

HSC English in the Media: The Reporting of Conventions and Controversies

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Abstract

This paper will examine issues surrounding media reactions to the purpose, content and structure of the 1999 HSC English syllabus in New South Wales. Contention over text selection and a continuing political focus on literacy have resulted in changes to the way we perceive and approach the subject 'English', What constitutes a 'valuable' text? and What (and who) actually defines the subject English anyway?

Along with these questions, this paper will specifically examine the public dimensions of curriculum change. Changes to text prescriptions, in particular the inclusion of film and multi media, have led to a backlash against supposedly new wave materials and an endless repetition of the familiar Shakespeare-vs-Spielberg debate. Changes to the technical language of the syllabus, such as the use of terms like composing and responding have increased public fear that postmodernism ('relativism') is destroying traditional ('proper') learning. The article asks how should readers of state and national newspapers balance the different perspectives that are regularly presented on the purposes of English as a method of teaching Literacy as opposed to Literature alongside more recent emphases on critical literacy and cultural studies perspectives in English teaching?

Introduction

For a long time now the subject known in many countries as 'English' has enjoyed a relatively high status compared to other subjects, and in New South Wales (NSW) remains the only compulsory subject for study in the post-compulsory years of schooling. In Australia, debates over the purpose and nature of the subject English have for a long time centred on the different merits of teaching grammar, or 'language' as opposed to the study of Literature, and the various advantages of 'Language' and 'Literature' instruction for different types of students. The study of Literature as a means of developing a student's personal growth, rather than as a detached analysis of Literature as an art form, was an especially prevalent issue in defining the subject in the decades following the Wyndham review of the Higher School Certificate (HSC) (Wyndham 1957), though 'cultural heritage' perspectives in the syllabus also maintained positions of privilege. More recently, however, issues surrounding the definition of the subject have changed somewhat in NSW, with the release of a new Stage 6¹ syllabus in signalling a significant paradigm shift within the subject (Board of Studies NSW 1999).

Project outline and framework

To form the basis of a broader discussion of issues relating to the English curriculum, this paper will report on aspects of a research project that has been carried out during my PhD candidature at the University of Sydney. The project sought to undertake an evaluation of the innovations and changes that were represented in the 1999 HSC English syllabus document – in particular, an evaluation of whether the changes to the syllabus represented a significant paradigm shift in the subject 'English' as studied in the final year of secondary school in NSW. The secondary aim of the project was to reflect on any challenges that were evident during the syllabus consultation period, in the implementation process, or in the public perception of and reaction to the change, as well as any problems or internal contradictions that became apparent in the syllabus document and its practical implementation.

In order to explore these issues, the project was based on a framework of three key focus areas. The first focus area was an examination and evaluation of the syllabus documentation. This included the theoretical basis of the actual syllabus document and the different – at times conflicting – philosophical basis of its content, pedagogy and assessment. Largely through the use of document content analysis, conclusions can be drawn about internal epistemology and pedagogy of the syllabus before facing any concern for how the theoretical base is being realised in real classrooms.

The second focus area is based on the practical implementation of the syllabus rather than the theoretical contents. Here the syllabus-in-action is explored, including the challenges faced in actual classroom implementation, the reaction of practitioners, the fulfilment of the assessment requirements, and the transformations in public representations and shared public understandings. Through an examination of external practices it is possible to identify the individuals, organ-

isations or perspectives that are resistant to changes in the syllabus, and also locate barriers to implementation.

Finally, the research examines the area where the first two foci interface. Evidence is collected within the project that demonstrates the ways in which teachers, students and the community are resolving (or are having trouble resolving) the tensions between internal and external requirements, pressures and demands.

Research methods

The methods that were used to carry out this research project were selected in order to apply the above framework to both the 'Pre-active' stage of the syllabus, and the 'Inter-active' stage of the syllabus (Goodson 1994). This allowed for an analysis of the framework with regards to the values and purposes that underpinned the syllabus development, as well as the ways in which the written curriculum was operationalised in schools and reacted to by various stakeholders.

Documentary and fieldwork evidence was collected from both the 'Pre-active' and the 'Inter-active' stages of the syllabus using a variety of qualitative methods. These methods largely involved the collection and content analysis of a variety of documentation from the consultation and implementation periods, as well as ethnographic fieldwork and teacher interviews conducted in two secondary English faculties in metropolitan NSW. This combination of content analysis and fieldwork methods allowed for a rich and in-depth exploration of the issues surrounding the development and implementation of the syllabus, as well as the interplay between the written curriculum and public and professional understandings.

Public understanding of curriculum change

Research on syllabus change, especially when conducted within the broader framework of examining a curriculum history, often takes as its focus the study of

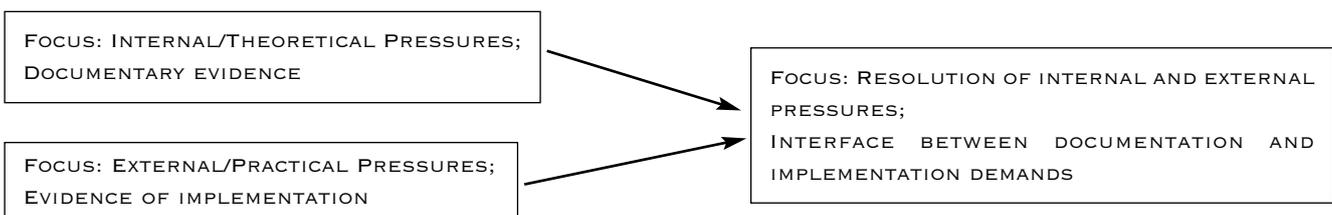


Figure 1. Focus Area Framework

syllabus documents and other primary sources of historical data that inform a broader understanding of the conditions in which change occurred (for example, Brock 1984, Sawyer 2002b, Michaels 2001a). The degree of change that is promoted in a syllabus document however, can be seen from an entirely different perspective when examined in relation to its public and professional reception. By collecting evidence of actual changes that take place in classrooms, of professional reaction and dialogue, and of public responses as represented in the media, we can expand our understanding of the nature of change beyond a content analysis of the theoretical paradigm shift.

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

Of these different aspects, this paper will focus on the public reactions to the syllabus change, and public understandings of the curriculum as represented through newspaper coverage during the syllabus development phase, at the time of its final release, and after its first examination. While newspapers are often critiqued for their tendency to sensationalise and polarise issues surrounding education, it is exactly this characteristic that makes their material so interesting to study, as the spectrum of issues represented in newspaper contributions and responses can be contrasted with the dialogue occurring in other areas at the time (such as professional journals, conference proceedings, etc.).

Newspaper reporting of the Syllabus change

One source of primary data that was compiled for this Doctoral research was a comprehensive collection of all newspaper materials – editorials, news articles, opinion pieces and letters – written on the area of HSC English during the period in question. Most of the articles were found in the *Sydney Morning Herald (SMH)*,² though some were located in the *Daily Telegraph* and *The Australian*. While some media coverage of HSC subjects and examinations appeared in 1997 after the release of

the McGaw Report, *Securing Their Future* (McGaw 1997), which made recommendations on the reformation of the HSC structure, there was little direct coverage of issues relating directly to the subject English at this time. Newspapers began to more specifically cover the topic of possible changes to HSC English in 1998 with the release of the Stage 6 English draft syllabus. The articles increased in frequency in 1999 with the approval and release of the final syllabus document, and regular media appearances ensued in each following year after the HSC examinations were held and the questions set for each paper became known to teachers, parents and journalists.

After conducting a content analysis on the newspaper articles concerning HSC English that were published from 1997–2004, four categories emerged to describe the bulk of the opinion being expressed. The content analysis had begun with a search within two categories – for what was being said in support of the new syllabus, and for what was being said against it – and these categories were largely retained. However, it became clear that there was a stream of opinion being expressed both ‘for’ and ‘against’ the syllabus that was concerned specifically with the list of prescribed texts that had been provided for teachers to select from to study within the generalised modules. A fourth category was also needed to collect opinions about the syllabus that specifically focussed on advocating a broader message about the role of the learner, or on a particular perspective about the nature and purpose of schools and education. Although these opinions could sometimes be labelled under broader ‘for’ or ‘against’ categories, they were grouped in a category of their own because they provided a particularly radical perspective on the syllabus, or because of the deeper philosophical implications of their views on curriculum organisation.

The ‘dissolution of the discipline’

Of all the material that has appeared in the newspapers since the McGaw Report and the subsequent release of the draft and final versions of the HSC syllabus, an overwhelming amount of it has been aimed at discrediting the new approach to English represented in the syllabus and the list of prescribed texts. While material relating to the selection of texts has been separated into a discrete category for this study, there was no shortage of negative views available for analysis about the theoretical perspective of the syllabus.

In an article promoting a newly released book titled *Education and the Ideal* – edited by a well-known

advocate for the cultural heritage model of English, Naomi Smith (Smith 2004) – columnist Miranda Devine celebrates the book as being symbolic of the ideological pendulum being ‘yanked’ back away from the ‘amorality and permissiveness’ of the 1960s (Devine 2004). In this Opinion piece, Devine pays tribute to the book as ‘[charting] the poisonous impact on young minds of modish educational ideologies of the past 30 or 40 years,’ and more specifically focuses on contributions to the book made by Dr Barry Spurr that bemoan the way in which ‘Postmodern relativism so influences the curriculum we cannot rank a work of art based on artistic value because that would be “elitist”’ (p. 17).

The theme of postmodern influences in the syllabus being equated with a kind of extreme relativism had appeared prior to this, however, and quite famously so in a *SMH* article by Dr Barry Spurr himself in 2001 (Spurr 2001, p. 12). In this article Spurr is also heavily critical of the way in which the ‘breadth of human experience [had been] increasingly narrowed to what a politically correct Australian might think in 2001.’ Echoes of this fear of political correctness are found in Devine’s article three years later, with Spurr again cited as arguing that ‘some of the texts prescribed for study have obviously been chosen primarily because they advance the politically correct social theories of today.’

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

It is wilfully short-sighted to base a State-wide secondary syllabus on a body of theory which denies the concept of real meaning, the existence of an essential self untouched by ideology, the existence of objective truth, and the possibility of adhering to ethics and principles intrinsically worthwhile and which do not merely serve the interests of the dominant group. (Smith 2001, p. 14)

The idea that the new syllabus is based on a denial of ‘the concept of real meaning’ is one of the most frequently utilised arguments in these articles, though other criticisms that feature prominently in negative accounts of the syllabus are claims that the syllabus is too difficult for students in the Standard course, and that the inclusion of film and multi-media texts would adversely affect reading ability and had provided students with a ‘soft option’ for study. One article referred to a teacher who had taught since 1975, and who believed that ‘there had been an increase in discipline problems from students struggling to cope with

the new Standard English course’ (Noonan 2001a, p. 6). In another article later in 2001, Noonan acknowledges that ‘the intention [of making the course more difficult] was, in part, to deter the better students from lazily choosing a soft option,’ but reflects that the effect of this ‘was to raise the bar for everyone.’ (Noonan 2001b, p. 13).

Defending the ‘new approach’ to English

Articles that argued in favour of the ‘new approach’ to English represented in the syllabus were often framed as reactions to other articles, or as defensive positions against a variety of negative views. One of the most frequent defences of the new syllabus became the defence of film and multimedia as valuable types of text. Susan Gazis, who was President of the NSW English Teachers’ Association (ETA) at the time, was quoted as denying that the study of film was a ‘soft option’ for students:

‘It is not a dumbing down at all and anyone who thinks that is probably underestimating the skills needed to study film and has not understood the syllabus or text requirements,’ she said. (Jamal and Raethel 1999, p. 3)

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

Fred Nile and his ilk might wince at the odd moments of nudity, destruction of property, swearing, dope smoking, cross-dressing and disrespect for authority ... Those students who manage to see and discuss all 18 films will emerge critical but not cynical about the way film-makers manipulate our emotions, and enthusiastic but not gullible about films as a form of literature. (Dale 1999, p. 12)

One particularly strong article that came out in 2002 was an Opinion piece contributed by Wayne Sawyer, who that year had succeeded Sue Gazis as the President of the ETA. The Opinion piece was a response to a scathing article that had been published two days beforehand by Brenton Boswell, an English teacher in the Sydney area, who had claimed that HSC English had ‘gone off the rails,’ that it included too much material to be covered adequately in the HSC timeframe, and that the syllabus was a ‘dumbing down disguised as a smartening up’ (Boswell 2002, p. 13). Sawyer responded to these claims by highlighting the inconsistency of a perspective that simultaneously viewed the syllabus as being a ‘dumbing down’ at the same time as being too demanding. Sawyer also contended that many criticisms of the HSC were a reflection of igno-

rance about the real issues, and that they '[emanate] largely from a misplaced sense of nostalgia, and the sense that "that's not how we did English in my day"' (Sawyer 2002a, p. 17).

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

The creators of the new English curriculum have rightfully acknowledged that the world has changed since Shakespeare and in 2001 we, too, have rich and valuable texts, such as *Frontline*. The courses still recognise the traditional value of Shakespeare and Austen, and while we are encouraged to examine the literary qualities of these texts, we are also asked to examine how they are received among different audiences ... Perhaps those who feel uncomfortable with the new courses are actually a little afraid to move away from the safe, mediocre opinions of a few study guides and to actually think for themselves. (McDonald 2001, p. 17)

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

Text Selection

The most tired cliché that was used by critics of the texts prescribed for selection in the HSC syllabus was undoubtedly the binary opposition that was repeatedly drawn between the study of Shakespeare and the study of Spielberg, or of *Star Wars*. Being more than a nice piece of alliteration to catch the reader's eye, these comparisons were constantly used in an attempt to shock readers into comprehending the so-called gravity of the damaging effect of mixing 'high' and 'popular' culture. As Catherine Armitage explained, 'what riles the critics is the idea that Luke Skywalker and Princess Leia could line up beside Othello and Desdemona as iconic characters of the western literary tradition' (Armitage 1998, p. 23).

Even some contributors, in an attempt to support the direction of the new syllabus, implicitly reinforced this valuing of canonical texts over 'popular' texts. One writer, for example, reassured readers that 'more students, as well, will study a play by Shakespeare than under that old course. This is a good sign' (no author listed, *SMH Online* news and features 1999, p. 14). Very

little attention was paid to the facts of the situation, which are that it is still compulsory for all students in the Advanced course to study a Shakespearean Drama, and that Shakespeare's plays are available for students in the Standard course to choose from as well. Instead, outlandish claims such as 'it is no longer necessary to read any Shakespearean drama for the HSC' (Spurr 2001, p. 12) were continually made.

Those who contributed newspaper articles, letters or opinion pieces defending the syllabus however, never really went so far as to publicly question whether the study of Shakespeare was really necessary at all. A reflection on the relevance of Shakespeare and the context in which his plays ought to be studied was evident in some contributions, with one writer pointing out that 'we forget too easily that Austen and Shakespeare contributed to the popular culture of their own time, in the media available to them ...' (Sharrock 2002, p. 12). Another writer argued for the study of the classics in a way that made them relevant and therefore important to the lives of students:

The new syllabus puts these classics into contexts that are relevant for those young people. They are not some distant authority to which students must submit, but the great works are woven into their experience. (Gold 2002, p. 12)

Aside from the criticism that the inclusion of film and multi-media texts constitute a 'dumbing down' of the subject, with more Shakespeare framed as the obvious alternative to the 'fad' of visual literacy, the other most prominent argument made in relation to text selection was, once again, in relation to postmodern theory and relativist values. Here Glover (Glover 2002, p. 44) neatly describes the syllabus as promoting the view that 'a bus ticket is as valuable a text as Chaucer,' while Devine elaborates at length:

The criticism of the new post-modern English syllabus is more than just that it's been dumbed down, with *Star Wars*, *Frontline* and the ATSC Web site among prescribed texts. It is more than the fact that the 2001 HSC English exams were riddled with political correctness, that Natasha Stott Despoja's maiden speech was reprinted in all its glory, or that, of 12 'great speeches' students were offered for 'critical study', the only Australians found were Paul Keating and Noel Pearson ...

It is that even if students do study Shakespeare and Keats, they are being asked to do so with the postmodern tongue in the cheek and through the prism of extreme scepticism the theory requires. They are expected to absorb postmodernism's core belief, that there is no absolute truth, that all facts are relative.

(Devine 2002, p. 13)

Not surprisingly, on the whole, there were a greater number of newspaper contributors expressing dissatisfaction at the texts available for selection, and although there was such a large amount of this type of content as to warrant a separate category, much of the argument still centred on familiar themes. Films were contrasted repeatedly with Shakespeare, often within a broader framework where visual literacy was continually played off against written literacy, and most of these criticisms were further tied in with references to relativism and postmodern 'fads'.

Other interesting perspectives

The final category used to classify the content of the newspaper articles was a category identifying contributions that combined opinion and ideology to advocate perspectives with broader epistemological or pedagogical implications. In many of the articles and letters in other categories, contributors were eager to express opinions about the positive and negative aspects of the new syllabus and the texts included for study, but few of these articles contained explicit reasoning or justification for their claims. While several writers were keen to tell their readers whether or not it was important to study Shakespeare, or whether political correctness had gone 'too far', few were able (or willing) to link these opinions to a wider belief about the purpose of education, and more specifically, about the purpose of learning and assessment in the subject English.

Though many articles did contain implicit arguments about the nature and purpose of English, the extracts in this category contain opinions that are explicitly linked to broader educational philosophies. In an article in *The Australian*, for example, University of Sydney Vice-Chancellor Professor Gavin Brown explains that the 'challenge' in English is 'to cater for two types of students: those who do want to go on to academic study and those who don't' (Armitage 1998, p. 23): a telling perspective coming from the Vice-Chancellor of the University whose academics have always featured prominently in all English syllabus committees.

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

The average student or one with talents in the sciences or economics must still submit to the vestiges of a quasi-academic syllabus when what he or she really

needs from English studies is a good training in spelling, grammar and expression. Such training would facilitate clear, accurate and confident use of the language, written and spoken, enriched by a survey of some of the classics of English literature with which, it was once assumed, anyone with a basic education would be familiar. (Spurr 2001, p. 12)

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

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

Students ... should be responding directly and personally to the art ... Perhaps we need to establish more than one subject. In Practical Literacy students could study *Blade Runner* and *Frontline*, and practice writing letters to the editor and composing advertising copy. Meanwhile, across the hall, there could be space for an obscure subject called English Literature, committed to the notion that some writers can clamber from the mud of their own time, sufficient to be heard centuries later. (Glover 2002, p. 44)

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

Discussion

The data extracted using a content analysis of newspaper contributions is extremely valuable as a measure of the issues that are regarded as important by the public in relation to students' study of English, as well as public perceptions of wider issues such as the purpose and nature of education. When compared to data

collected in other studies, as well as other forms of data collected for this Doctoral project, it can be seen that some of these concerns and/or defences are also shared by the professional community. A study of teachers' opinions about the implementation of the new syllabus conducted by Manuel in 2001 found that concern over the difficulty of the Standard course was shared by teachers across the state (Manuel 2002). Data collected within the current Doctoral project also shows links between media representations of postmodernism and professional concerns that the theoretical foundations of the syllabus are not always fully synthesised into professional practice.

These correlations, however, were minimal, compared to the discrepancies between what was represented as important in NSW and Australian newspapers, and the professional concerns documented during the syllabus consultation period, and following its implementation. Other information collected in this study, as well as that collected by Manuel (2002) and by the NSW ETA (2002) show that teachers and professional organisations have been more concerned with the application of the new standards-based assessment framework, the nature and content of the external examination, the lack of resources available to schools to assist with the integration of film and multi-media texts, and the provision of professional development. Most of the professional community, in contrast to the concerns of the media, has shown support for broadening the range of types of text available for study, and for the exploration of all texts in relation to different perspectives and contexts.

The problem that was presented at the outset of this paper, however, remains: if the wider public, including parents and community members, can be viewed as stakeholders in the outcomes of education, how are we to treat the results of a study such as this that highlights what is supposedly representative of public concern as focussing on issues that are mostly at odds with the concerns of practitioners and professionals (for a discussion of professional concerns, see Manuel 2002, NSW English Teachers Association 2002). This problem is compounded by the limitations of the data itself – although an examination of media representations is an ideal method of accounting for the public debate that has occurred over the nature of the new syllabus, it may be dangerous to generalise this to be representative of what the broader community believes.

What can be discussed however, are the traditional

conventions that have existed in the English curriculum, and the ways in which the community has reacted to the treatment of these traditions in the new syllabus. The public debate as documented in newspaper contributions has tapped into the controversial sticking points of the new syllabus, and the ways in which the paradigm shift in the subject English has been realised in classroom learning. The study of a Shakespearean drama, for example, is no longer compulsory for students studying the Standard course, though it remains compulsory for students in the Advanced course. What does this differential application of textual requirements say about the beliefs of the syllabus writers, or about the input that was received during the consultation process?

We can look at such questions in more depth with a closer comparison of claims that were made in the media with the realities of foundational structures within the syllabus document. Students' school assessment throughout the year, for example, is required to comprise of the following components and carry the following weightings:

Writing assessment task = 30%

Reading assessment task = 25%

Speaking assessment task = 15%

Listening assessment task = 15%

Viewing and Representing assessment task = 15%

(Board of Studies NSW 1999, pp. 114–120)

Though some sections of the media have represented the new syllabus as promoting a relativist view of knowledge, it would seem that somewhere along the line, judgements have been made about the greater value and intrinsic importance of written literacy – specifically writing tasks – over other forms of literacy. Similar judgements in favour of written literacy and traditional texts are seen in the types of text prescribed for close study. This privileging of written text over spoken or visual representations is not a new phenomenon, but it is interesting to note the maintenance of this tradition in the new syllabus, despite any claims being made to the contrary.

In the HSC year, students taking the Standard English course must closely study at least *four* types of prescribed text: Prose Fiction; Poetry; Drama; and a Non-Fiction OR Film OR Media OR Multimedia text. Students taking the Advanced course must closely study at least *five* types of prescribed text: Prose Fiction; Poetry; Drama OR Film; Shakespearean Drama; and a Non-Fiction OR Media OR Multimedia text. Despite the

claims made in the newspapers, it is not the case that students won't have to read written text anymore. In fact, the opposite is true: students can go through their entire HSC without ever studying a visual text, or without ever studying a work of non-fiction.

The inaccuracies and the silences in the bulk of media reporting are therefore very interesting to consider, as it opens up questions about how much of the public's perception may not be based entirely on fact, but rather on a strong desire to uphold traditional or conventional practices – or, as Sawyer suggests, on a sense of 'nostalgia' (Sawyer 2002a, p. 17). Questions about the level of expertise of public stakeholders also raise further questions about the legitimacy of their inclusion on the NSW Board of Studies and their representation on Curriculum Committees of the Board.³ Beyond this consideration is a deeper question about how much influence the fear of public 'backlash' has on syllabus developers, and how much conservatism is exercised during periods of syllabus reform in order to keep public criticism to a minimum. Finally, if it is legitimate to consider the perspectives of non-expert parent and community stakeholders in any process of reform, the absence of any representation of the student perspective ought to be reflected on as an area for future consideration.

Conclusion

This paper has presented the results of one of the methods used within a larger Doctoral research project, and as such contains a focused and in-depth analysis of the issues drawn out from that data. However, there are several broader implications for understanding the purpose and nature of the English syllabus in NSW, and for the English curriculum in general. Beliefs about what constitutes a 'valuable' or 'worthwhile' text, of the way in which those texts should be studied, and about the method and content of assessment of that study are all represented within the contributions made to newspapers, and serve as an important response to the beliefs that are implicitly contained in the actual syllabus documents, as well as the beliefs of professional educators and practitioners themselves.

Responses in both state and national newspapers also demonstrate the continuing struggle between cultural heritage perspectives on what ought to constitute the study of English, and the renewed focus in this HSC syllabus on critical literacy and the broader study of texts. While this syllabus may represent a paradigm shift away from traditional binaries such as

'language'/'literacy' or 'high'/'popular' culture, a belief in these binary differences is still evident in the public debates that continue to rage in our newspapers, and can also still be glimpsed in the way different texts and assessment modes are valued in the syllabus document itself.

Notes

- 1 The NSW education framework is organised along a Kindergarten – Year 12 continuum, and each subject syllabus is divided accordingly into the following six stages:

Primary School

Stage 1 = Years 1–2 (approx. 6–8 years of age)

Stage 2 = Years 3–4 (approx. 8–10 years of age)

Stage 3 = Years 5–6 (approx. 10–12 years of age)

Secondary School

Stage 4 = Years 7–8 (approx. 12–14 years of age)

Stage 5 = Years 9–10 (approx. 14–16 years of age)

Stage 6 = Years 11–12 (approx. 16–18 years of age)

- 2 The two primary newspapers in NSW are the Sydney Morning Herald and the Daily Telegraph (and their weekend counterparts, the Sun Herald and the Sunday Telegraph respectively). The Australian is the leading national newspaper, and covers news items from all states and territories.
- 3 Both the Board of Studies, and Curriculum Committees of the Board of Studies must include representatives from the Council of the Federation of Parents & Citizens' Associations of New South Wales, and either the Council of Catholic School Parents or the New South Wales Parents' Council. More detailed information about the composition of the Board of Studies and its committees can be found at <http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/contacts/boardmembers.html>

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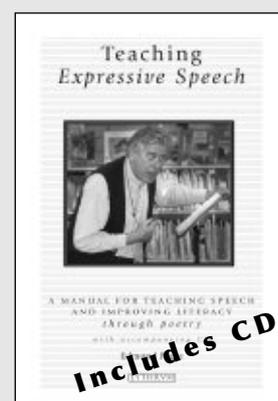
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