

Dis-lodging literature from English: Challenging linguistic hegemonies

TERRY LOCKE

University of Waikato

STEPHEN MAY

University of Waikato

ABSTRACT: This paper problematises the location of literature “teaching” within the English (L1) curriculum, as is the case in New Zealand and other settings. It defamiliarises this arrangement by drawing attention to official New Zealand policies of biculturalism and to the increasing cultural and linguistic diversity in many New Zealand classrooms. It identifies a number of social justice issues arising from the current arrangement, and also raises issues in respect of educational policy and ways in which canonical subjects become constructed in practice. It then discusses ways in which a new qualifications template developed at the University of Waikato might provide a vehicle for establishing a new arrangement, in terms of which literature study is dislodged from English and reshaped as a course of study entitled Literature in Society. It indicates ways in which Comparative Literature, as a predominantly university-constituted discipline, might contribute to the theorisation of this new arrangement.

KEYWORDS: Literature, English, linguistic hegemony, comparative literature, literacy, language policy, biculturalism.

Every act of the reception of significant form, in language, in art, in music, is comparative (Steiner, 1995).

INTRODUCTION

The current curriculum arrangement that prevails in New Zealand schools, and secondary schools in particular, stems from “reforms” heralded by the publication of *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (1993). This slim document was a blueprint of sorts, which identified seven areas of learning and eight essential skills which would underpin the construction of learning and teaching in New Zealand Schools. As in other English-speaking countries, the state asserted direct control of curriculum and assessment, a control which arose, according to some commentators, from a need, driven by a post-Fordist agenda, to align the schooling system with a new socio-economic milieu, restructured according to neo-liberal principles (M. Peters & Marshall, 1996; Robertson, 1996).

The history of English as a subject, in settings where the English language is the dominant and/or official language, has been marked by debate over the extent to which it should be constructed around the study of language or the study of literature. This is not the only area of contestation in respect of the subject English, of course. Still, it is one which has been played out in differing ways, at different times and in

different contexts, despite the number of ways in which the distinction constitutes a false dichotomy (Stoop, 1998).

For curriculum developers in New Zealand at the beginning of the 1990s, the situation was hardly resolved by the fact that there were *two* areas of learning identified by *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework* that subject English might find a home in: Language and Languages, and The Arts. The description of the latter, for example, contains the following:

Recognised arts forms include those of recent origin, such as film and video, and those, such as oratory, which have a particular cultural significance.... Schools will ensure that all students participate in a wide range of experiences in the arts to provide for balanced learning and an appreciation of the aesthetics of different art forms. In particular, schools will provide for learning in visual art (including craft and design), music, drama, dance, and *literature* [our emphasis] (1993, p.15).

As it transpired, *English in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1994) was not explicitly developed as a document to be identified with either area of learning. By implication (since it was never really spelled out), it can be regarded as a kind of hybrid within which the relative claims of a literature-based construction of the subject and a language-based one continue to be areas of contestation, driven by varying “models” or “versions” of the subject.

This contestation was highlighted in the often acrimonious debates that preceded the eventual publication of *English in the New Zealand Curriculum* (see Bell, 1994, for an extended discussion). Conducted throughout much of the 1980s, these debates fuelled a moral panic against an initial draft syllabus for English Forms 6 and 7 that explicitly reflected the country’s bicultural heritage – Māori and Pākehā (European) – and included a more comparative approach to literature, including indigenous Māori literature, as well as Pacific and women’s writing.¹ Māori, as the co-official language of New Zealand, was also explicitly recognised alongside English in the curriculum draft. Labelled pejoratively by its critics as “dumbing down”, “social engineering” and “political correctness”, this draft syllabus was subsequently usurped by a more traditional approach to the curriculum – emphasising a more “conventional” English canon, albeit with some recognition of New Zealand literature, and a reversion to a more monolingual emphasis on the English language at the specific expense of Māori (Ministry of Education, 1992). It was the latter, not surprisingly perhaps, that formed the basis of *English in the New Zealand Curriculum*.

The nature and value of *English in the New Zealand Curriculum* was also a matter of debate in the late 1990s (see, for example, Brown, 1998; Locke, 2000a). In relation to the concerns of this paper, most commentators would have seen the curriculum as tilting subject English towards a focus on textual (as opposed to literary) practice and language in use. Indeed, “Exploring Language” was one of three “process” strands, straddling the document’s three major Oral, Written and Visual Language strands. (The only major teaching resource the Ministry of Education funded in the aftermath of the document’s release was entitled *Exploring Language* (Ministry of Education, 1996). Some commentators, notably writer and academic C.K. Stead (1997), saw the

¹ The final draft was published as *Draft syllabus for schools: English Forms 6 and 7* (Ministry of Education, 1992) but was superseded by the national English curriculum itself.

document as signalling the demise of the disciplined teaching of literature as cultural heritage, though others suggested that this was overstating the case and that literature-based paradigms of the subject remained in the ascendancy (Stoop, 1998). Indeed, the *Exploring Language* project was a tacit admission that New Zealand English/literacy teachers were weak in their understanding of language, and Locke (2000b) has shown in a study of the changing academic profile of New Zealand secondary English teachers how language-related papers, for such teachers, have slipped off the undergraduate degree agenda.

May (2002b) has also argued that secondary English teachers in New Zealand (as elsewhere) are increasingly ill-equipped to deal with the cultural and linguistic diversity of their classrooms because: a) they are generally not interested in accessing, and/or are simply not aware of how to access and draw upon, the already existing linguistic resources of students, particularly those for whom English is not their first language; b) many do not recognise that academic English is a *specific* language register and thus needs to be *explicitly* taught – to L1 English speakers, and especially to L2 English speakers. Instead, the majority of these teachers continue to rely on the misplaced assumption that teaching *in* English as the language of instruction is sufficient for all students to acquire the academic English language register successfully. This osmotic approach to (English) language learning thus both universalises and invisibilises academic English discourse norms, often at the specific expense of students' language learning (see also Gee, 1996).

A number of reasons can be attributed to this. One, already alluded to by Locke (2000b) above, is that many secondary school teachers – indeed, the majority – trained in English literature, and not linguistics, and thus may actually have very little knowledge of *how* to teach English as an academic language register. The latter has usually been viewed as the responsibility of TESL teachers in specific relation to students for whom English is not a first language. Another is the related predilection of many secondary teachers, including many English teachers, to assume that the English literacy needs of their students, including students whose L1 is English, are not their concern. As Gunderson observes for example, from a North American perspective, “It has been known for some time that secondary teachers do not consider reading and learning to read as issues that are of much importance to them” (2000, p. 692). The difficulty of implementing whole-school language and literacy policies, particularly at secondary level, is testament enough to this (May, 1997; Corson, 2001).

Interestingly, this “invisibilising” of language is also reflected systemically, or at least was until recently, by the inclusion/elision of English under the “Language and Languages” learning area in the New Zealand Curriculum, thus obviating the need for monolingual English students (and teachers) to engage meaningfully with any other language. Only in 2003 was this state of affairs rectified by the establishment of an eighth “second language” learning area, the result in turn of an overall “stocktake” of the New Zealand curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2002).

Nonetheless, statements such as the following confirm an ongoing privileging of literary texts in *English in the New Zealand Curriculum*.

Among the wide range of texts included in English programmes, literary texts have an important role at all levels. Responding to literature has always been central to

students' encounter with language. Students should read a range of literature, including popular literature, traditional stories, children's literature, and literary texts with established critical reputations. The English curriculum affirms the importance of literature for literacy development, for imaginative development, and for developing personal, social, cultural, historical, and national awareness and identity (p. 16).

Verb modalities in the first three sentences (all assertions) suggest a strength of commitment. However, there is a degree of undercutting. Literary texts have (merely?) *an* important role. The third sentence appears to subvert the idea of a literary canon. Only the fourth sentence posits a rationale for literary study (which will be returned to later in this paper).

So where does that leave us in 2004? The intended curriculum as represented by *English in the New Zealand Curriculum* appears to privilege the study of "literary texts" in English over other texts. Traditional emphases on literary study as justified by both cultural heritage and personal growth "models" of English have ensured that literary study continues to have a place in the enacted curriculums of English classrooms. Rhetorical and critical literacy versions of English, which provide coherent rationales for regarding literary study as a facet of a broader study of textual practice in society, are virtually absent from the intended curriculum. The extent to which the degree majors of student-teachers intending to teach subject English as secondary levels is dominated by literary study remains a constant in New Zealand (Locke, 2000b; May, 2002b), though there is no doubt that constructions of literary study as the core business of university English departments have changed under the pressure of Cultural Studies and Critical Theory.

Though it is outside of the scope of this paper, one might, however, speculate that there is no assured place for literature as a textual category in the enacted curriculum. For example, the new New Zealand qualifications system, the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA), has effectively installed a *de facto* English curriculum at senior secondary level.² The wording of the eight level 2 NCEA achievement standards (Year 12), for example, mentions the word "literature" only once in a standard that begins "Investigate a language *or* literature topic...". Otherwise the achievement standards refer to extended written texts, short written texts, and so on.

QUESTIONS OF ENTITLEMENT

This paper argues 1) that the study of literature is an entitlement³ for all students, irrespective of their cultural or linguistic background and that 2) such a study can be constructed as a legitimate focus for the school curriculum (as intended and enacted).

² The NCEA (National Certificate of Educational Achievement) is a new, senior secondary school qualifications system which began its implementation in 2002. Previous systems of external examinations (School Certificate at Year 11, and Bursary at Year 13) and the internally assessed Sixth-Form Certificate (Year 12) were replaced by it. The NCEA combines internal with external assessment, ostensibly replaces norm-referenced assessment with standards-based assessment, and replaces the notion of "subject" with domains of learning made up of discrete assessment packages (either unit standards or achievement standards), each of which has its own credit weighting.

³ We are using the word "entitlement" here in ways which will be familiar to educators in England, where the national curriculum is framed in terms of a set of curriculum entitlements.

The first prong of this argument is developed in this section of this paper; the second is the concern of the next.

One starting point is the quotation from *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (1993) previously quoted:

Schools will ensure that all students participate in a wide range of experiences in the arts to provide for balanced learning and an appreciation of the aesthetics of different art forms. In particular, schools will provide for learning in visual art (including craft and design), music, drama, dance, and literature (p. 15).

The verb modalities relentlessly insist on “learning in...literature” as an entitlement. However, in the current situation, where learning in literature is located within the ambit of the English curriculum, this entitlement can be viewed as compromised.

Perhaps ironically, the nature of the compromise is highlighted from another statement from the same document:

Students whose mother tongue is a Pacific Islands language or another community language will have the opportunity to develop and use their own language as an integral part of their schooling (p. 10).

Here's another forceful modality (“will have”). As far as the entitlement to “learning in literature” is concerned, however, the reality of the situation exposes this assertion as no more than wishful thinking. Students with an interest in literature, for whom English is a second or additional language, have two options. They “do” it in English, or (at least at senior levels) they don't do it at all (May, 2002b).⁴

For such students, “doing it” means:

- A reading diet of texts in English, mostly composed in English and written for audiences for whom English is a first language;
- English language as the default language of instruction;
- Assessment events in English language (occasionally oral but usually written).

As an option for doing literature, this hardly represents an opportunity to develop and use one's first language as an integral part of one's schooling. Indeed, what is being fostered and perpetuated by this arrangement is, firstly, active discouragement in respect of a curriculum entitlement. Secondly, in situations where students for whom English is not a first language overcome this discouragement, they have to contend with the construction of English as a hegemonic language and conversely, the construction of non-English languages (including sign languages) as second-class “literary” languages.⁵

⁴ The situation in secondary schools is changing with the implementation of the NCEA. Previously, English at Year 12 was compulsory. This is no longer the case with the NCEA, though selected “literacy”-related achievement standards at level 2 (notionally Year 12) are a requirement for entry to tertiary institutions. It should be noted that the concept of “subject” has been elided in the thinking which underpins the NCEA (Locke, 2001).

⁵ The addition of the “second language” learning area, discussed above, may obviate this to some extent, although it probably will do little in the longer term to challenge or change the on-going hegemony of English and the related devaluing of “other” languages”.

This current arrangement (as we are calling it) warrants contestation on at least two grounds:

1. *Practicality*: It fails to recognise the increased cultural diversity of New Zealand classrooms and singularly fails to draw on that diversity as an important point of reference for fostering learning in the English curriculum (May, 2002b).
2. *Ideology*: It runs counter to New Zealand's own bicultural identity – premised on a partnership model between Māori and Pākehā (European) New Zealanders – and to a politics of language, which would embrace cultural and linguistic diversity. We argue the right of all students to have opportunities for mother tongue maintenance maximised wherever possible (May, 2002a).

LITERATURE IN SOCIETY

In this section we develop our claim that the study of literature in society is a desirable focus for the school curriculum (as intended and enacted). We argue that the development of such a study can play a role in addressing the way in which languages other than English are marginalised in the New Zealand school system, but also that this development can be justified in terms of wider benefits deriving from comparative approaches to literary study.

As indicated previously, *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework* views the study of literature as an entitlement and the national English curriculum can be seen as privileging literary texts among others. What the passage from *English in the New Zealand Curriculum* quoted above highlights, however, is that rationales justifying the inclusion of the study of literature cannot be separated from questions as to what the study of literature is, that is, from constructions of literary study.

The following sentence (the last from this passage) is a case in point: “The English curriculum affirms the importance of literature for literacy development, for imaginative development, and for developing personal, social, cultural, historical, and national awareness and identity” (p.16). The resonating word in this construction of the importance of literature is the discursive marker “develop” (“development”/“developing”) – a *trace* in a Foucaultian sense – which situates this rationale in a discourse, which constructs literature as playing a role in the personal growth of the individual person. In other words, the study of literature is being justified in terms of a construction of literary study that is congruent with what is sometimes called the “personal growth” model of English (Locke, 2000a). There are, we should note, other traces in this sentence. The word “national awareness and identity” can be interpreted as linked to another model of English, the “cultural heritage” model, with its emphasis on a canon of hallowed and culturally defining texts (see also Bell, 1994).

The multiplicity of discourses implicated in just one sentence leads us to refine the claim this section began with by making three points:

1. There is no one construction of the study of literature;
2. Different constructions of the study of literature suggest different justifications for curriculum inclusion;

3. Comparative literature addresses the question of the what, how and why of literary study in ways which intersect neatly with the claims for maintaining linguistic diversity argued for in the last section.

It is doubtful whether Wellek and Warren's classic *Theory of Literature* (1956), with its argument that the distinguishing feature of literature was “a particular use made of language” (p. 22) really represented a genuine consensus on the nature of literature and literary study – more, one might argue, notes towards a supreme fiction (to borrow from the title of Wallace Stevens' famous poem). Any confidence that a consensus might be arriving would certainly have been blown away under the onslaught of a host of late Twentieth Century *isms*: post-modernism, feminism, post-structuralism, culturalism, post-colonialism, constructivism, constructionism and so on, with texts like Terry Eagleton's *Introduction to literary theory* presiding over the fragmentation and questioning the term “literature” itself.

So our starting point in 2004 is a term, “literature”, which has been problematised, a range of constructions of literary study as practices and an awareness that the reality of how these practices become enacted in instructional sites is bound to be complex and indicative of contesting positions and claims. In respect of this latter point, it is clear, for example, that the ways in which teachers use questions to “enable” students to make sense of texts actually work to discursively construct “literature”, “texts”, “textual meaning”, “readers” and the “reading process” (Locke, 1997, 2003b). While a systematic discussion of this range of constructions is beyond the scope of this paper, it might be illustrative to mention two broad categories.

The first of these constructions argues that the term “literature” is a product of discourse and thereby inevitably historically situated. Texts, then, are deemed to be literary by virtue of the way they have been positioned within discourse. However, texts so deemed, like all texts, have their meanings shaped by the discourses at play at the moment of production and at the moment of interpretation by particular readers. Close study of the language at work in texts reveals the discursive underpinnings and offers readers the ability to contest the ways these texts would “have them read them”. Textual study of this kind is justified in a number of ways. For example, it sensitises readers to the ways in which knowledge and power interpenetrate, thereby enabling them to see how the dominance (or hegemony) of certain discourses – as disseminated in texts – leads to the marginalisation of certain groups and ways of reading the world (in ways that are inevitably textually mediated).

The second of these constructions argues that the term “literature” refers to texts, which, as Wellek and Warren suggest, arise from a particular kind of individual engagement with experience via the meaning-making agency of a particular kind (aesthetic) of language use (see, for example, Iser, 1978; Steiner, 1995). Such a view of literature connects with a view of the mind as represented in the recent findings of cognitive neuroscience (for example, Damasio, 2000) and with evolutionary literary theory (for example, Carroll, 1995).⁶ As a construction it tends to have a focus on the individual and personal, and to make room for such concepts as “creativity”, “creative genius”, “intuition”, and so on. Textual study (as a reading practice) leads to an appreciation of how certain individuals have (creatively and aesthetically) made sense

⁶ Carroll writes: “I argue for the view that knowledge is a biological phenomenon, that literature is a form of knowledge, and that literature is thus itself a biological phenomenon” (p. 1).

of the world. Again, this construction can lead to a number of rationales justifying literary study, for example, it can expand consciousness, enhance creativity and foster an appreciation (and emulation) of a particular kind of linguistic craft.

The presence of such debates suggests the need to challenge the implication in curriculum statements that literature and the literary are non-problematic categories and to highlight aspects of challenge, provocation, uncertainty, questioning, and disruption of expectations and stereotypes, which make reading and the study of literature – as a collective as well as personal experience – potentially so exciting.

Turning to the third point, a number of themes recur in the writings of recent commentators on the present-day status of comparative literature: literary study is characterised by ferment, vitality and a multiplicity of models; the humanities are increasingly marginalized; the humanities need to rethink their own legitimisation; comparative literature has a crucial role to play in literary studies (Ahearn & Weinstein, 1995; Steiner, 1995b; Tötösy, 1998).

Ahearn & Weinstein (1995) write about comparative literature this way:

...Comparative literature illuminates the artistic and cultural patterns of sameness and difference which exist both within and between societies, and it thereby gives us a precious, contrastive portrait of societies' values and beliefs, as well as their aesthetic and literary traditions. In some basic sense, studying comparative literature should confer a kind of civic and cultural literacy, not of the "recognition" type promoted by E. D. Hirsch, but of a more substantive and critical sort, entailing knowledge of various cultural traditions, ideally a knowledge that is nuanced, aware of contradictions, attuned to *discourses* both mainstream and marginal. It is worth repeating that the kind of knowledge envisioned here has little to do with so-called core reading lists but rather with a special kind of intellectual posture, a way of looking at the world and, thus, at oneself (p. 81; our emphasis).

Here is Tötösy's view, as set out in his "systemic" approach to comparative literature.

The basic definition of Comparative Literature includes – apart from the traditional and historical approach to "compare" literary texts from different languages and cultures – the study of the literary text in/as its relationship with extra-literary areas (e.g., sociology, history, economics, the publishing industry, the history of the book, geography, biology, medicine, etc), the other arts, etc. But most importantly – and here the discipline has played traditionally a significant role – Comparative Literature means the recognition and the engagement with the Other, may that be a "non-canonical" text (popular literature, for instance) or the literary and cultural aspects of another race, gender, nation, etc (p. 11).

Ahearn and Weinstein's advocacy of greater "civic and cultural literacy" is remarkably consonant with key tenets of the wider educational approach that has come to be known as "critical multiculturalism" (see May, 1999, 2003), suggesting useful congruities across educational paradigms. Here, we are not arguing that an intended Literature in Society curriculum for schools should locate itself solely within the Comparative Literature tradition as represented by these two commentators. However, we *would* argue that this tradition *does* offer a valuable perspective on *how* a Literature in Society curriculum might be formulated so that it makes central a

valuing of cultural and linguistic diversity, not only in theory but in terms of the actualities of programme design and classroom practice.

For colleagues of both authors engaged in the practice of teaching comparative literature in a multicultural university classroom and studying texts which derive from a wide range of cultures, it is precisely the challenging nature of the reading experience and the fact that students from different cultural backgrounds and with different kinds of family experience will often interpret the same text very differently that make it so interesting. Reading such works together permits not only the acknowledgement of cultural difference and variety (inside and outside the classroom), but encourages curiosity – a word notably absent from many curriculum statements – about other cultures.

A point made by Binford and Hardin (1991) is that, in reading literary texts from other countries and cultures, one may gain access to elements of the subjective experience of people living in very different social, historical, religious, economic, political contexts, which are quite unlike the supposedly objective material encountered in traditional history, sociology, and so on. The fact that these elements are mediated by language in the form of culturally specific genres is also made visible by this process of literary comparison, thus highlighting and (potentially) critiquing the hegemony of English – as evidenced by its universalising and normalising effect in subject English in English-dominant countries like New Zealand.

The *constructedness* of languages, and language varieties, as in effect historically, socially and culturally located *discourses* (Gee, 1996), thus becomes something which also needs to be specifically acknowledged and studied, alongside the inclusion of other languages and/or language varieties. A similar point is made by Simms (1991), writing out of the context of Aotearoa/New Zealand and addressing issues raised in the engagement with texts, not just from the Third World but also from the Fourth World, which he describes as “...made up of those national entities (ethnic, linguistic, and cultural) which remain politically submerged and often officially unrecognised” (p. 66). In Simms’ terms, New Zealand Māori and other Pacific Island groups can be thought of as part of the Fourth World. As Simms puts it, a “metropolitan” reader engaging with a Third or Fourth World text is “...looking directly at the interface of an interplay and intersection; not merely at the other culture – the oral, traditional mentality and its new written articulations – but also, and perhaps mostly, at our own society and mentality, at ourselves in the very act of confronting that otherness through this kind of sustained critical reading” (viii).

What has been said about English hegemony also needs to be qualified in the light of postcolonial theory which draws attention to “the possibilities of using [a hegemonic] language against the grain, of taking up and using a language that has been a tool of oppression, colonialism, or rigid identity and turning it against itself” (Pennycook, 2001, p. 69). Comparative literary approaches can draw attention to the extent to which the English language has been adapted and given new and different life in a process of counter-colonization by speakers and writers in colonised regions. In the New Zealand context, one immediately thinks of such English texts by Māori writers as Witi Ihimaera’s anthology *Where’s Waari* (2000) and Briar Grace-Smith’s play, *Purapurawhetuu* (1999). Such approaches make the study of “literature in English” a potentially more challenging and illuminating business than it traditionally was.

ENVISIONMENT AND BEYOND

We would like to conclude this article by tentatively suggesting a way forward – the merest of outlines for how a “Literature in Society” study might work in a secondary school, with particular reference to the situation in New Zealand. You could say that we are developing an idea for a future action research project!

We start with the given that literature is a problematical concept – we would say a *richly* problematical one – and yet an inescapable one. However one defines the concept it has a relatively unchallenged place in the New Zealand curriculum statement. More important, it designates a domain of textual practice that operates vigorously in the world at large – in sections of bookshops (next to the videos), in literary awards and in literary journals and other enterprises. From another angle, we might view it as a *taonga*, to use a Māori concept, which roughly equates with the English word “treasure”. Māori in New Zealand can point to the role Māori writers played in the cultural renaissance of the 1960s and 1970s, and to the increasingly central role being played at the present time by Māori writers, publishing houses and awards.⁷

The domain, then, is literature – not just as a body of esteemed texts, but as a social phenomenon characterised by processes of production, consumption and distribution. The notion of canonicity would be recognised, but also problematised. The emphasis would be on textual inclusiveness, with an emphasis on the importance of oral traditions. Depending on the linguistic composition of a particular class, texts would be chosen (at times using texts in translation) to represent a range of linguistic traditions, especially those “Fourth World” traditions that have previously been marginalised in Aotearoa/New Zealand. We would include the sign languages of hearing-impaired students as a special “Fourth World” case and recognise the status of deaf literature (Bahan, 1992; C. Peters, 1996; Valli, 1995).

What kinds of learning outcomes might such a course offer? Here is one set that we offer as a point of departure:

- An appreciation of the different meanings social groups bring to the idea of literature;
- An understanding of some of the patterns of production, consumption and dissemination characterising literature in society;
- An appreciation that there are different ways to read literature and that the experience of reading literature differs between individual persons and social groups;
- An appreciation of the shaping power of the verbal imagination;⁸

⁷ For example, Huia (NZ) Ltd, a New Zealand-based communications company providing publishing and communications services with a particular focus on Māori (<http://www.huia.co.nz/>), has introduced literary awards for Māori writers.

⁸ “The faculty for, the impulse towards verbal invention, towards the organization of words and syntax into formal patterns of measure and musicality, is universal. *Poiesis*, the ordering *ingenium* which gives to the world a narrative guise, which concentrates and dramatizes the raw material of experience, which translates grief and wonder into aesthetic pleasure, is ubiquitous. Man is not only, as the ancient Greeks had it, 'a language-animal'; he is a being in whom greater or lesser degrees of formal imagining and stylised communication are innate” (Steiner, 1995, p. 5).

- An understanding of the connection between oral tradition and literary textuality;
- A developed understanding of “the other” through encounters with texts from unfamiliar cultures and traditions;
- An appreciation of how an engagement with “the other” through texts can deepen one’s understanding of one’s own position(s) in the world;
- An understanding of the historical, social and cultural locatedness of language and language use;
- An enhanced understanding of how language works through encounters with other language traditions and by reflecting on problems posed by acts of “translation”;
- Situating academic or literary English more clearly in relation to other languages and language registers;
- An enhanced appreciation of similarity and difference as a result of the study of texts from a range of cultural traditions dealing with a particular theme or topic;
- An understanding of ways in which literary texts are technologically mediated and are being re-mediated under the pressure of new digital technologies.

Such a list appears to be privileging knowledge and attitude-based learning outcomes. However, we would see such an emphasis as appropriate, and that a range of skills will be developed via activities designed in accordance with the above list. Such a course would lend itself to inquiry-based approaches to pedagogy with an emphasis on problem-solving (Wells, 1992). We would also see such a course as being advantaged by rhetorical and critical literacy approaches to textual study. However, we would not suggest that this course privilege any one “version” of textual study. Indeed, one can argue that the currently unfashionable “cultural heritage” model of literary study has some relevance for current endeavours in Aotearoa to fashion a Māori literary tradition.

The issue of studying literature as a way of legitimising and helping maintain so-called community languages is a complicated one, in part because students' own knowledge of “their” languages varies so much (first, second, third generation, etc). A point that is well made in studies on this question is that literary study (in schools and universities) which encourages students from “minority” cultures to read texts from their “own” cultures (whether in the original or in translation), to research them (especially by consultation with parents, grandparents, and so on) and become the class “specialist” on them has value on many levels (Goody, 1995).

The question of whether these students are going to be able to write on “their” texts in “their” language – and, if so, whether a teacher is going to be able to read what is written, and whether it matters if they can't – is an intricate one. So is choice of text, as emphasised by June Levison in her account of using “world literature” in a GCSE English course at Islington sixth Form Centre, a 16-19 institution serving a multicultural, inner-city community in England (Levison, 1995). One of the activities Levison did with her students was have them translate a poem from their home language into English. Poets chosen by students for this purpose included Bengali poets, Kazi Nozmul Islam, and Chinese poet, Li Po. With A level literature students, she used “the independent reading and independent study aspect” of the AEB 660 syllabus to have them write a long essay pursuing their own reading interests and exploring aspects of their own histories in fiction. One such student wrote the

following in response to a study of *The Red Fox* by Farhana Sheikh and *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker:

The two books show, very differently, the importance of being accepted and being part of something. But more importantly, they both show the need of every individual to try and realise “who they are” in terms of race, culture, gender, sexuality, age, class, religion, everything...The way the women in each novel pull together and help each other is evident to show their strength in unity. Although they are seen as “the weaker sex” they can accomplish anything they try...discovering themselves is the first step towards accomplishing anything greater and both writers portray this in their novels (p. 23).

Alongside the study of texts from other cultures, a Literature in Society course could invite students to undertake creative writing projects, using the forms and conventions they have encountered in another culture. There is a nice piece in the Goody (1995) by Anthony Haynes, “Teaching the Urdu Ghazal in English Translation”, which describes just such a project (Haynes, 1995).

A point that comes through clearly in these England-based accounts of classroom-based experiments with world literature is susceptibility to changes in curriculum and assessment practices, which may militate against a course such as the one we have been describing. In the New Zealand context, a potential solution to this problem is a new senior school qualification called the University of Waikato Certificate of Studies (CS): English (Locke, 2002, 2003a). This qualification has been approved by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority for its national register of qualifications and also allows students to earn credits on the new National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) at Levels 2 and 3 (Years 12 and 13).

CS English is different from normal NCEA pathways in its approach to course design, assessment, moderation, pedagogy, “construction of English”, moderation and reporting. Fundamental to its design template are:

- a view of Years 12 and 13 as a coherent learning continuum;
- a flexible yet comprehensive programme of study described in terms of a set of work requirements;
- a set of common assessment tasks for both Years 12 and 13;
- a combination of internal and external assessment;
- the use of standards-based assessment using grade-related band descriptors;
- certification in the form of a summary profile at both Years 12 and 13.

What these parameters allow for is a course design based around rich tasks.⁹ Such tasks suit inquiry-based pedagogies, high-level and integrated thinking, and problem-solving (including problematisation). Using the list of learning outcomes as a guide, and in consultation with classroom teachers, a set of work requirements and common assessment tasks could be developed that would enable teachers to capitalise on the linguistic and cultural resources among their students.

⁹ The developers of the New Basics curriculum in Queensland describe rich tasks as characterised by intellectual challenge and “real-world value” (State of Queensland Department of Education, 2001-2003).

New Zealand already has two official languages, English and Māori, and educational settings where the language of instruction is neither of these two. The development of a Literature in Society Study, as described here, would dislodge literary study from subject English, where English is the medium of instruction and assessment and where literary texts, to the extent that they are still studied, are in English and by authors for whom English is the mother tongue. In this new arrangement, the focus on literature would be central and differently conceived than it is in the construction of English favoured by the national English curriculum. The study would not designate a specific linguistic medium for instruction (including assessment). And teachers would have at their disposal a veritable Babel of cultural and linguistic traditions to fire the imaginations of their students.

Acknowledgement: We would like to thank Dr Michael Hanne, HOD of Comparative Literature at the University of Auckland for his invaluable input into an earlier version of this article.

REFERENCES

- Ahearn, E., & Weinstein, A. (1995). The function of criticism at the present time: The promise of comparative literature. In C. Bernheimer (Ed.), *Comparative literature in the age of multiculturalism* (pp. 77-85). Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- Bahan, B. (1992). *ASL Literature: Inside the story*. Paper presented at the Deaf Studies: What's Up?, Washington, DC: Gallaudet University.
- Bell, A. (1994). New Zealand or Aotearoa? The battle for nationhood in the English curriculum. *Curriculum Studies*, 2 (2), 171-188.
- Binford, L., & Hardin, W. (1991). How First World students read Third World literature. In W. Luis & J. Rodriguez-Luis (Eds.), *Translating Latin America: Culture as text* (pp. 141-152). Binghamton, N.Y.: State University of New York.
- Brown, G. (1998). The New Zealand English Curriculum. *English in Aotearoa*, 35, 64-70.
- Carroll, J. (1995). *Evolution and literary theory*. Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press.
- Corson, D. (2001). *Language diversity and education*. Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Damasio, A. (2000). *The feeling of what happens: Body, emotion and the making of consciousness*. London: Vintage.
- Gee, J. (1996). *Social linguistics and literacies*. Basingstoke: Falmer Press.
- Goody, J. (Ed.). (1995). *Opening new worlds: Explorations in the teaching of literature with an international dimension*. Sheffield: NATE.
- Grace-Smith, B. (1999). *Purapurawhetuu*. Wellington: Huia Publishers.
- Gunderson, L. (2000) Voices of the teenage diasporas. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 43, 692-706.
- Haynes, A. (1995). Teaching the Urdu ghazal in English translation. In J. Goody (Ed.), *Opening new worlds: Explorations in the teaching of literature with an international dimension* (pp. 11-16). Sheffield: NATE.
- Ihimaera, W. (Ed.). (2000). *Where's Waari? A history of the Māori through the short story*. Auckland: Reed.

- Iser, W. (1978). *The act of reading: A theory of aesthetic response*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- Levison, J. (1995). The choice of texts is at the heart of our work. In J. Goody (Ed.), *Opening new worlds: Explorations in the teaching of literature with an international dimension* (pp. 20-24). Sheffield: NATE.
- Locke, T. (1997). Questions to ask a poem: Revisited. *English in Aotearoa*, 31, 29-36.
- Locke, T. (2000a). English in the New Zealand Curriculum: Benchmarks and milestones. *English in Australia*, 127-128, 60-70.
- Locke, T. (2000b). Secondary English teachers in New Zealand: A changing academic profile. *English in Aotearoa*, 40, 79-83.
- Locke, T. (2001). English and the NCEA: The impact of an assessment regime on curriculum practice. *Waikato Journal of Education*, 7, 99-116.
- Locke, T. (2002). The NCEA another way: CS English. *English in Aotearoa*, 47, 72-82.
- Locke, T. (2003a). Establishing a counter-hegemonic bridgehead: The English Study Design Project. In B. Doecke, D. Homer & H. Nixon (Eds.), *English teachers at work* (pp. 227-241). Kent Town, S.A.: AATE/Wakefield Press.
- Locke, T. (2003b). 13 ways of looking at a poem: How discourses of reading shape pedagogical practice in English. *Waikato Journal of Education*, 9, 51-64.
- May, S. (1997). School language policies. In R. Wodak (Ed.), *Language policy and political issues in education. The encyclopedia of language and education* (Vol. 1) (pp. 229-240). Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- May, S. (1999). Critical multiculturalism and cultural difference: avoiding essentialism. In S. May (Ed.), *Critical multiculturalism: Rethinking multicultural and antiracist education* (pp. 11-41). London & New York: RoutledgeFalmer.
- May, S. (2002a). Accommodating multiculturalism and biculturalism in Aotearoa/New Zealand: Implications for language education. *Waikato Journal of Education*, 8, 5-26.
- May, S. (2002b). The problem with literacy. *English in Aotearoa*, 48, 4-14.
- May, S. (2003). Critical multiculturalism. In M. Peters, C. Lankshear, M. Olszen & J. Kincheloe (Eds.), *Critical theory and the human condition: Founders and praxis* (pp. 199-212). New York: Peter Lang.
- Ministry of Education. (1992). *Draft syllabus for schools: English Forms 6 and 7*. Wellington: Learning Media.
- Ministry of Education. (1993). *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework*. Wellington: Learning Media.
- Ministry of Education. (1994). *English in the New Zealand Curriculum*. Wellington: Learning Media.
- Ministry of Education. (1996). *Exploring language: A handbook for teachers*. Wellington: Learning Media.
- Ministry of Education. (2002). *Curriculum Stocktake Report*. Wellington: Ministry of Education
- Pennycook, A. (2001). *Critical applied linguistics: A critical introduction*. Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Peters, C. (1996). *Deaf American literature: A performance-based minority literature*. Paper presented at the Deaf Studies IV, Gallaudet University, Washington D.C.
- Peters, M., & Marshall, J. (1996). The politics of curriculum: Busnocratic rationality and enterprise culture. *DELTA: Policy and Practice in Education*, 48, 33-46.

- Robertson, S. (1996). Teachers' work, restructuring and postfordism: Constructing the New "Professionalism". In I. Goodson & A. Hargreaves (Eds.), *Teachers' professional lives* (pp. 28-55). London: Falmer Press.
- Simms, N. (1991). *Points of contact: A study of the interplay and intersection of traditional and non-traditional literatures, cultures, and mentalities*. New York: Pace University Press.
- State of Queensland (Department of Education). (2001-2003). *About the rich tasks*. Retrieved June 30, 2003, from http://education.qld.gov.au/corporate/newbasics/html/about/about_rt.html
- Stead, C. K. (1997). The English Patient. *Metro*(April), 84-90.
- Steiner, G. (1995). *What is comparative literature? An inaugural lecture delivered before the University of Oxford on 11 October 1944*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Stoop, G. (1998). *The management of knowledge: Text, context, and the New Zealand English curriculums, 1969-1996*. Unpublished Ph.D., University of Canterbury, Christchurch.
- Tötösy, S. (1998). *Comparative literature theory, method, application*. Retrieved October 22, 2002, from <http://www.univie.ac.at/constructivism/books/totosy98/1.html>
- Valli, C. (1995). *Poetics of ASL poetry*. Paper presented at the Deaf Studies IV, Gallaudet University, Washington, D.C.
- Wellek, R., & Warren, A. (1956). *Theory of literature*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World.
- Wells, G. (1992). *Language and the inquiry-oriented curriculum*. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the National Council of Teachers of English, Louisville, Kentucky.