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AATE

English in Australia

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The Journal of the Australian Association for the Teaching of English

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Guidelines for Contributors

English in Australia is the peer-reviewed national journal of the Australian Association for the Teaching of English (AATE).

The journal is committed to publishing material that is of importance to English educators. We welcome high quality teacher-oriented and scholarly submissions in any relevant field of English education, including literature and literacy education.

We are interested in submissions that reflect dilemmas, debates and concerns facing current contemporary English educators in Australia and elsewhere. Submissions may take the form of:

- A report on empirical research conducted with or by English teachers or students in classrooms
- A theorised discussion of English curriculum, or of the effects of policy on English teaching, or
- Practitioner inquiries, including reflective writing that takes a scholarly and methodical approach, that elaborates or illuminates aspects of the practices of English teachers.

Submissions should be explicitly linked to issues of English teaching, pedagogy or curriculum and demonstrate familiarity with current and pertinent scholarly literature.

Articles will be considered from any context where the learning and teaching of English is framed in ways that would engage and interest a secondary English teacher. Writers should take care to relate, early in their submission, the research context for the benefit of both Australian and international readers. The journal welcomes contributions that challenge traditional ways of thinking about English and that prompt readers to entertain new ways of conceptualising English curriculum and pedagogy

Contributors are encouraged to read previous issues of *English in Australia* to get a sense of the existing and ongoing scholarly conversations in our journal. Articles that share Higher Degree Research conducted by English teachers (e.g. Ph.D. and Ed.D. research findings) are welcome.

All articles are subject to double blind peer review by at least two reviewers. This means that the identity of the author is not divulged to the reviewers, nor are the reviewers' names revealed to the author.

Please refer to the following guidelines:

1. All articles should be submitted via Scholastica: https://english-in-australia.scholasticahq.com/
2. Recommended length of articles for publication is between 5000 and 7000 words (including references).
3. Ensure your name is removed from the article, including from the document properties.
4. All submissions should be typed with double spacing in an easy to read font (e.g. Times New Roman or Calibri, 11–12 point) with a 2.5 cm margin on all sides.
5. Your submission should begin with an abstract of 100–150 words that succinctly summarises the research: context; design or methodology; and findings.
6. All references should conform to the American Psychological Association (APA) style. Please consult the *APA Publication Manual*, 7th edition, or any guide to APA referencing available through university library websites.
7. Submissions are expected to have a high standard of written English. Please ensure that you have carefully edited and proofread your submission. Articles submitted with a poor standard of written English, style problems or inaccurate/missing references will be returned to the author for revision before being considered for blind review.
8. Where possible, avoid footnotes. Usually it is possible to incorporate them into the text. Where they cannot be avoided, they should be numbered with a superscript and listed at the end of the article (endnotes).
9. It is the responsibility of authors to seek copyright clearance for any materials quoted, as required.
10. It is the responsibility of authors to ensure that all required ethics approvals and relevant permissions have been received prior to the submission of an article for review. Please ensure that a statement about ethical issues appears in articles that include data collected from or about humans, including any pertinent information about approvals or permissions.
11. It is expected that a clear statement about the implications of the research for English education policy and/or practice appears in either the Introduction or Conclusion section of your article.
12. Please include in Scholastica a separate file with your full name and institutional affiliation for publication, and a 50-word biographical description.
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You can expect feedback from the reviewers and editor to help you shape your work effectively. Please feel free to contact the Editor or members of the Editorial team to discuss any contribution which you may be considering.

Although *English in Australia* is predominantly a curriculum research and practice journal, occasionally poems and short texts of other genres relevant to the themes and readership of the journal are also published. Such pieces should be relevant to the lives and work of English teachers and students and be accompanied by a short (300–800 word) abstract or reflection. Please email the Editor regarding submissions of this type.

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Editorial

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Introduction

This non-themed issue is the final issue of the journal under the title *English in Australia*. From the next issue, the journal will be known as the *Australian Journal of English Education*.

The journal has always been about more than just English teaching in Australia, it has always been interested in English education in many settings outside Australia. Over the years the journal has included articles about the shape of subject English and English teaching in various educational jurisdictions, as well as global and local concerns and developments, and international scholars have been constant and critical contributors to the journal. A change in the title of our journal had to include consideration of whether to retain the word *Australia* as one of our defining identifiers. We believe that the change to the *Australian Journal of English Education* better reflects what has always been the broader professional project of the journal, while retaining its specifically Australian sense of location.

English in Australia

With this Editorial we acknowledge the well-recognised and respected role *English in Australia* has played in the discourse of English teaching in Australia since its first issue in 1965. In its nearly 60-year history, almost synchronous with the establishment of the national professional association of English teachers, the Australian Association of the Teaching of English (AATE), *English in Australia* has provided a venue for an extraordinary range of work in scholarly, teacher-researcher, pedagogical practice, and reflective modes. The new name of the journal is designed to continue the link to the association that publishes the journal, the Australian Association for the Teaching of English (AATE), as well as encourage transnational and international connections that reflect the global conversations and collaborations more indicative of the current and future scenes of English teaching. Moving forward as the *Australian Journal of English Education* our goal is that audiences and readers will continue to recognise the labour of this journal is undertaken in Australia, but in turning away from the positionality of a title focused on English *in* Australia, we aim to signal our openness to scholarship about dilemmas, debates and concerns facing current contemporary English educators in Australia *and elsewhere*.

***English* Education?**

Coincident with this shift in the journal's name and renewed focus on scholarship about and from beyond Australia, the context of English teaching in Australia is undergoing some radical challenges that necessitate new perspectives on the core educational role of English. In the Garth Boomer address given in Brisbane 2021, for example, Melitta Hogarth, called for the English education community to consider re-naming our school subject to reckon with our mono-lingual biases, to better recognise the plurality of Englishes in the nation and disrupt tendencies toward linguistic assimilation.

> I want to query the privileged positioning of subject English and its role in privileging the dominant norm. The subject content, the privileging of the coloniser's language, the silencing of Indigenous voices, even the naming of the subject – all work to maintain the status quo. (Hogarth, 2022, p. 5)

Critical projects reinstating Indigenous place names, acknowledging colonial legacies and questioning the role of language in the erasure of cultures were something to consider with the renaming of the journal, and the retention of 'English' is not unproblematic. Yet while Hogarth rightly signals that national agendas are inherent in the subject, as are difficult national histories that are continually reinforced by the name of the school subject, there is currently no clear alternative to the language used to define English as a subject, or the pedagogies used within it. Other related terms such as 'mother tongue' or 'L1' are similarly fraught. As such, the journal has only subtly re-framed the focus on English by more specifically describing the focus as being on the field of 'English

education', to remain recognisable to those who work within the field, either as teachers or researchers.

This does not, however, indicate stasis, or a reluctance to use language with the aim of dismantling settler colonial or nationalistic agendas. As Australian literary scholar Elizabeth McMahon notes, '[t]he issue of decolonization, including the decolonization of literary pedagogies, is immediate, fraught, and painful', and the *Australian Journal for English Education* looks to provide a location for dialogue in acknowledging the difficulties of this process, as well as developing approaches and new language to navigate the task. The new journal title signals on-going change and gives space for this conversation to emerge as a focus for future scholarship, and submissions are encouraged that engage with this wider project.

In this issue

Being non-themed, this issue of *English in Australia* allows for concerns and preoccupations to emerge from research and discussions currently in our English teaching community. The collection of papers in this edition signal that English education is at a critical moment with each contribution expressing something about what is preoccupying English teachers at this time. Emerging from the collection is a common thread of restriction. In this collection it is described as a restriction or impediment to teaching or learning in the subject that is caused by increasing methods of accountability and standardisation requirements, as well as curbed creativity for both teachers and students due to the governance of the subject at a secondary level.

Riddle's paper posits that we are in dangerous times, arguing that threats to democracy are also of concern to students. In other papers, a range of restrictions as well as pathways to greater freedom are shared, along with a recurring aim of designing education experiences that are responsive the needs of students and teachers. Dialogic approaches presented in papers by O'Mara and colleagues and Penn-Edwards and colleagues show how dialogic learning and collaborative research can serve to break down barriers between researcher, teacher, and student. Difficult or problematic research, often called for in our scholarship, can be approached using collaborative and relational methods such as those in this issue.

Centring the student in writing and assessment practices is recommended in findings by D'Netto and Scott Curwood, and Arnold and colleagues. Exploring restrictions and barriers in high stakes assessment and in assessment task sheets respectively, these papers offer ideas for greater inclusion and equity. The restrictive nature of formulaic approaches to teaching and task design is a common theme, with a significant recurring finding that teachers want to be involved in research to investigate complexities, not just be spoken to about it.

The 'perspective from the past' selected for this issue returns readers to 2008, with a paper by Rob Pope that playfully explores 'Curriculum', 'National' and 'English' as key terms in the context of what was, at the time, a new Australian Curriculum. The way educational structures are governed means that the national is always present in the context of subject English, perhaps more so than ever since the establishment of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) and the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). Pope offers an 'act of naming', encouraging us 'not regress to some image of a subject that never was' (p. 29). His concluding questions are as relevant now as ever, and with this editorial we ask anew: 'what current version of the subject 'English' do you wish to attack or defend, change or extend?' (p. 33).

Australian Journal of English Education

Moving forward, our hope is that the journal will continue, revitalised for a new era, to contribute to critical topics facing the teaching of subject English in secondary schools, as well as English studies and L1 education more broadly. Our deep interest in exploring the secondary/tertiary nexus in English education reflects the culture of AATE as a professional association, in which English teachers, English teacher educators, and scholars in English and literary studies associate in an all-inclusive professional community to share expertise and experience. In the context of seemingly perpetual literacy and reading 'wars', an entrenched neo-liberal culture of managerialism and surveillance, pressing social justice needs, and a rapidly shifting technological landscape, it is as important now as ever to collectively commit to nurturing continued scholarship by, with and for English educators.

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True Histories

From 'Little Things': Incorporating True Histories into Subject English

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With: Cassandra Alpium, Meaghan Beaucaire, Roxene Beech, Brittany Bell, Rebekkah Cranson, Tim Delphine, Paul Garner, Erin Horton, Jennifer Kernahan, Catherine Milvain, Alicia O'Keefe, Martina Polaskova, Douglas Rowell, Stephanie Savopoulos, Benjamin Taylor, Kelvin Wong, Melanie Whelan, Leteasha Yamada, Michael Ziemer

Abstract: The Australian Curriculum provides a warrant for all subject English teachers to enact the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures Cross-curriculum priority (CCP). This priority is 'designed for all students to engage in reconciliation, respect, and recognition of the world's oldest continuous living cultures' (ACARA, n.d.-a). This paper provides an example of how Ziggy Ramo's video text *Little Things* might be used to achieve some of the subject-specific aims of the English Curriculum while embedding the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP in subject English. This paper is written by pre-service teachers and teacher educators working together out of university campuses located on Wurundjeri and Wathaurong Country.

Keywords: teaching multimodal texts, subject English, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cross-curriculum priority, pre-service teaching, text study, multimodal text, music video

Introduction

The Australian Curriculum provides a warrant for all subject English teachers to enact the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures Cross-curriculum priority (CCP). This priority is 'designed for all students to engage in reconciliation, respect, and recognition of the world's oldest continuous living cultures' (ACARA, n.d.-a). In this paper we provide an example of how a video text might be used to achieve some of the subject-specific aims of the English Curriculum while embedding the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP in subject English. This paper is written by pre-service teachers and teacher educators working together out of university campuses located on Wurundjeri and Wathaurong Country.

We enter this study knowing that there has been critique of the CCP for not acknowledging the ontological depth and embeddedness of Indigenous Knowledges (Lowe et al., 2021) and not taking seriously the intersections of knowledge and complex convergences of Indigenous and Settler systems of knowledge construction (Nakata, 2019). Additionally, we recognise that including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian content through a CCP, as opposed to a standalone subject, leaves the content of a CCP not reportable, making teachers and school leaders unaccountable for their enactment of the CCP, which is dependent on the outcomes of the discipline knowledges (e.g., Mathematics, Science etc.) of the curriculum (Maxwell et al., 2018). This structure leaves the content of the CCP at risk of re-enacting the settler colonialism that works against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, which are 'atomised' (Lowe et al., 2021) around the

curriculum documents. Further, the structure of the CCP leaves its inclusion in the enacted curriculum 'at the discretion of teachers' (Salter & Maxwell, 2016, p. 309). The optionality of the CCP could reinstate the curriculum as a project of settler colonialism premised on obtaining and maintaining territory, which turns it into a process that 'eliminates large numbers of empirical natives from official reckonings' (Wolfe, 2006, p. 402).

In subject English, studying high-quality literary texts produced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors is one way to integrate complex convergences of knowledge and to embed ontological depth into the curriculum. There is a plethora of high-quality literary fiction written by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers, including some outstanding works for young adults. The AustLit BlackWords database, which records Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers and their publications, currently lists over 7,000 authors and over 25,000 publications (The University of Queensland, n.d.) This database contains biographical records, publication lists and publisher information, as well as information on works relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures or literatures and collections of full texts that can be freely used in English classrooms. Heiss (2022) articulates '20 reasons you should read blak', including the fine storytelling and reframing of language, thematic issues and high textual quality of blak literature. Heiss's chapter provides a series of arguments that English Departments can use as rationales if there is pushback from parents.

However, despite such an extensive, high-quality catalogue and an imperative to read blak, not all students are given the opportunity to study Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander texts in subject English. Research has shown that the study of texts by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers can be limited due to a lack of internal school support and prioritisation, resourcing, and teacher insecurities and professional capabilities (Worrell, 2020). Worrell's ongoing research has further identified the ways in which non-Indigenous teachers feel they do not have the ability to engage properly and in an authentic manner with text selection. The research found that teachers were 'coming up against a theoretical pitfall of representing a group which they don't belong to, which is clearly causing them some grief and tension' (Worrell, 2022), but that they did not have the same difficulty when approaching other texts from other times and places.

The purpose of this paper is to provide an example of how the complexities of the text *Little Things* by Ziggy Ramo can be analysed in subject English classrooms. Ziggy Ramo has family connections to the Nyikina people from the Kimberley. As an Aboriginal artist and activist whose artistic work focuses on the ongoing impacts of colonisation and systemic racism on Indigenous peoples in Australia, his text provides subject English teachers with an opportunity to examine the true histories of Australia while negotiating a rich and confronting cultural text. The music video is an excellent choice for study in the English classroom. It is freely available and fits into the sweet spot of not being the 'owned music' choice of young people, but still relatable to and listenable by them.

Our positionality

The lead authors of the text invited other lecturers from the unit Language, Literacies and Learning, as well as all the students who received a High Distinction for the first assignment, to join them in writing this paper. Language, Literacies and Learning is a compulsory unit for pre-service teachers across early childhood, primary and secondary courses in the Master of Teaching. Lecturers and students had already played and analysed the music video in class as part of our weekly Acknowledgement of Country program, where each week we focused on different understandings in the Acknowledgement using diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-authored texts. A logical extension of embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content in the unit was to take the opportunity to collaboratively write a paper that pushes against the boundaries of the Australian Curriculum and raises important questions about the settler colonialism that is potentially embedded in the national curriculum. Sixteen pre-service teachers and four lecturers are co-authors of this paper, including two Aboriginal authors. We have engaged in a deeper conversation with the text and each other through the collaborative writing. Modelling allyship in the collaborative authoring of the paper brought together authors of different heritages and academic positionalities. This collaborative authorship is yet another site of the attempt to unsettle settler colonialism that has been a feature of the unit.

We have presented our findings as a walkthrough of the video using a 3D model to illuminate the

text's construction. We use Green's (1988) 3D model of literacy and its operational, cultural, and critical dimensions to frame our analysis of Ramo's text. This model works extremely well to examine the intertextual linkages between the text's meanings across the model's three dimensions. We then provide integrated analyses of six short sections in the video to illustrate the ways in which the 3D model can be used in subject English to analyse a text. We also show how the study of *Little Things* maps to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CCP in subject English.

One of the limitations of this paper is that we are using a settler-colonial framework for analysis of a text that presents literacy as a multi-dimensional product. The model has been used to deconstruct the social, cultural, and historical discourses embedded in this text. The 3D model of literacy is based on a settler-colonial paradigm of text construction and deconstruction embedded in settler cultural heritage. We have used this model because it is a common frame that pre-service teachers will encounter when teaching literacy. By applying this model to a deconstruction of Ramo's text, we are foregrounding aspects of what needs to be learned, the importance of building relationships and changing discourses (Burgess, Fricker & Weuffen 2022). We acknowledge that the application of the 3D model of literacy to Ramo's video might be a stepping stone to embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander frames of analysis in the English Curriculum.

Little Things in the English classroom

Ziggy Ramo's music video *Little Things* builds on the Kevin Carmody and Paul Kelly song 'From Little Things Big Things Grow'. 'From Little Things' has been widely studied in Australian English classes, often alongside the study of other texts. In *Little Things*, Ramo has written a new song that repeats the original chorus, with Paul Kelly singing and playing guitar. In discussing his collaboration with Kelly, Ramo said, 'I feel honoured to be given permission by Paul Kelly and Kevin Carmody to revisit the story from another perspective … *Little Things* doesn't fit into a genre, it doesn't really fit into today's musical landscape, but this art felt urgent, and I wanted to share it with the world' (Newstead, 2021).

In *Little Things*, Ramo disrupts the narrative of settler colonialism. This disruption comes with terminology of 'genocide', 'invasion' and 'victims', all terms not mentioned in the Australian Curriculum: English or in the content connected to the CCP. Without these terms, the Australian Curriculum risks indoctrinating students into a settler-colonialist paradigm of history, and their absence raises questions about the responsibilities educators have in raising student consciousness through open-mindedness (Taylor, 2017). The release of the song coincides with the changing consciousness of invaders, four years after the Uluru Statement from the Heart emerged from the 2017 First Nations National Constitutional Convention at Uluru. The Uluru Statement from the Heart (2017) is an invitation for all Australians to walk together and engage in a broader consciousness of truth, treaty, and voice. Studying the high-quality, multimodal text *Little Things* is an opportunity to raise student consciousness through an analysis of the representations of history through texts. The multiple channels in multimodal texts provide opportunities for truth-telling, and Ramo's multimodal text is part of this textual landscape.

The 3D model of literacy

In this paper, we use the 3D model of literacy (Green, 1988; Green & Beavis, 2012) to analyse *Little Things*. This complex text carries meaning through visual, audio, gestural and spatial, and linguistic modes of communication. We overlay these modes with the dimensions of the 3D model: the operational-technical, the cultural-discursive and the critical-reflexive (Green & Beavis, 2012, p. 37). The operational-technical dimension considers the technical competence and functional skills needed to make meaning from a text; the cultural-discursive dimension considers the cultural meanings and contexts, and the languages used; and the critical-reflexive dimension considers how power (both structural and otherwise) is produced within and through the text. The components can be examined individually or simultaneously (as there are usually overlapping components), but not sequentially (O'Mara et al., 2019). The model was developed to 'contribute to educators' understanding of the socially situated nature of literacy, specifically in relation to school learning (Green, 1988, p. 156). We selected this model to emphasise the importance of viewing, and in turn teaching, the interrelated dimensions of literacy holistically (Green, 1988, p. 160). Texts change and teachers' pedagogy encompasses a broader sense of addressing not just discrete skills, but a holistic concept of literacy and knowledge of text (Durrant & Green, 2000).

Acknowledgement of Country

The video's first image is an Acknowledgement of Country that reads,

> *Acknowledgement of Country:* The Sydney Opera House honours our First Nations by fostering a shared sense of belonging for all Australians and we acknowledge the Gadigal people, traditional custodians of the land on which the opera house stands.

This Acknowledgement of Country can be analysed using the three dimensions of Green's model. Operationally, the text appears on the screen in white font on a black background. The traditional name of the Gadigal people exemplifies the practice of recognising proper nouns in terminology and place names. Acknowledgements of Country provided in English have the name of the lands and the peoples in the Aboriginal language of the land that is acknowledged. In the cultural-discursive dimension, the Acknowledgement in the Ramo text recognises the shared belonging that all Australians have to the land on which the Sydney Opera House stands. Through the critical lens of the 3D model, we can see that Acknowledgements of Country forward an agenda of visibility, reclamation and sovereignty that disrupt the elimination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in narratives of settler-colonial projects. When non-Indigenous people engage with an Acknowledgement of Country, it is one small step to becoming a 'bad settler' (Clark et al., 2016, p. 7). Bad settlers advocate for projects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sovereignty, unlike the ongoing project of settler colonialism which is entangled with projects of elimination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their custodianship of Country. And yet, despite Ramo's described 'special relationship' with the Opera House (Sydney Opera House, 2021), it is interesting to consider to what extent the Gadigal people, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives more broadly, were and are involved in the design, construction, and management of the Opera House itself.

Doctrine of Discovery

As the music video begins, we see the words 'little things' appear over an image of the water of Sydney Harbour heading towards the Sydney Opera House. The cultural symbolism is one of protest, as the Opera House is an icon of modern Australia and has been a lightning rod for protests in recent years, for a range of social justice and environmental causes (ABC News, 2009). Our analysis of the operational construction of the text points to the camera work. The use of a long shot of the city of Sydney works to make the Opera House initially appear insignificant, a 'little thing' in the skyline. The camera then zooms in, panning towards it so that it becomes central in the shot. The camera finally zooms in on Ziggy Ramo, standing atop the sails of the Opera House looking like a Captain steering his ship through the harbour, ready to make his claim. Ramo cuts a defiant figure, and as the camera looks up at him, the view imbues him with power as he declaims atop the highest sail. Tubowgule, the site of the Opera House (Sydney Opera House Trust, 2022), was traditionally a gathering place for storytelling.

He calls us to 'Gather round people and I'll tell you a story …'. He begins his story with the arrival of First Fleet 'armed' with the authority of the Doctrine of Discovery. He explains:

> It's how today Australia claims Terra Nullius
> Cause on that paper, the Pope did write
> That you're only human if you've been saved by Christ
> And if there are no Christians in sight
> The land you stumble on becomes your God-given right

Ramo's critique of the 1493 Doctrine of Discovery raises the consciousness of invaders living without a critique of a Papal Decree that defined a fully human person to be a Christian, thus creating a moral justification that enabled the genocide of non-Christian First Nations peoples. Pascoe (2018) describes how the

> application of theft and violence required some sophistry so that it could be squared with the Christian God's Ten Commandments. The logic went that murder and dispossession could be labelled 'just wars' and applied for the benefit of the murdered and dispossessed. (p. 235)

It is one small piece of paper (a 'little thing') that has had a profound impact (a 'big thing') on Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In Ramo's video, the audience is positioned to engage in the critique of this Papal Decree and the ongoing legacies of colonisation that are still enacted today, which connect to the critical dimension of the 3D model. In this instance, Ramo's critique of the Papal Decree reveals how many Australians are not reading history critically, resulting in the ongoing arrangements

being taken for granted. As true histories displace settler-colonial narratives in Australia, teachers will be enabled 'to feel confident to start thinking about the curriculum implications' (O'Mara 2006. p. 47). The 3D model provides teachers with a discursive mandate to mediate truth in classrooms.

Ramo maintains direct eye contact with the viewers, speaking a truth of perceived heroes, 'invaders' and a 'falsified' historical narrative. The message is intensified with his strong choreographed gestures, which overlay the critical dimension of the 3D model with the spoken words. When he makes the Sign of the Cross as he sings 'saved by Christ', he is emphasising the symbolic violence of the enacted practices of the Church as the enabler of this genocide. From atop the Opera House, his gesturing like a colonial explorer statue as he mentions Captain James Cook unsettles the dominant cultural paradigm of Australian history.

Destruction of 500 nations

After bringing our attention to the law used by invaders to justify their actions, Ramo homes in on the repercussion of *what* the law meant to the 'five hundred nations' – 'invasion', 'destruction', and 'genocide'. In the cultural-discursive mode, Ramo is introducing viewers to the vocabulary of true histories which challenge sanitised and euphemised versions of history. As authors we did a search for the word 'invasion' in the Australian Curriculum and found that the only time it was used was in History at Year 9 level, in 'discussing the contestability of particular historical terms in the context of Australia's history such as 'settlement', 'invasion', 'colonisation' (ACARA, n.d.-b). In the Victorian Curriculum, the word 'invasion' comes up four times, referring to Germany's invasion of Poland, invasion games in creative and critical thinking, the Norman invasion of England, and the Khmer Empire and the Tai invasion (VCAA, n.d.). The word 'genocide' is not in the Victorian Curriculum. The absence of this terminology in the Victorian Curriculum to describe the violent realities of the ongoing settler-colonial project creates the conditions necessary for students to be indoctrinated into a permanent amnesia of history. School becomes a validation of settlement, promoting the theft of land and normalising policies of elimination (Moodie, 2018).

Martin (2013) describes the underlying amnesia in Australia's colonial representations of its reality as having

> a direct impact on the cultural foundations of Australia that have negative implications upon a cohesive cultural identity. It is through such a colonisation of terra nullius that cultural amnesia evolves and has an impact on the value given to Indigenous culture which is predicated on 'country'. Apart from this amnesia about the ground of settlement, land is also seen as a type of 'other', land is something to be controlled and defined by the use of power (pp. 195–196).

With reference to the critical dimension, Ramo is problematising the absence of the term 'genocide' from the settler-colonial historical narrative. He points at the camera, challenging the viewer to question dominant knowledge and beliefs around legal rights juxtaposed with the reality of merciless invasion. Gesturing with five fingers, while verbally stating 'five hundred nations', is an operational move that reinforces the critical message of the 'destruction of 500 nations'.

Ramo describes how this decimation of culture planted the seeds that led to the Stolen Generations. In doing so, he critically highlights the extent to which Aboriginal people were dehumanised, paving the way for the Stolen Generations policies to be enacted. Culturally, Ramo demonstrates his connection to Country by using a metaphor from the natural world to frame these events. Operationally, he mimes the metaphor, his actions emphasising his words. He then adopts a crucifixion pose (see Figure 1 below), highlighting the continued persecution of Aboriginal people through their 'mass incarceration'. Interestingly, this imagery also resembles Brazil's 'Christ the Redeemer' statue, a Christian symbol of hope and freedom from captivity.

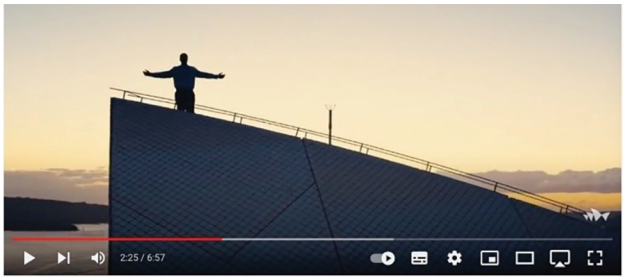

Figure 1. Ziggy Ramo's crucifix pose on the Sydney Opera House

Ramo uses footage of abandoned buildings to represent the decay of the settler-colonial state. In the critical dimension of the 3D model, viewers are positioned to recognise that colonisers used terra nullius to justify invasion (Pascoe, 2018) and that Ramo's reference to 'resistance' is connected to broader struggles for greater rights for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

peoples – including having the historical record corrected. These deeper critical meanings, produced through the visuals and accompanying lyrics, are only accessible with the prerequisite cultural knowledges (O'Mara, 2012). These cultural knowledges can be taught or reinforced alongside an analysis of Ramo's text.

You fought for them, but you don't fight for me

In Verse 4, Ramo continues to sing of truth and genocide, offering glimmers of hope of a better, more informed future through reconciliation and truth-telling. He implores the audience to acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, to consider the impact of these wrongs, and to think about what role each of us can play in the process of reconciliation. While the chorus is sung, the camera pans down a dimly lit hallway towards an earthy glow providing us with the visual metaphor of reclamation. Emerging from the dark hallway is a scene of daylight, where vivid greens of new plant growth and insects are thriving against the background of a decaying ship hull. Culturally, these images of the decay of the colonised space 'abandoned by Western society … being reclaimed by Country' (Sydney Opera House, 2021) provide symbols of hope and growth.

Analysing this section using the 3D model, the three elements can be seen to be working together to construct a visual metaphor of resistance to the settler-colonial project, pointing to the strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their cultures despite the atrocities that were inflicted by the invaders. The image of the plants budding from the ruins of the colonial inscription connects viewers to the use of 'from little things, big things grow'. This metaphor illuminates the steps society can take towards healing the wounds of our past and working together to create new ways forward. Ramo invites viewers to critically consider why Aboriginal histories have been distorted and whose interests are ultimately being served by this distortion. Educational institutions have a responsibility to teach future generations about all aspects of history, rather than discarding the truth due to the interests of settler governance (Rudolph & Hogarth, 2020). And yet colonial institutions, including in the education sector, have a vested interest in maintaining nationalistic fictions that distort historical truths. The systemic and structural limitations of school in Australia are left unresolved when students only experience superficial encounters with Indigenous Knowledges (Fricker, 2022).

'I see Genocide'

Figure 2. Ziggy Ramo standing with arms stretched by his side

Using the 3D model in this section of the video enables a deeper literary analysis. Operationally, Ramo normalises the term 'genocide' in his critique of settler-colonial history. He simultaneously uses disruptive language and questions invader cultural norms of silencing while adopting an open, almost plaintive stance and tone as a bridge to the true histories of Australia. Ramo parrots the settler-colonial trope that Aboriginal people in Australia should just 'move on' from the past, and then rhetorically asks viewers, 'Move on to what?' Again, this repetition and shaping operationally serves to draw our attention to the phrases that settler colonists use to subjugate generations of trauma-induced violence. 'Just move on' is a phrase that is hurled at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by those who want to avoid addressing historical issues of dispossession and oppression of Indigenous Australians (Palmer et al., 2022). Moving on comes with a culture of not recognising or fully resolving past atrocities in Australia. Ramo critiques this idea of figuratively 'moving on' by shifting it to the literal question of 'Move on to what?' given that the land has all been stolen. Moving on is evidence of a continued logic of elimination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their truths. Wolfe (2006) argues the logic of elimination is present in the powerful settler-colonial structures of today as well as the events of genocide in the past. Moving on attempts to disrupt the history of invasion, the effects of which have never stopped. Ramo reminds us, 'I still remember, have you forgot'. Again, the operational aspects of the text work to displace accepted cultural norms, critiquing them in the process.

Figure 3. Ziggy Ramo with his fist to his chest

Note. The spoken words accompanying this still are *Gurindji inspired us, to keep on fighting.*

Ramo then makes an intertextual reference to the original song 'From Little Things Big Things Grow' when he states that 'Vincent Lingiari, knew others were rising, Gurindji inspired us, to keep on fighting'. Lingiari and the Gurindji people staged the Wave Hill walk-off and were key figures in the early land rights movement (National Museum of Australia, 2022). Ramo reinforces his words with his fist on his chest, conveying solidarity with Lingiari's and the Wave Hill workers' defiance.

Figure 4. A long shot of Ramo with arms stretched out by his side

Note. The spoken words accompanying this still are 'So call it Australia, go on call it what you like, I just call it how I see it, and I see genocide'

In the next scene, we see Ramo from a wide-angled view, his arms outstretched, declaring 'So call it Australia, go on call it what you like'. Next, Ramo proclaims, 'I just call it how I see it, and I see genocide', a reference to truth-telling, a key plank of reconciliation (Reconciliation NSW, 2021). There is a compelling case for historical genocide-like activity in Australia (Sentance, 2022).

Note. The spoken words accompanying these stills are 'From little things, big things grow…'

With the return of the chorus '*from little things, big things grow*', we see images of churches, ships, and buildings (symbols of British colonialism) being overgrown by vegetation. This might be a metaphor for colonialism in decline, being slowly but inexorably reclaimed by Country.

The story of 'so-called Australia'

The 3D analysis of this section highlights the textual moves that Ramo makes to rename the continent, which call into question the validity of settler-Australian representations of the nation-state. Operationally, Ramo shapes this section of the video with intertextual references through visuals/gestures and the words of the song, reaching back both to earlier sections of the song video and to cultural representations beyond this work. There are three intertextual references that Ramo uses to unsettle 'so-called Australia'. The first raises questions of sovereignty connected to the naming of Australia as such. By saying 'so-called Australia', Ramo is making links to activists such as Thunig (2022), who have adopted this phrase as a language-labelling project of sovereign rights discourses. So-called Australia critiques the settler-colonial project of overlooking the 'so much more' in Australia as a nation-state and ignoring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people stand in their law to resist the continuing projects of invasion and elimination.

The second intertextual reference is when Ramo pounds his chest and throws a salute to Black Power with the words 'We know where we stand/we stand in our law'. This raised, clenched fist has become a global symbol of resistance against oppression, including the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020 that were adopted in Australia (Mounter, 2020). Operationally, the image of Ramo's message is shot through a low-angle camera

Figure 5. Stills of overgrown colonial structures

shot that visually positions the message with power and sovereignty atop the Opera House. This calls the invaders to recognise the importance of lore in the enactment of resistance. Such lore informs Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander belief systems and complex kinship systems, including resource management, decision-making, communication, learning and development of cultural traditions (Dudgeon et al., 2021). Operationally, the homonym of lore/law has cultural-discursive meanings that cut across the histories of Australia and the ways in which sovereignty is organised.

Ramo heightens the link to the original Paul Kelly and Kevin Carmody song with the third intertextual reference, this time a visual reference to the 'from little things big things grow' moment. Closely following a wide-angled shot that includes the Australian flag flying on the Sydney Harbour Bridge, in a pale blue shirt reminiscent of Lingiari's, he pours red sand into the wind in a gesture that mirrors Whitlam's pouring red Gurindji sand into Lingiari's hand in 1975 at Wave Hill. This event became a catalyst for subsequent land rights movements (Lawford & Zillman, 2018). Durrant and Green (2000, p. 99) note that the 'critical dimension' of the 3D model allows 'explicit consideration' of context, history, and power. Ramo revisits the context, history, and power of Lingiari's powerful resistance as part of this intertextual referencing between the two songs.

Figure 6. A Very Long Shot of ramo standing on the crest of the Opera House

Note. The spoken words accompanying this still are '*Now you can hear me, can you understand?'*

In the following scene, Ramo is now a distant figure. He asks, 'Now that you hear me, can you understand?', echoing the call of the Uluru Statement from the Heart, the Aboriginal Voice to Parliament, and the tenets of Reconciliation Australia (Reconciliation NSW, 2021). The first statement within Goal 1 is: provide all young Australians with access to high-quality education that is inclusive and free from any form of discrimination.

Ramo concludes by stating 'there will never be justice on our stolen land', which is possibly an allusion to Treaty (Reconciliation NSW, 2021) or the Stolen Generations (AIATSIS, 2022). The pouring of the sand is an internal reference to his earlier lyrics, foregrounding the injustice on stolen land: 'There will never be justice on our stolen land'. Instead of the sand going from the hand of a powerful settler to the custodian of the land as it did in the original video from Kelly and Carmody, Ramo's sand blows in the wind above the sails of the Opera House. Culturally, the red sand is strong symbolism of Stanner's observation in 1963 that 'Every fence in Australia encloses land that was once the sole or shared possession of a particular group of Aboriginal people. There are virtually no exceptions to that statement' (p. 50), with fencing representing a key aspect of coloniality (Mayes, 2020). An analysis of Ramo's gesture conveys meaning across critical, operational, and cultural dimensions. He points to a past event of land rights, but viewing that event in the year 2022, we need to face a powerful truth that almost no stolen land has been returned. It is also important to note that the very concept that land was 'stolen' fails to acknowledge that Indigenous people never 'owned' land in the manner of Western cultures, but rather were kin with Country. If anything, Indigenous people were 'owned' by land, rather than vice versa (Paradies, 2020).

Casualties of a war that never ended

In this section, Ramo fades the music out, operationally lulling the audience into a sense that the song is ending. The audience is then shocked back to attention with a crash of sound, operating as a reminder that the fight for justice, like the song, is not yet over. Ramo, with a distinct echoing refrain to his voice, states that 'since 1991 … four hundred and forty-one … Indigenous Australians … have died in custody'. At the time of writing this article, 527 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have died in custody since the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (Australian Institute of Criminology, n.d.). This coda to the music video provides a critical analysis of the ongoing nature of the original systemic violence, with its statement of current statistics, linking these contemporary atrocities discursively to the ongoing war. His message in this section highlights the ongoing casualties that are the result of government policies and practices of elimination that contribute to these statistics today. At the Don Dale Youth Detention Centre, despite the Royal Commission, the findings are still not resolved

and successive Australian Governments have yet to enact the recommendations.

Ramo combines multimodal aspects of music, visuals, and language to achieve his purpose. Rising to walk at the phrase 'but we are not dead yet' signals his continued agency in the midst of a national shame not fully recognised by invaders. The camera follows behind him as we are invited to follow his lead. He affirms Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resilience and sovereignty through the rallying cry 'Always was; always will be; sovereignty was never ceded'. Accompanied by a Yidaki, Ramo stares across the water as a ship appears at the harbour's heads. He then casts us back to 1788 with the invading forces entering Botany Bay. The narrative commonly told from the invaders' perspective is critically inverted, with the viewer taking on a Gadigal perspective on the approaching fleet. By employing multimodal techniques to communicate the perspective of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, this text engages viewers in the continued fight for truth-telling in Australia. We are seeing this arrival with the knowledge that this moment leads to ongoing genocidal acts and the destruction of land.

Conclusion

Text selection is a perennial issue for English teachers and English faculties in schools. For teachers who are hesitant to infuse the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CCP in subject English, our analysis of Ramo's video using the 3D model provides a dialogical space for teachers and students to educate about the true histories of Australia. This article is important for English teachers, pre-service teachers, schools and academics as they consider how to authentically incorporate the stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders into classrooms, and this article encourages them to considers text choices and how these are taught.

The video mediates Ramo's narrative in an engaging way using three dimensions of meaning-making. This analysis of the video has demonstrated the ongoing legacies of invasion. Wolfe (2006) has identified that 'When invasion is recognised as a structure, rather than an event, its history does not stop – or more to the point, become relatively trivial – when it moves on from the era of frontier homicide' (p. 402). Ramo has walked us through several ways of telling the other side, including recasting heroes as invaders, linking perspective lining to ongoing structures, questioning the continued enactment of policies that foster elimination through high levels of child removal, incarceration, assimilation, the destruction of sacred sites, and the erasure of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and practices, as well as a lack of content about the true histories of Australia and non-usage of explicit terminology to describe genocide in the school curriculum. A great text is a gift to English teachers. Selecting *Little Things* for study in your class opens the possibilities of a rich engagement with aspects of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CCP as you unravel the beautifully rendered text and unsettle yourself and your class with Ramo's question: Can there ever be justice on this stolen land?

Ramo's video is a robust example of the need to read more blak (Heiss, 2022) in the English Curriculum. Heiss gives 20 reasons to read blak and cites that the BlackWords database has 'grown to include more than 7000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers and storytellers' (2022, p. 322). A review of recommended English reading lists for senior school found that explicit inclusion of Aboriginal voice and cultures is limited (Scarcella & Burgess, 2019, p. 21). Texts examine interactions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal protagonists but lack an authentic Aboriginal viewpoint about contemporary issues of culture, power, values, and experiences. Of six commonly used English texts, only two, *Bran Nue Dae* and *Yolngu Boy*, provide an exploration of lived experience *within* Aboriginal communities (Scarcella & Burgess, 2019, p. 24). *Little Things* provides an opportunity to read more blak in a multimodal medium. Using the 3D model, teachers and students can also analyse texts and describe how they disrupt ideologies that are bound in ontological and epistemological ways of experiencing, perceiving, and sensing the world. The analysis of this text therefore provides a rich opportunity for analysis of a complex literary text as well as forwarding a social justice agenda. Ramo (Sydney Opera House, 2021) states that he made this video to counter apathy and make people face the truth. Unfortunately, as he reminds us, social justice opportunities in so-called Australia are limited, as there can never be justice on the stolen lands harbouring the English classrooms. It would be foolish to think that an analysis of the text can be decoupled from the ongoing oppression that underpins the opportunity for this analysis.

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Melissa Lucashenko said in 2023 that Australians need to do some 'truth-listening'. We are a group of academics and pre-service teachers from Deakin University, who see truth-listening and truth-telling as a core part of our job as educators.

English in Dangerous Times

English in Dangerous Times: Towards a More Democratic Future Through English Teaching and Learning

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Abstract: English teachers have long stood at the intersection of helping young people to read the 'word' and read the 'world' through rich learning experiences that tap into diverse literature, literacy and language practices with purpose, creativity and flair. However, given the complex set of crises facing young people, English curriculum and pedagogy need to actively support them in understanding their engagements with the world through close examination of texts in their contexts, and exploring the effects of those texts on themselves and others. As such, this conceptual paper argues for the central role of English teaching and learning in the project of reimagining schooling and society in more democratic, inclusive and sustainable ways. This paper was developed from invited presentations delivered to the 2022 English Teachers Association of Queensland State Conference and the 2022 Victorian Association for the Teaching of English State Conference.

Keywords: democratic education, crisis, social justice, inclusivity, sustainability, democracy

Introduction

It has become increasingly clear that young people who inhabit high school English classrooms across Australia and around the world are facing a future of extraordinary complexity, with multiple intersecting global crises coming together in ways that we do not yet fully comprehend. Indeed, crisis has become the new normal (Gardels & Berggruen, 2019; Lipscy, 2020), with cascading effects from increasing social and economic inequality, growing political instability and geopolitical conflict, rapid urbanisation and the depletion of waterways and food sources, globalisation, pandemics, collapsing ecosystems, and the increasing severity and instability of climate systems. Added to this is the creeping tide of fascism and authoritarianism, which are gaining new footholds all over the world. There can be little doubt that 'we are living in dangerous times' (Riddle & Apple, 2019, p. 1).

In addition to the growing set of complex crises already facing young people, a recent report published by the CSIRO (Naughtin et al., 2022) has outlined seven significant global megatrends that will affect society over the coming decades. These trends included the need to adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change, the increased demands placed on healthcare and social institutions, the effects of AI and automation across the full spectrum of human life, continuing digital disruption, rapidly escalating geopolitical tensions, and the urgent need to develop innovative and sustainable responses to addressing shortages of food, water and mineral resources.

Sardar (2010) has suggested that the contemporary global context can be described as *postnormal*, a state 'characterised by uncertainty, rapid change, realignment of power, upheaval and chaotic behaviour' (p. 435). The postnormal condition is experienced through the

interplay between three major elements: complexity, chaos and contradiction. The concept of postnormal times provides a useful overlay for how we might think through the accelerating pace of change and increasing sense of crisis during this century. These changes and crises are neither incremental nor isolated, but simultaneous and interconnected, and it is young people who will bear the biggest cost. The COVID-19 global pandemic provides a salient example of a postnormal phenomenon because it combines the key features of postnormativity – crisis, complexity and contradiction – alongside the speed, scope, scale, and simultaneity of rapidly accelerating change. Writing about the pandemic, Schwab and Malleret (2020) claimed,

> We will be dealing with its fallout for years, and many things will change forever. It is bringing economic disruption of monumental proportions, creating a dangerous and volatile period on multiple fronts – politically, socially, geopolitically – raising deep concerns about the environment and also extending the reach (pernicious or otherwise) of technology into our lives. (p. 11)

Given the increasing social – and indeed, existential – challenges facing young people, there is an urgent need to reconfigure the political, economic and social apparatus of contemporary liberal–democratic societies. As part of this reconfiguration, attention needs to be given to the formal and informal practices of education, including schooling and its role in building democracy (Aly et al., 2022; Apple et al., 2022; Riddle, 2022; Riddle & Apple, 2019). However, to reach a point of hope in our democratic future requires asking serious questions about the formal practices and institutions of education in Australia. We need to understand why social, economic and educational inequality continue to widen between students living in urban, rural and remote regions, between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, and between students who attend well-resourced, leafy green schools and those who attend schools that are under-resourced and have high staff turnover and large populations of culturally and linguistically diverse students, children living in out-of-home care and young people living with disability. We need to ask questions about why school, which kind of school, for whom, and for what reasons. We need to consider our own experiences as teachers and researchers and our cultural knowledges and assumptions about the world, including our politics and ethics as educators and community members.

Democracy has been a continuing challenge for curriculum in Australian schooling (Green, 2018), not simply through the teaching of civics and citizenship education but through how it runs across multiple subject areas, including English. There has long been a tangled relationship between democracy and education, in which school curriculum must be considered a key part of the democratic project (Reid & Thomson, 2003). As such, we need to consider the interplay of English curriculum and pedagogy within the context of crisis and to better understand how English teachers might support young people to become critical, creative and collaborative members of society, working together to build a more inclusive, sustainable and democratic future.

Schooling *for* democracy in the twenty-first century

A 2019 piece for the *Wall Street Journal* claimed that 'we are now at a precarious moment. Democracy faces a global crisis … over the past decade, one in six democracies has failed. Today only a bare majority of the world's larger states remain democracies' (Diamond, 2019, para. 2). There is a rising antidemocratic sentiment apparent across the world, evident through the increasing hold of protofascist groups and neofascist political parties in formerly liberal–democratic European and American states, in which far-right populism mixes with racist, misogynist and anti-immigration policies, White supremacist ideologies, hatred and fear of the Other (Said, 1978), and a society increasingly segregated along socioeconomic lines.

Additionally, the effects of decades of neoliberal economic and social policymaking have placed competition and the notion of the market as the highest point of ethics, justice and truth, which are antithetical to democracy and democratic education (Apple et al., 2022). Social and economic inequality is a foundation of contemporary neoliberal–capitalist societies, and this sets up a fundamental tension with democratic modes of equality, participation and belonging. Neoliberal capitalism concentrates wealth and power in the hands of a few, while being supported by the myth of meritocracy, which favours ruling elites while excluding others, including First Nations peoples, women, refugees, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and of course the underemployed and unemployed. One of the core principles of neoliberalism is the

notion of responsibilisation, in which the systemic and structural inequalities of social, political and economic institutions, practices and systems are rendered invisible, and instead, youth are made responsible for their situation (Kelly, 2001).

There is plenty of evidence to suggest that capitalism and neoliberalism are technologies of harm (Amsler, 2015) which are making us, animals and ecosystems sick. We know that inequality is getting worse both globally and here in Australia. For example, the rising cost of living is disproportionately borne by those on lower incomes. While wages have remained low, corporate profits are higher than they have ever been. We also know that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these existing inequalities, making them wider, especially along raced, classed and national lines of disadvantage.

Adding to the harms of neoliberalism and capitalism are the influences of populism, conspiracy theories, disinformation and *post-truth* on public discourse, social and traditional modes of media and communication (Bloom & Sancino, 2019; Rosenvallon, 2017; Zakaria, 2020). Under these circumstances, 'power is all that matters when trust and truth crumble' (Vaidhyanathan, 2018, p. 13). The success of post-truth discourses such as those fuelled by Donald Trump and the conspiracy collective known as QAnon (Badham, 2021), which have proliferated fantasy narratives of ideas like the 'deep state' – in which there is a secret shadow government controlling everything (Horwitz, 2021) – should be shocking to English teachers, who are interested in critical literacy and teaching young people to be capable and discerning users of multimodal texts. Facts matter. And separating fact from fiction with the tools of critical analysis to understand language use, genre, audience and purpose has long been the purview of English teachers. It is not enough to teach young people to read the words on a page. English teachers need to teach students to read the world and understand the power of words so that they can be creative and critical in their engagement with texts in the world (Janks, 2010).

Alexander (2019) argued that post-truth discourses have proliferated on social media, which has resulted in the reduction of nuanced debate to likes/dislikes, hyperactive trolling and abuse of people with different views, and the destructive effects of fake news on truth and fact-based consensus building in politics, science and society. At the same time, there has been a narrowing of educational policy discourses in places like Australia and the UK, which seek to avoid the development of critical literacy through engagement with controversial and complex topics in favour of a narrow form of learning as knowledge acquisition (Ashbridge et al., 2022; Brennan et al., 2022; Green, 2018). Given the current neoliberal education policy context, Ashbridge et al. (2022) suggest that 'the prospect of a democratic critical literacy for both teachers and students in England appears a virtual impossibility' (p. 302). Similarly, the opportunities for a curriculum that fosters civic duty and collective activism in problems that matter to young people are foreclosed by many contemporary education policies in Australia (Brennan et al., 2022). Almost 50 years ago, Boomer (1978) argued for a negotiated curriculum with students, in which the focus would be on a more democratic modality of 'classroom practice (what happens between teachers, children and content)' (p. 17). There is a clear need to consider how negotiating curriculum with students provides opportunities to engage in rich, meaningful learning that is underpinned by principles of social justice, equity, access and meaningful learning for all students (Mills et al., 2022; Riddle et al., 2023).

Young people face enormous uncertainty and instability, with significant challenges ahead. Students who sit in classrooms now – and those who will in the years ahead – will need the skills and knowledge to address the existential threats of catastrophic climate change and ecological collapse, domestic political instability and geopolitical tensions, increasing inequality and social division, and disruptive technologies and the impacts of AI on every aspect of life. However, the dominant neoliberal order has switched an ethics of care and responsibility for young people to a market-oriented view of them as consumers and a future workforce, which has eroded the notion of education as a common good (Reid, 2002). The notion of education as a social investment in preparing young people for a diverse range of futures is replaced by the commodification of young people, the entrenchment of education as a producer of 'job-ready graduates', and the cost–benefit analysis of economic exchange value, productivity and profitability.

Neoliberal logics of market-driven approaches to education have crept into discourses of schooling through things such as data walls, effect sizes of pedagogical interventions, measuring student and cohort gain, linking performance on things like NAPLAN to teacher quality, and so on. The logics of

economics and neoliberal politics have washed across our schools and universities, replacing students with clients and infecting everything with the overreliance on metrification as a proxy for quality and meaningful outcomes.

Given this troubling context, what could and should be the response of education – and particularly of high school English teaching and learning – to the complex challenges that will face the young people who will leave school over the next 20 years? As educators – English teachers, school leaders, university lecturers – what are we supposed to do about the crises that have become a hallmark of living during the twenty-first century? Why does democracy matter, and what is the place of education, and schooling in particular, in the project of democratising society? As Wells (1920) warned over a century ago, 'human history becomes more and more, a race between education and catastrophe' (p. 1100). If the aim is to work towards a more democratic, inclusive and sustainable future – and I argue this should be our aim as a society – then educators and education have to play a central part in helping to shape society's responses to the great challenges of our time.

One possible productive response is to commit to schooling that is *for* democracy, by helping young people to become capable, critical, creative and collaborative readers, writers and thinkers (Janks, 2010) who can collectively rise to the complex challenges ahead. Rethinking the role of English curriculum is central to the task of how young people are taught to both *read the word* and *read the world* (Freire, 1983). Engaging with language, literature and literacy does not simply mean acquiring the tools for decoding and re-encoding language within particular contexts and for particular audiences, but rather learning how to use those tools critically to refashion the world.

Schooling for democracy can enable young people to meaningfully connect their curriculum learning and school experiences to the wider world, which goes well beyond a simplistic notion of schools as places that produce future workers. Through a collective commitment to the radical democratisation of schooling, we can help young people become more connected to their sense of self within communities, increase their civic participation and collective well-being, and strive towards a shared endeavour to ensure a sustained and meaningful future together on this fragile planet we call home (Riddle, 2022).

Democratic contours in the English curriculum

The work of English teachers intimately relates to the unfinished project of democracy, of growing social inclusion and of finding ways to connect communities and cultures through shared stories, knowledge, and understanding (Green, 2008; Riddle, 2022). Young people engage with the world using a diverse range of 'youth literacies' (Alvermann, 2004), including the use of hybrid, multimodal texts (Bacalja, 2021) such as texting (Zebroff, 2018) and social media (Márquez et al., 2022; Pires et al., 2021), which presents an opportunity for English teachers to meaningfully connect with them through texts and to help develop their critical and creative capacity to think and act upon the world in multiple ways (Janks, 2010; Comber, 2015). As Bacalja (2021) has argued,

> Bringing youth literacies into the English classroom offers a world of opportunity. It allows students from diverse backgrounds to bridge at-home and at-school literary identities, including the development of the critical dispositions, transferable from one context to another, necessary to participate in a democratic and global community. And, it allows teachers to broaden their own knowledge base in response to a rapidly changing textual landscape that demands new ways of thinking about and working with texts. (p. 97)

The rapidly changing textual landscape requires young people to develop critical digital literacies (Pangrazio, 2016), and as Livingston and Sefton-Green (2016) have demonstrated, there are complex factors shaping the lives and meaning-making practices of young people in the 'digital age', including how 'young people build their own meaningful worlds, how these intersect with those of others, and how they imagine their future' (p. 4). There is an inherent radicalism in teaching young people to read, to engage critically with a wide range of texts and to learn to think for themselves. Boomer (1989) argued that English teachers should be radical agents of democratic change, claiming that

> to be radical is to be threatening; because you question the very basis of society; because you try to transform or make opaque, transparent habit and common sense. It also implies some form of solidarity with fellow, like-minded, radicals committed to transformative action. (p. 5)

Authoritarian governments have long recognised the dangers posed by an educated and critically capable citizenry to their hold on power. The well-worn tools of

propaganda and disinformation have substantial power within totalitarian environments because they are able to deceive populations that do not have the tools of critical literacy available to them. However, even their less malign cousins advertising and public relations/spin doctoring require careful critique and analysis to understand the ways in which texts are designed to influence and control thought and behaviour. There is a reason why English classrooms are awash with units of work on advertising, film, and media. The prevalence and influence of these texts in the world cannot be understated. So where in the curriculum are the opportunities to engage in democratic modes of encounter with texts and to develop the critical and creative capacities to read the word and the world?

Take as an example the following extract from the Queensland *Senior English Syllabus* (QCAA, 2018), with its emphasis on the central role of working with texts in English classrooms to better understand the importance of the interplay between language, context, purpose and audience:

> Education in the discipline of English offers students ways of thinking about, creating and engaging with texts and how they represent the world and human experience. The framework for the subject's interrelated objectives is informed by an understanding of the relationships between language, text, purpose, context and audience, and how these relationships shape meaning and perspectives. Students engage critically and creatively with a variety of texts … All senior secondary English subjects aim to develop students' critical and creative thinking, both independently and collaboratively, and their capacity to understand and contest complex and challenging ideas in order to form their own interpretations and perspectives, and to understand the interpretations and perspectives of others. (p. 9)

Similarly, the New South Wales *English Standard Stage 6 Syllabus* (NESA, 2017) claims that through the study of English, students are enabled as 'flexible and critical thinkers, capable of appreciating the variety of cultural heritages and differences that make up Australian society. They further develop skills in literacy, and independent, collaborative and reflective learning' (p. 11). These skills are important in enabling students to 'question, assess, challenge, reformulate information and identity and clarify issues, negotiate and solve problems' (NESA, 2017, p. 10), all of which are essential for tackling the very real crises facing young people.

The subject description for Stage 2 English (SACEB, 2022), undertaken by senior students in South Australia and the Northern Territory, states that

> In English students analyse the interrelationship of author, text, and audience, with an emphasis on how language and stylistic features shape ideas and perspectives in a range of contexts. They consider social, cultural, economic, historical, and/or political perspectives in texts and their representation of human experience and the world.

Students explore how the purpose of a text is achieved through application of text conventions and stylistic choices to position the audience to respond to ideas and perspectives. An understanding of purpose, audience, and context is applied in students' own creation of imaginative, interpretive, analytical, and persuasive texts that may be written, oral, and/or multimodal.

Students have opportunities to reflect on their personal values and those of other people by responding to aesthetic and cultural aspects of texts from the contemporary world, from the past, and from Australian and other cultures.

Further, the rationale of the *Victorian Certificate of Education: English and English as an Additional Language Study Design* (VCAA, 2016) argues that

> The study of English contributes to the development of literate individuals capable of critical and creative thinking, aesthetic appreciation and creativity. This study also develops students' ability to create and analyse texts, moving from interpretation to reflection and critical analysis. Through engagement with texts from the contemporary world and from the past, and using texts from Australia and from other cultures, students studying English become confident, articulate and critically aware communicators and further develop a sense of themselves, their world and their place within it. English helps equip students for participation in a democratic society and the global community. (p. 5)

According to the recently released Version 9.0 of the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2022), from the Foundation Year of schooling to Year 10,

> Through the study of English, individuals learn to analyse, understand, communicate and build relationships with others and the world around them. It helps create confident communicators, imaginative and critical thinkers, and informed citizens. The English curriculum helps students to engage imaginatively and critically with literature and appreciate its aesthetic qualities. They explore ideas and perspectives about human experience and cultural significance, interpersonal relationships,

> and ethical and global issues within real-world and fictional settings. Students are exposed to literature from a range of historical, cultural and social contexts. It helps them become ethical, informed, perceptive, innovative and active members of society. The English curriculum plays an important part in developing the understanding, attitudes and capabilities of those who will take responsibility for Australia's future.

Finally, there is a firm public commitment by all federal, state and territory Ministers of Education through the *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* (Education Services Australia, 2019) to a high-quality, high-equity education system for all young Australians. For example, Goal 2 states that 'All young Australians [should] become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community' (Education Services Australia, 2019, p. 6). Regarding the last part of Goal 2, the Declaration states that young people through schooling will become

> Active and informed members of the community who … are committed to national values of democracy, equity and justice, and participate in Australia's civic life by connecting with their community and contributing to local and national conversations. (Education Services Australia, 2019, p. 8)

The unequivocal curriculum intention to produce critical, capable, and confident thinkers and communicators is not unique to senior English curriculum rationales, but is written into school English curricular documents across Australian states and territories, the junior English curriculum design and other English-related courses, including English as an Additional Language, Foundational English, Extension English and English Literature courses. While there is a huge variety of interpretation and enactment of curriculum across different schooling and classroom contexts, the important consideration here is the centrality of a commitment to democratic and inclusive futures being supported by English teaching and learning.

Propositions for English teaching and learning towards democratic futures

Education is never neutral; it is always heavily imbued with political activity. Indeed, the development and implementation of curriculum is the political act of deciding who gets to learn what from whom and why (Mills et al., 2022). Although curriculum has generally been promoted as part of the selective tradition (Williams, 1965) by political leaders and policymakers as the 'best which has been thought and said' (Arnold, 2006, p. 5), it has always been ideologically motivated, particularly by powerful groups within society seeking to maintain the status quo (Apple, 2004). However, Freire (2000) has argued that education can either work to ensure conformity to a particular system or it can be a site of radical transformation by enabling people to creatively and critically engage with, and change, the world. Similarly, education always attempts to teach students to engage with the world in particular ways, and hopefully to 'define their relationship, if not responsibility, to diverse others, and experience in the classroom some sort of understanding of a more just, imaginative, and democratic life' (Giroux, 2010, p. 718). Further, Reid (2002) has argued that thinking about education for democracy requires that we consider democracy

> As a moral ideal, a form of social life constituted by the core values of 'positive' freedom and political equality. From a classical perspective, democracy can only flourish in a society where there is an informed and active citizenry who participate in political debate and public decision making on equal terms. (p. 572)

This is why teachers, and English teachers especially, are so important. The opportunity to work with young people as they learn to read the word and read the world is so powerful. And it's already there in the curriculum. The only question is how we take the English curriculum and infuse it with a democratic ethos and commitment to collective action with our students as fully participating agents of democratic change. Already, young people have demonstrated their capacities for critical and creative agency through the civic action and political resistance in movements such as the School Strikes for Climate, 'which bring young people to the centre of the debate about the kinds of economic and political structures that we need in a rapidly warming world and a disintegrating politics of mistrust and rising authoritarianism' (Riddle, 2022, p. 114). Schooling and the curriculum, pedagogies, and other institutional environmental, structural, processual and social factors that are bound up in young people's daily lives are absolutely enmeshed with the developing capacity for critical and creative agency of young people. As such, schools must work in ways that seek to foster the democratisation of society, rather than adhering to tired tropes of disciplinary centres that produce compliant consumers and future workforce participants. Schooling has to be a compact

between society and its young people, offering the promise of a more inclusive and sustainable future – one that embraces difference, recognises strength in plurality, and enables everyone to participate meaningfully as critical, creative, and compassionate members of society.

In mapping out a democratic pedagogy, Bernstein (1996) argues that three pedagogic rights are essential conditions for democratic engagement: enhancement, by which education opens up new horizons of critical understanding; inclusion, through which young people are valued socially, culturally, and intellectually; and participation, in which the discourses and practices of schooling and society engage with the lifeworlds of young people. This is an important consideration for English teachers, because 'schooling should not simply recite an empty rhetoric of democracy – whether that is through curriculum mandates, policy directives or education department mission statements – but should embody the practice of democracy as a lived expression of social becoming and belonging' (Riddle, 2022, p. 21). For example, Anson (2021) drew on these three pedagogic rights with senior English students who undertook oppositional and negotiated readings of texts in a dialogical and democratic engagement with literature in the curriculum. In doing so, these students were scaffolded in developing their agency and pedagogic rights through their critical engagement with texts, through

> Enhancement, as students are forced to engage with texts that challenge their current experience; inclusion, as students are empowered to negotiate different readings of texts through their own cultural and social understandings; and participation, as students are enabled to take up literate discourses (i.e., particular ways of reading and writing) that are valued in institutional settings. (Anson, 2021, p. 940)

There are multiple ways in which English teaching and learning can help to develop young people's rich critical capacities, through which they can better understand how texts within contexts work on the world to influence, inform, and sometimes deceive or coerce others. By grappling with perspectives, representations, cultural knowledge and histories through literature and everyday texts, students become able to apply a critical lens to matters of power, truth, and ideology which are written across social, economic, and political systems and institutions. The English classroom can also become a site of potential radical deconstruction through the problematising, interrogating, interrupting, contextualising, challenging, historicising, exposing, engaging, troubling and evoking of texts within contexts and their representations of peoples, places, histories and cultures (Slattery, 2006). English classrooms could, and should, be places in which young people can engage with difficult knowledge.

An example of grappling with difficult knowledge in the English classroom can be observed in McLean Davies and Buzacott's (2022) interviews with two teachers who taught Maxine Beneba Clarke's (2016) *The Hate Race*, in which they attempted to support the 'critical growth' of students. The authors argued for a more relational literacy, which can 'make transparent the relational and social work of English and reinstate in the curriculum the role of texts and their readers in imagining new possibilities for communities' (McLean Davies & Buzacott, 2022, p. 377). Similarly, Truman et al. (2022) demonstrated how the activation of intertextual networks can destabilise the literary canon and taken-for-granted assumptions about texts and contexts in English curriculum, so that deliberate efforts can be made to 'activate intertextual networks that empower people, texts and ways of making meaning that have been historically marginalised' (p. 847). Through examples like these of teaching students how to read the *word* and the *world* (Freire, 1983; 2004), a more critical orientation to English curriculum and pedagogy can work to develop the critical–analytical skills of students to understand the meaning-making practices and critical–cultural operations of texts, language and their production of knowledge and truth. Of course, a critical capacity to engage in public discourses requires a clear understanding of the importance of truth and transparency in democratic life (Aly et al., 2022). Therefore, English curriculum and pedagogy should also work to develop students' democratic lives in the classroom, through curriculum experiences, so that they have the direct opportunity to engage in acts of truth and transparency that are related to their communities, lives, and concerns. For example, Alford (2021) has argued that critical approaches to language and literacy learning are especially important for students from diverse cultural, linguistic, and educational contexts, including students for whom English is an additional language or dialect.

There need to be opportunities provided in classrooms for engaging in thick, activist forms of democratic participation and civic activism, which are not only embedded within curriculum but also deeply

connected to local communities and problems that matter. Students need to have the chance to become critical agents for change, who are able to negotiate the power relations within schools and communities. The use of texts that connect directly to the lifeworlds and communities of young people themselves can work towards opening spaces for dialogue and dialectic engagement with texts that are collaborative in nature and designed to position young people as democratic agents of change in the here-and-now, rather than some abstract notion of students as citizens-yet-to-be. One way of engaging young people as critical agents of change is through dialogic approaches to pedagogy, in which productive disagreement and dissensus (Rancière, 2015) is a vehicle for building common cause and understanding. In short, English curriculum and pedagogy can unleash 'the subversive possibilities of talk' (Alexander, 2019, p. 6), which provokes communal, rational, and epistemic accountabilities from students and teachers in classroom encounters with knowledge. Alexander (2019) argued that dialogic pedagogy requires a rigorous commitment to language, voice, argument, and truth, so that students can 'make, understand, critique and challenge argument outside as well as inside the classroom' (p. 12).

English teachers are well placed to do this work with students by teaching the critical literacy skills that encourage nuance, deliberation, and careful analysis (Janks, 2013). Teaching young people to question what they hear, see, and read, to be inquisitive, to be sceptical, to doubt and to imagine things otherwise is one of the most important things an English teacher can do. Green (2018) suggested that English curriculum and pedagogy might be productively reimagined through the concepts of rhetoric and democracy, 'bringing together textual practice, pedagogy, and political subjectivity with the challenging task of (re) forming the nation, for an uncertain future and in what are now quite different global conditions' (p. 42). In doing so, the English curriculum might contribute directly towards the project of democracy (Ashenden et al., 1984). After all, 'curriculum cannot be understood in isolation from the political, economic, social and cultural conditions in which it is produced and practised' (Reid & Thomson, 2003, p. xiv).

There is no doubt that we are living in dangerous times, and that the increasingly complex set of crises and challenges facing societies will continue to grow. As such, it is imperative that education play a key role in helping to prepare young people for a world of uncertainty and change. There is a central focus already evident in the junior and senior high school English curriculum on preparing young people for civic agency, democratic participation, and collaborative struggles to improve social, political, economic and environmental practices and institutions for generations to come. The challenge is to realise these aims through the careful selection of quality literature and relevant everyday texts, to provide multiple opportunities for students to engage with texts in their contexts in a diverse range of ways, and to open up spaces for dialogic and dialectic encounters within the English classroom, which live and breathe democratic values and engaged civic participation for all young people. I have no doubt that English teachers are up to the challenge.

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Rethinking Professional Development for English Teachers of Creative Writing: The English Teacher-Writers Project

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Abstract: This paper documents shifts in English teachers' knowledges and practices as a consequence of their involvement in a jointly funded Griffith University and Queensland Department of Education English Teacher as Writers Project. The pilot research uses an exploratory case study methodology to explore what works when it comes to challenging teachers to rethink and reshape their creative writing identities as a precursor to rethinking and reshaping their creative writing pedagogies and practices. Using data collected from interviews with participating teachers, a suite of dialogic creative writing workshops led by the research team (paper's authors), and a celebration evening, our approach offers possibilities for re-imagining how professional learning might be enacted in ways that are generative, respectful, and capable of enriching both classroom and personal identity.

Keywords: teacher-writers, creative writing, teaching pedagogy, English

Introduction

As Australian tertiary educators of pre-service teachers of English we, the authors, have a natural interest in the teaching of creative or 'imaginative' (as compared to informative and persuasive) writing, as it is termed by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA, n.d.-b, Version 8.4) and the professional development (PD) offered to teachers in this area. Our personal experiences of PD have been of passive and prescriptive events driven by the listing of techniques and skills to be taught for students to achieve.

In a time of global upheaval, the ability to think creatively – particularly to underpin problem solving – has never been more important. No longer perceived as the exclusive realm of the arts, creativity has more recently come to be recognised as universal (Harris, 2016; Root-Bernstein & Root-Bernstein, 1999). Creative individuals are characterised as having cognitive agility, responsiveness, hopefulness, and 'possibility thinking' (Jeffrey & Craft, 2006). Furthermore, teacher education programs are encouraged to nurture 'confidence in teachers through coaching, mentoring and development of a growth mindset for creativity' (Stinson et al., 2018, p. 21). If these are some of the attributes of creative individuals and the desired outcomes of creativity, what might this mean for teachers who are charged with the responsibility of teaching creative writing to their young students?

The impetus to position literary writing at the heart of our project was fourfold. First, Queensland's NAPLAN mean writing scores between 2011 and 2019 (ACARA, 2011, 2019) showed a decline for Year 5 (470.9 in 2011 to 463.7 in 2019), Year 7 (532.9 in 2011 to 502.3 in 2019), and Year 9 (564.4 in 2011 to 533.6 in 2019). These scores are still of concern, with results of 468.2 for Year 5, 515.0 for Year 7, and 544.2 for Year 9 in 2022 (ACARA, 2022a). Lovejoy et al. (2020) state bluntly that these outcomes 'are partly attributable to current orthodoxies around how writing is conceptualised, taught and tested' (p. 5).

Second, contemporary teachers' PD in teaching literary writing has been framed by formulaic genre templates with an emphasis on 'principles of good writing' (QCAA, 2016), 'advanced sentence grammar' (PETAA, 2017), and 'active writing strategies' (QCAA, 2009, p. 2). Much of this PD has been geared towards improving students' one-off, on-demand timed writing tasks rather than towards developing students as creative writers (see Simpson-Reeves et al., 2019; Simpson-Reeves et al., 2018). As the NAPLAN scores show, this approach has not translated into effective gains for student writing outcomes. Indeed, the recent *NAPLAN review final report* (McGaw et al., 2020) states that 'writing has not improved since 2011' (p. 84) and that 'students' writing for NAPLAN was frequently described as formulaic' (p. 83). This hints at a mechanistic or reductionist approach to writing, privileging technical accuracy over 'possibility thinking' (Jeffrey & Craft, 2006). The introduction of this national literacy and numeracy test in 2008 may have been responsible for an increased reliance on pedagogical approaches drawn from explicit genre theory as discussed by Derewianka (2015) with an emphasis on form and function over the aesthetic and affective qualities of writing. The relationship of English teachers with NAPLAN is complex, with Gannon and Dove (2021) suggesting that teachers' planning is 'despite and sometimes because of NAPLAN' (p. 657) and Carey, Davidow and Williams (2022) finding that 'NAPLAN has restricted how writing is taught' (p. 33). In addition, the PD format of one day in-service teacher workshops may be problematic; Yoo and Carter (2017) state categorically that 'focusing merely on content strategies and outcomes disengages teachers who are ultimately driven by a sense of purpose and meaning' (p. 39).

Third, the project team's personal provocation is that we believe the teaching of writing to be strengthened by teachers who themselves write.

Fourth, our amassed backgrounds of early childhood literacy, classic literature, playwriting, and media scripting attest to experiential hands-on approaches at odds with the methods of PD experienced. We wanted to use experiential hands-on approaches to highlight teachers' existing knowledge about creative writing, promoting teachers as empowered learners who can then empower the child writer through similarly adaptive learning opportunities in the classroom.

We proposed a pilot study asking *What might it mean for teachers of creative writing to be re-imagined as creative writers themselves?* and *How might we offer professional learning with an emphasis on process rather than product?*

Background: Review of the literature

To provide context for the project reported upon, creativity is defined and its place in the Australian Curriculum established with a focus on imaginative text writing. Writing pedagogy and the role of the teacher in the writing classroom are explored, as are the PD and support available in Australia.

Creativity in Australian English education

Nottingham (2010) believes that creativity can be developed by anyone, describing it as 'an ability that involves perceiving things in a new way, making unusual connections, asking searching questions, imagining and wondering' (p. 6). The *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) education declaration* (Education Council, 2019) places creativity firmly in the foreground of Australian teaching and learning, with the second of its two overarching goals proposing that 'All young Australians become confident and creative individuals' (p. 1). Achieving such an ambitious goal challenges educators to provide opportunities for students to learn in, and through, creative experiences.

The Australian Curriculum: English (Version 9) (ACARA, 2022b) comprises strands of Language, Literacy, and Engaging with, Examining and Creating Literature in which 'the purposes of these texts may be aesthetic, imaginative, reflective, informative, persuasive, analytical and/or critical, or any combination of these' (*Texts*, para. 1). According to the *National literacy learning progression* document (ACARA, 2020), the purpose of imaginative texts is to 'emotionally and intellectually engage the reader' (CrT10). Underlining the importance of creative writing is one of the seven General Capabilities (Version 8.4) outlined by ACARA (n.d.-a) – that of *Critical and Creative Thinking*, which is vital in allowing 'young Australians to live and work successfully in the twenty-first century' (para. 1). The emphasis is on independent and collaborative tasks, risk-taking, the use of imagination, and a stated belief that logical and analytical activities can simultaneously encourage creative thinking. Creative or 'imaginative' writing (ACARA, n.d.-b, Version 8.4) is defined by the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority's *General Senior English Syllabus* (2019) as 'resulting from originality of thought or expression' (p. 56), but, like informative and persuasive writing, is presented as able to be taught, as is any genre of writing (Exley & Kitson, 2020; Wild & Exley, 2019).

Writing creatively involves more than having the time, the ideas, the technical skills, the right repertoire

of language and the motivation to produce a story which compose an 'imaginative' text. It certainly requires all of these things, but as suggested by Ang (2020), it also needs a 'personal investment' (p. 158) on behalf of both the writer and the reader. Without this affective investment, creative writing opportunities for identifying inequities, overcoming struggles, empathising with others, celebrating differences, and changing lives are sidelined. There is evidence to suggest that teachers who write creatively themselves bring this creativity into their classrooms in the form of a nuanced creative pedagogy and teaching practice (Chamberlain, 2015; Hooper, 2012) and that this underpins their teaching of all subjects, not the least the teaching of imaginative writing.

The expectation of a teacher's practical experience varies depending on the subject area, such that music teachers are often asked what instruments they play and sports teachers to identify their favourite sport. Language arts teachers are rarely, if ever, asked 'What are you writing, and what are you reading right now?' (Rief, 2017, p. 33). To emphasise why this is important, Rief (2017) asked her middle years students, 'In what ways does it matter to you, or not matter to you, that I write?' (p. 33). Apart from knowing that their teacher appreciated the intricacies and difficulties of the writing process, the students provided some astute observations: they felt they had to work harder to 'satisfy both the writer and reader' (Rief, 2017, p. 34) in their teacher and applied more care and attention to improving their writing. Of note was the comment that 'learning writing … from someone who practices…on a daily basis makes it feel all the more important', and most tellingly that 'if a teacher was not a writer, he or she might just be teaching kids how to write to the rules of English' (Rief, 2017, p. 34).

Professional development of teachers of writing

There is neither one way to think about the disciplinary knowledge of English, nor one way to teach English (Doecke et al., 2018) and so teachers' professional learning needs are not straightforward. The early *National English Curriculum: Initial Advice* (National Curriculum Board, 2008a) declared that English plays a part in developing accurate, purposeful, critical, and creative understandings and expressions for further education, vocational settings, and enjoyable lifelong learning (p. 6) and that pedagogies need to be sufficiently flexible so as to 'adapt [their] contents and processes' (p. 5) according to students' needs. In terms of pedagogic practice, the *National English Curriculum: Framing Paper* (National Curriculum Board, 2008b) encouraged teachers to adopt 'a range of pedagogical approaches, some involving more authoritative and direct teacher intervention, some involving more encouragement, support, and indirect guidance' (p. 7). This pointed to the complexity of the teaching role and the need for English teachers to have a repertoire of pedagogical strategies to manage the brief inherent in the English Framing paper. The *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: English* (National Curriculum Board, 2009) supported this by describing teachers' pedagogies as needing to be 'both explicit teaching and more discovery-based or exploratory approaches' (p. 16).

Indeed, in considering teachers' professional learning, Oddone et al. (2019) state that as education today is *increasingly complex*, effective PD needs to be 'active, interest-driven, and autonomous, meeting personal learning needs while being socially connected' (p. 102). The key characteristics of effective PD are: *linking* – 'the teacher connects effectively and efficiently with people or resources to meet immediate or near future professional learning needs'; *stretching* – 'associated with discovery, expansion of the network, and curiosity' and *amplifying* – 'active contribution, creativity, and knowledge formation … collaborative co-construction' (Oddone et al., 2019, p. 106).

We propose a model of teacher professional learning that unashamedly focuses on what Green (2016) calls the knowledge question of subject English. This knowledge, however, should not be constructed as a hierarchically organised disciplinary field such as that found in Mathematics (see Grossman & Shulman, 1994). The knowledge in question needs to accept that the disciplinary field of English carries the potential for greater individual autonomy, in terms of both what is taught and how it is taught. Indeed, the very nature of English content requires English teachers to continually respond to the specificity of the contexts within which they do their work. We call for a model of teacher professional learning that acknowledges, respects and values that experienced teachers already have varying degrees of content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge. We hold that experienced teachers can make professional decisions about their teaching based on detailed understandings of their students, the languages and cultures in which those students are immersed, and their unique ways of learning. Experienced teachers are also credited with being capable of reflecting on knowledge presented

through research and professional learning events to advance their own practice and the students' learning.

Teachers as writers

The notion of teachers of writing being writers themselves is not new, with Cremin and Oliver (2017) finding 438 papers published on the subject between 1990 and 2015. Cremin (2020) herself has long advocated that 'teachers of writing must write', and acknowledges that although this is 'purportedly a common-sense view – that to be effective, teachers of literacy must be skilled role models' (p. 243), the necessity for teachers of writing to be writers is still a strongly debated topic.

Several studies have reported that when teachers have engaged in writing and shared their challenges with their students, their students have also benefited (Cremin, 2006; Locke et al., 2013), and that as teachers' confidence in their own writing developed, and their attitudes to teaching writing in the classroom also improved (Cremin & Baker, 2014).

A *Teachers as writers* study conducted in the United Kingdom by Cremin and colleagues (2015–2017) collected data from teachers undertaking a writing residential course run by The Arvon Foundation and found that following the course, 'teachers' identities and assurance as writers shifted significantly', and that pedagogic shifts impacted positively on students' 'motivation, confidence and sense of ownership and skills as writers' (Cremin et al., 2020, p. 49).

Similarly, Locke et al. (2013) report on the impact of a series of creative writing workshops on five New Zealand secondary teachers from a range of discipline areas. The research found 'positive and frequently significant effects' on the teachers' self-efficacy as writers and teachers of writing, but the researchers caution that this impact was moderated by individuals' complex interactions with writing in unfamiliar genres and responses to hearing others' works (and re-evaluating their own work), and the experience of sharing their work. The degree of change due to the workshops was not always positive, with one participant finding that her involvement in the project 'had not increased her self-efficacy as a writer', as it made her feel she was 'a bit rubbish' in comparison with the other participants and she realised she 'didn't have the abilities' she always thought she had (Locke et al., 2013, p. 61).

Unlike teachers in the United Kingdom (National Writing Project with a National Writing Day in June; National Association of Writers in Education, 2018) and the United States (National Writing Project, 2020, with a National Writing Day in October; Bay Area Writing Project), Australian English teachers have had little formal encouragement to be writers.

English teacher-writers project

In 2019 a team of five academics from the Education faculty of a large metropolitan university conducted a project in conjunction with the Queensland Department of Education. The project was funded by the Queensland Department of Education's Horizon Grant Scheme to provide local research aligning with current priorities, and was a way of exploring a novel approach to teachers' professional learning associated with creative writing. The project received ethical clearance from both the university and the Department of Education with agreements on privacy, de-identification, and secure storing of data. Pseudonyms are used when referring to the teacher-writer participants.

Case study

Our Teacher-Writer Project was designed as a pilot using exploratory case study research to find out what works when it comes to challenging teachers to rethink and reshape their creative writing identities. In particular we wanted to find out if a shift in teachers' creative writing identities would correlate to a shift in their creative writing pedagogies and practices. We held a fundamental belief that educators who share their worlds with their students enrich both learning and lives. The intention of our project was to cultivate personal and professional growth through a valuing of the creativity and pedagogical knowledge of teacher-writers, via a process of authoring, sharing, exploring, experimenting, self-reflecting, and presenting. The questions leading our research were: *How might we offer professional learning with an emphasis on process rather than product? What support can we offer through professional development for teachers to be creative writers?* and *What might it mean for teachers to be re-imagined as creative writers themselves?*

As Freebody (2003) points out, exploratory case studies allow fieldwork and other data collection to contribute to the 'specification of the research questions' (p. 82) for a further future study. A case study design was chosen as the most appropriate, since it was the uniqueness and particularity of the case (Merriam, 2002, 2009; Stake 2005; Yin 2003, 2016) – that is, the

suite of workshops and the participants' responses to these, together with the emphasis on a wealth of detail in 'real-life situations' (Flyvbjerg, 2006 p. 224) – that were the focus of investigation. The implementation of the workshops and the celebration event constituted a case, as it was 'intrinsically bounded' (Merriam, 2009, p. 40) by time, context, participants, and the data collection activities.

Participants

The sampling technique was non-random and purposive and in 2019, seven schools (four primary and three secondary) in the metropolitan and nearby areas identified as having a particular interest in literary writing were approached. English teachers were asked to volunteer to be participants in the project and were offered a suite of PD workshops. Twelve teachers from five schools (three primary and two secondary) signed up for the workshops and agreed to be interviewed about their experience and its impact on their teaching. This was deemed an acceptable sample size for a pilot case study (Schoch, 2019).

Data collection, collation, and analysis

Participants attended six two-hour workshops over four months. During this period, they were interviewed twice in their school setting about their writing and teaching of writing by a member of the project team. A third short video interview at the showcase reading event several weeks after the final content workshop allowed reflections on the project. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, and people and schools de-identified. As we wished to explore the 'experiences, meanings and the reality' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81) of a small group of participants, the project team analysed the transcripts following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis: reading and rereading the transcripts; noting sections of interest; identifying potential themes; reviewing the themes across the data; defining and naming themes; selecting illustratory examples.

The workshops

We designed and facilitated six workshops over four months, offered in face-to-face and virtual modes so that participating teachers could experiment with, create, share, and perform creative writing: stream-of-consciousness as a stimulus; poetry and exploring 'ing' verbs; getting purposeful about writing creatively (developing characters, building tension, and creating moods); transposing genres – the creative potential of music and video for writing; activating the writing process (drama and talking pedagogies); and editing and polishing writing. The aim was to identify an evidence base that could render opaque the affordances and challenges of a dialogic approach to teacher learning so that the participating teachers might become advocates for changes in professional learning practices.

The suite of workshops provided teacher-writers with time, space, and collegial support where they could immerse themselves in writing. The workshops were designed to be flexible, collaborative, and supportive – attributes that we hoped would also be valued in a classroom setting. They were purposefully centred on teacher professional learning as a dialogic process rather than a prescriptive product-driven event. Towards the end of the year, several weeks after the completion of the workshops, a celebratory event was held to allow the teacher-writers to showcase and perform their choice of the creative pieces that they had been writing in the workshops. In the audience on the evening were their colleagues and family.

The workshops were held late afternoon after the school day and teacher participants could attend in person on campus or through an online collaborative session; they did not have to commit exclusively to one or the other. Five of the six independent workshops were each run by one member of the project team, all experienced teachers of English, and the topics reflected their individual experience and passion. The sixth workshop allowed the participants to work with project team members to edit and polish their work for presentation. It was agreed by the project team that each workshop, although led by a different member each time, would have five key elements: First, the choice of workshop topic by the facilitator would position writing as an activity that all participants could explore, regardless of primary or secondary employment and irrespective of writing experience. Second, the focus would be on the teacher participants being present as writers – the discussions were about progressing their writing, not about how they could teach creative writing *per se*. Third, the facilitator would share some of her own previous writing, not just to provide an illustration of the topic under exploration but also to share her own propensity and vulnerabilities as a writer. The participants and the facilitator would work collaboratively in brainstorming how to approach writing of this topic or style. This underlined that these workshops were an extended community of

teacher-writers and that we were all invested in writing. Fourth, the teacher participants would be given a short period of silent time to write in the technique being discussed, with their own selection of audience in mind, or if chosen, for their eyes only. They would then be asked to share their writing if they felt so inclined. Although challenging in its immediacy and limiting in time, this emphasised that we valued the practice of writing and all writings. Constructive feedback by the project team member and participants was encouraged and was positive and supportive. Creative writing was seen as process-oriented, with each workshop producing at least the start of a text. The aim was that post-workshop, the teacher-writers would work further on those of their own texts that appealed to them, and that we would provide an opportunity for the writers to be assisted in polishing selected works. Participants were under no obligation to share their writing, but as many chose to, we organised a celebration event where the writers could read their own work or have a professional storyteller present it to family, friends and colleagues. Fifth, at the end of each workshop the teacher-writers would be asked to reflect about the workshop and their writing. Apart from administrative and funding requirements and our own innate higher education practitioner need to evaluate teaching from this feedback, the purpose of reflection was to draw the teacher-writers' attention to the ongoing nature of the initiative beyond the duration of the workshops.

Findings

The teacher-writers in our project, who were secondary English teachers and primary English specialist teachers, all expressed through their interviews a belief that they needed to be able to *do* and not just *teach* creative writing. As one participant, James, expressed, '*teachers must have specialised knowledge … knowing what works … it's really valuable*', and personal knowledge of an area allows for better teaching of that area, not to mention being able to write original exemplars. In a time when 'writing instruction is often squeezed from the curriculum or relegated to formulas and responses to prompts', Hasty and Hauptman (2019) emphasise that they 'believe that teaching writing is about teachers and students developing their identities and using their voices' (p. 28). Frawley (2021), however, suggests that 'the writer identity … often constitutes a site of struggle' (p. 38), and that sharing with students is not always wanted or seen as beneficial. In our project we embraced the former notion and argue that each teacher writer deserves the time and space to assert themselves as knowers, as individuals with language/s, histories and culture/s and deserving of a place to stand (Exley, Carss & Tamata, 2015).

Changes as a result of participation

At the start of the workshops, the teacher participants all admitted that writing creatively for themselves or being interested in learning writing skills for themselves motivated their involvement in the project, generally with the proviso that they also aimed to develop their teaching of writing with their students. In the main the teacher-writers downplayed their writing, with Amelia stating, '*I've never thought of myself as a writer or creative writer … ridiculous because I've been writing … since I was a child … [but] it's never been a serious thing*'.

The interviews were conducted using a script of key questions such as '*What were the benefits of your involvement in this project?*' and '*What effects did participation in the project have in the classroom?*' How a teacher-writer chose to respond has particular relevance and was clearly underpinned by two perspectives: *Personal: Understanding of the professional role through the personal experience* and *Professional: Implications for the classroom*.

Implications for teacher identity

After a review of 35 research studies, Gracia, Rodriguez and Pedrajas (2022) identified teacher professional identity as a 'dynamic nature concept' with a 'wide range of factors and elements which influence [its] development' (p. 389). A teacher's self-confidence in being a creative person is fundamental to being a creative teacher (Nemeržitski & Heinla, 2020); through this process, this project aimed to promote the creative teaching of writing.

The focus of the workshops was on motivating and developing the teachers' own writing, but we also supported discussions of implementation of such strategies with students when it was raised. Teacher-writers were asked about the benefits of participating in the project. Responses focused on the writing examples that each workshop expected, and their reflections presented themes of being a writer, stepping into a student's shoes, motivational effects, a means of personal growth, and how it encouraged better relationships with students and other staff.

All participants responded with versions of '*I see myself as a writer now*' (Olivia) and emphasised '*personal growth*' (Amelia) before referring to the impact of

the workshops on their classroom practice. Olivia explained further by saying, '*that's what I want for my children [students], to see themselves as writers*'.

Another common theme identified in interview responses was that being expected to write, to create, in each workshop placed the teacher-writers in their students' shoes, with realisations such as that '*as teachers we fall into "this is how it needs to be written, paragraph by paragraph", and you forget about the fun elements of it*' (Grace) being expressed, and teacher-writers being reminded that writing gives '*you a voice*' (Charlotte). A key aspect identified by the teacher-writers was that the workshops provided a nurturing space where teachers could try out new aspects of writing. The sharing of writing, although initially somewhat daunting, was perceived as low risk, as everyone was similarly placed.

More prosaically, in a time-poor life it provided Sally with motivation to write because of its '*discipline and the … time to sit down and write, that's really valuable*', or, as Ethan said, using an interesting metaphor, '*it knocked the chocks from under the wheels, gave me momentum*'. Several teachers also emphasised that writing creatively had to be a habit and that participation in the workshops had reminded them to get back into regular writing. As Ethan said, '*It's a myth that you're either creative or you're not. I think that it's just a muscle that needs to be exercised*'.

Writing creatively was also noted by the teacher-writers as being empowering allowing the writer to '*change and grow*' (Olivia) through the process of writing many texts. All participants professed to have written creatively at some time or another, but only one admitted to currently writing and publishing. Olivia thought participating in the workshops had broken down one of the major barriers to *being a writer*, that of '*your own opinions of yourself on whether you can succeed or not*'. Sharing writing in the workshops and presenting at the end of project performance validated *being* a writer to many of the participants.

As most teachers wrote about what they knew and had experienced, several pieces of writing from the workshops were situated in school situations. Olivia found that writing about her difficulties with a student

> built up my connection with him even more … clarified some thoughts about him and even perhaps built more determination in me that I need to continue to build that connection … the more I understand him, the more I can help him grow.

She determined that expressing something in words required the writer to examine the thought, idea, or situation – to analyse it in order to describe and explore it. Teaching creative writing creatively helped her with understanding her own teaching in a wider sense; as a deconstruction tool, it facilitated an understanding of a student's development and also her connections within that development. Working on a two-voice piece with a colleague was also a useful practice, as Olivia felt that it '*was about negotiation and that was a learning experience in itself*'. Indeed, she felt that the two voices produced a third voice embodying '*a coming together of the sharing of the experience through the poem*'.

Writing creatively was also seen as one of the few areas outside drama that allowed a person (the writer) to step outside of themselves and be instrumental in actively encouraging an empathy and understanding of others. Sharing such writing was baring a vulnerability, because, as Ethan said, you '*put a little bit of your heart and soul into it*', and it additionally demonstrated a certain trust in the audience. Ethan also suggested that the teacher, in sharing their own work in a classroom, allowed students to see another side of them – that of the vulnerable writer.

Implications for classroom pedagogies and practices

At the showcase event, several weeks after the last topic workshop, teacher-writers were asked whether involvement in the project had had an effect on their pedagogy and practice, and all declared that the experiences had already or would positively affect their classroom teaching. Responses focused on changes to pedagogy, the nature of creative writing/writing creatively, and the relationship between how they taught imaginative writing and how they wrote creatively.

James believed that as a secondary English teacher, to be effective he needed to have the specialised knowledge that came from writing for himself, saying, '*you wouldn't put a non-chemistry teacher on chemistry*'. Being passionate about writing, he said, means that teaching it '*just rolls off the tongue and is easy*' and that he knows '*what works*' from personal experience.

Amelia explained that she thought that '*all of our experiences, if we think about them, do translate into better practice in the classroom*'. Grace reflected that '*the way that I teach things has shifted*' and Chloe felt that '*it's definitely going to be easier teaching the children when it's their turn to write*'. The identified effects ranged from adopting new stimuli and processes to the development of the self, with Charlotte saying she feels that following the workshops she will '*continue to grow as a person and continue to write and inspire, hopefully, my students*'.

There was agreement that good creative writing was innately organic, and that as it required stages such as letting ideas ferment and multiple polishings, it took more time than other creative pursuits and did not sit easily alongside other pressing agendas such as those of NAPLAN. From a different perspective, Louise suggested that 'real world' writing, if aiming to be published, had to work within a number of constraints, and thus that working within school constraints was good practice. This highlights the difference between creative writing and the more unconditional *writing creatively*; from discussions and interview responses, the former can be implemented in a classroom situation like any other content, but the latter needs careful consideration, as it can be useful as a pre-creative writing activity.

Interestingly, the participating teachers all drew strong parallels between how they approached teaching their students' creative writing and how they themselves write creatively. For example, Olivia's underpinning of language teaching was that her students should '*put it down, get it out*' and described her own writing as a '*dumping of ideas or feelings, it's that outpouring of emotion*'. Ethan said that the creed of '*demonstrate, not tell how*' applied to his writing as well as his method of teaching. Chloe agreed, saying simply, '*my teaching is similar to the way I write*'.

Discussion

As with all writers, the teacher-writers in this project were driven by an innate desire to write, to play with language and find satisfaction – even pleasure – in their written words. They wrote to share, to collaborate, to make connections, as a cathartic process, in order to journal their actions and thoughts, to provide original exemplars for students, to process, and to think. But perhaps most importantly, they wrote because they were *writers* and not merely teachers of writing. Interview responses imply that participation in the workshops consolidated that teacher creativity – being a creative writer – is beneficial to the creative teaching of imaginative writing, and had a positive effect on students' learning with and through creative writing experiences. These findings could be evidenced in further research by adopting a measurement instrument such as a Likert-scale survey pre- and post the series of workshops.

We believe that the journey of our teacher participants in adopting the identity of a writer was successful:

- there was a suite of dedicated workshops which took place over a period of four months, allowing self-reflection between workshops, rather than a single PD day;
- the support afforded by the dialogic learning community was fluid, flexible, collaborative and collegial;
- the facilitators were also positioned as vulnerable writers;
- the workshops gave the teachers 'time out' from the classroom to dedicate to themselves as active and sharing participants – *to do* and create instead of being passive listeners shown *how to*;
- the participants were framed as *writers* throughout the workshops and their writings were valued as creative works, not as examples of staging features of genre in order to teach it;
- the workshop outcomes were highly individualised;
- the validation of the teacher-writers' abilities as writers was built over time and with increasing prominence through sharing with peers and facilitators, editing one-on-one with a member of the project team, and public reading; and
- although it was optional, the celebration event *published* the writing beyond the writer and the workshop attendees, bringing it into the *real* world – even when the writers felt vulnerable, they acknowledged that this too has its place in the writers' world – and publicly validated the participants as writers, by an appreciative audience. Many of the writers chose to read their works themselves, but some chose a storyteller employed for the event to present them, as it gave them an opportunity to hear the interpretation given to their work by a professional.

In considering what this might suggest for PD, we suggest that teachers have pride in their professional autonomy such that they conceptualise 'their own development as something more than accommodating professional development driven by mandated change' (Patterson, 2019, p. vii). Patterson identifies this as Enacted Personal Professional Learning, and states that this drives teachers' meaning-making experiences.

As the responses of the participants in this program suggests, any teacher is always in a state of becoming; their identity reshapes constantly in response to their shifting concerns, experiences, and personal histories. We suggest a more holistic and process-oriented approach to teachers' PD should centre on the teacher

not simply as a holder of knowledge, but as a lifelong and ongoing learner.

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Slam the Exam

Slam the Exam: Spoken Word Poetry in the Context of High Stakes Assessment

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Abstract: A significant body of research highlights the rich linguistic and cultural experiences offered by spoken word poetry when integrated into English pedagogy, particularly through its fusion of written and performative modes and its opportunities for cultivating empathy and creativity. However, few studies have examined secondary English teachers' experiences in balancing the multimodal literacies inherent in spoken word poetry with the demands of high-stakes examinations. This study addresses this gap by exploring the beliefs and practices of Australian English teachers around the inclusion of spoken word poetry in the text prescriptions for the New South Wales Higher School Certificate (HSC) examination. It offers insights into the scope for broadening existing understandings of literacy in the context of high-stakes assessment in secondary schools. Despite a general enthusiasm for spoken word poetry, it can be challenging for teachers and students to meaningfully engage with the textual form within the constraints of written examinations and assessment outcomes.

Keywords: HSC, Senior English, spoken word, poetry, assessment

Introduction

Spoken word poetry marries poetic devices with performative elements to create a compelling and thought-provoking experience for both a real and an imagined audience. On local stages, in national slams, and through online platforms, spoken word poets engage in the timeless art of storytelling (Curwood & Jones, 2022). Performances highlight each poet's unique craft, including content, form, and word choice, as well as their personal style of speaking, such as through accent, tone, and expression (Fisher, 2005; Newfield & D'Abdon, 2015). When spoken word poetry is brought into school contexts, students who may struggle in the English classroom often engage deeply with it (Dooley, 2014), especially when they are encouraged to capitalise on their multilingual abilities and explore their intersectional identities (Curwood & Bull, 2023; Jones & Curwood, 2020).

In 2018, high schools across the Australian state of New South Wales implemented new Stage 6 English syllabuses for Year 11 and 12 students, as stipulated by the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA). One standout feature of the syllabus is the inclusion of the writing-focused Module C: The Craft of Writing, required for Year 12 students in both Standard and Advanced courses. In this module, English teachers must select from a list of prescribed texts which are meant to provide stimulus for students' own writing and to develop their written expression (NESA, 2017a). While diverse forms of writing are an integral part of the HSC examination, the new Module C sought to engage students in a critical study of model texts and encourage their exploration and experimentation in creating imaginative, discursive, persuasive, and informative texts of their own.

Among the available texts for Year 12 students are the works of Kae Tempest and Luka

Lesson, which are the first spoken word poems to be included as prescribed texts for senior English. Each poem explored themes of self-empowerment and acceptance in the face of adversity, and they hold great potential for engaging students in culturally and socially diverse English classrooms. This study explored how teachers in New South Wales are engaging with spoken word poetry in Module C: The Craft of Writing, and the ways in which they are integrating the form into assessment programs, if at all. We asked:

1. How do English teachers conceptualise spoken word poetry within the Stage 6 Advanced and Standard English syllabuses for 2019–2023?
2. (How) are English teachers incorporating spoken word poetry into high-stakes assessment programs?

Spoken word poetry: From the stage to the classroom

Understanding spoken word poetry through a framework of multimodality

Multimodality offers a way to understand and draw upon the diverse linguistic, social, economic, and cultural capital that students bring to school (Walsh, 2007). When students produce multimodal texts, they must understand the presence, absence, and co-occurrence of alphabetic print with visual, aural, tactile, gestural, and spatial modes (Curwood & Gibbons, 2009). Spoken word poetry is an example of a multimodal text type, and one that has enjoyed a rise in popularity in recent decades both inside and outside the classroom (Dymoke, 2017; Dyson, 2005). Foley (2002) stresses the importance of differentiating spoken word poetry from traditional poetry, going so far as to label the form as a 'voiced verbal art' (p. 30) that extends far beyond the page and into the realm of lived experience. While the form is rooted in ancient oral traditions, Weinstein (2018) argues that modern audiences are likely to associate it with contemporary cultural movements such as hip-hop.

Research suggests that spoken word moves beyond the print-based modes of reading and writing while facilitating cultural responsiveness in processes of composition and analysis (Alvarez & Mearns, 2014; Muhammad & Gonzalez, 2016). This can account for the increased popularity of spoken word in secondary English classrooms, as students from diverse backgrounds are more readily able to relate to its themes, compounded by the authentic and visceral experience of the performance (e.g., Fiore, 2015; Jocson, 2006; Williams, 2015; Wong, 2016; Woodard & Coppola, 2018). With multimodality at its core, spoken word poetry necessitates code-switching between its embodied written and performative modes and their respective processes of composition and interpretation (Canagarajah, 2011). Spoken word poetry offers tremendous value to young adults, as it encourages them to explore their intersectional identities, draw upon their cultural experiences, consider how their performance can amplify the impact of their words, and critically reflect upon the reciprocal relationship with their audience. As such, this study draws upon existing scholarship to conceptualise spoken word within a multimodal framework and gain insight into how English teachers can incorporate the analysis and production of such poetry into their senior curriculum.

Spoken word poetry and multimodal literacy in senior English

Multimodality is an inherent part of the contemporary English curriculum in Australia. The Australian Curriculum: English highlights how the composition of written, spoken, visual and multimodal texts involves careful choices about language features, visual aspects, and textual structures. In NSW, multimodality is introduced to students from the beginning of primary school, identified as a targeted textual form for writing and representing across Years K–10 (NESA, 2017c). This continues into Stage 6, for Year 11 and 12, with Stage 6 Syllabuses explicitly noting a 'particular focus' on responding to and creating multimodal texts as a way for students to understand the shifting nature of information and literacy in the rapidly changing modern world (Freebody, 2013; NESA, 2017b). Multimodal texts are thus identified as a key text type in the Stage 6 English Syllabus, alongside spoken, written, and visual texts (NESA, 2017a).

Multimodal literacy is often framed as an explicit learning outcome for secondary students. In NSW, for instance, Year 12 English students must demonstrate an attainment of Outcome 2, which reads, 'A student uses, evaluates and justifies processes, skills and knowledge required to effectively respond to and compose texts in different modes, media and technologies'. Similarly, Outcomes 1, 4, 5, and 7 also present scope for the development of multimodal literacy, such as by requiring students to respond to and compose 'texts' rather than specifically 'written texts'. More specifically, the outcomes also signal a more obvious support of multimodal texts through the use of language such as 'complex' and 'different', which lend themselves to

non-traditional texts, including multimodal texts such as spoken word poetry.

Tensions among multimodality, creativity, and assessment

In some Australian states and territories, multimodal composition is required in summative or formative assessment. Importantly, this raises issues of how assessment frameworks can account for creativity, criticality, and holism in order to understand how students' utilisation of modes and semiotic resources can afford or constrain knowledge representation (Ross et al., 2020). In NSW, the Stage 6 English Syllabus requires Standard and Advanced students to complete one multimodal presentation that 'includes at least one mode other than reading and writing such as listening, speaking, viewing and representing' (NESA, 2017c). Not only are students encouraged to engage with and respond to multimodal texts like films and spoken word poems, they are also required to engage in the creation of their own original multimodal works. Spoken word poetry offers an opportunity to engage students in multimodal composition, as prior research has found that it is instrumental in the development of young people's multimodal literacy skills as well as their empathy, cross-cultural understanding, and self-confidence (e.g., Alim & Paris, 2017; Alvarez & Mearns, 2014; Dymoke, 2017; Fisher, 2005; Johnson & Vasudevan, 2012).

Spoken word poetry is an intriguing inclusion within the otherwise rigid HSC English curriculum, which has historically placed great emphasis on novels, poems, and Shakespearean plays (Manuel & Brock, 2003; Manuel, 2017). Within the context of English Extension 2, for example, recent research (Curwood & Bull, 2023) has found that when teachers support students in utilising spoken word poetry as the basis for their Major Work, it allows them to demonstrate their command of multiple languages and complex geopolitical contexts. For one young Muslim woman, it allowed her to explore the inequities and injustices in her life – and push back against the lack of representation of Muslim people in the prescribed texts for the HSC English Syllabus. However, Middleton and Curwood's (2020) study reveals that while English teachers believe in the importance of fostering student creativity, it can be difficult for them to prioritise creative learning and risk-taking in senior English courses due to assessment requirements.

The multimodality, creativity, and performativity of spoken word poetry can be challenging for teachers to reconcile with high-stakes assessment. McKnight (2020) highlights how the teaching of writing has become increasingly formulaic due to the nature of standardised testing, and she posits that authentic writing that values students' voices and experiences is 'unlikely to happen on a large scale until it is also valued by assessment regimes' (p. 12). Gannon and Dove (2021) similarly argue that standardised assessments simply cannot account for what teachers are trying to enact in their classrooms, including engagement, individuality, and explicit knowledge of language features, and does not recognise the 'salience of teacher agency and its complex relationship to student learning' (p. 677). It is within this context that we sought to explore whether and how Australian English teachers could integrate spoken word poetry into the senior English curriculum, given assessment requirements, constraints, and pressures.

Methodology

Research context

Matriculating high school students in NSW complete the Higher School Certificate, a credential awarded for the final two years of schooling. Based on the HSC, students receive an Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR), derived from a moderated 50:50 combination of a student's school-based assessment mark and their external examination mark. The ATAR is then used to determine university entrance. Given the competitive nature of university entrance and the heavy weighting of HSC examinations on final grades, Year 12 students learn in an environment defined by high-stakes assessment (Ayres et al., 2004). English is currently the only mandatory subject in the HSC and students select an English course according to their interests and abilities (NESA, 2017a). In 2018, high schools across NSW implemented the 2019–2023 Stage 6 English Syllabus, developed by the NSW Education Standards Authority, which has since been extended to 2025. The Stage 6 Syllabus, at both Advanced and Standard levels, includes four modules to be studied over the course of Year 12. One of these modules – Module C: The Craft of Writing – promotes the development of students' skills in imaginative, discursive, persuasive, and informative written expression through the study of at least two short stimulus texts chosen by the teacher from a prescribed list (NESA, 2017a).

Among the prescribed texts available for teachers to select in Module C are two spoken word poems, Kae

Tempest's 'Picture a vacuum' and Luka Lesson's 'May your pen grace the page'. Notably, no specific version or performance of the poems is prescribed, and multiple versions can be found online. While the prescribed texts are intended to act as stimuli for students' writing and the development of their written expression, the performative elements cannot be ignored, nor necessarily reproduced by students in the context of the written examination demands of the HSC (Dymoke, 2017). That said, the Syllabus also brings with it a new requirement that students complete at least one multimodal assessment task over the course of Year 12 English, which offers an opportunity for students to engage with the composition and performance of spoken word poetry.

Research participants

The study involved 37 secondary English teachers from New South Wales government, independent, and Catholic high schools. All participants completed on online survey, and two were selected to take part in in-depth interviews based on their differences in geographic location, the type of schools in which they taught, and their perspectives on spoken word poetry, thus providing a more nuanced perspective and bolstering the overall credibility and trustworthiness of the study (Merriam, 2009).

The first of these teachers, Jane, teaches English at a coeducational Catholic high school in the Central Tablelands of New South Wales, 140 km from Sydney. The second teacher, Maria, is the Head Teacher of English at a coeducational independent school on Sydney's North Shore. Both teachers are experienced, having taught for 31 and 18 years respectively.

Teaching a HSC English class this year	**Yes – Advanced English**	**43%**
	Yes – Standard English	**24%**
	No	**32%**
Type of school	Government	44%
	Independent	20%
	Catholic	49%
Years of teaching experience	0–5	41%
	6–10	19%
	11–20	11%
	21–30	16%
	31+	14%

Table 1. Demographics of surveyed teachers

Data collection and analysis

The study commenced with a survey that included multiple choice, Likert scale, and open-ended short-answer questions, asking teachers to reflect upon their attitudes and practices towards teaching spoken word poetry in general as well as towards its recent inclusion in Module C as a multimodal text type. The survey also collected demographic data from teacher participants pertaining to gender, age, years of teaching experience, and school type. Jane and Maria then participated in in-depth interviews, which helped to generate detail and richness by exploring otherwise 'inaccessible' areas of reality such as subjective experiences and attitudes (Peräkylä & Ruusuvuori, 2011, p. 529). The interview questions were deliberately open-ended to allow participants to provide information that the researcher may not have anticipated (Merriam, 2009).

Data was analysed through an inductive process of thematic analysis (Saldaña, 2009), which involved the close examination of survey results and interview transcriptions to allow recurrent themes to emerge naturally rather than presuming them, in understanding how teachers are conceptualising spoken word poetry and incorporating it into their assessment programs. First- and second-cycle coding methods were used to analyse short-answer survey responses and interview transcriptions. Within the first cycle, data was analysed line-by-line and meaningful extracts were labelled with descriptive codes such as 'value of performance poetry' and 'impact of high stakes assessment'. Emergent patterns were identified within the second cycle, and the overall number of codes was condensed. The codes were then cross-referenced with the survey, in order to both substantiate and further interrogate key findings. Data from the multiple choice and Likert scale survey questions was analysed statistically to identify commonalities and differences in participants' perspectives.

Findings and discussion

This article presents several key findings about teachers' conceptions of the significance of spoken word poetry in HSC English syllabuses. In line with existing literature, the majority of teachers recognised the pedagogical, personal, and political potential of spoken word poetry, and they supported the increased scope for multimodal literacy development in the Stage 6 Syllabus. However, a number of teachers have decided at this point not to include spoken word poetry in their HSC curriculum, suggesting an underlying

trepidation about embracing multimodal textual forms, particularly within the context of high-stakes assessment.

'Language is alive and vital': Conceptualising spoken word poetry in senior English

There is a stark juxtaposition between literacy as defined within syllabus outcomes and literacy as framed within assessment practices for Module C, both in-school and through external examinations. Although spoken word poems are substantial texts in their own right, they sit somewhat incongruously within the conceptual framework for Module C, which is focused primarily on building students' skills and appreciation for the written word. Survey participants expressed a strong belief in the importance of multimodal literacy in understanding and responding to spoken word poetry, with 84 per cent of teachers acknowledging the form as multimodal, rather than simply a written text that happens to be read aloud. A further 92 per cent of respondents agreed that students needed an understanding of both language and performative devices when responding to spoken word poems, affirming the scholarly consensus on the symbiotic relationship between written and the spoken words (Dymoke, 2017).

In terms of teacher pedagogical beliefs, 68 per cent of survey respondents believe it is important for HSC English programs to include texts that students are able to personally engage with, with a further 32 per cent of teachers believing that it is not important for students to study texts from the Western literary canon. This signals a broader shift in secondary English pedagogy, however gradual, towards a greater sense of cultural and semiotic diversity.

With this in mind, spoken word poetry seems an apt choice for senior English teachers in cultivating student engagement, as prior research suggests that students are more likely to perform better in assessment tasks, including high-stakes examinations, if they genuinely enjoy or connect with the texts they are studying (Alim, 2011; Kirkland, 2009). Spoken word poetry has been closely associated with empathy, achieved in part through its multimodality. This affords students multiple ways of understanding and engaging with poetry in a multisensory, multidimensional, and multimodal textual experience (Curwood & Cowell, 2011; Fisher, 2005; Weinstein, 2018). As one senior English teacher explained, spoken word is 'immediate and actively dynamic as well as highly engaging. Students can see and even feel new ways of language. It shows that language is alive and vital'. In addition, an early career teacher noted spoken word poetry as being a 'much more personal, relatable form as it employs a conversational tone, and allows students to see and hear the composer directly'.

'Interesting students in the beauty of poetry': Spoken word poetry and culturally responsive pedagogy

The inherent multimodality of spoken word poetry was understood by some teachers as a way to embrace culturally responsive pedagogy, promoting an enjoyment of English by bridging the dichotomy between students' home lives and the classroom. Culturally responsive pedagogy is understood as a powerful means of leveraging student engagement (Alim & Paris, 2017; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2004), and can therefore be integrated into a high-stakes assessment program to maintain student interest in a heavily pressurised educational context.

For many teachers, the benefits of positioning learning as culturally responsive have greatly influenced their approach to text selection in Stage 6, whether this means including spoken word poetry in their program or avoiding it. Jane, an experienced teacher in rural NSW, selected Luka Lesson's 'May your pen grace the page' for her Year 12 Standard English class as part of their study of Module C: The Craft of Writing. She identified multimodality as an 'engaging way of interesting students in the beauty of poetry using more than one mode'. She emphasised the multimodality inherent in spoken word poetry alongside the use of pace, volume, and sound devices as ways of creating meaning. Performativity was central to Jane's conceptualisation of spoken word, functioning as a 'hook' to interest students in the form as it extended beyond writing to leverage their interests in rap and hip-hop.

When introducing spoken word, Jane began by showing her students a performance from poet Omar Musa, who is well known for his blending of poetry with hip-hop. This was followed by a discussion of the meaning and effectiveness of sound devices, before moving on to 'May your pen grace the page'. Jane introduced her students to Luka Lesson's poem by showing a video of his performance, discussing it as a class, and then moving into reading and annotating the written text of the poem, involving the explicit teaching of relevant poetic devices and structures. Students were given opportunities to respond to the

poem both orally and through writing in forms such as written annotations, think-pair-shares, and class discussions. This allowed them to deeply engage in collaborative analysis and reflection on the spoken word poem, urged on by the poet himself: 'may your pen express upon the page every feeling you're in'.

'New and invigorating': Incorporating spoken word poetry into higher-stakes assessment programs

Spoken word poetry offers greater accessibility and relatability for students, as it embraces multimodal literacies and touches on their lived experiences and interests. However, some teachers, such as Maria, chose not to include spoken word in Module C due to their belief that it might compromise their students' HSC examination results. Maria was the Head of English at an independent school in an affluent area of Sydney, and the vast majority of students in her Year 12 cohort planned on attending university and thus expected high HSC results in order to do so. This is not to say Maria was unsupportive of spoken word poetry as a text type; in fact, she was quite the opposite: 'I think that emerging texts that make the list should be new, invigorating, and where possible linked to themes of social justice and global issues. Texts that give rise to resistant voices are a good text to bring into the HSC as much as possible'.

That said, she believes spoken word poetry is best taught to students when teachers 'feel they know enough about it to confidently teach it'. Because she considered herself 'not that familiar' with spoken word poetry, she avoided teaching it.

Teachers like Maria support the inclusion of spoken word poetry into the curriculum in theory, but not in practice. Instead, Maria preferred to teach discursive personal essays such as those by George Orwell and Sylvia Plath, as she was more familiar with them and able to model a deeper level of knowledge and understanding, and thus felt more confident in providing quality teaching to her students. While Maria appreciated spoken word poetry as a textual form, she believed that it was not necessarily as aligned with the interests and ambitions of her students as it might be for other groups of students, and could potentially act as an obstacle to their successful performance on the HSC English examination, as it might not be as accessible and explicitly transferrable as a discursive essay.

When faced with the pressures of high-stakes assessment, it is tempting for teachers to select texts which will maximise student results, whether by capturing their interest or by having close ties with examination specifications. Maria is not alone in this approach; in a survey response, an early career teacher justified their decision to not teach spoken word poetry in Module C by saying that they 'chose texts that felt more relevant to the types students would have to produce'. This teacher instead chose other prescribed Module C texts and taught Margaret Atwood's speech 'Spotty-handed villainesses' to prepare students to write persuasive and discursive responses, and Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* to encourage them to write imaginatively. Teaching Advanced English in a partially selective school, this teacher likely faced a similar pressure to Maria to produce high examination results, and evidently chose texts that would aid students in developing their ability to compose written responses by mirroring the forms those students would be required to write the day of the exam.

'Too many conventional text types': Teachers' challenges in incorporating spoken word poetry and multimodality into high-stakes assessment programs

Teacher beliefs do not always translate directly into pedagogical practice, particularly when it comes to assessment. Yancey (2004) argues that while teachers are comfortable with the products and processes of multimodal text construction, they are decidedly uncomfortable in the related assessment. While multimodality may play a significant role in interesting students in spoken word poetry by departing from traditional written constraints, it is still approached with some trepidation in high-stakes contexts. Curwood (2012) warns of the dangers of approaching texts in one medium through the paradigms of another, as related assessments may fail in capturing students' processes of content learning and meaning-making across multiple semiotic resources and representation modes. With this in mind, an overall question is raised of whether spoken word poetry is indeed a suitable inclusion within Module C, or whether it would be more appropriately placed within a module that is not so embedded in writing-based teaching and learning practices.

Survey responses revealed a trend among teachers to design in-school assessment tasks in a way that will prepare students to achieve high grades in written external examinations regardless of whether they engage with diverse semiotic modes. Maria is one such teacher, closely modelling her Module C in-school

assessment task on the structure of the Module C questions given in examination specifications, with students producing 'a creative response with a reflection to help them write creatively with a critical appreciation for their work and how they are influenced by the works of others'. Indeed, prior research indicates a shift in teachers' pedagogical focus when preparing students for high-stakes assessments, moving from 'imagination and creativity' to 'analysis and drilling' (Frawley, 2016, p. 60), with an increasingly formulaic approach (McKnight, 2020) that threatens the underlying aim of the Stage 6 English Syllabus for students to become 'innovative, active, independent learners' (NESA, 2017e, p. 6).

School-based assessment presents an avenue for teachers to explore the multimodality of spoken word poetry. Jane's students were given an assessment task in which they were to compose a creative composition inspired by a Module C prescribed text such as Lesson's 'May your pen grace the page' as well as an accompanying reflection. As such, the task addressed Outcomes 1, 3, 4, 5, and 9 from the Standard English HSC Syllabus. Interestingly, Jane did not use the task to address Outcome 2, which has perhaps the most explicit links to multimodality of all the outcomes. That said, Jane's task did provide scope for students to address the multimodality of the poem; students were instructed that their sustained written response was to take inspiration from the 'form, structure, significant features, context, and key concepts' of prescribed texts. These concepts are not necessarily exclusive to prescribed written texts, so it allowed students the opportunity to develop a piece of writing in response to the spoken word poem. In the survey, another teacher shared how they managed to integrate processes of multimodal composition into their task by giving students the option to present their written creative piece as a spoken word poem 'if they prefer'.

It is difficult to account for the performative side of spoken word poetry in written HSC examination questions, which form a substantial component of HSC assessment. For example, a sample examination question for Module C in Standard English included the following, 'Explain how your writing in part (a) was influenced by what you have learned about figurative language through the study of your prescribed texts in Module C' (NESA, 2017d, p. 8). Students could discuss the role of performance in enhancing the figurative language, but they would likely not fare well in this question if they focused primarily on the text's performativity at the expense of a discussion of figurative language. Even then, the process of interpreting and evaluating multimodality through written assessment paradigms can be problematic, Yancey (2004) suggests, as it fails to acknowledge multimodal texts holistically, instead focusing on fragmented components or skills involved in their composition. This thereby signals a privileging of the written word over the spoken, at least in the context of high-stakes examinations. As Au (2007) notes, in the era of high-stakes assessment, the nature of assessment can heavily impact student writing, and this is only compounded by the writing-focused nature of HSC assessment. Students may therefore be less inclined to embrace multimodal texts such as spoken word poems when they are often being asked to compose academic essays, narratives, and reflective statements.

Conclusions and future directions

The inclusion of spoken word poetry among prescribed text options on the Stage 6 English Syllabus in NSW invites us to critically consider how the form is conceptualised in light of high-stakes assessment programs more broadly. This study investigated teachers' conceptualisations and implementations of spoken word poetry in the context of the HSC as a highly pressurised matriculative examination. In its divergence from traditional written modes, spoken word poetry can facilitate culturally responsive pedagogy, leading to greater student engagement and critical literacy. In exploring relevant topics through accessible forms of expression, spoken word strengthens students' multimodal literacy skills while empowering them in studying for high-stakes examinations.

This study poses clear pedagogical implications for teachers as they explore spoken word poetry as an emerging text type in high-stakes assessment contexts. While the form is capable of fostering genuine enjoyment among students, it is tempting for teachers to forego it in favour of other forms more clearly aligned with examination outcomes. This suggests that while teachers are generally supportive of emerging, multimodal text types, the pressure of 'teaching to the test' in light of HSC examination requirements continues to prevail. It can be difficult for teachers and students to meaningfully engage with spoken word poetry as a textual form due to the constraints of the written HSC examinations and the demands of assessment outcomes, which heavily dictate the types of texts students produce both during class time and through assessment tasks.

In a world of familiar essays, narratives, and reflective statements, it is not surprising that some teachers hesitate in including spoken word poetry in their HSC curriculum. However, as this study suggests, the intersection of multimodality and culturally responsive pedagogy can critically and creatively engage students within the senior English curriculum. This study therefore implores teachers of the HSC, and other similar programs, to consider spoken word poetry as a valuable means of capturing and maintaining authentic student engagement. At the same time, we must critically question the value of high-stakes assessments like NAPLAN and the HSC in Australian schools: What truly matters when it comes to the processes and products of student writing? How does standardised testing promote teacher agency and encourage student engagement, creativity, and empathy? How can schools support teachers as they develop new multimodal approaches to teaching, analysing, and assessing poetry?

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Analysis of Task Sheets

Who is it for? A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of English Task Sheets

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Abstract: Multimodal discourse analysis (MMDA) has been instrumental in the evolution of English curriculum and pedagogy. However, it is unusual for educators to direct the tools of multimodal inquiry to their own text productions. In the context of prioritising accessibility within the new Queensland Certificate of Education in Queensland, which has increased standardisation requirements and placed pressure on schools to prepare students for high-stakes assessments in Year 12, three English Heads of Department (HoDs) and two academics worked together to analyse samples of their Year 10 summative task designs. The aim was to 'make the familiar strange'. When they analysed the design of assessment task sheets, HoDs were able to identify barriers for students negotiating the reading pathway. Results demonstrate that task sheets have multiple demands within their composition that provide cues for how teachers and school leaders can design tasks that prioritise the interests of the learner.

Keywords: accessibility, multimodal discourse analysis, assessment, English curriculum

Introduction

English teachers in Australia have never been under more pressure to balance the competing interests of formal curriculum, accountability cultures, and the needs of twenty-first-century learners. Additional pressures have come from new curriculum, the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters and teacher shortages (Ball, 2014; QSA, 2002; Salton et al., 2022; Westacott, 2022). Under these conditions, teachers, school leaders and policy-makers often make assessment design decisions under pressure and in a hurry, with little time to review traditional practices. Sometimes the impact of these decisions on students may not be evident until after the event. This is particularly relevant in everyday assessment design decisions like the composition of classroom assessment tasks.

In Queensland, the decisions teachers make about curriculum and assessment are influenced by many sources. The Australian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (ACARA) and Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) provide broad principles that are interpreted by system authorities and schools. Schools have significant freedom to design, administer, and mark assessment at school with minimal external control and oversight. This flexibility, until recently, included senior assessment. For 50 years, since 1971, Queensland had a senior certification system based on internal school-based assessments delivered by teachers and consensus-moderated between schools rather than centrally designed senior public examinations (Maxwell, 2010). However, this freedom to design assessment began to change in 2019, when Queensland reintroduced external examinations in Year 12 for the 2020 cohort, aligning more closely with tertiary entrance systems in NSW and Victoria. Though 75% of assessment for most subjects outside mathematics and the sciences remains school-based (Polesel et al., 2020), there was an intense decision-making period during which schools renegotiated assessment practices.

Assessment change in Queensland has had immediate effects on students and teachers. Greater standardisation of curriculum and assessment, fewer summative tasks and genres, and a higher-stakes environment overall are new features of the senior assessment landscape. New assessment requirements from the final year of schooling are appearing in lower grades – an assessment phenomenon known as washback (Cheng & Watanabe, 2004; Deng & Carless, 2010) When senior assessment forms influence assessment in lower grade levels, it can mean that students do not have a full range of curricular opportunities appropriate for their stage of development (Alford, et al., 2022). There are implications for reduced equity (Cumming, 2020; Polesel et al., 2021; Teese, 2013), as teachers may be less able to be responsive to individual and cohort needs in their interpretation of the formal curriculum. More restricted assessment processes can also undermine teachers' and curriculum leaders' sense of professional authority, creativity, and energy (Doherty, 2014; Willis & Klenowski, 2018), and raises the risk of vulnerable students in high-stakes assessment cultures being blamed or 'responsibilised' when they experience failure (Torrance, 2017). It is timely then for school-based assessment decision-makers to critically reflect on and exercise their agency in the design of school assessment tasks and how these can best serve the interests of learners.

Teachers in subject area English are well positioned to make use of disciplinary expertise to critique and then leverage the aspects of the assessment task design process over which schools can reasonably exercise control. In this spirit, the authors turned to multimodal discourse analysis (MMDA) and the work of Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, which have had a historical and continuing influence on English curriculum and practice. MMDA provides tools students and teachers can use to build English disciplinary knowledge and critical literacy skills for literary, popular culture, and media texts in the context of the Australian Curriculum: English (Macken-Horarik et al., 2019; Mills & Unsworth, 2017). Examining multiple modes of representation and how these interact with one another to create semiotic meaning offers 'a critically distancing perspective on the power-laden use of (forms of) speech and writing in socially discriminatory ways' (Kress, 2011, p. 208). It is difficult to think of a text type where the priority of recognising discriminatory potential and aligning the interests of the text producer and the text interpreter is clearer than for summative assessment tasks. Teachers (and students, and parents, and ultimately policy-makers) need students to comprehend the invited reading if they are to have a fair opportunity to show what they know and can do in relation to the intended or formal curriculums. For many English teachers, MMDA may constitute implicit or background knowledge as part of progressive pedagogies for multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Kalantzis & Cope, n.d.). Certainly it is an area requiring additional professional learning (Macken-Horarik et al., 2018). Nonetheless, its analytic tools are familiar enough to provide a useful starting point for analysing assessment tasks with curriculum leaders.

Some tools of MMDA useful to this enterprise

MMDA is a substantial field, offering an array of tools for analysing multimodal texts. These are underpinned by Halliday's understanding of language as a social semiotic (Halliday, 1978/1994), which considers language in a contextual framework and in turn informed the development of the Australian Curriculum: English (ACARA, 2018; Love et al., 2015). In this paper, Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996/2021) principles of composition provided helpful analytic tools; however, it is acknowledged that other approaches (Bell, 2004; Fairclough, 2010; Gee, 2014) and additional tools, like Halliday's concept of thematic progression, would likely also yield valuable insights.

Composition, or how the representational and interactive elements in the text relate to each other (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996/2021), includes three main systems or principles of *meaning-making*: *information value*, *framing* and *salience* (Figure 1). Together, these decisions guide the selection, attention, and framing of information so that 'learners can be brought closer to the culture's understanding of the matter in a number of steps' (Kress, 2011, p. 216). These tools of cohesion are used by the author to invite the reader to recognise the intended meaning. In the case of summative task-sheet design, the reading pathway created by teachers or faculties will ideally be a coherent prompt that enables students to make meaning and then act in their own interests by producing an appropriate response.

Information value describes how the text is laid out in compositional zones (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996/2021). The placement of various elements is in sections or zones: left-right, top-bottom, centre-margin (Figure 2). Information value decisions indicate what is relevant and important. The distinction

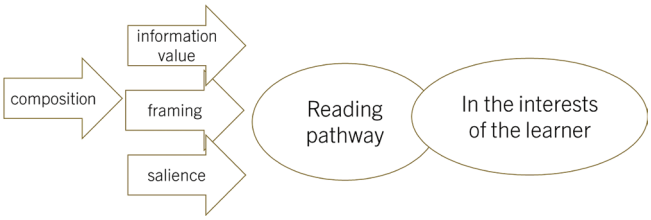


Figure 1. Information value systems and their connection with the learner

between left and right is one source of meaning. In the theory, left is associated with the 'general', 'past', 'recoverable' or 'Given', while right is associated with the 'specific', 'present', 'not recoverable' and therefore 'New' (Halliday, 1978/1994; Van Leeuwen, 2005a). A simple example of this would be the general label Name on the left and a person's actual name on the right. The vertical dimension refers to the placement of information from top to bottom, graduating from general, or 'Ideal' on the top to more specific, or 'Real' meaning at the bottom (Holsanova et al., 2006; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996/2021). For example, the words *Unit 1 Assessment Analytical Essay* might be placed at the very top of a task sheet and the specific information about the task would 'naturally' come underneath. A third variation on placement decisions is *mediated*, in which the central position is the most important and a circle of subordinates surrounds the central figure (Arnheim, 1982). These zones can work separately, in coordination or (as we shall see) in competition.

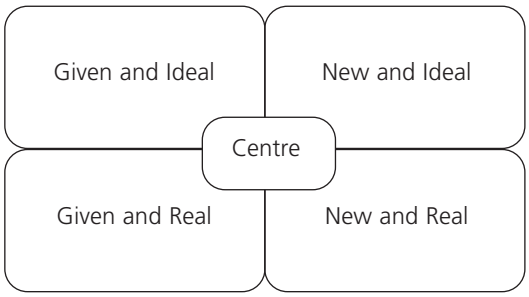


Figure 2. The Information Value SYSTEM (Adapted from Alyousef, 2016)

Framing is how the elements in the text are separated and connected. The lines, spaces and placement of images and text play a role in determining the reading pathways. Some elements are disconnected or 'framed off' from each other, while others occupy the same space and may be read as belonging together. Strength may be signalled by how thick or thin any lines are, or whether there are lines at all (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996/2021). While it is easy to think of everyday examples of framing, such as spaces between items on websites and in newspapers, framing also features in the assessment tasks teachers distribute to students. Framing in assessment can guide reading pathways, but it is notable that in the QCAA's Senior task endorsement processes, it has been limited to white space rather than frame lines.

The third system in composition is *salience*. Salience describes the ways in which the participants in a text draw attention to themselves, and in doing so create a 'hierarchy of importance' (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 202). Salience can be indicated by relative size, sharpness of focus, and colour contrast. Relevant also for our examination of assessment tasks is placement in the visual field. Objects appear heavier towards the top and left, and objects in the foreground or on top of other objects appear more important. Teachers want students to attend to the elements that are most salient if they are to be successful in composing their response.

These three systems work together using the semiotic resources of cohesion to make a text coherent. In using them, authors determine a readying pathway such that the reader can (choose to) take up the intended meaning. For analytic purposes, the systems offer a way of re-examining text for meaning-making, so that the authors in this study can problematise that most familiar of education texts: the assessment task.

Assessment task sheets as cultural tools

In systemic functional linguistics, genres are characterised by what they do: that is, by their social function. A summative assessment task in English might be considered an example of genre-making because it is adapted for communicative action in a way that represents the agency of its authors (Van Leeuwen, 2005b). Task sheets are genres 'invented' for the institutional purpose of measuring performance against the expectations of the curriculum. Their aim, at least on the surface, is to provide students with a straightforward prompt to which they respond (Figure 3), and in the interpretation and transformation of the prompt to a response, learning occurs.

In practice, assessment tasks are so commonplace in schools that the product of the sign-maker's interest and the powerful discursive work that task sheets do is opaque. In addition, there are competing priorities, of educational authorities, teachers and students, that can play out as lexical and visual density and as ambiguity (Graham et al., 2018) when powerful administrative and curricular interest dominate over pedagogical priorities. Students, especially students who experience difference and disability, can often be at a disadvantage

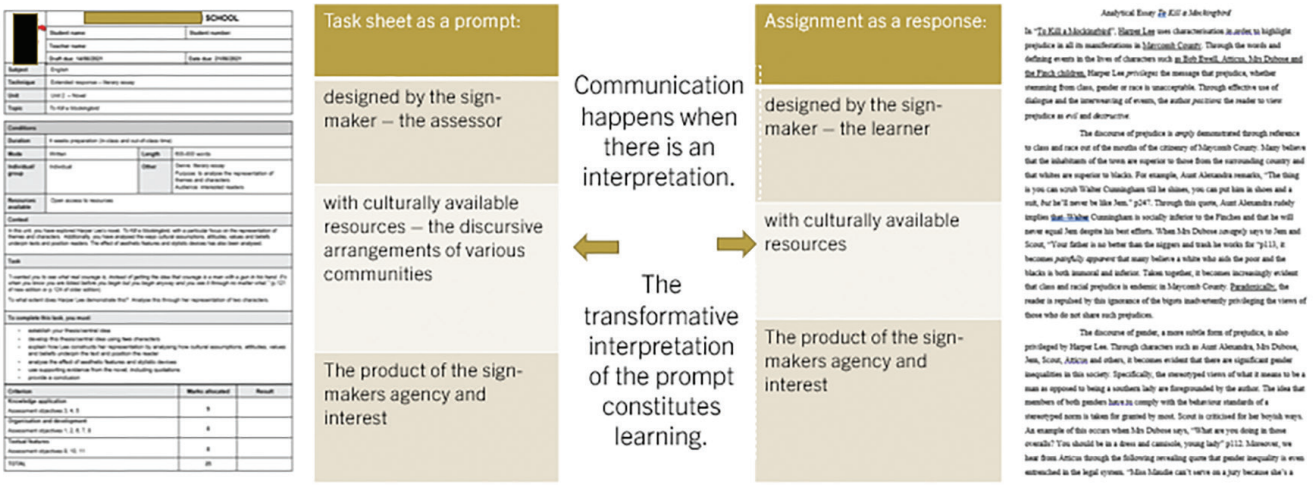


Figure 3. The assessment task as a cultural tool

when they have a different 'take' from their teachers on what the task means: 'In that context the assessor may well see the (student's) sign as an "inadequate", "wrong", "mistaken", misguided sense of the matter' (Kress, 2011, p. 209). As sign-makers, teachers wield cultural resources in assessment design. Assessment task sheets are, at least in Queensland schools, mainly local productions, so there are opportunities for teachers to analyse their assessment designs and consider their composition in the interests of learners. Once assessment task sheets are acknowledged as powerful discursive texts, they can become a focus for designing the reading pathway so that they are invitations for students to demonstrate the best evidence of their learning.

Method

The research question that guided this inquiry was: *What do English HoDs notice when they analyse the composition of assessment task sheets?* Noticing is an active process of making the familiar strange – of carefully attending to an everyday teaching situation that may not usually be a focus of inquiry. Noticing has been a helpful concept in Mathematics education. Mason (2009) proposed that:

> teaching, in its full sense, requires ongoing study of oneself in order to be sensitive to learners, ongoing enquiry as to the sense that learners are making, and ongoing enquiry into the subject matter the discipline. (p. 205)

Since then it has been used to support teachers in multiple disciplines to engage in reflexive inquiry by helping them query a familiar practice and give a detailed account of what is before them before deciding what action to take (Cowie et al., 2018; Sherin & van Es, 2005).

The first noticing step is the conscious effort to see familiar assessment task sheets in a new way. This was the initial phase, in which the three English HoDs read a book chapter article about MMDA and assessment by Kress – *Discourse Analysis and Education: A Multimodal Social Semiotic Approach* (Kress, 2011) – and identified a quote or idea that helped them see assessment tasks in new ways. In sharing why the quote was meaningful with the other HoDs and two researchers, the group members built a shared language of critique and an orientation to the idea of assessment tasks as cultural tools. The second phase was a close analysis of three assessment task sheets provided by the English HoDs, using MMDA's three systems of composition to make observations about what was guiding the reading pathway in each text. Data included the three task sheets made available through research ethics approval from the university, school sector and school principal, the written reflections from the authors about their reading of the academic paper, and discussion of the task sheets.

This socio-semiotic analysis is connected with a larger Australian Research Council Linkage research project investigating how summative task design and formative assessment can be more accessible, especially for students with language and attentional difficulties. The Linkage project began in response to a detailed analysis of the inaccessibility of an English assessment task sheet (Graham et al., 2018). In the larger project, an in-depth technical and inclusive analysis of these same task sheets is occurring through the lens of accessibility. Eye-tracking computer technology has traced actual student reading pathways to inform

the redesign of summative assessment task sheets. Principles and recommendations for redesign are forthcoming from that analysis. This article outlines a complementary process of supporting HoDs to first notice the reader pathway, in order to reinforce the need for assessment task redesign at a local school level while simultaneously deepening English teaching discipline knowledge. The invited reading pathway of this article follows the process to enable other HoDS and English teachers to engage in a similar process of noticing for themselves.

Phase 1: Noticing why it is important to pay attention to the reader's role in assessment task sheets

Noticing involves being able to adjust a familiar gaze and attend in a new way. As a first step in noticing the reader's role in the familiar text type of an assessment task, each author engaged in a close reading of the Kress (2011) article and chose one quote or idea that prompted them to notice the reader's role in assessment task sheets in a new way. Key ideas are summarised, with illustrative individual reflections highlighted in italics.

The first quote prompted a discussion about why students may not see assessment task sheets as inviting them to take an agentic reader's role.

> In texts … social principles become material, manifest, visible, tangible. In traditional institutional education, the principles of coherence held by one generation – teachers, let's say – were dominant. Increasingly, with an ever-growing gap between the principles of students and those of their (generationally distant) teachers, these principles are likely to be ever more different. Given that power is differentially distributed between these two groups, that leads to serious problems. (Kress, 2011, p. 207)

Task sheets are designed according to principles that make sense to teachers who represent a generation older than their students', and these principles are also representative of the social meanings from a previous generation. For one HoD, this was *a bit of an a-ha observation for me (particularly the part about the generational distance…maybe I'm just getting old!). This is a really important aspect of why it's essential to put the learner at the centre of the assessment task. It crystallises the importance of them demonstrating the learning that is important to them in the world that they'll inhabit… The rapid pace of social change makes this even more imperative.* Conversations in faculty meetings while tasks sheets are being planned are often based on what is important to be taught, with teachers advocating by saying 'This is really important for students to know'. The quote prompted the reflection that it is important to ask 'Important to whom?' Additional reflections related to what and how students should 'know' the curriculum were prompted by this quote: 'Epistemological commitment cannot be avoided, no matter what the mode' (Kress, 2011, p. 210). Instead of relying on what has previously been regarded as the uncontested teacher viewpoint about the important focus, there are opportunities to recognise, interrogate, and perhaps even negotiate what knowledge is of value to students.

The group acknowledged that competing factors will influence how teachers will construct knowledge. *It doesn't always extend to considering students' cultural knowledge. When students don't do well, teachers may say 'Why didn't they get it?' but asking questions like 'Is that the way we have to teach?' and 'Why don't our children value the knowledge that we do?' can open up valuable curriculum design choices.* When reflecting on why such discussions were rare in their combined experience, the HoDs noticed the emotional cost of walking the boundary of using the resources and knowledge base teachers have and valuing the interests of students as meaning-makers. Finding out from students what topics or genres they value is something teachers can do to resolve this tension, or at least work productively with the tension.

The importance of students as meaning-makers who respond to assessment tasks was the focus of the second quote:

> Pedagogically speaking, an exhibition (re)presents a 'curriculum' for visitors seen as learners. In that context, the 'maps' made by the visitors at the conclusion of their visit, can give some indication of which aspects of the overall design/message/curriculum engaged the visitor's interest and how. (Kress, 2011, p. 218)

The analogy of a museum exhibition and assessment task sheets is very apt for me. It helps prompt a bit of reflection on whose purpose task sheets serve, and whether they hold up as strong examples of pedagogical tools that prompt engagement or learning, or whether they serve a more didactic purpose which prompts particular answers that conform to an accountability agenda, but don't necessarily prompt engagement.

The discussion exploring this metaphor highlighted how, as adult learners, we didn't like to be heavily directed and scaffolded, yet that is the tension that is

faced by teachers and students. Assessment is highly scaffolded. It has become a rigid guided museum tour that is stifling. Assessment task sheets could act as prompts: *This is what assessment task sheets should be – a prompt to students that is not shaping their response through external powers designed primarily through a rigid accountability discourse, but instead something which directs the student's attention and allows them to shape knowledge in a way that demonstrates the desired skills and objectives.* These experienced HoDs noted that, even in an assessment task that offers choices, agency is often reduced through scaffolding, teaching and assumptions about quality made by all parties involved.

Looking back, the group noticed that *since the 1990s, student choices have been narrowed and this has impacted engagement. Perhaps the lack of choice for teachers reflects a social culture where teachers push that lack of choice down to students.* There was recognition that teachers do have agency to find the sweet spot between 'anything goes' and enabling student choice and agency. For example, exploring different ways of representing learning can occur in multimodal assessment. Future conversations topics were identified such as whether the current range of assessed genres is too narrow, what other possibilities are, or what would happen if students had a choice about what the units were and what the assessment was to be. The group concurred that with student agency comes accountability. *At the moment I say to kids, 'It looks like I care about your assessment more than you do'.* The HoD reflected on how a shared language of student agency enabled them to say *'You have made the choice to say that is what you value. How are you then working on making it clear?'* as a way to consider agency and accountability side by side.

The importance of design and agency for meaning-making and avoiding over-scaffolding provided an important introduction to Phase 2 that focused the analysis on three Year 10 English task sheets, drawing on the MMDA principles outlined in the article.

Phase 2: Analysing the invited reader's role in assessment task sheets

Assessment task sheets and student responses are each a product of the respective sign-makers' agency and interest. The challenge in assessment design is to create a harmonious 'multimodal ensemble' (Kress, 2012, p. 38) that aligns the interests of assessor and the learner. This alignment is the principled work of teachers, especially English teachers who understand the power of language and discourse. In Phase 2, the analysis focused on the composition of task sheets, to contemplate a reading pathway in the interests of the learner. The task sheets were considered for their information value, framing and salience.

These systems may be familiar to English teachers, who teach about critical analysis of multimodal texts. Participating in this fine-grained reading may refresh previously learned disciplinary knowledge, suggesting how it might after all be useful with students, while addressing practical reforms in assessment. As the analysis progressed, it was clear that there were convoluted and competing reader pathways in each of the three task sheets. Information value was considered for the first task sheet, which provided a good example of coherence being compromised by informational value decisions. The second task sheet suggested that alterations to framing could improve a reader pathway, while the third task sheet showed how salience could be improved.

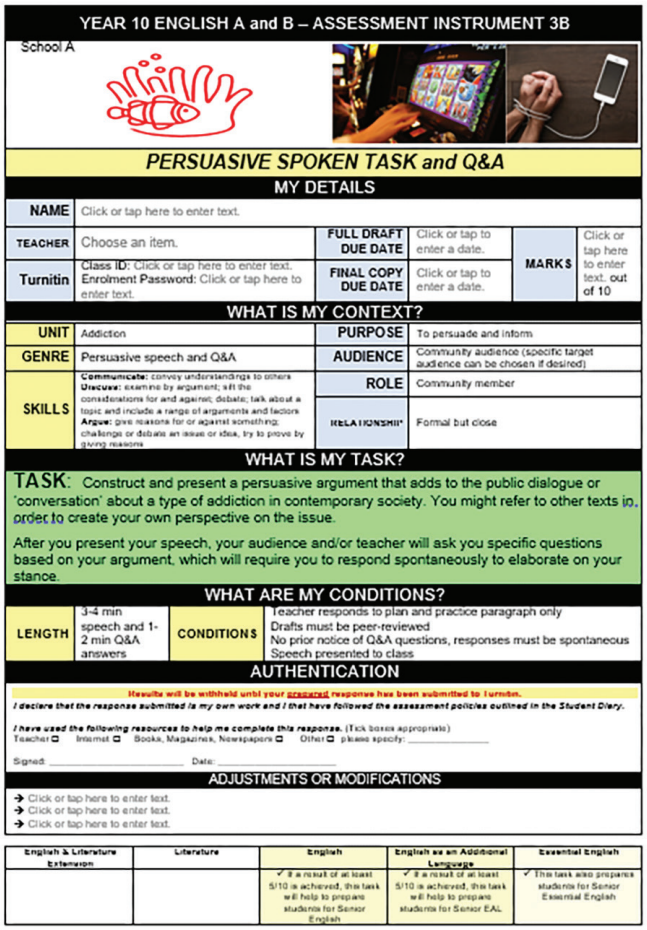
Information value: Where is the information and what does that tell us about what is important? Where things are placed on the page reflects what is regarded as most important to see: information value. Placement decisions about a large number of elements, variously employing left-right, top-bottom, and centre-margin arrangements, contribute to the complexity of the task sheet as a text. An analysis of School A's task sheet (Figure 4) revealed several possible barriers to student comprehension created by information value decisions. Many of these related to how the reader pathway is marshalled in different directions with the potential to distract and confuse the reader. HoDs noticed that placement decisions in the assessment task resulted in irrelevant information being afforded unnecessary prominence, while important aspects were hidden by 'visual noise' (salience). Attending to information value suggested that the 'given and ideal' (top left) location, which is routinely used in assessment task sheets for school names, logos and emblems, would be better used for information that oriented students to the assessment task. For example, the valuable real estate taken up by school branding could be replaced by the 'what' or main topic of the assessment. Many of the design considerations were identified in the analysis process as administrative cues – a legacy from when task sheets were physical marking artefacts, printed and stapled to the front of a student's response. With digital submission more common, that function is no longer as important. In making these design choices, details that are not central to the task interrupt

the flow of important information from 'given to new' and 'ideal to real'.

The central position is another crucial element of the composition (Arnheim, 1982). In line with this, the task is in a large green field at the centre of the A4 page. While this is a logical design choice, when it is combined with reading pathways running left-to-right and top-to-bottom and hard framing in tables to map curriculum links, the reading pathway is disrupted. Without the intervention of a teacher to guide reading of the task in the classroom, students are being expected to look to the 'task' section first. After this, they could search for information about the conditions or type of task, which are found both above and below the task. The reading pattern encouraged here is not linear, but rather radial in nature, with several points of disconnection. These disruptions to a more natural left-to-right, top-to-bottom reading pathway affect accessibility and make it necessary for teachers to unpack the task verbally. While the template itself was over time intended to orientate students through a predictably routine layout, the MMDA analytic process indicated how 'assessments requiring additional engagement between students and their teachers, or indeed between students themselves, to clarify expectations and requirements, are not innately inclusive' (Kieran et al., 2018).

When putting the learner's engagement with the assessment task at the centre of design choices, traditional placement of many factors of an assessment task sheet can be challenged. *Does the school logo need to be there at all? If software was to read this aloud linearly, would it make sense?* Much information included on the page was not relevant to the task itself or had become obsolete, including authentication declarations (software is usually used for this) and information about subject pathways. This analysis prompted some reflection about how information can sometimes be 'over-mapped', with too many markers of curriculum and assessment policies and procedures creating unnecessary noise and distracting from clear reading pathways and the assessment task itself. Interrogating what elements in the information value system contribute to or detract from a coherent reading pathway for a student reader was a good first step for analysis.

Framing: How are the elements separated and connected? Framing creates categories that can control a reader pathway by determining which signs will be interpreted as being distinct or independent and which will be



YEAR 10 ENGLISH A and B – ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT 3B

School A

PERSUASIVE SPOKEN TASK and Q&A

MY DETAILS

NAME	Click or tap here to enter text.				
TEACHER	Choose an item.	FULL DRAFT DUE DATE	Click or tap to enter a date.	MARKS	Click or tap here to enter text. out of 10
Turnitin	Class ID: Click or tap here to enter text. Enrolment Password: Click or tap here to enter text.	FINAL COPY DUE DATE	Click or tap to enter a date.		

WHAT IS MY CONTEXT?

UNIT	Addiction	PURPOSE	To persuade and inform
GENRE	Persuasive speech and Q&A	AUDIENCE	Community audience (specific target audience can be chosen if desired)
SKILLS	**Communicate:** convey understandings to others **Discuss:** examine by argument; sift the considerations for and against; debate; talk about a topic and include a range of arguments and factors **Argue:** give reasons for or against something; challenge or debate an issue or idea; try to prove by giving reasons	ROLE	Community member
		RELATIONSHIP	Formal but close

WHAT IS MY TASK?

TASK: Construct and present a persuasive argument that adds to the public dialogue or 'conversation' about a type of addiction in contemporary society. You might refer to other texts in order to create your own perspective on the issue.

After you present your speech, your audience and/or teacher will ask you specific questions based on your argument, which will require you to respond spontaneously to elaborate on your stance.

WHAT ARE MY CONDITIONS?

LENGTH	3-4 min speech and 1-2 min Q&A answers	CONDITIONS	Teacher responds to plan and practice paragraph only Drafts must be peer-reviewed No prior notice of Q&A questions, responses must be spontaneous Speech presented to class

AUTHENTICATION

Results will be withheld until your assessed response has been submitted to Turnitin.

I declare that the response submitted is my own work and I that have followed the assessment policies outlined in the Student Diary.

I have used the following resources to help me complete this response. (Tick boxes appropriate)
Teacher ☐ Internet ☐ Books, Magazines, Newspapers ☐ Other ☐ please specify: _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____

ADJUSTMENTS OR MODIFICATIONS

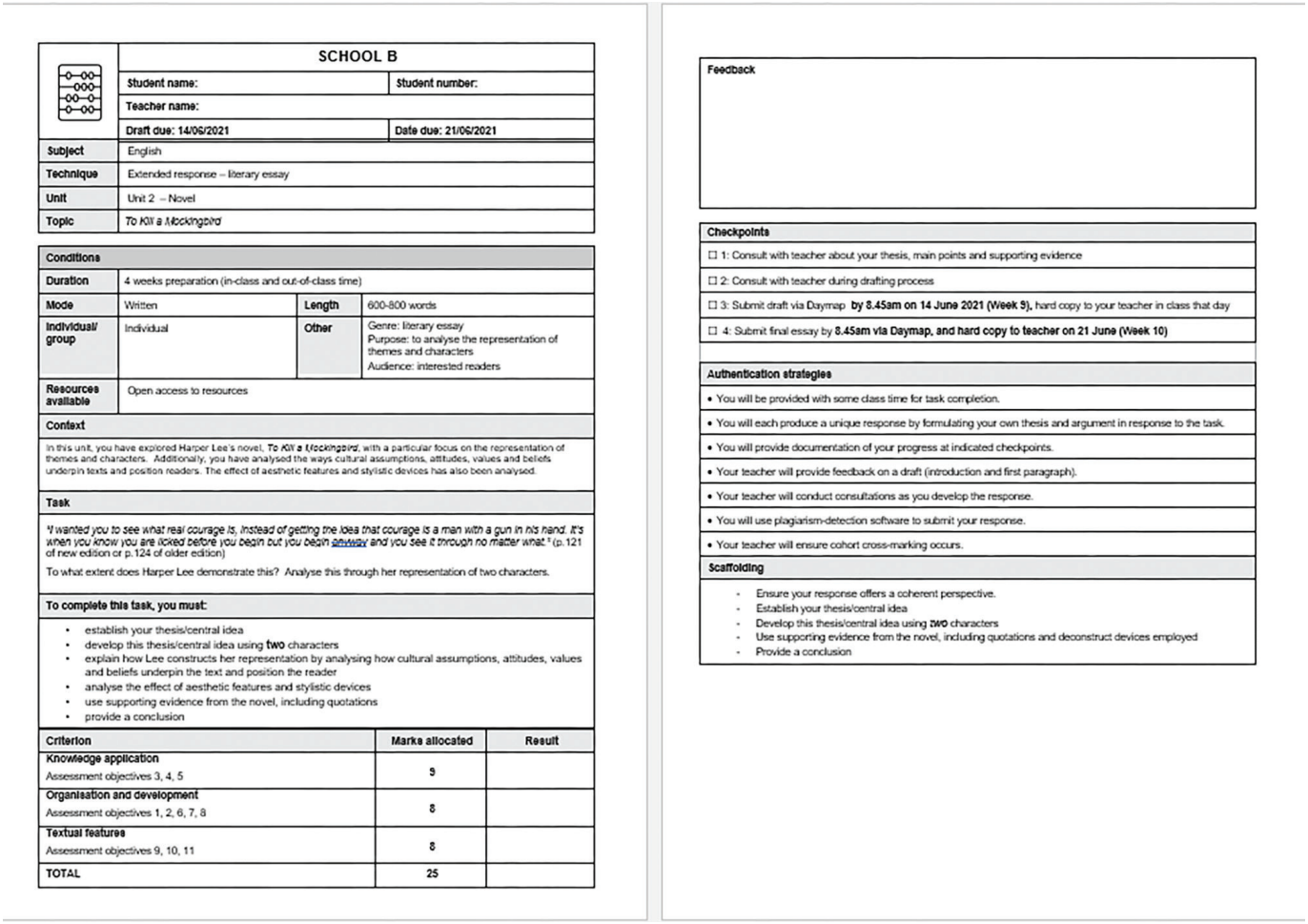
→ Click or tap here to enter text.
→ Click or tap here to enter text.
→ Click or tap here to enter text.

English & Literature Extension	Literature	English	English as an Additional Language	Essential English
		✓ If a result of at least 5/10 is achieved, this task will help to prepare students for Senior English	✓ If a result of at least 5/10 is achieved, this task will help to prepare students for Senior EAL	✓ This task also prepares students for Senior Essential English

Figure 4. School A Task Sheet

interpreted as connected or belonging together. As assessment task sheets often have a high volume of information that may belong to various categories, they make frequent use of framing. In analysing the task sheets, we asked *What work do the lines, spaces and placement of images do to control the ways we read? Which things belong together and which have been 'framed off' from each other? How thick or thin are frame lines and are they lines (segregation) or spaces (separation) indicating stronger or weaker categorisation?* A close analysis of the three task sheets highlighted that there were multiple types of framing, when combined with related issues of information value and salience, have the potential to confuse or overwhelm student readers.

An analysis of School B's task sheet (Figure 5) illuminated how conventional notions of 'organised' task sheet design might interrupt a learner's reading pathway. Design decisions to include tables and boxes to separate information, shading, bullet points and bolded font are often guided by whole-school templates. In this case, the framing separated types of information into administrative information, faculty or discipline information, and task production requirements. The



SCHOOL B

Student name:	Student number:
Teacher name:	
Draft due: 14/06/2021	Date due: 21/06/2021
Subject	English
Technique	Extended response – literary essay
Unit	Unit 2 – Novel
Topic	*To Kill a Mockingbird*

Conditions			
Duration	4 weeks preparation (in-class and out-of-class time)		
Mode	Written	**Length**	600-800 words
Individual/ group	Individual	**Other**	Genre: literary essay Purpose: to analyse the representation of themes and characters Audience: interested readers
Resources available	Open access to resources		

Context

In this unit, you have explored Harper Lee's novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, with a particular focus on the representation of themes and characters. Additionally, you have analysed the ways cultural assumptions, attitudes, values and beliefs underpin texts and position readers. The effect of aesthetic features and stylistic devices has also been analysed.

Task

'I wanted you to see what real courage is, instead of getting the idea that courage is a man with a gun in his hand. It's when you know you are licked before you begin but you begin anyway and you see it through no matter what.' (p.121 of new edition or p.124 of older edition)

To what extent does Harper Lee demonstrate this? Analyse this through her representation of two characters.

To complete this task, you must:

- establish your thesis/central idea
- develop this thesis/central idea using **two** characters
- explain how Lee constructs her representation by analysing how cultural assumptions, attitudes, values and beliefs underpin the text and position the reader
- analyse the effect of aesthetic features and stylistic devices
- use supporting evidence from the novel, including quotations
- provide a conclusion

Criterion	Marks allocated	Result
Knowledge application Assessment objectives 3, 4, 5	9	
Organisation and development Assessment objectives 1, 2, 6, 7, 8	8	
Textual features Assessment objectives 9, 10, 11	8	
TOTAL	25	

Feedback

Checkpoints

- ☐ 1: Consult with teacher about your thesis, main points and supporting evidence
- ☐ 2: Consult with teacher during drafting process
- ☐ 3: Submit draft via Daymap **by 8.45am on 14 June 2021 (Week 9),** hard copy to your teacher in class that day
- ☐ 4: Submit final essay by **8.45am via Daymap, and hard copy to teacher on 21 June (Week 10)**

Authentication strategies

- You will be provided with some class time for task completion.
- You will each produce a unique response by formulating your own thesis and argument in response to the task.
- You will provide documentation of your progress at indicated checkpoints.
- Your teacher will provide feedback on a draft (introduction and first paragraph).
- Your teacher will conduct consultations as you develop the response.
- You will use plagiarism-detection software to submit your response.
- Your teacher will ensure cohort cross-marking occurs.

Scaffolding

- Ensure your response offers a coherent perspective.
- Establish your thesis/central idea
- Develop this thesis/central idea using **two** characters
- Use supporting evidence from the novel, including quotations and deconstruct devices employed
- Provide a conclusion

Figure 5. School B Task Sheet

assumption is that students will read in a 'logical' manner, from top to bottom. The top section is framed off by lines and space for information about the student; the student is required to add their student number, which on reflection was seen to be no longer relevant information in the context. Shading in the subsequent sections privileges conditions and administrative authority as most important and draws the learner's eye to these cells (salience), in this case introducing the left-to-right reading pathway (information value). Below the administrative information is curricular information related to subject, technique, unit and topic details and task conditions. The next section, which consists of framed-off subsections but is not itself separated from the previous or next section, presents the actual task information. It's a lot.

For a learner, the deployment of framing resources may be bewildering, especially since much of the information contained within frames is irrelevant to their understanding of the core purpose of the task. Shaded cells, bolded font, white space, and bullet points signify importance but they also constitute additional framing, and the student reader must determine how the various elements are connected and distinct. Framing decisions also affect coherence for the actual task. Italics delineate the quote. This signals emphasis, but it may be unclear to students what the relationship between the quote and the task description should be. On the second page is a large empty box for feedback. Ideally, this would be framed with the marks so the connection between the two is clear to the learner. The framing used in this entire section related to the task has high potential to interrupt a learner's ability to connect these aspects in ways that are helpful to their task performance.

A strong influence on the original task sheet design was a belief that a Year 10 task sheet should be used to prepare the learners for the Senior school. Thus the remaining information across the pages mirrors Senior (Year 12) assessment criterion, feedback, checkpoint, and authentication strategy features. Some of these are arguably inappropriate or unnecessary for Year 10. The heavy framing of authentication strategies, as with much of the information, serves little purpose other than an authoritative one related to emphasising senior responsibilities. Overall, 'layered' framing with

attempts at cohesion via shading, bolding, dot points and lines disrupts the learner's comprehension and communicates the power and importance of senior school outcomes and administrative authority.

In assessment task design, it is critical that framing decisions work harmoniously with information value and salience to invite the reader to create a reading pathway in the interest of the learner; that is, to understand what response is expected. The example presented here includes information that has been selected for a variety of reasons. Multiple and layered framing resources are likely to interrupt a reader's pathway and distract them from making sense of the task requirements. Competing priorities are easily overlooked when templates are used and purposes other than clearly communicating the requirements of the task are privileged. In recognising the disruption, the HoDs noticed that framing can also assist the reader by categorising the information to assist comprehension.

Salience: What visual elements are evident that would draw a reader's attention? The elements in a text draw attention to themselves in various ways, and these decisions made by agents create a hierarchy of importance (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996/2021). Although the elements in texts always compete, some texts make it easy to see what is important, and secondary students' assessment task sheets should certainly do so. The analysis for salience focused on *What has greatest and least size?* and *How do tone and colour contrasts direct attention?* As with all the analytic categories, salience interacts with the other systems. For example, placing information in the top left corner can be evidence of what has greater salience, and it also establishes a reading pathway from left to right and top to bottom (information value). Where competition for salience is very high, the intended reading might be compromised. This will almost certainly be significant for students who experience difficulty with reading complex texts.

When analysing the School C task sheet (Figure 6) through a salience lens, making the familiar strange was particularly fruitful. The task sheet format was the result of years of evolution from the starting point of a school-wide template, which made it easy to overlook what might otherwise have been obvious: the formatting of the first page, which represents mainly whole-school

NOTICE OF FORMAL ASSESSMENT

Year ten English Unit two: Be like Greta

Student:	**Teacher:**

Purpose of Assessment: Students are to demonstrate their ability to prepare and present a **persuasive** multimodal speech.

Date Set:	Week beginning May 10	**Draft obligations met:**
Draft Due:	Week beginning May 24	**Yes** ☐ **No** ☐ **= letter/ phone call home**
Date Due:	Week beginning June 7	

Conditions:
- Maximum of one draft with feedback;
- Subject matter developed through individual research and unit activities;
- All planning documents, drafts, PPT slides, task sheet and final script must be submitted.

Length:
- 4 – 6 minutes

Access to resources:
- Open access to resources

Feedback: Feedback given on ONE draft

Late submission: All requests for extensions must be submitted to the Head of Department prior to the due date. Late submissions without explanations acceptable to the Head of the English Department will be assessed on monitored class work.

Assistance received in drafting and proofreading

	None	Some	Major
Teachers			
Parents			
Tutor			
Friends			
Other			

Plagiarism Declaration:

This is my own work. I haven't copied it from anywhere. I've shown all the help I've received.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

1. BACKGROUND

The organisers behind School Strike for the Climate, the movement founded by Greta Thunberg, are planning a Livestream called #BuildaBetterFuture, to launch the next phase of their fight for climate action.

As issues of sustainability grow more urgent in the face of increasingly frequent extreme weather events, species extinctions, rising sea levels, frighteningly enormous piles of waste going to landfill, and damning statistics that show that the world's non-renewable resources are running out, the need to take action and persuade others to get involved is becoming increasingly apparent.

2. TASK

You are to create a presentation to contribute to the #BuildaBetterFuture Livestream, persuading your audience to take action on an issue of your choosing (in consultation with your teacher).

You will need to:
- Decide on a sustainability issue that interests you, such as water, energy, waste or biodiversity;
- Narrow the context: investigate the impact of your issue at more focused level such as at school or in a particular part of Australia;
- Investigate the ways in which your audience could help to make a difference;
- Construct a thesis which makes the reasons for the need to take action clear;
- Write your speech using a range of techniques to persuade your audience to take action;
- Create a digital multi-modal component such as a PowerPoint or Prezi to support your speech. It should help to persuade your audience to take action, not simply illustrate your points;
- Make sure you have a strong call to action.

You must position your audience to understand the underpinning ideas, values and attitudes connected with your issue.

3. ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS

Informed student speaking to persuade peers and adults participating in the Livestream.

4. GUIDELINES:

Your multimodal response is a **persuasive** text type that uses rhetorical techniques to convince an audience to adopt your point of view. Include:

An introduction including a hook, something to engage and connect with your audience, and an explanation of who you are and why the audience should engage with your issue;

A body providing evidence as to the importance of your issue, such as statistics, facts and authoritative opinion. Present this evidence using a range of persuasive techniques, and propose a solution/solutions (which will underpin your call to action);

A conclusion including a summary of your main points, and a strong call for your audience to take action.

Language: emotive, persuasive, high modality.

Elements to consider:
- Images that connect to the issue and/or intended audience;
- Fonts, colours and language that create a mood and an intended emotional appeal;
- Layout of your PowerPoint/poster so that it is visually engaging, is persuasive and will encourage further action.

Figure 6. School C Task Sheet

administrative priorities, is stylistically different from the second page, which represents curricular priorities and task instructions. This discursive shift is potentially confusing to students who are considering how to judge a hierarchy of salience. On the first page, the gold-and-black school logo in the top left corner combined with the large font for school and unit is at the top of the hierarchy of salience. On the remainder of the page, headings are bold but are situated within the cells of the information to which they are related (framing). On the second page, headings are not only in bold, but also capitalised, numbered, and given a separate row with a grey background. The green 'meme' on page two (STOP DESTROYING OUR PLANET), a distillation of the purpose of the task, was a deliberate salience choice, drawing attention to the task cell as an engagement tool. However, this competition for salience would undoubtedly have misdirected some students to search for significance, when the decisions that seemed to point to salience were really a hangover from a previous redesign and relatively meaningless for the purpose of deciding how to respond. This 'salience compromise' may well be resolved by the teacher's explanation during class time, or by students becoming used to meanings through routine or repetition across the school. Nonetheless, it is an example of hierarchical choice that affects coherence.

Overall, the pragmatic concerns of fitting the 'required' information onto the pages may have had more influence on the task sheet design than any questions of deliberately managing salience for students. This additionally resulted in a lack of white space on the second page. As with School A, the legacy of having a picture on every task sheet as an engagement tool contributes to a competition for salience. Similar to School B's task sheet, a range of resources for framing, including bold font and shading, create objects that compete for salience; everything and therefore nothing is salient, and this may be taken as an invitation to disengage. Without clear cues to meaningfully help students recognise what is *most* important, students must turn to the teacher or perhaps peers for coherence.

As part of the Accessible Assessment Linkage project, all three task sheets were redesigned drawing on data from students' eye-tracking and interviews, and further conversations with HoDs and researchers. The redesigned task sheets include clear hierarchy of salience, making it easier to see what is important and what the student needs to do in order to respond within the culturally acceptable limits designated by the prompt.

Discussion

The outlined process of critical reflection between peers made use of the English HoDs' disciplinary expertise in MMDA to answer the research question: *What do English HoDs notice when they analyse the composition of assessment task sheets?* Reading the book chapter by Kress together raised questions about how assessment task sheets function as cultural tools to 'realise the interests of their makers' (Kress, 2011, p. 207). In the subsequent discussion, the HoDs noticed the ways in which semiotic resources had been deployed, both as expressions of generational power and as immediate information texts to prompt student responses. They considered whether the layout of the assessment task sheet was contributing to a clear or confusing reader pathway. The analytic steps of MMDA also suggested possible actions beyond layout decisions, like attending to the topics of assessment, the modes or genres, and how much choice is made available to students. The critical process was an efficient and practical way to leverage the aspects of task sheet design over which schools, and faculties within schools, can reasonably exercise control.

Starting with the Kress (2011) reading enabled peers to develop a shared language of critique to give an account for how choices in creating texts communicate powerful ideas. We learned together that 'the principles of coherence are social in their origins and, being social, they 'track' social changes – though social and semiotic pace may not necessarily be the same' (Kress, 2011, p. 207). This perspective allowed us to read the assessment task sheet is an example of everyday 'entexting' or genre-making (prompt and response) in schools where the generic patterns develop over time, influenced by systemic and operational priorities. The traces of the social powers were often opaque, as these essentially procedural texts were so encoded in the culture of school sites that their layered and sometimes archaic signifiers pointed to priorities that no longer exist. These patterns and effects may be so familiar that they are invisible to their authors. Indeed, it may even be unclear who the authors really are and who might have the authority to re-make them. However, other signifiers pointed towards the washback effects of a new Senior curriculum and the power of adult administration.

Noticing textual choices and contemplating their

origin and possible effects is a first step to making change (Cowie et al., 2018). With their cultural resources of MMDA, English teachers have the opportunity to contemplate how students can be empowered through the design decisions of summative assessment task sheets. Students in completing assessment tasks are engaged in transforming given information and given representation (the task or prompt) into new representations (the response) (Kress & Selander, 2012). The HoDs noticed that the topic and layout of the task sheet needs to be designed in the students' interest and for students to try to match 'what is seen as proper representations and signs of learning' (Kress & Selander, 2012, p. 265). Teachers decide what might be 'proper' representations when they grade student work and have this representation in mind when they design an invited reading of the task sheet. To access the opportunity to create a proper representation fairly, students should be able to comprehend the invited reading with minimal support. While teachers do decode assessment task sheets in their classroom explanations for students, task sheets are a cultural tool designed to be read in multiple places and times. They need to be accessible on their first reading *and* in subsequent readings – at the start of an assignment, during the preparation of drafts, and after receiving grades. They need to be accessible when students read them at school and at home and in class. They need to be accessible among peers, or with the support of a parent, sibling or tutor. English HoDs noticed, when they analysed the composition of assessment task sheets, that they could more readily guide students' access to the task through attending to issues of selection, attention, framing and interpretation. Considering the elements of a text and how students might use these to make meaning allowed the HoDs to recognise what elements of the composition were being given prime real estate for information value, how framing was working to direct attention, and what objects were given salience. In recognising the problems, it was quite easy to see what small changes could be made in the layout to support, rather than confuse, the reader.

HoDs and teachers have agency and power as people who are deciding what will be considered a proper or successful representation of learning, even when there are some limits to their agency in deciding how assessment is represented and discussed across the school. Teachers design assessment task sheets in contexts, and need to balance multiple accountabilities. For example, schools may mandate templates in the name of consistency so a focus can be included even when it may not be directly applicable to that task. Assessment task sheets can be used to coordinate the official curriculum across many classes; they can include administrative information about how to use electronic submission or apply for extensions; and they can contain mechanisms to regulate behaviour through reminders to avoid plagiarism. Often these competing priorities are added into a task sheet without contemplating their wider impact for students. The multiplicity of purposes that were evident in the three task sheets that were analysed was seen by the HoDs as a metaphor for their own tensions. Decisions had been made over time and persisted in the document even when the reasons were no longer valid, such as following a move from paper to electronic submission. In all three cases there were formatting issues that were carried over from previous task versions, with individual teachers too busy to question, interrogate and reflect. Revisiting these decisions regularly as an English team is one way to critically reflect on the intentional reader pathway and consider redesigning the task.

As new assessment requirements have rapidly washed back from the final year of school into lower secondary grades in Queensland, there is opportunity for teachers to notice the consequences of this washback. Such noticings may lead to informed challenges to the document design process, like agreeing on what the purpose of an assessment ask should be, and extend to wider disciplinary considerations, such as whether the genres of representation have become too narrow. Such design considerations and selections that are made in designing the task sheets are thus transformed into spaces for agency and change.

Concluding thoughts

English teachers are well positioned to use the culturally available resources at their disposal to design assessment task sheets to privilege the interests of the learner. This paper makes a case for 'the development of apt tools for the recognition of agency in learning' (Kress & Selander, 2012, p. 216) and suggests a place to begin. The collaborative process of analysing assessment task sheets enabled experienced secondary English educators to question why task sheets look the way they do and consider whose interests they serve. The two-phase analysis highlighted practical ways for teachers to engage in redesigning the task layout. The process of engaging in disciplinary knowledge using

MMDA to analyse English assessment task sheets is a worthwhile one for curriculum leaders to include as a regular review process. As HoDs balance an array of competing interests, the process of critical inquiry into the text of the assessment task sheet can simultaneously build their disciplinary knowledge, assessment literacy and critical literacy, and invite teachers to walk with them. It is equity work and professional learning combined.

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'Curriculum', 'National', 'English' ...? A Critical Exploration of Key Terms with Some Seriously Playful Alternatives

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ABSTRACT

This opens with a critical and historical exploration of the terms that make up the phrase 'English National Curriculum', breaking them down to build them up differently. This prompts a critique of the nominally singular subject 'English' that stresses its plurality ('Englishes') and introduces the concept 'Englishing' to highlight its ongoing dynamism as a reflexive verbal practice. The conclusion is organised round five prefixes and a suffix: multi-, inter-, trans-, co-, re- and -ing. These, it is argued, combined with a variety of stems and roots, point the ways forward for a subject that is always one and many, a series of open processes as well as more or less achieved products. The emphasis throughout is upon actual readers, as potential (re)writers, responding creatively as well as critically, in and on their own terms.

This is an act of naming – and a kind of game-plan – in two parts. The first part offers a historical perspective on the words at the core of the present and many previous debates. What are the main meanings that 'English' and 'National' and 'Curriculum' have carried over the years, centuries in fact, and in various contexts? What do they actually – or can they possibly – mean nowadays, at the beginning of the twenty-first century? The second part is more playful but still serious. It is a work-out with some parts of words – the prefixes *inter-*, *multi-*, *trans-*, *co-* and *re-* and the suffix *-ing*, to be precise – that seem to me especially needful if we are to keep moving the study of English (and much else) forwards and not regress to some image of a subject that never was.

Taken as a whole, this piece draws on – and pulls together – the main strands in my work as researcher, teacher and text-book writer: investigating ways in which the history of words can throw light on important aspects of meaning that are often forgotten or ignored (Pope 2005); developing understanding of a subject that may seem to be singular and fixed ('English') but that in reality always turns out to be plural ('Englishes') and ongoing ('Englishing') (Pope 2002a; 2009a); commitment to learning that is creative as well as critical, turning potentially passive reading into thoroughly engaged acts of writing and rewriting (Pope 1995, 2002b, 2006a). With the latter in mind, this piece is punctuated with direct questions to the reader (you) and some invitations to carry on researching and writing in and on your own terms).[1]

One last preliminary observation: it relates to the presentation and ordering of words in the above title and the exploration that follows. What I have done – in a sense *all* I have done – is to highlight each and reverse all of the items in the all-too-familiar phrase 'English National Curriculum'. For the latter tends to come at us as a prefabricated block, as though it were a single

lump of thought. Indeed, in educational reporting and sometimes in the education reports themselves (in the UK in the 1990s, for example – contemporary Australia, beware!) 'English National Curriculum' hardened to become the kind of 'ready-made phrase' that George Orwell censured in his classic essay 'Politics and the English Language' (1946): 'They will construct your sentences for you, even think your thoughts for you […] partially concealing your meaning even from yourself'. ' "Curriculum", "National", "English" …?' is an attempt to offset this tendency. It is a modest yet hopefully suggestive instance of what critical linguists and cultural theorists call 'defamiliarising' or 'making strange'. It also invites a vigorous 'supplementing' as well as further 'interrogation' of the terms at issue (hence '… ?').[2] Such vigilance and resourcefulness are especially necessary where 'English' itself features as the means of communication as well as the object of study. 'Englishing' is what we *do* too.

Here, then, are some selected observations about the words at issue, along with some questions and provocations to keep them on the move. The information draws on a range of standard and recent authorities (*The Oxford English Dictionary* and supplements, 1989–; Lewis 1962; Williams 1983; Bennett et al. 2005). The questions should be freely supplemented – and themselves questioned – as the reader sees fit.

CURRICULUM (from Latin *currere*, *currens*, to run, running) has early meanings ranging from 'running' in general to 'race-running' in particular. It shares its root (via French) with COURSE, meaning both a physical course (for running, jousting, rowing, etc.) and, by extension, a course of action and educational course. So there are 'curricular' possibilities that can embrace 'running' for its own sake, to keep fit, and running for a prize or prestige, to win; also physical and cerebral kinds of activity. Curriculum also has close cognates in the adjective CURRENT, meaning a flow of water and what is presently passing, e.g. 'current affairs', and its abstract noun CURRENCY, which has long carried the general sense of 'that which is current' and, the dominant sense since the nineteenth century, 'flow of money' or simply 'money'. 'No graven images may be/ Worshipped, except the currency', says Arthur Hugh Clough – poet, civil servant and friend of the writer and inspector of schools, Matthew Arnold – in 'The Latest Decalogue' (1862), his satiric rewriting of The Ten Commandments for mid-Victorian morality, concluding with the still richly resonant lines: 'Thou shalt not covet, but tradition/Approves all forms of competition'.

So how far do you *see the curriculum to be about 'running to keep fit' or 'racing to win'? Fit for what? Through competition or co-operation? Does it extend to other kinds of physical and cerebral activity? And do the majority have to be 'losers'?*

NATIONAL in its earliest usages refers to a 'people related by blood and birth' (Latin *natio*) who were all, by extension, likely to be NATIVE to the same area. Both these terms derive, via French, from Latin *nasci*, *natum*, meaning 'to be born'; hence also English 'nativity' and 'nature'. In this respect, contentiously yet incontrovertibly, the 'FIRST NATIONS' of Australia, like those in North and South America and Africa, were – even if they are no longer – the various peoples born in and native to the land before the coming of European settlers. The latter, however, brought with them a concept of 'nation' (initially 'nationhood') that was already highly developed, historically specific and, as it turned out, deeply influential. From the late sixteenth century onwards, the Western European NATION STATES that superseded medieval feudalism were framed in terms of commercial competition and military expansion, and from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries were further defined and fuelled by the scientific and industrial revolutions. Thus was born a concept of NATIONALITY only nominally tied to the notion of 'country of birth' and in reality underwritten by agreements over trade and empire and, when commercial push came to military shove, overwritten by disagreements about colonial rivalry. 'Papers' (legal and financial) were the essential currency of such nationality and its key documents, still, are the 'passport', 'visa' and 'work permit'. Though it is important to remember that full 'nationality', like voting rights, was for a long time dependent on property, sex, age, and in some cases, religion.

'INTERNATIONAL' seems to be the natural complement and counterpart to 'national'. But the term has only been current since the late nineteenth century, and the fact that its most common modern collocations are with 'trade' and 'aid' suggests that it is of strictly limited scope when it comes to securing international justice and countering considerably more powerful collocations such as 'the national interest' and 'national security'. MULTI-NATIONAL and TRANS-NATIONAL refer almost exclusively to what used to be termed 'international capital' and are now called 'corporations', with or without the involvement of nation states. These are all verbal arenas and economic and political agendas that could be addressed by a modern, internationally aware

curriculum. The fact that they are automatically foreclosed or marginalised in terms of an expressly 'national' agenda is arguably part of the problem rather than the solution.

Meanwhile, there remains the usually unnoticed but potentially fundamental link between NATION and NATURE. The fact that both share a root in Latin *natum*, meaning 'born, birth' and by extension 'growth', suggests at least the possibility of a really radical 'national' *and* 'natural' curriculum: alert to deeper and wider responsibilities, local and global, and informed by long-term ecological understanding as well as short-term economic gain (recalling that these words, too, have a common root, 'eco-', from Greek *oikos*, meaning 'home'). Who knows, we might even develop some fresh SUPRA- and INFRA-NATIONAL organisations that cherish and celebrate notions of 'home' above and beyond – or within and between – the spaces currently occupied by dominant notions of 'national security' and 'national interest'? Perhaps we already have them, but known by existing names (such as 'states', 'counties', 'regions') that we also need to re-think and rename? Imagining these and fashioning some new-old terms accordingly, afresh, would at least be a start. Perhaps a crucial one.

So – what kinds of 'native' and 'international' cultures do you *want to embrace (or sideline or exclude) with* your *version of 'national'? How local* and *global, widespread and diverse, homo-* and *hetero-geneous, are the communities they – you, we – live in? Naturally, you will already have a vision of 'home' and 'nearest and dearest'. How far does it – do they – extend: to other people(s), other species, the rest of the natural world …? What do you call – how do you re-call – it (them us)? Imagine a world. Some words …*

'English', 'Englishes', 'Englishing' … ?

At this point we take a rather different tack. Instead of overviews of the key terms with some alternatives, I shall start with a few sentences from the 'General Explanations' to the *New English Dictionary on Historical Principles* (subsequently *Oxford English Dictionary*), first published in 1933 (pp. xxi–xxii). Reading these words some seventy-five years later, one may be struck by how modern as well as dated, prescient as well as passé, they now sound:

> No one man's English is all English […] It is not today what it was a century ago, still less what it will be a century hence. […] And there is absolutely no defining line in any direction: the circle of the English language has a well-defined centre but no discernible circumference.

What follows is a version of this text as it might be rewritten and supplemented for the first decade of the twenty-first century. Here and now by me, in fact. (You there and then might have different ideas and different words to offer. So please do.) My suggested additions are in italics.

> No one man's *or woman's or child's or machine's* English is all English. *Perhaps we had better talk of Englishes or processes of Englishing* […]; it is *indeed* not today what it was a century ago, still less what it will be a century hence. […] And there is absolutely no defining line in any direction; the circle of the English language *perhaps had* a well-defined centre *but now it has many centres and intersecting spheres of influence (American and Australian and Caribbean, for instance, as well as those of the global media) and* no discernible circumference – *because this geometrical metaphor may need to be replaced by another (based on, say, open systems and evolving networks).*
>
> *Or some other text in some other medium entirely …*

This is an attempt to demonstrate – not just define – what I have called 'Englishing'. It is writing *in* English *on* English, what theoretically might be termed 'meta-English' or 'English as act and fact' (also see Pope 2009a). In some sense, of course, this is what teachers and students of English do all the time. It's just that they – we – tend to do it with a depressed or merely derivative sense of their/our own verbal resources. If nothing else, 'Englishing' is a reminder to be more upbeat and adventurous about the latter: an open invitation to critique and create in our own rights/writes and not just produce more or less (un)critical commentaries. Put yet another way, politically as well as poetically, Englishing actively *under-writes and over-writes* what otherwise may pass as mere lip-service to a pious, albeit in principle worthy, series of platitudes: that all users of language, like all members of society, have 'a say' and 'a stake' in the system; that these systems only truly exist in their constant re-discovery and re-making; that each of us has a responsibility to make as well as find our own 'voices' in the very act of responding to those of others; and so on. True, too true – but in the abstract not true enough. By Englishing ourselves, for others as well as ourselves, we actually do it. And that arguably makes all the difference.

But of course you, as reader, may not agree. (That's part of the point.) So you, as a writer, may really want to argue, or at least seek to differ. (That's the whole point.) After all, turning 'English' into a verbal noun by

adding the suffix '-ing' may seem trivial, odd or even faintly offensive. And yet, on closer inspection, it turns out that 'English' has served as a verb at various times throughout its history, though often in the past participle form 'Englished'. Wycliffe in the fourteenth century was the first of many to use 'English' verbally to mean 'translate into English', while Milton in the seventeenth century used it to mean 'turn into plain English'; though it should be pointed out that the latter was a much more learned, often Latinate language than would pass as 'plain English' in some quarters these days (see *Oxford English Dictionary*, 1989–, 'English', verb, senses 1 and 2).

'Englishing' in the sense proposed here is historically relatable yet critically distinct. Grammatically, it puts the emphasis on 'English' as a dynamic, ongoing process; hence the progressive/continuous participle '-ing' rather than its past perfective counterpart, '-ed'. Semantically, as suggested, it presents opportunities for exploring the expressive and communicative resources of the language-user's (teacher's, student's) own language – including the characteristically 'creative' and 'playful' aspects of metaphor, ambiguity, pun, hyperbole, paradox, humour, inversion, making and breaking patterns of all kinds – even while engaging with texts by other people ('authors') that may exhibit all these qualities too. English reconceived as Englishing thus becomes a way of *saying* and *seeing*, *doing* and *being*: not just an object or aspect of knowledge but a *way of knowing*.

But even if this specific (re-)coining of the form 'Englishing' is judged quirky, unnecessary, untimely or just plain ugly, I would insist that the general point of the above rewrite of the *New English Dictionary on Historical Principles* (1933) still holds. (Perhaps re-read it at this point.) That is, for all the evident continuities, there have been some profound and widespread changes in the nature, status, functions and perceptions of 'English' over the three quarters of a century since it was written. We may thus, quite properly and at the very least, talk of 'Englishes' (plural) as some measure of the many and various sources and resources in play: historically and geographically, socially and technologically (see Pope 2002a: 13–72). For that reason alone, even leaving aside the vexed and complex changes in the senses of 'National' and 'Curriculum' sketched above, the sheer variety of kinds of 'English' on offer would appear to support a flexible and evolving policy of 'mix-and-match' rather than the uniformity of 'one-size-fits-all'. Certainly the UK experience to date suggests that while the former may have appeared too 'uncoordinated' for some, the latter had a nasty habit of turning into a 'strait-jacket'.

The aim of the remaining section of this piece is to put some other words and images into play. They too are part of the 'Englishing' game, not just ways of naming the same things differently.

Multi-, inter-, trans-, co-, re-, and –ing!

Here, finally, are some prefixes and a suffix that I have found recurring – and to be of enduring value – in much of my recent work (e.g. Pope 2006a; 2006b; 2009a; 2009b; also Swann, Carter and Pope in preparation). For me certainly, and apparently for quite a few others too, these bits of words point to directions and dimensions in which the subject needs to be moving if it is to remain critically engaged and creatively exciting. What's more, they seem to be vital at any level or stage of the educational process. Of course prefixes and suffixes on their own can achieve little or nothing; it is only when they are attached to the live roots and stems of words that they gain force and point. They also beg questions and prompt us to consider prefixes and suffixes that are opposite or alternative. The crucial purpose of this list, then, paradoxically, is to encourage others to extend and eventually replace it: to identify parts of words that they themselves already favour, and generate yet other words they find needful or fun. Collectively and cumulatively these may add up to a kind of *curriculum*. And some of them have already been attached to *national* and *English*. But the main thing is to approach them all in a spirit of serious play. English in education is nothing if not that.

MULTI- is for the 'many' words and worlds – Multimedia, Multimodal and Multicultural – where words are precious but never the whole story, and where Mono- is usually an illusion, although so may be 'Multicultural' programmes and 'Multinational' corporations.

INTER- is for the words 'between' and 'among' – Interactive, International, Intertextual, Interpersonal and Interdisciplinary – because looking at and into something also means looking around and beyond to its relations with other things. No Intra- without Inter-, and vice versa. Only connect!

TRANS- is the 'across' word – as in Transformation and Translation which are never merely Transported or Transferred; *trans-* is the Latin, in Greek it's *DIA-*, as in Dialogue ('across-word') and Dialectic ('crossed-reading'). Only connect differently!

CO- is the 'with' bit (from Latin *cum*) as in Co-operation – which involves Conflict and Competition as well as Consensus – and all the other Com- and Con- words such as Communication and Community, Conversation, Context and, yes, Connect. Being 'with' anyone or anything is inevitable and may be desirable but it is never straightforward. 'Con-science' and 'Con-sciousness', for example, remind us what, ideally, must go 'with' various kinds of knowledge and ways of knowing: the 'sci-' root is common to both and derives from Latin *scire*, to know. So still, consciously and conscientiously, connect …

RE- can mean doing 'afresh' and not just 'again', as in Re-creation, Re-vision and Re-membering (when they are more than mere recreation, revision and remembering) and Re-reading and Re-writing and Re-search (when they involve active reflection and reintegration not just passive repetition and recording). 'Re- afresh' is the sustainable, because adaptable, and renewable resource. 'Re- again' is exact replication and deathly dull. In theoretical circles 'Re-' often hangs around with 'De-', hence Deconstruction and Reconstruction, De-centring and Re-centring, usually in that order.

-ING is ongoing – in process of doing and being and becoming … We already have it and do it in Reading and Writing, and Re-reading and Re-writing, and Creating and Criticising and Interpreting, … For '-ing' is a happening kind of thing (a verbal noun). So adding it to 'English' we get 'Englishing' – an ongoing process. But when it's all done and dusted it's 'Englished' – a finished product. Both are essential. But only one can keep on evolving, emerging, changing, connecting …

So, finally, what current version of the subject 'English' do you *wish to attack or defend, change or extend?*

Does it have space for a plurality of 'Englishes', and do you care – or dare – to keep on rewriting ('Englishing ') them as you see fit?

But perhaps you are not quite, or at all, happy with the visions of a 'National Curriculum for English' implied here – organised on principles of, say, multi*plicity,* inter*national-ism*, co-*operation and* re-*creation, and of ongo*ing *processes of teach*ing *and learn*ing …

If so, what seriously playful – or deadly serious – alter-natives have you *got to offer?*

Either way, let's keep on connecting.[3]

Notes

1 All works referred to can be found in the References below.

2 'Defamiliarising' is the now-conventional, rather cumbersome translation of the Russian Formalist phrase *priem ostranenie*, which can also, importantly, mean the reverse, 'making the unfamiliar familiar'. 'Making strange' is the better translation of the German *Verfremdung* in Bertolt Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*, which is itself more familiarly but inaccurately rendered as 'alienation effect' (for discussion of both, see Pope 2002(a), pp. 90–1, 371). The ongoing quest for 'supplements' to supply 'absences' round alternative 'centres' can be traced throughout the work of Jacques Derrida; for references to that, see Pope 1995, pp. 190–1 and 2002a, pp. 168–70. For the strategic use of suspension dots between and even within words (e.g. 're … creation') so as to invite readers to research and rewrite the terms in play, see Pope 2005, pp. 84–9, 191–2.

3 'Only connect', the insistent injunction at the core of this changing refrain, is itself deeply multilayered and highly intertextual. In the present context it refers to the classic underwriting of humane experience in E.M. Forster's *Howards End* (1910, Ch.22, where the words are first uttered); to the recent overwriting of the phrase in the AATE collection of essays *'Only Connect …' English Teaching, Schooling and Community* Doecke, Howie and Sawyer (eds.), 2006; and, by extension, to my review of the latter, 'Rewriting English Now … Again … Afresh', Pope 2006b. All these offer further points of departure, if not of arrival.

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