fads’, as the “dumbing down” of the syllabus into a “soft ‘filmish’ option” (Editorial, 1999) was consistently linked to the downgrading of ‘basic’ literacy and the dilution of academic rigour.

5.3.4 Schooling different ‘types’ of student

The final theme identified in the content of the newspaper articles was that of the broader epistemological or pedagogical implications that were seen as being represented by changes to the English curriculum. In many of the articles analysed, contributors were eager to express opinions about the positive and negative aspects of the new syllabus and the texts included for study, but few articles contained explicit reasoning based on theories of knowledge or any other philosophical justification for their claims. While several writers were keen to tell their readers whether or not it was important to study Shakespeare, or whether political correctness had gone ‘too far’, few were able (or perhaps willing) to link these opinions to a wider belief about the purpose of schooling and education more broadly, and more specifically about the purpose of learning and assessment in the subject English.

Though many articles did contain implicit arguments about the nature and purpose of English, the extracts pertaining to this theme contain overt opinions. In an article in *The Australian*, for example, University of Sydney Vice-Chancellor Professor Gavin Brown explains that the “challenge [in English is] to cater for two types of students: those who do want to go on to academic study and those who don’t” (Armitage, 1998) – a telling perspective coming from the Vice-Chancellor of the University whose academics have always featured prominently in all English syllabus committees.

The motif of English needing to “cater for two types of students” is taken up again in 2001, when Spurr complains that:

The average student or one with talents in the sciences or economics must still submit to the vestiges of a quasi-academic syllabus when what he or she really needs from English studies is a good training in spelling, grammar and expression. Such training would facilitate clear, accurate and confident use of the language, written and spoken, enriched by a survey of some of the classics of English literature with which, it was once assumed, anyone with a basic education would be familiar. (Spurr, 2001)

The assessment from both Brown and Spurr that there are just “two types” of English student – and therefore just “two types” of educational need – is problematic enough. When Spurr adds to this a polarisation of students with talents in English as opposed to those “with talents in the science or economics”, the problem is compounded even further as mathematical and linguistic knowledge are cast as mutually exclusive and oppositional. A closer look at Spurr’s proposal might also lead one to question the rationale behind tying a study of “some of the classics” to “training in spelling, grammar and expression” to form the basis of an “average” student’s education in English.

Glover takes this model of needing different classes for different students up again in 2002, suggesting that:

Students...should be responding directly and personally to the art...Perhaps we need to establish more than one subject. In Practical Literacy students could study *Blade Runner* and *Frontline*, and practice writing letters to the editor and composing advertising copy. Meanwhile, across the hall, there could be space for an obscure subject called English Literature, committed to the notion that some writers can clamber from the mud of their own time, sufficient to be heard centuries later. (Glover, 2002)

Again, the opposition is created where two types of students are in need of two types of English study. In this extract we see Glover tapping into the traditional binary opposition between the study of Literacy and the study of Literature; of practical knowledge as serving a purpose that is both isolated from and lower than aesthetic knowledge. There is an explicit tying of traditional, canonical Literature to an enlightened and transcendent learning experience, with a contrasting link made between modern texts, visual texts and text types other than the traditional essay, and uninspired or unimaginative practical study.

5.4 2005: A sustained assault

As so many individuals and groups can reasonably claim a stake in the products of education, it is understandable that the content, processes and systems involved in education often arise as issues for discussion in the public domain. As one of the ‘core subjects’, and as such often mandatory for study in some form at all levels of schooling, it is also understandable that the subject English is regularly found as a focus for attention in the education arena. In addition to this, in a political climate where concern over literacy standards is continually being linked to concern for national social and economic success, and where the teaching of ‘English’ is melded together with the teaching of ‘literacy’ and ‘values’, it stands to reason that the content of English lessons and the structures used to teach the English subjects have grown beyond being a topic of general public interest to become positioned as immediately relevant to the lives of every individual.

In 2005 the usual level of interest taken in the teaching and assessment of English was increased significantly as news media, in particular columnists writing for *The*

Australian reported on components of the teaching of English that it identified as controversial and in need of change. Vaguely defined concepts including ‘postmodernism’, ‘critical literacy’, ‘political correctness’ and ‘cultural relativism’ were continually combined in an attack on the current methods of teaching English from Kindergarten to year 12 and a push for a return to traditional content and ‘back to basics’ teaching methods in English and in education generally. The addition of a number of government inquiries being either commissioned or reported on in 2005 meant increased opportunities to report on areas of English, and although those reports focussed mainly on the teaching of reading and literacy in the earlier years of schooling and on teacher training, the linking in newspaper reports of ‘literacy’ to ‘English’, and of both literacy and English to reportedly perilous and vogueish teaching ‘fads’ served to amplify more direct criticisms of the HSC English syllabus.

The following sections provide a chronological account of the public attacks on the subject English that were made throughout 2005 and represented in news media reports and dialogues, and will be followed by a discussion of how themes contained in this year-long assault as well as in newspaper pieces over the preceding ten year period studied can be drawn together using core categories of discourse and theorised as contributing to public awareness of and debate over the purpose and content of studies of English.

5.4.1 Partisan politics in the English classroom

Early in February 2005 a bitter and at times personal attack was launched in the media against an editorial that was published (Sawyer, 2004) in the Spring edition of *English In Australia*, the journal for the national professional association for English teachers the Australian Association for the Teaching of English (AATE). The editorial was written by Associate Professor Wayne Sawyer, an academic from the School of

Education at the University of Western Sydney whose teaching and scholarship focuses on the area of English curriculum, and who was at the time President of the NSW ETA. In the editorial Sawyer had stated his personal position that the Federal re-election that year of the Howard-Coalition government indicated that recent school-leavers (who had voted for the Coalition in record numbers) had not learned lessons in their English classrooms about critically analysing language that had been constructed to manipulate an audience. Sawyer cited the Federal government's deception of the public on issues such as the 'children overboard' scandal, the introduction of the GST, the war in Iraq and mandatory detention of refugees as areas where the government had used deceptive language, and argued that ex-students had failed deconstruct manipulative messages, as well as failed to critically analyse political decisions that could be considered immoral, undemocratic and unethical.

The attack on Sawyer's editorial, and on Sawyer himself, raged throughout February and was consistently cited throughout the year by journalists and politicians wanting to argue that there had been a "creeping, insidious politicisation of our educational institutions by the cultural Left" (Editorial, 2005b), that 'social literacy' was being used "to promote left-wing, New Age views of issues" (Donnelly, 2005c), and that "our public schools [had] become hostage to political correctness" (McDougall, 2005b). As well as citing Sawyer's editorial as proof of 'left-wing' bias in schools, critics also seized on the editorial as evidence that a 'critical literacy' approach to teaching in English had led to a "dumbed-down curricula in our schools [where] a bastardised version of postmodern theory" (Editorial, 2005a) had led to literacy standards falling as students were made to focus on deconstructing texts *instead of* mastering 'the basics'.

In an article titled 'cannon fodder of the culture wars', which firstly featured in *The Australian* and was then republished on the *Online Opinion* website, Kevin Donnelly

produced one of the most sustained attacks on Sawyer's editorial, arguing that it provided evidence that English was now being taught by "elites who seek to control Australia's cultural agenda", and who preferred "indoctrination to education" (Donnelly, 2005b). The article went on to condemn a variety of aspects of education that Donnelly took objection to, ranging from attacks on "the postmodern classroom [where the] aesthetic and morals of great literature" were being ignored, to claims that teachers were failing to teach basic reading and writing skills, and that more competitive assessment should be introduced to counteract "such failed fads as whole language" and increase reading standards.

Of the articles, letters, opinion pieces and editorials collected on the debate over Sawyer's editorial, only letters to the editor ever voiced support for Sawyer or for English teachers – news articles, opinion pieces and editorials were always either against Sawyer's views and against critical literacy, social literacy, postmodernism etc., or they were constructed as objective presentations of news material. Of the news articles that were presented as 'objective', many contained quotes and citations only of politicians and critics who condemned Sawyer, which may indicate an editorial bias in what material was selected and could therefore influence public discourse. News of the editorial was published in all of the newspapers chosen for analysis in this study (*The Australian*, the *Daily Telegraph*, and the *Sydney Morning Herald*), as well as in most other major papers (e.g. *The Age* and the *Herald Sun* in Victoria and the *Courier Mail* in Queensland), however coverage was by far the greatest in *The Australian*, with 18 news articles, editorials, opinion pieces and letters published in a four day period between the 9th and the 12th of February 2005. Out of the three major broadsheets analysed in this study, only in *The Australian* did the news of Sawyer's editorial grow into a large-scale attack on 'progressive' or 'New Age' education.

While two key figures from the English teachers' associations were able to get their letters to the editor published (Howie, 2005a, Sommer, 2005a), a number of opinion pieces and official responses were not accepted by the news media for publication. These pieces were often posted on the website of the AATE, and President of the AATE Paul Sommer also posted a piece onto the *Online Opinion* website (Sommer, 2005b), however these platforms certainly have a much smaller circulation than the major state and national broadsheets, and the AATE website in particular would draw its audience mostly from English teachers who would conceivably be more sympathetic to their perspective than the general public.

The furore that erupted over Sawyer's editorial was one that extended beyond the news media editorials and opinion pages, as Federal Education Minister Brendan Nelson brought the issue to parliament. Nelson's statements made in parliament were reprinted in *The Australian* (Nelson, 2005b), where readers were made aware of the parliamentary comments, including the claim that Sawyer's editorial "confirm[ed] what many parents suspect: that a minority of teachers use the classroom to impose their own partisan political views on their students", as well as Nelson's suggestion that "Professor Sawyer's colleagues and his employers should seriously review his place in any position of leadership". In another article the Prime Minister John Howard was also quoted on the issue, insisting that "this kind of comment drives more people out of the public education system [and] only confirms suspicions that people have that the public education system lacks the balance that's needed". As both the NSW ETA and the AATE are cross-sectoral associations, representing English teachers from all school systems – public and independent – Howard's implication of public schools in his statement makes a curious addition to the material against Sawyer.

The ease with which politicians and journalists were able to demonise Sawyer, an experienced educational academic specialising in English curriculum and a key figure in professional development for English teachers, is important to note in any consideration of the public context in which the 1999 HSC English syllabus continued to be implemented in 2005. The attack, which at times could be described as ferocious, as well as the silencing of responses from teachers and teacher educators wishing to be heard in defence of Sawyer, reflects a specific agenda that was being promoted through the media, and the extent to which professional educators and teaching practitioners are undermined in the public eye in their ability to make the best decisions about the content and nature of schooling.

5.4.2 Teacher training and the need for standards

In mid-February 2005, at the same time as Professor Sawyer's editorial was being debated and often condemned in newspapers and in political circles, Brendan Nelson announced that he had ordered a national inquiry into teacher training. While some news sources referenced the inquiry as being "sparked" by Sawyer's editorial (Burke, 2005), Nelson was quoted as denying any link between the two issues (Grattan, 2005). It must be considered, however, that regardless of the Minister's denial that the inquiry had been ordered in response to Sawyer's editorial, the timing of the announcement and their concurrent reporting in the news media would have linked the events in the public psyche despite any official claims to the contrary.

In November 2004 Nelson had also announced the commissioning of a national inquiry into the teaching of reading, and at the end of February 2005 *The Australian* printed a lengthy piece written by Nelson (2005c) that tied together the rationale and mindset of the Federal Minister with his views on education and an overview of both the inquiry into the teaching of reading and the inquiry into teacher training. The piece written by

Nelson explained his belief in the need for national consistency and standards, the role of the newly formed National Institute for Quality Teaching and School Leadership (NIQTSL), and also foreshadowed his plan to develop an Australian Certificate of Education (ACE). This was not the only article that Nelson published directly in newspapers that year, with the Minister publishing again in May 2005 with an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* about the need for an ACE (Nelson, 2005a).

The act of publishing these pieces and the timing of Ministerial action to coincide (whether purposefully or not) with media reporting on the apparent ‘problems’ in schools and in English teaching particularly served to maintain an authoritative voice for the Minister within the news media throughout the year. The significance for this for English teachers was that their professional views and practices were undermined by questions about consistency and quality, and that the media attack on changes to English curriculum and on teachers gained an increased amount of public attention and sense of legitimacy.

5.4.3 Postmodernism undermining cultural heritage and literacy

Over a two month period, from late July until late September of 2005, a war over English curriculum was fought on many fronts, as politicians and media columnists attacked not only English courses and teachers, but also teachers and ‘new-age’ teaching methods in general. The various criticisms ranged from direct attacks on the supposed lack of what was referred to interchangeably as ‘canonical’ or ‘traditional’ Literature set for study in the new ‘postmodern’ English, to broader attacks on the apparent ‘left-wing bias’ in schools, the damaging effects of teaching ‘fads’ such as outcomes-based learning and assessment, and low literacy standards throughout all levels of schooling. While many of these themes had appeared in the media prior to July, and continued to be covered after September, the two month period examined in

the following sections was intense and unrelenting, and an awareness of the issues covered is very important to developing an understanding of the climate that was created during 2005, and context in which the subject English was being understood and practiced.

On the 23rd of July 2005 a week-long attack was launched in the weekend edition of *The Australian* by Luke Slattery on what he termed ‘postmodernism’ in education, and specifically in English. While the letters to the editor published during the period were generally balanced in number of those supporting and those criticising Slattery, *all* of the news articles, opinion pieces and editorials during the week 23-30 July 2005 were scathing in their criticism of English teaching, and of the way in which the “[postmodern] theory that there was no objective truth had infiltrated secondary school curriculums in the guise of Critical Literacy” (Slattery & Taylor, 2005). This tying together of the concepts ‘postmodernism’, ‘critical literacy’ and the notion of denying ‘objective truth’ had been established earlier in the year during newspaper reporting of Sawyer’s 2004 AATE editorial, and was repeated ad nauseam throughout 2005. The lack of any clear definition of what was meant by the terms ‘postmodernism’ or ‘critical literacy’ was a key feature of the news media reporting throughout 2005, and was especially lacking in the articles appearing in *The Australian* by Slattery and other writers during late July.

In the first article of the week-long series, Slattery argued that postmodern theory was a “culturally relativist theory, which teaches that there is no such thing as objective truth [and had] largely fallen out of fashion on university campuses” (Slattery, 2005a p.1). This loose definition, which connects the ideas of ‘cultural relativism’ and a denial of ‘objective truth’ to an umbrella term of ‘postmodernism’ was constantly utilised throughout Slattery’s articles to create a conception of English as a subject devoid of

values, where students are denied access to essential cultural knowledge. In the same opening article of Slattery's series, postmodernism was described as having "work[ed] its way into Australian classrooms, politicising the study of books, films and emails, now grouped under the catch-all of 'texts'". Thus the new terminology being employed in English syllabuses – where all forms of communication were to be understood as 'texts' – was isolated as proof that postmodernism had pervaded English teaching as 'relativism', and had led to texts such as *Hamlet* being just as important to study as a Cornflakes box.

Word such as *texts*, *deconstruct* and *unpack* were also usually written throughout the July series of articles within inverted commas to increase the sense of strangeness surrounding supposedly postmodern tools, and to imply the dubiousness of the concepts themselves. Beyond this clustering of concepts, however, and utilisation of journalistic techniques to make them seem foreign and unnatural, there was very little in any of the articles appearing in *The Australian* at this time to give the reader an understanding of the many different understandings of postmodernism, or of the ways in which the English teaching profession was had tried to reconceptualise the nature and purpose of the subject.

As well as claiming 'cultural relativism' (read interchangeably as 'postmodernism' or 'critical literacy') as a historical fad, Slattery also quoted a number of academics or other commentators to support his argument that a focus on critical literacy has resulted in a decline in standards of 'basic' literacy skills such as reading, writing and comprehension. The argument that "critical literacy theorists are asking [students] to run a hurdle race before they can walk with ease" (Slattery, 2005a p.10) was invoked with regularity with Slattery arguing at one point that:

Postmodern theory is a tool that should ideally be handled by the subtle and well-read; by those already steeped in the intellectual tradition. To introduce the ideas of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and the rest at school level, admittedly in a boiled down form, is simply irresponsible. In the hands of second-rate intellects, postmodern theory has become stultifyingly doctrinaire. (Slattery, 2005a p.10)

This assertion that postmodern theory is only suitable for “those already steeped in the intellectual tradition” seems to be at odds with one of Slattery’s other key assertions – that postmodern theory is a 20-year old relic that has “fallen out of fashion on university campuses” (Slattery & Richardson, 2005 p.1). It is therefore unclear at times whether postmodern theory as defined by Slattery is being promoted as a waste of time and an outdated ‘fad’, or as an endeavour too difficult for school-level study. In addition, the claim that the use of postmodern theory as a tool for engaging in critical literacy is too difficult for students seems to be at odds with claims that critical literacy has led to a ‘dumbing down’ of the curriculum.

While the contradiction of postmodernism being represented as too difficult for students to engage with and simultaneously leading to a ‘dumbing down’ of the curriculum was not addressed for the duration of *The Australian’s* news coverage in July 2005, Slattery’s reference to postmodernism becoming “stultifyingly doctrinaire...in the hands of second-rate intellects” (Slattery, 2005a p.10) was immediately seized upon as a thinly veiled insult to teachers of English. The comment attracted a backlash in some letters to the editor in the following week, with one reader accusing Slattery of being “condescending and specious” (Buchholz, 2005), and another angrily claiming “that post-modern theory is a tool to be handled by the subtle and well-read necessarily excludes [Slattery]” (Eliades, 2005). What was not analysed, however, was the way in which Slattery had made this claim in a page 10 article of the 23rd July, after first

establishing a quote on the cover story of that same paper from Catherine Runcie, an “honorary associate of the University of Sydney” (Slattery & Richardson, 2005 p.1). In the cover story Slattery reported that Runcie had described the impact of postmodern theory on schools as “a great pretentious movement of teachers pretending to be intellectuals”. This technique of establishing external experts and their ‘authoritative’ opinions and then drawing upon them later to support or justify reported news and opinions is a standard feature of news media, and one which was used consistently by Slattery throughout the July attack. As the nature of news media rarely provides a context for such ‘expert’ claims to be scrutinised, validated or counter balanced, so it was in this context that external authority figures such as Runcie were established to enable Slattery to support an argument against postmodernism in schools without any substantial reporting of the actual contents of syllabus documents, or evidence of any school-based practice.

5.4.4 Lack of academic rigour in ‘cappuccino courses’

Immediately following the intensive week of reporting in *The Australian* about the supposed influence of postmodernism on schools, Brendan Nelson was reported as having “signal[ed] an attack” (Slattery, 2005b) on cappuccino courses in English. The term ‘cappuccino courses’ had been used by Nelson in the past to refer to University courses that he did not regard as having significant academic merit, when in 2003 proposals were put forward to allow Ministers the power to withhold funding or disallow altogether University courses that were not seen as appropriate for University level study. The term had also been used in early 2005 by Nelson in relation to “lifestyle-oriented courses” run by TAFE and Community Colleges, claiming that Australia was in danger of running short on tradespeople and therefore needed to be sure it was training “more brickies and less belly dancers” (Maiden, 2005a). The term

was used again in early September 2005 to refer to the inclusion of Surfboard riding as part of HSC vocational course in Applied Sport, Leisure and Recreation course (Stanley, 2005), with Nelson quoted as arguing that “it's bad enough that we've got some of these cappuccino courses in our universities, that we're now apparently offering it as an HSC subject...well it's just an absolute disgrace.”

On August 6, Luke Slattery reported that Nelson was “responding to a series of reports in *The Australian* charting the infiltration of so-called critical literacy in the English syllabus” (Slattery, 2005b). The article went on to qualify Nelson’s views in relation to reports (which had primarily been written by Slattery) in previous editions of the *Weekend Australian*:

“Critical analysis” was important, he said, but it should not be ideologically driven or diminish the joy of reading. He attacked the “so-called experts”, who lacked scientific validity and favoured jargon over clear English, as having too much impact on the school curriculum. “These people (critical literacy theorists) are potentially doing significant damage to our future,” Dr Nelson told *The Weekend Australian*. “We're on the verge of a quiet revolution in terms of parental frustration and resentment of trends that seem to have a grip on the education establishment. “The only resistance that I seem to get to plain-language reporting and the kinds of cappuccino courses in English comes from teachers and education bureaucrats”. (Slattery, 2005b)

The use and re-use of the term ‘cappuccino course’ as a general derogatory term to apply to any learning experience that Nelson regarded as lacking in academic rigor or relevance resulted in the case of English in a vague and unspecific attack, with no reference to any particular course or syllabus level. The primary target for this critique was the broadening of the concept of ‘text’, which had resulted in students studying TV commercials as well as canonical novels in a way that encouraged students to “approach all texts...as the bearers of suspect ideologies” (Slattery, 2005b). The argument for

replacing “postmodern mumbo-jumbo” with “plain language” and “common sense” was justified, according to Nelson, because “we diminish ourselves if we ignore the moral and intellectual purposes of education, which are deeply rooted in the classics” (Slattery, 2005b).

It is unclear whether this vague and indefinite attack was meant to label all NSW English courses as ‘cappuccino’ in nature, as all NSW English syllabuses have adopted the terminology of ‘texts’ to apply to all visual, verbal and written communication, and have broadened the range of texts that are studied at each level of schooling. Indeed, the Minister did not identify any particular state as being under attack, instead implying that the problem was a national one. What is clear, however, is the way in which the Minister added his authority to the media’s arguments regarding the need to focus on aesthetic readings of classic literature as a way of imparting moral and intellectual discipline. The attack also served to reinforce a discourse of education that had been gathering momentum in the press since February that positioned schools and teachers as acting in opposition to parents and society in general, as subversive elements that needed to be stood against in order to safeguard social order. The addition of Ministerial support to the public claims being made in the media therefore needs to be considered not only as a factor contributing to the general environment in which teachers were implementing the HSC English syllabus, but also as a factor of significant weight as divisions that were being promoted in the media were now receiving endorsement from the office that controlled policy and funding for education at all levels.

5.4.5 Critical literacy as ‘left-wing’ and ‘anti-American’

Just two weeks after Nelson was reported as “signalling an attack” on cappuccino courses in English, the Federal Treasurer Peter Costello delivered an address at the

Australian American Leadership Dialogue forum that included criticism that anti-American sentiment existed in Australian society, and that teachers were known to be promoting a left-wing, anti-American bias in their classrooms (Lane, 2005; Devine, 2005; Donnelly, 2005a). The comments in this address were followed by further comments made by Costello to Channel Nine for television broadcast the following day (August 21) re-stating the claim and elaborating that anti-Americanism was being passed on through teachers in schools who were “were carrying left-wing ideological baggage from the 1970s” (Garnaut & Jacobsen, 2005).

Devine cited an article written by fellow columnist Kevin Donnelly (casting him as an authoritative voice by referring to his capacity as author of a book titled *Why our schools are failing*) as arguing that “Left-wing academics, teachers unions and sympathetic governments have all conspired to use the education system to attack the so-called capitalist system and indoctrinate children with left-wing ideology” (Devine, 2005). Devine went on to argue education systems that encouraged secularism and placed social critique above aesthetic appreciation were likely to encourage terrorism when mixed with anti-American sentiment:

If Australians are taught that the Western values they have inherited are no better than the values of any other culture, no matter how primitive, and that America is the world's most dangerous terrorist, then radicals offering certainty will flourish. (Devine, 2005)

In an opinion piece published the previous day, Donnelly had argued that “the 3Rs of reading, writing and arithmetic have been redefined as the republic, reconciliation and refugees” (Donnelly, 2005a), thus tying together Costello’s claims of anti-Americanism with claims that had been made earlier by Brendan Nelson about the influence of left-wing teachers, and with the implication that this influence has come at the cost of

students learning ‘the basics’ at school. This subtle but definite reminder of one of Donnelly’s regular subjects – the literacy crisis in Australia and the need to get ‘back to basics’ – was followed with details of how the NSW Teachers Federation and the AEU had failed to ensure educational standards were being met in schools, instead wasting resources and exercising their left-wing bias by supporting students right to protest the war in Iraq, and encouraging teachers to stick to the “progressive side of politics”.

Costello’s comments served to further discredit teachers and the education system, as well as to reactivate references to Sawyer’s 2004 editorial in *English in Australia*. Sawyer’s editorial was cited as evidence that Costello’s claims were based on claims that had come from within the profession (Bolt, 2005; Lane, 2005), along with references to speeches made by representatives of the Australian Education Union (AEU) and NSW Teachers Federation. While Costello’s claims were important, as Nelson’s arguments about ‘cappuccino courses’ in English were in the weeks before, for publicly signalling the attitude and therefore possible policy directions of the Federal government, they also served as a catalyst for the media to once again publish hostile material about the role of teachers and schools in corrupting contemporary education.

5.4.6 Literature, conservatism and morality

On September 21 2005 Cardinal George Pell, the Archbishop of Sydney, delivered an Address to the National Press Club in Canberra. Making reference to the recent “considerable coverage” in newspapers that had demonstrated “relativism’s intrusion into the classroom as post-modernism or ‘critical literacy’” (Pell, 2005), Pell used a considerable proportion of his address to argue for the detrimental effect ‘relativism’ had produced on education, and more specifically through the corruption of the teaching of literature. While this attack on English was directly linked with perspectives previously put forward in the media by critics of ‘postmodernism’, ‘relativism’, and

‘critical literacy’, the way in which Pell linked criticism of the curriculum with a Catholic commentary on values and morality, resulted in more of a backlash than support in the media. From the very outset of his discussion of education, Pell connected the influence he saw ‘relativism’ to have had on the curriculum with the dangers of promoting “subjective values”:

Relativism is powerful in Western life, evidenced in many areas from the decline in the study of history and English literature, through to the triumph of subjective values and conscience over moral truth and the downgrading of heterosexual marriage. (Pell, 2005)

This linking of the decline in the study of English literature to an embracing of subjectivity and therefore of immorality and chaos was a central tenet of Pell’s speech. The identification of such phenomena as the “downgrading of heterosexual marriage” as being exemplary of the ‘sordid and dismal’, however, demonstrated the way in which anti-postmodernism could be extended to justify conservatism.

Coverage of Pell’s address in newspapers’ reports, editorials and opinion articles was more objective in its approach than they had been in the previous two months. Most articles created a sense of objectivity by contrasting several quotations from Pell’s address to quotes from key educational figures speaking in opposition to Pell’s address and supporting the English syllabus. NSW ETA executive officer Eva Gold (Morris, 2005; McDougall, 2005a), NSW ETA president Mark Howie (Norrie, 2005a), University of Newcastle humanities lecturer Wendy Michaels (Rowbotham, 2005), Board of Studies president Gordon Stanley (McDougall, 2005a) and Dr Brian Croke, a member of the Board of Studies described as “the state’s leading Catholic authority on school curriculum” (Norrie, 2005a) were all cited in a manner that portrayed their perspective as being more authoritative than had been seen throughout the year to date.

Regular columnists such as Donnelly, Slattery and Devine, who all had been vocal on the subject of the destructive nature of relativism in schools in the past, did not publish in any of the major state or national newspapers on the subject of Pell's address in the following week, perhaps reticent to overtly associate their views with Pell's criticism of other issues relating to sexuality, morality and the family:

Examining how relativism in the form of school-based post-modernism proposes to make students into 'agents of social change' makes it apparent very quickly that there is another agenda at work underneath it all. Generally accepted understandings of family, sexuality, maleness, femaleness, parenthood, and culture are treated as 'dominant discourses' that impose and legitimise injustice and intolerance. These dominant discourses are then undermined by a disproportionate focus on 'texts' which normalise moral and social disorder. Too much time is given to narratives about sad and dysfunctional individuals and shattered families...students are not forced to confront and learn from the great English classics but are allowed to sink towards the sordid and the dismal rather than strive towards the good and the beautiful. (Pell, 2005)

While Cardinal Pell's National Press Club Address makes reference at its outset to the newspaper coverage of relativism, postmodernism and critical literacy in education, responses that appeared in newspapers over the following days were less likely to renew the general attack on these concepts, as had been seen in previous months. Instead, newspaper coverage following Pell's address tended to discuss whether the inclusion of "lightweight" types of literature, such as movies and advertisements, was necessary or desirable in a syllabus that must cater to "a huge range of students" (McDougall, 2005c). Bell Shakespeare Company artistic director John Bell was adamant on this point, arguing that critical literacy programs that denied students access to high quality works were resulting in an "elitist attitude" in schools, with less able students being "denied their heritage" (Rowbotham, 2005). Bell was cited directly in Rowbotham's

article as saying that “it is elitist not to teach [Shakespeare], to say someone is not good enough or not smart enough”.

Letters to the editor in both *The Australian* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*, however, were quick to jump on Pell’s depiction of “parents wonder[ing] why their children have never heard of the Romantic poets, Yeats or the Great War poets and never ploughed through a Bronte, Orwell or Dickens novel” (Pell, 2005). Parents and community members criticised the view that students should be forced to “plough through” the classics, and argued that being forced to read classic works of English literature was more likely to drive students away from such texts (Letters, 2005b). Others argued that the English classroom ought not to be a place to teach “morals”, and that HSC texts traditionally regarded as “classics” such as *King Lear*, *Hamlet*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Medea*, *The Portrait of a Lady*, and *A Doll’s House* were not idyllic portrayals of church-endorsed morality, but were also full of “sad and dysfunctional individuals and shattered families” (Letters, 2005a).

In many ways the address delivered by Cardinal Pell became a catalyst for supporters of the English syllabus to be heard in response to accusations of embracing relativism and ‘dumbing down’ the curriculum, as what were seen as extreme positions put forward in Pell’s address seemed to discourage the media attack that had so routinely followed any mention of the English curriculum throughout the year. For a short time at the end of what had been a long two months of media hostility, educators and their representatives were supported directly by being quoted in the newspapers as figures of authority, and indirectly by the presentation of these quotes in an objective context, rather than the critical or derogatory context that had been the custom in many previous articles. The implications for a profession that had been struggling throughout the year to justify its policies and practices of course cannot be measured here, though it is interesting to

consider the role of public discourse in positioning teacher practitioners as being supported by their community, or as acting in opposition to it.

5.4.7 English assessment standards – a national survey

Shortly following comments made by Cardinal Pell about the importance of canonical literature for teaching values and ensuring an appropriate cultural heritage, Federal Education Minister Brendan Nelson announced a national study to compare the content, curriculum and standards of post-compulsory courses in English, maths and physics and chemistry across all states and school sectors. This national survey of Year 12 assessment would on completion contribute to determining the content of the ACE. In an announcement that was timed in such a way that it could coincide with other attacks on education (e.g. Cardinal Pell's), Nelson expressed concern that “standards are being dumbed down” in “key” subjects (Maiden, 2005b), and that students in various states may not be studying material at as high a standard as others. Nelson was quoted as being particularly concerned that “moves away from classical literature to emphasise contemporary texts is causing concern to many parents” (Norrie, 2005b).

While this example of media reporting on educational issues is an important demonstration of the way in which material in the newspapers took on an ‘art-imitates-life-imitates-art’ quality during 2005, with new reporting and announcements picking up on echoes of previous coverage as well as foreshadowing the news to come, it is also an example of one of a handful of issues that spanned the entire year through recurrent coverage. While schools and education in general are certainly popular social and political topics, and as such should be expected to be covered in various news media, the relentless and often ferocious attack on the English curriculum in particular during 2005 was extraordinary when compared to the total coverage over the ten year period analysed in this study. The addition of constant commentary by key political figures

such as the Federal Education Minister on the apparent decline in standards and loss of rigor in senior English syllabuses, as well as the commissioning of a number of inquiries and studies relating to education also signalled the height to which criticism of teachers and curriculum was being prioritised as an area for public politicking.

5.5 Categorisation of public discourse reflected in newspapers

As previously discussed, it is difficult to say to what extent the newspaper representations of the issues relating to the HSC English syllabus are a valid reflection of general public opinion; however, the power of these representations and the ways in which they were seen to gather momentum and gain support from public leaders in 2005 signals the important role that media representations can play in moulding public perceptions and influencing educational policy. The ways in which journalists chose to mostly represent teachers as unprofessional, holding marginal views and favouring trendy ‘fads’, only seldom drawing on teacher representatives as voices of authority, also provides an insight into the role played by the media in limiting the capacity of teachers to publically present valid and informed views about their own profession. Ultimately, while this choice of data can only give us so much certainty about what ‘the public’ expects from education as a ‘public good’, valuable insights have been gleaned about the spectrum of issues that have been represented in newspaper contributions and which serve to shape the public psyche, and this is expected to provide an interesting contrast with the discourse of teachers that will be analysed in the next chapter.

Following the initial analysis of themes throughout the entire period of 1995-2005 three core concerns were identified as forming the categories of public discourse as represented in newspaper contributions – the need to develop personal values, the need

to pass on cultural heritage through the study of quality ‘literature’, and the need to ensure that students learned ‘the basics’ of language. While the bulk of the material presented negative perspectives on HSC English syllabus, with the impact of postmodern theory and the broadened concept of ‘valid texts’ presenting a particular concern, these perspectives were able to be mapped alongside more positive views using the three core categories to represent the underlying shared desires for what the English curriculum should do. The core concerns in public discourse represented in the media were seen to overlap (as shown in Figure 3 below), and in the following sections each of the three categories will be developed and connections between them will be explored.

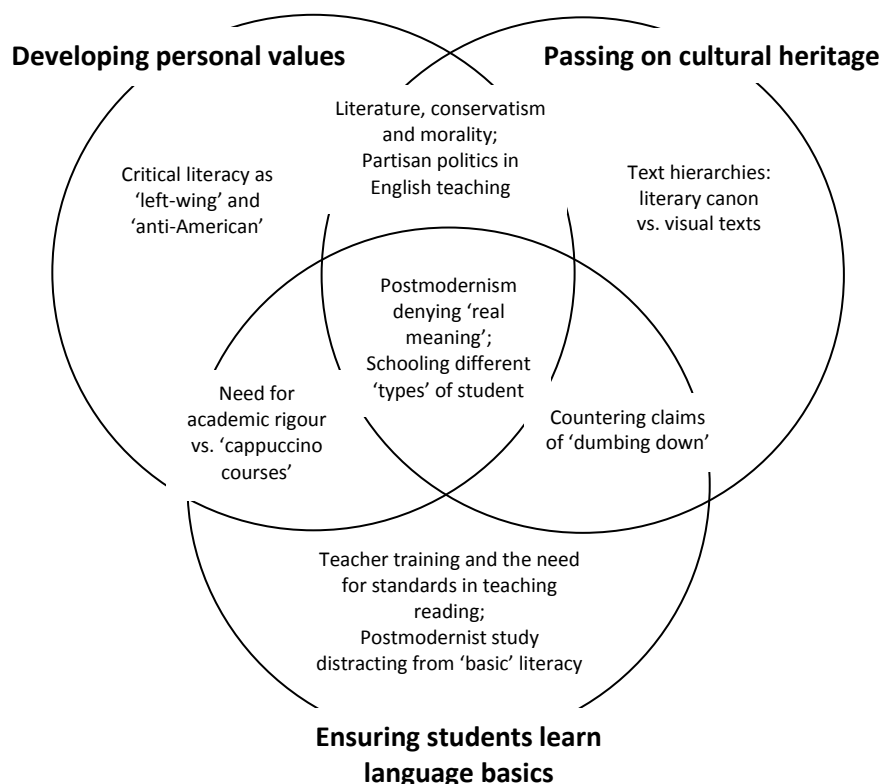


FIGURE 3: CATEGORISATION OF CORE CONCERNS ABOUT ENGLISH CURRICULUM REPRESENTED IN NEWSPAPERS

5.5.1 Developing personal values

All of the newspapers analysed for this study contained references to the influence of postmodern theory on the HSC English syllabus, and on English curriculum more broadly, and this theme can be linked to all three of the core categories discussed here. In relation to the development of personal values postmodernism was most frequently labelled a threat to English as a school discipline due to the adoption of ‘relativist’ attitudes toward culture and values that were perceived as a dominant feature of the theory. Claims were consistently made by writers such as Slattery, Devine and Donnelly that a belief that “there was no objective truth had infiltrated secondary school curriculums in the guise of Critical Literacy” (Slattery & Taylor, 2005), and consequently any teaching practice that involved the exploration of dominant values or historically marginalised perspectives was deemed detrimental to the development of students’ personal value systems.

The development of a student’s personal values (also their ‘ethics’ or ‘morals’) is an aim that is advocated by several key philosophies of English curriculum, as discussed previously in chapter 2. However, both explicit and implicit understandings of which values ought to be taught and to what end were narrow in the newspaper materials covering the issue. Criticisms about the way in which the “breadth of human experience [had been] increasingly narrowed to what a politically correct Australian might think” (Spurr, 2001) implicitly signal a desire to impart traditional western values in the curriculum, as well as to ameliorate against the valuing of minority perspectives, whether these be of women, different cultural or socio-economic groups, or a range of sexualities. In 2005 when the Federal Treasurer made public statements about the valuing of ‘other cultures’ being tantamount to ‘anti-Americanism’, one columnist was quite clear in identifying content that should be deemed as ‘politically correct’, arguing

that “the 3Rs of reading, writing and arithmetic have been redefined as the republic, reconciliation and refugees” (Donnelly, 2005a). This distaste for political correctness was not only related to the focus of textual analysis that might take place in an English classroom, but also to text choice, as seen in Devine’s criticism of the inclusion of Natasha Stott Despoja’s maiden speech to Parliament in the 2001 HSC exam (Devine, 2002).

Where specific attacks on values in English were made by Cardinal Pell in 2005, however, it was observed that not only were the views of English teachers and their representatives provided more coverage and presented with greater authority, but writers who had been eager in the past to publish their views about ‘traditional’ values refrained from presenting material in this case. Pell’s views on the inadequacy of the English curriculum in developing appropriate personal values in students were made clear when he asserted that “generally accepted understandings of family, sexuality, maleness, femaleness, parenthood, and culture...are undermined by a disproportionate focus on ‘texts’ which normalise moral and social disorder” (Pell, 2005). The consequent backlash that occurred suggests that, while newspapers may be accurate in representing a public desire for students to develop their personal values through the study of English, that the valuing of heterosexuality, masculine power and British culture that are *implied* as being ‘traditional’ in other articles are not as popularly supported when they are *explicitly* stated.

In fact, while all published pieces aligned with broader curriculum theories in some way when they advocated the teaching of ‘values’, explicit statements about the values to be taught were always presented in a negative light. This was seen in the backlash against the conservative values proposed by Cardinal Pell, and was also seen in the constant criticism of English teachers as using their classrooms as a site to impart partisan

politics, in particular ‘left-wing’ politics. It cannot be known whether the sustained attack on English teaching in 2005 would have arisen if it weren’t for the publication of Sawyer’s editorial comments about John Howard’s election reflecting a failure of critical literacy, but it is clear that these comments were seen as indicative of ideology-driven curriculum, and roundly criticised as a result. It seems that media representations were unanimous in the rejection of anyone in a position of power, whether that is a university professor, an English teacher or a Catholic Archbishop, telling students what to value, despite their simultaneous insistence that students must be instilled with values. Instead, engagement with the ideas, characters and worlds within texts was presented as the means through which students should develop their personal values, and it is this idea that is explored in the next category, as the ideas pertaining to the concept of quality literature and cultural heritage are developed further.

5.5.2 Passing on cultural heritage

In the newspaper contributions analysed the most frequent suggestion for how students could develop their personal values was through the study of texts that would lead them to reflect on the world around them and their role in it. The expanded definition in the 1999 HSC English syllabus, however, of relevant texts for study to include not only prose fiction, poetry and drama, but also film, media and multimedia texts was consistently criticised as a ‘dumbing down’ of the curriculum, and texts using visual language were represented as being drawn only from ‘popular culture’ and being of poor quality. Despite arguments cited in some articles regarding the demanding nature of visual analysis, and of film studies in particular, Shakespeare was repeatedly compared to *Star Wars* to make the point that the study of a broader range of texts constituted a threat to students’ engaging with their cultural heritage.

Part of this concern for the loss of cultural heritage was again linked to distress about the influence of postmodern theory and ‘cultural relativism’ in the curriculum. Spurr’s assertion that “postmodern relativism so influences the curriculum we cannot rank a work of art based on artistic value because that would be ‘elitist’” (Devine, 2004) is representative of this view, and analysis of the HSC syllabus later in this thesis will explore the validity of such perceptions about the lack of attention given to artistic or aesthetic value in the content or outcomes of the Standard and Advanced courses. What the arguments in the media show, however, is that concern about the undervaluing of ‘artistic value’ was in fact being conflated with anxiety about the undervaluing of works from the traditional Western literary canon. Claims such as those made by Donnelly in 2005 that the “aesthetic and morals of great literature” were being ignored in English classrooms demonstrate how the need to study ‘great literature’, or ‘the classics’ was portrayed as the best way to cultivate aesthetic taste and personal morals. These assertions extended beyond the realm of media rhetoric in 2005 when Federal Education Minister Brendan Nelson used the claim that “moves away from classical literature to emphasise contemporary texts is causing concern to many parents” (Norrie, 2005b) as a rationale for undertaking a national study to compare post-compulsory courses in English across Australia.

The issue of cultural heritage, however, and its importance to student learning was at times questioned, as a variety of at times contradictory messages were represented in relation to the ‘type’ of student in question. In some articles references were made to the fact that canonical texts had been retained in the HSC text list to the benefit of both courses, while some letters to the editor stressed the damaging effect on students’ reading and learning when they were forced to ‘plough through’ classic texts. The larger amount of canonical texts including Shakespeare in the Advanced course was

highlighted by John Bell as representing an ‘elitist attitude’ and denying less able students access to an exploration of their cultural heritage, but opinion writers as well as the Vice Chancellor of the University of Sydney stated views that less able students required more ‘practical’ study while more able students required ‘academic’ content.

What underlies the contradictions in these comments is a poor representation of the relationship between studying canonical texts, and providing students with a way to learn about and engage with their cultural heritage. Clear statements about *whose* cultural heritage was being implied were lacking, and questions of the importance of multicultural and Indigenous heritage were avoided by focussing on the need for ‘quality’, which could only be assured by drawing from classic works of Western (implicitly ‘British’) literature. Another complexity in using literature as a vehicle to ‘pass on’ the values of Australia’s cultural heritage that was largely ignored, though some letters to the editor made the point, was the sophisticated concepts and at times sordid and dismal portrayals that form the basis of many canonical works in Western literature. Too frequently journalists represented students’ engagement with what was considered ‘valuable literature’ as detached from acts of learning and teaching in the classroom, neglecting the significant role that would be played in guiding a student through such works.

Another important relationship that is neglected in the newspaper accounts of the need to pass on cultural heritage is the relationship between content and pedagogy, as evidenced by constant attacks made on critical literacy. While all published comments promoted the need for English to develop a love of reading, and to provide students with knowledge about language and culture that would enable them to function successfully as citizens in their post-schooling lives, opinions about whether ‘classic’ literature should be explored aesthetically or critically were presented in a way that did

not acknowledge scope in the curriculum for both of these. Arguments about whether to privilege canonical or ‘classical’ literature over visual and ‘popular’ texts were therefore seen to be intertwined with arguments about whether students should be adopting or critiquing the cultures and values represented in these texts. Comments by Brendan Nelson that critical analysis had the potential to ‘diminish the joy of reading’, and that “we diminish ourselves if we ignore the moral and intellectual purposes of education, which are deeply rooted in the classics” (Slattery, 2005b) reflect the general trend of the published discourse to promote the benefits of accepting and adopting a singular cultural heritage in the form of values embedded in the classics.

5.5.3 Ensuring students learn language ‘basics’

References were consistently made throughout the period of 1995-2005 to the need to ensure that students were learning ‘the basics’ and English teachers were portrayed as neglecting a close study of written language in favour of ‘softer’ options, specifically the study of film and other visual texts. Alarmist arguments that English had been ‘dumbed down’ by an increased focus on visual and popular texts were only made with reference to a small number of texts on offer as evidence of the decline in standards of language learning. Ideas about what type of language study should take place in senior English curriculum were closely tied to notions of the expected post-schooling opportunities for different ‘types’ of student, and the historical purpose of schools as providing a skilled population for the workforce was emphasised.

Recalling the overview of curriculum theory in chapter 2 relating to contemporary notions of language use involving operational, cultural and critical literacy, the language study reported in newspapers as being essential tended only to relate to the operational aspect of literacy. Basic skills such as ‘good training in spelling, grammar and expression’ that would facilitate ‘clear, accurate and confident use of the language’

were commonly represented as lacking in current students and graduates, and the attainment of functional language skill was often divorced from the study of literature. While the study of literary works was depicted as a separate practice, intended as a transcendental experience that would allow students to develop their culture, tastes and values, learning ‘the basics’ was associated with ‘practical’ language use, and more specifically, only with written language.

Concerns about the influence of postmodernism, which ultimately ran through all areas of criticism levelled against the HSC English syllabus, manifested in two ways in relation to the potential of students to successfully acquire basic skills in language use. Firstly, the extension of what could be considered a ‘text’ to include film, media and multimedia fell under the general accusation that postmodern ‘cultural relativism’ had led to a denial of any truth or value that could be held up as worth studying – in this case, the superiority of traditional literary forms such as poems, novels and playscripts had been denied and a threat to learning written language was perceived as a result. Secondly, the time spent in class on critical literacy practices, such as questioning the values represented in a text or considering marginalised perspectives, was seen as detracting from time that could have been spent on close language study. The notion that such critical studies would necessarily involve close study of language was not represented, and critical literacy overall was constantly labelled a waste of time and a ‘fad’.

As the only mandatory subject in the HSC, English courses (in particular the Standard English course) would inevitably also be offered to students that do not readily engage in the content, who may even require remedial instruction in operational literacy, and on occasion views were cited about the issues that had been observed in actual classrooms. On these occasions the biggest threat to student engagement in the Standard course was

identified as the large *amount*, not the ‘type’ of content covered in the course. The increase in both the standard of work required and the amount of content to be covered by students in the Standard course that was reported by some stood in contrast to claims of ‘dumbing down’ made by others. And yet such claims in the media about low standards of reading and poor teaching of ‘basic’ reading skills by English teachers in general were reflected in the Federal government inquiries into the teaching of reading and into teacher training commissioned under Brendan Nelson.

Figure 3 indicated that the three core categories constructed to understand the public rhetoric of desired outcomes of English teaching were interrelated, and that the initial themes represented in the news media during 1995-2005 could be located within these broader categories. While this interrelation has been explored in this analysis of newspaper contributions and related political initiatives, future research into the views of parents, community members, and of students themselves could provide further information about what various elements of ‘the public’ as stakeholders in education as a ‘public good’ expect from the post-compulsory English curriculum.

5.6 Conclusion

The data extracted using a content analysis of newspaper contributions is valuable as a measure of the issues that are regarded as important by the public in relation to students’ study of English, as well as wider issues of the purpose and nature of education. Concerns about the influence of postmodern theory, and about the widening of English curriculum to explicitly include visual texts were observed, but were seen alongside other themes as relating to larger categories of concern about values, cultural heritage, and language study in English classrooms. The increased reporting on issues relating to

the teaching of English in 2005 is also important to take into account in the context of this study. While newspaper reporting of HSC English understandably increased during phases of its development and in its first years of examination, it might have been expected that reports depicting the English syllabus as controversial would decline as the public settled into the new syllabus and the paradigm shift in English curriculum that had influenced the structure and content of the syllabus.

To see such an increase in reporting, and indeed, such an aggressive approach in much of the public debate from those in favour of a return to more traditional approaches to the study of literature, signals an uneasy time in which practitioners have had to implement a syllabus that is under constant public scrutiny and criticism. It also provides an insight into the political context in which teachers are working, with much of the coverage lending support to the various government initiatives aimed at ‘increasing standards’ – the assumption and implication of such initiatives being that current standards and practices are failing to meet the goals of education as defined by those in power, rather than by the profession. The next chapter of this thesis aims to provide some insight into the challenges faced by teachers implementing the 1999 HSC English syllabus in two different schools, before finally turning in chapter 7 to a selective content analysis of the syllabus text to explore the possible bases for both professional and public claims about the significance of changes to English under the ‘new’ HSC.

Chapter 6: Case Study Data Analysis

6.1 Introduction

As discussed in the description of the research design and methods used for this research, two schools were selected in which to conduct case studies of the implementation of the 1999 HSC English syllabus. These implementation case studies involved spending one ‘field day’ a week in each school over two school terms (July – December in 2004) to observe the ways in which the English faculty staff had implemented the syllabus with their students in their particular school context, and to talk with the teachers both in day-to-day conversation and in semi-structured interviews about their beliefs and experiences relating to the syllabus.

The schools were selected based on the researcher’s knowledge of their different school contexts, and although the methodology of this research did not aim to generate generalisations about the experiences of similar schools, it was hoped that the different issues observed at each school site could be compared and contrasted to provide a rich understanding of the complex nature of the lived experiences of the syllabus. While both schools selected are public high schools located in the Sydney metropolitan area, the different school contexts – a long established, single-sex, selective high school and a co-educational, community high school servicing a disadvantaged student population – were expected to yield a range of insights into the challenges and problems faced when implementing the HSC English syllabus. It was expected that the researcher’s familiarity with these schools would help to overcome some of the problems associated with case study research, such as gaining the trust of participants and developing a knowledge of the case study site; however the familiarity with the selected schools did

not necessarily lead to easy integration into the school or a receptive attitude from the staff, and the impact of this will be explored in the discussion section of this chapter.

In this chapter the two schools will be reported on as separate case study sites, with data in the form of field observation notes and interview transcripts used to identify the key features and issues that shaped the implementation of HSC English in each school. To identify the dominant influences on each school's context, interview transcripts and field notes were subjected to a process of "open coding" to identify, name and categorise the initial concepts and potential themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.102). These themes were continually developed and refined throughout the six-month field work period by applying further analytical coding tools, namely "axial coding" to relate initial categories of concepts and themes to one another, and "selective coding" to identify core categories. The themes and concepts that were identified were then tested for validity toward the end of the field work period using methods of "structural corroboration" and "consensual validation" (Eisner, 1998, p.110-113). Structural corroboration was achieved by comparing the themes identified by the researcher in field notes with the themes directly reported by the teachers in their interviews to ensure that the conclusions being drawn by the researcher as an 'outsider' were justly linked to the experiences and ideas of the teacher 'insiders', while consensual validation was achieved by providing written reports of the researcher's findings to teachers in the faculty and adjusting some of the final conclusions based on their feedback.

6.2 School profiles

6.2.1 Welton High School

Welton High School (“Welton” hereafter) is a selective boys’ high school in the Sydney metropolitan area. During this study it had a student population of approximately 1100 drawn from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds. Approximately 75 per cent of the student population came from a non-English speaking background (NESB), although English teachers at the school expressed a belief that this factor was not seen as a barrier to student success. As a selective school Welton requires students to have sat the Selective High Schools Test at the end of Primary school, and uses a combination of students’ exam marks and other records of academic ability to choose which students will be accepted into the school. The impact of this is that the school, as with other selective schools in NSW, has a strong emphasis on academic development and achievement. The school has a long tradition of high achievement and a reputation for success in all aspects of schooling, including academic, cultural and sporting spheres. The boys at the school tend to be involved in several extracurricular activities, and these activities are often of a nature that is associated with elite school culture and high academe – public speaking, debating and musical performance, as well as sports such as rugby union and cricket.

The English faculty at Welton at the time of the study consisted of eleven full-time and one part-time teacher, most of whom had been at the school for more than three years, at least three of which had been at the school for long periods ranging from 13-25 years, and only two of which were at the school as their first full-time appointment. The staff taught HSC English to approximately 220 students over nine classes of 24-25 students, all of which were required to enrol in Advanced English. Almost all of the students had also elected to enrol in the Extension 1 course in English during year 11 and more than

half the grade had stayed in the Extension 1 course in year 12 every year since the new syllabus had been implemented. This was the first year that the English head teacher had turned some students away from the Extension 1 course for misbehaving or underperforming in year 11 classes, and so the usual eight classes had been reduced to seven classes of 23-24 students, leaving approximately 165 out of 230 students enrolled in English Extension 1. The English faculty did not run the ESL or the Standard English courses at all, and had not done so since the new syllabus had been implemented.

6.2.2 Shermer High School

Shermer High School (“Shermer” hereafter) is a coeducational public high school in the Sydney metropolitan area. During this study it had a student population of approximately 450, and while these students were drawn from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds, the school most notably has enrolled a large proportion of Polynesian students (referred to in the school as “Pacific Island” or “P.I.” students) and Aboriginal students (approximately 12 percent of the total school population indicated an Indigenous background). Enrolment in the school is mostly from families in the surrounding suburb and the school maintains strong links with the local community, in particular with families from the Pacific Islands who take an active interest in school activities and whose families and children often associate outside of school through community and religious groups. The school also accepts a small number of students each year who have sought transfer from other local schools as a result of behaviour problems, a large proportion of which are Aboriginal students whose families have heard that Shermer High has a reputation for supporting and accommodating the learning needs of Aboriginal students.

Members of the school's senior executive staff often talk proudly about the school's reputation as a haven for troubled and marginalised students, and about the school's philosophy of providing students with support and care, but they also acknowledge the challenges that accompany such a role. Students at Shermer largely come from families of a low socio-economic status (SES) with a mix of students drawn from private homes in the local area and from the local community housing estate. As a school serving a high concentration of low SES communities Shermer High had been receiving targeted funding from the NSW Department of Education and Training through the Priority Schools Programs (PSP) since the inception of both the Priority Action Schools (PAS) Program and the Priority Schools Funding Program (PSFP) in 2002 – the school was one of only a small number of schools that received funding from both the PSFP and PAS programs in recognition of their deep needs. In contrast to Welton High School where the school's selectivity and ethos of tradition and success had resulted in a prestigious public image and a high demand for enrolment at the school, the enrolments at Shermer had been steadily decreasing over the past five years as violence and disruption that had occurred in previous years at the school had solidified a public image of the school as a 'last resort' for students in the local area that couldn't secure enrolment at any other specialised, selective or private school.

The English faculty at Shermer High School consisted of six full-time English teachers, of whom only the Head Teacher had been at the school for more than three years – the Head Teacher had been at the school for thirteen years, since arriving at Shermer as his first full-time appointment in 1992. Of the other five teachers, three had been appointed to Shermer as their first full-time teaching job, and one of these teachers was originally trained as a Primary teacher but had been taken on at the High School because of the need in the school for an English teacher who was trained to program work for students

with Primary-aged literacy levels. The staff taught HSC English to approximately 70 students, nine of whom were enrolled in a small Advanced English class with the remainder of the grade enrolled in the Standard English course. The school did not have a need to run the ESL English course, and did not run any Extension English courses.

6.3 Initial themes for Welton High School

As already described, teacher interviews and observations for the case study at Welton High School were collected during weekly field research days over two full school terms. One of the themes that was apparent from the outset, and that recurred regularly throughout the study, was the framing of students and their parents as ‘clientele’, and the regular deferment to the demands of the clientele as a rationale for learning and teaching practices. This focus on accountability to the school community, in particular in relation to students’ academic performance, often appeared alongside comments about the impact of working in a single-sex school environment, with teachers demonstrating strong beliefs about boys’ education including the inclination of boys to be competitive across all subjects, but to be more likely to prefer Mathematics and to resist reading and engagement in ‘girly subjects’ like English. Preferred subjects and learning styles were often accepted as common wisdom, and again this had an impact on decisions about curriculum and pedagogy.

As observations and interviews progressed, teachers became more willing to discuss their personal curriculum philosophies, and this exposed themes relating to their view of English within the curriculum hierarchy (in particular as contrasted to Maths and Science based subjects), as well as the broader hierarchy of combined curricular and

extracurricular experience within the school. The pressure on students to balance a broad range of pursuits as well as a large workload, whilst maintaining high levels of academic achievement, was a theme that strongly intersected with teachers' beliefs about English as a subject. 'Cultural Studies' and 'Literary Criticism' approaches to English were seen as fitting in best with the culture of the school, and the lack of time and energy for student creativity was a common concern.

6.3.1 The nature of the 'clientele'

When asked about the specific context of Welton and whether there were any issues or factors that shaped the way that English was taught in the school, all of the teachers spoken to in both formal interviews and in everyday conversation suggested that the school's academic selectivity and the fact that it was a boys' high school were the most influential features of the school's context, and most made particular use of the term "clientele". In the English faculty staffroom at Welton the phrase "clientele", as well as being synonymous with the specific attributes of 'selectivity' and 'boys-only', was also used to invoke the concept of the school being a provider of a product or service to the students and their families, and of the school being accountable to the demands of students and parents for high achievement and success.

All of the teachers participating in the case study made comments at some point during the interviews and observations about the fact that the students at the school were 'very intelligent', and that they often could achieve very high marks 'without trying hard' or engaging in depth with the subject. Carol, a teacher with over 15 years experience who had been at the school of four years explained this further in relation to English, describing the boys at the schools as preferring a "cognitive" rather than an "affective" learning style, and as being "so much to the cognitive that they absolutely disregard or pour scorn on that affective form of approaching topics". She also believed that the

students in the school were extremely bright, and that most had “photographic memories”, but that they struggled to apply the things they learned in subjects like English because of their lack of ability in engaging with “affective” subjects that required an emotional and personal connection.

Mark, who had been at the school for over 20 years and had himself attended the school as a student, also discussed the academic nature of the school. He explained in one interview the difference in workload and overall tone from schools he had taught at previously:

I found that in [two other comprehensive schools] you never really got much real teaching done, you were often just a child minder really, and so there was no – not a lot – of engagement with the kids. I suppose that’s a bit of a generalisation – with the senior classes if you were lucky and had a good class you would get decent stimulation from the kids, but most of the time it was just depressing.

In conversation with Carol, Mark agreed that the students’ subject preferences seemed to reflect a devaluing of creative work, but suggested that this may have more to do with the maturity level of the students, and their preference for consuming popular culture over more traditional or canonical texts. He pointed to the students’ interest in video games, and “the usual car chase and explosion films and so on”, and contrasted this with his desire to engage them with not only canonical literature, but also in discussion and reflection “about music and intelligent, thoughtful films”, claiming that the “kids have a virtually culturally deprived background”, and that “if you’re talking about the arts generally, well, they haven’t got a clue.” Teachers further described meeting with some students after they had received their HSC marks and finding that they had such low engagement with the subject that they would proudly boast that they “didn’t even read the books”. However they did contrast this with descriptions of “top students” who

could “discuss [values and ideas] at a pretty high level”. In this respect, ideas about student *ability* – with “top students” seen as able to engage – and student *interest* – with the lack of engagement attributed to cognitive learning styles and cultural values – were often conflated.

Teachers’ beliefs about the school clientele subsequently overlapped with themes that later emerged in the study. Beliefs about male students tending to be either predisposed to cognitive thinking, or lacking in maturity exposed a tension between ideas about the school clientele as a whole, including parent expectations, as opposed to ideas about the specific social experiences and learning needs of boys. Beliefs about how English curriculum could connect with students in light of their interests and abilities also resurfaced when teachers discussed the hierarchy of knowledge *within* English as a subject, in particular in relation to choice of HSC English courses within the school.

6.3.2 Boys and mathematics

In a formal interview Mark argued that the nature of the selective schools exam that students had to take to gain admission to the school had a serious impact on the type of student that enrolled in the school. He explained that “because in the entrance test they just have a multiple choice test for English...we get kids here who are outstanding in Maths and so on, but when it comes to English they’ve got ESL problems, they don’t read, [and] their expression generally is not very good”. Although Mark alluded to this emphasis on Maths in the selective schools entrance exam as being a relatively new phenomenon, he also claimed that the students at the school had “always had a certain arrogance about them”, and that the students had “very high impressions about their ability” as a result of both their own intelligence and experiences of success, and of school’s tradition of producing and emphasising success. He also described the students’ approach to English as “mathematical” and “formulaic”, explaining that

“when it comes to reading they learn what the different readings are for a text and reproduce it – there’s no real engagement, most of the time”.

The faculty’s head teacher Melanie also spoke in an interview about the students coming into the school as “Maths students”, by scoring highly on the mathematics section of the selective schools entry exam, and suggested that this seemed to lower the boys’ confidence in their ability to do well in English. She explained that this was compounded by attitudes in the school that “boys can’t do English”, but believed that the English faculty had made a lot of progress in breaking that notion because they had “had a lot of kids with Band 6’s” in HSC English, and that success in the subject (leading to improved results in student HSC exams and a higher profile for the school) had generated more support for English from the rest of the teaching staff. Another teacher in the faculty, Vanessa, who had been at the school for two and a half years and was filling the role of head teacher while Melanie was on leave in Term 3, argued that the rigid segmentation of Modules in the HSC English syllabus made it easier for the students to learn, because of the male students’ more “formulaic way of approaching English”. This tension between the picture of the male student who could not succeed in English because of his preference for Maths, and the male student who was better equipped to succeed in English because of his mathematical and formulaic approach to learning was prevalent in many informal staffroom discussions, and it was common for teachers in the English faculty to hold both beliefs – that mathematical ability and “formulaic” thinking was both a detriment and a benefit – simultaneously.

6.3.3 Curriculum hierarchies

In addition to the perceived personal preference amongst students for “cognitive” subjects such as Maths, all teachers also mentioned the pressure on students from their parents to succeed in Maths as a pathway to a high UAI score and entry into university

courses such as “Economics, Economics/Law, Engineering or Medicine”. Teachers believed that parents were playing a big part in feeding students’ beliefs that English could not be studied, and that spending time on English activities such as reading a book or writing was wasting precious time that could be spent more productively on Maths. While the teachers agreed that the students were themselves very ambitious and eager to enter high profile university courses in the areas of Maths and Science, without involving parents and students directly in the research it was difficult to gauge the extent to which students were being pressured from parents, and perhaps teachers or other peers, to follow certain interests and life paths.

In a lunchtime conversation, Patricia (who for some time had been reluctant to participate in the research project at all) and Vanessa heavily criticised the school as wanting to “stay in the 1950’s”, and suggested that racist and sexist attitudes were promoted by older male teachers in the school who believed in holding onto “tradition”. They described the school as being particularly difficult for female teachers, especially those in “wishy-washy subjects [like English]”, and described the boys as having licence to “punish” teachers they thought might not be “up to scratch”. Patricia expressed resentment at having been lied to about what the school and the students were like by the head teacher, Melanie, who told her that if she came to teach English at Welton she would be able to do a lot of creative work and that the boys would love that – instead Patricia felt that the students hated English, and that, as a teacher, if you didn’t just hand them the answers you were “gone”. This discussion uncovered an interesting tension between the concept of the “clientele” (students and parents) as coming to the school with particular beliefs, needs and wants, and of the school playing a more active role in shaping the behaviour and desires of the students through the attitudes of the school staff.

6.3.4 Pressure on students' time

The emphasis in the school on promoting extracurricular activities outside of regular school subjects had resulted in a school culture that valued success in areas other than academic study, however, while some teachers regarded this as constituting a positive and holistic approach to education, all teachers commented on the impact that such a culture had on the amount of time students had to spend on English. Some teachers suggested that there was a lot of pressure on students to be successful in a range of subjects and extracurricular activities, with the head teacher, Melanie, commenting that “time is an issue actually for kids in this school – many of them have got far too much to do”, but most teachers seemed confident in the students’ ability to meet performance demands. Sport, especially cricket, was identified as the main activity that took time away from school study, and Carol suggested that one reason why students at the school did not reach their potential in the Extension 2 course was that they were usually too “swamped” with what else they were doing to spend energy on a long term creative project.

Extracurricular activities such as sport, however, were rarely identified as being the *sole* distraction, or a distraction from school work overall; rather it was only English that was described as “missing out” from the students’ attention. Melanie explained that when it came to English students would “try to avoid reading their novels, because then they’d have to sit down and read when they could be doing something else”, which included sport, but also included other subjects that students perceived they were better at, enjoyed more, or found “easier to study”, such as Maths and Science.

6.3.5 HSC English course hierarchies

Teachers’ beliefs about the status of English within the school curriculum were echoed by their beliefs about the status of the HSC Advanced and Extension courses as

compared to the Standard, ESL and Fundamentals courses. One of the important aspects of HSC English at Welton High School that was mentioned by all of the teachers involved in the study was the decision to run only the Advanced English course for students in Year 11 and 12 – not to offer the Standard English course, making it compulsory for all students to study English at the highest level. Teachers in the English faculty were evenly divided on whether they thought this approach was wise, with some teachers commenting that the standard of English for some students with an ESL background was so poor that the school should in fact be running a small class in the ESL English course. It is interesting to note that, while teachers saw such allocation of subject status as undesirable across the school curriculum, expressing disappointment at the general dismissal of English as a “wishy-washy” subject, views on upholding high standards and maintaining status *within* the faculty were more diverse.

The head teacher, Melanie, emphasised in an interview that the decision to run only the Advanced course was part of her personal vision for English at the school, and she acknowledged that not all teachers in the faculty agreed with the decision. Melanie explained that her approach was necessary because although the students did not want to do “hard English”, they did want high marks, and because it had been made clear during the development of the syllabus that marks in the ESL and Standard English courses would not be scaled very highly, Advanced English was practically essential for students wanting to achieve a high UAI score. She also explained that she saw it as her role to “make kids do the best English they can do”, and to push them as hard as possible because she knew they were capable of doing the work, and she wanted to make sure the students became “successful and scholarly as well”.

In contrast to Melanie, Carol was critical of the school policy of pushing students to achieve in high level courses, and believed that there was a real need for a Standard

class to run and that the job of the English teacher was a lot harder because there was so much work to do in “dragging [the students] up to the standard” of the Advanced course. Carol also commented, however, that the decision to run only Advanced English was probably a good strategy because “the minute that you ran a Standard class you would have a landslide where everybody wanted to get into it. And that would be very, very difficult to check”. She observed that the boys’ competitive nature combined with the pressure that was on them to succeed meant that they were successful in the Advanced course despite their lack of ability or interest in the subject, and described the boys as being willing to do anything to “get themselves up to that standard”: “These children, whether they get past papers and they learn them off by heart or they get three tutors or they get – whatever they do – they will get that paper answered.” Without talking directly with the students it is difficult to present a full picture of how the students felt; however all of the teachers in the English faculty agreed that although the students were very ambitious and highly driven to succeed, given the chance they would not take English, or at least would study an easier course in the subject.

In one lunchtime conversation, Anna (a beginning teacher) cited the school’s “snob factor” as being the reason why only classes in Advanced English were run, explaining that running Standard classes would be seen by the school executive as “damaging to the elite reputation of the school”. She expressed deep concern, however, that this reputation came at the expense of the students’ learning and grades, as her understanding was that the students who had achieved a Band 4 mark in the Advanced course would actually have received a better UAI if they had studied the Standard course.

6.3.6 Beliefs about English: Literary Criticism and Cultural Studies

Teachers in the English faculty at Welton High School held a range of beliefs about what the subject English should be about for all students generally, and about the reasons for teaching English to their students in particular. While some teachers talked often about the value in English being the discussion and study of ‘themes’, ‘ideas’ and ‘culture’, most also talked about the value of critical literacy, and as Vanessa put it, of studying “how texts can manipulate your own thinking without you being aware of it”. Because of the nature of the study, most teachers would talk about English with specific reference to the Stage 6 English syllabus, although when they did discuss English more broadly in the context of the subject in Year 7-10 their opinions did not change. Questions in everyday conversations about the changed nature of what was considered a “text” in English, and about the theoretical underpinnings of the syllabus – in particular about whether it had been heavily influenced by postmodernist theory – tended to generate thoughtful comments from teachers about the nature of English, and so direct questions about these particular issues were included in most of the formal interviews with teachers, in addition to broader questions about the purpose of English.

Cultural Studies

When asked directly about the impact that theories such as postmodernism had had on the HSC English syllabus, all teachers stated that they didn’t see it as having had the kind of impact that was often described in the media. Vanessa argued that the theory behind the 1999 HSC English syllabus, and behind contemporary English curriculum generally, had little to do with postmodernism, but seemed to be based on a “cultural studies” model, and that this was moving English “into the modern era” by dealing with concepts that were more relevant to people’s everyday lives, and by encouraging students to explore and be conscious of “how texts influence and work in our lives, and

to how reading positions are established”. This sentiment was common among other teachers who had identified “critical” reading as an important aspect of studying English, suggesting that the critical literacy practices in the faculty were largely underpinned by a ‘cultural studies’ approach to English curriculum –analysis and questioning of the text were certainly advocated, but critiques that challenged the text or promoted thinking about social change were not discussed by any of the teachers in the study. Critical literacy was seen as a tool for better understanding the creation and maintenance of cultural norms, rather than for resisting or changing them, and as such was embedded in a cultural studies approach to the curriculum.

Literary Criticism

In contrast to Vanessa, Mark was more comfortable with what he termed “traditional” approaches to literature, and although he was happy to see the scope of English texts broadened to include film and media texts, he thought that some University readings had “gone a bit overboard”. Mark worried that marginal University readings of texts were having too much of an influence on what teachers and students tried to cover in the HSC, but acknowledged that

It does give you that opportunity to explore a lot of areas and give kids new ideas, rather than kids just watching American television shows all the time – and pretty crass ones at that – you can show them something different and get them thinking about different sorts of texts...broaden their outlook and get them to draw on the culture a bit.

A difference could therefore be seen in teachers’ willingness to expand their understanding of what could be considered a ‘worthwhile’ type of text for study, and their willingness to relinquish approaches to the curriculum that were more closely aligned with classic Arnoldian philosophies relating to the power of ‘literary criticism’

to expose students to ‘the best that has been thought and said’, to teach them important values, and to generally make them better, more cultured people. This finding is at odds with generalisations expressed in the media about the broadened definition of the ‘literary canon’ to include visual texts equating to a ‘postmodern’ or ‘relativist’ philosophy of English curriculum.

While teachers in the English faculty at Welton certainly expressed a range of reasons for their growing sense of comfort with using a range of text types, all teachers in 2004 stated that they were happy with the broadening of the term “literature” to the term “text” in English to include film, media and multimedia texts. This, however, was described as a marked change from the attitudes held when the syllabus was first taught in 2001. The head teacher reported the first year of the new HSC at Welton as very difficult, with only two staff members demonstrating, in her opinion, an understanding and appreciation of the new syllabus, 2-3 staff members needing a high level instruction although they were open to learning new practices, and the remaining staff members (approximately six teachers, or half of the faculty) refusing to accept the new approaches in the syllabus and showing determination to stick to past approaches to texts. Carol, however, was eager to assert that the division in the faculty between people who were more traditional in their approach to English and so therefore had experienced problems coming to terms with the new HSC syllabus, and people who were comfortable with newer approaches should not be generalised as a divide between ‘older’ and ‘newer’ teachers. She expressed frustration at the picture of the new teacher who had just come from learning the newest practices and theories at University, arguing that she had come across many beginning teachers whose approach to English was heavily aligned with more traditional notions of English curriculum.

6.4 Initial themes for Shermer High School

6.4.1 Conventions of success

In contrast to Welton High School, where schooling success was practically a given, teachers at Shermer High often spoke of the seemingly competing purposes of education, and particularly of English curriculum – of the need to both generate ‘success’ for students through ‘objective’ measures such as the School Certificate and HSC exams, and the need to resist such schooling structures that they saw as putting their students at a disadvantage by narrowing the curriculum. Teachers all agreed that commonly accepted conventions of educational success – in particular developing a sophisticated writing style and achieving high academic grades – largely were not realised in the school. For some teachers this was a significant source of frustration and disappointment. Others argued that in schools of this type, where social and economic disadvantage was seen to impact heavily on the goals and motivations of the students, different measures of success were needed to support student needs.

As will be discussed further in section 6.4.6 teachers at Shermer often referred to the need to measure a student’s personal growth across academic, social, emotional and physical aspects of schooling, rather than only focussing on objective measures of academic success. In this respect many teachers at this school could be seen to hold a distinctly humanist philosophy of education, with notions of educational success closely aligned with goals of ethical growth and social justice, and the educational institution being regarded as a source of mostly negative control over students’ capacity to realise their potential. While not all teachers subscribed to this philosophy, those who held humanist beliefs were consistently seen to recognise greater potential in their students, while teachers who saw the role of the school as inducting students into existing social

structures experienced deep frustration when students did not achieve using conventional measures of academic success.

One other cause for concern in relation to student success was shared by all teachers in the English faculty at Shermer, namely concerns about the fairness of using marks obtained in the Area of Study (which constitutes 40% of both courses) to standardise scores across Standard and Advanced English. Teachers discussed during one faculty meeting the differences between the learning outcomes prescribed in the Standard as opposed to the Advanced course. Differences were noted in the outcomes for the two courses, and all teachers expressed unhappiness with the way in which student responses to Paper One of the HSC exam on the Area of Study were marked against a common criteria. Teachers explained that, in effect, this meant that students in the Standard course were ‘competing’ against students in the Advanced course, and as such there was pressure on teachers to teach the Area of Study to students in the Standard course using Advanced course outcomes.

Most teachers also identified the low number of students obtaining high Bands of achievement in the Standard course across the state as demonstrating an inherent barrier to students’ ability to succeed. This, however, was not viewed as a result of inequalities in the syllabus itself, but as a result of ‘harsh’ marking in the HSC exam. Denise, an English teacher who was appointed to Shermer as her first permanent school and had been there for three years, explained in a formal interview: “There should be no reason why students in the Standard English course can’t achieve more Band 5s and 6s if their work was actually marked against their course outcomes... [but I believe] there is a culture now, of marking Standard and Advanced students as though they were expected to learn the same stuff. But Standard is *supposed* to be easier – it’s just not fair!” Comments such as these highlighted the general perception in the faculty that

inappropriate measures of success were being applied to their students, and in particular to students in the Standard course.

6.4.2 Effects of student disadvantage

When asked about the specific context of Shermer High School and whether there were any issues or factors that shaped the way that English was taught in the school, teachers in the faculty resoundingly argued that students' disadvantaged backgrounds, including low socio-economic status and non-English speaking backgrounds, impacted on their ability to improve their literacy skill. There were, however, markedly different beliefs about the role of the school and the education system at large in addressing issues of disadvantage. While some of the teachers were embracing differentiated curriculum as a model for serving students' literacy needs – the Head Teacher in particular showed very strong beliefs in the need to use a variety of methods to connect with the students' experiences and draw out their tacit knowledge – others exhibited an attachment to a deficit model of teaching students, blaming deficiencies in the student for poor academic performance.

At the furthest extreme, Pauline showed an adherence to a deficit model of education, and often used her training as a Primary school teacher, and her focus on language and literacy teaching, as a reference point for considering the abilities of her students. She expressed constant frustration with the low level of knowledge and work output that she saw in her own classes, claiming that she had “seen better work from Primary kids...some Year 1s can write better than my Year 7s”. In one interview she explained a possible reason for what she considered to be an inability of some students to comprehend what they learned in class:

I think we've got a lot of kids in this area with a disorder called 'receptive learning disorder'. I went to an in-service about it, and apparently it's

prevalent in low socio-economic areas, like this one, and a lot of our kids are going to have that disorder. And I've come across kids that display the symptoms of that disorder, where they can't process information and they can't follow instructions – I've come across that a lot...I think it's from the ages of 0-3 when they're not stimulated enough...that time can never be made up, so it's like they've got a gap in their brain, and then it becomes genetic.

These beliefs were having an effect on Pauline's ability to teach English – she estimated that approximately 30% of her Year 7 class exhibited symptoms of 'receptive learning disorder', and described her only method of dealing with the frustration of this as "just persevering...even though you know that you can never help them". Over the two term observation period she consistently described the experience of teaching in a disadvantaged school community as "burning me out", "taking its toll" and being like "bashing my head against a brick wall".

Maria, a teacher trained in English and Computer Studies who had been appointed to Shermer that year teaching English for the first time, also saw deficiencies in student experience, though her observations pertained more to students' cultural background, in particular of students from the Pacific Islander ("P.I.") community. Maria described most P.I. families as eager for educational success, but also as being without the cultural tools – or educational capital – to achieve this as

most kids from educated backgrounds, or who have parents that have at least gone through the Australian school system, can go home and ask for help or support with their school work. Whereas my kids go home, and there's no-one to ask.

While Maria did frame the lack of at-home support as a culturally-based deficiency, she also spoke often of the families that she knew closely through her own husband's (Polynesian) family and through her church group. She saw the emphasis on written

language in the English curriculum, in particular in external exams such as ELLA and the School Certificate, as placing Polynesian and other students from non-English speaking backgrounds at an unfair disadvantage, explaining that “a lot of the times it’s not their ideas, it’s the way they put it down on paper – their actual writing technique – which fails.” Teachers in the English faculty also generally agreed that many of their students that came from Polynesian and Indigenous cultural backgrounds had a higher regard for oral language and multimodal creative expression (incorporating language with visual art and music), and expressed frustration that students’ creative potential and tacit knowledge were not being drawn on or developed due to overemphasis on written language.

6.4.3 Student welfare

In addition to impacting on levels of student literacy and educational capital, issues of social disadvantage were considered by teachers to intersect with issues of student welfare, and therefore to have an impact on students’ ability to focus on and complete their work. This was seen as a school-wide problem, however teachers in the faculty believed that the impact was felt most in English and other humanities-based subjects that required high written literacy skill and extended writing in assessment. They cited examples of students struggling to complete work at home as a result of suffering from depression and low self-esteem, and in some cases, as a result of abuse or neglect.

One disturbing example of this was observed during a field research day in Term 4. A female student who was known to staff to have suffered sexual abuse at home in the past arrived at school noticeably upset, being described by her first period English teacher as “pale and unusually withdrawn”. The teacher suspected there may have been an issue at home, and with this particular student was worried about whether abuse had again occurred. The student was monitored and the issue followed up when details did

come to light later in the day. However for the teacher this scenario posed a significant moral problem at the classroom level; as she asked me at recess, “you tell me how I can worry about whether or not a kid has handed in their homework when I am wondering whether they have been raped the night before? The homework is insignificant to her, and to me.”

Another example of student welfare intersecting with curriculum issues related to reporting to parents. All teachers in the faculty described the sense of caution with which they approached report writing, and an avoidance of calling parents and guardians to discuss poor assessment results or missing homework in cases where children were known to suffer physical abuse in the home. As Maria put it in one interview:

Most of the parents [in particular in the Polynesian community] are really for education...it's good that if you have a bad kid you can contact the parent and you know something will be done. The bad thing is, because, I guess, they have that passion...unfortunately a lot of them hit the roof...so you've got to be very careful about who you tell and who you don't tell. And to report back to a parent I always have that in the back of my mind – I know ultimately this kid is going to get the bejesus belted out of them, and is that going to make much difference? Or do I just take the next day as a new day? And that's always playing in the back of your mind.

Teachers at Shermer were always eager to point out that student welfare was a concern in all schools – the conflation of ‘disadvantage’ and negative experiences such as abuse and neglect, or threats to mental health were resented by the staff at large. However, in one faculty meeting English teachers did offer the opinion that students in more elite schools might not see these things impact so heavily on student learning, as expectations of student achievement and social stigma surrounding family problems would “keep those students in line”, and “at least ensure the work got done.” The

higher levels of social capital perceived in more advantaged school communities was also seen as a factor, with Maria explaining in one interview that students who “don’t have the intellectual support at home” experience low self-esteem when they struggle to complete homework, which in turn “reinforces a failure mentality” and impacts negatively on student motivation.

The faculty was divided on this issue, with some teachers seeing participation in schooling practices such as homework as essential for students to improve their life prospects, while others argued there was little benefit from persisting with homework in classes where majority of students did not have adequate support at home to complete it. Low achieving students in particular were seen to either be in most need of homework (to compensate for their current low achievement), or, in exact opposition to this, seen by some teachers to need high rates of success to build their motivation. Homework was seen by some as making students feel “stupid” when they “didn’t get it” at home, and as such became an issue of student welfare as concerns about low self-esteem and even depression and anxiety were brought to the fore.

6.4.4 Differentiation in HSC English

In order to cater to various student needs and abilities, English teachers at Shermer drew on a variety of strategies to engage students in learning. A point of praise for the 1999 Stage 6 English syllabus was the broadening of the definition of ‘text’ to include film, media and multimedia, as well as prose fiction, poetry and drama, which had been studied under previous syllabuses. Teachers saw this heightened emphasis on visual and spoken literacy as paramount to student engagement, and as such also welcomed the addition of visual language modes ‘viewing’ and ‘responding’ to the existing modes of ‘reading’, ‘writing’, speaking’ and ‘listening’ – although some difficulty was both

reported and observed in the assessment of the newer modes, and this will be discussed further in relation to levels of teaching experience in section 6.4.5.

The problem encountered by English teachers at Shermer High was that, although they saw the Stage 6 syllabus as providing them with scope to adopt different approaches to lesson *content* and learning *processes* (i.e. what the students learned and how they learned it), the ability to offer a differentiated curriculum fell short when it came to the learning *product* – when students had to demonstrate what they had learned. Even though the syllabus made it mandatory to assess written, spoken and visual language modes, teachers were unhappy with the lack of flexibility in assessment weighting, and with the almost exclusive use of written language performance in the final HSC exam. By mandating that reading and writing practices constitute a combined 55% of a students' school assessment mark (with speaking and listening making a combined 30% of the total, and viewing and representing the remaining 15%), and further enforcing the dominance of written language in the external examination, teachers at Shermer felt that the lack of differentiation in ways that students could demonstrate their learning put their school at a significant disadvantage.

While Adam acknowledged the need to ensure “equity in how the kids are assessed across the state”, he and other teachers at Shermer High School often lamented the way in which the students' school assessment marks were moderated against their external examination marks. While all teachers recognised the resource issues in examining English, especially considering the size of the cohort due to its mandatory study, the general feeling was expressed in one faculty meeting: “This can't be the best we can offer – there *must* be a better way!” In particular Adam described the disadvantages of an external exam that solely assessed students using a written paper for students at Shermer, who often showed a higher level of skill and engagement with spoken and

visual language than with written language. He suggested other possible methods such as using itinerant markers in a similar way to the Drama and Music examination, collecting assessment tasks instead of exams for the state-wide marking process that is currently used to mark exam papers, or employing inspectors to visit schools and ensure internal assessments were being marked in an impartial and professional manner. Adam argued that although such suggestions would undoubtedly bring their own set of budget and staffing complications, the current method of “demanding that [students] perform in a certain time frame on a certain day in a certain space [is] a really false way of measuring aptitude in any case”.

6.4.5 Teaching experience

With the exception of the Head Teacher, all of the teachers in Shermer High’s English faculty were in the beginning years of teaching, and all teachers commented on the difficulty of refining their curriculum knowledge in a school where issues of student welfare and discipline consumed much of their professional energy. When asked in a formal interview about the philosophy and ideals embedded in the syllabus, Pauline confessed that “[to be honest] I don’t know it well enough to make that sort of judgement really.” While all teachers were familiar with the syllabus outcomes and the text prescriptions, none could recall looking at the rest of the syllabus document in recent times.

The lack of familiarity with the syllabus was compounded by the fact that only the Head Teacher had ever marked HSC examination papers, and teachers had engaged in no school based or externally provided professional development to assist them in refining their ability to implement the syllabus. Some teachers interviewed were very unhappy with how the faculty as a whole worked to program the units of work and create assessment tasks for Stage 6 English. Pauline explained what she viewed as a lack of

preparedness in creating and grading assessment tasks. She saw assessment tasks as always created “at the last minute”, with the common scenario being that someone realises that “we’ve got an assessment task we need to get out next week, let’s try and make something up.” Once assessment tasks were collected, the faculty had experienced some problems with returning these to students. Again, Pauline described:

What we’re meant to do is take turns [with the marking] but that’s been sloppy because no-one ever knows [whose turn it is]...like, the last assessment task wasn’t marked for a very long time. It might have been a month or even over a month that students’ work had been sitting in the staffroom, and I don’t know if that was any particular persons fault, I’m not sure, but I think it was a lack of communication...I think we need to work that out better, because the students are beginning to realise that that end of things is a bit sloppy as well.

The lack of teaching experience in the faculty was seen to have an impact on teacher workload, as much time needed to be spent creating program and assessment material. This was compounded for Stage 6 programming by the newness of the syllabus and therefore lack of existing resources to draw on. The fact that the school in general had a very high staff turnover also meant that the one teacher in the faculty with deep knowledge and experience – Head Teacher, Adam – was often occupied elsewhere by Executive duties due to his long period of service and familiarity with the school. While all teachers expressed admiration of the amount of extra duties undertaken by the Head Teacher in his role as a school Executive, and of what they described as his extraordinary capacity to give his time to others, it was clear that in such a small faculty with so many inexperienced teachers who were relatively new to the school, that the lack of time for professional sharing and faculty organisation tasks was having a negative impact on the teachers’ ability to deliver the curriculum.

6.4.6 Beliefs about English: Literacy and Personal Growth

Teachers in the English faculty at Shermer High School communicated more agreement with regard to what the subject English should be about than the teachers at Welton High, though the reasons they expressed for teaching English were often in specific relation to the students in their school than to English students generally. All teachers in the English faculty at Shermer identified a need to equip students with skills to *communicate effectively* in society, as well as a need to provide students with opportunities to *express themselves creatively* as essential aspects of the subject. Different teachers, however, held vastly different views on the best ways to cultivate these skills and capacities, and while they all focused on the work students do in English as a way for many students to improve their chances of success in life, there was often debate about how best to achieve this. As with the teachers at Welton High, most teachers confined their conversations to issues relating to the Stage 6 English syllabus, but did not express a different opinion about English in the broader context of the subject in Year 7-10.

Literacy and language acquisition

One of the key differences among teachers' beliefs about English at Shermer High was between discourses of literacy learning to enable participation in society, and literacy learning to empower students to change society. Although the actual terms "participation" and "empowerment" were only occasionally used in conversations and interviews, the English teachers tended to either focus on one or the other as being the purpose of English. For example Pauline, a Primary-trained teacher who had been at the school for three years, emphasised in her interview the need for students to learn "literacy" skills, such as grammar, spelling, punctuation and how to compose a variety of text types; she also described her surprise when discovering that her Year 7 students

“didn’t know how to write a letter, didn’t know how to address a letter or an envelope.”

Pauline declared these as the “basic skills in life”, and worried that students would leave school ill-prepared to participate in society.

Denise also believed that the students at Shermer were generally below the average ability of students across the state. In relation to the Stage 6 courses, she spoke specifically about changing from teaching the Standard to the Advanced HSC English course: “I’ve done Standard before... and all of a sudden I’ve jumped to this Advanced class and I’m like, whoa, this is amazing compared to the Standard, but it’s not amazing in comparison to what Advanced students should be doing.”

Concerns about acquiring literacy skills, in particular written literacy, for social participation stood in contrast to perspectives that still advocated literacy learning, but did so with a focus on empowering students to resist institutionalised disadvantage and empower them to make positive life changes. That is, all teachers in the faculty saw literacy and language acquisition as a high priority in English classrooms. The difference in opinion over the aims of participation and empowerment was seen in the teachers’ attitudes toward literacy *assessment*, and their commitment to placing literacy learning *ahead of* creative expression and engagement with texts and the ideas within them.

Literacy for PARTICIPATION:	Literacy for social EMPOWERMENT:
Need to get a job at the end of school	Empower students to change their world
Important to know ‘the basics’	Understand how texts position the audience
Need to function in society	Need to build meaningful social relationships
Learn to cope with workforce demands	Literacy as a gateway to creativity
Engage with texts to increase knowledge	Engage with texts to aid personal reflection

TABLE 10: FREQUENTLY OCCURRING PHRASES RELATING TO TEACHERS’ BELIEFS ABOUT LITERACY OBSERVED DURING FIELD DAYS AT SHERMER HS.

Creativity and Personal Growth

In both formal interviews and informal discussions, Maria emphasised the need to encourage creativity and expression in English as paramount. Maria and Adam both suggested that “in years to come...the greatest pieces of literature won’t necessarily be the things that are best written, they’ll be the things that convey the most meaning”, and that it would “be lovely if [English] was about just purely empowering the child and letting them know that their voice, their inside feelings and thoughts [were important], whether they spell incorrectly or they have the right structural techniques.” The Head Teacher, Adam, expressed a similar view, emphasising the importance of nurturing creativity, and engaging students in creative tasks. Adam also did not want to see English “as being a formulaic, grammar oriented subject” but preferred to see it as “an exploratory thing where you can just engage with different texts and have fun with them and see the creative side of literature and all types of texts.”

Adam often compared the study of English to study in Visual Art, arguing that although a deep knowledge of the history of art and the techniques used in a variety of mediums was beneficial to both art making and scholarly study, it was not always the core focus of the subject. Just as a student might have a personal response to a painting, and even critique it, with a limited knowledge of what brushstroke was used or the era it was painted in, so too could an English student arrive at a meaningful response to language without employing knowledge of grammar. Adam also referred to the way in which artistic ‘mistakes’ were often ignored, or at least only selectively identified for refinement in Visual Art, whereas language expression, in part due to what he described as the subject’s “examination culture”, was viewed as something that must be free from error. All English teachers at Shermer described the deflation, as well as embarrassment, they had seen in students that had finally written something only to see it come back covered in red-pen corrections. While all teachers agreed these were sad scenarios, some believed them to be beneficial to the student, as they could learn in a risk free environment that their work would need to be of a higher standard in the outside world, while others, including Adam, saw great detriment in demanding technical precision at the expense of creative expression.

6.4.7 A taxonomy of learning in English

Beliefs about English as a subject for “participation” vs. “empowerment” correlated with the level of emphasis that teachers tended to place on exams, with teachers who saw the subject as being primarily a tool for ‘participation’ tending to focus more closely on exam preparation and raising students’ literacy achievement scores. In one interview, Pauline was keen to reiterate her beliefs: “I think the big emphasis needs to be on literacy, like...grammar, spelling, punctuation and all that sort of thing, because in the School Certificate, that’s what you’re being marked on, and some people argue

that that's not important, but I think if you're going to get marked on that in the paper it is important to teach that."

Another teacher in the Faculty, Denise, who had been at the school for three years after being appointed there permanently as her first teaching job, put forward a view that English as a subject needed to be concerned with the attainment of basic written literacy, but also had to encourage a "love of language" and a predisposition to critical reading. She explained:

When a student leaves at either Year 10 or Year 12, I think that they should be able to write, they should be able to read, they should be able to...it might sound strange, but to fulfil basic expectations in society. So if they fill out a form, they should be able to understand a form and fill it out...if a student reaches those goals, that's my minimum level. [But] my main goal is that I want them to come out with a love of language. And I think if they can't read, they can never get to that point of loving language...

This point of view reflects again the preoccupation at Shermer High with ensuring the attainment of basic written literacy by all students, but is different to the views expressed by Pauline in that it conveys a clear hierarchy of goals for English as a subject. After describing basic literacy as her "minimum" goal, and a "love of language" as her "main goal", Denise described the "ultimate goal" of English as being "to get students, or anyone, stepping out and starting to read language and then **question**". The hierarchy of learning that placed literacy and language acquisition ahead of personal engagement with literature and critical reading often resulted in teachers describing classes where students could not progress to creative tasks or critical thinking, as teachers became 'bogged down' in the technical aspects of literacy work.

6.5 Categorisation of influences on syllabus implementation

The analysis of data from case study research conducted at Welton and Shermer High Schools reveals a number of pressures on the delivery of the curriculum, and demonstrates the impact of school culture, as well as teachers' own beliefs about schooling and the importance of English, on the delivery of HSC English courses in the final year of school. The two schools chosen for this study deal with very different school communities, and the differences in the challenges that teachers faced in implementing the syllabus in these schools varied significantly. However, while the initial themes identified for each school reflect the different contexts of the schools, further analysis of the connections between these themes did yield three core categories that can be used to classify the experiences across the two schools.

Ultimately three sources of influence on the implementation of the HSC syllabus were identified – the expectations of adult stakeholders, the needs of the individual students, and the teachers' own beliefs about English teaching. These influences were seen to overlap in relation to some of the initial themes explored earlier in this chapter (as shown in Figure 3 below), but when these influences pulled teachers in different directions in their teaching methods or goals barriers to effective curriculum delivery were observed. In the following sections each of the three categories of experience observed in the school case studies will be developed and connections between the experiences in the two schools will be made.

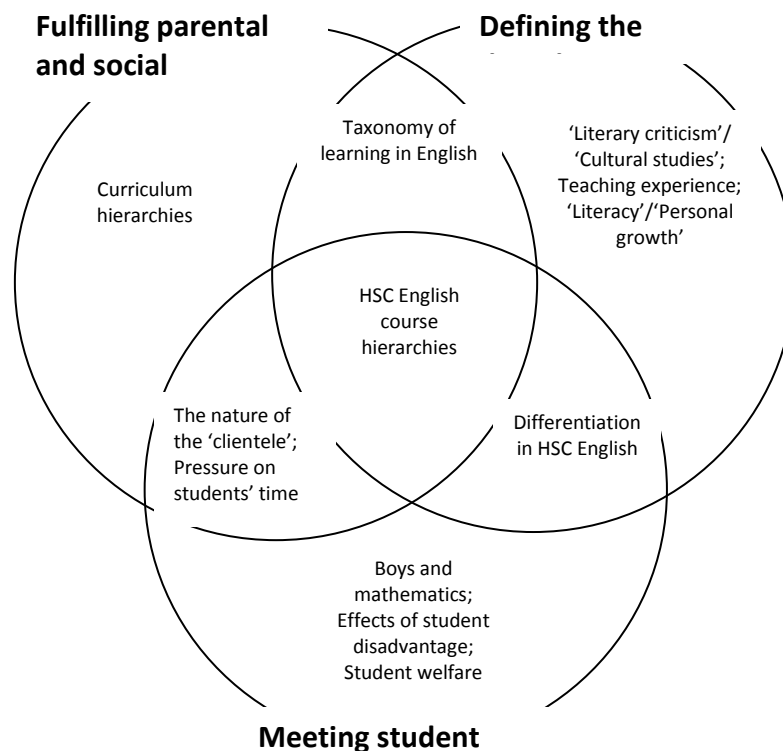


FIGURE 4: CATEGORISATION OF CORE INFLUENCES ON SYLLABUS IMPLEMENTATION

6.5.1 Fulfilling parental and social expectations

Teachers at both Welton and Shermer High Schools consistently identified three groups as the most important stakeholders in education – parents, ‘society’ in general, and the students themselves. Although these stakeholders posed different challenges in the two schools, it was clear that demands on teachers to satisfy third-party expectations of schooling had an impact on syllabus implementation relating to choices in content, pedagogy and assessment. Other people and groups were at times identified as having an influence on curriculum choices – namely the school executive, journalists and politicians – however while these groups took an interest in English curriculum and had varying degrees of influence over school operations, they were not viewed as stakeholders in the sense that teachers saw schooling as functioning to meet their needs. Teachers did not express a sense of being motivated by any kind of ethical obligation to

satisfy these groups, nor did they often refer to satisfying these groups as being part of the fundamental role of teaching English.

In both schools parents, as one of three consistently identified groups of stakeholders, were viewed as highly influential in their capacity to shape the culture of the school. The teachers observed felt strongly that their respective schools must meet parental expectations and that ultimately teachers were directly accountable to them. Parents at Welton were identified as ‘clientele’ with clear expectations of conventional academic success. Parents at Shermer were perceived as having a broader concept of schooling success that included participation, school completion and preparation for the workforce. In both cases, while the expectations of the parent groups were perceived to be different in the two schools, teachers perceived one of their key their professional roles to be the delivery of schooling outcomes that met or exceeded parent expectations.

The second stakeholder identified by teachers in the study as exerting power over curriculum delivery was ‘society’ at large. Teachers viewed schooling as playing a key role in developing knowledge, values and skills that students would require to participate in society beyond school. The role of schools in generating students with adequate standards of literacy to participate in post-school work and life was emphasised in both schools, although views of what consisted ‘adequate’ standards differed. At Shermer High School teaching HSC English was heavily impacted by pressure to develop operational literacy – in particular written literacy – in response to concern that students would be at a disadvantage when seeking employment or demonstrating their learning in the written HSC exam. At Welton High School teachers were more concerned with the development of cultural literacy and the attainment of HSC marks that would ensure entry into prestigious university courses.

External social structures relating to credentialing, employment and social participation were therefore framed as the source of ‘social’ pressure on curriculum delivery – teachers felt pressure to develop students that would successfully fit into society, rather than to develop students’ capacity to challenge social expectations and norms. Importantly, while teachers viewed education as a kind of ‘public good’ essential to the development of a prosperous society, when discussing their personal curriculum philosophies, their views on what kind of adult the school as a whole was expected to construct had a heavy impact on the knowledge, skills and values that teachers focussed on cultivating through the teaching of English. Notions of excellence and high status at Welton had led directly to the decision to only run the Advanced HSC English course, while a focus on raising examination scores at Shermer to increase students’ post-school opportunities had led to tension between teachers who disagreed on the pedagogy required to achieve syllabus outcomes relating to personal growth and critical thinking while also preparing students for success in examinations.

The third group of stakeholders identified by teachers was the students. However, while curriculum choices were seen to directly impact on student learning and school experience, student *expectations* of English and of schooling in general, were expressed as being less influential than the expectations of adult groups. Student expectations were not seen as exerting power over teacher practice except in cases when student expectation aligned with parental expectation, for example in the shared student and parental expectation of high HSC marks at Welton. Schools and teachers were not perceived as accountable to students, except through the measure of HSC results, and teachers found areas of the English syllabus and its delivery most problematic when the expectations of adult stakeholders were perceived to be in opposition to student needs.

It is this discourse of student ‘needs’ (as opposed to their ‘expectations’) that frames the next core category of experience observed during the study.

6.5.2 Meeting student needs

All teachers in the study were adamant about the importance of meeting the needs of students, both individually, and as a collective. Frequent reference was particularly made in both schools to the need to *deepen their literacy capacity* across written, aural and visual modes, to *develop critical thinking and reading skills*, and to the need for students to engage in lessons that *promoted personal growth*. In addition to aspects of personal growth that were common between the schools – chiefly, the need to develop students’ sense of self and identity in relation to the world around them – at Welton teachers also made reference to the need to develop an *appreciation of culture* beyond the everyday world of the teenage boy, and most teachers at Shermer made reference to the need to promote *creative expression*. These beliefs were observed to intersect heavily with teachers’ own curriculum philosophies, which will be discussed in the next and final section. What caused the discourse surrounding students’ needs to stand out as a core category in its own right was the way in which students were regarded as stakeholders to whom no-one was accountable, and were therefore consistently disempowered when compared to adult expectations and desires.

‘The needs of the student’ were often invoked by the teachers as a basis for their own personal English curriculum philosophy. At Welton High for example, Mark based his belief that English teaching should focus on literary criticism (albeit applied to a broader range of texts) on his belief that teenage boys needed increased exposure to ‘culture’ and ‘the arts’ to compensate for their immature tastes as represented by action movies and video games. In such cases, observations of individual student need were in fact *not* the primary factor influencing teachers’ beliefs, but rather student ‘need’ was

framed as what kind of schooling experience students ‘needed’ to fulfil perceived social needs.

When student need *was* identified as a primary influence – when a teacher made direct reference to particular attributes, tendencies or goals that they had observed in a student or group of students – contradictions were evident in the ways in which different teachers applied this knowledge to shape their approach to the English curriculum. The most frequent references to student needs at Welton were made in relation to the particular needs of boys in education, and to the need to adapt content and pedagogy to cater for student preferences for more ‘cognitive’ disciplines such as Mathematics and Science. While all teachers in the study identified these distinct needs at some point, they expressed very different beliefs and contradictory responses to these needs, as discussed earlier in section 6.3.2. Similarly, at Shermer, all teachers identified a tendency in many students to engage more readily with aural and visual texts, but while some saw this as an attribute that needed be nurtured, others viewed it as something that would need to be compensated for. Although all teachers could agree that the development of written literacy was of high importance – irrespective of where student interest and ability may lie – they exhibited very different beliefs about how this was best achieved.

Ideas about what students ‘needed’ were therefore seen to be influenced by the personal beliefs of the individual teachers in the study about the purpose and function of schooling (both in general terms, and of their own school as a particular case), as well as being based on assessments of students’ specific attributes, tendencies or goals. In both schools, where disagreement arose as to how best meet students’ needs, it was the assessment component of the curriculum that was used – rather than the syllabus document – to formulate common goals within the faculties. At Shermer High this

meant the prioritising of developing written literacy in order to prepare students for HSC examinations and for employment; at Welton High this led to an increased focus on securing high achievement in HSC assessments and exams.

The needs of students that were observed to impact most heavily on the delivery of the HSC English syllabus therefore were those that related closely to the general post-school aspirations of each school respectively. While this perhaps could be expected of approaches to curriculum in the final year of schooling, the implementation choices generated by this framing of student need stood in contrast to many of the beliefs about English as a school discipline that teachers articulated in both observations and formal interviews, including the belief that the curriculum ought to be differentiated based on student needs. In the next and final core category of influence on curriculum choices the key claims made by teachers about what they believe the purpose and function of English to be are explored, as is how these beliefs intersect with ideas and attitudes observed in relation to student need and adult stakeholder expectations (as discussed in section 6.5.1) within their respective school context.

6.5.3 Defining the discipline

Teachers at both Shermer and Welton High School were often keen to discuss their personal philosophies of education, and of English teaching. As explained earlier in this chapter, the definitions of what English as a school discipline ought to contain in terms of content and strive for in terms of learning outcomes differed between the two schools, with teachers at Welton tending to favour theories of Literary Criticism and Cultural Studies in their approach to teaching, and teachers at Shermer tending to favour a focus on Literacy development and Personal Growth through creative expression. In both schools, teachers' broader philosophies about the function of schooling tended to frame their beliefs about student 'needs' – in both schools teachers also identified their

school's context and resulting culture as constraining their ability to teach English in a way that corresponded to their beliefs about English as a discipline, and on their ability to meet the full range of student needs.

At Shermer High the relationship between the context of the school and teachers' capacity to teach English according to their personal beliefs about the subject was most strongly observed in relation to literacy teaching. The high demand on the teachers to raise student achievement in external assessments such as ELLA and the School Certificate in the junior years, as well as pressure to focus on increasing writing skill under timed exam conditions in the senior years had led to a shared notion of a taxonomy of learning in the English faculty that framed 'basic' written literacy skills as isolated and requiring large amounts of attention. While there was disagreement among teachers as to whether this was justified, all teachers viewed it as undesirable that lessons often got 'bogged down' in language decoding and comprehension work and too seldom progressed to more interesting, creative and critical tasks. In contrast to widely recognised models of literacy within the NSW Department of Education, such as Freebody and Luke's 'four resources model' which provides a framework for learning skills like decoding and comprehending language in combination with engagement in cultural and critical literacy practices, teachers at Shermer whose personal philosophies predisposed them to a focus on literacy development saw these various literacy practices as 'competing' for their time.

A important aspect of the school context that shaped teachers' capacity to develop their professional knowledge and therefore refine their capacity to meet the literacy needs of students at Shermer was the strain placed on staff time and faculty cohesion by high demands relating to student welfare in the school. In particular, teachers who were new to the profession cited a lack of time and focus as preventing them from staying

organised as a faculty and as posing a barrier to the development of consistent and effective teaching and assessment programs. Pressure on the school from parents and the community to provide high levels of pastoral care as well as intense remediation in skills to increase the prospects of students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds had left most teachers feeling 'burnt out'. The immediacy of student welfare needs was also seen to solidify teachers' beliefs about the purpose of schooling and English teaching, in this case meaning the pursuit of Literacy development and Personal Growth models of English teaching in response to student need.

This dialogic relationship between student need and teaching philosophy, where teachers' broader beliefs about the purpose of schooling shaped their perception of what students 'needed' from their English lessons, and where the particular attributes, tendencies or goals of students in turn encouraged teachers to adopt philosophies of English teaching that were responsive to their school context, was also observed at Welton. While at Shermer this had led to the general adoption of Literacy development and Personal Growth models of English teaching largely in response to student disadvantage, at Welton this had led to the general adoption of Literary Criticism and Cultural Studies models of English teaching in response to the more privileged and aspirational nature of the students.

At Welton the choice of courses to run and of texts for study within those courses continually needed to be legitimised in the context of a high achieving boys-only school. There was a necessity to build English as a high status subject within the school in order to compete with more 'cognitive' subjects, in particular Mathematics and Science, for attention and respect in the curriculum hierarchy. Teachers frequently cited the way in which creativity and risk taking, which formed part of their beliefs about what English teaching should encourage, had been stifled by the necessity to single-

mindedly pursue high HSC marks to meet the demands of their student ‘cliente’ and their parents. The pressure on students’ time due to high study and extracurricular workloads made it difficult for the boys to ‘indulge’ in English study at home that was not focussed on summative assessment, and teachers reported a high incidence of private tutoring outside of school hours that also would focus on increasing assessment performance.

As at Shermer High School, pressure at Welton to ensure that students were in a position to take up post-school education and employment opportunities meant that the HSC examination was often used to frame teachers’ interpretation of the syllabus. As many of the teachers were more experienced than those at Shermer, both in terms of years of service and in terms of a greater number of teachers having had experience marking HSC exams, the faculty at Welton was observed to have a more unified understanding of programming requirements for teaching and assessment. This, however, had not necessarily lead to the adoption of a holistic view of the discipline, and the study of English tending to be defined in the senior years in relation to what students would have to demonstrate in their final exams.

Figure 3 indicated that the three core categories of influence on syllabus implementation identified in these case studies were interrelated, and I identified where the initial themes for each school case study could be located. While this interrelation has been explored in this analysis of the case studies, further research will be needed to demonstrate the validity of this model across a larger sample of schools, as well as the strength of each of these influences in schools with different staff and community demographics.

6.6 Conclusion

In both of the case studies analysed in this chapter the demographics of the school community shaped the construction of two very different school cultures – one with a priority of achieving high academic success to satisfy the expectations of their elite ‘clientele’, the other with a focus on participation and school completion to mitigate against the general social and economic disadvantage of the school community. Expectations of parents and society had had a large impact on the culture of the schools, and teachers tended to construct and espouse models of English teaching that were responsive to these cultures. The culture of the schools in this study and the expectations that flowed from this were therefore observed to have a high impact on the implementation of HSC English courses.

Ideas about student need, on the other hand, while influential, seemed to be formulated by individual teachers based on their personal experiences and philosophies, which differed between the teachers observed. When the attributes, tendencies or goals of individual or groups of students were considered, teachers displayed different ideas about how these needs should shape curriculum choices. As a result, beliefs about student need within the faculties were at times contradictory, and a unified approach to implementing the syllabus was usually achieved by aligning choices in content, pedagogy and assessment to the anticipated post-school education and employment opportunities of the general student population.

Despite choosing two schools that catered to two different communities of students, it was found that both schools focussed heavily on increasing student achievement in HSC assessment, albeit for different reasons. While this served to unify the staff within the English faculties by providing a common goal, in both schools it resulted in an ethos of

teaching in the senior years that privileged summative assessment over formative assessment, in particular of written work, and where examination requirements shaped the interpretation and implementation of the syllabus content and outcomes. Most teachers explicitly identified a tension between what they would consider authentic implementation of the syllabus and the demands of the HSC assessment structure. In the next chapter of this thesis, I use these observations of syllabus implementation in the two school case studies, as well as conclusions from my earlier analysis of media representations, to selectively analyse key elements of the syllabus for HSC Standard and Advanced English and further investigate the relationship between the intended and the enacted curriculum.

Chapter 7: Analysis of the Higher School Certificate English Syllabus

7.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 4, the analysis conducted here represents a social constructivist approach to methodology which has led to an examination of the subject definitions and traditions evident in the ‘preactive’ stage of the curriculum by exploring areas of the syllabus that have been selected as most relevant. Using the findings from the previous two data sets (on media representations and school implementation case studies) ‘theoretical sampling’ is used to locate evidence within the syllabus text that can illuminate the bases for the professional and public understandings that have been identified.

A ‘connoisseur’ approach to subject definitions and traditions is used here. Sections of the syllabus have been chosen based on their capacity to expose the innovations and changes to content, pedagogy and assessment in HSC English, and reflect on the challenges to public and professional discourse that they represent. The extent to which the syllabus represents a ‘new beginning’ for English of the type described by Brock (1984), as opposed to merely representing the progression of a historical ‘continuum’ in Australian English curriculum will also be discussed throughout the chapter using Reid’s (2004a) four categories of curriculum grammars – purposes, view of knowledge, view of curriculum and its organisation, view of students and teachers – to connect material from the syllabus with the core concerns and influences of stakeholders. Exploring the ways in which curriculum grammars were challenged or retained in the documentation will provide insight into the role played by the syllabus in shaping the beliefs and attitudes of teachers and within public commentary, and will allow reflection

on the content of the HSC English syllabus as a mechanism within Hunter's broader genealogy of the functions of schooling.

7.2 Changes to the course structure in the 1999 syllabus

Before identifying the sections of the syllabus analysed in this study, a brief overview is provided of changes that were made to the course structure on HSC English with the introduction of the 1999 syllabus, and the stated reasoning behind some of the most significant structural changes that were made. A requirement of studying the HSC from 1999 onwards was that students must study subjects totalling at least 10 'Units', and it is mandatory for the study English to be included in this. This had also been a requirement under previous syllabuses, with the key difference that from 1999 onward English would be the *only* mandatory subject in Stage 6.

Under the previous syllabus structure students had to elect to study 2 Units of English in either the most difficult (*Related*) course, or the less difficult (*General* or *Contemporary*) courses for English. Students now choose one 2 Unit English course from:

- English (*Advanced*)
- English (*Standard*)
- English as a Second Language (*ESL* – restricted entry based on ESL status)

While students in the previous 'Related' English could elect to study an extra Unit of English (the *3 Unit English* course), students studying the 'Advanced' course in the 1999 syllabus can choose to study up to *two* extra Units in English:

- English Extension Course 1 (*Extension 1* – 1 Unit of elective course work)

- English Extension Course 2 (*Extension 2* – a 1 Unit ‘Major Work’)

A new, single-Unit *Fundamentals of English* course was also made available to students undertaking ESL or Standard English courses to “assist them to achieve English language outcomes” (Board of Studies NSW, 1999a, p.13); however this was to be run only as a Preliminary course (i.e. in Year 11) and would not contribute to the HSC award.

Important changes to the structure of the courses available in HSC English were the eradication of the 2 Unit Contemporary course and the introduction of a second Extension course, ‘Extension 2’. The 2 Unit Contemporary course was in part replaced with the introduction of a strictly defined 2 Unit ESL course to cater for students that spoke English as a second language, which 2 Unit Contemporary was originally designed to accommodate (Manuel & Brock, 2003). Extension 2 was an additional restricted entry course consisting of an additional 1 Unit of study that could be taken by students already studying Extension 1. In the Extension 2 course students would focus on the construction of a substantial composition in any medium to be marked externally as a Major Work (Board of Studies NSW, 1999a, p.129). The introduction of a sustained Major Work into HSC English was a significant addition to the syllabus, as all examinations under previous syllabuses had been conducted exclusively under timed conditions. The addition of this second Extension Unit to the subject at HSC level also served to elevate the status of the subject by making it one of the only two subjects – the other being Mathematics – that students could study up to a fourth Unit level.

One of the determinations of the McGaw Report in 1997 was that revisions to the HSC needed to promote the study of subjects at more advanced levels to reverse the decline in advanced level courses (McGaw, 1997, p.20), and encouraging students to take up a Major Work through English Extension 2 was one measure taken to increase interest in

advanced levels of study. McGaw concluded that the structure of the previous HSC had resulted in students opting to study subjects at lower levels than they were capable of to try and maximise their HSC marks, and that this was especially prevalent in the English courses. 2 Unit Contemporary English had been designed to cater for the growing number of ESL students, as well as the increase in students who were completing post-compulsory schooling but who did not plan to proceed to university study (Manuel & Brock, 2003). But enrolments in the course grew dramatically as years went on and students saw an opportunity to study the easier course and still be eligible for university entrance.

Under the previous HSC syllabus students who were capable of studying the 2 Unit General course were enrolling in 2 Unit Contemporary, and students that were capable of studying 2 Unit Related English were also ‘dropping down’ to take the 2 Unit General course. Enrolments in the 3 Unit English course were also in decline as students perceived there was little reward for taking advanced levels of study in terms of gaining additional marks. A reduction was therefore made to the number of 2 Unit courses available to the majority of students and two (rather than three) 2 Unit English courses were developed for the new HSC at a ‘Standard’ and an ‘Advanced’ level to be marked on a common scale. It is therefore the content of these two courses that have been selected as most relevant for close analysis in this chapter, alongside the general sections of the syllabus pertaining to the Aims, Rationale and Assessment of HSC English.

7.3 *Selecting syllabus content for analysis*

The core concepts discovered in the previous two data sets form a basis on which to select the evidence of these discourses that needs to be sought out in the syllabus document. The core concerns about English curriculum represented in newspapers (the need for students to *develop personal values, pass on cultural heritage* and *learn language basics* through the study of English), together with the core influences on syllabus implementation observed in the school case studies (teachers' own *definitions of English as a school discipline*, and the need for teachers to *fulfil social and parental expectations, as well as meet student needs*) suggest that familiar 'curriculum grammars' in English were challenged with the introduction of this syllabus.

Using the research framework outlined in Chapter 4 (Figure 1), evidence that has been collected from the first focus of this research – the external and practical pressures on syllabus implementation – can now be compared to the pressures posed internally by the content and structure of the syllabus. We explore to what extent the HSC English syllabus *does* satisfy the core concerns of the public represented in newspapers, and the extent to which the syllabus *supported* or *challenged* the core influences on teachers' work. To do this, the opening 'introductory' sections of the syllabus have been selected for close analysis, as it is in these sections that the syllabus writers have provided direct explanations and rationales for the study of English generally, and for the particular approach to English that is intended to frame our understanding of the document.

In addition to the opening sections that introduce the syllabus document, the Standard and Advanced courses have been chosen for analysis, as discussed above in section 7.2. It is one of these two courses that the majority of English students must study for the HSC, and therefore the course content in the form of Area of Study and Module

descriptions and the overarching course ‘outcomes’, as well as the mandatory language modes and texts set for study, are subjects of analysis. As the texts set for study constituted such a large focus for stakeholders – for the news media especially through concerns represented about reduced study of canonical literature – content from the syllabus companion document *English Stage 6 Prescriptions: Areas of Study, Electives and Texts, Higher School Certificate* has also been selected for analysis in this chapter. The other companion document that was provided to schools along with the syllabus, *An introduction to English stage 6 in the new HSC* (Board of Studies NSW, 1999b), will also be referred to. Finally, after analysing the opening sections of the syllabus and the content, language modes and texts set for study in the Standard and Advanced courses, the closing sections of the syllabus that deal with ‘Assessment and Reporting’ in the HSC will be explored.

7.4 *Introductory sections*

The Stage 6 English syllabus document begins with seven introductory sections (Board of Studies NSW, 1999a, pp.5-12). These aim to contextualise the subject within the HSC program of study and the K-12 learning continuum, and to theoretically position the syllabus structure and content. While these sections are not explicitly isolated or labelled as providing an ‘introduction’ to the syllabus, sections 8-16 that constitute the rest of the syllabus document are focussed on providing detail about specific requirements for each course, and about assessment and reporting, and so serve a purpose different from that of the more explicitly theoretical content of sections 1-7. The first seven section headings in the syllabus that organise this information are:

Section number	Section heading	Description
1	The Higher School Certificate Program of Study	Outline of the wider purpose of the HSC in general.
2	Rationale for English in the Stage 6 Curriculum	Justification of the importance of the study of English specifically.
3	Aim	A succinct, one-sentence statement of the aim of the subject.
4	The Study of English	A brief elaboration on the central purposes of the study of English.
5	Key Terms in the Study of English	Selection of the specific terms used and the complex processes and concepts they will be taken to represent.
6	Continuum of Learning for English Stage 6 Students	A description of the K-12 continuum and of what students will learn in English in Stages 1-3, 4-5 and 6.
7	The English Stage 6 Candidature	Brief statements of purpose for each of the five Stage 6 English courses – <i>Standard, Advanced, ESL, Extension</i> and <i>Fundamentals</i> .

TABLE 11: OVERVIEW OF INTRODUCTORY SECTIONS OF THE 1999 STAGE 6 SYLLABUS

Of these introductory sections, all except sections 1 and 6 are analysed to determine the approach to English curriculum that is being put forward. Sections 1 and 6 provide only basic and general information about the HSC and the English course structure. The following sections of this chapter contain the close analysis of the *Rationale*, the *Aim*, the elaboration on *The Study of English* and the introductory statements about the Standard and Advanced courses in *The English Stage 6 Candidature*, while analysis of *Key Terms in the Study of English* will occur in later sections as the relevant terms arise in relation to other aspects of the syllabus. For convenient referencing, these sections of the syllabus are reproduced at the end of this thesis (Appendix B: 1999 Stage 6 syllabus extracts).

7.4.1 Syllabus rationale

A rationale aims to provide an explanation of reasons, with justifications for key choices. A rationale in any syllabus document, therefore, could be seen as the most appropriate place to provide answers for questions that relate directly to issues such as the view of knowledge informing it, including *why* certain subject content has been chosen as important to learn about and therefore classified as ‘knowledge’, and *why* certain structures for learning have been deemed best for engaging with the subject knowledge. A rationale could also provide justifications for the construction of the other curriculum grammars – the purpose of the English subject, the role of curriculum organisation, and the positioning of students and teachers.

Upon reading the Rationale of the HSC English syllabus there appears to be only a limited number of clues about the view of knowledge that the syllabus represents, and certainly no direct, explicit account of the epistemological theory behind the decisions that have been made about the various aspects of the syllabus such as its content, its structure or its assessment. This lack of explicit justification results in a Rationale that seems not to allow a reader to obtain a clear picture of the view of knowledge that the syllabus aims to represent. The Rationale consists of six paragraphs of varying lengths, and it is in paragraphs [1] and [5] as shown in Extract 1 below where the key indicators about the view of knowledge in the syllabus are found:

[1] The study of English is central to the learning and development of students in NSW and is the mandatory subject in the HSC curriculum. The importance of English in the curriculum is a recognition of its role as the national language and increasingly as the language of international communication. Proficiency in English enables students to take their place as confident, articulate communicators, critical and imaginative thinkers, and active participants in society.

[5] The study of English enables students to make sense of, and to enrich, their lives in personal, social and professional situations and to deal effectively with change. Students develop a strong sense of themselves as autonomous, reflective and creative learners. The English Stage 6 syllabus is designed to develop in students the faculty to perceive and understand their world from a variety of perspectives, and it enables them to appreciate the richness of Australia's cultural diversity.

(Board of Studies NSW, 1999a, p.6)

EXTRACT 1: SYLLABUS SECTION 2: RATIONALE EXTRACTS

The first observation that can be made about the view of knowledge being advocated in this syllabus Rationale comes from the first sentence of the statement, and provides a reference to a taken-for-granted belief that defined fields of knowledge of particular importance do exist, and that they ought to be mandatory for study to ensure that all learners have contact with and access to them. In particular, the syllabus Rationale proposes that the English subject constitutes one such field of important knowledge, and the second sentence in the statement provides two clearly defined justifications for the recognition of English as deserving mandatory status:

- that English must be studied because it is the **national language**, and
- that English must be studied because it is increasingly the **language of international communication**.

In addition, the third and final sentence of paragraph [1] in the syllabus Rationale promotes English as playing a role in enabling students to “take their place...in society”, and describes three capabilities or aptitudes that would be possessed by an ideal citizen in that society:

1. being a confident, articulate communicator
2. being a critical and imaginative thinker, and
3. being an active participant.

It is in this final sentence that the link between increasing one's knowledge and improving one's capacity as a citizen is firmly established, and a view of knowledge that considers knowledge as closely linked with citizenship is implied. The words "critical" and "imaginative" in this sentence are loaded with pedagogical meaning, signalling to the professional English teacher that knowledge in the form of a study of language is to be used to not only increase students' ability to identify the ways in which they are positioned and manipulated by language in society, but also of the importance of cultivating students who can create and construct their own meanings through both communicative skills and imaginative thinking.

These aspects combine to frame what is meant by the final social role that is described – that of being an "active" participant. Being able to communicate critically and imaginatively in both national and international contexts are the skills that constitute knowledge in the syllabus, and that knowledge is viewed as valuable because of its capacity to cultivate a certain version of citizenship. Returning to the functions of schooling described by Hunter (1993), it is significant that critical thinking and the associated critical approach to reading that is referred to throughout the syllabus has been explicitly identified in the Rationale. Such references to becoming an active citizen and reading in a critical way – which includes adopting questioning and resistant stances toward invited readings – form the basis of objections made in newspaper articles of student 'indoctrination' and the promotion of a 'left-wing' agenda. A close analysis of the Rationale however, as well as of the outcomes for both the Standard and Advanced courses shows that where students are required to think critically about texts,

they are also required to think ‘imaginatively’, and to engage in the invited reading of a text in order to analyse and explain the use of specific language forms and features.

Paragraph [5] of the Rationale similarly combines words that are rich with professional and pedagogical meaning. The first sentence of paragraph [5] refers to the study of English as enabling students to both “make sense of” and to “enrich” their lives, defining the role of knowledge as both serving a utilitarian role by increasing students’ understanding of aspects of life, and as making students’ lives richer by using knowledge to reflect on, admire, and generally consider meanings that may not have a direct utility value. What is not made clear in this rationale is whether both of these roles of knowledge inform all of the HSC English courses, or whether the practical uses of knowledge, for example, might be more prevalent in some courses than others. There is also a lack of foregrounding as to how historical tensions between language and literature, and between the functional and aesthetic roles of language will be negotiated in the HSC English curriculum – this is something that only appears in a later introductory section on *The Study of English*.

The syllabus Rationale also offers in paragraph [5] references to the capacity for knowledge to enable students to “deal effectively with change”, to “understand their world from a variety of perspectives”, and to “appreciate the richness of Australia’s cultural diversity”. These objectives are important indicators of a desire to use knowledge acquisition or construction as a means of cultivating citizens that are tolerant and inclusive in their social attitude, and who are more interested in using knowledge to appreciate diversity and embrace change than in using knowledge to enforce hegemonic values and culture. This represents a shift away from a view of knowledge in English that sees learning as a means of imposing cultural heritage or protecting any certain set

of values, toward a view of knowledge that recognises the value of a wider range of contexts and perspectives.

In relation to the specific features of the HSC English syllabus that define the content and processes selected to promote students' engagement with knowledge, the Rationale again contains only generalised, implicit justifications. The Rationale includes no specific references or information to justify decisions that have been made about knowledge in the forms of:

- **Content:** the knowledge that has been chosen for inclusion through such mechanisms as the prescribed text list, the focuses and electives, and the prescription of certain categories of texts to be studied is taken for granted, and never justified as being the most appropriate content to produce citizens that are 'confident, articulate communicators, critical and imaginative thinkers, and active participants in society'.
- **Organisation:** the new framework of organising the English curriculum through the use of outcomes is described in later sections of the syllabus, but is not justified as an optimal mechanism for defining the products of learning.
- **Assessment:** the mechanisms chosen for the measurement of knowledge acquisition, such as the weighting of different language modes to be more highly valued than others and the process of combining internal assessment and external examination marks to create the HSC credential are not detailed.

A reading of the entire syllabus reveals choices that have been made about the kinds of content that are considered most effective in promoting linguistic ability, and in producing citizens with the desired characteristics of confident, articulate communication, critical and imaginative thinking, and active participation. AOS topic areas such as *The Journey* and Modules containing material for the teaching of *Close/Critical Study of Texts*, *Experience Through Language*, and *Comparative Study of Texts and Context*, for example, are presented as the preferred method for framing

content knowledge. A reading of the syllabus that exposes such decisions about what is believed to constitute valid ‘knowledge’, however, still does not provide the justification or reasoning for why such content is seen as most appropriate, as might have been covered at the outset of the syllabus to assist teachers in understanding the changes to the course, and to counter any criticism of the changes to how learning in English is framed.

The HSC English syllabus can in these ways be interpreted as lacking explanation of whether it constitutes a new approach to viewing knowledge, or whether it maintains the view of knowledge in general and of English in particular set forth in previous syllabuses. While the eclectic nature of philosophy and practice in English teaching certainly warrants the production of syllabuses that provide scope for multiple understandings to be embedded, the extent of the changes made in senior secondary English in this syllabus warrants a more explicit framework. This reliance on implied definitions at the outset of the document constitutes one source of confusion for both teachers and members of the public seeking to identify the functions of schooling that are being prioritised through choices that have been made in the syllabus in relation to the content, organisation or assessment of knowledge.

7.4.2 Syllabus Aim

At the opening of the syllabus, a single-sentence definition of the Aim of Stage 6 English is provided:

The aim of English Stage 6 is to enable students to understand, use, enjoy and value the English language in its various textual forms and to become thoughtful, imaginative and effective communicators in a diverse and changing society.

(Board of Studies NSW, 1999a, p.7)

While this definition is quite short in a literal sense, it is representative of much of the language used in the syllabus in that it contains a dense collection of several ideas, with multiple word groups combined to compress terminology that is rich in pedagogic and professional meaning into one sentence. A reading of this Aim therefore requires the reader to carefully separate the key ideas embedded in it in order to extract meaning from the statement. On doing this, one important aspect that can be noticed is that the statement of the Aim of the syllabus effectively contains two main components – firstly, that students are intended to **“understand, use, enjoy and value the English language in its various textual forms”**, and secondly, that students are intended to **“become thoughtful, imaginative and effective communicators in a diverse and changing society”**. The fact that the statement of the Aim of the syllabus is actually a combination of *two* distinct aims is representative of the layered and embedded nature of representing meaning that occurs throughout the syllabus document, as different ideas about the purpose of English are fused together to create a program of study that incorporates and capitalises on a diversity of approaches to and beliefs about the subject, often without acknowledging the impact that will follow the combination of certain concepts.

The two core aims contained in the syllabus statement do position people working with the syllabus – teachers and students – as needing to maintain a divided focus in their work. Students are defined as needing to engage in a somewhat detached study of language in a variety of textual forms, as well as to engage in the social purpose of English by developing their capacity to communicate in a socially responsive way. I say here that the aim of studying language in a variety of textual forms can be seen as being somewhat detached, as there is no evidence from within the statement itself to signify what the purpose of studying language is actually seen to be. While the

statement does specify that the study of language should take place within the context of “various textual forms” (and thus signals a rejection of language learning for its own sake, or by rote, that does not contribute to a higher understanding of how meaning is represented in texts), it does not go any further in suggesting why this is a desirable aim. Historically the study of language and of literature has been justified as essential for achieving such aims as disciplining the mind, passing down cultural knowledge or illuminating the human condition by connecting readers to universal ideas, but such aims are not referred to in this statement, either in the sense that they are included or rejected. The second core aim by contrast paints a much clearer picture of what students ought to become – “thoughtful, imaginative and effective communicators” – and alludes to the need for this capacity to be developed in response to our “diverse and changing society”.

This divergence of the singularly presented Aim into two core aims in some way maintains a traditional curriculum grammar in English, specifically the historical differentiation of English as having both a **utilitarian** purpose of increasing people’s capacity for literacy and communication, and an **intellectual** purpose of generating students that are skilled in language arts, appreciation and critique, and that might also study English for enculturation or personal pleasure. What does constitute a significant change to the way in which the curriculum grammar of English is represented in the Aim is the specific reference to the diverse and changing nature of society. Criticisms of the cultural heritage model of English, in particular of the favouring of Western perspectives, British and colonial heritage, and mono-cultural values are clearly answered here with a new missive that the study of culture and values through the subject English must be framed by the contemporary environment of cultural diversity and change.

7.4.3 The Study of English

Another important and explicit definition is posited at the opening of the syllabus, directly following the statement on the ‘Aim’ of Stage 6 English, as to what the study of English contains, and what the purpose of that study is. This definition is relatively brief, considering the depth and breadth of debate described in the Background chapter of this thesis over how best to define the nature and purpose of the English subject, or subjects. The concept that is emphasised in the 1999 Stage 6 definition of the study of English is that of meaning, and the study of how language “forms and processes” in various texts create and convey meaning. The entire definition provided in the syllabus under the heading ‘The Study of English’ contains a number of iterations about the activities and contexts involved in creating and understanding meaning:

Meaning is central to the study of English. The study of English makes explicit the language forms and processes of meaning. English Stage 6 develops this by encouraging students to explore, critically evaluate and appreciate a wide variety of the texts of Australian and other societies, in various forms and media, including multimedia.

The study of English involves exploring, responding to and composing texts

- in and for a range of personal, social, historical, cultural and workplace contexts
- using a variety of language modes, forms, features and structures

Meaning is achieved through responding and composing, which are typically interdependent and ongoing processes.

(Board of Studies NSW, 1999a, p.7)

EXTRACT 3: SYLLABUS SECTION 4: THE STUDY OF ENGLISH

A number of different concepts about what the purpose of studying English should be are represented in this syllabus definition of ‘The Study of English’. The first and most important concept is that in the new HSC syllabus “meaning” would be the central focus of the study of English, with the traditionally dominant studies of ‘language’ and

‘literature’ positioned as existing within broader aims of the subject to enable exposure to a variety of forms of meaning, and the explicit study of how meaning is made. Whereas the purpose of previous syllabuses had been emphasised variously as being the study of language to improve the literacy of the population or to establish logical and disciplined thinking, or the study of literature as a means of enculturation or to promote personal growth (or often a combination of these purposes), the adoption of the discourse of English as a study of meaning represents a significant paradigm shift in the understanding of what the purpose of the subject is. The grammar of the subject, or “the regular structures and rules that organise the work of instruction” (Tyack & Tobin, 1994, p.454), is conceptually different in this syllabus, with ‘the work of instruction’ now positioned as being organised around new ‘structures and rules’, with meaning making positioned as the new focus of the subject, around which the work of instruction is to be organised.

It is also the case, however, that from its outset the syllabus text can be seen to bundle clusters of ideas in which the individual concepts are complex and loaded with professional and pedagogical discourses and implications that exist beyond a literal interpretation. The subordination of the study of language and literature as purposes in their own right to being positioned as means to the new end of creating and understanding meaning is just one example of how a significant paradigm shift can be implied in the text of the syllabus document. Also embedded in the syllabus definition of The Study of English is the statement that the subject will help develop an explicit understanding of the ways in which language forms and processes convey meaning by “encouraging students to explore, critically evaluate and appreciate” a wide variety of texts. This statement signposts the inclusion of a variety of concepts, with students having to be encouraged to adopt three distinct approaches to their study of English:

- **explore** texts – referring to the need to provide opportunities for students to question the meanings of the text and reflect on the personal meaning it has for them, is most closely aligned with a ‘personal growth’ philosophy of English
- **critically evaluate** texts – referring to the belief that students’ study of English ought to involve a critical reading of texts, or a reading ‘against the grain’ to reflect on the ways that texts are constructed and construct the experiences of readers, which is aligned with a ‘critical literacy’ philosophy of English
- **appreciate** texts – referring to an approach to textual study that examines the aesthetic qualities of the intended reading of the text and reflects on the value and quality of the text as a natural piece of creative expression, which could be seen to most closely align with ‘Leavisite’ and ‘cultural heritage’ philosophies of English.

While these tasks of exploring, critically analysing and appreciating texts are placed together at the opening of the syllabus to signal that they must all be regarded as key methods of engaging in the study of English, the syllabus includes no further explanation or theorisation about how these approaches to text can sit together within the subject in a complementary way. There is no theoretical framework for how these approaches to text will balance in a subject that historically has been impacted by tensions between philosophies of English that favour one approach over the other as best serving the purpose of the English subject at the time. So, while it can be concluded that the grammar of the subject was reconfigured in respect to desiring an approach to the study of English that incorporated **all** of the approaches of exploring, critically evaluating and appreciating texts, a theoretical framework for how this would translate into actual changes to the ‘regular structures and rules’ of the subject is not provided in this instance, and so there is little direction for how the ‘work of instruction’ in English might change.

The inclusion of the statement that students' would study a "wide variety of the texts of Australian and other societies, in various forms and media, including multimedia" is another aspect of the opening of the syllabus document that signals an important shift in the grammar of the subject. While an un-theorised reading of this statement might suggest that the syllabus writers were merely ensuring that they covered all of the possible forms of text for study, a historically and professionally informed reading of this qualification exposes the shift away from a sole focus on print-based texts, such as prose novels, poetry and plays, toward a more diverse definition of what will be acknowledged in English as a legitimate 'text'. Specifically, the statement includes the clarification that the new definition of 'text' will include multimedia, which is offered as a qualification to the already stated notion of the syllabus now including "various forms of media".

A similar qualification is made in specifying that students must study texts from "Australian and other societies". Rather than only prescribing students study a *variety* or a *wide range* of societies, "Australian" texts are singled out for prescription, as with "multimedia" texts. There is no suggestion in the remainder of the syllabus document that this is intended to signal either a rejection of the traditional canon of English Literature, or a rejection of print-based texts; rather, these qualifications are made to emphasise the distinct nature of the change that is being undertaken, and they function to isolate the aspects of that change that could be seen as radical in nature and confirm that they are intended and will be mandated. In this way the changed meaning of what can constitute a legitimate focus for study in English, and indeed the very concept that novels, websites, poems, plays and films would in this syllabus be understood within a broader definition of "text", constitutes a significant change to the grammar of the subject.

While this might be seen as a natural evolution for the subject as the ‘human capital’ and ‘skilling’ functions of schooling in particular demanded a broader range of text and language study, reaction to this in the public arena demonstrated unease at the perceived shift in focus. In addition, teachers were offered little guidance in re-aligning their personal philosophies or practices to a syllabus that called for new understandings of what constituted a valuable text, and the purposes for which language and literature was to be studied. The new terminology of ‘responding’ (to encompass reading, listening and viewing) and ‘composing’ (to encompass writing, speaking and representing) proved alienating to public commentators and politicians who claimed that such jargon was emblematic of postmodern and relativist approaches to education. Such reactions raise questions about the extent to which a syllabus document ought to be ‘public-friendly’, and one perspective is that while education can be viewed as a public good, this should not necessarily entail professional working documents such as a subject syllabus to be jargon-free. The difficulties experienced by teachers in understanding and adopting the nature and purpose of the changes to English, however, do indicate that new and competing ideas were causing tensions for professional readers of the syllabus, as well as public ones.

7.4.4 The English Stage 6 Candidature

One of the curriculum grammars that have remained firmly in place in the 1999 HSC English syllabus is the differentiation of levels of difficulty within the subject. While most HSC level courses are only available for study at a single level of difficulty, English is one of the few subjects that are available for study at a number of levels, depending on the interest and ability that a student has for the course. While this differentiation of levels includes special provisions for students that use English as a second language (the ESL English course), students with learning difficulties (English

Life Skills), and for students that are accomplished in the subject and choose to study at a more intensive level (Extension courses 1 and 2), English also constitutes a special case as all ‘mainstream’ students that are required to take the mandatory 2 Units of English must choose between *Standard* and *Advanced* levels of the course. This is also the case in one other subject, mathematics. As English is set for mandatory study in the HSC, however, and therefore is elevated somewhat as being valuable to all and having an essential role across the curriculum areas, it is revealing to consider the differentiated purposes that are declared for the Standard and Advanced courses.

In the final section of the introductory pages of the syllabus, before moving onto sections that describe in more detail the requirements of each specific course, brief statements are provided that succinctly express the purpose of each of the English courses. The descriptions provided for the Standard and Advanced courses are:

English (Standard) is designed for students to increase their expertise in English in order to enhance their personal, social and vocational lives. The students learn to respond to and compose a wide variety of texts in a range of situations in order to be effective, creative and confident communicators.

English (Advanced) is designed for students to undertake the challenge of higher order thinking to enhance their personal, social and vocational lives. These students apply critical and creative skills in their composition of and response to texts in order to develop their academic achievement through understanding the nature and function of complex texts.

(Board of Studies NSW, 1999a, p.12)

EXTRACT 4: SYLLABUS SECTION 7: THE ENGLISH STAGE 6 CANDIDATURE (STANDARD AND ADVANCED COURSES)

A critical analysis of these two descriptions, especially in comparison to one another, reveals not only that the subject grammar of providing differentiated levels of English obviously remains, but also that the difference between the Standard and Advanced

course is not just a matter of increased workload or difficulty, as the two courses are described as having inherently different purposes.

While the Advanced course is described as developing students’ “academic achievement”, there is no mention of “academic” achievement in the Standard description, raising the question of what is implied by the term ‘academic’. As both courses yield an academic result for students in the sense that satisfactory completion of either course will earn the student a HSC qualification, it is not made clear what characteristics of the Advanced course make it ‘academic’ compared to the Standard course. Unless this reference to academic achievement is an implied message that an officially high level of achievement (e.g. Band 6 results) can only be reached in the Advanced course, readers of the syllabus are left to critically compare the other expressions used in these course descriptions to determine what the implied purpose of each course is.

Table 12 below provides a direct comparison of the key statements within the description of the candidatures in Standard and Advanced English:

statement	Standard course	Advanced course
[1]	[Students] increase their expertise in English...	[Students] undertake the challenge of higher order thinking...
[2]	...in order to enhance their personal, social and vocational lives.	
[3]	The students learn to respond to and compose a wide variety of texts in a range of situations...	The students apply critical and creative skills in their composition of and response to texts...
[4]	...in order to be effective, creative and confident communicators.	...in order to develop their academic achievement through understanding the nature and function of complex texts.

TABLE 12: COMPARISON OF STANDARD AND ADVANCED ENGLISH SYLLABUS DESCRIPTIONS

While statement [2] is common to both course descriptions, the differences between statements [1], [3] and [4] clearly show the curriculum grammar of Standard English as

being a utilitarian course remains, while Advanced English involves skills that are defined as “academic” – “higher order thinking”, “critical and creative skills” and “understanding the nature and function of complex texts”. Standard English is conceptualised as more functional and utilitarian in nature in the sense that it involves a practical increase in skill (students “increase their expertise in English”), and achieves goals that have practical applications (learning to compose and respond to texts for “a range of situations” and becoming “effective, creative and confident communicators”).

This evidence of utilitarian and academic purposes being ascribed to the Standard and Advanced courses respectively not only provides a rich source of information about the purpose of English as defined in this syllabus, but may also be used as point of reflection to explain the **dual aims** of the syllabus, as explored previously. As documented earlier in this chapter, the Aim of the syllabus can be seen as consisting of two distinct aims – one that relates to a study that is detached and intellectual, another that has more of a practical application in learning to communicate in the social world. While there is no direct evidence linking one part of the Aim to the Standard course and another part to the Advanced course in an exclusive way, it is interesting to note the curriculum grammar of ascribing different purposes to different level courses echoed in the dual nature of the syllabus Aim.

7.5 The Standard and Advanced Courses

The focus of this chapter is an exploration of the two core English courses that are available for selection by the majority of HSC students. As the study of English is mandatory to attain a HSC, all students must elect either ‘Standard’ or ‘Advanced’ English for study, unless they meet the well-defined criteria for entry into the restricted

ESL course. Standard and Advanced English are both structured in a very similar fashion, and 40% of the content is in fact common to both courses to enable students in both courses to be marked on a common scale.

The Standard and Advanced English courses both contain three major variables that are designed to allow teachers and students flexibility in designing a course program that is appropriate and meets the needs and interests in their school or class, while at the same time enabling the Board of Studies to specify mandatory conditions for any HSC study. The three variables that schools need to factor into any HSC English program design are:

- **Course content:** Schools will make selections from BOS designed ‘Area of Study’ and ‘Module’ *electives*, as well as from the *list of prescribed texts*
- **Types of text:** Students in the Standard and Advanced courses must study a *specified number of texts* in the *specified categories* of prose fiction, poetry, film, drama, non-fiction, media, multimedia and Shakespearean drama.
- **Language modes:** Schools must program a combination of assessments that ensures all students are being assessed across the full range of language modes; *reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing and representing*

Within the boundaries of these requirements teachers will design a program for study, in some cases with the input of their students, that meets local needs in terms of students’ interests and ability, as well as best utilising resources available to the school. A set of learning *outcomes* (a total of 13 in the Standard course and 15 in the Advanced course) specify the intended result of student learning, and student assessment and examination is measured against these outcomes. In the following sections the various elements of the HSC program will be analysed in more depth, before finally moving on to an analysis of the assessment and examination requirements for HSC English.

7.5.1 Course Content

In the 1999 syllabus, for the first time HSC English was to be studied within the scope of a main ‘Area of Study’ (40% of the course content) and three additional ‘Modules’ (Modules A, B and C, each worth 20%). In contrast to previous syllabuses, which had historically been organised around the study nominated texts in the categories of prose fiction, poetry and drama, students from 2001 onward would study texts within broader contexts, such as the concept of ‘Change’ or of ‘The Journey’ in the Area of Study, or electives such as ‘Telling stories’ or ‘Dialogue’, as found in Module A of the Standard course. This change is significant, as it reflects an intention to embrace a more diverse construction of the nature of the subject. The differing characteristics and features of the Area of Study and the Modules reflect a manifestation of various philosophies and approaches to the teaching of English, as outlined in the table below.

Area/ Module	Characteristics and features	Approach to English reflected
Area of Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common to the Standard and Advanced courses • ‘An exploration of a concept that affects our perceptions of ourselves and our world’ • Study of ONE prescribed text plus a variety of independently chosen related texts • Creative writing is examined in the HSC within the Area of Study 	<p>Drawing on a valuing of ‘personal growth’</p> <p>(students explore how texts create and reflect personal meaning; creative writing used as a pedagogical tool to encourage reflection on students’ own perceptions and beliefs)</p>
Module A	<p>Standard: <i>Experience through language</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘an exploration of the uses of a particular aspect of language’ • Study of ONE prescribed text <p>Advanced: <i>Comparative study of texts and contexts</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘a comparison of texts in order to explore them in relation to their contexts’ • Study of TWO prescribed texts 	<p>High ‘language’ or ‘skills’ focus in the Standard course.</p> <p>‘Language’ study in the Advanced course closely related to developing ‘cultural’ literacy (students explore how context shapes meaning)</p>
Module B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shakespearean plays always available for selection in both courses <p>Standard: <i>Close study of text</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘students engage in detailed analysis of a text’ <p>Advanced: <i>Critical study of text</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘students develop an informed personal understanding of their prescribed text through critical analysis and evaluation’ 	<p>Drawing on a valuing of ‘cultural heritage’ and literature appreciation.</p> <p>(both courses focus closely on analysing a single text of high cultural relevance)</p> <p>Advanced students engage in ‘critical literacy’ practices to reach personal understanding.</p>
Module C	<p>Standard: <i>Texts and society</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘students gain an understanding of the ways that texts communicate information, ideas, bodies of knowledge, attitudes and belief systems in ways particular to specific areas of society’ • Study of ONE prescribed text plus related texts including ‘workplace’ texts <p>Advanced: <i>Representation and text</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘students evaluate how medium of production, textual form, perspective and choice of language influence meaning’ • Study of ONE prescribed text plus a variety of independently chosen related texts 	<p>A predominantly ‘socio-cultural’ perspective is taken in this Module.</p> <p>(both courses explore how society – individual, historical and cultural context – is represented in text)</p> <p>Different types of student candidature are constructed by the requirement in the Standard course to study ‘workplace’ texts, with more emphasis is placed in the Advanced course on students’ independent research.</p>

TABLE 13: APPROACHES TO ENGLISH REFLECTED IN THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COURSE AREA AND MODULES

This change in what is recognisable as the framework of study in English goes some way toward explaining the negative representation of the changes in the media, as many reports and articles indicated a decline in the study of literature, when in fact the syllabus had moved to organisation around contexts rather than around single texts. While English faculties would now be making choices about what to study from BOS designed ‘Area of Study’ and ‘Module’ electives, each study area includes an in depth study of a text from the *list of prescribed texts*, which includes canonical works, and works from the traditionally studied poetry, drama and prose fiction, as well as of film, media, multi-media and non-fiction. Students are also required to compare and contrast their prescribed texts to related texts they have sourced independently, (except in Module B where students in both the Standard and Advanced courses closely analyse a single text) and this new requirement enables students in Year 12 to have experience of a greater number and breadth of texts than was seen in the previous syllabus. The shift in curriculum organisation, however, had shifted the grammar of the curriculum enough to cause concern for stakeholders who did not find ready evidence in the syllabus of a retained reverence for traditional literature.

Such concerns about the dilution of English as a subject due to the emphasis on how language creates meaning in context (rather than on studying the texts as canonical cultural artefacts) were described in Chapter 5, with some journalists and politicians claiming that the introduction of visual texts had resulted in a lack of time spent on studying canonical literature, and that in depth textual analysis had been sacrificed to enable further study of the context of texts and introduce critical approaches to reading. The introduction of visual texts and language modes are explored more closely in section 7.5.3, but the descriptions (shown in Table 13) of the characteristics and features of the Area of Study and Modules, as well as the summary of the approach to English

curriculum that is reflected in each, together show that the act of in depth textual analysis had not disappeared. Module B on the contrary retained a model of focussing on a single text for in depth study, in both the Standard and Advanced courses. All of the other Modules and the Area of Study, although now organised around larger contextual concerns (e.g. ‘experience through language’ in Standard Module A and ‘representation and text’ in Advanced Module C), retained a close analysis of a prescribed text as a major content requirement.

Although an analysis of the syllabus does not support the view that English had been ‘diluted’, or that canonical texts were no longer valued, the variety of approaches to English embodied by the construction of the Area of Study and Modules shown in Table 13 is likely one of the sources of pressure felt by English teachers who found difficulty reconciling their personal English curriculum philosophies with the direction taken in the syllabus. As referred to in the previous section, the introduction document put out by the Board of Studies to support implementation of the syllabus explains that “the syllabus allows for an engagement with new theoretical developments in the study of English, while maintaining the literary orientation that has been the traditional character of HSC English in New South Wales (1999b, p.2). Upon closer analysis, however, what appears to be the case is that *different* areas of the course are based around *different* theoretical approaches. The Area of Study, for example, involves a highly student-centred approach to the texts studied with a focus on concepts that ‘affect our own perceptions of ourselves and the world’, such as Change, The Journey and Belonging. It also draws on pedagogical devices such as personal exploration of a concept through creative writing that are commonly associated with the ‘personal growth’ model in English. Module B, in contrast, places the emphasis of the learning on the text set for study, which aligns more closely with approaches to English that

favour the development of an appreciation of literature as a cultural artefact, essential to forming a connection with students' cultural heritage.

This analysis of the differing approaches to English that underpin various areas of the content in the HSC syllabus provides further insight into ways that the syllabus may be providing teachers with mixed messages about what is most valued in English. A teacher who comes to value, for example, the creative composing done by students in the Area of Study, may then find such opportunities for composing to be lacking in the Modules. As explained in Chapter 6, one of the core pressures felt by HSC English teachers implementing the syllabus was the need to re-define, or re-align their beliefs about English as a school subject, and analysis of their experience showed that this was based in part on their need to adapt to the needs of the students and the school community. The other source of this pressure was the conflicting discourses and pedagogical approaches that teachers readily identified between the course content and the HSC assessment and examination requirements. The assessment and examination requirements for the syllabus will be explored in depth later in this chapter.

Another document that teachers must consult in conjunction with the syllabus is the *List of Prescribed Texts* to find the range of texts available for selection in the Area of Study and in each of the Module electives. A count of the number of texts available for selection in each category (shown in full in Appendix C) shows that the number of texts available in the newer, more visual types of text i.e. media, multimedia, dropped over time, while the number of texts in the more traditional prose fiction and poetry categories rose in the 2009-2012 text list – the first revision of the text list since the peak in media coverage of the syllabus in 2005 – as shown in the table below.

	Standard 2001- 2003	Advanced 2001- 2003	Standard 2004- 2008	Advanced 2004- 2008	Standard 2009- 2012	Advanced 2009- 2012
Shakespeare	1	4	2	4	2	4
Drama	9	7	8	6	7	6
Poetry	8	8	9	8	10	11
Prose Fiction	7	9	8	11	14	17
Film	7	7	7	8	6	7
Media	2	2	2	2	1	0
Multimedia	3	2	3	2	1	1
Nonfiction	7	9	6	8	3	6

TABLE 14: NUMBER OF PRESCRIBED TEXT AVAILABLE FOR STUDY (BY CATEGORY)

The choices that had been made regarding the texts that would feature on the prescriptions list provided further implicit guidance for teachers on the philosophical beliefs that underpinned the new English syllabus. The number of texts available in each category (Table 14) shows that traditional forms of written literature – prose fiction, poetry and drama, including Shakespeare – retained their priority, with far fewer texts on offer in newer categories that incorporated visual language. Despite claims made in the news media, therefore, about a ‘postmodern’ approach to English destroying the valuing of culturally significant forms of literature, or causing written language to be devalued, it can be seen that this in fact was not the case.

While the number of film texts available to choose from is comparable to the numbers of drama and nonfiction texts, the categories of media and multimedia can be seen to contain much fewer options. Despite including media and multimedia as a category of text available for study in the HSC, the lack of texts listed for study on the HSC *Prescribed Text List* in these categories makes it less likely that teachers will elect to set them for study, both because of the limited range of texts to choose from, and the corresponding lack of professional development and resources to support teachers that are interested in pursuing these texts for study. The lack of media and multimedia texts

listed for study also makes it easy for teachers to avoid selecting these texts, especially as these texts have never been listed as options in the HSC English Area of Study that is mandatory for students in both the Standard and Advanced courses. As well as these practical constraints, by limiting so severely the number of media and multimedia texts approved for study at the HSC level, the Board of Studies sends a clear message to both schools and the community about the place of these texts in the hierarchy of knowledge in English. The next section of this chapter will more thoroughly detail the implications of changes that were made to the types of text that could be studied in English.

7.5.2 Types of Text

While the syllabus definition of ‘The Study of English’ (Board of Studies NSW, 1999a) emphasises the centrality of understanding and conveying meaning, it does not feature an explicit description of the types of materials that will be the focus of such a study of meaning making. It does allude to the concept of English involving a study of “texts”, emphasising that students should be encouraged to “explore, critically evaluate and appreciate a wide variety of the texts of Australian and other societies, in various forms and media, including multimedia”, however it is not until the following section of the syllabus where a selection of ‘Key Terms’ are defined that a clearer explanation of how texts will be conceptualised in relation to the goal of understanding and conveying meaning, and a definitive set of parameters for what can be included as ‘text’ is provided:

Texts in English Stage 6 are communications of meaning produced in any medium that incorporates language, including sound, print, film, electronic and multimedia. Texts include written, spoken, nonverbal or visual communication of meaning. They may be extended unified works or presented as a series of related pieces.

(Board of Studies NSW, 1999a, p.8)

EXTRACT 5: SYLLABUS SECTION 5: KEY TERMS IN THE STUDY OF ENGLISH (TEXTS)

As documented in Chapter 5, there has been a strong reaction in the media, in particular from conservative politicians and opinion columnists, to the use of the term ‘text’ to encompass all types of communication of meaning. Much public debate has centred on the criticism that the concept of labelling all communications of meaning as ‘texts’ has led to the abandonment of valuing one text over another, and has brought for example Shakespeare’s plays alongside cereal boxes as, for example, equally valuable texts for study. There is no evidence in the opening pages of the syllabus or otherwise that supports this claim, and students are encouraged to engage in processes of textual appreciation that involve making decisions about the value and quality of a text. However, the introduction of the terminology of text (as well as the associated terms composing and responding) represents an important change to the grammar of the curriculum for English, as the subject is now positioned as a place where meaning is studied through a range of textual representations, rather than only through print-based literature.

One of the most important prescriptions in the Standard and Advanced courses is the requirement for the mandatory study of certain types of text. The text requirements for each course are that students in the Standard course must closely study at least four types of prescribed text, one of each drawn from the categories of:

- Prose Fiction
- Drama
- Poetry
- Nonfiction or Film or Media or Multimedia

(Board of Studies NSW, 1999a, p.31)

Students in the Advanced course study one text more than in the Standard course, and the categories from which these are drawn are slightly different. Advanced students must closely study at least five types of prescribed text, one of each drawn from the categories of:

- Shakespearean Drama
- Prose Fiction
- Drama or Film
- Poetry
- Nonfiction or Media or Multimedia

(Board of Studies NSW, 1999a, p.49)

While the Key Term ‘Texts’ is defined in the introduction to the syllabus as including “any medium that incorporates language, including sound, print, film, electronic and multimedia” (Board of Studies NSW, 1999a, p.8), the categories of text required study in both the Standard and Advanced courses retain an imbalance among various mediums, with the print medium retaining a heavy emphasis. Students in both the Standard and Advanced courses are even able to avoid *any* non-print prescribed texts in HSC English by studying prose fiction, drama, poetry, Shakespearean Drama and a print-based nonfiction text, depending on their course. Students cannot, however, avoid a study of print-based prescribed texts. While students are also required to study texts of their own choosing in the Area of Study and in some Modules (in Module A and C of

the Standard course, and Module A of the Advanced course), and it is no doubt intended that students will encounter a wider variety of textual mediums in the additional texts they have chosen, a clear knowledge hierarchy is established by enforcing the study of print-based language through mandatory requirements.

Furthermore the categories of possible ‘mediums’ suggested – sound, print, film, electronic and multimedia – seem erroneous when the boundaries drawn around the categories themselves are questioned. While ‘film’, for example, could be considered a medium of production, the category of ‘sound’ is not so clear. This combination of ill-defined categories of text ‘mediums’ and a clear intent to preference written language mediums regardless of the breadth of categories provided to include print, sound and visual mediums in isolation and in various ‘blends’ suggests that this curriculum grammar, the view of knowledge, in the subject English remains skewed to favour print mediums and written literacy. This privileging of written literacy is also apparent in the mandatory weighting of the language modes (reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing and representing) in internal assessment and represents reinforcement, not a challenge, to the traditional view of what content should constitute legitimate knowledge in the subject English.

While the lower status of non-print mediums is reinforced by confining them to be studied mostly as additional texts that students are to source on their own, this act of requiring students to find and study texts of their own choosing also serves to legitimise students’ own experiences and interests as valid and worthwhile knowledge. Students have certainly been encouraged in earlier syllabuses to supplement their prescribed texts with a wider study of other materials, however the 1999 syllabus is the first to require specific study and assessment of both prescribed texts and texts of students own choosing across all 2 Unit English courses.

Although legitimating students' knowledge through its inclusion in the syllabus prescriptions can be seen as changing the curriculum grammar, it is important to acknowledge the evidence available in the syllabus of conflicting depictions of knowledge hierarchies. Described already is the way in which written literacy and print-based texts are implicitly defined as inhabiting a higher place on the knowledge hierarchy than literacy based on audio and visual texts, or multimedia texts. It is also interesting to consider the implication of retaining Shakespearean Drama as a specific category of text, mandatory for study by all students in the Advanced English course. In the support document *an introduction to English stage 6 in the new HSC*, which was provided to schools with the 1999 English Stage 6 syllabus, the following information is provided under the heading of 'theoretical underpinnings':

The syllabus allows for an engagement with new theoretical developments in the study of English, while maintaining the literary orientation that has been the traditional character of HSC English in New South Wales. The syllabus recognises the significance of meaning as a process as well as a result of responding to and composing texts.

(Board of Studies NSW, 1999b, p.2).

Specific reference to "maintaining the literary orientation that has been the traditional character of HSC English in New South Wales", along with the prescription of Shakespearean Drama as being an essential component of a more 'Advanced' study of English suggest that aspects of study that might be considered 'literary' in orientation remain a primary focus in English. The 'theoretical developments' represented in the syllabus, such as a more inclusive definition of what will be counted as a legitimate or valuable text, or the interdependent nature of responding and composing, remain unnamed, unspecified, inexplicit, and so lose a great deal of the power they might have had for significantly changing the grammar of the curriculum.

7.5.3 Language Modes

The 1999 HSC English syllabus featured the first inclusion of visual language modes in the NSW English curriculum, given the terms ‘viewing’ (to describe the act of *responding to* texts that use still and moving image) and ‘representing’ (to describe the act of *composing* texts that use visual language features and text conventions).

	Written Mode	Spoken Mode	Aural Mode
Responding	Reading	Listening	Viewing
Composing	Writing	Speaking	Representing

TABLE 15: ACTS OF RESPONDING AND COMPOSING (BY LANGUAGE MODE)

As previously discussed, this explicit incorporation of visual language modes into the English curriculum constitutes a significant shift in what is considered valid content for study in English, and in conceptualisations of the professional landscape for English teachers. The introduction of the modes of viewing and representing into the official curriculum signalled the uptake of an approach to the field of English studies that acknowledged the impact of the then relatively new field of multiliteracies, extending the language content of the syllabus beyond printed and spoken words to include study of a broader range of devices for meaning making, in particular the grammars of still and moving images, music and sound. It is this development that formed one of the central and recurrent themes of criticism in newspaper articles from 1995-2005. While it is certainly undeniable that film and other visual media had been included for study in the syllabus, however, there are fewer bases for claims made about the link between engaging with visual literacy and visual texts and the core concerns that ultimately lay at the heart of political and media commentary.

Although visual language modes were implicitly described in the introductory sections of the syllabus as being of equal importance, an analysis of the assessment requirements that appear later in the syllabus shows that written language was still privileged as the most significant language mode. The weighting of language modes in assessment provided the acts of reading and writing with a combined 55% of the total activity to be assessed:

- Writing = 30%
- Reading = 25%
- Speaking = 15%
- Listening = 15%
- Viewing and Representing = 15%

It is clear that concerns represented in the media that the inclusion of visual texts for study constituted a threat to the teaching of canonical literature, and therefore a threat to the passing on of cultural heritage, cannot be seen as arising from a devaluing of written language in the syllabus.

The use of the terms ‘composing’ and ‘responding’ in the syllabus, not just in relation to visual language, but to frame the processes of engaging with language in all modes, is another aspect of conceptualising language that proved alienating for some public commentators as these new, unfamiliar terms were associated with ‘trendy’ theory. The subsuming of recognisable terms such as ‘reading’ and ‘writing’ into these overarching processes of responding and composing is an example of a change that perhaps signalled to the public that established priorities and values were being set aside, or renegotiated in the 1999 syllabus. This issue raises questions for discussion later in this thesis about the extent to which the language of a curriculum document ought to be

accessible to parents and the community, and the impact on teaching and learning when professional jargon and discourse is undermined. It is also worth considering, however, whether greater clarity in the introductory pages of the syllabus about how the language modes were intended to intersect and balance with each other might have removed unnecessary ambiguity for all stakeholders.

7.5.4 Outcomes

The introduction of standards-referenced assessment and the related objectives and outcomes that were devised as organisers for learning constituted a significant change to the way that stakeholders were to conceptualise achievement across all HSC courses from 1999 onward. By shifting the focus of the courses from attaining content knowledge and norm-referenced assessment to the achievement of learning outcomes, teachers were to be able to organise student work around the associated objectives relating to ‘knowledge and understanding’ and ‘skills’. Although many of the outcomes are common to both courses – a total of 13 in the Standard course and 15 in the Advanced course – there are notable differences between some outcomes that provide insight into the different learning experiences intended for students in the respective courses.

Appendix D (comparison of HSC English course outcomes) shows in detail the words and phrases that differ in the outcomes for the Standard course when compared to the Advanced course. The comparison highlights differences in particular in the degree of sophistication required in students’ analysis and response to texts; while students in the Standard course are required to ‘demonstrate understanding’ (Standard HSC outcomes 1 and 2) or ‘describe’ (Standard HSC outcome 4) features of language and text, students in the Advanced course are required to ‘explain’ (Advanced HSC outcomes 1, 2, 4, 5 and 12A) and ‘evaluate’ (Advanced HSC outcomes 1, 5, 9 and 12A) in their responses

to text. This allocation of higher order literacy skills to the Advanced English course provides some explanation for the conceptualisation of a hierarchy, or ‘taxonomy’ for learning in English that was observed at Shermer High School, where students with poorer operational literacy skills were seen as being denied access to more empowering ways of working with texts.

A comparison of the ‘knowledge and understanding’ and ‘skills’ objectives associated with the course outcomes (shown in Appendix D) provides further points of difference between the two courses. Where students in the Standard course are required to develop skills “in responding to and composing a range of texts” and “in effective communication”, students in the Advanced course are asked to respond and compose “a range of *complex* texts” and communicate “at different *levels of complexity*” (Board of Studies NSW, 1999a, p.41, my emphasis). This requirement that students in the Advanced course engage in more complex texts, as well as the higher number of prescribed texts studied in the course (five texts are studied in Advanced English while only four are studied in Standard English) provides a clear differentiation between the courses in terms of difficulty. This, however, stands in contrast to suggestions made in some news articles that different courses might provide for two different ‘types of student’ by aligning the study of spelling, grammar, expression and visual media texts to less able students, and reserving more sophisticated literacy practices and the study of classic Literature for students intending to enter into further academic study.

It is of interest to note that while the syllabus contains objectives in the areas of ‘knowledge and understanding’, ‘skills’ and what students will come to ‘value and appreciate’, the learning goals for what students will value and appreciate do not align to any of the course outcomes, and as such are not assessable.

Students will come to **value and appreciate**:

- the role of language in developing positive interaction and cooperation
- their developing skills as users of English
- the pleasure and diversity of language and literature
- the role of language and literature in their lives
- the study and use of English as a key to learning
- reflection on their own processes of responding, composing and learning
- English as a language of communication and culture
- appropriateness, subtlety and aesthetics in language use.

(Board of Studies NSW, 1999a, p.6)

EXTRACT 6: 'VALUE AND APPRECIATE' OBJECTIVES FOR STAGE 6 ENGLISH (STANDARD AND ADVANCED)

This is significant, as teachers in both of the schools in this study identified the importance of meeting student needs as a core pressure on syllabus implementation, and described the need to develop in students a personal, lifelong love of language and literature as being a key part of their English teaching philosophy. As such, the syllabus presents teachers with a powerful framework for approaching this by including objectives for what students will come to value and appreciate, but the focus that this area receives in the lived experience of the syllabus is limited by the lack of attachment to the assessment and examination framework.

Overall, while the newly introduced terminology of 'composing' and 'responding' to 'texts' throughout the syllabus proved alienating and provoked a negative reaction from journalists and politicians discussing HSC English in the public arena, a reading of the outcomes for either course shows that one of the core concerns about English put forward in the media – that students were not required to learn language basics – as unfounded. On the contrary, the analysis made here of the difference in course outcomes shows that students in both of the mainstream HSC English courses engage in

study that explicitly develops operational literacy by requiring them to either “describe and analyse” (Standard course) or “explain and analyse” (Advanced course) the ways that language forms and features, and structures of texts shape meaning and influence responses. The objective of developing “skills in effective communication” also features in both courses. In the following and final section of analysis in this chapter, the relationship between the course outcomes, as well as other aspects of the course content to the assessment and examination of HSC English is explored.

7.6 *Assessment and Examination*

As previously discussed, the most significant and fundamental overall change made to HSC assessment and reporting under the new structure implemented in 1999 was the shift away from a norm-referenced approach to reporting HSC results to a standards-referenced approach. The introduction of standards-referenced reporting methods meant that there would no longer be a predetermined proportion of students allocated to each mark range – instead, there would be no limits on the amount of students who could achieve the top standard and all students who met the minimum requirements of their course would receive a mark of at least 50. While students would still have information available to them about how they performed in relation to other students, this would come in the form of course reports for each subject that included descriptions of individual student achievement in the final HSC report.

One particularly significant aspect of assessment in HSC *English*, however, is the fact that it is the only subject that is mandatory for study in the HSC, and the only subject that is compulsorily included in the calculation of a student’s UAI. These factors mean that questions about the content or form of assessment and examination in HSC English

are necessarily laden with additional attention on the nature and fairness of an assessment schedule that is encountered by all HSC students regardless of their level of interest in the subject, and which will further impact on all students who elect to receive a UAI.

Student achievement in the HSC is measured using an equal combination of a student's internal class-based assessment mark and the mark they receive in their external examination at the end of the year. The external examination in both the Standard and Advanced English courses takes the form of two examination papers, each of two hours duration. The first paper (Paper 1) is traditionally sat early in the HSC examination period, and is a common paper sat by all Standard and Advanced English students. Paper 1 contains three sections based on the AOS, which all students in the English and Advanced courses will have studied as a common component: these include questions on an unseen text (or a range of unseen texts) to assess reading comprehension, as well as a writing task and a section in which students answer questions based specifically on the texts they have studied within the AOS. The second paper (Paper 2) is traditionally sat two days later in the HSC examination period, and consists of questions, again in three sections, based on the course-specific electives from Modules A, B and C. In calculating the UAI, the common Paper 1 is used to scale students' marks in Paper 2 by adjusting the marks received by students in the second paper based on how well Standard and Advanced students performed compared to each other in Paper 1 of the HSC that year.

Paper 1 (Area of Study: 45 marks, 2 hours)	Paper 2 (Modules: 60 marks, 2 hours)
Section I (15 marks): Reading Task	Section I (20 marks): Module A
Section II (15 marks): Writing Task	Section II (20 marks): Module B
Section III (15 marks): Area of Study	Section III (20 marks): Module C

TABLE 16: SUMMARY OF THE CONTENT OF THE HSC ENGLISH EXAMINATIONS

This process of marking Standard and Advanced responses to Paper 1 on a common scale seems reasonable in one respect, as the courses do share several common learning outcomes (as can be seen in Appendix D). However, by using these results to moderate the marks received in Paper 2, concerns such as those raised at Shermer High School about the difficulty experienced by students in the Standard course in achieving success in HSC English are seen to be justified. This systemic requirement for students in the Standard and Advanced courses to be marked against a common scale also sends a mixed message to teachers about the difference between the courses, as student learning experiences are clearly differentiated in the course content through the increased number and complexity of texts studied, as well as the higher level of sophistication in analysis demanded by many of the learning outcomes in the Advanced course.

The situation observed at Welton High School, where the Head Teacher had elected not to run the Standard course in order for students to achieve higher grades can be attributed to this system of directly comparing the examination marks of Standard students to the marks achieved by the Advanced cohort, rather than to a desire to choose course content that best suits student learning needs. With no students in the Standard course receiving an achievement Band 6 for English at all across the State from 2001-2004, and only 2.36% students receiving a Band 5 in 2005 (Board of Studies NSW, 2001, 2005), the potential for students to achieve the outcomes set for the course was demonstrably limited. The impact of this on students is heightened due to the

compulsory nature of English in the HSC, and the mandatory inclusion of English marks in the calculation of the UAI, with students desiring entry into competitive university degree essentially being forced to enrol in the Advanced English course, regardless of their level of interest in the subject. The negative impact on student welfare of denying students from high levels of achievement based on less demanding outcomes was described by teachers at Shermer High School, and raises questions about the level of stress and disappointment experienced by students in the Standard course across all NSW schools.

Another significant aspect of assessment and examination that emerged for English teachers and students after a few years of observing trends in HSC examination results (Board of Studies NSW, 2001, 2005) is the difficulty of obtaining a high ‘Band’ of achievement (i.e. a Band 5 or 6) in any English course when compared to other HSC subjects (e.g. Mathematics):

HSC subject	Band 6s 2001	Band 5s 2001	Band 6s 2005	Band 5s 2005
English (Standard)	0.00%	0.35%	0.01%	2.36%
English (Advanced)	4.36%	33.20%	7.95%	37.84%
Mathematics (General)	1.51%	11.35%	4.37%	18.96%
Mathematics (2 Unit)	11.82%	29.22%	15.05%	23.73%
Visual Arts	4.35%	21.21%	11.30%	39.99%
Modern History	8.40%	26.49%	9.59%	32.38%
French (Beginners)	13.34%	17.33%	17.16%	20.81%
French (Continuers)	27.10%	33.68%	20.78%	27.66%

Table 17: Comparison of Band 5 and 6 levels of achievement awarded in various HSC courses

The table above compares a selection of HSC courses to illustrate the difficulty of obtaining high levels of achievement in HSC English, most notably in the Standard course. Compared to Mathematics, the only other subject that is offered at two levels of difficulty (the 'General' course being less demanding than the '2 Unit' course), students studying the less demanding Standard English course found it far more difficult to obtain high results than students in the Advanced English course, and English can be seen to have been less rewarding overall in terms of the percentage of Bands 5 and 6 that were awarded to students. While this can be attributed to the shift to standards-based assessment, as markers are no longer required to award predetermined numbers of grades across the full range, the small number of students achieving high levels of success in English raises questions about whether the objectives of the courses are too demanding, and about the fairness of moderating the grades of Standard students against their peers in the Advanced course when the two courses are oriented around different content, objectives and outcomes. Table 17 also illustrates the comparatively high levels of success achieved by students studying French as a foreign language, at both the 'Beginners' and 'Continuers' level, meaning that students are more likely to experience success in studying a foreign language than in studying texts composed in the English language.

The pressure on students to perform in HSC English described by teachers at Welton High School, and the related tendency of students to hire tutors, to rote learn exam responses, and to only superficially engage in course material in order to orient their learning around achievement in summative assessment tasks can be linked in part to the sustained culture of difficulty in obtaining high levels of achievement in English compared to other HSC subjects. Anxiety felt by teachers at Shermer High School over the extent to which they ought to prepare students for performance in timed written

exams can also be seen as being exacerbated by the narrower opportunities for high achievement in HSC English.

The syllabus requirement that a range of language modes be studied has been discussed in section 7.5.3 above, however the detail of this is worth covering again here in the context of assessment requirements. The requirement that the assessment of reading and writing comprise 55% of the internal assessment signals that the focus of the HSC syllabus remains heavily on skills, knowledge and understanding relating to and expressed or represented through written language, with a medium-range focus on the spoken language skills of speaking and listening (a combined assessment weighting of 30%), and an even smaller focus on the newly introduced visual language modes of viewing and representing (a combined assessment weighting of 15%). While the emphasis on successful demonstration of written language skills has been discussed briefly in the context of the internal assessment, this is compounded by the fact that the external examination for both the Standard and Advanced courses consists entirely of written tasks. Furthermore, the ‘raw’ or unscaled marks that students receive from their school based assessment are not given directly to students, but are scaled against their schools’ examination marks to ensure that HSC results are fair and consistent between schools, in order to ensure parity by negating the impact of teachers who mark too ‘hard’ or too ‘soft’.

What this means for students is that they are not only being assessed internally using a heavy focus on written language, but that they also must perform in exclusively written examination tasks in both Papers of the external exam, and furthermore that any marks they may have received for achievement in spoken or visual language under the internal assessment program are moderated against an exam performance that is exclusively comprised of written tasks composed within a strict time limit. In addition, although the

sections of Paper 1 that call for a piece of imaginative writing and a response to unseen texts often require students to respond (in a written answer) to a visual text, or to use a visual text as a stimulus for their imaginative writing task, the pen and paper nature of the exam completely prohibits the provision of spoken or multimedia texts as the basis for these tasks.

It is noteworthy that while the syllabus contains four explicit content components within which texts are to be studied, namely the Area of Study (AOS) and Modules A, B and C, there is no framework within the syllabus that similarly sets out content or prescriptions for the learning of the *unseen text comprehension* or *imaginative writing* skills that are assessed in Paper 1 of the external exam. Rather, these skills are embedded in the general outcomes of each course, and it is indicated that the activities of composing original imaginative text and comprehending unseen text will be encountered as part of the work undertaken and assessed within the AOS and Modules:

Assessment requirements and structures are more detailed and are explicitly linked to the course outcomes.

The new syllabus requires a balance among:

- the assessment of knowledge and understanding outcomes, and skills outcomes
- syllabus components and language modes
- types of assessment tasks such as creative responses over time, composition portfolio, oral presentation, viewing and listening tasks.

Examinations such as class tests, term tests and trials must not exceed 30% of the assessment program.

(Board of Studies NSW, 1999b, p.2).

While this statement from the *Introduction to English Stage 6 in the New HSC* document clearly directs schools to set a range of assessment tasks, no more than 30%

of which should be examination style, teachers at both Shermer and Welton High Schools expressed difficulty in preparing students for success in the HSC examination without ‘mirroring’ its style by setting timed, written tasks for internal assessment. The need felt to create tasks in ‘composing’ written and spoken work that was in fact an analysis of a prescribed text meant that teachers in both schools were severely limited in their capacity to engage students in composing their own original, creative works. This process whereby the form and content of a high-stakes examination can dictate the way in which schools interpret and implement official curriculum directives was explored at the outset of this thesis, and has certainly been found to be occurring in the context of the 1999 HSC English syllabus.

7.7 Conclusion

The shift away from a norm-referenced approach to a standards-referenced approach to reporting HSC results based on achievement of course outcomes constituted the biggest change to the conceptualisation of post-compulsory education since the Wyndham reforms in 1957. The introduction of the visual language mode and of texts featuring visual elements into the HSC English syllabus was such a significant change to the curriculum that it formed one of the dominant themes of public discourse represented in newspapers at the time. Combined with an explicit focus on the ways that meaning is formed through the use of language in a range of text and the associated practices of imaginatively and critically exploring personal, social, historical, cultural and workplace contexts, this syllabus can be seen to clearly represent a ‘new beginning’ for English of the kind described by Brock (1984).

Despite the claims made in newspaper material published from 1995-2005 however, it would be unfair to categorise this syllabus as an entirely ‘new story’ for English. While the inclusion of film, media and multimedia was viewed as both radical and innovative, a number of aspects to the content and structure of study were seen to significantly remain the same as written language, traditional textual forms and material from the established literary canon continued to hold high status through both course and assessment requirements. The inclusion of critical literacy practices also proved problematic, as analysis of the different course outcomes and Module content for the Standard and Advanced courses showed that more able students were provided more opportunities to exercise critical approaches to texts, and as such there are limitations to the extent to which critical literacy could be engaged across the entire candidature.

In an overview of the work of teachers, their contexts and cultures, O’Sullivan (2005) provides a useful metaphor in exploring the ‘exterior’ and ‘interior’ landscapes of teachers’ work. She explains that “the interior landscape of teachers’ professional identity contains a number of domains that influence their work...There are complex and dialectic connections between the various domains; sometimes they are in harmonious and fluid existence, at other times, competition between them creates tension for teachers.” In the research design for this thesis the syllabus was identified as a vital element of the ‘preactive’ stage of the curriculum for HSC English, and as such forms key influence on the ‘interior landscape’ of English teachers’ work. The analysis of samples of the syllabus content in this thesis has uncovered competition between domains of influence within the document that can be directly linked to tension surrounding the implementation of a changed version of English – both for teachers themselves, and for members of the wider community as represented in newspaper coverage.

This is not to say, however, that a considered and informed reading of the syllabus does not satisfy the core concerns of the public that were represented in newspapers – for example, the concern that students would no longer engage with reading and writing ‘skills’ can be seen to be unfounded given the strong preference given to written texts, as well as the clear requirement to reach learning outcomes relating to the description, explanation and analysis of language forms and features. The pressure felt by teachers to meet student needs is also seen to be accommodated in the course outcomes and objectives, while competition between what is set out in the syllabus and what is required under the assessment and examination regime can be seen as another source of tension for all who seek to understand the underlying philosophy of the HSC English curriculum. Issues such as these will be explored at greater length in the next chapter, where the analysis of the relationship between all three data sets is discussed, and the key research questions are returned to in an analysis of how changes in the English curriculum were understood by various stakeholders and implemented by teachers in schools.

Chapter 8: Conclusions and Implications

The frequent reduction of the goals and content of the curriculum to a study of ‘books’ and ‘basics’ has clearly frustrated those involved in English curriculum studies and in enacting the English curriculum. This thesis aims to clarify the issues involved in this reductionism and the resulting professional frustrations. It reports the findings of research that analysed changes that were adopted in 1999 to the Higher School Certificate (HSC) English syllabus in the Australian state of New South Wales. Based on textual analyses of the discourses constructed in state and national newspaper articles from 1994-2005, as well as in case interviews with English teachers at two schools, a selective sampling of the English Higher School Certificate curriculum documents was undertaken to locate sources of influence on curriculum implementation. This thesis seeks to illuminate the ways in which stakeholders’ beliefs about the functions of schooling (Hunter, 1993) shape their various responses to the changing nature of English as a school subject.

The research design developed for this project enabled the collection of data that provide insights into how the 1999 HSC English syllabus was understood in both professional and public contexts. This in turn enabled analyses of syllabus content to identify not only the significance and scope of the theoretical innovations in the curriculum, but also the notable underlying tensions that posed challenges to its consistent implementation. At the outset of this thesis, two key research questions were identified to guide the analysis of what were framed as internal and external pressures on syllabus implementation:

1. What are the innovations, challenges or problems that shaped the construction and implementation of the syllabus?
2. What is the nature and extent of the resulting theoretical shift in the underlying philosophies of the subject?

In this chapter the findings from all sets of data – the core concerns about English curriculum expressed in newspapers, the core pressures on teachers implementing the syllabus, and changes to the content and organisation of the syllabus that had an impact on these stakeholders’ positions – are discussed in relation to these two key research questions, as well as the curriculum philosophies overviewed in Chapter 2. The nature of the 1999 HSC English syllabus is explored with regard to the particular functions of mass schooling (as identified by Hunter, 1993) that are seen to have been prioritised, as well as with regards to the future scenarios for schooling provided by the OECD (2001). This discussion also enables conclusions to be drawn as to the extent of the theoretical changes in English curriculum that the syllabus represents.

It is notable that an Australian Curriculum for English (at the time of data collection, a draft) was released during the writing of this thesis, and some brief remarks are made about the future of English curriculum in NSW and nationally at the conclusion of this chapter. While the data collected for this thesis has involved research focussed on the 1999 HSC English syllabus, some reflection on the future direction of English curriculum, in particular in light of future scenarios for schooling provided by the OECD (2001), can be made here, to place the innovations in NSW English curriculum in a broader context of English curriculum change.

8.1 Key findings

The purpose of this research is to document the movement from the ‘official curriculum’ to the ‘enacted curriculum’ in the specific case of HSC English to establish the innovations, challenges and problems that shape the construction and implementation of English curriculum in the final stages of secondary school. **Three core concerns are identified as common to the discourses of teachers, news reports and curriculum documents in this study, concerns about: fulfilling parental and social expectations; how to define English as a school discipline; and meeting student needs.**

The size and severity of criticisms of HSC English appearing in the media, which culminated in a concentrated attack throughout 2005, indicated the controversial nature of the innovations introduced in the 1999 syllabus. With the inclusion of visual language modes and the explicit focus on meaning requiring texts to be analysed in their social and historical context constituting significant changes to the grammar of the curriculum, it is understandable that both professional and public stakeholders were seen to go through a period of reaction and adjustment. This research shows the layers of pressure on syllabus implementation that arise when changes to the curriculum cause concern for external stakeholders, for example when not all English courses are offered to students in a school because courses that are perceived as having lower status or intellectual demand are not seen as appropriate for the school ‘clientele’. This research also provides a picture of teachers seeking to meet student needs and stakeholder expectations within a context of shifting professional discourses about English as a school subject.

8.1.1 Change in the HSC English syllabus: Innovations and challenges

Shifting from norm-based to standards-based assessment in all Stage 6 subjects from the year 2000 onward was intended to be a way of better meeting student needs by reporting directly on their personal performance against pre-determined learning outcomes. This innovation had a profound impact on assessment in English, and on perceptions about student performance, as both of the mainstream English courses were shown to be far more difficult to achieve success in compared to other HSC subjects (as shown in Table 17). The reporting of achievement in the Standard and Advanced courses on a common scale, despite differences in the course content and outcomes, was also seen to cause problems in schools when teachers at both schools expressed a sense of pressure to increase student performance in the HSC.

The results of this study however indicate that it was not the shift to standards-based assessment that resulted in high levels of pressure on students and schools. Observed in the two schools in this study was the way in which the maintenance of the traditional grammar of the curriculum through the continued focus on performance in high-stakes, externally marked, written exams played a key role in shaping the way in which course requirements are interpreted and used in the classroom. The continued pressure placed on these schools and their students to perform at relatively high levels in the HSC exam resulted in a climate of learning whereby a student's academic identity can be constructed around the achievement Band they are expected to be awarded in the HSC, and where summative assessment requirements restrict the capacity of teachers to engage in their preferred pedagogical styles.

Another significant change to the English curriculum identified in the 1999 HSC English syllabus was the explicit foregrounding of the study of 'meaning' as the core focus of study in English, with the study of language and texts to be framed by the

objective of understanding texts in their contexts, involving analysis of representations and constructions of meaning. This is an approach that has been identified as necessary in contemporary society where more sophisticated, “abstract, symbolic-logical capacities” are required than in the past, including the capacity to use higher order skills to think critically for the purposes of “analysis, solving problems and drawing conclusions” (Lankshear, 1998, pp.357-359). As the concepts of critical thinking and communication have become more intertwined, English curriculum has expanded to accommodate this. A close analysis of the syllabus shows that concerns represented in the media about critical literacy and postmodern approaches to studying texts in context leading to moral relativism and a neglect of cultural heritage in the English classroom, while understandable given the significance of this shift, are unfounded.

A final significant aspect of change in the syllabus was the introduction of visual language in the modes of ‘viewing and representing’, as well as the associated introduction of texts for study that incorporated visual language – namely film, media and multimedia texts. While analysis of the assessment and exam structure of HSC English, as well as of the number of these texts included in the prescribed text list illustrates that written language was still privileged as the most highly studied and valued language mode, the endorsement of visual language as a valid element of study in English nonetheless represents a significant shift in the conceptualisation of the subject.

In his analysis of the development of NSW secondary English syllabuses from 1953 – 1976, Brock (1984) concluded that each new syllabus had constituted a ‘new beginning’ for English as a school subject; the shift in English curriculum to accommodate visual language reflected in all three sets of data in this study demonstrates that this is again the case. English as a school subject, through the changes embedded in the 1999 Stage

6 English syllabus, is seen as once again undertaking a ‘new beginning’ in NSW. In the face of an increasingly visual and digital future, this innovation in the 1999 syllabus can be understood as a change that was seen to be vital to the continued relevance of the subject, one which has stimulated renewed interest in public and professional spheres on what the underlying philosophy of English ought to be.

8.1.2 Changing philosophies of English

Teachers in both schools in this study described the impact that syllabus change had on their personal philosophies of English teaching, however analysis of teacher interviews and observations indicated that teachers’ beliefs and motivations were more strongly linked to their perception of student need, and to the expectations of their particular school community. With teachers at Shermer High school tending to value English as facilitating personal growth and improving students’ post-schooling opportunities through increasing literacy and language skills, teachers at Welton High School, by contrast, tended to value English as an avenue for exploring culture, in particular cultural heritage, and as providing students with an avenue to reflect on the relationship between language and values by participating in literary criticism. Improving post-schooling opportunities was also a valued function of English at Welton, however this was manifest in different pedagogical choices, including the narrowing of course options for students.

Despite the localised nature of the philosophical tendencies of the teachers observed in English faculties at Shermer and Welton, the introduction of visual language and text analysis was seen to constitute a significant overall change to the content of the English curriculum in both schools, reflecting an important theoretical shift in the subject. The influence of ideas relating to multiliteracies such as those advocated by the New London Group can be seen here, with acknowledgement being given in the syllabus to

the added layers of meaning provided through use of the grammars of still and moving images (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), music and sound. HSC English from 1999 can therefore be seen as more than an updated version of the previous syllabus developed along the same theoretical continuum, with the integration of visual language into the curriculum for English constituting part of the ‘new beginning’ for English that is represented in the syllabus.

This significant change, as well as the explicit foregrounding of the study of ‘meaning’ as the objective for ‘operational, cultural and critical’ literacy practices (as described by Green, 2002), was represented in the news media as detrimental to objectives such as the passing down of cultural heritage, the teaching of Western values, and ensuring all students learn language ‘basics’. While a close analysis of the syllabus shows a lack of evidence for these concerns, the impact of public discourse on the work of teachers should not be discounted as the pressure of parental and social expectations was identified in this study as a core influence on syllabus implementation.

8.1.3 The effects of change: a new beginning?

This research project sought to reflect on Brock’s claim, to explore whether the 1999 syllabus could be classed as a ‘new beginning’, and, if so, whether that ‘new beginning’ has consequently amounted to the telling of a ‘new story’; that is, whether any theoretical shifts that are apparent in the syllabus are making an impact on delivering a new kind of English curriculum in practice. This study concludes that the 1999 HSC syllabus does indeed represent a ‘new beginning’ for the English subjects as the first official curriculum in New South Wales to prescribe multimedia and media texts for study at all levels. It also finds that the shift in understanding assessment in the HSC as standards-referenced, rather than norm-referenced, constitutes a significant element of

this 'new beginning', as does the increased (official) attention given to the formal assessment of the visual language mode in the syllabus and in external examinations.

However, this study also seeks to expand on Brock's claim, arguing that, while the 1999 HSC syllabus represented a 'new beginning' for 'official' English, these innovations and changes were not necessarily experienced by teachers and students in the enacted curriculum as a 'new story', due to the maintenance of the status quo in HSC assessment and examination regimes. By continuing to overemphasise the role of formal, summative, teacher-judged assessment within a high-stakes curriculum framework, challenges and problems are encountered as students' needs are subordinated to the perceived expectations of parents (or, 'the clientele') and the wider community in the 'enacted' HSC English curriculum.

In his analysis of the development of English syllabuses in NSW secondary education from 1953-1976 Brock (1984) tracks a series of 'new beginnings' in the history of New South Wales English curriculum – the implementation of 'Newbolt' English in the 1953 syllabus, the restructuring of NSW education system and reintroduction of language topics in 1965, and the integration of overseas models in 1971. He describes 'new beginnings' as times when the "approach to the teaching and learning of literature [currently understood as texts] was fundamentally different", or when 'previous innovations' were seen to "disappear", or when a "substantial and overt interference" with the body charged responsible with the establishment of curriculum was observed (pp. 352-353). This study finds that the 1999 HSC syllabus is indeed another 'new beginning' for English in NSW, due to the fundamentally different approach to literature as encompassing the visual mode, and due to the disappearance of the third course in HSC English previously known as the 'Contemporary' course. The analysis conducted of the newspaper reports from 1995-2005 in this study furthermore provides

observations that shed light on the discursive relationship between the categories of concern as represented in the media, and the position of politicians and curriculum designers on the ideal content for English.

Hunter describes schools as ‘pastoral bureaucracies’, which blend dual foundations of bureaucratic organisation and pastoral pedagogy (1993). In finding that the core categories of influence relative to the HSC English curriculum were concerns about how to: i) meet student needs, ii) fulfil social and parental expectations, and iii) define English as a subject, this study concludes the pastoral bureaucracy as understood in Hunter’s genealogy of mass schooling in Australia is alive and well. The analysis presented here of media and teacher discourses during the implementation of an innovative and high-stakes English syllabus gives us insight into how different views about the ideal functions of schooling are playing out in school sites and in the wider community.

Hunter also uses his observations about the functions of schooling to argue that modern education systems cannot be held up to abstract schema and ideals, and that educationalists should relinquish their distrust of the instrumental functions of schooling (e.g. skilling and regulating the population). He explains the over-simplifications that are made when binaries are formed around the cultural binaries of “a liberal ‘child-centred’ education and a normative training of the population” (Hunter, 1993, p. 19) and suggests that rather than narrowly conceiving of bureaucratic measures (such as official curriculum) as “the dead hand of class interests”, the ways in which “the exercise of administrative power makes new knowledge possible” should also be considered (p. 21).

Analysis of the process of HSC implementation conducted in this research has shown the public and professional challenges as well as the opportunities and innovations that have arisen in HSC English because the exercise of administrative power (changes in the official curriculum) *did* make new knowledge possible. English *did* get another ‘new beginning’ in 1999...but a ‘new story’ is still waiting to be told. In the OECD in its *scenarios for future schooling* (2001a) future extrapolations of the status quo include ‘robust bureaucratic school systems’ and ‘extending the market model’ – both of these scenarios are witnessed to differing extents in the two schools chosen for this study. And while the official curriculum is seen as innovative in its inclusion of visual language modes and use of a standards-based assessment model, it is also seen to continue significant curriculum traditions. One of the strongest examples of the continued manifestation of these traditions is the ascribing of more elite literacy practices and culturally elite texts for study in the *Advanced* than the *Standard* HSC English course. The HSC curriculum in NSW can be seen to uphold the “status quo” and therefore prevent movement toward “re-schooling” and “de-schooling” scenarios” (OECD, 2001a) by maintaining powerfully bureaucratic systems and strong pressures toward uniformity.

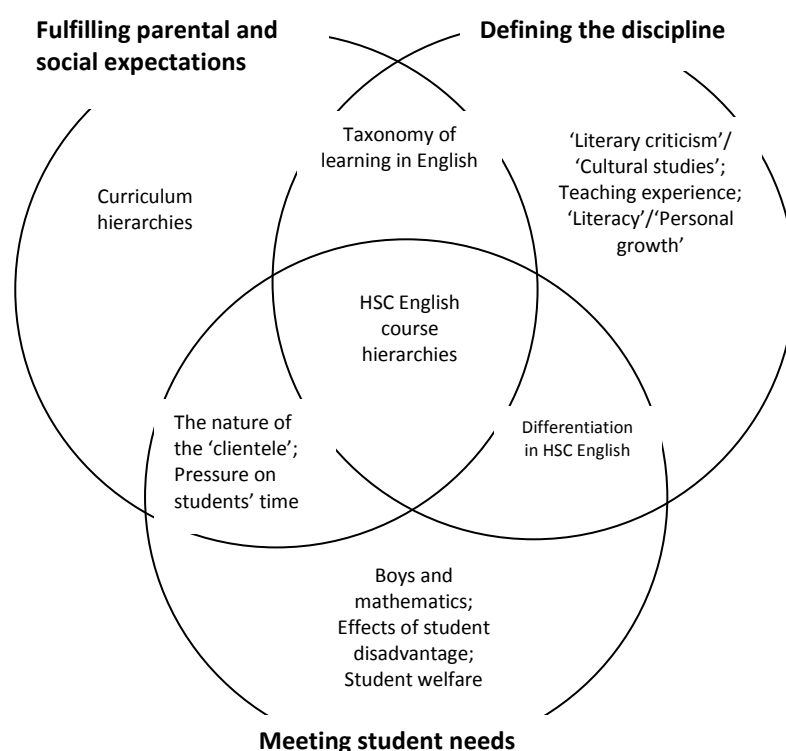
8.2 Implications of this research

8.2.1 Implications for research methodology

The findings generated by this study confirm the importance of employing a methodology in the study of curriculum that recognises school subjects as constructed social phenomena as advocated by Goodson, who argues that there is a clear need to examine the historical, social and cultural constructions of knowledge, as well as

subject pedagogy in the present (cf. Goodson, 1992, 1994, 1996). By utilising mixed methods within a historical frame, this study was able to provide insights into how changes in the content of the syllabus document were enacted and constructed in the lived reality of the syllabus, as experienced by teachers and perceived in the public domain of news coverage.

The use of grounded theory methods in analysing the views of these stakeholders enabled core elements of concern and pressure to be identified without imposing an existing theoretical framework, which may now be used as a basis for other research in this field:



Categorisation of core influences on syllabus implementation.

Three core elements of concern were identified as consistently influencing the lived experience of the syllabus that can in future be used as a lens for further interpreting curriculum policy and practice:

- fulfilling parental and social expectations
- defining the discipline
- meeting student needs.

These three elements appear as the most influential concerns around which more specific pressures intersected in this study to reveal points of conjecture and contradiction. The initial research question set out to focus on two differently conceptualised sources of pressure, labelled ‘internal’ and ‘external’ pressures. In this design the influences located at the site of everyday schooling practice (such as teachers’ beliefs and official curriculum requirements) are differentiated from pressures located outside the immediate school and classroom site (in this study, parental and social expectations as well as media representations) in order to understand the interface between documentation and implementation demands:

The choice to explore the beliefs about HSC English represented in the newspapers in conjunction with the exploration of teachers’ experience has enabled valuable insights to be gleaned about the spectrum of issues represented in the media which serve to shape the public psyche, and this provides an interesting contrast with the discourse of teachers observed in the case studies. O’Sullivan (2005) argues the importance of educational research such as a study of the syllabus taking into account the lived reality of syllabus implementation, and observes that the “silent voices” of teachers are often underrepresented. This research, however, demonstrates the potential for understanding the social construction of the curriculum by exploring the lived realities of both professional and public stakeholders, and recognises that it is not just the views of stakeholders, but also tension between their various expectations that can have an impact on syllabus implementation. The collection of data that allows the comparing and contrasting the views of various stakeholders is therefore shown to add depth to

understanding the syllabus, by locating the sources of tension that may be hindering effective implementation of change.

8.2.2 Implications for theory

Recalling that Brock (1984) argued that each new secondary English syllabus from 1953-1976 had formed a 'new beginning' for the subject, HSC English from 1999 can be seen to contain important new features and theoretical approaches to the subject's discourse, which did again amount to a 'new beginning' for English. Although the HSC syllabus continues to embrace an eclectic range of approaches to English, which researchers have previously identified as a key feature of the subject (Marshall, 2000a), the integration of visual language into the curriculum, as well as the construction of text and language analysis around a focus on understanding 'meaning' constitute the key elements of the 'new beginning' for English that is represented in the syllabus.

The New London Group named the goals for literacy learning as "creating access to the evolving language of work, power, and community, and fostering the critical engagement necessary for them to design their social futures and achieve success through fulfilling employment." (Cazden, et al., 1996, p.60). The need to become proficient 'readers' of visual language was thus linked to the imperative of empowering students to engage in society as active citizens. The suspicions raised in the news media about left-wing bias and cultural relativism in the curriculum that were generated by such views of literacy as those advocated by the New London Group can be connected to fears about the 'functions of schooling' (Hunter, 1993) that are perceived to be privileged. In particular, the 'political' function of schooling described by Hunter is constructed in news articles as being corrupted, as the preferred political principle of active citizenship advocated in the syllabus is seen as a threat to the function of introducing students to their 'cultural heritage'

However, the need to increase visual literacy can also be seen as essential for fulfilling the ‘skilling’ and ‘human capital’ functions of schooling, as put forward by Hunter (1993). With the increasing integration of information and communication technologies (ICTs) into the workplace identified by the OECD (2001a) as one of the key influences signalling the growth of the knowledge economy and the related demand for multiliterate knowledge workers, increased attention given to visual language and multimodal text forms can be considered essential to the production of a skilled and competent workforce. The effect of this is enhanced economic productivity, rather than a ‘dumbing down’ of English as portrayed in many newspaper articles. An important implication of this research for the way we theorise the teaching and learning of English is therefore the importance of considering philosophies of English curriculum in relation to larger conceptual frameworks of schooling.

8.2.3 Implications for professional practice

The analysis in this study of prescribed texts and assessment requirements in the HSC shows that, although the expansion of English to include visual literacy practices constitutes a key change for the philosophy of the subject, the continued emphasis on traditional literary forms such as prose fiction, poetry and drama and the minimal provision of support for teaching media and multimedia texts (Manuel, 2002) limits the actual capacity for students to engage with visual language and everyday texts. By retaining a focus on written language through assessment requirements and choice of available texts for study, opportunities to engage students in multimodal literacy practices are also constrained. There are several opportunities in the HSC English courses, however, for visual, media, multimedia and new media texts to be incorporated into coursework as the ‘related material’ required in the Area of Study and Modules A and C in both the Standard and Advanced courses, and this is a choice that the

individual teacher can choose to take up, and which can be promoted and supported by professional associations.

The curriculum hierarchy within English that was observed at Shermer High School has large implications for the teaching of English at all year levels. A hierarchy of learning that placed literacy and language acquisition ahead of personal engagement with literature and critical reading was reflected at Shermer when teachers described classes where students could not progress to creative tasks or critical thinking, as they became ‘bogged down’ in the technical aspects of literacy work. In some newspaper articles this was described as desirable, with the need to cater to two ‘types’ of student – academic and non-academic – made explicit in two articles, and several others arguing the importance of learning language ‘basics’ before encountering critical reading practices. Contemporary constructions of literacy, however, emphasise the importance of engaging all students in operational, cultural and critical literacy practices (Green, 2002), and providing them with opportunities to draw a variety of reading resources, including those of a ‘text analyst’ (Luke & Freebody, 1999).

The imperative for professional practice therefore must be the construction of learning and teaching in English that engages all students in both critical and multimodal literacy practices. This does not entail the rejection of high standards in written literacy, or of traditional and canonical texts as portrayed in majority of newspaper representations of English. On the contrary, the special ‘literacy project’ for English proposed by Green (2002) describes various domains of text – literature, media and everyday texts – as providing unique content that is not covered elsewhere in the school curriculum, and this approach would encompass a continued valuing of ‘writing’ and ‘literature’ as they are traditionally understood.

8.2.4 Implications for policy

The findings of this research indicate a continued struggle over definitions of English both within the profession and throughout the community. A significant issue that came to light in this research was the impact of replacing the professional terminology of ‘literature’ with the term ‘text’, as this caused alarm in the public domain that traditional and canonical works had been devalued. Other changes such as the introduction of the terms ‘composing’ and ‘responding’ to indicate the expansion of English to include multiple language modes also proved problematic, as this broader landscape for English was then restricted through the content and assessment requirements of the HSC, which continued to strongly privilege the single mode of written language. The problem posed for policymakers in future is therefore to define English in a way that provides a clearer and more unified articulation of what the objectives of study in English are and of how learning and teaching should be constructed to fulfil that vision.

Recent work by Bull and Anstey (2010) in developing pedagogies for reading and writing in a multimodal world argues that it is necessary to reconsider what is understood by the terms ‘literacy’ and ‘text’, and proposes that “codes and conventions of semiotic systems [provide] the tools that enable the reader/viewer to work out the meanings” of texts. They describe five semiotic systems – linguistic, visual, audio, gestural and spatial – and explain how these can be used to frame not only the study of digital and new media texts, but also traditional texts employing more than one semiotic system, for example dramatic performances, speeches or picture books. While policymakers might define the linguistic mode as the ‘core business’ of study in English, the discourse of semiotic reading offered by Bull and Anstey offers a powerful model for conceptualising work in English that includes the strong emphasis on language basics demanded in newspaper commentary as well as scope for English

teachers to retain an eclectic range of philosophies and pedagogies within a curriculum focussed on rigorous language/semiotic analysis and meaning making.

In addition to the implications for policy surrounding the definition of English, this research also found that there is a need for greater alignment of the views of knowledge represented in a syllabus or other curriculum documents, and the philosophies that are embodied in related examination and reporting structures. While the case studies conducted in two schools for this research cannot be generalised to represent the experiences of teachers and students across the state, the negative effect conveyed of setting standards that were seen by teachers to be unreasonably high has profound system-wide implications. The decision by the Board of Studies to grade the exam papers of students in the Standard course on a common scale to students in the Advanced course is significant here. By creating a situation where students in the Standard course found it almost impossible to achieve a Band 5 in the course, with no Band 6s being awarded at all, the academic identity of students across the state is compromised. Given that approximately half of the learning outcomes for the Standard course are different from those in the Advanced course, it is reasonable that this is viewed as an obstacle to the provision of equality of opportunity, with the opportunity to achieve success significantly limited for some students.

This phenomenon was described by Masters (2002) in a review of the 'new HSC' conducted in 2002. He argued that the labelling of student results using the 6-Band structure was having a negative effect by encouraging simplistic comparisons between students, and drawing too much focus to the boundaries between bands (in the sense that students separated by one mark are being assigned to different bands and being interpreted as more different than they are: Masters, 2002, p.57). Masters also described the high impact of the University Admission Index (UAI) received by a

student in relation to the more qualitative descriptions of achievement offered through the HSC results gained for each course, and some confusion about the relationship between the results achieved for a course (which might be quite good) and the UAI that is calculated (which might seem 'low' in comparison). While Master's recommended that the Board of Studies continue to work with tertiary institutions and authorities to ensure that students, parents and teachers understand the relationship between new HSC marks and the UAI, the observation that "for many, the UAI appears to be the measure that matters" (Masters, 2002, p.73) is telling.

The objective expressed by McGaw (1997) in his recommendations on the construction of standards-referenced assessment in the 1999 HSC that the reporting structure was to give 'meaning to marks' is countered by the continued significant focus given to formal assessment achievement Bands and UAI scores in the enacted curriculum reported in the Masters Review. Despite recommendations made by Masters about the removal of Band descriptors of achievement, the reporting of achievement using the Bands has notably been retained, and students in English continue to experience great difficulty in achieving high Bands in their HSC assessment compared to other courses, especially in the Standard course. In this way HSC English in particular is seen to have a strong 'regulative' function, to use Hunter's terminology, in terms of the role it plays in defining the students that are likely to go on to post-school academic study. The innovative nature of the change to HSC reporting to better provide information about the skills, knowledge and understanding that students have demonstrated is therefore seen as compromised by the retention of curriculum grammars that place high value on the regulative function of the HSC by foregrounding the sorting and comparison of students.

Based on the descriptions of future ‘scenarios’ for schooling constructed by the OECD (2001a, shown in Table 2), the model of learning and teaching prescribed by the 1999 HSC English syllabus can be understood as a ‘maintenance of the status quo’, where powerfully bureaucratic systems and strong pressures toward uniformity are maintained to both ensure socialisation and deliver equality of opportunity. Given that a possible outcome of the resistance to change and of the critical political and media commentaries featured in this scenario is a ‘teacher exodus’ where comparatively poor working conditions and low teacher morale results in teacher shortages, it is essential that regulative aspects of the curriculum, while playing a vital role in ensuring equality of opportunity, are carefully considered by policymakers in future. In relation to the Australian Curriculum for English, for example, the current approach which has seen the curriculum content developed in isolation from assessment and reporting requirements may create barriers to curriculum implementation as seen in this research if the two areas draw on different, possibly competing curriculum grammars.

8.3 Limitations of this study

One of the key limitations of this study is that, while the analysis of newspaper representations of the HSC English syllabus provides important insights into the construction of public discourse and the types of pressure exerted on teachers’ practice, the views of other stakeholders, most notably parents and students, would help paint a more complex picture of the lived experience of the HSC curriculum. Furthermore, while this study involved analysis of both state and national newspaper articles over a ten year period, the discourse and debate represented in these is necessarily limited by such factors as the personal philosophy of the journalist and editorial choices and agendas. As such, there are limitations to the extent to which the core concerns

represented in newspapers can be said to characterise concerns about the teaching of English held in the wider community.

In regards to the analysis of teacher experience, the research objectives for this study called for a methodology that would allow close exploration of syllabus implementation, and two schools were selected as case studies for this. This methodological choice yielded rich findings about the relationship between teachers' philosophies and the local school context, the extent to which the experiences of these teachers can be viewed as typical of NSW English teachers generally is limited. Furthermore, while the two schools observed were chosen because of the differences in their student population and school communities, this study remains limited to the experiences of public school teachers in metropolitan schools.

Exploring the innovations in the HSC English syllabus required this study to focus intently on the NSW context of learning and teaching in the senior years of high school. The scope of document analysis was limited to just three texts – the syllabus, the text prescriptions list, and the introduction to Stage 6 English provided to schools by the NSW Board of Studies. Attempts were made to connect the research findings to larger educational debates and theories about English curriculum, there are limitations in the lack of comparison of the 1999 HSC syllabus to senior secondary English curriculum documents from other Australian states, or to beliefs and experiences relating to English curriculum from years K-10.

8.4 Directions for future research

The limitations of this study described in the section above all provide possible points of departure for future research relating to HSC English curriculum in NSW. Research

that collects evidence of the beliefs and attitudes of parents, students, and other community stakeholders would be valuable to compare and contrast to the views put forth in newspaper articles recorded in this study. Further study of teachers implementing curriculum change could use the core pressures identified in this study as a framework for analysis of future case studies, or possibly isolate one of these pressures (social and parental expectations, shifting definitions of English, and meeting student needs) as an area for targeted exploration.

There is also much scope for future researchers to continue the work of analysing the syllabus as historically constructed by comparing it to the previous HSC syllabuses written in 1982, and to changes anticipated in the development of an Australian Curriculum for English. Comparison of the experiences of English in senior secondary school to the learning and teaching practices of junior high school might also provide insight into the functions of schooling that are prioritised at different stages of schooling. Similarly, comparison with senior secondary English curriculum in other Australian states and territories, as well as internationally, could help future researchers to place the NSW experience in a broader context.

Beyond such extensions of the research in this thesis, other areas for future research that arise from this study include further exploration of the impact of high stakes examinations on the delivery of the intended curriculum, and the problematic nature of balancing students acts of responding and composing, in particular across multiple modes. Due to the heavy focus on textual analysis in senior English, both schools described difficulty in finding time for students to compose their own work (in written, spoken or visual modes), and the heavy emphasis on assessment of reading and writing furthermore results in a de-prioritising of spoken and visual language development. Future research might identify pedagogical practices that can be used in the senior

school, specifically within such regulative, writing-focussed assessment environments, that support multiliterate practice and create opportunities for students to continue developing their own imaginative writing and personal expression in the senior school.

It is worthwhile questioning, upon reflection on the findings of this research, whether pressure that has historically been placed on English to act as a service subject for the whole curriculum by developing students' literacy skills has now been increased with the expansion of literacy to incorporate multiple language modes as well as digital and new media. Concern over the crowded nature of English curriculum was expressed in both professional and public commentary in this study, with various suggestions made as to what ought to be 'cut out'. Given contemporary perspectives on English that promote a literacy project for English that uses 'literature, media and everyday texts' to explore how meaning is made on the operational, cultural and critical levels (Green, 2002), as well as promoting the analysis of how various language modes can reinforce or augment linguistic meaning (Bull & Anstey, 2007), such suggestions for reducing the scope of English curriculum do not provide a way forward. Future research, however, might investigate the potential of discourse surrounding multiliteracies to explore ways in which various curriculum areas overlap with one another based on their shared focus on particular semiotic systems and meaning-making, for example the focus on visual systems of representation in both English and Visual Arts. Such research could develop cross-curricular frameworks of literacy and language modes that are currently lacking, and provide a common discourse for planning student learning experiences.

One of the findings of this study of the 1999 HSC English syllabus is that conflicting philosophies embedded in the curriculum lead to challenges for professional stakeholders, and encourage them to seek certainty in the hidden curriculum formed by assessment and reporting requirements. It is timely that this analysis of the HSC

English syllabus should be completed at a time when HSC English will see new changes in the foreseeable future in response to the introduction of an Australian National Curriculum in 2012. A final and important direction for future research, therefore, is the study of the curriculum philosophies that underpin the Australian Curriculum for English in Years K-10 and 11-12, and exploration of how these reflect the functions of schooling that are prioritised in this new era of Federalised control of curriculum in Australia.

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Appendix A

Open coding of interviews (extracts)

Key:

Italicised = Views on education and schooling in general

Underlined = Views on the school context

Blue highlight = Beliefs about English as a school subject

Red text = Perception of issues relating to HSC English specifically

Welton High School – “Mark” 11th November 2004

Kelli: Well what do you think English should be about?

Mark: Um, it depends how profound you want to be I suppose [laughs].

Kelli: As profound as you need to be!

Mark: The hardest thing, when I think of the type of students that I've had, they're rarely talking...they're often kids who have matured earlier than the other, that's why I think teaching girls would be a different experience because they mature more quickly than boys often do mature, so at the higher end it's really talking about values, experiences and those sorts of things you get from literature, which I suppose is a pretty, which is getting back to that traditional approach to literature. But even after the – I shouldn't say 'even' – under the new syllabus we are approaching it from wanting do different readings with them. We're still engaging on that level – what are the values that are being discussed here? – so with the top students you can discuss those at a pretty high level, whereas with the less able

students you're just saying [small laugh] when you ask them a question about the values that are being shown there's not much coming from them, I'm just saying 'well, what about these values and what do these things mean?' and then the kids will eventually come up with something, but you feel as though you're directing them all the time. So I suppose to answer your question, what it should be is engaging with young people who haven't had as much experience with the world as you've had and picking up on their responses to literature and just developing so that they can express insight into literature in particular in a thoughtful and sophisticated way.

Kelli: Do you think that's what this syllabus is also trying to achieve or does it have a different philosophy?

Mark: Yeah, I think it is. Um, I think one of the things that I like about it is it's getting students to look at a variety of texts for example – I must admit I had my worries at first but once I started teaching it I sort of saw it was fine – having a look at film, even popular songs, music, painting; and this is an area where you get into trouble because the kids have a virtually culturally deprived background in my way of thinking [small laugh]. If you talk about music and intelligent, thoughtful films, you know, not the usual car chase and explosion films and so on...if you're talking about the arts generally, well, they haven't got a clue. What was I saying? Oh yes, so one of the things that I like is that you're pushing them towards film and art and music and other sorts of texts so that they can write about the arts, generally, and not just literary responses, like poetry, short story and novel responses, um...what's the other thing, um...non-fiction, looking at those sorts of things. But getting them to think broadly like that – that there are wonderful opportunities in all sorts of things. It's interesting that our kids are smart enough often, or quite often to get into that top Band despite the fact that they haven't really got any leanings in that direction and you get the impression that they're not going to be interested in literature once they leave school [laughs].

Kelli: Do you think that's fair?

Mark: Do I think it's fair or not?

Kelli: Yeah – it’s not a question I usually ask, but it keeps coming up, the idea –

Mark: *I suppose it has to be, I mean what else can you do? And if you can push the kids in the direction of exploring some of these things later on when they leave school...and occasionally kids come up to me and – I remember one boy coming up to me years and years ago, about 20 years ago, under the old system – and he said ‘until I was in your classroom I hated reading’ he said ‘but you’ve turned me into a reader, and now when my kids are watching television and they say “come and watch this Dad” I say “no I want to read this book”!’* *And so you realise that just through engaging kids here and there who may not have been all that interested in reading and so on, or even writing poetry, something like that, because you’ve shown some enthusiasm for this subject it has rubbed off on these kids. When you were talking before about what you expect from teaching you would like to think that some of your students will be inspired to some extent. It’s not easy to do, and it’s not something you can work at all that consciously, I think it just comes from showing enthusiasm for the subject. And when that happens – at some point a student says ‘you’ve inspired me to go on and try and write poetry or to do some more reading’ – it’s all worthwhile.*

Welton High School – “Melanie” 4th November 2004

Kelli: When the new syllabus came in how did your faculty handle it?

Melanie: It was mixed. There were two or three people who...*you find this in a lot of Faculties, there’ll be the people who will embrace change, the people who’ll really reject it because it’s terrifying, and the ones who say ‘just tell me what to do and I’ll do it’ – wouldn’t matter what it was, new syllabus or anything else, you get those three types in your Faculty, you get various numbers of them. So the ‘just tell me what to do and I’ll do it’ are OK, but you’re madly trying to get them to understand why they’re doing it. Um, we have different personnel up there [in the faculty] of course, and a lot of the ‘old and bold’ tried to make it*

into what they had always done – and there is lots of stuff...I mean, you can't teach an English teacher very many new things! But, some of them said 'no, that's wrong, it couldn't be that – I reject that'. So I took one of the main ones of those along to some of the meetings they were having and she became a bit of a champion for it and then said 'no, this is how it is, it's not like that – I've been to the meeting and this is how it is', so she became a bit of an ally, I had another person who was really keen and belonged to ETA and was kind of along with the whole thing. So they were the two people. I had about two others who were 'tell me what it is and I'll just do it', or, sort of 'tell me a bit at a time and I'll get my head around it'. And I had quite a few who were just 'nup, she's wrong, it's not like that, it couldn't be that', 'we don't have to do it this way', and they were terrible for about a year. Um, but the second year they were more inclined to come on board, but I think we were all more comfortable – the first year we were all terrified we were going to do the wrong thing all the time, and I was too, because I've got all these people not wanting to do things and you'd find out they'd done things in a sort of an old way and think 'oh no, how am I going to keep them all on track?'. So it was a bit hairy. Um, second year it calmed down and, ah, I found I didn't have as many people rejecting it in the way I'd heard other Head Teachers had difficulties, um, and I decided mine actually weren't too bad! [laughs] But I think that some of them still say 'I'm still not happy with this section', 'we're really supposed to be doing readings like this' la di da di da...and you know, they might intellectualise about it and so on, but at least their practice is pretty right and they're calm and they get most stuff right I'm thinking. But the first year was terrible – worrying, but we were OK – the second year was OK, we got some good results in the second year and third year we got some great results so I think we must have been doing lots of right things, and I think now people are getting to the critical stage 'well, we know it's like this, but **should** it be?' And that's OK. Everyone's got to do that, that's healthy.

Kelli: You were saying before about the Extension 1 paper, the way that the questions are pretty limited...what did you think about the other papers, the Advanced and Standard papers?

Melanie: I think that they're quite fair. Um...I think the Area of Study paper – well, even as a language paper in the olden days it was always a busy paper for kids to get through, and

that's probably still the case because there's so much reading and writing and then the third question and so on. I just don't think...I think bright kids can sort of do justice to, in our case all the poetry and their collected materials and so on. But I've never really been unhappy with that paper, I think the questions are not tricky and I think they do allow kids just to go for it so I haven't been unhappy with that. Um, and I think paper 2...I think when I talk to the guys upstairs [in the English faculty] after them most of the time they're happy. I think there was a poetry question people weren't happy with at one stage, it was Donne – they weren't feeling happy with that anyway and how it was being taught and what did 'readings' mean when you're doing all the poems and how would you apply them; they were unhappy generally, so I think they were worried about the question and so they felt like that too when the paper came out I think. But I haven't had any major complaints from the staff about the paper and all the kids – most of the time – they've said yeah, they were able to do things...*I don't think the Board's into tricky papers. You know, they used to be years ago but I think now the questions tend to be broad, now that's a problem for kids to actually decide themselves what they're going to put into an answer. A broad question can be difficult because it doesn't say 'just pick this, this and this', it's saying 'from everything you've done give me an answer to some broad sweeping question', so taking decisions in an exam takes a bit of skill and courage... 'I'm only going to use this and this and this'. So you could argue that's there in those papers, but I don't think that I would criticise those papers, you know, the odd question here and there you go 'ooh, this would have been...' you know. But, no, I still think they're alright. But yeah, the Extension 1 paper I think from day one we all said 'well how many questions can you ask on this?' So you just worry about prepared answers in that situation.* So I suppose this time with all their little cartoons and drawings and stuff they've actually got something for them to respond to in a sense, to try and overcome that, but I think it's a difficulty.

Kelli: Outside the actual content of the papers, the **idea** of the examination and the assessment structure for the HSC year. What do you think about that?

Melanie: Assessment in school and out?

Kelli: Yeah.

Melanie: Um...well *I suppose that depends what kind of school you're in*, because for some kids – well, for all the kids here – it's a university entrance thing. But I've taught in other schools where for the kids it's not like that, it's sort of, they're looking for a certificate to say they've finished school at some sort of a standard, and it's a worrying and big deal for them and their teachers and so on, um, and I think...well, I shouldn't talk for other schools but just big picture I know there are lots of schools that don't offer anything more than Standard, and...I don't know, I think sometimes it's an issue of how many kids you've got wanting to do it and whether they're pushed hard enough and how difficult the courses are for them and all that sort of thing, so I think it probably seems harsh to many candidates that they have access to a course that has got more marks involved to get into Uni, but then you've got that opposite problem that I mentioned before about the capable not being recognised before, so that's a whole philosophical thing about what you do with kids who want a certificate who want a certificate and want to feel good and do other things in life apart from University, and the same credential being there for the most capable and so on and they've got to be able to show what they can do. So, I think that's a problem with an end point exam for schooling anyway...I don't know whether there's something else they can do. I mean some kids don't know if they want to go to Uni so you can't very well kind of say 'pick which kind of HSC you want', so I don't know if that one's got an answer. Um, as far as assessment in the school...you've got to be pretty careful that you load everything with correct weightings, that's tricky. Um...it's quite a lot of trouble to do – with big candidatures like ours – to do listening and speaking tasks...I mean, I think speaking should be part of what they do, it's a big skill in the world, but it's hard in a school to organise it and all that.

Kelli: Do you tape them here?

Melanie: No we don't. We do two teachers in there marking together. Marking individually, doing a comparative thing immediately and deciding on the marks. Um...I think...I mean, tape is only the voice anyway, you're not looking at the whole presentation. So I think double marking is the best I can do there, I think it works – *it's very time consuming and teacher consuming, and the Deputy people hate it, the Principal says 'well*

can't you just get rid of it', um, 'no'[laughs]! And some kids can do really well in it and why shouldn't they be scored in it, I mean that's a big skill, they should be able to get great marks for that as well as a kid who can write, really. Of course it's a very stylised thing in one sense because it's a formal speaking task, um...we went through a few years back group presentations – we did those in Year 11 too, eight people in a group discussion and they all had to participate with two teachers, one the facilitator asking questions and the other one marking everybody, so we've done all of those sorts of things, but anyway. Um, you have to be really careful with your marking – it's a lot of marking – people, you know, how much marking can you do at a time, it's very hard. I think people are getting better at setting assessment tasks and it's showing that the outcomes are actually all in the question and that their marking scheme is OK, I think they're getting better at that. Because assessment's not something that teachers are not taught much about, they come out of teaching and they just mimic what they see in practice, and good assessment's a really difficult thing, so, you know...and people don't like to make up a whole test and then be told 'no you can't do that it's hopeless you've got to do this again and it's not doing this that and the other', so, um, that's an ongoing learning thing for teachers, but they're just never taught enough about good assessment tools and practice and all of that. Most [pre-service teaching] courses tend to really revolve around how to stand out the front and deliver, so I don't know what they're doing at the Unis at the moment but I still don't think there's much on assessment from what I can gauge. Maybe outcomes but I don't know about setting tests and...you know. It just doesn't happen, so people come out and think that any old HSC question must have been fabulous. I mean, as far as I know they're not creating very much with assessments. I'm pleased that some of my guys upstairs are starting to have the courage to be a bit more creative with what they do – in Juniors particularly they're starting to be a bit more interesting – but um, I think that's a whole big area for attention anyway. So, we try to minimise the assessment by putting some things together, but there still seems to be a lot of it [laughs]. And trial is big because they're at the end point then, and for a lot of our guys the trial is the main thing they worry about because some of them have been just doing sport, sport, sport, sport, sport, they haven't really studied madly, but sport ends and they've got a few weeks before the trial and they can lift their mark 15 marks. And then they study between then and the HSC and we're saying 'how did Joe Blogs get this mark!'

Because they're smart. They've got all their stuff. They'll come to us with six million essays to mark all at once and they've got it together. So, that's frustrating [laughs].

Kelli: Well, that's pretty much it today. Is there anything that you'd like to add?

Melanie: Well, I mean, I could talk all day, but...

Kelli: Well, I know what else – tell me about how you don't run Standard here.

Melanie: Oh, because our boys all want to get into University. Many of our Asian boys are like all the schooling in Australia, they're not really ESLs. We've also got some kids who are marginally ESL but would play on it if we gave them an easier course – they don't want to do, you know, hard English, but they want high marks – and the University said all along that they were not going to scale Standard up very far at all. So, I took a decision in the first year – given what I'd seen of how our kids performed in 2 Unit Related and General – and I knew they could do it [Advanced]. They'd have to do a little bit of work but hello, who cares about them having to do a bit of work, and they would get much better results and that's what's happened.

Appendix B

1999 Stage 6 English Syllabus (extracts)

Section number	Section heading	Description
1	The Higher School Certificate Program of Study	Outline of the wider purpose of the HSC in general.
2	Rationale for English in the Stage 6 Curriculum	Justification of the importance of the study of English specifically.
3	Aim	A succinct, one-sentence statement of the aim of the subject.
4	The Study of English	A brief elaboration on the central purposes of the study of English.
5	Key Terms in the Study of English	Selection of the specific terms used and the complex processes and concepts they will be taken to represent.
7	The English Stage 6 Candidature	Brief statements of purpose for each of the five Stage 6 English courses – <i>Standard, Advanced, ESL, Extension and Fundamentals</i> .
8.2	English (Standard) Overview	For the Preliminary and HSC courses.
8.3	English (Advanced) Overview	For the Preliminary and HSC courses.
9	English (Standard)	9.1 Structure; 9.2 Rationale; 9.3 Objectives.
10	English (Advanced)	10.1 Structure; 10.2 Rationale; 10.3 Objectives.
15.5	Assessment (Standard)	Components, Weightings and Tasks.
15.8	Assessment (Advanced)	Components, Weightings and Tasks.

NB: The following extracts constitute 15 pages of the total 146 pages in the 1999 English Stage 6 syllabus.

1 The Higher School Certificate Program of Study

The purpose of the Higher School Certificate program of study is to:

- provide a curriculum structure which encourages students to complete secondary education;
- foster the intellectual, social and moral development of students, in particular developing their:
 - knowledge, skills, understanding and attitudes in the fields of study they choose
 - capacity to manage their own learning
 - desire to continue learning in formal or informal settings after school
 - capacity to work together with others
 - respect for the cultural diversity of Australian society;
- provide a flexible structure within which students can prepare for:
 - further education and training
 - employment
 - full and active participation as citizens;
- provide formal assessment and certification of students' achievements;
- provide a context within which schools also have the opportunity to foster students' physical and spiritual development.

2 Rationale for English in Stage 6 Curriculum

The study of English is central to the learning and development of students in NSW and is the mandatory subject in the Stage 6 curriculum. The importance of English in the curriculum is a recognition of its role as the national language and increasingly as the language of international communication. Proficiency in English enables students to take their place as confident, articulate communicators, critical and imaginative thinkers and active participants in society.

English involves the study and use of language in its various textual forms, encompassing written, spoken and visual texts of varying complexity, including the language systems of English through which meaning is conveyed, interpreted and reflected.

The study of English enables students to recognise and use a diversity of approaches and texts to meet the growing array of literacy demands, including higher-order social, aesthetic and cultural literacy. This study is designed to promote a sound knowledge of the structure and function of the English language and to develop effective English communication skills. The English Stage 6 courses develop in students an understanding of literary expression and nurture an appreciation of aesthetic values. Through reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing and representing experience, ideas and values, students are encouraged to adopt a critical approach to all texts and to distinguish the qualities of texts. Students also develop English language skills to support their study at Stage 6 and beyond.

In Stage 6, students come to understand the complexity of meaning, to compose and respond to texts according to their form, content, purpose and audience, and to appreciate the personal, social, historical, cultural and workplace contexts that produce and value them. Students reflect on their reading and learning and understand that these processes are shaped by the contexts in which they respond to and compose texts.

The study of English enables students to make sense of, and to enrich, their lives in personal, social and professional situations and to deal effectively with change. Students develop a strong sense of themselves as autonomous, reflective and creative learners. The English Stage 6 syllabus is designed to develop in students the faculty to perceive and understand their world from a variety of perspectives, and it enables them to appreciate the richness of Australia's cultural diversity.

The syllabus is designed to develop enjoyment of English and an appreciation of its value and role in learning.

3 Aim

The aim of English Stage 6 is to enable students to understand, use, enjoy and value the English language in its various textual forms and to become thoughtful, imaginative and effective communicators in a diverse and changing society.

4 The Study of English

Meaning is central to the study of English. The study of English makes explicit the language forms and processes of meaning. English Stage 6 develops this by encouraging students to explore, critically evaluate and appreciate a wide variety of the texts of Australian and other societies, in various forms and media, including multimedia.

The study of English involves exploring, responding to and composing texts

- in and for a range of personal, social, historical, cultural and workplace contexts
- using a variety of language modes, forms, features and structures.

Meaning is achieved through responding and composing, which are typically interdependent and ongoing processes.

5 Key Terms in the Study of English

This syllabus uses some terms in specific ways to describe complex processes and concepts. A detailed glossary appears in Section 16 for reference purposes. Key terms used to describe the study of English in the syllabus are outlined below.

Responding is the activity that occurs when students read, listen to, or view texts. It encompasses the personal and intellectual connections a student makes with texts. It also recognises that students and the texts to which they respond reflect social contexts. Responding typically involves:

- reading, listening and viewing that depend on, but go beyond, the decoding of texts
- identifying, comprehending, selecting, articulating, imagining, critically analysing and evaluating.

Composing is the activity that occurs when students produce written, spoken, or visual texts. Composing typically involves:

- the shaping and arrangement of textual elements to explore and express ideas, emotions and values
- the processes of imagining, drafting, appraising, reflecting and refining.
- knowledge understanding and use of the language forms, features and structures of texts.

Texts in English Stage 6 are communications of meaning produced in any medium that incorporates language, including sound, print, film, electronic and multimedia. Texts include written, spoken, nonverbal or visual communication of meaning. They may be extended unified works or presented as a series of related pieces.

Context is used in its broadest sense. It refers to the range of personal, social, historical, cultural and workplace conditions in which a text is responded to and composed.

Language modes refers to the modes of listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing and representing*. These modes are often integrated and interdependent activities used in responding to and composing texts in order to shape meaning.

It is important to realise that:

- any combination of the modes may be involved in responding to or composing print, sound, visual or multimedia texts; and
- the refinement of the skills in any one of the modes develops skills in the others. Students need to build on their skills in all language modes.

**Representing* is the language mode that involves composing images by means of visual or other texts. These images and their meaning are composed using codes and conventions. The term can include activities such as graphically presenting the structure of a novel, making a film, composing a web page, or enacting a dramatic text.

Language forms and features is the term used to refer to the symbolic patterns and conventions that shape meaning in texts. These vary according to the particular mode or medium of production and can include written, spoken, nonverbal or visual communication of meaning.

Structures of texts is the term used to refer to the relationship of different parts of a text to each other, and to the text as a complex whole.

knowledge and understanding of the role and function of literary conventions and devices. Students analyse the relationships between texts and technologies of production and evaluate the ways in which the medium itself influences the shape and nature of meaning. Their skills in composition are further developed.

In Stage 6, as students explore more complex texts, as well as simple texts in more complex ways, they refine their knowledge of language forms and features, and of the structures of texts. They apply this knowledge to develop communication skills in specific post-secondary contexts for personal, academic, workplace and social purposes.

Students value and appreciate their own and others' use of language. They enjoy the diversity of language and literature and appreciate the role of English in their lives and in learning.

7 The English Stage 6 Candidature

English (Standard) is designed for students to increase their expertise in English in order to enhance their personal, social and vocational lives. The students learn to respond to and compose a wide variety of texts in a range of situations in order to be effective, creative and confident communicators.

English (Advanced) is designed for students to undertake the challenge of higher-order thinking to enhance their personal, social and vocational lives. These students apply critical and creative skills in their composition of and response to texts in order to develop their academic achievement through understanding the nature and function of complex texts.

English as a Second Language (ESL) is designed for students from diverse non-English-speaking, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island backgrounds as designated by the course entry requirements. The students engage in a variety of language learning experiences to develop and consolidate their use, understanding and appreciation of English, so as to enhance their personal, social and vocational lives.

English (Extension) is designed for students undertaking English (Advanced) who choose to study at a more intensive level in diverse but specific areas. They enjoy engaging with complex levels of conceptualisation and seek the opportunity to work in increasingly independent ways.

Fundamentals of English is designed for those students who need to develop skills in using the English language effectively. The course equips students to participate in more satisfying learning. It assists them to meet the requirements of the English (Standard) courses or the English as a Second Language (ESL) courses and to achieve English language outcomes to support their study at Stage 6.

8.2 English (Standard) Overview

Preliminary English (Standard) course (120 indicative hours)

In the Preliminary English (Standard) course, students **explore** and **experiment** with the ways events, experiences, ideas and processes are represented in and through texts.

Content common to the Standard and Advanced courses — AREA OF STUDY Provides students with the opportunity to explore, analyse and experiment with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> meanings conveyed, shaped, interpreted and reflected in and through texts ways texts are responded to and composed connections between and among texts. 		45 indicative hours
ELECTIVES Each of the electives provides students with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a range of texts to enable them to draw upon and comment on similarity and difference opportunities through their response to and composition of texts to identify, practise and develop an understanding of the ways: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> texts achieve a range of purposes texts are modified to suit different audiences and situations technologies influence the structures and language of texts language forms and structures are used for meaning opportunities for imaginative and affective expression in their response to and composition of texts. 		75 indicative hours
Area(s) of Study and texts ARE NOT prescribed for the Preliminary common content and the electives.		

HSC English (Standard) course (120 indicative hours)

In the HSC English (Standard) course, students **reflect** on and **demonstrate** the effectiveness of texts for different audiences and purposes. The course requires the study of at least FOUR types of text, one drawn from each of the following categories: prose fiction; poetry; drama; nonfiction or film or media or multimedia.

Content common to the Standard and Advanced courses — AREA OF STUDY Provides students with the opportunity to explore, analyse and experiment with : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> meanings conveyed, shaped, interpreted and reflected in and through texts ways texts are responded to and composed ways perspectives may affect meaning and interpretation connections between and among texts how texts are influenced by other texts and contexts. 		45 indicative hours
MODULES Students choose 1 elective from each of the 3 modules.		
Module A: Experience Through Language	Module B: Close Study of Text	Module C: Texts and Society
Language of texts — perceptions and relationships with others and the world.	A single text study — the interaction of ideas, forms and language.	Texts particular to specific social contexts.
		75 indicative hours
Texts, the Area of Study and Module electives ARE prescribed for the HSC.		

8.3 English (Advanced) Overview

Preliminary English (Advanced) course (120 indicative hours)

In the Preliminary English (Advanced) course, students **explore** the ways events, experiences, ideas, values and processes are represented in and through texts and **analyse** the ways texts reflect different attitudes and values.

<p>Content common to the Standard and Advanced courses — AREA OF STUDY</p> <p>Provides students with the opportunity to explore, analyse and experiment with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • meaning conveyed, shaped, interpreted and reflected in and through texts • ways texts are responded to and composed • connections between and among texts. 	<p>45 indicative hours</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">ELECTIVES</p> <p>Each of the electives provides students with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a range of texts to enable them to develop and demonstrate an understanding of ways representation occurs in texts • opportunities through their response to and composition of texts to explore, analyse and evaluate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – effects of textual forms in their personal, social, historical, cultural and workplace contexts – ways texts are modified to suit different audiences and contexts – ways technologies influence the structure and language of texts – ways language forms and structures are used for meaning • opportunities for imaginative and affective expression in their response to and composition of texts. 	<p>75 indicative hours</p>
<p>Area(s) of Study and texts ARE NOT prescribed for the Preliminary common content and the electives.</p>	

HSC English (Advanced) course (120 indicative hours)

In the HSC English (Advanced) course, students **analyse** and **evaluate** texts, and the ways they are valued in their contexts. The course requires the study of at least FIVE types of texts, one drawn from each of the following categories: Shakespearean drama; prose fiction; poetry; drama or film; nonfiction or media or multimedia.

<p>Content common to the Standard and Advanced courses — AREA OF STUDY</p> <p>Provides students with the opportunity to explore, analyse and experiment with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • meaning conveyed, shaped, interpreted and reflected in and through texts • ways texts are responded to and composed • ways perspectives may affect meaning and interpretation • connections between and among texts • how texts are influenced by other texts and contexts. 			<p>45 indicative hours</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">MODULES</p> <p>Students choose 1 elective from each of the 3 modules.</p>			
<p>Module A: Comparative Study of Texts and Context</p>	<p>Module B: Critical Study of Texts</p>	<p>Module C: Representation and Text</p>	<p>75 indicative hours</p>
<p>The comparative study of texts in relation to historical or cultural contexts.</p>	<p>A single text study – the evaluation of ideas and expression.</p>	<p>The study of how textual forms, choice of language and perspectives represent information, processes and ideas.</p>	
<p>Texts, the Area of Study and Module electives ARE prescribed for the HSC.</p>			

9 English (Standard)

9.1 Structure

The Preliminary English (Standard) course consists of 120 indicative hours of study. The HSC English (Standard) course consists of 120 indicative hours of study.

Study in the Preliminary course requires completion of:		Study in the HSC course requires completion of:	
Preliminary common content	45 indicative hours	HSC common content	45 indicative hours
Electives	75 indicative hours	One elective chosen from EACH of the three English (Standard) course modules	75 indicative hours

9.2 Rationale

The Preliminary and HSC English (Standard) courses are designed for students to become proficient in English to enhance their personal, social and vocational lives. These courses provide students with the opportunity to become confident and effective communicators and to enjoy the breadth and variety of English texts. They offer a rich language experience that is reflected in the modes of reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing and representing.

Students explore language forms, features and structures of texts in a range of personal, social, historical, cultural and workplace contexts. They respond to and compose texts to extend experience, access information and assess its reliability, and synthesise the knowledge gained from a range of sources to fulfil a variety of purposes. Responding to and composing texts provides students with the opportunity to appreciate the imaginative and the affective and to recognise the ways texts convey, interpret and reflect ways of thinking about the self and the world.

These courses provide diverse approaches to texts so that students may become flexible and critical thinkers, capable of appreciating the variety of cultural heritages and differences that make up Australian society. They also encourage development of skills in independent, collaborative and reflective learning. Such skills form the basis of sound practices of investigation and analysis required for adult life, including the world of work as well as post-school training and education. The courses encourage students to reconsider and refine meaning and reflect on their own processes of responding, composing and learning.

9.3 English (Standard) Objectives

Objectives are general statements, organising the more specific learning goals contained in the English (Standard) outcomes.

Students will develop **knowledge and understanding** of:

- the contexts, purposes and audiences of texts
- the forms and features of language, and the structures of texts.

Students will develop **skills** in:

- responding to and composing a range of texts
- effective communication
- individual and collaborative learning
- investigation, imaginative and critical thinking, and synthesis of ideas
- reflection as a way to review, reconsider and refine meaning and learning.

Students will come to **value and appreciate**:

- the role of language in developing positive interaction and cooperation
- their developing skills as users of English
- the pleasure and diversity of language and literature
- the role of language and literature in their lives
- the study and use of English as a key to learning
- reflection on their own processes of learning
- English as a language of communication and culture
- appropriateness, subtlety and aesthetics in language use.

10 English (Advanced)

10.1 Structure

The Preliminary English (Advanced) course consists of 120 indicative hours of study. The HSC English (Advanced) course consists of 120 indicative hours of study.

Study in the Preliminary course requires completion of:		Study in the HSC course requires completion of:	
Preliminary common content	45 indicative hours	HSC common content	45 indicative hours
Electives	75 indicative hours	One elective chosen from EACH of the three English (Advanced) course modules	75 indicative hours

10.2 Rationale

The Preliminary and HSC English (Advanced) courses are designed for students to become critical and sophisticated users of English in order to enhance their personal, social and vocational lives. These courses provide students who have a particular interest and ability in the subject with challenging learning experiences and opportunities to enjoy the breadth and variety of English texts, through the integration of the modes of reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing and representing.

Students explore language forms, features and the structures of a variety of texts in a range of personal, social, historical, cultural and workplace contexts. They refine their understanding of the relationships between language and meaning. They respond to and compose texts critically and imaginatively, in order to extend experience, gain access to and evaluate ideas and information, and synthesise the knowledge gained from a range of sources to fulfil a variety of purposes. Students learn to use language in complex and subtle ways to express experiences, ideas and feelings. They engage in close study of texts and extend their knowledge of personal, social, historical, cultural and workplace contexts to understand how these influence the composition of and response to texts.

These courses foster an appreciation of aesthetic values and provide students with opportunities for enhancing their understanding of literary expression. Students explore the different ways in which texts rewrite and represent conventions used in other texts, and they consider how these representations achieve meaning. They learn that different ways of reading may produce different meanings and may reflect attitudes and values.

Students are encouraged to value a range of approaches to texts so that they may become flexible and critical thinkers, capable of appreciating the variety of cultural heritages and differences that make up Australian society. These courses also encourage the development of skills in both collaborative and independent learning. Such skills form the basis of sound practices of investigation and analysis required for adult life, the world of work and post-school training and education. These courses encourage students to reconsider and refine meaning and to reflect on their own processes of responding, composing and learning.

10.3 English (Advanced) Objectives

Objectives are general statements, organising the more specific learning goals contained in the English (Advanced) outcomes.

Students will develop **knowledge and understanding** of:

- the purposes and effects of a range of textual forms in their personal, social, historical, cultural and workplace contexts
- the ways language forms and features, and the structures of texts shape meaning in a variety of textual forms.

Students will develop **skills** in:

- responding to and composing a range of complex texts
- effective communication at different levels of complexity
- independent investigation, individual and collaborative learning
- imaginative, critical and reflective thinking about meaning
- reflection as a way to evaluate their processes of composing, responding and learning.

Students will come to **value and appreciate**:

- the role of language in developing positive interaction and cooperation
- their developing skills as users of English
- the pleasure and diversity of language and literature
- the role of language and literature in their lives
- the study and use of English as a key to learning
- reflection on their own processes of responding, composing and learning
- English as a language of communication and culture
- appropriateness, subtlety and aesthetics in language use.

15.5 Assessment Components, Weightings and Tasks – English (Standard)

Preliminary English (Standard) Course

The suggested components, weightings and tasks for the Preliminary English (Standard) course are detailed below.

Syllabus Components	Syllabus Component Weighting
Common Content	40
Electives	60
	100



Modes to be assessed across the components	Weighting
Listening	15
Speaking	15
Reading	25
Writing	30
Viewing/Representing	15
	100

There should be a balance among:

- (i) the assessment of knowledge and understanding outcomes, and skills outcomes
- (ii) syllabus components and language modes
- (iii) types of assessment tasks.

HSC English (Standard) Course

The internal assessment mark for the English (Standard) course is to be based on the HSC course only.

Syllabus Components	Syllabus Component Weighting
Area of Study	40
Module A	20
Module B	20
Module C	20
	100

Modes to be assessed across the components	Weighting
Listening	15
Speaking	15
Reading	25
Writing	30
Viewing/Representing	15
	100

There should be a balance among:

- (i) the assessment of knowledge and understanding outcomes, and skills outcomes
 - (ii) syllabus components and language modes
 - (iii) types of assessment tasks such as creative responses over time, composition portfolio, oral presentation, viewing and listening tasks. Examinations such as class tests, term tests and trials must not exceed 30% of the assessment program.
- The internal assessment program measures the achievement of course outcomes through course content and across the language modes. An assessment task can be designed to incorporate one or more of the modes and one task may address several syllabus outcomes.
 - While the allocation of weightings to the various tasks set for the HSC course is left to individual schools, the percentages allocated to each syllabus component must be maintained. Five to six tasks are considered sufficient to assess the components of the course.
 - Individual tasks should not be worth less than 10% nor more than 30% of the total assessment.

15.8 Assessment Components, Weightings and Tasks – English (Advanced)

Preliminary English (Advanced) Course

The suggested components, weightings and tasks for the Preliminary English (Advanced) course are detailed below.

Syllabus Components	Syllabus Component Weighting
Common Content	40
Electives	60
	100



Modes to be assessed across the components	Weighting
Listening	15
Speaking	15
Reading	25
Writing	30
Viewing/Representing	15
	100

There should be a balance among:

- (i) the assessment of knowledge and understanding outcomes, and skills outcomes
- (ii) syllabus components and language modes
- (iii) types of assessment tasks.

HSC English (Advanced) Course

Syllabus Components	Syllabus Component Weighting
Area of Study	40
Module A	20
Module B	20
Module C	20
	100



Modes to be assessed across the components	Weighting
Listening	15
Speaking	15
Reading	25
Writing	30
Viewing/Representing	15
	100

There should be a balance among:

- (i) the assessment of knowledge and understanding outcomes, and skills outcomes
 - (ii) syllabus components and language modes
 - (iii) types of assessment tasks such as creative responses over time, composition portfolio, oral presentation, viewing and listening tasks. Examinations such as class tests, term tests and trials must not exceed 30% of the assessment program.
- The internal assessment program measures the achievement of course outcomes through course content and across the language modes. An assessment task can be designed to incorporate one or more of the modes and one task may address several syllabus outcomes.
 - While the allocation of weightings to the various tasks set for the HSC course is left to individual schools, the percentages allocated to each syllabus component must be maintained. Five to six tasks are considered sufficient to assess the components of the course.
 - Individual tasks should not be worth less than 10% nor more than 30% of the total assessment.

Appendix C

Comparison of texts prescribed for study by course

Further detail provided on Table 4:

	Standard 2001- 2003	Advanced 2001- 2003	Standard 2004- 2008	Advanced 2004- 2008	Standard 2009- 2012	Advanced 2009- 2012
Shakespeare	1	4	2	4	2	4
Drama	9	7	8	6	7	6
Poetry	8	8	9	8	10	11
Prose Fiction	7	9	8	11	14	17
Film	7	7	7	8	6	7
Media	2	2	2	2	1	0
Multimedia	3	2	3	2	1	1
Nonfiction	7	9	6	8	3	6

Number of prescribed text available for study (by category)

Key for following comparison tables:

Texts available to both the Standard and Advanced course (Area of Study)
Texts available to the Standard course only (Module Electives)
Texts available to the Advanced course only (Module Electives)

2001-2003	Shakespeare	Drama	Poetry	Prose Fiction	Film	Media	Multimedia	Nonfiction
Area of Study: Change (Standard and Advanced courses)								
Changing Worlds		The Dreamers	Imagined Corners	Ender's Game	Star Wars: New Hope			On Giants' Shoulders
Changing Perspective		Cosi	Skrzynecki	Looking for Alibrandi	Radiance			The stolen children
Changing Self		Away / Six degrees...	Harwood		Much Ado...			My Place
Module A								
Standard (Experience through language)								
Elective 1: Telling stories				Lawson short stories		Through Australian eyes		Maybe tomorrow / Tales
Elective 2: Dialogue		Stolen / The Club	Kominos					
Elective 3: Image			Inside Black Australia		Truman / Strictly Ball.		When the wind blows	
Advanced (Comparative study of texts and context)								
Elective 1: Transformations	Hamlet	Ros. & Guil	The Pardoner's Tale	Emma	Clueless / Simple plan			
Elective 2: In the wild	The Tempest		Wordsworth	BNW / Imaginary life	Bladerunner			The Explorers
Module B								
Standard (Close study of text)	Macbeth	Navigating / Shoe horn...	Owen / Westbury	We all fall.../ Briar Rose	Witness		AWM website	An Australian Son
Advanced (Critical study of text)	King Lear	Dr Faustus	Plath / Donne	Lion / Jane Eyre / Cloudstreet	Citizen Kane		ATSIC website / Samplers	Wild Swans / speeches
Module C								
Standard (Texts and society)								
Elective 1: The institution and personal experience		State of Shock		Raw	Dear America			
Elective 2: Exploration and travel				Hitch Hikers Guide...		Bush tucker man		Tracks
Elective 3: Consumerism			Dawe				Real Wild Child	
Advanced (Representation and text)								
Elective 1: Telling the truth			Hughes			Frontline		The justice game
Elective 2: Powerplay	Julius Caesar	Antigone		1984		Two weeks in Lilliput		After Mabo
Elective 3: History and memory					Life is Beautiful			The Fiftieth Gate
TOTAL (STANDARD)	1	9	8	7	7	2	3	7
TOTAL (ADVANCED)	4	7	8	9	7	2	2	9

2004-2008	Shakespeare	Drama	Poetry	Prose Fiction	Film	Media	Multimedia	Nonfiction
Area of Study: The Journey (Standard and Advanced courses)								
Physical journeys		Away	Skrzynecki	Huckleberry Finn	Rabbit Proof Fence			Lionheart
Imaginative journeys	The Tempest		Coleridge	Ender's Game	Contact			On Giants' Shoulders
Inner journeys		Cosi	Imagined Corners	Empire of the Sun	Life is Beautiful			My Place
Module A								
Standard (Experience through language)								
Elective 1: Telling stories				Lawson short stories		Bush tucker man		Maybe Tomorrow
Elective 2: Dialogue		Stolen / The Club	Dawe					
Elective 3: Image			Watson		Truman / Strictly Ballroom		When the wind blows	
Advanced (Comparative study of texts and context)								
Elective 1: Transformations	Hamlet	Ros. & Guil	The Pardoner's Tale	Emma	Clueless / Simple plan			
Elective 2: In the wild		The Golden Age	Wordsworth	BNW / Imaginary life	Bladerunner			Throwim way leg
Module B								
Standard (Close study of text)	Richard III	Navigating / Shoe horn...	Owen / Westbury	we all fall... / Briar Rose / Ports	Witness		AWM website	Into the wild
Advanced (Critical study of text)	King Lear	School for scandal	Harwood / Yeats	Lion / Wuth. Hts / Cloudstreet	Citizen Kane		ATSIC / Samplers	Wild Swans / speeches
Module C								
Standard (Texts and society)								
Elective 1: The institution and personal experience		State of Shock		Raw				One man's war
Elective 2: Ways of living			Kominos			Seachange	Real Wild Child	
Elective 3: Into the world		Educating Rita	The Simple Gift		Billy Elliot			
Advanced (Representation and text)								
Elective 1: Telling the truth			Hughes			Frontline		The justice game
Elective 2: Powerplay	Antony & Cleopatra	Life after George		1984		After Mabo		
Elective 3: History and memory				Kelly Gang	Memento			The Fiftieth Gate
TOTAL (STANDARD)	2	8	9	8	7	2	3	6
TOTAL (ADVANCED)	4	6	8	11	8	2	2	8

2009-2012	Shakespeare	Drama	Poetry	Prose Fiction	Film	Media	Multimedia	Nonfiction
Area of Study: Belonging (Standard and Advanced courses)								
<i>From 2009 onward the Area of Study was no longer divided into three sub-categories, but was to be studied as a holistic concept</i>	As You Like It	The Crucible / Rainbow's End	Skrzynecki / Dickinson / Herrick	Joy Luck Club / The Namesake / Great Expect. / Heat and Dust / Swallow the Air / Romulus...	Strictly Ballroom / Ten Canoes			
Module A								
Standard (Experience through language)								
Elective 1: Distinctive voices		Pygmalion	Burns / Paterson	...Harry Lavender				Speeches
Elective 2: Distinctly visual		The Shoe-horn Sonata	Douglas	Lawson SS / Maestro	Run Lola Run	Seachange		
Advanced (Comparative study of texts and context)								
Elective 1: Exploring Connections	Richard III	W;t	Dobson / Donne	The Aunt's Story / Pride & Prej.	Looking For Richard			Letters to Alice...
Elective 2: Texts in time		Who's Afraid of Virginia...	Browning	Frankenstein / Great Gatsby	Bladerunner			Room of One's Own
Module B								
Standard (Close study of text)	Merchant of Venice	Cosi	Owen / Wright	Curious Incident... / Briar Rose / Fly Away Peter	Witness			Into the wild
Advanced (Critical study of text)	Hamlet	A Doll's House	Harwood / Yeats / Slessor	Lion / Jane Eyre / Cloudstreet / 60 lights	Citizen Kane			Orwell essays / speeches
Module C								
Standard (Texts and society)								
Elective 1: The global village		A Man With 5 Children		Year of Living Dangerously	The Castle		Wikipedia	
Elective 2: Into the world		Educating Rita	Blake / Watson	The Story of Tom Brennan	Billy Elliot			Unpolished Gem
Advanced (Representation and text)								
Elective 1: Conflicting perspectives	Julius Ceasar	The Herbal Bed	Hughes	Snow Falling on Cedars	Wag The Dog			The justice game
Elective 2: History and memory			Levertov	The Woman Warrior / Kelly Gang	The Queen		Sept 11 Website	The Fiftieth Gate
TOTAL (STANDARD)	2	7	10	14	6	1	1	3
TOTAL (ADVANCED)	4	6	11	17	7	0	1	6

Appendix D

Comparison of HSC English course outcomes

Key:

Grey italicised text: indicates outcomes that are identical in the Standard and Advanced courses (Outcomes 3, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12 & 13)

Red text: indicates additional outcomes and phrases that appear in the Advanced course only

Blue highlighting: indicates terminology within outcomes that is particular to the different courses

English (HSC – Standard) Outcomes	English (HSC – Advanced) Outcomes
1. A student demonstrates understanding of how relationships between composer, responder, text and context shape meaning.	1. A student explains and evaluates the effects of different contexts of responders and composers on texts.
2. A student demonstrates understanding of the relationships among texts.	2. A student explains relationships among texts.
	2A. Advanced only A student recognises different ways in which particular texts are valued.
<i>3. A student develops language relevant to the study of English.</i>	<i>3. A student develops language relevant to the study of English.</i>
4. A student describes and analyses the ways that language forms and features, and structures of texts shape meaning and influence responses.	4. A student explains and analyses the ways in which language forms and features, and structures of texts shape meaning and influence responses.

5. A student analyses the effect of technology and medium on meaning.	5. A student explains and evaluates the effects of textual forms, technologies and their media of production on meaning.
<i>6. A student engages with the details of text in order to respond critically and personally.</i>	<i>6. A student engages with the details of text in order to respond critically and personally.</i>
<i>7. A student adapts and synthesises a range of textual features to explore and communicate information, ideas and values for a variety of purposes, audiences and contexts.</i>	<i>7. A student adapts and synthesises a range of textual features to explore and communicate information, ideas and values for a variety of purposes, audiences and contexts.</i>
<i>8. A student articulates and represents own ideas in critical, interpretive and imaginative texts from a range of perspectives.</i>	<i>8. A student articulates and represents own ideas in critical, interpretive and imaginative texts from a range of perspectives.</i>
9. A student assesses the appropriateness of a range of processes and technologies in the investigation and organisation of information and ideas.	9. A student evaluates the effectiveness of a range of processes and technologies for various learning purposes including the investigation and organisation of information and ideas.
<i>10. A student analyses and synthesises information and ideas into sustained and logical argument for a range of purposes and audiences.</i>	<i>10. A student analyses and synthesises information and ideas into sustained and logical argument for a range of purposes and audiences.</i>
<i>11. A student draws upon the imagination to transform experience and ideas into text, demonstrating control of language.</i>	<i>11. A student draws upon the imagination to transform experience and ideas into text, demonstrating control of language.</i>
<i>12. A student reflects on own processes of responding and composing.</i>	<i>12. A student reflects on own processes of responding and composing.</i>
	12A. Advanced only A student explains and evaluates different ways of responding to and composing text.
<i>13. A student reflects on own processes of learning.</i>	<i>13. A student reflects on own processes of learning.</i>

Appendix E

Comparison of HSC English course objectives

Key:

Red text: indicates additional phrases that appear in the Advanced course only

Blue highlighting: indicates terminology within objectives that is particular to the different courses

Stage 6 <i>Standard</i> English Objectives ('Knowledge and Understanding' and 'Skills')	Stage 6 <i>Advanced</i> English Objectives ('Knowledge and Understanding' and 'Skills')
Students will develop knowledge and understanding of the contexts, purposes and audiences of texts.	Students will develop knowledge and understanding of the purposes and effects of a range of textual forms in their personal, social, historical, cultural and workplace contexts.
Students will develop knowledge and understanding of the forms and features of language and structures of texts .	Students will develop knowledge and understanding of the ways in which language forms, features and structures shape meanings in a variety of textual forms .
Students will develop skills in responding to and composing a range of texts.	Students will develop skills in responding to and composing a range of complex texts.
Students will develop skills in effective communication.	Students will develop skills in effective communication at different levels of complexity .
Students will develop skills in individual and collaborative learning.	Students will develop skills in independent investigation , individual and collaborative learning.
Students will develop skills in investigation , imaginative and critical thinking, and synthesis of ideas .	Students will develop skills in imaginative, critical and reflective thinking about meaning .
Students will develop skills in reflection as a way to review, reconsider and refine meaning .	Students will develop skills in reflection as a way to evaluate their processes of composing, responding and learning .