David McRae interviewed by Meredith Maher

MM: David, to the first question, which is really open. Tell me about how you became involved in the development of the first English Study Design...

DM: (Laughing) I was the boss.

MM: (Laughing)... and what experiences and perspectives did you bring to the discussion?

DM: The core, the thing that bothered me personally, the thing that was annoying me, was how difficult it was to separate the learning from the credentialing. I'd been working, teaching Year 12 English and wrestling with the conundrum, I suppose, where credentialing came up against learning, still a major problem now of course. So, the personal thing was that I wanted kids to learn more and have the opportunity to learn more and probably also to spread themselves out a bit further than was allowed at the time.

But the other thing that was the core technical issue, the permanent question in education, how do you manage mixed-ability teaching especially at these levels. I remember writing about this when I was doing the review of Special Education in NSW. At exactly the same time you've got Ron Reed (Director of Secondary Education in Victoria) establishing the principles of education for the Curriculum Advisory Board (CAB) in Victoria which were about general studies, commonality and keeping kids together and Harold Wyndham (Director General of Education in NSW) producing his report in NSW by which every child in the state has their IQ tested in Year 6 and were consequently assigned to a stream. As per these tests, anyone with an IQ of between 80 and 95 is put in a special class for 'mildly intellectually disabled' young people. These are contrary ideas. I learnt, and liked, Ron Reed's.

Ignoring the 11 Plus, the monster in the room, this is in the best humanist tradition of English education. Harold Wyndham would have been influenced by American and 'scientific' ideas about education. These issues mean that proper certification is difficult to manage. The issues are always the same. High status, mid status, low status courses with high status, mid status and low status outcomes — regardless of performance. Think about VCAL today.

I had been thinking about these issues for a long time and writing about them, in union journals and so on, not so much to do with English but predominantly about assessment. And there is something I've dug out for you here which is illustrative, an article by Bill Hannan (*The Secondary Teacher*, journal of the Victorian Secondary Teachers' Association, VSTA) which was the sort of thing teachers used to feed on.

MM: I remember that article.

DM: He asks good questions about the notion of ability and how you might answer them in an educative context. Bill and I were working together very closely at the time, not in any formal sense, although he was the editor of the Technical Teachers Union of Victoria journal, *TTUV News* and I was the editor of *The Secondary Teacher* at the time and we were writing about those things fairly constantly as an issue. Both unions had policy about assessment that sort of tallied in this regard. I was an English teacher, both of us were English teachers, as you know. The unions' policy was for descriptive assessment but I never liked descriptive assessment much because it wasn't sufficiently resolved. There was not enough direction, not enough limitation and definition in it.

MM: Was there a difficulty in clarity of meaning?

DM: Yes, always. But even more so, there was difficulty in consistency across markers, across assessors working individually without moderation, so that you got kids treated in various ways.

I remember when Phil Noyce (teacher and VSTA Council member) was appointed as a teacher rep to the Board of VUSEB (Victorian Universities and Schools Examination Board) or was it VISE? (Victorian Institute of Education). He was a mathematician and he suddenly discovered all these extraordinary things about how marks were standardised and the assumptions that as based on, the way Physics marks were stretched to allow us to identify the sixteen smartest kids in Victoria and so on. Anyway, so I began teaching English Method at Melbourne State and that helped focus my attention on English.

In 1980 Kwong Lee Dow, Chairperson of VISE, with a lot of encouragement from Gil Freeman (a Board member representing the VSTA), set up a committee to investigate the status of English as a compulsory subject. And there were some very interesting lines of argument going on about this. People shouldn't have to do English because they didn't want to have to do anything that was an imposition on their subject choice. Why do you have to? Everybody speaks English, blah blah blah. If you were doing Literature why should you have to, and so on. That was probably the strongest line of argument but there were other arguments that were more, probably more dead set libertarian than that, which mostly came from non-government schools. But there was also a lot of rumbling from Science students who didn't want to have to do English because it would knock around their tertiary entrance scores.

Kwong set up this process, and I got a bit of a grip on it working with Gil. It was certainly a bee in my bonnet, and I developed a submission to VISE about it which included several hundred signatories. I can't find a copy now but the line went: yes, it should be compulsory. However, if so, there are consequences for how you must assess it and what sort of a course it can be. And it can't be Group 1 English.

At the time I had access to lots of teachers because I was visiting about 80 schools regularly and about 200 over the course of a year supervising my students, and that was in the days when you did do student supervision. Seriously. And enjoyed it. Anyway, so I had quite a big network of contacts, who were reasonably easy to marshal. What was in the submission was not a challenging idea for the teachers I was working with. It was really a distillation of widespread if slightly inchoate professional sentiment. As I say there were several hundred signatories, and it was the only multi-person response. So, difficult to ignore, and I got put on the committee. I was a very raw, callow youth who didn't know much about these types of things.

Eric Ford chaired the committee. Marion Meiers and Robert McGregor were on it. Marion, I think, was representing VATE, and Robert was representing the Department. He was Chief Inspector of English at the time. Eric was an Inspector of English and Joan Benson might have been a VATE representative too. There were one or two others I can't place. Anyway, we met over four months or so receiving many hundreds of submissions, and I was allowed, I offered and was allowed, to write the report, and that's where this 'agent of community' notion came in as the underlying principle for why English should be compulsory.

MM: So, what was that 'agent of community' notion?

DM: The fact that everybody did the same subject. The fact that it was the only case where every student in a cohort would have the same or similar experiences that they could share. It might have been a bit of ambitious idealism but it was heartfelt and meant seriously. This was a version of a very fundamental idea among my union colleagues at the time, that the purpose of education was not to chop things up so that you didn't feed various things to various different lots of chooks, ensuring the fat ones always got better fed. It was to keep people together, to make education co-operative and collaborative, to help each other in the process, all these admirable things that you'll find Ron Reed saying in 1966. Put simply: everyone should get better, and that was everyone's responsibility.

You can be creative within that, but basically this is the first principle of inclusion and that is we learn together and we learn the same sorts of things, even if it turns out to be in different ways. So, a pretty fundamental idea and not a popular one, not universally popular. But this idea did have a very well-established group of people behind it, including many people in the English teaching world, who were at the time very dissatisfied with exams, marks, the arbitrariness. It's might be hard to understand that now, but like us all I was a creature of the zeitgeist which was very much in my favour just then.

The recommendations about the common study didn't go through the English Subject Committee. If it went through the English Subject Committee it would have happened. I was on the committee and there were three counts of the vote and different people voted different ways each time and, in the end, it lost by three votes but it didn't matter because the government changed. But it was at that point that Graeme Withers, Margaret Gill and I wrote a paper about what English could be for Year 12, or actually for Years 11 and 12, I think. It was tremendous fun but I can't remember a thing about its content. (Laughs)

MM: Where would that paper be?

DM: All the material about English as a compulsory subject will absolutely be in archives somewhere because it was a major institutional initiative.

MM: I can remember it at the time. And I remember fearing that the answer was going to be no, but then the employers were on side with it, weren't they?

DM: Well, yes they were, yes they were, and that was sort of interesting in its own way. And I'd already started thinking. I was still at Melbourne State College and I'd started thinking... because I'd got a bit bored with what I was teaching and Bill and I had been talking about what an English course could look like if you pursued really tried hard. Could it be what we would think was a good thing in our terms?

The major ideas that I had were about the structural elements of a course of study (in the senior secondary years context): which elements had to be regulatory, which elements had to be directive/advisory and which had to be optional. And that's where this idea of a study design came from.

But that happened over the course of a year. I made each one of my students prepare a unit for *Senior English. A Course of Study*. Bill and I wrote the writing unit which still hung on pretty well after that. There are some people that you might even know on that list of authors. A very interesting and very distinguished collection of people, because the students all had to consult with experts in the field they'd taken up, Adolescent Literature for example. And this is a list of all the people we went to see. A heap of them. There's Ray Misson for example.

And this other long list is some of the people that we submitted units to test. It was pretty heavy duty. This was when Group 1 English was Group 1 English and Group 2 could be anything you like. There was STC and there was already English A which was sort of for girls who wanted to go into business, girls who wanted to be secretaries. Senior English became English B, and it has this introduction which means I don't have to pretend to remember anything. It's all there. There's actually a long history of things as I thought they were at the time and, to me at least, this is sort of interesting because you can see where my discussion was going at this time.

This tells you exactly what I was thinking about at the time. And this ... this was driving over Clifton Hill overpass (laughs).

MM: (Laughs) This was an anecdote I had recalled in an earlier conversation when David had described to a group of teachers a moment of insight into an ideal structure for the course.

DM: And how you remembered that anecdote I've got no idea in the world. And so, this is what it was. There had to be rules, there had to be a structure and then you could fill it up how you wanted to — which was sort of the broader notion and then there are these discussions about issues that you might be seminal to your interests.

Looking at it now, for me English B is an old but still thrilling document. These are the rules for kids. And it was managed, for the years that it ran... It might have run for four years... but it certainly ran for three, and there is a version of this, I don't know whether you want to talk about what this looks like. Everyone had to do writing and you could choose two other units from Language, Literature or Production, which I think was turned into something like Language Workshop or something. I've forgotten.

MM: Did it become the Communication Project?

DM: Yeah. Exactly. Spot on. English B is in essence a fixed-up version of Senior English and it took a long time, nearly a year of steady work, and Chris Reynolds (VISE Liaison Officer) was a very important figure in that. But this actually became a template for all VCE studies in terms of rules and structure. That provides an indication of how much we learnt. I did have answers to most questions.

And I think you'll find in the English B booklet or in the introduction to *Senior English* an explanation or a discussion of all of this and also a discussion about assessment and this 'third way', so to speak, which began life as 'goal-based' and became 'work required' and was one of the things that was in all VCE studies. Is that the sort of thing you want to know?

MM: Yes. All that, that's important. I'm also interested in, I suppose, the small-p politics of how decisions were arrived at and what it means for the profession.

One of the ideas that is sitting behind this is the notion that, over this period, it is perhaps the first time that the profession had a real voice in shaping the curriculum and even from the things you've said this afternoon, clearly there is a voice of the profession coming into that design.

DM: Absolutely. Absolutely. What I was working from, we were working from, was what we saw happening in the classroom. I was watching a heap of good teaching and talking to a great many good teachers.

MM: And, of course, some of that was corrupted afterwards.

DM: Yeah. Very early on.

Anyway, as far as this goes, I had, I should say 'we', we became a sort of a coterie of English B teachers and I think there were eight in the first year, and then by the third year we had 1400 kids, I think there were 86 schools. Teachers used to meet together three times a year and have a yarn and fix things up and make decisions. I was co-ordinating that, but I was emphatic… it was the render to Caesar idea, God in this case being the profession, you know, you render to Caesar what belongs to Caesar but any time you possibly can, you say that the profession is the overriding determinant.

I've spent a lot of my life trying to make things like that happen. Setting up the Australian Teaching Council and the abysmal horrible thing that the Victorian Institute of Teaching has become and so on and so on. And I wrote a very big report for the Schools Council called *Australia's Teachers: an Agenda for the Next Decade,* (*https://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv%3A8741*) 400 pages of discussion and ideas about trying to professionalise teachers and to build trust in the profession.

Back to the point. In time, we had, I suppose, 200 teachers who were wrestling with English B, one way or the other. It was certainly true that there was a ready audience for these ideas and there was a very ready audience for the idea that teachers knew what they were on about and deserved to be trusted in that regard.

One of the things I originally wrote into the VCE was that all subjects would be moderated through teacher meetings and so on, and then we did some sums very sadly it just wasn't going to work. It was just vastly too expensive, plus we had some negative responses. It was interesting, because I never had any trouble getting teachers to moderate in English B, because their administrators... well, it was informal, I suppose, I just said the meeting's on and I'll see you there. I didn't have to do travel or anything. They organised all of this themselves. This is in the days of the 'inspired amateur', Meredith. And of course, as soon as you formularize these things they become more difficult.

Anyway, in time I became responsible for the implementation of the VCE during the transitional sense. I was the Ministerial representative on the VCAB Executive. I wrote the final version of the governing policy and helped supervise the development of studies.

MM: To what extent did the Blackburn Report sort of kick in with support for these notions?

DM: Mmm, without wanting to be mean, I'd say zero, close to zero. I went back and had a look at [the Blackburn Report's] summary the other day. Jean and Bill of course were BFFs, they had been buddies for goodness knows how long. And this report came out and we got so cross because it was all about dividing people up into streams, giving all the power back to the unis, in fact it seemed to run against most of the things we had been agitating for – absolutely against the run of the game as well.

You don't separate kids into streams, you keep people together as much as possible. We couldn't interest Jean in this at all. There were a lot of exams... she had been very impressed by the university people; in fact there is a very nice little summary of the Blackburn Report on the web done by... it might have been Lyn Yates in *A History of Curriculum in Victoria* or Curriculum Documents in Victoria, *http://web.education.unimelb.edu.au/curriculumpoliciesproject/Reports/download/Vic-1985-BlackburnReport1985.pdf* but I think it had 50 recommendations and we approved of 16 and sat upstairs in VSTA headquarters, Victoria St Richmond and crossed out all the ones we didn't like and wrote a damning account of it in our weekly, *The News,* with the headline 'Blackburn Out Black Burnout'. Gerry Tickell went off to negotiate with the Minister – it happened over a fortnight — and most of it got rolled. That was when the Ministerial Unit was set up, for Post-Compulsory Schooling with Bill Hannan in charge.

Then of course you can do what you like because the recommendations are at a level of generality and fluidity that they can be reconstructed, and they were dramatically, and I have to say, very carefully and on the basis of a lot of knowledge, reconstructed.

MM: You've touched on a lot of these ideas, but what did you see as the achievements and drawbacks of the first English Study Design, as it was published, and how well, in anticipation, and I think that's very different from implementation, how well did you think it catered for the cohort of Year 11 and 12 students?

DM: The achievement was its existence in any form. That was an astonishing achievement. Look, English never gave us any trouble. There was never any problem with English. English just sort of rolled on. The whole game suited English and the other Humanities subjects perfectly. There were smart, committed people in charge guiding the way. I remember there were issues

about the Communication Project and about the boundaries, and scope because people would do anything. Content and volume.

MM: Or humungous.

DM: But also running socials ... maybe it's in, maybe it's out. I think we were a bit more constrained and hard line in English B, but that was never a real problem. … The real problem was getting content into Physics and Chem. It was Physics that gave me bad dreams. The writers didn't want to put any content in. They had completely misunderstood what was going on. It wasn't anything goes; it was the very best goes for everyone – a very different idea. Managing streams in Maths. That's always a crisis, and I don't know that it was resolved really well. It was resolved – but hard. Also trying to get something into the Tech Studies that meant something. It was a wrestle.

MM: Why was it a particular problem with Maths and Sciences?

DM: The people involved hadn't been through the 'do whatever you like' phase and come out the other side. They were still stuck in do whatever you like. Think up a project and do it. You know. And it was so funny because Penington (David Penington, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Melbourne) was going crazy about the lack of content, blah blah blah and blaming the VCAB Maoists. But he had no idea. Here we were working our guts out to get sequenced principled knowledge so that at the end of it you'd be a very reputable Physics scholar. No difficulty in terms of the structure of a study design, but I remember I spent weeks with Sid Boydell when he became the Physics writer. And we said, you've got to understand this, there are things to be known in these areas and we must have them in there. It's not just sort of open go.

And the problem with Maths was, it's always the problem with Maths, the sort of sequenced state of knowledge. And where you cut the lines ... how you organise those. And the way it's happened again is that you have hard Maths and less hard Maths and less hard again and Bob's your uncle. That was something that we had to deal with. Sometimes you just look away.

And two other things happened at that time. There was a list of things that were going to be compulsory. And Australian Studies could have been, except that the private schools loathed it so much, loathed it. Absolutely loathed it. It was cultural offence to be proud of and interested in your own country. I hated that. Meredith Freeman (VCAB study writer/project officer) took most of that on the chin.

MM: It was compulsory initially, wasn't it?

DM: And Maths. You had to do two units of Maths.

MM: And a science, I think, early on. Or was it Maths or Science?

DM: Could have been. Jean had that in her ...

MM: Early on. And I think that tended to become Psychology.

DM: Yeah, well. And we did some studies and projections on this and there were about 35% of kids who would not be able to accommodate that requirement, so we deleted it. The overall completion rate would have been round 65 percent and you don't want to make that trouble for yourself. That change caused a bit of a kerfuffle.

Anyway, back to the point. I don't know how much I'm helping you here. But English, English, because of the people on the FOSC, Helen Howells and Jan Osmotherly in particular, just knew ... it was second nature to them, they'd had years of acclimatisation to these ideas. And most of

the other people on the FOSC /FOSCs were with it as well. It was new to the academics, who were coming in cold and I think found it very foreign on the whole. It is a pretty foreign idea, and they had to reconstruct. It wasn't a matter of what books will we make everyone do, it was a matter of what are the range of desirable options in this area of the genre or whatever. And so, there was much more freedom for teachers to construct their own courses, much more, under this dispensation.

MM: It struck me that the change in nomenclature, from syllabus to study design is actually quite an instructive one.

DM: Yeah, yeah ... absolutely. So that it was for that reason as well, for the 'render to Caesar' sort of idea, you know.

MM: So, you'd be suggesting ... forgive me for putting words in your mouth, but you'd be suggesting that the nature of that Study Design and the flexibility inherent in it would be one mechanism of catering for a diverse cohort?

DM: Indeed. A major mechanism. The only mechanism as it happens. It wasn't hard to convince people. I've forgotten whether we had ESL, but in there (Senior English) there was something called Language Workshop for students who had difficulties with language.

But yes, absolutely, and I think you'll find in there an absolute belief in the capacity of teachers to respond to the particular needs of their students, that you don't find talked about much these days. That was an article of faith, always, that teachers would know. It was their professional responsibility as well as a fact of their professional life which must be respected.

This is an argument I have from time to time these days. One view says that school-based curriculum development was a disaster and didn't happen. I agree. But 'school-based curriculum development' was the wrong idea. You need to distinguish between curriculum development — because just in my case this took goodness knows how many hours, thousands of hours probably — and what there is in every school and in every class: *school-based curriculum*, and that's how you have to see it. You have to see where the decisions are being made, telling decisions, and the really telling decisions are being made most minutes of most time in the classroom, and that should be respected. They get made when teachers are deciding how to structure their work, how to organize their class, all sorts of things, all that pedagogical content knowledge which tends to just get ignored by people who really should know better.

This was the point of English B really: to render to Caesar what was Caesar's; but to leave the teaching decisions to the teachers. With the several hundred teachers who taught English B I thought we had proved that this would work.

MM: So, what were (and this is a bit of a segue) what were the major pedagogical implications of this new approach, of this Study Design with its structures?

DM: Well, you'd have to think of how you wanted your course to be, because there was more room to move. It wasn't just a matter of picking your books or wondering whether clear thinking was going to be in this year and what form it was going to take and whether you had to do précis or ... you know ... pretty ropey. (Laughs)

MM: Were clear thinking and précis still around in the eighties?

DM: Well, in various forms, and they're still around in various forms now, and if you're really good at teaching précis, well, cut loose, but be prepared to evaluate it.

A tremendous amount of thinking went into determining just what the work requirements should be, across the board, really. VCAB spent endless amounts of time on that. And the idea was to

say well, what would you learn if you did this, what would you have to be able to do to complete this task, and that was ... it turned out to be a pretty simplistic notion; it should have been more, a little bit more worked out than that, but still, I mean the basic drive of the idea is correct. But also, we wanted to take away ... we wanted to get to a binary answer, did you do it or didn't you? And that was a very important part of the assessment process.

MM: So that's the S and N?

DM: Yeah, yeah, which of course still exists, doesn't it?

There are some remnants. The first studies were fantastic bits of content, mainly due to Ann Borthwick (Policy Officer, VCAB Board) I think, but they are incredibly rich pieces of curricula and, I think, sort of out of the box, and English actually felt a bit pale in that company because it doesn't have content in the same way that History or Chemistry does. They were very strong in terms of content.

MM: Now what about the assessment issue? I've always thought that in high-stakes assessment it's very contested and there are many competing views and so on. I mean, from my perspective, Literature has probably had a lot less scrutiny than English has...

DM: For sure.

MM: ... even though Literature now can fulfil the compulsory English requirement. And there goes your 'agent of community'.

DM: That's right. And that went a while ago, I think.

MM: Yes. But I think, because of its larger numbers, English has always been a particular focus of, well, public scrutiny, university scrutiny, and so on. What about the assessment issues? I mean, I'm picking up from my reading that the initial idea was that this compulsory English not be scored.

DM: Yep, yep. That's right. And I think, if I remember, that that was my argument, in my submission to the English as compulsory subject inquiry. I would have said it at that time, but I think that was an argument, that it was a necessary consequence of everybody having to do it, because there'd be such a wide range of skill involved, and so if you force people to do it you can't force people to penalize themselves.

That was sort of the way the argument ran. Which was another important reason to find another form of assessment that would validate your position. STC, which I was running, ran for a year and helped set that up too when I was teaching at Sydney Road (Community School). That had descriptive assessment and I was always very dissatisfied with the way that turned out... even though it proved the point that kids could be assessed like that and still get into university.

La Trobe University had provision for kids with STC. We'd done a lot of work and I think there were 14 tertiary institutions that kids could get into with STC, but of course they couldn't get into Medicine or Law or Engineering or anything that really, really, really mattered. But my view about that, which is contrary to the Blackburn perspective too, was that in fact STC was contributing to a sort of ghettoization of kids whereby they were supposed to getting educational benefit but doing themselves in the eye in terms of prospects for credentialing and so on. Not good.

This was the idea with Group 1 and Group 2. Smarties will do Group 1 and ... and this was the time of an enormous influx into senior levels, as you would remember. This is what generated the crisis. When I did Matric at Horsham in 1966, there were 290 kids in Year 7, and 36 in Year 12. And that sort of situation would have been reasonably common, not just in the country.

MM: Yeah. When I did Year 12, we had started off with 240 in Year 7 and we had 72. But that was a suburban high school.

DM: OK. But a suburban high school might have had a higher retention rate because suburban high schools were often very good places to get educated and they were more immersed and knowledgeable about the education game.

But it just changed … suddenly you're looking at 70, 80 per cent retention rate. And nobody knows what to do. That issue underlay all the discussion of the time. I thought, quite vigorously at the time, that STC was taking the responsibility off the shoulders of those who should be addressing better educational outcomes across the board, because I was interested in improving the education of the Group 1 kids as well. I thought there were plenty more options for them and there were a lot of other people who were thinking that as well.

MM: Just going back to the idea that if a subject is compulsory then some kids would be doing themselves a disservice by it being scored, does that disadvantage the students who are good at English?

DM: Yes. And this is what happened in due course. And this was another one of these moments of awakening when I was writing the VCE policy, which was ... okay how are we gonna do it? I think we worked out that if every study had a five-point scale there would still be plenty of room to select students for tertiary purposes.

MM: I seem to remember that Viv Eyers, from South Australia, corroborated that.

DM: Correct. So, we were going to go for a five-point scale. Originally it was going to be S and N. The hard core were still sticking to S and N for everybody. And there would have been a body of hard-core unionists who would have had exactly the same view. Maybe, I don't know, it might have been 5-15% of the secondary teaching force might have had that view. It was very au courant. People read these things and believed them. (Laughs).

And still, still, Bill's article is ... it's a very interesting argument about the fundamental purpose of education. Is it to distinguish one lot from the other?

Anyway, it wasn't very long into the process of writing the policy that we were going to have bi-partite assessment and you got your VCE on the basis of your work requirements and you got into university on the basis of your score.

MM: That seems to me to be a fundamental shift in itself, though, that bipartite notion, that you can gain the certificate and that the levels of assessment, the scoring, is something completely different. And one might see that as a positive step ...

DM: Well, it was a little way forward, in that if you wanted to be really serious about it, I mean all this stuff was out of time; if we'd started work on this even six or eight years earlier, it would have been a lot easier. By the time we got there it was slightly anachronistic, so that when we arrived, the times had moved a bit and the opposition decided we were fair dinkum, it was going to happen and brought out all their big guns.

If you were starting again you'd do a really big sell job on the significance of work for learning. You would put your back into that a lot harder because there's still something very, very important about that in terms about how you are going to learn something. You have to try hard.

MM: So, this is the focus on work requirements and having work requirements that are substantial.

DM: Yep. Yep. Yep. Yep. And that do connect to the things that you want to be able to do. For me and others that was a very big deal. That was a very important thing and plus, it was a very important gesture towards teacher responsibility because it was teachers who said, teachers who constructed the work requirements and then made the decision about whether it was going to be OK or not.

MM: And teachers took that seriously, in my experience.

DM: Certainly did. No question about that. And great things were done, as a result but not universally, and I think there probably would have been a fair amount of talk in some necks of the woods, just like NAPLAN. Posh schools don't take NAPLAN at all seriously, they don't even do it, they don't even care, because there's no payoff. The payoff is at Year 12. So, you can do what you like in Year 9 and go to whatever particular version of Timbertop and then really settle down and get at it and get your tutor in and so on. So, there would have been a trade in stuff for work requirements. There's always a trade. Doesn't matter what you do in education, there will always be people who trade in ... and who want to game good ideas.

MM: Yes... find ways around it.

DM: And all it takes is teachers who don't want to play. And this is exactly what you're trying to develop in them, a teacher's sense of responsibility.

MM: That's been quite comprehensive and we've covered all of what I've raised.

DM: There are very many things that I don't know, especially about what happened next.

MM: Oh, I think everybody has their own take on it just because of their background ...

DM: I tell you what, one of the things, one of the practical things was that the Writing unit was very influential beyond its immediate application. I think if you went back and looked, you would find (and this is part of a much wider thing) but you would find a great deal more writing being done around this time than previously.

MM: And publication of student work...

DM: Yes, absolutely. And this might reflect it, or it might have helped generate it, but I remember in Year 11 I did two essays and that was my sum total of written composition for the year. That's not very good, is it?

MM: I suspect too that there was more what you might call 'creative writing' don't you?

DM: Much more.

MM: Student production of fiction, for example.

DM: Yeah, much more, absolutely. For sure.

MM: And I know that *The Age* and even my local paper used to publish student work. They'd have annual competitions and so on, and there was some quite good and quite usable material. I've still got copies of some.

DM: Ah, there's *Ministerial Paper 6*, that's what's in there, and that's the sort of thing you'll get in the Blackburn Report and I remember Helen Praetz, who was Jean's off-sider, her project officer for the Report. She and Bill wrote that together, but we'd been working on thinking like that for a decade.

MM: It did strike me at the time, and struck a number of other people, that the thinking and the voice behind *Ministerial Paper 6* was quite different from the other Ministerial papers.

DM: Yeah, yeah.

MM: It was opening a different view of what schools might be.

DM: I mean, they (the other Ministerial papers) were sort of an administrative type of thing, weren't they?

MM: I can't remember them all, but yes ...

DM: What you were allowed to do, school governance issues and ...

MM: *Ministerial Paper No 6* was really opening up ideas ...

DM: And it had influence for years and years.