‘The Sacred and the Profane’: Writing the Secondary English Subjects and the Delimiting of Professional Identity

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B. Ed. (Hons.)

A portfolio submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

University of Western Sydney

May 2014
Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

(Signature)
Acknowledgements

Thank you to my supervisors Wayne Sawyer and Susanne Gannon for your invaluable advice, guidance and feedback. Your belief, faith and enthusiasm kept me motivated. Thanks to Brenton Doecke for your support as an editor and mentor, offering crucial intellectual input and encouragement along the way. I also thank Bill Green and Cal Durrant for the opportunities for publication that you made available to me and for your editorial guidance and support.

My gratitude is expressed to Brian Miller. Our conversations about teaching English when we worked together many years ago now were significant to the genesis of my research.

My heartfelt thanks and love to my family – Emma, Ella, Alexandra and Elizabeth. Your generosity, patience and understanding made this possible.
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AATE</td>
<td>Australian Association for the Teaching of English</td>
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<td>ACARA</td>
<td>Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority</td>
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<td>ACER</td>
<td>Australian Council for Educational Research</td>
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<td>AESOP</td>
<td>An Exceptional School Outcomes Project</td>
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<td>ALEA</td>
<td>Australian Literacy Educators Association</td>
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<td>BOS</td>
<td>Board of Studies</td>
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<td>ETA</td>
<td>English Teachers Association</td>
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<td>HSC</td>
<td>Higher School Certificate</td>
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<td>IFTE</td>
<td>International Federation for the Teaching of English</td>
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<td>NCB</td>
<td>National Curriculum Board</td>
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<td>NSW</td>
<td>New South Wales</td>
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<td>PEN</td>
<td>Poets, Essayists and Novelists</td>
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<td>PL</td>
<td>Professional Learning</td>
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<td>PLATO</td>
<td>People Lobbying Against Teaching Outcomes</td>
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<td>STELLA</td>
<td>Standards for Teachers of English Language and Literature in Australia</td>
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<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<td>US</td>
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Abstract

The research I present in this portfolio is broadly concerned with the programming, politics and ethics of secondary English and its teaching in New South Wales, my home state, and Australia in the years 2003 to 2013. It was undertaken in a time of significant curriculum change. These developments took place in a media and political context that was generating a good deal of comment and controversy, including strident criticism from some commentators and politicians of the quality of contemporary English teaching.

The research specifically relates to the conditions of being for the secondary English subjects in a time of curriculum change and contestation. Following Green and Beavis (1996), English subjects is used here to signify that, in the field of English studies, subject identity necessarily entails consideration of both the subject that is taught, in its different historical configurations or ‘models’, and the discursive ‘writing’ of the teacher subject that each ‘model’ anticipates.

I argue that a notable element of the contestation currently surrounding the teaching subject English in Australia is that it has exceeded various moves to delimit the secondary English curriculum. The English teacher subject has also become a site of contestation upon which the future prospects of English depend. The struggle for the English subjects is about setting the boundaries of possibility for English teachers’ pedagogy and defining their role as agents of a preferred ‘model’ of English.
The preface (Chapter 2) and four papers that comprise Chapter 3 of the portfolio accordingly explore how English teachers can reconceptualise their subject and their practice through ‘rewriting’ their professional identity in their classroom programming. It has a conceptual-theoretical basis in the development of what I call ‘a transformative model for programming secondary English’. The act of writing a programme is understood here as (professional) writing in a poststructuralist sense, through which English teachers write themselves into being. The ‘transformative model’ is a recursive curriculum model integrating significant models of English teaching into a coherent, developmental teaching and learning cycle that I have come to recognise as enacting an ethic of hospitality to difference.

The four papers presented in Chapter 4 extend on my exploration of the significance and affordances of this ethic to secondary English teachers by recontextualising it within consideration of professional responsibility and advocacy, primarily through the lens of dialogical ethics (Kostogriz & Doecke, 2007 & 2013) and its theoretical underpinnings. The movement from programming to advocacy, I argue, was a necessary extension of the critical-theoretical basis of the ‘transformative model’ given it was developed and disseminated in a time of subject contestation. In such conditions, advocacy is integral to, even indivisible from, the dissemination of the sort of research for praxis I have undertaken (cf. Mullen & Kealy, 2005; Parr, 2010).

The research enhances understanding of key aspects of the professional identity work English teachers can undertake in the context of subject
renewal through their programming and in publicly representing their work through other forms of advocacy, which is now widely considered to be a defining element of teacher professionalism (e.g. AATE & ALEA, 2002). It demonstrates possibilities for challenge and resistance available to secondary English teachers in “speaking back to standards-based reforms” (Parr, 2010), and contributes in an original way to the “increasingly researched area of English teachers’ professional identities” (Sawyer, 2006b, p.30; cf. Doecke, Homer & Nixon, 2003).
Chapter 1

Overarching Statement – Introduction to the Research Portfolio
1.1 Structure of the Ed.D Portfolio

In line with course requirements, the portfolio consists of:

1a. an overarching statement (Chapter 1) which serves as an introduction to the portfolio and explains the research components in terms of their interdependence, contribution to my personal and professional development, and contribution to the field of scholarship.

1b. an extension of this introduction (Chapter 2) taking the form of a preface to the subsequent chapters of the research portfolio, in which I explain the development of ‘a transformative model for programming secondary English’.

2. a substantial research component (Chapter 3), comprising four papers exploring the recontextualisation and practical application of this model in response to different historical conditions and professional challenges I have faced as a teacher.

3. four research papers (Chapter 4), which have been published after the usual processes of scholarly review, including in important peer-reviewed journals in the field of English curriculum, such as *English in Australia* and *Changing English*, as well as book-chapters published in the field since 2008.

Table 1: Organisation of the portfolio and details of publication

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<th>Chapter 1: Overarching Statement</th>
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<th>Chapter 2 - Preface to the Research Portfolio: A transformative model for programming secondary English.</th>
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<td><strong>Text</strong></td>
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<td>1. A transformative model for programming 7-10 English</td>
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**Chapter 3: A Transformative Model for Programming Secondary English and its Pedagogical (Re)Contextualisation**

### 3.1: Considering the ‘transformative model’ as a generative and ethical response to certain historical conditions in English teaching in NSW and Australia.

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### 3.2: Applying the ‘transformative model’ in and across different pedagogical contexts.

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**Chapter 4: Considering Ethics and Responsibility in Professional Engagement and Advocacy Related to the Teaching of Secondary English in Australia**

### 4.1 Response-abilities: ethics, pedagogy and subjectivities in secondary English teaching and advocacy.

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### 4.2: Advocating an enabling and expansive vision of the English subjects in response to national initiatives.

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The ‘transformative model for programming secondary English’ presented in the preface and in Chapter 3 has already had an impact in the field of English teaching in Australia and beyond. It has been:

- described by one international commentator as “important conceptual work” with “potential for new practice” (Burgess, 2008, p.365)
- characterised as enabling the informed “power of principled practice” (Snyder, 2008, pp. 82) in a book for the general reader about contemporary debates in the teaching of English and literacy in Australia
- used to support the professional learning of NSW teachers and the teaching of 7-10 English in NSW through publication on the curriculum support website of the NSW Department of Education and Communities
- taken up by teachers as the underpinning framework for the development of published units of work for classroom use in secondary English (e.g. Hewes, 2012; Moore, 2005)
- published in national and international professional publications, including book chapters (e.g. Howie, 2006), and the professional journals of the Curriculum Corporation (Howie, 2004) and the Australian Association for the Teaching of English (Howie, 2005)
- referred to as an “important conceptualisation of English” in a
discussion paper that was prepared for the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority as theoretical background for the development of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (Sawyer & Meiers, 2004, p.11)

• cited in academic publications as a model both of and for innovative programming (e.g. Sawyer, 2007 & 2010; Gannon, 2009)

• adopted from 2007 as a core planning approach within the central English Method unit 1X at the University of Western Sydney.

1.1.1 A Note on the Preface: A Transformative Model for Programming Secondary English

The preface (Chapter 2) was published prior to the commencement of my candidature in the Doctor of Education programme. As such, it sits outside of the formal course requirements. The prefacing paper has been included because it provides an explanation of the curriculum programming model I have proposed and the curriculum theorising underpinning this model. In this way, it provides necessary background information relating to my research and its genesis.

1.1.2 A Transformative Model for Programming English and its Pedagogical (Re)Contextualisation

The required research component is presented in Chapter 3 of the portfolio. It takes the form of work undertaken at the nexus between secondary English curriculum theorising and practice. Directed towards transforming the practice-traditions of secondary English education from within and working with and through critical theory, the research may consequently be characterised as adopting a ‘critical-emancipatory’ approach to research for praxis within a ‘practical philosophy’ orientation.
Chapter 3 has two parts.

**Part 1 of Chapter 3 (3.1)*** consists of two published texts. Here a case is made for the ‘transformative model’ as a generative and ethical response to the “ontological foreclosure” (Flint & Peim, 2012, p.103) of English teaching in NSW and Australia. I would now represent the model as reclaiming the notion of ‘transformation’ from the educational discourse of crisis and standards-based change, with its “subtext of…command and control” (Flint & Peim, p.59) at a system or organisational level. Resisting this understanding, which Flint and Peim argue is ubiquitous in educational discourse in developed nations at the present time (cf. Doecke, Howie & Sawyer, 2006), and instead seeking to understand it at the level of praxis, I have been influenced by the work of Kostogriz and Doecke (2007 & 2013). I have been most encouraged by the challenge their ethical perspective on the teaching of literacy presents to standards-based reforms. In endeavouring to adopt a similarly relational or dialogic understanding of my own work in the related field of secondary English teaching, I have come to relocate the curriculum theorising underpinning ‘the transformative model’ within the “rich tradition”(Kostogriz & Doecke, 2007, p.95) of ethical thought provided by Derrida, Levinas and Bakhtin. For example, I now see the transformation to which ‘the transformative model’ aspires as being deeply invested in Derrida’s notion of “hauntology” (Derrida, 1994). This critical theoretical idea understands and represents transformation as being antithetical to command and control, understanding it instead
in terms of disturbance, difference and deferral. Hauntology, moreover, implicates educational transformation in questions of inheritance and responsibility, iteration and performativity (cf. Kenway, 2008), all key considerations in any study of praxis. On these grounds, I contend that the research undertaken in developing and disseminating the model contributes to the “revitalization of debate about education and educational praxis” (Kemmis, 2010, p.24) by highlighting how inheritance and responsibility, and iteration and performativity, are especially relevant to the act of researching educational praxis in secondary English education, when this is understood as “knowledge and theory that comes into play in the doing of education” (Kemmis, 2010, p.25). Indeed, the ‘transformative model’ has itself been developed in and through a decidedly Derridean understanding of play (Caputo, 1997, pp.100-15), which is to say that it both understands and represents the possibilities for being of the English subjects – teachers and teaching - as being constituted by, and within, the play of differences. While such a proposal also carries, as I shall go on to explain subsequently, the trace of Bakhtin’s (1981 & 1984a) dialogism and aspects of Levinas’s (1969) thinking on difference and otherness, what I would stress here, in the context of considering the possibilities for “speaking back to standards-based reforms” (Parr, 2010), is that the Derridean notion of play enables the ‘transformative model’ to be seen as deconstruction in action - ontologically, pedagogically, ethically and politically - as I have sought to respond to the present conditions of my professional work.

Part 2 of Chapter 3 (3.2) also consists of two published texts. In this section, the critical theorising of Chapter 2 and the previous section of
Chapter 3 (3.1) is reinforced and extended to consider practical applications of the curriculum planning model I have developed. These applications are centred in different pedagogical contexts, namely the teaching of literature and the teaching of film, and were written in response to particular historical and political circumstances impacting upon both my classroom practice and my thinking about the secondary English curriculum. Each text addresses distinct but inter-related attendant ontological questions for the English subjects within the shared context of secondary English curriculum renewal and development.

**Table 2: The content of Chapter 3 of the portfolio and details of publication**

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1.1.3 Considering Ethics and Responsibility in Professional Engagement and Advocacy Related to the Teaching of English in Australia

Four published research papers are presented in Chapter 4 of the portfolio. These papers represent a series of singular professional engagements, undertaken in specific contexts, in response to what I deemed to be the calling into question, or the calling to account, of the intellectual, ontological and ethical underpinnings of the ‘transformative model’. A key notion within dialogism is that of answerability. The critical theoretical texts which form Chapter 4 consequently mark what I deem to be a necessary orientation in my research towards professional advocacy and related ‘political’ activity. The introduction to the portfolio that follows below justifies and deals at some length with both the nature and necessity of this orientation. It is sufficient to say here that the four published papers presented in Chapter 4 constitute a necessary, ongoing response to changes in my conditions of working and being, as I continue the process of “person building” or “self-definition” (Goodson, 2005, p. 85) in and through the dialogic relations I have with others. Moreover, they constitute a form of continuing critical enquiry into my own work as an English teacher and a professional representative of other English teachers. The research papers are enframed in the introduction as expressions of professional responsibility, the acknowledgement of which is necessary to any developing understanding I might have of myself as an accomplished teacher of English according to the standards (AATE & ALEA, 2002) co-developed by the Australian Association for the Teaching of English, the professional body I came to head during my candidature.
Table 3: The content of Chapter 4 of the portfolio and details of publication

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<th>Chapter 4: Considering Ethics and Responsibility in Professional Engagement and Advocacy Related to the Teaching of Secondary English in Australia</th>
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1.2 Research Themes

1.2.1 Questions of ontology and ethics in an age of standards-based reforms

The research I present in this portfolio is broadly concerned with the programming, politics and ethics of secondary English and its teaching in New South Wales and Australia in the first decade of this century. It specifically relates to the conditions of being for the secondary English subjects, both teacher and teaching, in a time of curriculum change and
contestation. It can therefore be understood to be grounded in what Flint and Peim call “problematic ontological questions” (p.100) in educational research. Flint and Peim argue that such questions have been marginalised, and consequently made even more compelling, in an age of standards-based reforms, a time dominated by the enframing of both schooling and research within a discourse of crisis and the language of improvement and governmentality (c.f. Doecke, Howie & Sawyer, 2007; Doecke et. al., 2007; Parr, 2010). In this collection of critical theoretical engagements with the discourse of crisis, I identify, examine and suggest alternatives to certain forces (historical, pedagogical, political and socio-cultural) directed in various guises and manifestations towards the ontological foreclosure of English and its teaching in Australia and the state of New South Wales in the first decade of this century.

The research component (i.e. Chapter 3) and four research papers (i.e. Chapter 4) of which the portfolio is comprised expound on the (re)writing of the English subjects, addressing the question of how English teachers can reconceptualise their subject and their practice through (re)writing their professional identity in a range of pedagogical and professional contexts. Following Green and Beavis (1996), English subjects is used here to signify that, in the field of English studies, subject identity necessarily entails consideration of both the subject that is taught, in its different historical configurations or ‘models’, and the discursive ‘writing’ of the teacher subject that each ‘model’ anticipates.

The history of English, both internationally and in this country, is now
commonly depicted as a series of paradigm shifts. Dixon (1969) famously described these shifts in terms of the historical movement from a ‘Skills’ model of English to a ‘Cultural Heritage’ model and on to a ‘Growth’ model. More recently, Sawyer & McFarlane (2000) have identified ‘Critical Literacy’ as the dominant paradigm in Australia. The salient point here is that the history of secondary English is, to a significant extent, a history of contestation related to ontological difference, meaning the paradigm shifts should not be understood as successor narratives. The history of secondary English has an overtly ethical element because it has been shaped markedly by the perceptions of English teachers as to the extent they can recognise their professional selves in the curriculum. That is to say, English teachers’ recognition of the way(s) they can be in, with and through the curriculum is enframed by the strength of intellectual and emotional attachment they retain towards the particular subject model with which they most strongly identify. Peel (2000) suggests that English is unique amongst school subjects because it has historically had, in its different iterations, the role of being “an agency for a particular kind of pedagogy” (p.132). This claim rests on the fact that, at the level of teacher praxis, each historical model is distinguished by particular defining or characteristic pedagogical methodologies (cf. Sawyer & Howie, 2011). At any given point in the subject’s history, the characteristic pedagogies of the predominant subject ‘model’ will, in effect, anticipate a particular ‘model’ English teacher. Peel notes that so strong is the attachment English teachers can have to particular pedagogies, any change to the subject as teachers understand it is likely to be perceived as a threat to their very understanding of themselves as professionals, and
accordingly be met with hostility and resentment. Bernstein’s (1977) work on the classification and framing of educational knowledge is relevant here, introducing a note of religiosity that may account, at least in part, for the vehemence with which debates about English and its teaching have been conducted over many years. As Bernstein describes it, any change in subject classification strength, or any alteration in the boundary maintenance of what is held to constitute and distinguish a particular school subject, could well be experienced by teachers and others with a vested interest in the curriculum as “a pollution endangering the sacred” (p.96). Consequently, resistance to change will be triggered, as has been evident in different Australia states at the historical moment of significant curriculum change in English. The point of contestation then becomes the desire and capacity of teachers to reframe their practice, as they negotiate and seek to bring into some form of new synthesis what they perceive to be ‘sacred’ and ‘profane’ sources of subject knowledge and concomitant teaching strategies.

1.2.2 (Re)writing the English subjects through and for difference

My research has been undertaken through a series of negotiations with and refaminings of the ‘sacred’ and ‘profane’ in English education, as I have looked to find ways beyond this binary and its ontological and ethical fundamentalisms. It identifies and responds to particular centralising and totalising forces of both a professional and a political nature that were

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1 Peel deals, in particular, with attitudinal data relating to English teachers’ responses to the introduction of the National Curriculum in England. An opinion piece by Hastie (2011) is a recent example of a reaction to the Australian Curriculum from an experienced teacher. Hastie focusses on ontological questions related to the English subjects, describing his resentment towards the subject paradigm of critical literacy.

working to restrictively delimit the “self/selves” (Mitchell and Weber, 2005, p.8) of English teachers in the time period encompassed by the texts of which the portfolio is comprised.

As I have suggested above, such forces have over time been deeply implicated in questions of the degree of fidelity the secondary English curriculum and its teachers are held to demonstrate to a particular subject model or paradigm. The centralising and totalising forces necessarily brought to bear in English curriculum development, in teachers’ subsequent classroom programming of that curriculum, and in the pedagogical approaches or strategies teachers adopt in operationalising their programme are, for all their identifiable differences in force and apparent intent, profitably recognised and understood as instances of what Bernstein calls boundary maintenance. Such forces are both ideological and practical in nature and consequence. They are essentially directed towards both the securing of the (historical and political) primacy of a particular model and the bulwarking of a particular state of being for the English subjects.

This research portfolio demonstrates possibilities for challenge and resistance available to teachers when classroom programming is alternatively understood and enacted as a mode of writing for the productive mobilisation of the unique potentialities of the key historic subject models – a way of (re)writing English teaching ‘self/selves’ into a transformed state of being that I now recognise, under the influence of Bakhtin, as being enabled by dialogic exchange, and through the work of Levinas and Derrida, as entailing a particular ethical notion of
responsibility. On these terms, the classroom teaching programme, in and through which the teacher operationalises the mandated syllabus or curriculum framework developed by an external educational authority, becomes a heteroglossic, open-ended text capable of working against totalising and centralising forces in the pedagogical field. Such work is enabled through the harnessing of the affordances of the historically significant subject models without subsuming their differences within a totalising technology. As such, a certain ethical potentiality in programme writing in secondary English is evident: it becomes a way of welcoming difference, taking the form of an act of hospitality in preparation for the coming of that which is other in the curriculum, in pedagogy and in the subjectivities of teachers and students. The programming model resists the state of being programmatic as it enacts difference with(in) itself, bringing into play, in a non-hierarchical fashion, subject paradigms and pedagogical understandings which have been historically represented in binary fashion as competing and irreconcilable. It is therefore fundamentally ethical in nature, being “other orientated” (Kostogriz & Doecke, 2013) at both an intellectual / conceptual level and in terms of the social relations it seeks to foster and sustain in the classroom.

1.2.3 Dissemination: the move from the spheres of programming and pedagogy to politics and professional advocacy

In the preceding section I have intimated that ‘the transformative model’ both constitutes and is constituted by a dialogic or relational perspective on the ethics of teaching secondary English, and can be accordingly understood as being essentially responsible in its approach to secondary
English teaching and its traditions. The notion of responsibility as I employ it here is succinctly captured by Caputo (1997), after Derrida, who identifies the ethical imperative inherent in being and acting within a tradition in terms of a particular kind of self-reflexivity and relationality. Caputo writes of “a responsibility to read, to interpret, to sift and select responsibly among many competing strands of tradition and interpretation of tradition” (p.37). Drawing from Pope’s overview of the ethical dimensions of English Studies, in which he cites the work of Bakhtin, to be responsible in this way might be said to depend on being fully responsive, which is to say “response-able” (Pope, 2002, p.157). In what follows, I will go on to argue that the imperative of which Caputo writes has necessarily meant that, over the course of my research, my work had to be (re)formulated and (re)contextualised as a response to broader socio-political questions and imperatives, as my research concerns came to exceed the fields of the history and curriculum ‘politics’ of subject English alone.

That this should be so is given a sense of inevitability in retrospect by the manner in which I found myself compelled to respond, and the extent to which I found myself to be response-able, to significant political interventions in the fields of English curriculum and teaching then taking place on a national scale. One such intervention, referred to in Chapter 4 of the portfolio, was the development of the Australian Curriculum for English (ACARA, 2011). A second was the Australian government summer school for select English teachers, held in Geelong in January, 2008, an event also referred to in Chapter 4 of the portfolio. As I outline in Chapter 4, the impetus for both these interventions lay in concerns being raised in
the media and the federal parliament about the professional capacities of the nation’s English teachers. Such interventions are, at their heart, always attempts to make dominant particular interpretations of tradition, a process which requires the discrediting of other interpretations. As such, I found them to challenge and call to account the interpretations of English curriculum history and tradition that have informed the development of the ‘transformative model’, and I was compelled to respond to both for ethical and professional reasons. The transference and recontextualisation of my theorising of the programming of secondary English from the professional (i.e. pedagogical and research) spheres to the public sphere of professional representation and advocacy had to follow, and the particular circumstances of my working life at this time, namely my professional representative role as President of AATE, gave me a platform to do so.

Such a particular set of conditions as I have just outlined might then suggest that the movement I made to advocacy was simply compelled by overlapping aspects of the circumstances in which my professional representative role, teaching and researching were taking place. However, I would instead argue that, given the nature and orientation of my research, advocacy is integral to, even indivisible from, its dissemination (cf. Mullen & Kealy, 2005; Parr, 2010). Advocacy was always already the necessary and responsible / response-able thing to do, regardless of the particular personal, historical and political circumstances in which my research was developing.

How so?

As I have already indicated, I have come to understand the potential of
‘the transformative model’ to allow dialogue across differences in terms of Derrida’s thinking on hospitality and democracy: a democracy that is always to come and which, as Critchley (2008a) has emphasised, “has the character of an ethical demand or injunction” (p.10). Evident in Caputo’s extrapolation on Derrida’s thinking, as cited in the previous paragraph, is the idea that the ethical demand as conceived by Derrida entails the responsibility to remain open to the otherness of the Other. That which is Other is not to be, and by definition cannot be, totalised or reduced within an economy of the same. For it would be unjust to not recognise the Other as other, suggesting that the ethical demand of which I write has an active element that presents a challenge to every individual person in and through the very experience of life itself. This ethical challenge manifests in a relational sense and is the necessity of and for the recognition of difference: “I am obliged to seek out the other, to learn to hear its voice and see its face” (Attridge, 2008, p.22).

In the years following publication of my initial paper explaining the ‘transformative model’, which is reproduced here as the preface to my research portfolio, it proved enlightening for me to begin to consider national developments in the field of English teaching and curriculum in terms of questions of relationality and (ethical) obligation. My developing understanding of these notions came to help me to see that I needed to do further work as a teacher-researcher in responding to the changing conditions of my working life. In particular, I became increasingly cognisant of a pressing responsibility to remain open to the surprise that inevitably stemmed from the coming of the other within the ongoing
process I was undertaking of considering future possible states of being for the English subjects.

To remain blind to the other, or silent in response to the utterances of the other, is to turn away from hospitality through neglect, and is consequently a form of injustice. In such a statement as this may be glimpsed “the passage from ethics to politics” (Critchley, 1999, p.274) as there is a decision to be made in any encounter with otherness. This is a decision, made in the here and now, and within the specificity of a particular context, about how to respond to the other, “without this being reducible to some sort of moral calculus” (Critchley, 1999, p275). The ethic of hospitality shifts in the moment of this decision to the sphere of the political as it demands engagement in and with “questions of equality, fraternity, community and political responsibility” (Critchley, 1999, p.275).

Complicating this decision, making it infinitely demanding (cf. Critchely, 2008b), is its aporetic state of (im)possibility. Such a decision will be made in the recognition that deconstruction, understood here as the “affirmation of the coming of the other” (Caputo, 1997, p.53), will always already be at work in the act of destabilising - opening out - any closed system or technology such as consensus or completeness, which includes any sense of the singularity, centrality or sufficiency of the being and identity of ‘self’ or ‘group’. For such ideas necessarily rest on inevitable acts of ontological violence, as I shall go on later to explain with reference to my own professional context and activities. The point to be made here, before moving on, is that resistance to the discourse of crisis in education and
the language of standard based reforms in educational research requires more than an assertion of democratic intent. For it to be democratic on the terms in which I have described democracy here, such claims must be necessarily hesitant, or stuttering, attempting to articulate a reflexive consciousness and understanding of the ontological violence they themselves enact.

In the context of the disputation and disquiet surrounding English of which I have written above, I identified that the dissemination of my research needed to move beyond a restrictive inside/outside binary and towards a willing engagement with ‘strangers’ and the spectres whose shadowy presence was evident in my own thinking and writing. Commitment to a democracy to come, openness to and preparation for, the coming of the other, understood here as the possibility of future difference in the being of the English subjects, demanded engagement with those who had or would still yet challenge and disturb my equanimity and certainties through opposition and critique, and consequently help me to recognise those elements of my own thinking and language which remained implicated in a will to govern, control, possess or subsume. Yet, in working through this in the process of undertaking my research, I became conscious that a counter responsibility remained with me, as it would anyone in my professional position. This was to identify and call into question the totalising forces evident in the discourse of others, exposing the shaky grounds (ontological, ethical, ideological, pedagogical) on which they were seeking to build consensus, and the ‘violence’ their community building was doing to others through the necessary exclusions it rested
upon. This, I have come to believe, was not incommensurate with an ethic of hospitality. When understood within a situated notion of professional ethics (Kostogriz & Doecke, 2013), this counter responsibility can in fact be explained as an ethical action. For it gives rise to a response which recognises, acknowledges and responds to the call of the other within the specificity of a singular encounter and context, promoting a dialogic exchange through response-ability. After all, as I understand it from my reading of Bakhtin and others, dialogic interaction entails answerability, the juxtaposing of relative perspectives and the struggle of competing voices. The alternative, silence, is entirely unpalatable, as it creates a ‘space’ in public discourse that will otherwise be filled by authoritarian monologism.

In summary, the ontology and language of professional engagement became for me a facilitator of the necessary movement into the field of advocacy. Such a movement has been characterised as a “progressive-radical” form of self-study by teacher-researchers (Mullen & Kealy, 2005, p.164), or one that recognises activism as a form of research dissemination. Consequently, in the research presented in the portfolio, I also explore certain ethical consequences and imperatives arising from the recontextualisation of the ‘transformative model’, and the ideas and values which informed its development, including those stemming from commentary and criticism that followed its movement from the professional to the public sphere.

1.3 The Context of the Research

Book-ending the research were two instances of significant curriculum
change in secondary English. These were the introduction of a new syllabus in New South Wales for English in the junior secondary years of 7 to 10 (NSW BOS, 2002), and the development and introduction of the Australian Curriculum for English (ACARA, 2011), which took place between 2008 and 2011. These events took place at a time when the teaching of English came under intense media and political scrutiny, and was being discussed outside of the profession in what was often a heated and divisive manner (cf. Doecke, Howie & Sawyer, 2006; Snyder, 2008).

At the start of the new century, Green (2002) wrote of how “a lived culture of crisis characterises English teaching” (p.25) in Australia. Within the professional sphere of English education and its publications and forums, prominent curriculum theorists in Australia (e.g. Green, 2003; Misson & Morgan, 2006) and overseas (e.g. Kress, 2006; Pope, 2002) were arguing for the renewal of English, an opening out, in the face of the crisis of identity the subject was now widely accepted to be experiencing within the research literature. At the same time, in the media and political spheres, conservative commentators and politicians began to push for a recentring of English within a more restrictive and restricted understanding of the subject – one which typically sees it as dealing exclusively with the ‘Basic Skills’ and ‘Cultural Heritage’ curriculum models.

Green (2008) reminds us that a school curriculum is always already political, perhaps even before it is educational. As I have described it, the contestation surrounding secondary English and its teaching, which has

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3 The development of the Australian Curriculum for English remains ongoing. At the time of writing, the final senior English curriculum had not been published. In January, 2014 the federal Minister for Education, Christopher Pyne announced that an evaluation of the curriculums that had already been developed and released was to take place, and he flagged changes may be made (Pyne, 2014).
provided the genesis and context for my research, can be seen to be due in no small part to the ambitious, often competing claims that are made for English as a school subject. It is, for some at least, charged with the responsibility of producing *at once* highly literate citizens who also have a rich imaginative life, a certain aesthetic sensibility, sound moral principles and a profound sense of their national identity (see, for example, Donnelly, 2007). Others have valorised the ways English teachers can help students to use “language for change”, their teaching of English demonstrating “a principled commitment to social justice even when principles and absolutes can be doubted” (Morgan, 1997, p.205).

Given the ambitions held for English, and the ways these have been positioned in different ways at different times in history to conform to an emerging national interest or imperative (cf. Green & Beavis, 1996), the contestation in which secondary English was engulfed in Australia in the years of my candidature in the Doctor of Education programme incautiously might be dismissed as being simply a new variation on an old theme. Such contestation certainly carries a strong trace of debates and controversies in other times and in other places, as highlighted in the short national curriculum histories written by Peel, Patterson and Gerlach (2000), and published together in one volume which considers the formation of the subject in England, Australia and the United States.

What distinguished the acrimony surrounding the English subjects in Australia in the first decade of this century from that which has been evident in the past is that the contestation surrounding the *teaching* subject
(i.e. English) exceeded various moves to delimit the curriculum. In a way that was not evident to the same extent in the past, the teacher subject, the ‘self/selves’ of English teachers, became a site of contestation upon which the future prospects of English were said to significantly depend.

Characteristic of much commentary about English and its teaching in Australia as I began my research was its ad hominem nature, as noted by Windle (2011) in his exploration of the processes by which an educational policy agenda can be generated in an activist media sphere, his exemplary case being the English teaching paradigm of critical literacy. It is almost as if the names of the supposed perpetrators of crimes against ‘common sense’ and ‘community values’ were needed as a form of signature (cf. Derrida, 1993), anchoring in an embodied reality, the claims of a ‘crisis’ in English teaching which were being made. The primary role of attribution of such a signature was that it enabled blame for aspects of the ‘crisis’ to be directly attributed to someone, who could then be held - at least in a representative sense - responsible for it.

This development raised the professional and personal stakes for those who chose or were required to write and speak about English and its teaching at this time. Professional and public pronouncements on such specialised fields as English curriculum and pedagogy began to be held up to media and political interrogation and critique with a vehemence and intensity unequalled in the past, not even in the 1990s – a period often seen as particularly fractious in both the UK and Australia (Sawyer, 2006a). The historical gap between the professional and public domains
came under siege. This is perhaps best understood as part of a broader trend. Commentators on the Australian media (Lucy and Mickler, 2006; Hamilton and Maddison, 2007; Manne, 2007) have noted what they view as a disturbing trend towards a syndicated propensity for ideologically driven attack in commentary on a raft of social and cultural issues related to Australian society and its future development.

These commentators contend that at the core of this development has been a widespread but targeted contesting of intellectual expertise and authority. In the realm of education, this typically pits those working in supposedly ‘rarefied’ and ‘progressive’ institutions and bodies such as professional associations, universities and educational bureaucracies against a different kind of expert. This is an ‘expert’ who deliberately retains less specialised and more diverse professional interests, working in or for an organisation that is somehow more connected to the ‘real world’, and with this, ‘public opinion’ and ‘common sense’. Such organisations include - in the main self-avowedly, it must be said - sections of the Murdoch press, privately owned consultancy services and conservative ‘think tanks’. One example of the latter sort of ‘expert’ is Kevin Donnelly, an educational consultant and, at least for much of the first decade of this century, a favoured educational commentator in the Murdoch owned national broadsheet *The Australian*\(^4\). Donnelly uses the neologism of “educrat” throughout one of his books (Donnelly, 2007) to deride the former, more traditionally understood sort of ‘expert’. The evocation of Soviet-style

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\(^4\) Donnelly’s significance in and to national educational debates in the last decade or so can be gauged from the fact that in early 2014 he and Professor Ken Wiltshire were appointed by the Liberal federal Minister for Education, Christopher Pyne, to review the Australian Curriculum developed under the previous Labor Government. Prior to this, both Donnelly and Wiltshire had been strongly critical of the national curriculum (Taylor, 2014).
faceless or shadowy figures being in control of schools and schooling points to the political and moral enframing which the contesting of the English subjects is commonly given. On these terms, it becomes possible to understand the contest around expertise in English curriculum and pedagogy as a further recontextualising force in the struggle between “sacred” and “profane” sources of educational knowledge, as identified by Bernstein.

The charges of intellectual and moral negligence on the part of English educators being so readily expressed by some in the media and political spheres made questions of curriculum and pedagogical allegiance, as made evident in teachers’ praxis, highly loaded. While teachers’ framing of their work has never been just a matter of professional judgement, let alone unconstrained self-determination (cf. Bernstein, 1977 & 2000), it was now even more explicitly tied to the notion of ‘the public good’ or ‘national interest’. The development of a national curriculum added to the force of the discourse of a singular, self-evident ‘national interest’. As Gannon (2011) notes,

> The [English] Curriculum is…situated as a disciplinary apparatus with a national reach and political ambit. None of the Rationales of the other three Curriculum areas (Science, History, Maths) are as strident in their linking of disciplinary knowledge to the future of the nation state (p.189).

The disciplining of the English subjects through a discourse of nationhood raised significant ethical challenges for teachers as they sought to negotiate
curriculum change, and consequently their orientation towards particular ways of understanding their work, as made possible for them by history and the key subject paradigms that had informed previous curriculums. Up for grabs were the conditions of nothing less than their professional being, as made possible in the interplay of and spaces between these past paradigms and those anticipated or desired for the future curriculum. Of course, such spaces are often understood in competitive or even antithetical terms, including by English teachers themselves (Peel, 2000). The criticisms being made of teachers and certain curriculum paradigms in this way performed significant (curriculum) boundary maintenance work – a further manifestation of the ontological foreclosure Flint and Peim have identified in the discourse of crisis which has come to characterise key aspects of educational policy making, commentary and reporting. Moreover, and, in terms of what was at stake, perhaps even more importantly, these criticisms also posed a significant challenge to teachers in the sphere of their non-professional life: to be a dissenting teacher was to also now run the risk of being publicly represented – at the very least at the level of implication – as a traitor to the nation (see, for example, Devine, 2005).

1.4 My personal and professional investments in the research

My own experiences as a teacher and a professional representative of other teachers are instructive in understanding aspects of the developments I have outlined above. Beyond their particularities, they say something generally about what was at stake for all who crossed from the professional to the public sphere, only to have their integrity and expertise derided and
therefore potentially diminished in the eyes of others. During the period in which my research was undertaken, I held the positions of President of the national peak professional body for secondary English teachers and English educators, the Australian Association for the Teaching of English, and President of the NSW English Teachers’ Association. At a time of intense contestation and the development of a national curriculum (ACARA, 2011), my representative roles required me to move from the classroom into academic, public and political spheres, taking on roles as a curriculum researcher and theorist, an advocate and a commentator. Evident in the example of my very being, professionally speaking, but necessarily blurring the boundaries between the professional and personal each time I was named in public and professional commentary, is a struggle to delimit my agency. This struggle on an individual scale is nevertheless all about setting the boundaries of possibility for English pedagogy in general. As Mitchell and Weber argue, “there is nothing about focusing inwards on the individual that necessarily precludes simultaneously pointing outwards and towards the political and social” (p.4). The struggle of which I write was being enacted in and through irreconcilable representations of my very being, emanating from sources other than me, as my role as an agent of what others deemed to be, or more typically deemed not to be, a desirable ‘model’ of English and English teaching was delineated. The following examples will give a more direct sense of the colonising forces I am asserting to be at play here.

The substance and ethical underpinnings of ‘the transformative model’, along with supporting representations I have written about aspects of my
own teaching practice, have led to me being (rather flatteringly) described as a teacher who epitomises “the power of principled practice” (Snyder, 2008, p.82). They have conversely also led to me being portrayed, whether directly or by implication and association, as a cultural relativist who is opposed to great books and writing (Donnelly, 2008), as a “wrong- headed” purveyor of “postmodern doubt” (Hastie, 2011) and even as a “promoter of extremist ideology” (Devine, 2007). In contradistinction to the claims I and others have made for the ‘transformative model’, the capacity of an individual English teacher and representative of other English teachers to occupy simultaneously divergent subject positions was certainly not to be seen in such criticisms of my thinking and practice as a positive or enabling force, which is to say one capable of taking the subject into the future.

My personal experience of being disparagingly cited by media commentators such as Donnelly and Devine [and I was far from being alone in this (Freesmith, 2006)] certainly supports Windle’s contention that a defining thread of the conservative ‘push back’ in Australia against contemporary English teaching has been the targeting of what its proponents would label as dissenting individuals. Such a development raises significant ontological and ethical questions for the English subjects. Not least of these is the question of responsibility/response-ability: the extent to which it is concomitant upon teachers in the midst of change to display fidelity to the past, while pursuing an enabling vision of the future. For me, a sense of responsibility has also entailed, under the influence of Bakhtin, Levinas and Derrida, necessarily finding an appropriate mode of response to critics, in order that an ethic of hospitality may be enacted - not for its
own sake, in a reductive economy of exchange, understood in terms of an obligation, but as the seeking of justice within an ethic that remains capable of affirming otherness and alterity (cf. Derrida, 2008). As I have previously indicated, useful to me in this work has been the perspective of dialogical ethics (Kostogriz & Doecke, 2007 & 2013), and the subject positioning I have come to understand it has allowed me in my research. I will further explain this debt in what follows, when delineating the theoretical perspectives informing my work.

Writing of the mediatisation of English teaching, Windle stresses the consequent need to “account for the movement of individuals across different social fields” (p.314). One such movement is that from the school classroom to the media and other domains of public representation. Here, in the conjoining of the public and the private, of the theoretical and the practical, of the individual and the representative, and of pedagogy and advocacy, is to be found the imperative for, and the structural conditions of, my portfolio. As I have argued in this introduction, and develop much further in the portfolio itself, such a movement raises challenging questions related to professional praxis, engagement, responsibility and ethics.

1.5 Rationale and Aims

My project affirms the importance of an open, unfinalisable and dialogically ethical (Kostogriz & Doecke, 2007) understanding of the teacher subject as a form of resistance to the conservative re-centring of the teaching subject currently in play in Australia. Further, my project is located in the broad movement towards English (teacher and teaching) subject renewal
that has been developing here over the last decade or so, contributing to the “increasingly researched area of English teachers’ professional identities” (Sawyer, 2006, p.30; cf. Doecke, Homer & Nixon, 2003). The grounding of my research in the ‘transformative model’ makes an original contribution to this growing field in that it provides a supporting structure for English teacher identity work that is readily iterable (Derrida, 1993), across different contexts, while remaining located in a dialogic understanding of the subject’s history. The ideal of teacher ‘eclecticism’, put forward by Morgan (1997) and Sawyer and MacFarlane (2000), as a productive way of moving beyond the curriculum contestation and ‘ontological foreclosure’ of which I have written above, is accordingly made possible, while being problematized, in a way that the metaphor of ‘eclecticism’ cannot, in and of itself, bring about. As a technology, the transformative model, it might then be said, helps to realise the (im)possibility of principled eclecticism, recontextualising it from the realm of idealism to that of praxis.

Such professional work as undertaking this study can also be located in the broader social justice project of democracy to the extent that issues of representation, or who is said to be entitled to ‘speak’ on social and cultural issues (such as English education) and what is said to count as valid knowledge, relate to the possibility of advancing, and not limiting, diverse ideas, interests and ways of being in the world (Lucy & Mickler, 2006). I am not alone in arguing that such a possibility is central to the historic project of English (e.g. Green, 2008; Kress, 2006). Refusing the limiting of ways of being an English teacher is essential to the public struggle to prevent the neo-conservative closure of the subject (Doecke, Howie &
Sawyer, 2006; Parr, 2010). My study is intended to be a refusal of just this sort. Such a project, and such an orientation, is given added resonance by the Australian Curriculum. A national curriculum will, of course, inevitably constitute a rewriting of the English subjects to a significant extent. What form(s) that rewriting may take is currently up for grabs, as the process of staged implementation begins in coming years. Already a body of research is developing that demonstrates the restrictive and restricting nature of the Australian Curriculum for the English subjects (see, for example, various contributions to Doecke, Parr & Sawyer, 2011).

1.6 Research Questions, Methodologies and Theoretical Perspectives

1.6.1 Overview of the Research Agenda

In the effort to understand as well as to improve one’s practice, theory both grows out of practice and helps in making sense of it; it also suggests the kinds of improvement that might be attempted and provides a rationale for explaining the reasons for these changes to others. At the same time, theorizing is never finalized, since it is conducted in a dialogue with others; it is also only valuable when it shapes and is shaped by action. (Wells, 2001, p.2)

My research can be understood as a theorising of the subjectivity of English teachers, operating at the juncture of practice-theory-action identified by Wells. It proposes and explicates in different contexts, which is to say in response to different challenges facing English and English
teachers at the present time in Australia, an enabling framework – the ‘transformative model’ - geared to assist teachers to negotiate the now fraught relationship in English studies between three fields of pedagogical knowledge transmission (Bernstein, 2000): production, recontextualisation, and reproduction.

As such, the research was orientated towards engaging with critical theory in order to allow me to participate more deeply and self-reflexively in my fields of professional practice. In itself, this may be understood as a recontextualisation, outside of the field of secondary English teaching, of my questioning of standards-based reforms and seeking of alternative subject positions. The nature of the research, its questions and methodologies, is such that it sits outside of the dominant ‘solution orientation’ of professional doctorate programs, as described by Flint and Peim, in which “social amelioration…can be realized through strategies of intervention and their attendant tactical, technical practices informed by practice-orientated, evidence-based research and knowledge production” (p.107). In nature and ‘spirit’, I instead align my work with what Parr (2010) identifies as inquiry- based professional learning. In my research, curriculum theorising, professional advocacy, and critical analysis of policy and related public commentary are not simply employed in the process of inquiry. They constitute the process of inquiry itself, providing a multivalent response to the authoritarian and limiting discourse of standards-based reforms and endeavouring to keep open a dialogic and unfinalisable understanding of the English subjects and English teaching practice.
Table 4: Overview of the research agenda (Chapters 2 and 3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 2 (preface) &amp; Chapter 3</th>
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<th>Chapter 3</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Text:</strong></td>
<td>A Transformative Model...</td>
<td>Problematising Eclecticism...</td>
<td>Critical Literacy...</td>
<td>The Subject(s) of Fiction</td>
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<td><strong>Key research questions</strong></td>
<td>How can framing theory practically enable a principled eclecticism in teachers’ programming of secondary English?</td>
<td>How might a non-totalizing dialogic understanding of teachers’ programming of secondary English be envisaged?</td>
<td>What contribution can the Derridean notion of ‘hauntology’ make to the renewal of secondary English in Australia?</td>
<td>How can a ‘transformative model of programming’ contribute to the teaching of film in secondary English and thereby subject renewal in secondary English?</td>
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<td><strong>Methodologies</strong></td>
<td>Practitioner inquiry: conceptual-theoretical research</td>
<td>Practitioner inquiry: conceptual-theoretical research</td>
<td>Practitioner inquiry: conceptual-theoretical research, reflexive autobiographical inquiry, critical textual analysis</td>
<td>Practitioner inquiry: conceptual-theoretical research, reflexive autobiographical inquiry, critical textual analysis</td>
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Table 5: Overview of the research agenda (Chapter 4)

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<th>Part 1</th>
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<td>Text: <em>Embracing the other...</em></td>
<td>Text: ‘Authenticity was never really...’</td>
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<tr>
<td>Key research questions</td>
<td>Text: STELLA as a compass for change</td>
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<tr>
<td>In the context of the renewal of secondary English, what constitutes</td>
<td>What place does an ethic of hospitality to the Other have in</td>
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<td>ethically responsible advocacy?</td>
<td>the politics and teaching of secondary English?</td>
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<td>Methodologies</td>
<td>How can consciously theorised practice change the spaces for debate</td>
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<td>Practitioner inquiry: conceptual-theoretical research, reflexive</td>
<td>and pedagogy in the programming and teaching of Australian literature</td>
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<td>autobiographical inquiry, critical textual analysis</td>
<td>in secondary English?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theoretical perspectives</td>
<td>Practitioner inquiry: conceptual-theoretical research, reflexive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dialogical ethics based on Kostogriz and Doecke (2007), Bakhtin,</td>
<td>autobiographical inquiry, critical textual analysis</td>
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<td>(1981 &amp; 1984a) and Levinas (1998); poststructuralism based on Derrida</td>
<td>Dialogism based on Bakhtin (1981 &amp; 1984a); poststructuralism based on</td>
</tr>
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<td>Ethical criticism based on Eaglestone (1997); dialogical ethics</td>
<td>Carnivalsque based on Bakhtin (1984b); framing theory based on</td>
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<tr>
<td>based on Kostogriz and Doecke (2007), Bakhtin, (1981 &amp; 1984a) and</td>
<td>MacLachan and Reid (1994); poststructuralism based on Lucy (1997 &amp;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Levinas (1998); poststructuralism based on Derrida (1997); narrative</td>
<td>2010); dialogism based on Bakhtin (1981 &amp; 1984a)</td>
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<td>inquiry based on Goodson (2005)</td>
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1.6.2 Methodologies

The research is primarily orientated towards extending and enhancing my own professional learning and practice. The research methodologies I draw upon across this portfolio include conceptual-theoretical research, critical textual analysis and reflexive autobiographical inquiry.

As the papers in Chapter 4 of the portfolio make most evident, the
research has a characteristic, even defining element of professional activism, in that it has been self-consciously devised, developed and disseminated as a way of writing back (cf. Mitchell and Weber, 2005; Parr, 2010)\textsuperscript{5} to various conservative representations of English teachers’ experience. This has been approached through a “theoretical, interrogative” (Flint & Peim, 2012, p.109) mode of research, which I align with a ‘critical-emancipatory’ approach to practitioner research for educational praxis. This approach is defined by Kemmis (2010) as research which “adopts a first-person relationship with practice as constituted in one’s own action or in one’s participation in the social praxis of a community or group or profession” (p.12), with a view to grounding the research in the “happening-ness, the ‘sheer-actuality’ of practice” (p.14) and in order to bring about renewal and change. This element of social praxis is most evident in the fact that many of the papers comprising the portfolio were explicitly published within the context of dialogic exchange around a particular theme, issue or aspect of secondary English pedagogy.

The vital importance of research for praxis is emphasised by Kemmis, who positions such research in an ethical sense against the present preponderance and predominance of scientific objectivist studies of teaching practice. Kemmis argues the latter are essentially designed to bring about control and standardisation in a manner that conflates education with the training of teachers and students to serve and participate in the neo-liberal economy. He positions research for praxis against objectivist studies by emphasising the value of dialogue and relationality in a way that chimes for me with the

\textsuperscript{5} The idea of speaking or writing back, as evoked by these authors, carries the acknowledged trace of the groundbreaking work of Ashcroft et. al. (2002) on postcolonialism, as well as the dialogic notion of answerability.
work of Koestogriz and Doecke, and also of Parr.

Educational traditions always evolve in and through the practice of self-aware educators who see their individual and collective practice as needing to respond to new circumstances and opportunities. This evolution cannot be sustained for long just through isolated innovations introduced into the tradition by individuals; they need to be interrogated in the community of enquiry that constitutes the profession. Educational traditions may orientate and be present in the deliberation and conduct of individual educators, but they can only survive and thrive as traditions by being sustained in communal debate and deliberation among members of the profession. (Kemmis, 2010, p.20)

I would like to think that my research has been oriented towards such communal debate and deliberation, and enframed as such, from the prefacing paper onwards.

The invocation of Bakhtin and Derrida in the portfolio indicates that the proposed research draws on dialogic and poststructuralist approaches, both being concerned with the formation of the subject through language and textuality. My method, then, is to be also understood in part as a method of philosophical presentation of a critical nature, in which I apply ontological concepts such as dialogue and hauntology against other theoretical languages I have encountered, whether explicitly presented in the scholarly literature or implicitly presented in the mass media and educational praxis.
1.6.3 Theoretical Perspectives

Central to my project is the ‘transformative model’. This model draws on framing theory (Hart, 1988; MacLachlan and Reid, 1994) to enact a dialogic relationship between the history and possible futures of the English subjects. This is done by enabling different teacher-subject positions or ‘consciousnesses’ (e.g. the ‘literacy’ teacher, the ‘cultural heritage’ teacher and the ‘personal growth’ teacher) to exist side by side (cf. Bakhtin, 1981) in an iterable (cf. Derrida, 1993) and generative fashion, and without the subsuming of these positions within an all-dominating singular subject ‘consciousness’.

The ‘transformative model’ is aligned to the project of critical pedagogy to the extent that it promotes the sort of “dialogical encounter between... discourses” that Giroux (2005) argues offers educators the opportunity to “re-examine the partiality of their respective views...as part of a broader radical democratic project”, projecting theoretical practice which enables engagement in “forms of transgression that challenge knowledge and social relations structured in dominance” (p.14).

For this reason, the research can also be characterised as a form of practitioner research that Parr labels inquiry-based professional learning. As Parr explains it, the grounding of inquiry-based professional learning in Bakhtinian dialogism means that it seeks to draw on a variety of research forms and genres without seeking to simply replicate existing generic forms, in order to generate “newer and richer” (p.27) representations of the
A defining aspect of inquiry-based professional learning is that it enacts the idea of critical inquiry as an ongoing project, in which a reflexive position is maintained that “holds up to critical scrutiny the very claims that are being made and advocated” (p.26). The basis for this is made evident in Parr’s citing of Crotty (1998):

Critical inquiry cannot be viewed as a discrete piece of action that achieves its actions and comes to a close. With every action taken, the context changes and we must critique our assumptions again…It is a cyclical process (better seen, perhaps, as a spiralling process for there is movement forward and upward) of reflection and action. (p.65)

I have endeavoured to capture my own ongoing spiral of reflection and action in the structuring of my research in and through the movement between the preface (Chapter 2) and the papers comprising Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 of the portfolio. This structure establishes with the preface the original context for the development of the ‘transformative model’, proceeding in Chapter 3 to then represent its recontextualisation in response to developing professional circumstances and challenges, with Chapter 4 moving between broad political issues of national importance and specific classroom challenges as the implications of the thinking behind the ‘transformative model’ are explored. Moving beyond the preface to Chapter 3, the structure of the portfolio, as such, is not neatly chronological or linear. The papers have been organised around shifting
contexts in and between Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, in line with Parr’s emphasis on the contextual nature of inquiry-based professional learning. The dialogic pairings of papers within the individual chapters are directed toward showing how the contexts of my teaching, representative roles and research have overlapped, creating new challenges for me in ways that simply cannot be boxed and labelled discretionally as a ‘teaching’ issue, an ‘advocacy’ issue, or a ‘research’ issue. This is in line with Parr’s emphasis on the value of “grounded and situated accounts of teachers learning” (p.22) in generating rich accounts of and new possibilities for praxis, in contradistinction to the comparative aridity of approaches to studying teachers’ work which regard practice in a distant and objectivist manner (cf. Kemmis, 2010).

The fact that the theorising I will undertake is centred in, but necessarily exceeds, my own practice also locates the proposed research within what Goodson (2005) describes as the methodological imperative of postmodern times: “a concern with objectivity moving toward a primary concern with the way subjectivities are constructed” (p.175).

I have already acknowledged the influence of the work of Kostogriz and Doecke in my research, highlighting the significance of the notion of dialogical ethics because of the research and advocacy positions I found available to me after reading their work. In this can also be seen the influence of Levinas, in the way that my research began to grapple with the consequences of a recognition that engagement with that which is Other – other subjects of English, other perspectives, the texts of others – has
inevitably unsettled my equanimity and called me into question, demanding a response. My research carries the influence of Bakhtin in that it has been brought about and expressed through dialogic discourse, acknowledging that any dialogue will involve struggle and contradiction. It is a continuation of the acknowledged potentiality of “Bakhtin’s insights...to disrupt current archaic and somnambulistic ideas about ‘best practices in education’” (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006, p.55), as has been expounded in the work of Kostogriz and Doecke, and others (Parr, 2010). The subject positioning made available to me by dialogical ethics has also been reinforced by the influence of Derrida (1994) in that it accords with my understanding of the national interest, the democracy that is always to come in this country, and indeed globally, by respecting “the singularity and infinite alterity of the other” (p.65) in order to allow reciprocity and dialogical communication as cornerstones of human rights (cf. Callinicos, 2008).

1.7 Conclusion

My research agenda explores the complexities and contradictions of contemporary English teaching by theorising the subjectivity of English teachers whilst operating at the juncture of practice-theory-action.

Chapter 3 of the portfolio relates to the classroom implementation and professional recontextualisation of ‘a transformative model for programming secondary English’. This model has allowed me to reframe my practice in a time of subject contestation. The ‘transformative model’ can accordingly assist secondary English teachers and educators in the process of subject renewal, helping them to respond in a principled and
ethical manner to perhaps the most pressing challenge they face at this time: to move beyond ethical positioning that understands subject English – its content and pedagogies - in terms of that which is ‘sacred’ and that which is ‘profane’, in order to negotiate and bring into a new synthesis different sources of subject knowledge within an ethic of hospitality to difference. The pressing nature of such an ontological and ethical challenge has only been increased by ongoing questioning of the being of the English subjects within the Australian Curriculum. This invests my research with timely relevance and points to the ways in which the ‘transformative’ model may be used by teachers to renew their practice. The ‘transformative model’ enables teachers to programme in a generative manner that mobilises the affordances of key subject paradigms in a non-hierarchical and non-totalizing manner. It also provides the basis for secondary English teachers to evaluate and respond to future curriculum development through historical and pedagogical frames of reference (cf. Sawyer & Howie, 2011). Chapter 4 demonstrates the different subjectivities available to the English subjects, and the possibilities for challenge and resistance available to teachers, when classroom programming is understood and enacted as a mode of writing for the dialogic mobilisation of the unique ethical and other potentialities of key historic subject models.

The latter point foregrounds the necessary movement within the portfolio, as I have argued, between the research and my professional advocacy work. The research has a defining element of professional activism, which is most evident in the papers which constitute Chapter 4 of the portfolio. In Chapter 4, questions of professional responsibility and
advocacy are considered in terms of relationality and dialogical ethics, ideas which I now recognise to be the very basis of the ‘transformative model’. In Chapter 4, the case is made for a grounded and principled form of advocacy that remains open to difference, being hospitable to otherness without forswearing answerability. The papers which comprise Chapter 4 of the portfolio show how such advocacy can be undertaken in the fields of teachers’ programming and in public representations of their understanding of the secondary English curriculum and its teaching. The examples provided here illustrate how all representations by English teachers of their work constitute a form of political advocacy, and remain grounded in historical debates and the contesting of the being of the English subjects. Such acts of representation – which I take to include programming, as well as more obvious acts of advocacy such as responding to consultations or engagement with the media or government – therefore need to be informed by and undertaken in the name of response-ability. The principles outlined in Chapter 4 of the portfolio, I suggest, will be of value to teachers and educators seeking to develop a framework in order to negotiate the present renewal of the English subjects in Australia in an ethical manner.
References


NSW BOS (Board of Studies) (2002). *English Years 7-10 Syllabus*. Sydney: NSW Board of Studies.


Chapter 2

Preface to the Research Portfolio: A Transformative Model for Programming Secondary English
Table 6: Content of Chapter 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. A transformative model for programming 7-10 English</td>
<td><em>English in Australia</em>, 142, Autumn 2005, 57-63</td>
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**Text 1: A transformative model for programming 7-10 English**

Written following the International Federation for the Teaching of English Conference in 2003 and as a new syllabus for English 7-10 was being introduced in NSW, this paper was originally published in *mE Tahor*, the journal of the English Teachers’ Association of NSW. It was subsequently republished in *English in Australia*, following the usual process of peer review, at the invitation of the then editor, Wayne Sawyer. The paper proposes and describes a ‘transformative model for programming secondary English’. A prevalent theme at this conference was the crisis of identity in English and its teaching in the new millennium. I frame the development and dissemination of the ‘transformative model’ in dialogic terms as an engagement with keynote addresses by Alan Luke and Bill Green. Moreover, foreshadowing themes I develop in Chapter 4 of my research portfolio, I describe it as an act of critical inquiry best understood as the exercising of a professional responsibility in a time of curriculum change and contestation: “[the] sort of interrogation of our praxis required if we are to be able to identify and retain those qualities and characteristics which make English a distinctive school subject.”
A Transformative Model for Programming
7–10 English

Mark Howie
Penrith High School

The vexed questions of what constitutes English as a school subject and the professional identity of English teachers in this new century were ubiquitous at the IFTE Conference in July 2003. As a classroom teacher and active member of my state ETA, I was struck in particular by the number of speakers and presenters, both national and international, who urged teachers to take charge of their curriculum and become advocates for their subject. The dire situation facing our colleagues in the UK and the US, which was consistently represented as being the result of local versions of standardised curricula, became an ominous refrain at the Melbourne conference – one which readily brought to mind the famous soundtrack to *Jaws*. What follows is a description of some thinking I have been doing around the new NSW 7–10 Syllabus, with a view to ‘swimming with the sharks’ and taking up the challenge of reconceptualising and reorientating my own practice in a time of change.

The article was originally written after IFTE for *mETaphor*, the journal of ETA (NSW) in the hope that it might contribute to a ‘connecting conversation’ about the new NSW syllabus, and indeed the very nature of English itself. I remain optimistic about this outcome, as the curriculum model I describe here has been taken up successfully in a modified form in classrooms other than my own (Miller and Pinnington-Wilson 2003).

Introduction

The 2003 IFTE Conference opened with Alan Luke delivering the Garth Boomer Address. In his address, Luke provocatively suggested that English is in a state of crisis. He argued that English is a subject that is experiencing great difficulties in defining itself. Luke highlighted the very strands around which the IFTE Conference was organised as attesting to the identity crisis in English: Literacy for a Democratic Society, English as a Global Language, Literacy as Textual Diversity: English as Cultural Studies, 21st Century Literacies, Professional Identity and Change: the Role of English Literacy Educators in the 21st Century.

Drawing on Basil Bernstein’s (1977) work on the classification and framing of educational knowledge, Luke posited that English is dominated by bifurcated pedagogies. While the content of English is open (weak classification), teachers remain fundamentally partisan in how they teach it (strong framing). According to Luke, teachers typically approach teaching English as a ‘fantasy’ literacy, which takes students ‘elsewhere’ through the imagination and empathy, divorcing them from the realities of their social conditions and their material state. Here he seemed to be suggesting, as others have (Reid 2003), that a version of the ‘Personal Growth’ model of English, which overlooks the emphasis John Dixon originally placed on the social in *Growth Through English*, is predominant in Australia. Extending his argument, Luke went on to add that when a more socially orientated approach to English is put into practice, it is too frequently done as a series of ‘one off’ activities, be they individual lessons, discrete units of work or special
projects. In other words, the desire on the part of teachers to inject ‘relevance’ into the curriculum is too frequently conceived of as an ‘add on’, rather than the core business of English.

While more emotive in its tone and intent, Luke’s rhetoric of crisis echoes the recent thinking of other influential curriculum theorists who have identified further divisions in English. While Bill Green was prevented by illness from speaking at IFTE, an article (2003) published in the lead up to the conference points to his intention to approach and question the adequacy of dominant pedagogical practices in English from a different angle. In the recent past Green (2002) has noted that a new awareness of ‘subject-specific literacies’ has been a challenge to the traditions and practices of English as a literature-based subject. He suggested that there exists a pressing need to identify an English ‘literacy project’, which would enable the articulation of the unique, complex and multi-dimensional role English plays in the school curriculum. In his more recent paper, Green suggests that under the influence of Cultural Studies, English has shifted from being a literature-based subject to being a text-based subject. According to Green what is problematic is the question of whether these shifts and challenges have opened up the English curriculum to genuine difference in terms of praxis (p. 14).

I wonder if (the so-called textual turn) is not, in actual fact, a way of doing – albeit under the sign of something else altogether – Business as Usual. Is the new emphasis on textual diversity more or less simply a diversion? Have things changed much at all, in what might be called the ‘deep grammar’ of the subject and profession? Is there at base, any real difference?

Clearly, if there is to be a change, those working at the ‘base’ are charged with the significant responsibility of bringing it about. This responsibility is particularly pressing for teachers in NSW at the present time, given the introduction of the new English 7–10 Syllabus. How we set about reconceptualising the English curriculum – by which I mean not only what is taught but also how it is taught – becomes crucial.

Reframing 7–10 English

I want to argue here that the most crucial statement in the Rationale the NSW 7–10 syllabus provides for the study of English (BOS 2002, p. 7) is that the syllabus ‘enables students to draw on the methods of different theoretical perspectives and models for teaching English to assist their students to achieve the syllabus outcomes at the highest level’ Such a statement reinforces the view that English is essentially defined by its pedagogy, or the ways in which the ‘study of language in its various textual forms’ is approached. Moreover a specific link is made between student achievement and these pedagogical practices. It seems to me that the underlying ‘message’ of the statement is that student outcomes cannot be achieved at the ‘highest levels’ by any manifestation of partisanship on the part of teachers in how they translate the syllabus into classroom practice. This understanding is reinforced in the Glossary (p. 71): [theoretical perspectives and models] assist students to engage with the ‘full scope of, and relationship between, meaning and text’ (my emphasis). In this light, what has been done in the past remains relevant but is not sufficient. Teachers must change what they do in the classroom beyond the use of ‘new’ types of texts. In effect this requires the weakening of teachers’ framing of the English curriculum. We need to be less strident and more fluid in our allegiance to particular theoretical models and perspectives.

The ‘models’ of English explicitly glossed in the syllabus are Critical Literacy, Cultural Heritage, Cultural Literacy, Personal Growth and the social view of language. (The latter is perhaps best described as a reconfiguration of particular aspects of Genre theory.) Given the emphasis the syllabus places on aesthetic appreciation, New Criticism seems also to be a significant – albeit ‘silent’ theoretical perspective in the document.

There is not the space here to outline the differences between these models and the disjunctions and antipathies that exist between them. What I do want to present is a model that might inform the development of classroom programs, in order that the practices of each of these models are drawn on in an integrated way, working towards a valid and significant purpose within what Green termed the English literacy project, namely transformation of the ‘self’.

When English is understood as a range of practices which contribute to the formation of a particular kind of person that societies have found they need, and which English is able to help produce (Peel et. al. 2000, pp. 17–18), there is space to find the meeting points between the different models of English which have informed curriculum development throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty first. The historical trajectory of the subject is such, at least in the version which informs the NSW 7–10 Syllabus, that the grand ‘project’ of English can now be delineated as the development of individuals who know, question, and
challenge how they are socially and culturally situated, and who can use language to effectively fulfil an expanding range of social roles, while also giving shape and realisation to their social, cultural and economic interests.

The curriculum model described below sets out to symbiotically harness the power of each of the historically significant models of English described in the NSW syllabus in working towards the goal of developing self and socially aware individuals, who have the imagination necessary to envisage other ways of being in the world and the linguistic wherewithal to know how to set about (re)shaping themselves as their various interests require or demand. To this end, a historically situated understanding of English underpins the model, which acknowledges, draws together, and calls upon a plurality of practices. The pragmatic eclecticism demanded by the Rationale for the NSW syllabus can consequently become a principled eclecticism. A deliberately fluid framing of the curriculum by teachers who draw on the model may potentially break down the historical binaries which Luke seemed to be suggesting are preventing English from evolving to meet the demands of a new century: for example, imagination and critique, the personal and the social. Change to what Green calls the ‘deep grammar’ of the subject may also result as the model functions to promote a synergism that allows teachers to both draw on and move beyond familiar or dominant practices to which they might prescribe, with the model providing a framework by which the component parts of the syllabus outcomes and content might be contextualised and worked towards in a recursive manner.

Towards an integration of ‘models’ of English through the metaphor of framing

Following MacLachlan and Reid (1994), the term frame is used in the model outlined below (Figure 1) as emphasis on ‘framing’ draws ‘attention to agency and acknowledges the complex nature of the interpretive process’ (p. 9). To talk for example of the ‘(re)contextualising’ of the syllabus in the classroom, as opposed to the ‘(re)framing’, seems to imply the repositioning of a set of given, or ‘found’ and static meanings. In other words, how teachers interpret the syllabus and put it into practice is represented as unmediated and largely unproblematic. Such a representation is too simplistic and does not accord with the format and intent of the syllabus. More significantly, it ignores the foregrounding of process and activity in the statement in the

Rational that ‘the syllabus enables teachers to draw on (my emphasis) the methods of different theoretical perspectives and models…’ In engaging with the syllabus, the metaphor of framing shifts the emphasis away from engagement with the syllabus as a set of outcome and content statements that might be transposed onto existing practices, to engagement with a series of outcome and content statements that require a reconceptualising of practice if they are to be achieved.

I have adapted the framing metaphor employed in the model from the current NSW Visual Arts Syllabus for Years 7 to 10, which has a parallel emphasis on a theorised understanding and practice of what we now call ‘responding’ and ‘composing’ in English in NSW. The obvious synergies between the two subjects are evident in the explanation of the Frames in the Visual Arts Years 7–10 Syllabus (BOS 1997):

The Frames recognise that Making and Studying in the Visual Arts is conditioned by different theoretical orientations which affect the way images and objects are identified, valued, interpreted, created and used. (p. 2)

If ‘Making and Studying’ was replaced with ‘Responding and Composing’, and ‘images and objects’ with ‘language and text’, this statement would not be out of place in the English syllabus. In order that the theoretical perspectives and models listed in the glossary of the English syllabus are acknowledged, I have renamed what is called the ‘Postmodern’ frame in the Visual Arts Syllabus the ‘Critical frame’ in the model for curriculum planning described below. This allows for the inclusion of Critical Literacy and means approaches to text derived more broadly from post-structuralism can take their place in classrooms alongside textual and literacy practices derived from post-modernism.
Describing the frames

In essence, the model presented here functions to enable teachers to devise units of work or lesson sequences that bring together the different theoretical models identified in the syllabus – and their defining pedagogies.

Familiar practices in English teaching in NSW, which have been predominant in past syllabuses (i.e. personal growth and cultural heritage) emphasise that integral to the study of English is the exploration of how our personal knowledge and understandings of the world and our subjectivities are socially and culturally formed through language and text. However, in the new 7–10 syllabus the Aim of English is stated as ‘to enable students to use, understand, appreciate, reflect, on and enjoy the English language in a variety of texts and to shape meaning in ways that are imaginative, interpretive, critical and powerful [my emphasis] (BOS, p. 12). The transformative model I have proposed instantiates this aim as the growth from the personal, i.e. knowledge and understandings grounded in a subjective frame of reference that is immediate and restricted, to the cultural and critical, i.e. knowledge and understandings grounded in frames of reference that are more distant and elaborated. This makes possible an English curriculum characterised by challenge, resistance, and transformation.

The subjective frame draws on the Personal Growth model of English, and the familiar practices of reader response theory and ‘writing for understanding.’ It seeks to have students personally engage in an active process of meaning making in composing and responding to texts. However, in anticipating the cultural and critical frames, it also acknowledges that (personal) responses are culturally constructed. That is to say, that culturally dominant and accepted readings exist and that culturally and structurally frames fosters and sustains (personal) growth through students’ developing deeper understanding of the structures and processes of language and text, and how language and text function within cultural and situational contexts. Students’ developing understanding of language through active use informs their understanding of text, but their developing understanding of text will in turn extend their understanding of language.

The cultural frame highlights for students that their processes of responding and composing are culturally situated. As students’ developing understanding of language and text is (re)situated in the cultural frame, they may then in turn begin to acquire the knowledge, skills and understandings of texts as socio-cultural constructs they need to effectively compose and respond to texts within a broadening range of contexts for different audiences and purposes.

The cultural frame also foregrounds the development of a self-reflexive literacy that enables students to understand and draw on different processes of responding and composing aligned to the different theoretical models in the syllabus. In this way, for example, students might understand that an initial, so called personal response to a text in fact draws on or accords with a particular set of reading practices. Other ways of responding to the text can then be explored and other readings generated. Such exploration can be extended to the very notion of the ‘self.’ This frame highlights for students what Reid (2003) has called the ‘social constructedness of any form of individual identity’ (p. 104). With regards to students’ own texts, the cultural frame allows them to explore the processes of their own composing and the way that their texts represent the ‘self.’ Other ways of responding and representing the ‘self’ can then be explored.

Working within the structural and cultural frames, students may be assisted to develop their aesthetic appreciation of language and texts. As the syllabus glos- sary (BOS, p. 67) describes it, an ‘aesthetic experience is generated in the encounter between specific texts and specific readers, audiences and viewers in specific conditions.’ The reading practices and understandings developed within these frames can be geared to allowing students to develop the kind of aesthetic responses and ethical judgements valued in Personal Growth, Cultural Heritage and New Criticism approaches.

The critical frame promotes Critical Literacy as a differentiated reading practice, allowing students to challenge and/or resist particular ways of reading a text. It
requires students to interrogate their initial responses generated within the subjective frame. The critical frame also draws on post-structuralism and post-modernism in giving students freedom to ‘play’ with texts, including their own, and to transform them.

The recursive nature of the model makes it inevitable that by the stage of a unit of work or lesson sequence in which students are working within the critical frame, their initial understandings would have been extended or transformed. They are now in a position to revisit the understandings initially generated within the subjective frame, and articulate how their learning has given them a new set of understandings of not only language and text, but also of themselves as English students.

Appendix 1, which outlines how I have attempted to allocate particular key aspects of the syllabus outcomes within and across the four frames, will provide readers with some idea of what I mean by the recursive nature of the model. It shows how an element of a particular outcome is ‘targeted’, with that outcome then being continually ‘revisited’, each time with a different emphasis deriving from the characteristic pedagogical practices of the theoretical models delineated in the syllabus.

In summary, the proposed model represents (personal) growth as students’ developing understandings of themselves and their place in the world, with an emphasis on such understandings as being socially and culturally situated, and their developing knowledge, understanding and mastery of language use. As such, students develop the social and cultural understandings and reflexive literacy practices necessary to participate authoritatively and critically as readers and writers in social and cultural discourses situated well beyond the classroom. In so doing I have sought to suggest one way that teachers might work towards integrating the glossed theoretical perspectives and models in their implementation of the NSW 7–10 Syllabus. I have argued that the dictates of the syllabus itself necessitates such an approach, with an integration of the models being required in order that students may work towards achieving the outcomes ‘at the highest level’ and to fully engage with ‘the scope of, and relationship between, meaning and text’.

Readers interested in exploring the efficacy and possibilities of the model I have described here might find a unit of work on teaching Autobiography to Year 8, which I have called ‘(Re)writing You’, a useful resource. It may be found at the website of the NSW Department of Education and Training Curriculum Support Unit: www.curriculumsupport.nsw.edu.au. Follow the links to Secondary>English>teaching ideas>Implementing the new English years 7–10 Syllabus>English project Schools 2003>Penrith High School.

Conclusion
It is now commonplace for English curriculum theorists and historians to describe the subject as being in the midst of great change, or even crisis. As relayed at IFTE in July, the experiences of our UK and US colleagues suggest that we do indeed live in ‘dangerous’ times. This places a pressing responsibility on those involved in the field of English teaching. As Bill Green (2003) has recently written, ‘it is especially important … to keep asking such questions as these [i.e. Where are we now? Where have we come from? Where are we going?], and to seek to probe thus into our past, our present, and our future’ (p. 135). This sort of interrogation of our praxis is required if we are to be able to identify and retain those qualities and characteristics which make English a distinctive school subject. With the introduction of the Years 7–10 Syllabus, English teachers in NSW have a real and immediate opportunity to engage in the sort of critical inquiry into their own teaching that Green advocates. This article represents something of my own efforts in this direction.
### Appendix 1: Stage 4 Frames and Outcomes

#### Subjective Frame
As it is derived from personal response and reading from the 'invited' position (i.e. complying with the world view of the text or culturally dominant/accepting of the text available to the reader).

| 1. | Responds to and composes texts for understanding, interpretation and pleasure |
| 2. | Uses a range of processes for responding to and readings composing texts |
| 3. | Responds to and composes texts in different technologies |
| 6. | Draws on experience to imaginatively respond to and compose texts |
| 8. | Makes connections between texts |
| 9. | Demonstrates understanding that texts express views of their broadening world |
| 10. | Identifies, considers and appreciates cultural expression in texts |
| 11. | Uses, reflects on and assesses individual and collaborative skills for learning |

#### Structural Frame
As it is understood through language & textual processes & forms, including social purpose, structure, language features, symbols & figurative language.

| 1. | Responds to and composes texts for understanding |
| 2. | Uses a range of processes for responding to and composing texts |
| 3. | Responds to and composes texts in different technologies |
| 4. | Uses and describes language forms and features and structures of texts appropriate to different purposes, audiences and contexts |
| 5. | Makes informed language choices to shape meaning with accuracy, clarity and coherence |
| 6. | Draws on information and ideas to imaginatively and interpretively respond to and compose texts |
| 8. | Makes connections between and among texts |
| 10. | Identifies and considers cultural expression in texts |

#### Cultural Frame
As it is understood in relation to the historical and social contexts in which text is composed.

| 1. | Responds to and composes texts for understanding and interpretation |
| 3. | Responds to and composes texts in different technologies |
| 6. | Draws on information and ideas to interpretively respond to and compose texts |
| 7. | Thinks critically and interpretively about information, ideas and arguments to respond to and compose texts |
| 8. | Makes connections between and among texts |
| 9. | Demonstrates understanding that texts express views of their broadening world and their relationships within it |
| 10. | Identifies, considers and appreciates cultural expression in texts |

#### Critical Frame
As it is understood in relation to post-structuralist understandings of language (multiple meanings/ readings), critical literacy (resistant readings), & post-modern understandings of text (appropriation, intertextuality, parody, relation to other texts).

| 1. | Responds to and composes texts for understanding, interpretation, and critical analysis |
| 2. | Uses a range of processes for responding to and composing texts |
| 3. | Responds to and composes texts in different technologies |
| 7. | Thinks critically and interpretively about information, ideas and arguments to respond to and compose texts |
| 8. | Makes connections between and among texts |
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NSW Board of Studies (2002) English Years 7–10 Syllabus, Sydney: NSWBOS.


Chapter 3

A Transformative Model for Programming English and its Pedagogical (Re)Contextualisation
3.1 Considering the ‘transformative model’ as a generative and ethical response to certain historical conditions in English teaching in NSW and Australia

Table 7: Content of Chapter 3.1

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Text 2: Problematising eclecticism and rewriting English

This paper was published in a special edition of the journal *Changing English*, which was dedicated to English in the Antipodes. In this paper, I explicitly reframe ‘the transformative model for programming secondary English’ in poststructuralist terms, through the concept of writing-in-general. I highlight certain limitations in the influential notion of a ‘principled eclecticism’, which has underpinned syllabus development in my home state of New South Wales, as a response to the widely mooted crisis of identity in English. I make a case for the ‘transformative model’ as a technology for the propagation of an open-ended, non-totalising understanding of English and its subjects.
Problematising Eclecticism and Rewriting English

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Introduction

Subject English and English teaching have been sites of contestation in Australia in recent years (see Doecke, Howie, and Sawyer 2006; Snyder 2008). Understanding and writing about the English subjects (cf. Green and Beavis 1996) in Australia at present is not easily approached from a position outside of the divisive politics and rhetoric of the so-called ‘culture wars’ (Doecke, Howie, and Sawyer 2006, 1–3; cf. Donnelly 2007). In more general terms, the question ‘What is English?’ is one that has received considerable attention throughout the subject’s history (e.g. Davies 1996; Green 1995; Peel, Patterson, and Gerlach 2000). What is of interest, however, within the context of understanding the subject possibilities anticipated by such a relatively recent example of English curriculum renewal in Australia as the current Years 7–10 English syllabus in New South Wales (Board of Studies 2002), is the way it has been imagined that English teachers might break free of the debates they have found themselves caught up in, along with their subject area. To this end, the ‘writing’ (and ‘rewriting’) of the English teacher is recognised here to be a key consideration in furthering the project of subject revivification (cf. Cormack and Comber 1996).

Sawyer (2006, 30), influenced by Peel (2000), has suggested that observing English through ‘the professional identities of teachers’ provides an alternative way of ‘constructing English’ to approaches that have sought to define the subject by its content, the skills it engenders, or what might be held up as particular, defining pedagogical approaches. Such a line of argument is fully congruent with the influence Sawyer himself has had on the reshaping of English and the English teacher in New South Wales (NSW), specifically with regard to the development of a new syllabus for Years 7 to 10 (Board of Studies 2002). As principal author of the literature review (Sawyer and McFarlane 2000) that provided the intellectual foundation for the syllabus development process, Sawyer coined the metaphor ‘intelligent and intellectualised eclecticism’ (Sawyer and McFarlane 2000, 10) to describe the subject position for the ‘new century’ English teacher to be anticipated by the syllabus.

Seemingly, to occupy the position of ‘eclecticism’ is to stand above the history of English, with all of its past conflicts and its present identity crisis. The metaphor of ‘eclecticism’ removes the English teacher from simple subjection to the history of the subject they teach, as they exercise individual agency and imagination to bring order and unity where otherwise might be found difference and disharmony.

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Sawyer’s coining of the metaphor of an ‘intelligent and intellectualised eclecticism’ refocusses attention on the importance of programming, and to the reimagining and renewal of English, following earlier work by Green (1990) and Reid (1996). The common thread in that earlier work is a shared belief that programming constitutes a complex form of professional writing. Following Reid (1996, 151), I understand programming as ‘a public and overt representation of the teacher’s planning process in textual form’. A programme is not limited to being a ‘plan’. Instead, programming is better understood as ‘practical-theory’ (Reid 1996, 152), or the textual expression of a set of beliefs about the possibilities of the English subjects. Such ‘writing’ mediates between theory and practice to produce a ‘certain desirable type of teaching subject’ (Reid 1996, 147), even as the teacher/writer ostensibly sets out to put into practice an envisaged set of desired and desirable learning experiences for her students. From this, it follows that to change the way programming (or teachers’ planning as professional writing) is understood is to change the way the English (teaching and teacher) subjects are understood (cf. Green 1990). On these terms, the teacher-subject is not so much a ‘free’ agent, writing English through their programming, as they are the agent of a particular version of English that is ‘writing’ them (cf. Peel 2000).

The emphasis that Green, Reid, and Sawyer place on programming as the shaping of teacher subjectivity has profound implications for English teaching. It reminds us that any act of reimagining English and the English teacher is inextricably caught up in the play of different understandings of writing, and therefore questions of what teacher ‘agency’ can in fact be understood to mean. The metaphor of ‘eclecticism’ is a particular case in point, and one which, reconsidered some years on, has a good deal to contribute to a historical understanding of the complexities of English teaching in Australia, particularly at present.

In advancing his argument for understanding English through teacher identity, Sawyer (2006, 30) cites Peel (2000, 165) as emphasising the importance of understanding the English teacher subject in terms of ‘[h]ow things we engage with position us as subjects: the making of subjectivity’. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that Sawyer highlights Peel’s research findings about the dominance of ‘personalism’ as a key driving force in the history of English. However, even as he does this, he notes what a ‘problematic notion’ the ‘personal’ is in a ‘post-structuralist’ world (Sawyer 2006, 30). Just how problematic it is can be gauged from the fact that, in highlighting the tension between personalism and poststructuralism, Sawyer harks back to one of the key debates in English teaching in Australia during the late 1980s and 1990s: the question of how to best teach writing (e.g. Gilbert 1989; Kamler 2002; Sawyer 1995). Just as the writing pedagogy that English teachers might use in their classrooms now inevitably bears the trace of past debates between personalist and poststructuralist approaches, the writing of teachers themselves – the writing of the (teacher) self – also remains caught up in this play of difference.

In what follows, I take up Sawyer’s call to understand English through the identity-work of teachers. I will go on to consider some of the possibilities and limitations of Sawyer’s metaphor of ‘eclecticism’ in the (re)writing of the (NSW) English teacher, with specific reference to the implementation of the 2002 English 7–10 syllabus. This first entails consideration of the nature of writing itself and the way in which different conceptualisations of writing anticipate a different teacher, and indeed the teaching self, when recontextualised within consideration of certain
historical imperatives in the programming of English teachers. Subsequently, I will suggest that the very tension Sawyer has identified between the English teaching discourses of personalism and poststructuralism, particularly as this relates to writing, is, in fact, crucial to understanding the (dis)enabling power of the metaphor of ‘eclecticism’.

Writing-in-general

In their report to the NSW Board of Studies, Sawyer and McFarlane (2000, 10) (re)imagine the English teacher as one who is capable of an ‘intelligent and intellectualised eclecticism’. Of particular relevance here is the fact that in their first recommendation, Sawyer and McFarlane position ‘eclecticism’ against the idea that a single model of English curriculum should predominate in the new English syllabus for Years 7–10 (Sawyer and McFarlane 2000, 10). This representation of the ideal English teacher highlights that such a figure can be understood as a textual ‘space’ in which dominant teacher subject-positions are being contested, which is to say being written and rewritten, in the process of re-imagining the English subjects.

Following Derrida, ‘writing’ is understood and used here in a very particular way. This understanding is one that exceeds the ‘common-sense’ or colloquial association of writing with the graphic representation of speech on a page or screen, and is instead what Derrida (1997, 74) refers to as ‘writing in general’. Lucy (1995, 41) notes that Derrida uses ‘writing’ (i.e., writing-in-general), to signify ‘what structures any and every semiotic event’. A Derridean understanding of ‘writing’ thereby foregrounds the constructed nature of all processes of meaning and sense-making, enjoining us to consider the textuality of these processes and their products. As Derrida (1997, 158) has (now rather infamously) stated, ‘there is no outside-text; il n’y a pas de hors-texte’.

Most notable about writing-in-general is the play of difference and deferral it establishes as being intrinsic to the process of signification. Such play makes the very operation of language possible and comprehensible, and it is this that Derrida (1991) calls différence. For example, to write ‘English teacher’, as I have just done, is to necessarily refer to something totally other, in this instance the deferred presence of a particular individual English teacher or a particular conceptualisation of the English teacher (e.g. ‘the typical English teacher’) to whom or which the sign might actually refer and allow it to take on (necessarily delayed) meaning. Moreover, this reference is allowed by the difference between the sign I have used (i.e. composed on my screen) and the absent other to which it refers.

Derrida (1997, 74) describes the colloquial understanding of writing as a narrowing of the ‘trace’. What he means by this can be seen in the emphasis commonly (and unproblematically) placed on individual acts of agency and creativity, as captured in attributions such as an ‘authentic authorial voice’ and ‘truthfulness’ when writing is being discussed – something that has been particularly true of school writing (cf. Gilbert 1989). Such points of emphasis serve to deny the endless play of signification, or the inevitable gap in time and space between the text – the semiotic event – and an author’s presence and intentions, which Derrida attributes to writing-in-general. For this reason, an illusory sense of (singular) meaning, presence and unity are ascribed to the text when writing is colloquially
understood as ‘the way in which individuals spontaneously create and express their own meanings’ and an ‘invisible thread connecting the author’s subjectivity to the reader’s’ (Gilbert 1989, 80).

Derrida’s understanding of writing as writing-in-general resists this narrowing of the trace. Instead, Derrida suggests that the trace necessarily precedes writing without, it must be emphasised, determining a simple point of origin. To the contrary, Derrida stresses that:

… any experience is structured like a network of traces, which return to something other than themselves. In other words, there is no present which is not constituted without reference to another time, another present. The present-trace. It traces and is traced.

(Derrida 2004, quoted in Wolfreys 2007, 1)

One highly significant consequence of Derrida’s notion of writing-in-general, which becomes obvious in this quotation and in what it highlights about the nature and function of the trace, is the challenge it presents to any claim that might be made as to authorial intention having a purity of presence and a unifying function – qualities attributed to the English teacher in Sawyer’s metaphor of ‘eclecticism’. Free from such defining elements of a commonsense understanding of writing as authorial intention and unifying presence, writing-in-general can accordingly be understood as dissemination.

Caputo (1997, 184) describes ‘dissemination’ as the attempt to explain meaning, by insisting upon a ‘more chastened sense of the contingency of sense, of everything that calls itself universal or necessary, transcendental or ontological…’. This comes about not by rejecting such ideas out of hand, but by ‘redescribing them in the play of traces’ (Caputo 1997, 184). Because, as Lucy (1995, 44) interprets Derrida, ‘presence is never an original or originary concept, being “itself” structured by the possibility of iteration’, writing-in-general will always carry over into new contexts, establishing new chains of connection and correlation, and potentially bringing about endless play.

In other words, the very condition of writing is iterability, which can be understood as repetition-with-a-difference (Wolfreys 2004, 122). As Derrida (1997, 101) explains it, the ‘entire system of [a text’s resources] and its own laws’ means it must inevitably move beyond the ‘[present] experience of the person who writes or reads it’. What remains with each movement beyond each recontextualisation is but the trace of what was once present. There can never remain within the reiteration a ‘full or fulfilling presence’, as the structure of iterability ‘implies both identity and difference’ (Derrida 1993, 53). Wolfreys (2004, 254) provides an evocative summation of this structure when he writes of ‘[t]he radical absence, the abyssal dispersal that writing opens …’.

Writing the teacher

The Derridean notion of writing-in-general has profound implications for how we can conceive of and write (about) the self, including the English-teaching self. For Derrida (1997, 160), there is no escaping the fact that ‘… in each case, the person writing is inscribed in a determined textual system’. In urging teachers to don the garb of ‘eclecticism’, what can be called the textuality of any understanding or expression of human experience and identity is denied by the unifying function of the metaphor. ‘Eclecticism’ effectively positions the English teacher as the ‘author’ of
their identity and practice in a way that apparently moves them ‘outside the text’, beyond history and outside of the play of différence.

English teaching becomes a form of ‘authoring’, or, as Gilbert (1989, 75) defines it, the ‘adding [of] something unique to the world by giving original expression to personal expression’. The metaphor emphasises agency unproblematically, stressing spontaneous creation and immediacy. The subjectivity of the teacher ‘author’ is defined by its immediate connection to that of the student ‘readers’ of the curriculum that the teacher has ‘written’ through a programme and the ‘performance’ of that programme. This can be seen in the emphasis that Sawyer and McFarlane (2000, 10) place on the metaphor of ‘eclecticism’ as giving teachers a high degree of autonomy in meeting the needs of particular students in particular school contexts.

Of course, if Derrida is right, and there is ‘no outside-text’, the claim made for these metaphors must ultimately prove illusory. Indeed, the investment made in metaphor itself reminds us of nothing less. Even as the metaphor attempts to escape (English-teaching) history by standing above it, traces of the past are evident. (By the same token, it must also be acknowledged that, as it has been responded to and recontextualised, the metaphor has inevitably also had a generative effect, stimulating different thinking about programming English and the writing of the subjectivities of English teachers – a point I take up again below.)

These defining elements of a colloquial understanding of writing were predominant in the teaching of writing in Australian schools in the 1980s. Gilbert (1989) identifies them as the very foundation of the process writing movement, although arguably this is something still evident today (see Doecke and McClenaghan 2004). In this context, the metaphor of ‘eclecticism’ can be understood in Derridean terms as a further dissemination of a personalist discourse of the English subjects, a reiteration of a particular understanding of English and the English teacher that it has, paradoxically, and on its own terms, sought to leave behind.

Such a historical development draws attention to the iterability of the curriculum metaphor of ‘eclecticism’ and its subsequent recontextualisation. It also highlights the fact that the metaphor and its recontextualisation remain grounded in the poststructuralist challenge to the personalist discourse of the English subjects. The trace of the past, as the notion of writing-in-general establishes, is not constrainable, and so it cannot be imagined that things could ever be otherwise. The subject debates and disputations that Sawyer notes elsewhere in this Special Issue as defining English in Australia in the 1990s remain key to understanding English in the specific context of NSW in the new century, notwithstanding Sawyer’s notable intellectual efforts to direct English towards new possibilities.

On iterability and the signature-effect

If the 2002 syllabus can be said to have a ‘signature’, then, it is the metaphor of ‘intelligent and intellectualised eclecticism’. This metaphor, and its positioning within and against the history of English, was inscribed in the syllabus development process, as already noted. The initial recommendation ‘that no single model of English curriculum should predominate in the new English syllabus for years 7–10’ (Board of Studies 2002, 10) broke decisively with the practice of grounding a new syllabus in a particular model of the subject (i.e. ‘Growth’), as was the case
previously. Instead, the aim was to centre the syllabus in a particular version of teacher subjectivity.

The influence of the metaphor as a signifier of (teacher and teaching) subject unity is readily visible in the syllabus’s language, even though the metaphor itself is not cited. According to the Rationale: ‘The syllabus enables teachers to draw on the methods of different theoretical perspectives and models for teaching English to assist their students to achieve the syllabus outcomes at the highest levels’ (Board of Studies 2002, 7). As the Glossary states: ‘Theoretical perspectives and models present significant views on the teaching of English. They incorporate different ways of considering texts to assist students to engage with the full scope of, and relationship between, meaning and texts’ (Board of Studies 2002, 83).

Such emphasis on teachers working at once in, through, and with different models of the subject creates an obvious moral imperative for teachers to be ‘eclectic’. In this context, the metaphor becomes what Burke (1989, 92) labels a ‘poetic ideal’ – an attempt to ‘attain a full moral act by attaining a perspective atop all the conflicts of attitude’. Understood rhetorically, the metaphor envisages an English teacher who is less shaped by history than they are the (re)shaper of it, articulating the heteroglot historical imagination that prominent English curriculum theorists (e.g. Green 2003; Pope 2002) argue is essential for the revivification of English. In short, the metaphor imagines teachers standing above the late twentieth-century ‘crisis’ in English, which Sawyer and McFarlane (2000, 3) understood to be a crisis of identity, representing them as agents for subject renewal, and suggesting a new subject identity through an innovative synthesis of pedagogies.

The authors of the metaphor evidently foresaw the existence – in NSW, at least – of a certain sort of teacher (already possessing the requisite values, attitudes and pedagogical practices), as one who could, having already moved beyond the figure of the teacher associated with previous syllabuses and the identity crisis the subject was experiencing at the century’s end, bring a new English into being. Such play of presence and absence evokes Derrida’s notion of différence, ‘an always already absent present’ (Spivak 1997, xvii), as discussed previously. This does not allow the metaphor to escape its origins in the conflicts of the last decades of the twentieth century, even as it aspires to transcendence. Ironically, it is the existence of historically understood subject–model oppositions that make the metaphor of ‘intelligent and intellectualised eclecticism’ possible. The paradox of its transcendentality highlights a real problem with the metaphor, however, even before its recontextualisation in classrooms is contemplated: an inherent orientation towards self-effacement, which – as I now go on to explain – renders it incapable of such recontextualisation.

No matter how it is understood to organise different motivations, perspectives and pedagogies, ‘intelligent and intellectualised eclecticism’ must be recognisable in different classrooms. A defining characteristic of a signature is its iterability. As Derrida (1993, 20) writes, ‘[i]n order to function, in order to be legible, a signature must have a repeatable, iterable, imitative form. It must be able to detach itself from the present and singular intention of its production’. As a written mark, a signature (on a cheque or contract, for example) stands for its signer and a particular intention, even in his or her absence and despite the passing of time.

Divorced from its point and time of origin, as it will be once the attempt is made to recontextualise it in classrooms, the power of ‘eclecticism’ therefore rests on its
performativity. This is to say, its ability to be repeated and yet remain intact and recognisable. The synthesis of subject models that the metaphor demands requires a particular form (if not a formula) that can be iterated and reiterated across varying classroom contexts. The problem, of course, is that it is impossible to imagine ‘eclecticism’ as having a prescribed form that is, in all contexts, exactly reproducible – even by the same teacher in consecutive lessons. Programme implementation is necessarily subject, as Green (1990, 45) has emphasised, to the unpredictability of classroom actions and interactions, particularly in relation to how students engage with what is on offer, meaning that ‘whether intended of not, negotiation (and even improvisation) always characterises classrooms in action’. As the signature of subject renewal, the metaphor was, on its own terms, destined to not succeed.

The emphasis the first recommendation to the Board of Studies placed on ‘maximising[ing] teacher ability to respond to the demands of context and praxis’ (Sawyer and McFarlane 2000, 10) ensures that ‘eclecticism’ cannot be mechanically taught and made reproducible as a signature. Instead, the imperative in this recommendation is on allowing difference as a response to the demands of teaching in different contexts. However, this undercuts the unifying potential of eclecticism at the level of the teacher subject. The metaphor, in a sense, is betrayed by its own origins. It doesn’t require individual teachers to be eclectic in their (supposed) historically informed practice. Instead, it makes the teaching subject (i.e. English) ‘eclectic’ – after a fashion. However, it would be hard to describe this as necessarily being ‘intellectualised’ practice, to the extent that this idea relates to conscious decision-making grounded in the subject’s history. The emphasis placed on localised contexts in the genesis of the metaphor means that it is inevitably inclusive of whatever teachers determine they need or want to do, within the limits provided by the syllabus and their particular teaching context. The personalist emphasis on immediacy and a unifying presence is clearly evident in the metaphor and, accordingly, it might be said to suffer from the same problems attributed more broadly to a personalist understanding of (school) writing (cf. Gilbert 1989, 11).

In rhetorical terms, the influence of the metaphor of ‘eclecticism’ on the 2002 syllabus can be understood to demand a self-reflective individual who has a wide-ranging understanding of the history of the subject and its conflicts, close familiarity with different ‘models’ of the subject and their defining pedagogies, and also the imaginative and practical capacities to stand outside of the historic conflicts and their personal allegiances (e.g. to a particular ‘model’) in order to meld entrenched differences into something that works for students. This desirable end-point is a classroom programme that might, following Bakhtin (1984), be described as dialogic in nature, resisting a fixed and singular historical ‘consciousness’, or identity, such as the ‘personal growth’ teacher. Here we hit upon an obvious paradox, a further problem for the metaphor: the fact that an effective decentring of the historical consciousness of English teachers, the centrifugal discourse of ‘eclecticism’, requires the normative centring of their identity as ‘eclectic’. The sort of reader the metaphor requires, it would seem, is precisely one who can resist it, if the aim of a decentred, more open-ended English is to be achieved in the future.

It can be argued, then, that there is an emptiness at the ‘reasonable centre’ of the otherwise worthy and ambitious metaphor of ‘intelligent and intellectualised eclecticism’, which is so important conceptually to the 2002 NSW English 7–10
syllabus. As a signature for a new syllabus, ‘eclecticism’ falls victim to the contradiction that Derrida notes between the defining singularity of a signature and the social requirement of multiplicity that is demanded by its use. The metaphor necessarily remains caught up in such oppositions as the desired ‘eclecticism’ being, in terms of its performance, broad or narrow, successful or unsuccessful. What cannot, therefore, be escaped is the manner in which the metaphor paradoxically gives licence to that element of performance Derrida calls citation, or each partial or idiosyncratic performance (as all performances must be) of ‘intelligent and intellectualised eclecticism’. The metaphor necessarily remains caught up in such oppositions as the desired ‘eclecticism’ being, in terms of its performance, broad or narrow, successful or unsuccessful. What cannot, therefore, be escaped is the manner in which the metaphor paradoxically gives licence to that element of performance Derrida calls citation, or each partial or idiosyncratic performance (as all performances must be) of ‘intelligent and intellectualised eclecticism’. The metaphor necessarily remains caught up in such oppositions as the desired ‘eclecticism’ being, in terms of its performance, broad or narrow, successful or unsuccessful. What cannot, therefore, be escaped is the manner in which the metaphor paradoxically gives licence to that element of performance Derrida calls citation, or each partial or idiosyncratic performance (as all performances must be) of ‘intelligent and intellectualised eclecticism’. The metaphor necessarily remains caught up in such oppositions as the desired ‘eclecticism’ being, in terms of its performance, broad or narrow, successful or unsuccessful. What cannot, therefore, be escaped is the manner in which the metaphor paradoxically gives licence to that element of performance Derrida calls citation, or each partial or idiosyncratic performance (as all performances must be) of ‘intelligent and intellectualised eclecticism’. The metaphor necessarily remains caught up in such oppositions as the desired ‘eclecticism’ being, in terms of its performance, broad or narrow, successful or unsuccessful. What cannot, therefore, be escaped is the manner in which the metaphor paradoxically gives licence to that element of performance Derrida calls citation, or each partial or idiosyncratic performance (as all performances must be) of ‘intelligent and intellectualised eclecticism’. The metaphor necessarily remains caught up in such oppositions as the desired ‘eclecticism’ being, in terms of its performance, broad or narrow, successful or unsuccessful. What cannot, therefore, be escaped is the manner in which the metaphor paradoxically gives licence to that element of performance Derrida calls citation, or each partial or idiosyncratic performance (as all performances must be) of ‘intelligent and intellectualised eclecticism’. The metaphor necessarily remains caught up in such oppositions as the desired ‘eclecticism’ being, in terms of its performance, broad or narrow, successful or unsuccessful. What cannot, therefore, be escaped is the manner in which the metaphor paradoxically gives licence to that element of performance Derrida calls citation, or each partial or idiosyncratic performance (as all performances must be) of ‘intelligent and intellectualised eclecticism'.

The appeal to (the teaching) context for meaning, made in that first recommendation to the Board of Studies, ironically makes possible the sort of free play that is the ‘determined modification of a general citationality – or rather, a general iterability…’ (Derrida 1993, 18, emphasis added). Accordingly, the totalising perspective that is the metaphor proves incapable of excluding what it seeks to oppose: the possible resistance of NSW English teachers to consciously drawing in an ‘eclectic’ manner from historic models of their subject in order to meet the needs and interests of their students – or their inability to do so. Consequently, the metaphor effectively appears to define and approve of, as English, whatever it is that teachers decide to do in their classrooms. On the metaphor’s own terms, the extent to which the past is recontextualised and brought into a new unifying synthesis is – and can be – of no real concern. English becomes whatever is being done in a particular NSW classroom at a given moment; or, rather, what is being done in all NSW English classrooms at any given moment.

That said, to suggest that the metaphor was hollow and destined to fail on its own terms is not to say that it did not bring about an effect. A Derridean understanding of writing emphasises the inevitability of the metaphor of ‘eclecticism’, as writing which offers different possibilities for the English subjects, establishing new sets of connections and new correlations. In other words, the metaphor will write into being, and indeed has, still further possibilities for understanding the English subjects, particularly through teacher programming – including my own efforts in this regard (Howie 2005, 2006).

Conclusion

The notion of writing-in-general has profound implications for any possible understanding of agency in the context of the revivification of the English subjects. In the very act of writing this paper, I have remained conscious of my text as an assemblage of the ideas and words of others. Indeed, as I ask myself ‘What is it possible to conclude?’, my first thought immediately takes me back to the concluding remarks of others at another time: the emphasis Green and Beavis (1996, 112) place on the importance of the exercising of ‘historical imagination’ to ‘debates and formations of subject English, and of English teachers’ work, into and beyond the present day’. At the same time, I also begin to project my (not yet fully formed) conclusions outwards, beyond the immediate topic of the English subjects, to begin to consider the challenge that writing-in-general presents to the discourse of teacher effectiveness and its particular version of ahistorical and decontextualised agency (‘the quality of the individual teacher is what makes the difference for students’) – a discourse that now dominates my working life as a teacher (cf. Doecke and Parr 2005).
The message here, in the wandering of my thoughts, is that play and difference cannot be outstripped and cannot be contained. The contestation that surrounds English, and its present identity crisis, cannot be left behind or risen above. A totalising metaphor such as ‘eclecticism’, or any other subjugating version of the ideal English teacher, cannot therefore realise its own ambitions, no matter how worthy. Goodson (2005, 175) argues that the methodological imperative of postmodern times is that a concern with objectivity ‘move’ toward a primary concern with the way subjectivities are constructed. My critique of the metaphor of ‘eclecticism’ has been based explicitly on these grounds. I have argued that ‘eclecticism’ attempted to write into being a position of objectivity for the NSW English teacher, outside of history and over the English subjects, that was simply not possible.

At the same time, I also acknowledge how the metaphor of ‘eclecticism’ has made possible the ‘transformative model’ of programming that I have proposed elsewhere (Howie 2005, 2006), which I would now want to recast in more explicitly Derridaen terms – that is, as a practice of ‘writing’. Recontextualised in this way, and to the extent that the trace of the metaphor remains in my ‘transformative model’, I cannot escape the thought that I have, in a paradoxical way, remained an agent of the very metaphor I have critiqued. It is interesting to note that, in recently advancing the case for ‘eclecticism’ in a different context, in considering how English teachers and their students might productively engage with digital news media forms, Sawyer (2007) draws on the ‘transformative model’. Such is the force of dissemination and the nature of the play that writing-in-general brings about.

When applied to teachers’ programming, the concept of writing-in-general allows us to see how teachers write themselves into being, and yet do not. Such an understanding of writing emphasises how programming, like all writing, is necessarily implicated in the interplay of difference and inevitably bears the traces of various other people and ideas. This constitutes a profound challenge to any idea that teachers are ‘free agents’ in how they recontextualise the official curriculum within their classrooms. We return, for example, to the idea that English teachers are inescapably caught up in the subject’s past and current debates about its proper scope and provenance, just as I have been in writing this paper. In textual terms, the English teacher, as it has been written and rewritten in Australia in recent years, can therefore be understood, following Bakhtin (1981), as a heteroglossic site, or one in which the play of competing discourses is a significant force in bringing about pedagogic practices and identities (cf. Cormack and Comber 1996). Agency, then, properly resides in teachers seeing their programming as being so much more complex than the individual expression of creativity and a unifying consciousness.

The project of (re)framing English that is at the heart of the ‘transformative model’, reconceptualised, allows different (historicised English teacher) ‘conscious-nesses’ to exist side by side. The play of traces of the subject’s past is not reduced by, or subsumed within, a single unifying consciousness. In fact, it is difference and play that constitutes the model. The social and political implications of this are significant. The alternative perspective I am proposing here promotes the sort of ‘dialogical encounter between … discourses’ that, as Giroux (2005, 14) argues, offers educators the opportunity to ‘re-examine the partiality of their respective views … as part of a broader radical democratic project’.
Notes

1. The emphasis Green places on student subjectivity here invests ‘negotiation’ and ‘improvisation’ with a different set of meanings from how I have been, albeit implicitly, considering such actions in terms of teacher subjectivity, and more particularly their romantic valorisation within the personalist discourse in which the metaphor of eclecticism is located.

2. In making his case for a ‘new eclecticism’ in English studies, Pope (2002, 164) acknowledges that ‘there is no single way of “being eclectic”’, but stresses that ‘[i]t makes sense to develop a more theoretically considered and resourceful array of practices’, as this will allow the educator to both ‘respect existing disciplinary boundaries’ and ‘cross and re-draw them at need’.

3. Even this reference to Bakhtin suggests a further attribute of the ideal syllabus reader: enough familiarity with critical theory in order to be able to understand how the syllabus ‘works’ in linguistic, epistemological and ontological terms.

4. The metaphor has, in fact, since taken on broader significance and power for teachers in NSW. The ‘eclectic’ English teacher, in its most recent iteration (Sawyer, Brock, and Baxter 2007), which reports on research conducted in successful NSW government school English departments focusing specifically on the junior secondary years, has been represented as the very model of an effective practitioner.

References


This paper was published in a special edition of *English in Australia* focussing on the development of a national curriculum for English. I use the occasion of the graduation of a class of my students to reflect on the place of critical literacy in the English curriculum. Enframed in poststructuralist terms through the Derridean notion of ‘hauntology’, I set ‘the transformative model for programming secondary English’ against the impetus to subordination and effacement evident in criticisms being made of critical literacy by media commentators and academics. In this paper, I challenge the binaries of ‘purity’ and ‘corruption’, which I found to characterise public discourse relating to English and its teaching at the time the Australian Curriculum was being developed. I argue that the basis of the ‘transformative model’ lies in the understanding that subject identity is preceded by, and is consequently both made possible by and remains dependent upon, a structure of difference that cannot be effaced.
Critical Literacy, the Future of English and the Work of Mourning

Mark Howie

In this article I use the occasion of farewelling my Year 12 students at the end of their schooling, some intertextual references to Hamlet, and some conceptual frames of Derrida, to reflect dialogically on the role of critical literacy in Australian English curricula in the past, the present and into the future.

"You don't have to believe in ghosts to be affected by them." (Lucy, 2004, p. 111)

Stay, illusion!

As I write, I am in mourning. I have just farewelled my Year 12 students as they left school to begin their 'stuvac' (study vacation) in preparation for the Higher School Certificate (HSC) examination. The last lessons with a Year 12 class are always disconcerting. I have found these lessons to have a sense of desperation about them, as they are characteristically both frantic and sorrowful. The pressure of getting through the final parts of the course invariably demands a final sprint to the finish of what has become a gruelling marathon. At this time I find myself thinking back and asking whether I have done everything I possibly could to best prepare my students for their exam. However, the end of thirteen years of schooling is finally in sight for my students, and this brings a sense of excitement, anticipation and relief. The desperation to finish is tempered by a collective impulse to stop, take a breath and think back on all that we have been through together. Lessons go off on a tangent as we look to find paths into the retelling of anecdotes that will allow us to laugh at ourselves. Somehow a tacit agreement has been reached that this is an appropriate way of acknowledging we share a bond with a fast-approaching expiry date. There's an unstated need to pay our respects to this bond and to celebrate it in some way. We are, it might be said, looking to hold a wake even before the end has been reached.

The final days with an HSC class is a curious time. It is, recalling Hamlet via Derrida (1994), a time that is 'out of joint', or not readily comprehensible within the conventional delineation of past, present and future.

As Derrida (1994; cf. Lucy, 1997, pp. 144–148) reads Hamlet, it is the appearance of the ghost that unhinges time. The comings and goings of the ghost call into question our understanding of the present, and all that is associated with this, precisely because a spectre does not exist in time in the way that we conventionally understand it. Derrida (1994) describes the entries and exits made by the ghost in Hamlet as 'a question of repetition: a spectre is always a revenant. One cannot control its comings and goings because it begins by coming back' (p. 11). In other words, a ghost exists both inside and outside of conventional time.
The past few weeks with my Year 12 students was indeed a disjointed time – a time of repetition, the very possibility of which necessarily made everything different (cf. Derrida, 1988). In our thoughts and actions we moved between the present and our memories of a time that once was, all the while anticipating a final parting. The notion of memory points in turn to a shadowy presence in all that we said and did in our last hours. This is the question of what it is exactly that we have been bequeathed by our time together. As we mourned the end of this time, we were also contemplating what we will be left with, including that which we will inherit from each other. When Derrida (1994, p. 67) suggests that all inheritors are in mourning, I think I know what he means. As I have hinted at above, my students and I had been tentatively edging around the matter of how we could best speak of all that we had experienced together. We struggled to find language and gestures by which we might pay appropriate homage to our shared past.

Derrida (1994) also suggests that the return to the present of the past, in the form of a ghost, leaves us with the question of what to do into the future: ‘Inheritance is never a given, it is always a task’ (p. 67). In his reading of Hamlet, Derrida argues that the task which lies ahead for Hamlet, his inheritance, is to determine how to be (or not to be). Derrida sees this inheritance as fundamental for each of us in our particular comings and goings.

The relevance of the Derridean ideas of inheritance and mourning to my professional life was brought home to me in a humbling and moving way a few weeks ago when a group of my Year 12 students presented me with a t-shirt of their own design. I have since come to believe that the t-shirt signifies something more than ‘thank you’. I see it as a statement about our shared past, what this past has bequeathed us and how it should carry over into the future. Through this gift, a renegotiation of the teacher-student relationship took place.

On the front of the t-shirt is a slogan which reads ‘Bakhtin to the (Past, Present and) Future’ The slogan takes the form of a visual parody of the logo for the film Back to the Future. The visual punning acknowledges, at the very least, a shared language and understanding in the relationship we had enjoyed to that moment. But it also marks a consequent change in that relationship. There was a new found maturity in my students’ playful determination to have another word with me, and not leave my closing words of our final lesson as the end of things. (Bakhtin, of course, reminds us that there is always the possibility of one more response.) Having given me the t-shirt the day after our final lesson, my students took a digital photograph of me wearing it and mugging for the camera. Of course, these actions – the giving of the gift and the taking of the photograph – make possible another response in a different context. It is this task I am now undertaking: a case of repetition-difference, you might say, that aspires to make a difference. To put it another way, I see this anecdote as problematising the status being accorded to curriculum philosophising in the abstract, at the expense of the practical knowledge of teachers, in discussions around the subject’s future. I shall return to this point below.

As I see it, my students’ gift pays homage to the way we had explored Bakhtin’s thinking on language, particularly its dialogic nature, in an elective I had taught them. Those familiar with Rob Pope’s work (2002) would recognise the t-shirt I was given as a textual intervention, highlighting the critical-creative possibilities of what he calls, following Bakhtin, ‘response-ability’ (p. 156). Intertextuality is brought into action by my students in a humorous way. More significantly, the t-shirt also refers back to my teaching and Bakhtin’s thinking for subversive ends. The photograph of me wearing the t-shirt introduces an element of the carnivalesque (Bakhtin, 1984), at the students’ intense, even intimidating teacher (such is the gist of postings at rate-myteachers.com) is now and forever captured in the role of a clown. Whatever persona I had adopted in class was disrupted and decentered – a ‘gap’ created within it that allowed the performance of another me and the consequent inversion of familiar power structures. So the dialogue between us, and between us and the thinking of Bakhtin, was continued beyond the bell that signalled an end to our last lesson and the physical space that was our classroom. The students could now walk away knowing they had fundamentally altered their relationship with me, and that they had irrevocably changed the way I would remember them. As I became complicit in their joke, this put us on a more democratic footing. With the photograph, they created their own image (material and metaphorical) of us; one which they can take into the future as the way they remember English. Such is the dialogic power of this affirmative act of resistance, which I certainly recognise as a form of critical literacy: it has (re)shaped my memories and my sense of self, as these words attest. Their gift has changed me because it changed us.

As a form of individual and public expression of
meaning, I interpret my students’ gift as acknowledging at once their interest in what we have studied, their respect for me as their teacher and their determination to be independent, creative thinkers. I also see it as expressing their acceptance of the weakening of the disciplinary boundaries of English. My students are evidently not fazed by critical theory. They have moved easily between English as the study of literature and a version of English which is more orientated towards the study of language and rhetoric. The t-shirt indicates that they see value in popular culture for the way in which it can, just like high culture, function to create shared understandings of significant aspects of our world and lives, as well as a sense of community. They also clearly recognise reception and creation as being interdependent, a key understanding underpinning the study of English in NSW and one which makes problematic a too ready distinction between knowledge and process (see, for example, National Curriculum Board, 2008, p. 7) in determining an English curriculum.

Such are the relationships I have enjoyed with these students, and the signifying power of their gift of the t-shirt, that I feel they will be with me in spirit for many years to come, always present in my thinking. I believe it is of great consequence that this feeling should be with me as I contemplate and respond to the development of the national English curriculum – beyond my teaching, the most urgent professional responsibility I face at the present time. After all, what a national curriculum has to offer future students is of vital significance. The ghostly presence of my ‘past’ students, their haunting of me, makes me alert to the presence, in this process of developing a national curriculum, of other ghosts and other forms of haunting. My past students, and the signifying power of their gift of the t-shirt, seemingly count for very little.6 More to the point, it is as if this work has never even been undertaken – its very existence denied by being passed over in silence. For this reason, there appears to be no getting away from the fact that critical literacy is a ghost which makes possible much current commentary about what a future English in this country might or might not be,7 including my own efforts here.

The present haunting of English is encapsulated in remarks by Graham Turner, director of the Centre for Critical and Cultural Studies at the University of Queensland. In expressing his opposition to the National Curriculum Board’s appointment of Peter Freebody to write a framing paper for English, primarily on the grounds that Freebody is not an English literature specialist but has a research interest in critical literacy, Turner was quoted (Ferrari, 2008) as saying that ‘criticism [of critical literacy] mounted over the past few years from both the Left and the Right will be ignored and we’ll simply return to what we’ve had over the past 10 years, which is not good enough.’

Turner’s position warrants attention as we move towards a national curriculum. The question of the future of English will inevitably carry traces of the contestation of recent years, despite the adept and confident ways students can, as I have described above, move between different understandings of the subject. Slattery (2008a), a prominent media critic of critical literacy (see Lucy & Mickler, 2006), takes his lead from the sort of views expressed by Turner when he writes that criticism of critical literacy by prominent academics means ‘it’s suddenly possible to talk about humanistic values and aesthetic pleasures without risking ideological sanction, charges of ‘privileging’ the canon, or retrograde foggyish conservatism.’

In this way, our ‘disjointed now’ (Derrida, 1994, p. 71)

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Nothing is rotten in the state of Denmark

The dilemma for Hamlet, ‘To be, or not to be …’, is brought about, which is to say prevailed, by the appearance of a ghost. Contemplating this idea in the context of the move towards a national curriculum, which, after all, requires consideration of what English can and cannot be, has left me feeling as if I am currently working in a time that is particularly unhinged or disjointed. An audacious revisionism with regards to the subject’s history is now being pursued as we consider its future.8 You might say, if you believed in ghosts, that a particular spectre currently looms very large in the realm of English. This is critical literacy, which has been widely characterised as the current orthodoxy in contemporary English teaching. The voices of teachers working with critical literacy, not to mention their students, have been marginalised and silenced in much of the criticism being made of it. Teachers, and the reality of the work they have done in the past, the sort of work my students have paid tribute to with their t-shirt, seemingly count for very little. More to the point, it is as if this work has never even been undertaken – its very existence denied by being passed over in silence. For this reason, there appears to be no getting away from the fact that critical literacy is a ghost which makes possible much current commentary about what a future English in this country might or might not be, including my own efforts here.

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significant degree of autonomy is crucial to the national teachers to freely exercise professional judgement and a discussion paper it has stressed that the capacity of This is a point the NCB itself acknowledges. In a key promotion or limit teacher autonomy. 

There is no inheritance without some interpretation to reaffirm, to select, to filter and to interpret. At the heart of the experience of inheritance you have a decision to be true to the past and to choose and interpret, and so there is initiative. When we inherit, we don’t simply passively receive something. We choose, we select, we reaffirm. So at the heart of the experience of inheritance you have a decision to reaffirm, to select, to filter and to interpret. There is no inheritance without some interpretation and some choice, which means that you never inherit passively everything which is given to you. You make a decision to be true to the past and to choose and interpret, and so there is initiative.

As we contemplate the future of English in this country, we should consider the interpretations and choices being made in the (re)evaluating of its past, and the ends to which these are being put. A particular point of focus must be the consequences of these interpretations and choices for teachers. Specific consideration needs to be given to the extent to which visions of a future English promote or limit teacher autonomy. This is a point the NCB itself acknowledges. In a key discussion paper it has stressed that the capacity of teachers to freely exercise professional judgement and a significant degree of autonomy is crucial to the national curriculum, if it is to meet the diverse needs of students: ‘The curriculum should allow jurisdictions, systems and schools to implement it in a way that values teachers’ professional knowledge and reflects local contexts (National Curriculum Board, 2008, p. 4).

Accordingly, it is through the notions of spectrality, inheritance and mourning that I return to the recent work of Misson and Morgan (2006), who notably provide a ‘defence’ of critical literacy which starts at the very point that those who wish to see critical literacy expunged from the English curriculum also begin: namely, with the idea that there are areas of English that critical literacy, as ‘currently constituted’, cannot ‘deal with adequately’ (p. ix). Misson and Morgan have, in their own ways, greatly influenced the thinking and practice of many English teachers in this country, myself included. And it is precisely because of their influence, my inheritance from them, that I am compelled to reconsider their work in light of current developments at a national level. The impetus here is the way that their version of the recent history of English, particularly their advocacy of the aesthetic turn (Sawyer, 2006), challenges me to rethink my practice. As has been seen, Slattery has identified the aesthetic turn as making it possible to *once again*, in the context of the development of the national curriculum, speak of and understand English in a very traditional way. This is, of course, not to suggest that this is an outcome Misson and Morgan would see as desirable. In fact, the opposite is true, given that they make a case for poststructuralism and the ‘saving’ (p. 221) of critical literacy. It is, however, a consequence that they have helped bring about, no matter how unwittingly, and one to which Australian teachers are now being publicly called upon by prominent academics and commentators to respond.

I now understand Misson and Morgan’s book as a defence of critical literacy that leaves those of us who have been influenced by their past work in an unreasonable position. My motivation in stating this, I must stress, is a desire to continue to think about and discuss the possibilities of being and non-being for the English subjects. It is, in other words, to read and respond to Misson and Morgan on their own (poststructuralist) terms, given the emphasis they place in their book (Misson and Morgan, 2006, p. 225) on the English subjects remaining open to difference. Each of us reads individually... out of our own experience, and it is the range of readings that can make an English classroom one of the most exciting places to be, not simply to celebrate diversity, but to understand
what generates diversity, and for each person to refine her or his own views through interaction with those of others.

Part of my response to their suggestions as to the responsibilities of English teachers is to ask a question of my own. What, if any, responsibilities do Misson and Morgan, as curriculum theorists, have to the past and to their readers, particularly those teachers who have taken their previous writings about poststructuralism and critical literacy seriously enough to subsequently re-evaluate their classroom practice? Given their assumption that ‘a critical literacy model [of English] is not the current norm in English teaching’ (p. xii), a claim that contradicts the opinion of the more shrill opponents of critical literacy, it would seem fair to assume that Misson and Morgan envisaged that teachers familiar with their past work would likely form a significant percentage of their readership. If not, and citing the sub-title of their book, in whose ‘classrooms’ exactly do they believe English requires ‘transforming’ due to critical literacy’s ‘limitations…in terms of its conceptualisation of significant matters such as individual identity, human emotion, and creativity…’ (p. x)?

On these terms, to (re)consider the work of Misson and Morgan in the context of the development of a national curriculum is to consider the ‘gap’ between different levels of the curriculum, specifically the two levels Goodson and Walker (1991, p. xiii) label ‘interactive realization’, or what takes place in classrooms, and ‘preactive definitions’. The impulse here, as I have suggested above, is to pay attention to history and the choices it offers us. The present development of a national curriculum in Australia is preceded by past efforts in this country and elsewhere. In reading about such efforts, I have been particularly struck by Goodson’s (1994, p. 41) argument that the national curriculum in England, with its grounding in ‘traditional’ subjects, gave renewed impetus, after a brief flourishing of teacher-led curriculum expansion in the 1970s and 1980s, to the formalising, abstracting and decontextualising of ‘professional knowledge’. Such knowledge was characterised by philosophical and bureaucratic prescription, and superseded ‘practical and utilitarian knowledge as the central concern of professionals’ (p. 41). Accordingly, the academic philosophising and bureaucratic processes that define ‘preactive definitions’ of curriculum were accorded precedence over the knowledge made available by the ‘interactive realization’ that grows out of the complex negotiations which take place between teachers and students in classrooms.

Goodson argues that in such conditions, when ‘state and bureaucratic conditions are becoming more and more pervasive’, the task ahead of educators is to ‘improve our understanding of the politics of curriculum’ (p. 119).

Reading Goodson nearly two decades on, it is as if he is writing about Australia in 2008. His is a message that concerned educators in the field of English education have been echoing for some time now (see, for example, contributions to Doecke, Howie & Sawyer, 2006). Misson and Morgan are also evidently aware of the politics of the English curriculum in Australia. They are, of course, active players in these politics – as they acknowledge upfront in their book (see p. ix). They stress that the study of English has experienced a century of disputation, the ‘fallout’ from which ‘has not yet subsided’ (p. 5). Yet, in contextualising their position on the relationship between critical literacy and the aesthetic within the (admittedly brief) history of subject contestation in Australia that they provide, Misson and Morgan are oddly silent on the effects of this disputation on teachers. In particular, they have nothing to say about the manner in which those teachers who have aligned themselves with the project of critical literacy have been publicly maligned. On the terms provided by Derrida’s thinking on inheritance, this constitutes a choice to focus only on the ‘preactive definition’ of the English curriculum, and to ignore – beyond the level of generalisation – its interactive realization in classrooms. Their choice to focus on the ‘preactive definition’ is made in response to a stated general uneasiness about critical literacy (p. ix), for which no supporting evidence is provided, and the belief of another academic and ‘critical literacy guru’ (p. ix) that critical literacy can have no concern with poetry.

No doubt such a focus on curriculum (re)definition is a perfectly justifiable orientation, and readily understandable within the contexts of the authors’ professional lives and interests, as well as the demands of having an overseas publisher and readership. But such considerations do not preclude the idea that Misson and Morgan have made a decision to respond to the recent history of English in this country, and the histories of English curriculum theorising and research, through a deliberate series of reaffirmations, selections, and interpretations that position them (unwittingly?) against teachers and the possibility of the dialogic construction of professional knowledge in classrooms and other professional spaces (cf. Doecke, Homer & Nixon, 2003).
Given that they do not consider in their book the particular, contextualised demands teachers face in working with critical literacy in classrooms with students, and all that can come of this, it is a rather cruel irony that Misson and Morgan advance their critical literacy in the name of opening the English subjects to difference, or extending oneself by acknowledging other people’s ways of seeing the world...[and] a generous acceptance of individual diversity as well as social diversity’ (p. 225). For avowed poststructuralists, Misson and Morgan demonstrate a surprising determination to conceive of a ‘full presence which is beyond play’ (Derrida, 1978, p. 279), or a version of critical literacy which effaces difference. They do not engage with Derrida’s (1988) notion of iterability and what this means for the ‘interactive realization’ of critical literacy in classrooms. It is a general principle of textuality, Derrida (1988) argues, that ‘A corruption that is “always possible” cannot be a mere extrinsic accident supervening on a structure that is original and pure, one that can be purged of what thus happens to it’ (p. 27). Understanded with reference to the Derridean notion of iterability, Misson and Morgan’s newly configured critical literacy seems to be projected towards just such a purging of a ‘corruption’, and so might be understood as an attempt to close-off and re-centre critical literacy. Their ‘new’ critical literacy is, on its own terms, (re)defined in opposition to the understandings and practices of those teachers who are already implementing something they understand to be critical literacy, which will necessarily be made manifest in classrooms through and as repetition-with-difference. Misson and Morgan appear to want to take critical literacy back to an originating presence: a poststructuralism that can deal with aesthetics, and which somewhere, somehow and in some other time existed unsullied by the misunderstandings of secondary English teachers and their clumsy attempts to apply theory in classroom practice. It is hard to reach any other conclusion when a particular, contextualised demands teachers face in working with critical literacy in classrooms with students, and all that can come of this, it is a rather cruel irony that Misson and Morgan advance their critical literacy in the name of opening the English subjects to difference, or extending oneself by acknowledging other people’s ways of seeing the world...[and] a generous acceptance of individual diversity as well as social diversity’ (p. 225). For avowed poststructuralists, Misson and Morgan demonstrate a surprising determination to conceive of a ‘full presence which is beyond play’ (Derrida, 1978, p. 279), or a version of critical literacy which effaces difference. They do not engage with Derrida’s (1988) notion of iterability and what this means for the ‘interactive realization’ of critical literacy in classrooms. It is a general principle of textuality, Derrida (1988) argues, that ‘A corruption that is “always possible” cannot be a mere extrinsic accident supervening on a structure that is original and pure, one that can be purged of what thus happens to it’ (p. 27). Understanded with reference to the Derridean notion of iterability, Misson and Morgan’s newly configured critical literacy seems to be projected towards just such a purging of a ‘corruption’, and so might be understood as an attempt to close-off and re-centre critical literacy. Their ‘new’ critical literacy is, on its own terms, (re)defined in opposition to the understandings and practices of those teachers who are already implementing something they understand to be critical literacy, which will necessarily be made manifest in classrooms through and as repetition-with-difference. Misson and Morgan appear to want to take critical literacy back to an originating presence: a poststructuralism that can deal with aesthetics, and which somewhere, somehow and in some other time existed unsullied by the misunderstandings of secondary English teachers and their clumsy attempts to apply theory in classroom practice.

It is an honest Ghost, that let me tell you
A sense of possibility of the English subjects being otherwise than they have been represented by critics of critical literacy, at least as it is currently understood to be practiced, is evident in the teacher narratives produced as part of a significant national project, ‘Standards for Teachers of English Language and Literacy in Australia’ (STELLA) (AATE/ALEA, 2002). These provide a window on the ‘interactive realization’ of English in actual classrooms. A frequent refrain of the STELLA narratives is the complexity of the negotiations taking place between teachers and students, as the affective elements of reading and responding to literary and other texts are brought into a generative relationship with the development and expression of more socially and culturally complex understandings. Van Haren (2002), for example, takes up this theme in relaying her experience of teaching Shakespeare to Year 8 boys. McClenaghan (2002) highlights the creative and critical possibilities for deep personal engagement with language and texts offered by textual interventions, especially those involving the embodied experience of performance. Pidduck (2002) considers the consequences of his students becoming disengaged because of the ‘tyranny’ of a set text made mandatory by the faculty program he is required to follow, and discusses how he has been forced to recast his own poststructuralist understandings of reading and response in practice. These teachers are clearly committed to promoting authentic engagement for students with what they are reading, and they are not imposing alternative and resistant readings on their students in a doctrinaire manner. The narratives foreground the sort
of classroom negotiations that are integral to teaching and learning in schools, yet often ignored in academic curriculum debates limited to questions of disciplinary integrity (cf. Lucy, 2008).

It would be spoke to

Just as Hamlet is compelled to find a way to speak to his ghost, I am also conscious of an imperative of my own. In developing my position to this point, I cannot, here and now, just(ly) reach a conclusion. To do so would be to subsume the perspectives offered by academics who are critical of critical literacy within an unproductive set of binaries: teacher / academic, secondary classrooms / the academy, practice / theory, authentic / inauthentic. These are the same binaries, now reversed, that I have taken issue with above. The deconstructive reading I have offered of efforts to advance a future English by evoking a spectral critical literacy demands that I also act in response. Lucy's (2004, p. 113) explanation of Hamlet's dilemma strikes a chord here:

... the ghost's presence (whatever it might be) calls up the question of what to do about it, and of what to do about what the incorporeal spectre says about the body politic of Denmark and what must be done about that. In a sense, the more Hamlet faces up to the 'virtual space of spectrality', or the more he tries to think difference differently, the more he becomes aware of his obligation to make a political decision, a decision that has to be made out of respect for his father's memory; the authority of his own position to the role of sovereign-protector; the political interests of his subjects and, of course and above all, out of respect for justice.

The present haunting of English and my impulse to deconstruction move me to revisit my past and to re-evaluate my own practice. I must, just as Hamlet did, also speak to a ghost. My interest in justice demands that I say something about how I believe the English subjects should be. I owe it to my students, to myself and to all that we experienced in our shared past. This is a task I now understand to have been passed on to me, along with a t-shirt, by my students. My present concern is that a future national English curriculum which ignores critical literacy10 could make such an exchange impossible. It could, at the very least, devalue my students' gift and all that it can now be said to signify, reframing it as a sentimental remnant of a time of curricula disorder and excessive teacher autonomy. Recalling Derrida's reading of Hamlet, particularly the implications of the manner in which Hamlet is called into question by the appearance of the ghostly figure he takes to be his father, I must undertake my own work of mourning.

The 'transformative model' of programming I have proposed elsewhere (Howie, 2005 & 2006), and which now informs my teaching, has been specifically cast in terms of the subject's past. It directly acknowledges and draws upon the different historical models by and through which the subject has been understood. The model is an attempt to acknowledge my positioning within the subject's history. It is an expression of the debt I, like every English teacher, owe that history for whatever it is I can possibly understand my professional identity and practice to be.

Recast here in explicitly poststructuralist terms, the model can be viewed as setting itself against the impetus to subordination and effacement evident in criticisms currently being made of critical literacy. In other words, the programming model I have proposed is an attempt to 'think difference differently', by not seeing English in terms of 'purity' and 'corruption' (get thee behind me, critical literacy...), as if there is a single true version of the subject. At the same time, the model does not hold that anything goes. Instead, it understands that subject identity is preceded by, and is consequently both made possible by and remains dependent upon, a structure of difference that cannot be effaced, no matter how big and bad the spectres are that are called upon to frighten us towards a particular, supposedly more 'correct' vision of English. What Derrida (1997, pp. 144–145) labels supplementarity – a 'cohabitation' of 'significations' that is 'as strange as it is necessary' and which 'adds only to replace'11 – defines the model, giving it an openness, fluidity or indeterminacy that refuses alignment with the entrenched positions of current curriculum debates.

Certainly, this is how others have understood it. In this special issue, Sawyer writes of how the model seems to counter the sort of binaries that I hear in some debates about a future national English curriculum, the supplanting of critical literacy by a renewed focus on aesthetics being the example of the moment. 'Howie's (2005) recent model of programming – itself based on MacLachlan and Reid's (1994) work on framing – has provided an interesting and generative way of reading texts in class that enables the production of student texts in ways that are critical, creative or critical-creative.' Sawyer's 'of' and his hyphenation position the model as a spectral third 'presence' in discussions about the past and present of English in this country, carrying as they do the trace of the binary that tends to be established
between critical literacy – as it is understood by its critics to be currently constituted – and the aesthetic. On these grounds, it seems to me to be not too excessive to attempt to say something of what this model might offer conversations about a future English curriculum. This is perhaps summed up by ending where I began: with my students, the t-shirt they gave me, and their act of affirmative resistance.

So, what’s in a t-shirt? On the basis of the preceding discussion, mine can clearly be seen to hold a significance that implicates it in philosophical and historical discussions relating to the future constitution of English in this country. This otherwise unassuming t-shirt can be seen to signify that my students have internalised the idea that English is about relationships, and it’s about practices of reception and creation, or the negotiation and possibilities of meaning from different socio-cultural and historical positions (cf. Frow, 2001). My programming has obviously been significant in assisting them to such understandings in the way that it has brought about a particular set of possibilities for English and how we might relate to each other in our shared context. The notion of programming and its effects is obviously a significant issue at this important time in the history of English in this country. It points back to Goodson and the important lesson he has offered from the experience of implementing a national curriculum when the process might otherwise remain driven by party political and bureaucratic imperatives, as Goodson and Walker lament was the case in England two decades ago.

Notes
1 Hamlet: ‘The time is out of joint: O cursed spite,/ That ever I was born to set it right...’ (Shakespeare, 1985/2001, I.5.189). Derrida draws on these lines in the prefacing quotation to Specters of Marx.
2 Derrida (1988, p. 12) calls this structure of repetition-with-difference iterability: ‘Every sign... can be cited, put between quotation marks; in so doing it can break with every give context, engendering an infinity of new contents in a manner which is absolutely immittable...’ This statutoriness, this duplication or duplicity, this iterability of the mark is neither an accident or an anomaly; it is that (normal/abnormal) without which a mark could not even have a function called ‘normal’.
3 Bakhtin (1986, p. 69): ‘... all real and integral understanding is actively responsive, and constitutes nothing other than the initial preparatory stage of a response (in whatever form it may be actualised). And the speaker himself is orientated precisely toward such an actively responsive understanding.’
4 ‘Meaning is achieved through responding and composing, which are typically interdependent and ongoing processes’ (Board of Studies NSW, 1999, p. 7).
5 Turner (2008), for example, conflates the traditional, literature-centred discipline of English with such things as media, cultural and film studies, seeing them as ‘associated disciplines’ and united in their pursuit of a common goal: inculcating ‘imaginative, moral, and ethical experiences’ for students. It is as if the disciplinary contestation of the 1980s and 1990s that led Frow (1990, pp. 360–361) to write of ‘productively conflictual chaos’, and to suggest that ‘The scope of the discipline of English has thus become more like that of a generalized rhetoric, or a general field of textual studies... no longer restricted to the study of high culture and to apparently universal aesthetic values...’, never took place. In fact, contrary to Turner’s description of ‘associated disciplines’, Frow (p. 359) suggested in 1990 that the discipline of English, unlike the school subject English, ‘has rarely taken seriously the realities of its role in ethical regulation’. Frow does, however, appear to have come around to Turner’s view of thinking, seeing a new settlement for the discipline of English and its ‘associates’ as a result of the development of a national curriculum. Like Turner, Frow has also publicly condemned the appointment of Freebody by the National Curriculum Board on the grounds that he is not an English or literature studies specialist (see Whitlock, Dixon, Frow & Coleman, 2008), suggesting that this new settlement for English can only come at the expense of critical literacy.
6 I have in mind here the sort of work that teachers have written about in AATE Interface publications edited by Doecke, Homer & Nixon (2003), Doecke & Parr (2005), and Doecke, Howie & Sawyer (2006). To the extent that I had deliberately programmed a unit of work for my students which drew on critical theory, taking a socially and culturally critical approach to language and text and exploring questions of ideology and effects of power in communicative acts, I would locate my teaching of the aforementioned elective within the broad project of critical literacy.

7 Others include grammar, phonics, the Western canon and whatever else supposedly no longer gets taught in English. These are spectres evoked by commentators to give form to a possible national English curriculum, precisely because they allow them to define what should (and should not) be in it (e.g. Donnelly, 2008).

8 Lucy (2008) addresses the tensions and paradoxes within Turner’s position, particularly considering his prominent institutional role within the field of cultural studies, a field of academic inquiry that has, ironically enough, had quite a deal to do with the redefining of English as a discipline in our universities and schools.

9 In this special issue Sawyer discusses the work of Misson and Morgan in precisely these terms.

10 Slattery (2008b) has suggested that the absence of the term ‘critical literacy’ from the framing paper for English is a considerable concession to its opponents on the part of the NCR, and a repudiation of its value and influence.

11 Lucy (1997, p. 118) explains supplementarity as ‘recurring process of exchange’ functioning as ‘both an addition and a substitution’.

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3.2 Applying the ‘transformative model’ in and across different pedagogical contexts

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**Text 4: The subject(s) of fiction**

This book chapter was published in *Charged with Meaning: Reviewing English 3rd Edition*, a reference for both practicing teachers of English and pre-service teachers. In this chapter I contend that teachers are subjects of, and participants in, the unfolding history of the subject called English. I show through explanation and practical application how the ‘transformative model’, applied here in the context of responding to and teaching fiction, both explicitly acknowledges and draws upon traces of the English subject’s past, as disseminated through the teaching practice lore of significant historic models or discourses. In a time of curriculum contestation, I argue that the model enables English teachers to better understand our responsibility to understand teaching lore in a reflexive manner.
CHAPTER 28

The Subject(s) of Fiction

Mark Howie

I sat down to begin writing this chapter in a week that marked a milestone in my life; the start of my twenty-first year of teaching English. In approaching the task ahead of me I was very conscious of having been the subject of fiction, its pedagogies and related public discourse for well over three decades, taking into account my years as a student and my years as a teacher. I have lived with and through significant changes in the way that fiction is taught, and I continue to do so. Much of how I understand myself as a person and as a teacher stems from my history as a reader, including my reading of the history of the teaching of English and my location in that history. I know, because I am a reader (and not only of fiction), that I am not alone in having such an understanding. Other reader-teachers might have dealt with this subject before me (e.g. Doecke 2004, Lucy 2001, Morgan 2003), but still the idea that in reading fiction we are also learning to read ourselves and our lives remains one that I have made my own. It is a principle that underpins my planning, programming and pedagogy.

My primary concern here is to propose some ways that early career English teachers might begin to make sense of the flux of the history of English teaching, as they set about the practical tasks (which are never just practical) of programming and planning for the teaching of fiction. Of course, teaching English simultaneously takes place in a variety of contexts, including those that exceed the educational (i.e. when education is understood in a strictly institutional sense), being social, cultural and political in nature. In other words, and as is probably also true of the teaching of anything, the teaching of fiction is never just about the teaching of fiction. The contestation that has surrounded English teaching in this country, particularly the teaching of literature, cannot be ignored by those entering the profession, as deep political and social investments are made in it, and the divisiveness that has been prevalent in recent times is certainly impacting upon the work of teachers (see various contributions to Doecke, Howie & Sawyer 2006).

One appropriate form of response to such contestation is to frame classroom practice in terms of what research suggests are present imperatives. I do this in what follows by foregrounding possible points of dialogic connection between my proposals and the implications Andrews (2001) draws from his summary of thirty years of research into the nature and practices of reading fiction, as well as the conclusions of recent research (Sawyer, Brock & Baxter 2007) into what enables exceptional outcomes for students in English education.

From the outset it is necessary for me to set certain boundaries for my chapter. At best, I only allude to some very important issues in the teaching of fiction. I do not attempt to provide a sustained rationale for the teaching of fiction (or literature more generally), believing that I can add little to the significant work that has already been done in making the case for the primary role English teachers play in enabling students to enter and inhabit ‘secondary worlds’ (Benton & Fox 1985). For similar reasons, I do not attempt to explicate the various stages of response researchers have suggested readers move through as they read fictional and other works. I pass over certain key debates of historic importance, such as the

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arguments put forward to both criticise and defend the teaching of a set class novel, believing these already to have wide currency. Finally, the restrictions of my word limit mean I cannot hope to provide a comprehensive guide to practical strategies for the teaching of fiction. Such ideas are to be found elsewhere in this book, as well as in many other publications. I will, however, provide what I hope readers find to be useful illustrative examples.

Before writing our first unit of work and teaching our first classes, we have all experienced the teaching of fiction. Teaching fiction therefore demands that we critically reflect upon the enabling and limiting aspects of our personal histories as subjects of fiction teaching, as well as the history of the subject called English. But it also requires each of us to be able to simultaneously act from and upon these histories, recontextualising both for a new set of circumstances. This imperative follows from a movement we are all, at the outset of our careers, required to make: namely, from being a student-reader to being a teacher of student-readers. Of course, there is a parallel movement also involved in the teaching of fiction. This is one relating to our beliefs about reading and reading practices in our ‘non-school lives’ and what we bring to, put into practice and allow in our classrooms. One could scarcely conceive of an English teacher, or at least one deserving of this professional title, who is not an avid reader, just as a genuine music teacher is expected to be able to play an instrument and an art teacher to engage in at least one of the forms of art practice. While I intend here to focus on the movement from being a student-reader to being a teacher of student-readers, I remain very aware of the importance of the second movement I have outlined, particularly the way it suggests that teachers - like their students - are always more to learn. The memory of an influential English teacher who steered a grateful student in new directions in his or her fiction reading is a culturally ubiquitous one, not least in the autobiographical writing of literature teachers (e.g. Doecke 2006; Lucy 2001). Such guidance is often held to be life changing, indicating that the two movements I have outlined are likely to be closely interrelated in the lives of most English teachers.

(1) Teachers need to be enthusiastic readers of contemporary fiction to maintain the tradition of literature as a living cultural force.

(Andrews 2001: 98)

My overarching aim in what follows is therefore to consider the interface between the subjectivities and pedagogies that personal history and the history of English as a school subject make possible to teachers. I do so in order to promote a reflexive understanding of programming and planning for the teaching of fiction. It is my contention that students become powerfully literate – surely, as the Australian Association for the Teaching of English (AATE) advocates, a key aim of any worthwhile English curriculum – when they are able to rethink and reconstruct experience, including their experience of reading and responding to fiction. This requires teachers to not only understand their programming and planning for the teaching of fiction in an epistemological sense (i.e. as being about ways of knowing), but in terms of ontology and ethics (i.e. as being about shaping ways of being and acting).

(2) Young people should continue to be encouraged to read widely, and to make connections between all aspects of their reading (and viewing).

(Andrews 2001: 99)

A particular memory of my own schooling in fiction, recontextualised here within a set of broader ruminations upon the functions and possibilities of the teaching of literature within the English curriculum, certainly bears this out. Let me now transport you back to the early 1980s, and a Year 12 English classroom in a suburban boys’ state high school.

On becoming ‘sivilized’

An animated discussion as to how to best understand the ending of The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, our Higher School Certificate (HSC) text, is in process. This discussion is dominated by me and another boy, and will be allowed to run, more or less, for the entire lesson. The teacher appears

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happy to sit back and let us take the lead. I had the night before read a journal article on the book's ending, which my teacher had included in a list of recommended readings and placed in a resource file in the school library. I strongly recall parroting during the class discussion the line of argument taken by the author of this paper. Of course, I persisted with reading the article in the first place because it seemed to make good sense: that is to say, the article seemed to chime with my instinctive understanding of the novel, giving my subsequent responses a discernible form and language. In retrospect, the implications of this are clear: I could hardly say that the thoughts and words coming from my mouth during the discussion in question were fully mine. I certainly made no effort to attribute a source to my arguments, freely expressing them as my own. As the teacher left the room singing at the end of the lesson, evidently satisfied with what had just occurred, a number of useful messages about the nature and substance of learning in English had been reinforced for me, even if at the time I didn't have the language to articulate them in the way I can now. As a result of this lesson I understood the importance of dialectical reasoning to the creation of knowledge in English; I recognised the need to learn and take up the language and modes of argumentation of a particular discourse community, in order that I might gain the approval of my teacher and HSC markers; and I saw the importance of reading beyond the set text, and beyond my own thoughts and experiences, if I were to succeed.

Of all the books I formally studied at school, Huckleberry Finn was one that I truly enjoyed, and the novel has stayed with me in ways that I could not have anticipated at the time. In the here and now of writing this chapter, my professional interests in post-structuralism leads me to note - not without a wry smile - the way in which the ending of Twain's great novel speaks back to the teaching of the novel that I experienced, which was nonetheless both adventurous and assured. Suddenly, a whole new understanding of the end of the novel - and my own becoming - is made evident.

Huck's determination to light out for the territory has become a mantra of sorts for me over the decades - a line I tend to repeat to myself whenever I feel stilled or trapped. This has had good and bad consequences, both for me and people close to me. But personal confession is not the point here, even if it does help to explain Huck's appeal to some readers. It is of no great consequence that my confession calls into question certain supposedly enduring moral messages of this great work of literature, as such a mode of reading and interpretation - so dominant in the past of English - has been contested now for decades, with various publications offering alternative critical conceptualisations of reading and examples of the practical application of these in secondary English classrooms (e.g. Worth & Guy, 1998; Thomson, 1992b). What is relevant is the obvious irony in play during the HSC English lesson I have recalled. I was discussing, amongst other things, Huck's lighting out, his quest for freedom from constraint, even as I was learning to (re)produce a socially and culturally sanctioned interpretation. I was endorsing Huck's desire not to be constrained by the past (where he has been before) and the desirous of others, even as I was giving new voice to the past utterances of another (i.e. the unnamed critic to whom I have referred) and despite the fact that my desire to be able to articulate a particular understanding of Twain's novel had become indistinguishable from the way this critic understood its final pages. In effect, my ideas, desires and language were not pure my own. I was, in short, a very willing participant in my 'civilising' as an English student by my own pedagogic Aunt Sallys. Not that I really knew this at the time. Interpretation, or the ascription of meaning, requires some distance and considered reflection.

I want to be able to confirm Huck's refusal of Aunt Sally's 'civilising' as standing for the imaginative capacity of the reader to move forward into new territory, to (re)imagine and give some sort of form and language to the shadowy and unrealised longings that underpin who they are and what they might yet become. In a certain sense, this is undeniable true. In the instance I have cited from my own life, it is evident that I wanted to be a successful HSC English student. This was new territory for me, I first surveyed and then gained access to this territory by entering the library and beginning to read the article I mention in my autobiographical recount. My reading of this secondary material subsequently gave me a way to express...
ideas I wanted to take on as my own, let me speak with the ‘indigenes’ of this new territory (i.e. my teacher and the HSC markers) in their own language. In this way, my first memory highlights the transformative powers of the pedagogy to which I was subject. It was an enabling force. In becoming ‘sivilized’ as an HSC English student, I was also required to leave behind the reader I once was, having been schooled in the junior secondary years in a more ‘personalist’ mode of response that certainly did not, at least as far as I was aware at the time, necessitate or value the sort of secondary critical reading I began to do as an HSC student. There is, however, a necessary qualification to be made here: to assert the transformative powers of my experience of studying The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn requires that the pedagogy I was subject to in my recount be understood in the context of the specific socio-cultural context in which it took place, and that it also be recognised as a response to a particular set of pragmatic requirements for student and teacher alike, not the least of which was a good external examination performance. Reading in the English classroom is always framed, circumstantially and in other ways. This is something which is also true of any and every act of reading (MacLachlan & Reid 1994; Reid 1984). As we learn to negotiate varied texts and contexts (or are taught to do so), we learn to read in different ways in order to meet particular requirements and ends.

(Further understanding is needed that fictional work are framed cultural artefacts, operating within a rhetorical space that is quite distinctive: the reader brings expectations to it; attitudes to it are shaped by the book.

(Andrews 2001: 98)

With this qualification in mind, I also understand my first memory to immediately call into question the interpretation (i.e. as enabling) I have provided of the lesson I recall in my autobiographical text. Part of the education of English students, given the official demands of the curriculum and how these are secured through such things as assessment and certification, is to ‘apprentice’ students into a discipline, particularly as they move towards the senior years. Here a teleological understanding of the (student) self becomes obvious, as the formation of a particular sort of student becomes an educational end. This is a student that amongst other things, reads and responds to fiction in ways that replicate the defining English teaching discourses of the favoured model(s) of English underpinning the particular curriculum framework to which the student (and his or her teacher) is subject. Under these conditions, teaching English might be understood as a form of genetic engineering, producing successive generations of (most likely) unknowing clones. As Thomson (1992: 1) writes of his own schooling,

My objection to the way students of my generation were taught to read and think about literature (and society) at school and university is...that the theory of reading informing the teaching – usually New Criticism – was never made explicit, so that at no stage did we ever question it or consider the possibility of there being other ways of reading, all carrying with them their own underpinning ideologies. We were, therefore, left without choices about how to read and think, and thus inevitably manipulated. We accepted one way of reading as the only, or natural way to read.

My own experience of schooling suggests that nothing had changed a quarter of a decade later; moreover, my conversations with prospective English teachers in my work as a teacher educator have revealed that most find it very difficult to identify the assumptions underlying the reading practices they have internalised from their own literary education, suggesting that Thomson’s objections remain very relevant even today. It is for this reason that the movement beyond considering the pedagogies of fiction teaching purely in epistemological terms becomes crucial, and engagement with their ontological and ethical dimensions becomes necessary. If we are going to keep on producing clones of ourselves, we should have a pretty clear idea of who we are, where we have come from and how we should behave. We should, in other words, have a ‘map’ of our English teaching DNA, in order that we can choose what we pass on, as well as the manner in which it is best passed on, in an appropriately informed manner. So, what exactly can be concluded from my own schooling in literature? Can such an evocation of personal experience function as a sort of genetic counselling for prospective English teachers?
The pharmakon effect

The teaching of literature (including fiction) clearly has a pharmakon effect (Derrida 1981). It both enables and constricts forms and directions of self-development in a manner that makes the two effects synchronous and indistinguishable. Clearly, the teaching of fiction is structured by an impossible difference. It anticipates that students will be somehow no longer themselves (i.e. as they once were) as a result of the experience, having become more (imaginative, capable, empathetic, understanding, critical, aware, humble, reasonable, connected, in tune, self-aware...) than they were at the start of the school year. What space here, then, for the realisation of the humanist understanding of a singular and unified self, as propagated by critics of contemporary English teaching who argue for what they call a ‘traditional’ approach to teaching literature?9

I am most myself when I am not myself. This is a rather mystifying and paradoxical realisation to reach after many decades of reading, studying and teaching fiction. It is nonetheless a ‘truth’ I take from my experience. In writing the rhetorical question which concluded my previous paragraph, I was very conscious – and could not deny even if I wanted to – the debt I owe English, my teachers, and more particularly the study of fiction for teaching me the power of interpretation. It is this that has, after all, given me the capacity to go back to my own past and a previous self, recontextualise my memories and all that I have read, and hold these up to scrutiny (in effect re-reading and re-interpreting them) in order that I might find new meaning and fresh understanding. I don’t know that students ever quite do this anywhere else in the school curriculum. Learning in English can, long after exam answers have been written, subsequently take the form of nothing less than a mode of being, providing a set of ethical reference points and processes by which the demands and challenges of life might be negotiated – just as I have done here by citing the example of Huckleberry Finn, trying to make sense of myself and my work in order to solve the ‘problem’ of how to write this chapter. At least in part, I can now say this because many years ago I once participated in an energetic discussion about the ending of The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, having first read a scholarly article that gave me the impetus to begin to (re)imagine myself and which also helped me to realise the limitations of my language as I moved into a new communicative and intellectual context. For this reason, I recognise my different fiction reading and teaching selves in the argument Lucy and Mickler (2006: 26) make for the English curriculum, including the teaching of fiction, as being all about the capacity to read the world around us in a particular way – one that resists certitude:

Differences make up our world, because we live in a world of signs. We live in a world of contested meanings and values because we do not live in a world of pre-existing, unmediated things in themselves whose significance is divinely ordained. The world of signs does not collide with the world of things, but rather things are made to mean from within the world of signs (...think of a dragon). We have no choice but to interpret the world, in other words, except at times when the will to question is oppressed by a suffocating orthodoxy.

On these terms, the teaching of fiction is best projected towards equipping students with those protocols of reading - to quote Scholes (1989) quoting Derrida- that will allow them to more ably read themselves and their lives - that is to say, to understand themselves as subjects constantly in the process of becoming someone else, or being revised and (re)presented, through language, narrative and the attendant experiences and pedagogies of the English classroom. It seems to me that the fundamental concern of English, and more particularly the teaching of fiction, with the discursive shaping of the self (cf. Peel, Patterson & Gerlach 2000) requires that English teachers conceptualise their pedagogy, planning and programming in ways that promote a ‘will to question’ amongst their students, offering them an alternative to ‘suffocating orthodoxy’. We should do so in order that our students might successfully negotiate the pharmakon effect of literature teaching and, to paraphrase Scholes (1989: 151), keep on reading, keep on reading the texts that they read in the texts of their lives, and keep on rewriting their lives in the light of those texts – as I have endeavoured to do here in response to one chapter in my own reading history.

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Before we can, in the fiction teaching classroom, conceive of our students as subjects constantly in the process of becoming someone else, we first need to conceptualise subject English in such a way as to allow us to operationalise such an understanding — in other words, to program and practice English teaching as if it is always already in the process of becoming something else. And if this describes how we should understand English, it should also be how we understand and describe ourselves as teachers of the English subjects.

(Re)framing English

It has been my contention here that teachers are both subjects of, and participants in, the (unfolding) history of English. A crucial way in which we negotiate this history is through English teaching lore. I use this word here to mean teaching practices (cf. Downing, Harkin & Sosnowski 1994). It is now common to understand the history of English in terms of certain models or discourses, which are often discussed as being competing or antithetical. Wendy Morgan, for example, outlines ‘four sometimes overlapping, sometimes competing discourses of English’ in Australia (Morgan 1997: 17-21). Each of these models or discourses has its own practices, meaning each will ask students to read and respond to fiction in different ways. For example: Ian Reid writes of how the once-dominant cultural heritage model, which he describes through the metaphor of the literature gallery, promotes the idea that literature is ‘a self-evidently discrete category, a unique form of discourse imbued with special qualities’ (Reid 1984: 13). Reid suggests that teaching within the discourse of the gallery typically makes students complicit in ‘appreciative rituals’ (p.30), without ever holding these rituals up to analysis.

As Reid’s explication of the heritage or gallery model suggests, the defining practices of different English teaching discourses are more than ways of knowing and understanding that might, for example, help students towards a deeper level of engagement with a particular novel. They are, in fact, ways of organizing social relations and establishing regimes of value. When we are, as teachers, conscious of how fiction teaching lore serves the interests of particular social relations and values, we are therefore more likely to be wide ranging in our practice. To revisit the objections Thomson makes to his schoolling (as quoted above), an English teacher is hardly likely to move beyond the characteristic teaching approaches of New Criticism if she does not even recognize the fact that she is exclusively operating within this discourse. As a consequence, when we are able to historically locate and theorise our own fiction teaching practices, (re)contextualising fiction teaching lore in a reflexive and open-ended manner, we are able to help our students to better read the world around them. Students will be able to more broadly connect what they are doing in their engagements with fiction in the English classroom to the world as they experience it, and in fact will be more likely to recognize how different ways of reading fiction in English can and will shape their experience of the world around them, as they will have developed a more complex set of reading protocols.

For this reason, it seems to me to be useful to understand each of the models of English as different teaching practice genres (cf. Downing, Harkin, & Sosnowski 1994). This enables us to better understand our responsibility to replicate teaching lore in a reflexive manner, or one that is characterised by the intelligent eclecticism that research suggests is a key component of students’ success in English.

...what we saw in these [exceptional English] faculties was an intelligently eclectic approach to subject practice….By intelligent we mean here an eclectic practice that was not simply opportunistic or not thought through but an eclecticism which was consciously adopted in the interests of student need

(Sawyer, Brock & Baxter 2007: 75)

Much of contemporary genre theory draws a distinction between participation and belonging, holding that participation in a genre takes many different forms (cf. Frow 2006: 28). As such, it offers us an alternative to notions such as singularity and purity in considering the notion of identity, not least the identity of English and the identity of English teachers. As Cranney-Francis (1992: 46) writes of the value of genre:

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...texts are understood as strategic processes, actively positioning readers in relation to the range of meaning-potentials they constitute or are constituted by. Genre is thus a means by which the reading and writing subject can become aware of her/his power to intervene in the way s/he is textually positioned, and so in the discursive practices of her/his society.

Recognising English teaching lore as carrying the open-endedness of genres allows us an alternative history of English to the radical disjunctures proposed by a conservative critic of contemporary English teaching such as Donnelly (2006), who understands the English teaching subjects in terms of (past) purity and (present) corruption. It allows us to instead recognise as a positive force for social good the sort of imitability in the relation between text and genre that will enable the text that is a lesson or unit plan, and the text that is the lesson or unit in performance, to be derived from an intelligently eclectic approach.

More pragmatically, it should also be emphasised that English curriculum frameworks and syllabuses will inevitably acknowledge the history of the subject, even when this history is not made explicit. In a sense. curriculum documents anticipate a reader-teacher who understands this history and is thus able to recontextualise it in some sort of practical order and form (i.e. praxis) in the classroom (cf. Howie 2008).

Elsewhere (Howie 2005) I have proposed a ‘transformative model’ of programming for response, including to fiction, that does not seek to disown or deny the play of the traces of the subject’s past, as disseminated through the teaching practice genres of different models or discourses of English. I have argued (Howie 2008) that this programming model promotes a sort of ‘dialogical encounter between...discourses’ that Giroux (2005: 14) argues enables educators to ‘re-examine the partiality of their respective views...as part of a broader radical democratic project’.

Following MacLachlan and Reid (1994), the term frame is used in the model (Figure 1) as emphasis on framing draws ‘attention to agency and acknowledges the complex nature of the interpretive process’ (p.9).

To talk, by contrast, of the recontextualising of a syllabus in the classrooms seems to imply the repositioning of a set of given, or ‘found’ and static, meanings. In other words, how teachers interpret the syllabus and put it into practice is represented as unmediated and largely unproblematic.

**Figure 1. A transformative model of curriculum planning in English.**

![Diagram](image)

The model I favour functions to enable teachers to devise units of work or lesson sequences that bring together the different theoretical models that have defined English over time, as well as their pedagogies.

Understandings of English teaching which have been predominant in past syllabuses (i.e. personal growth and cultural heritage) have emphasised the capacities of language and literature to enhance and extend self-understanding and our understanding of aspects of the world around us (e.g. our relationships with others). However, such an understanding has come under challenge from socially and culturally critical understandings of language and text (Gilbert 1989; Morgan 1997), which hold that knowledge of the self

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and the world is actually formed and made available to us through language and text. The transformative model I have proposed accordingly (re)contextualises growth in English as growth from the personal (i.e. knowledge and understandings grounded in a subjective frame of reference that is immediate and restricted) to the cultural and critical (i.e. knowledge and understandings grounded in frames of reference that are more distant and elaborated).

The subjective frame draws on the personal growth model of English, and the familiar practices of reader response theory. It seeks to have students personally engage in an active process of meaning making in responding to texts. However, in anticipating the cultural and critical frames, it also acknowledges that (personal) responses are culturally constructed—this is to say, that culturally dominant and accepted readings exist and that texts work to ‘invite’ particular readings.

The structural frame draws on a social view of language in working to extend students’ understanding of the structures and processes of language and text, and how these work to make meaning. It works with the subjective frame in foregrounding Dixon’s emphasis on students’ increasing mastery of the use of language in a range of contexts alongside the valuing of personal experience (Dixon 1967/1972; see Sawyer, ‘The “Growth” Model of English’, this volume). Further, the structural frame enables teachers to draw on the familiar: close reading practices of New Criticism, as well as structurally-orientated approaches to the teaching of reading and response (e.g. aspects of genre approaches), in order to increase the sophistication of students’ responses to fiction. Working in, through and between the subjective and structural frames fosters and sustains (personal) growth through students’ developing deeper understanding of the structures and processes of language and text, enhancing their capacities as readers and writers.

The cultural frame highlights for students that their processes of responding and composing are culturally situated. The cultural frame foregrounds the development of a self-reflexive literacy that enables students to understand and draw on different processes of responding aligned to the different theoretical models or subject discourses informing the official curriculum. In this way, for example, students might understand that an initial, so-called ‘personal’ response to a text in fact draws on or accords with a particular set of reading practices. Other ways of responding to the text can then be explored and other readings generated.

Working within the structural and cultural frames, students may be assisted to develop their aesthetic appreciation of language and texts. The reading practices and understandings developed within these frames can be geared to allowing students to develop the kind of aesthetic responses and ethical judgements valued in Personal Growth, Cultural Heritage and New Critical approaches.

The critical frame promotes Critical Literacy as a differentiated reading practice (Morgan 1997), allowing students to challenge and / or resist particular ways of reading a text. It requires students to interrogate their initial responses generated within the subjective frame. The critical frame also draws on post-structuralism and post-modernism in giving students freedom to ‘play’ with texts, including their own, and to transform them.

The recursive nature of the model makes it inevitable that by the stage of a unit of work or lesson sequence in which students are working within the critical frame, their initial understandings would have been extended or transformed. They are now in a position to revisit the understandings initially generated in the subjective frame, and articulate how their learning has given them a new set of understandings of not only language and text, but also of themselves as readers of fiction.
In what follows, I provide a necessarily incomplete example of how a teaching program can be developed using the frames I have outlined above. *Swallow the Air* (2006) is a lyrical coming-of-age story, which can be read either as an episodic novel or a collection of inter-related short stories largely dealing with the theme of Aboriginal identity. The book’s author, Tara June Winch, is of Wiradjuri, Afghan and English heritage. *Swallow the Air* has won the Victorian Premier’s Literary Award for Indigenous Writing and the David Unaipon Award. It has already found a well-deserved place on recommended reading lists for senior secondary English students. In my experience, students find reading *Swallow the Air* to be an engaging, moving and sometimes challenging experience. The ongoing History Wars and the continuing national discussion about reconciliation make the content of the novel both very topical and highly charged for Australian readers.

**SUBJECTIVE FRAME**

1. Before reading the novel, explore the etymology and meaning of the word reconciliation. Then, working in groups, devise and perform a short dramatic piece which explores different meanings of the word, as well as at least two different contexts in which it might be understood.

2a. Write about a time in your life when you felt a strong sense of belonging or, alternatively, when you felt that you did not belong. Be prepared to share your piece with other students. Aim to evoke the thoughts and feelings you recall from this time as strongly and in as engaging a manner as you can for your readers.

2b. Having completed your life writing piece, write an accompanying critical evaluation of your own work. In this you should identify and consider:

   ~ the perspective of belonging you have conveyed
   ~ the language techniques and narrative devices and strategies you have employed to make your piece engaging for readers
   ~ the persona you have adopted in representing your own life and how this is made evident.

2c. After you have shared your life writing piece with other students, they will respond in a group discussion by also critically evaluating your piece in the manner outlined above. Having listened to this discussion, consider with the group the differences between their critical analysis of your writing and your own. How might these differences be explained? Did the responses from your group extend your understanding of your own writing? If so, how?
**STRUCTURAL FRAME**

1. Track references in the novel to water and drowning. In what way(s) can the narrative be read through these references? What moral message(s) does such a reading strategy offer?

2. The novel has been praised by reviewers for its poetic qualities.
   
   a. Analyse particular examples you have found to be effective. What features of language and syntax give the writing in each of your examples a poetic quality?

   b. How does the poetic nature of much of Winch's writing contribute to the development of her protagonist May? Base your response on three significant passages. In particular, you should consider whether the poetry of May’s language is a form of escapism or whether it allows her to ascertain and convey a deeper sense of the realities of the world around her, as well as her relationships and experiences.

3. Wide reading: compare and contrast the narrative form and voice of *Swallow the Air* with that of a significant coming-of-age novel of your own choosing. What, in Winch’s novel, do you find to transcend its historical context and have a timeless quality?

4. Research the idea of literary archetypes, in terms of both mythical storylines and character types. Which archetypes do you detect in the narrative structure of the novel and its characterisation? In what way(s) might the presence of these archetypes be said to reinforce certain ideas about culture and identity which appear to be advanced in the novel?

**CULTURAL FRAME**

1a. Reviews of the novel have focussed on the way it evokes and draws on Aboriginal storytelling traditions and techniques. What examples can you find in the novel? What particular understandings of human experience and the world around us do these examples convey?

1b. At the same time, the novel is also replete with imagery and a narrative trajectory that owes something to Christianity (without being aligned to institutionalised religion), evoking ideas such as a lost paradise, a fall, martyrdom, resurrection and salvation. What examples can you find in the novel? What particular understandings of human experience and the world around us do these ideas convey?

1c. What political and moral messages might be understood to be at work in the novel, particularly when you consider your answers to 1a and 1b. What relevance do these appear to have to Australians in the first decade of the twenty-first century?

**CRITICAL FRAME**

1. Research activity. Working in groups, research the so-called History and Culture Wars, which were prominent in the years of the federal Liberal government (1996-2007), the time period which encompasses the writing and publication of *Swallow the Air*.

   Having shared, collated and synthesised your findings, consider the following questions with your group:

   - Do the ideas, attitudes and values expressed in the novel concord with or call into question dominant political ideas relating to different cultures and peoples at the time in which the book was written and published? Support your response by close reference to the text.
   
   - Considering your answer to the above question and with reference to particular passages in the novel, in what ways is it possible to read Winch’s book as being in effect political? Is this reading one that you would endorse? Explain why or why not.
SUBJECTIVE FRAME

1. Tara June Winch’s writing is not represented in the Macquarie PEN Anthology of Australian Literature, which was published in 2009. Imagine that you have been asked by the General Editor to evaluate Winch’s work to determine whether an extract from Swallow the Air should be included in a revised edition of this important anthology. This requires you to:
   ~ choose an extract from the novel which you believe to be representative of her writing and which you also believe will highlight why her inclusion will help readers of the anthology to gain a better understanding of the history of Australian literature, if not of Australia itself
   ~ write an accompanying explanatory text which, in the form of a critical evaluation of the extract you have selected, highlights the aesthetic qualities of Winch’s writing, as well as her likely relevance to Australian readers and international readers interested in finding out more about Australia
   ~ provide and justify a recommendation as to whether, on the basis of your critical evaluation, Winch and Swallow the Air are deserving of inclusion in the revised edition.

1. Pragmatically, the rationale for teaching fiction in English is always already provided by the history of the subject and the curriculum framework which teachers are required to operationalise. The Shape of The Australian Curriculum: English (ACARA 2009: 5), for example, states that literature texts are recognised as having personal, social, cultural and aesthetic value and potential for enriching students’ lives and scope of experience. Literature includes a broad range of forms such as novels, poetry, short stories, plays, fiction for young adults and children, including picture books, multimodal texts such as film and a variety of non-fiction.


3. With regards to the seeing of a class novel, Andrews (2001:58) summarises the research as suggesting that variation needs to be built into the teaching of the ‘class reader’ so that readers of all abilities will benefit from the activity of reading a book in a large group. Benton & Fox (1985) devote a chapter to practical suggestions as to how such variation can be achieved.


6. If ‘bad’ can come of following Huck’s example, then from which character(s) in Twain’s book is the reader supposed to learn? If nothing of worth is ultimately to be learnt, what’s the point of reading the novel as anything other than an ‘entertainment’, to borrow Graham Greene’s term? And if the novel only functions as an ‘entertainment’, what’s the point of formally studying it at school? Of course, we might understand Huck’s behaviour to be erratic and impulsive at the end – the actions of a kid, in other words. But if Huck is like this, at the end of the novel, how can the reader take as reliable anything that he has discovered or determined beforehand? Above all, why am I even writing of Huck as a real person, who could teach me something about life? As these questions suggest, the history of the teaching of literature weighs heavily on English teachers, and we need to understand how every didactic utterance we might deliver is located within this history. Theory is always at work in the fiction teaching classroom, not least when it is most strongly disavowed. The discursive exclusion that is this note suggests that any and every communicative act shares Huck’s impulse to light but and refuse ‘stilising’. This is an idea that Derrida (1988) explores, if not exactly in these terms. So, we begin to further understand the problem with understanding meaning as something that exists outside of, and precedes, the acts of reading and interpretation – in, for example, authorial intention.

7. This is a notion that strongly informed the intellectual foundations of the national curriculum for English (ACARA 2009).

8. Derrida takes this word from Plato (see Lucy 2004: 90-92). He uses the word because of its several and, at once, opposing meanings (including poison, remedy and cure). In effect, the word highlights the delineation of differences (e.g. oppositions) to be unsustainable. The pharmakon - the interplay of difference - is that which comes before any oppositional difference. Before an English curriculum can be understood as enabling or constraining, it will be both. This suggests, then, the (im)possibility of identity is a singular, complete and present sense.

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9. For example, Donnelly (2006) unproblematically writes of the ‘best’ works of literature as giving readers access to and understanding of a supposedly universal ‘human experience’ (p.154) and an all-encompassing ‘human nature’ (p.155).

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Text 5: Reel English? Putting students in the ‘frame’ in the teaching of film

This book chapter was published in *Media Teaching: Language, Audience and Production*. Bringing together contributors from Australia and the UK, *Media Teaching* focuses on issues and considerations related to media education and the teaching of English. In my chapter, I identify certain historic challenges media education has presented to English, including the latter’s privileging of print literacies and its marginalising of popular culture. Taking as my example the teaching of *Star Wars*, I consider ways in which the ‘transformative model’ can assist teachers to bring English and media education closer together, arguing that this is necessary for English to remain relevant and vibrant in a post-industrial world. In this way, the ‘transformative model’ is positioned against retrogressive and normative discourses of English and its teaching, which I found to be highly prevalent in public and professional commentary in Australia at the time of writing.
Chapter 7
Reel English?
Putting students in the ‘frame’
in the teaching of film
Mark Howie

Indeed, it may be that, over the longer term, both English and media education in schools will become part of a more inclusive subject field (Buckingham, 2003: 95).

Introduction
Can ‘English’ cope in a post-industrial world which has radically extended the range of literacy practices young people engage in on a daily basis? This provocative question, asked by Julian Sefton-Green and Helen Nixon (2003) some years ago, now emphasizes the tensions being created for subject English by the dynamic role of popular culture in young people’s lives. Beyond its emphasis on an evolving understanding of literacy in and for this new century, the question posed by Sefton-Green and Nixon particularly draws attention to the central role popular culture plays in (adolescent) identity formation, the central historical concern of English (Peel, 2000). Taking up the issues of technology, pleasure and participation, Sefton-Green and Nixon make a compelling case for the breaking down in English of exclusionary binaries such as literary/popular texts and print-based/multimodal literacy practices. They call instead for a ‘creative investment in popular literacies which will help English connect to its emergent constituencies in a media-saturated world’ (p.250). How this might look in the secondary English classroom, with particular refer-
ence to the teaching of *Star Wars* (aka *Episode IV - A New Hope*), a 'blockbuster' film that is popular with students, is the subject of this chapter.

Following a brief rationale for the classroom study of *Star Wars*, I begin by highlighting the tensions English teachers in Australia are currently experiencing in having to renegotiate their professional identity and to reconfigure their teaching methodologies in line with what is diversely and divisively said to be the proper provenance, scope, and content of their subject. In doing so, I establish a particular context of public contestation for my own classroom explorations of the interface between English and Media Studies in relation to the teaching of film.

I then go on to draw attention to correlative developments within the profession that I believe are effectively limiting the realisation in this country of Buckingham's anticipated more inclusive subject field. In response, I put forward a particular programming framework that I have been working with as a way of addressing the tensions and paradoxes facing Australian teachers as we take up the challenges of bringing English and media education closer together, and ensuring that English does indeed 'cope' in this new century.

In so doing, I argue—as others have in other contexts and over time (eg Buckingham and Seddon-Green, 1994; Doecke and McClenaghan, 2004; Misson and Morgan, 2006)—the need for English teachers to give due regard to students' own social and cultural behaviours as both consumers and producers of popular culture. The approach I take recognises the fact that students are active, even joyful participants in a range of socio-cultural behaviours and relations that extend well beyond their immediate classroom engagement with a particular text. Influenced by the thinking of—amongst others—the authors cited at the start of this paragraph, I question the idea that a text-based critical literacy is, as some have suggested (eg Peal, Patterson and Gerlach, 2000), the way forward for English in the future. It is my position that, in this time of contestation, a commitment to the teaching of popular culture in English in a critical way is indeed necessary. However, in addition to critical, social and cultural understandings, such a commitment must also encompass questions of aesthetics, audience participation and production. I see the particular programming framework I put forward as a way to promote a more inclusive subject field, which (re)positions what I hope is a heterogeneous, non-judgmental understanding of student identity and personal experience at the centre of the English curriculum, without being either 'critical' or 'celebratory' in a doctrinaire way.
Why Star Wars?
The opening titles of Star Wars are now burned into our collective memory and the film has become a milestone in popular culture. Indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to state that the release of Star Wars created a phenomenon. The film became a cinematic, cultural and financial juggernaut which changed cinema going forever, heralding a new—if now very familiar—world of suburban multiplex theatres, big budget, special effects laden Hollywood blockbusters, and saturation marketing through product tie-ins (Biskind, 1998).

Having cost US$9.5 million, with an additional few million for promotion and publicity, Star Wars took in over US$100 million in its first three months. Within four months of U.S. release in August, 1977, it had overtaken Steven Spielberg’s Jaws as the highest grossing film at the box office to that point in time. As the film’s popularity has endured, so too has its unsurpassed ability to make money. When the Star Wars trilogy (aka Episodes 4, 5 and 6) was re-released in two thousand cinemas across the United States in 1997, it grossed US$250 million (Since then Episodes 1, 2 and 3 have also been incredibly successful, both at the box office and in video and DVD sales.). If these figures are not mind boggling enough, consider also the fact that the film’s director, George Lucas, had the foresight and business savvy to take the then unheard of step of insisting that the studio give him the merchandising rights when he was negotiating his contract with the studio heads at Fox. With the re-release of the trilogy in 1997, Star Wars had made well over US$3 billion in licensing fees over the two decades following its release.

The first major ‘cross over’ film in the science fiction genre (a ‘cross over’ film being one which is able to find and maintain a mass audience well beyond that of the devotees of a particular genre) Star Wars was also ground breaking in other areas. Lucas was amongst the first directors to realise the ever developing possibilities for the use of sound in the cinema going experience. Over Fox’s objections, he insisted on using Dolby Stereo. As stereo sound was not widely used in suburban theatres at the time, those which did not have the required technology were forced to buy it if they wanted to screen Star Wars. The making of Star Wars also required the use of innovative special effects. The technicians working for Lucas were forced to make much of their own equipment as the requirements of the film were so specialised that the necessary technology just didn’t exist at that time.

Perhaps more significantly, film critics and cultural commentators credit
Lucas with irrevocably changing the direction of cinema, and not necessarily for the better. The more cynical have argued that *Star Wars*, along with the films of Spielberg from that time (*Jaws, Close Encounters of the Third Kind*), destroyed the American film industry, ushering in a period of devolution and offering the cinematic equivalent of fast food (see Biskind, 1998). With intelligence replaced by the infantilism of sound and spectacle, their argument runs, American cinema has become akin to an amusement park. Those more supportive of Lucas and his film have argued that, while flawed, *Star Wars* still marked a return to a rich historical tradition of archetypal story telling with a clear moral message (Booker, 2004). Further, others have suggested that far from being childish and unintelligent, the film shares the thematic concerns, and may be read as a sophisticated appropriation of great literary works from the past such as Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* and Sir Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte D’Arthur* (Simon, 1999).

Either way, *Star Wars* is a remarkable cultural indicator of the power and appeal of visual story telling. With individual English teachers (eg Jones, 2006; Simon, 2006) being prepared to argue that Hollywood ‘blockbuster’ films are valid texts for classroom study because of their appeal for teenagers and their ideological power, the enduring popularity of *Star Wars*, the ways it has changed film making and viewing and the critical disagreements about its cultural value and significance make it particularly worthy of classroom investigation. Unfortunately, this not a widely shared opinion—within and without the English teaching community.

**Back to the future: The backlash against the teaching of film in English**

These are difficult times for English teachers in Australia as they grapple with the place of popular culture and media education in English. In recent years, the teaching of English has come under intense media and political scrutiny (cf Doecke, Howie, Sawyer, 2006). To a significant extent this questioning of English can be understood as a retrograde, media-driven reaction against the ‘textual turn’ in English (Durrant, 2005; Sawyer, 2006)3. However, as far as it is possible to generalize about these things, account also needs to be taken of how the profession itself has been responding to the textual turn in what appears to be a somewhat defensive way—one which does not give due regard to the realities of the lived experience of students (cf Sefton-Green and Nixon, 2003).

Particularly noteworthy in recent public discourse about the English
curriculum has been the way critics of contemporary English teaching in Australia have focused their attacks on the teaching of film. The study of film in English has been demonised as embodying all that is wrong with contemporary education. It has been equated with a lack of intellectual rigour, an emphasis on engagement and sociology at the expense of ‘real’ learning and lax moral standards (McGraw, 2005; Sawyer, 2006; Sommer, 2003).

The tenor of the criticisms being made can be gauged from a particular editorial in The Australian—the only national broadsheet—which rails against the setting of films such as Star Wars, Blade Runner and Citizen Kane as examinable texts that teachers and students can choose to study for the Higher School Certificate (HSC) in New South Wales. According to the editor:

The study of English at school level has been turned into a trendy version of film studies as well as a vehicle for the latest thinking on political power, gender and race relations...a bit of intellectual rigour is in order (The Weekend Australian editorial, March 9–10 2002, quoted in Sommer, 2003).

The exclusion of popular culture from the curriculum and the bulwarking of the traditional concern of English with literature in a traditional, Levantine manner are very much the order of the day for conservative critics of English as it is presently constituted in Australia (eg Donnelly, 2006). In looking back to the past in order to set a course for the future of English, such criticism drives a wedge between Media Studies and English, effectively denying what otherwise might reasonably be seen as a natural affinity between the subjects as they have developed historically. It argues for the shunning of the sort of socially and culturally critical approaches to language and texts that Buckingham (2003) identifies as being intrinsically associated with media education, and which Australian English teachers would recognise as being typical of what has been labeled an Australian version of critical literacy (Morgan and Misson, 2006; Morgan, 1997; Peel, Patterson and Gernach, 2000).

A second line of attack of conservative commentators has been to emphasise functional, print-based literacy and call for a return to the teaching of the ‘basics’ of grammar and spelling. A constant theme of opinion writers in recent times has been that a supposedly all pervasive focus on popular texts and critical literacy in English classrooms has come at the expense of students, denying them a solid grounding in foundational literacy skills. Claims of a literacy ‘crisis’ in
Australia have been widespread—while students can apparently now deconstruct texts in terms of power relationships, their spelling and writing have become deficient (cf. Sawyer, 2006).

It would be misleading, however, to imagine that uncertainty and ambivalence about the teaching of popular culture in English is merely a concern of conservative media commentators and opportunist politicians. What cannot be overlooked in considering recent developments in Australia is the fact that many teachers remain quite sympathetic to the privileging of print over visual texts and the condemnation of critical literacy that has been evident in media and political criticisms of contemporary English teaching. A key finding of a large scale study of the teaching of visual texts in English by Hancock and Simpson (1997), which is endorsed by Sommer (2003), is the rather nebulous position of film in the curriculum. The Hancock and Simpson study suggests that teachers are uncomfortable in teaching film as a textual form in its own right, and are transporting from their teaching of literature to their teaching of film a quite limited range of familiar or ‘traditional’ literary practices. These are primarily centred on dealing with the text as a story, with a particular focus on aspects of plot, characterisation and theme.

This study is just one amongst a number which have suggested that many English teachers in Australia continue to primarily define themselves as teachers of literature in a very ‘traditional’ sense (see Morgan and Misson, 2006; Wyatt-Smith, 2000). The sense that many English teachers in Australia are somewhat uncomfortable about teaching film, and more particularly the fact that they are reluctant to teach it as a textual form in its own right, without simply replicating how prose fiction is taught, suggests there exists within the profession some wariness about the move towards bringing media education and English closer together in a more inclusive subject field. A pressing issue arising from the public and professional contestation engulfing English in Australia is the effect it is having on the positioning of students within the curriculum.

Back to (visual) basics: Setting limits on how film is taught in English

The challenge to the notion of a more integrated subject field for English in Australia stemming from the evidence provided by Hancock and Simpson to suggest that English teachers are reluctant to move beyond traditional literary practices in their teaching of film is reinforced and extended by the evident corolling of film within the curriculum as a means to teaching functional literacy.
skills in a new guise. It would appear that when teachers do move beyond narrative to aspects of visual semiosis, they are dealing with their unease about film, both in terms of its place in the curriculum and how to teach it, by taking on a ‘back to basics’ discourse and giving passing but limited acknowledgement to so-called ‘new’ and ‘multi’ literacies. Certainly, teachers who are operating within what might be termed a critical literacy paradigm in teaching film self-consciously define themselves as working against what they perceive to be predominant pedagogical practices amongst their colleagues, and indeed the way visual meaning making is dealt with in syllabus documents and external examinations (eg Jones, 2006).

Functional limitations are being imposed on the teaching of film by the official curriculum and in the recontextualisation of that curriculum in English classrooms. How this works in practice can be seen in a professional learning support resource for the teaching of film in English (DEST, 2002) that was developed and released by education authorities in NSW as a cross-sectoral initiative to accompany the implementation of the revised Stage 6 English Syllabus (BOS, 1999), which prescribed films as HSC examinable texts for the first time. This resource included the following advice about teaching film and how it is different from teaching literature (Readers will note the problematic endorsement that these ‘tips’ come from actual teachers, as opposed to— one would guess—educational bureaucrats or academics, who might be ‘out of touch’ with the realities of the classroom).

**Tips from teachers**

We asked a number of teachers how they went about teaching film. Listed below is a compilation of teaching strategies being used successfully by teachers.

- Watch the film as a whole without any attempt to stop and analyse.
- Isolate a scene. Watch it again with varying focus on particular parts.
- Isolate a technique (lighting, sound, camera movement etc).
- Look at overriding ideas or thoughts in related material and contrast them i.e. A- B-grade Sci-fi film with *Blade Runner, Brave New World*, and examples of modernism.
- Identify the various genres used or hinted at in the film.
- Identify narrative questions that the students have before they view the scene.
• Interrogating the scene. What are your expectations? What surprises you in the scene? What disappoints you?
• Question the students about the specific use of props etc. Why focus on it?
• Look for symbols or visual metaphors within the mise en scene and discuss their relevance.
• Focus on the three layers of sound individually. Why a particular sound effect? Why the use of particular music? Is there repetition of sound or noise?
• Turn the sound down and watch.
• Turn the vision off and focus on the sound.
• Students prepare an alternative approach to a specific scene.
• Students present a tutorial that explains significant scenes in detail.
• Use a wide variety of film resources for comparison, contrast and alternative approaches.
• Work from the glossary to analyse and understand specific scenes and techniques.

What is interesting about such a list, and what will make the endorsement that these tips came from teachers worrisome to those seeking a more inclusive subject field for English, is where it sits operationally within the dimensions of practice in school literacies. Unsworth (2001) summarises the work of various researchers in this area, using the terms ‘recognition’, ‘reproduction’ and ‘reflection’ to group common, interconnected typological elements (figure 1).

What must be kept in mind here is the fact that functionally orientated and traditional print-based forms of literacy teaching are now widely held to be

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Figure 1 Distinguishing critical literacy – comparing typologies of literate practice (Unsworth, 2001)
necessary but not sufficient in preparing students for the demands of a highly mediated life, in a century in which 'the visual' is growing ever more important (Buckingham, 2003; Sefton-Green and Nixon, 2002). Critical literacy is now almost routinely accepted by curriculum theorists and historians as an essential literate practice in contemporary schooling (Buckingham, 2003; Morgan and Misson, 2006; Peel, Patterson and Gerlach, 2000).

The list of tips for teaching film provided to NSW English teachers is clearly out of step with what the research literature argues is being demanded of schooling in the 21st century. The advice provided limits consideration of how meaning is made in film to recognition (e.g. 'Isolating a technique...') and reproduction (e.g. 'Students present a tutorial that explains significant scenes in detail'). To the extent that the advice provided is representative of what is happening in NSW classrooms in which film is being studied, it appears that students are being offered quite limited opportunities to move into the more analytical and critical literacy Unsworth labels reflection. At the very least, it would appear to be the case that NSW teachers do not readily identify teaching strategies which are characteristic of this domain as being common practice for them. Notions of audience and production (Buckingham and Sefton Green, 1994) are also absent from the list, and consideration of film as an aesthetic text (Misson and Morgan, 2006) is more implicit than explicit.

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that students I spoke to in preparing this chapter were quick to point out the disjunctions between how film is typically being taught in English and their out of school viewing experiences and related cultural behaviour. According to Dom, a Year 12 student and unabashed Star Wars fanatic:

The study [of a film such as Star Wars] shouldn't be limited to the film itself. Looking at the story and characters, or things like shots and angles, or what the director was trying to do, does not take into account fandom. [Star Wars] is not just a movie. It's something more—like a community. How successful this community is shows how successful the film is—how it has textual integrity. How it affects people, how it draws people in is a measure of its success. Studying Star Wars should be like studying pop culture itself, and what is good about it. You have the 'expanded universe' of Star Wars, for example: ad-ons like computer games, comics and novels and so on. These expand the series [of films]. Give it more life. The expanded universe continues things. Fills the gap. Keeps the community alive.
between the films. Even after the films are finished [screening], fans keep contributing, keeping the films alive.

Dom went on to explain to me the hierarchies that exist within the 'expanded universe': the kudos that certain individuals gain because of their expert knowledge of the films, and the status that can be obtained by individuals through such activities as collecting Star Wars merchandise and memorabilia, and moderating online discussions at fan websites. Lest this seem overly serious, he also emphasised the sheer joy and fun to be had as a ‘fan’. Having explained how he, like other dedicated fans of his acquaintance, had purchased tickets for a special midnight screening of Episode 6—Revenge of the Sith months in advance, Dom then enthusiastically described the ‘cosplaying’ [ie dressing up in character] and the light saber fights which continually broke out in the aisles during the film.

The sense of community a young person such as Dom finds amongst his fellow fans, the importance of this community to his own identity, and the significance of the community’s [essentially] online habits are not to be underestimated. To him, they are an integral part of viewing the Star Wars films, and indeed his sense of self. Dom puts it this way:

[dedicated fans] know stuff the average person in the street doesn’t. We feel at home on the Internet. It’s our place. We can find people with same interests and ideals anywhere and they can become some of the best friends you’ve ever had. We’re not restricted to just meeting people in the local area. People have been with Star Wars throughout their lives. We share the same interests and ideas. The movies give you an ideal of heroism to live towards. But it’s also an escape. You can drown yourself in the mythology of Star Wars. You can spend hours reading about it.

While Buckingham (2003) suggests that the influence of questions and approaches from Media Studies might productively reshape the teaching of literature as English moves into the twenty-first century, some teachers seem to be actively setting about ensuring that such a process of transformation is not fully realised in Australia. In the process, they are (inadvertently?) enacting the more shrill incantations of conservative media commentators and politicians. To be fair, it must be acknowledged that the mediating influences of curriculum documents and professional learning support tend to ask teachers to do no more
than this. However, when aspects of narrative and the most obvious elements of
visual meaning making become the primary focus in the teaching of film,
more complex questions of participation, production, pleasure and identity
are likely to be passed over. Sadly, these can be the aspects of watching and
enjoying a film that students can be most interested in—as Dom emphasised to
me in our discussions.

What, then, is to be the way forward towards a more inclusive subject
field? In these fraught times, when the locus of control of the English cur-
riculum in Australia is clearly being contested, Green’s (2003b) invocation that
‘we entertain the possibility of working somewhat against the grain of current-traditional English teaching’ (p.145) can serve as a rallying call as we think about
and engage with the processes and tensions of subject reformation, and set
about the task of taking the project of English into the future.

(Re)Framing the teaching of film in English: Towards an integrated
subject field
As the current debate about the teaching of English in Australia indicates, any
critical examination of the practice of English teachers will be inherently con-
nected to the notion of professional identity and how this is historically situat-
ed (see Doecke et al, 2002). In order to negotiate the current challenges to
English and the status of media education in the curriculum, it is important that
teachers are able to develop and work through and with what Green (2003b)
describes as ‘more fluid, dispersed, flexible practices of self and textuality’. Such practices are necessary if the limiting binaries of popular/literary texts, and
print-based/multimodal and functional/critical literacies are to be broken down
in the English classroom. In working towards a more inclusive subject field,
English teachers will be well served by a framework through which to histori-
cally locate their practice in a non-partisan way—a framework that is inclusive
of different—even competing—understandings of English, which allows the
subject to develop into the future without jettisoning all that has been held to
be good and worthwhile in the past.

Different versions of this sort of framework have been put forward. The
New London Group has devised a ‘multiliteracies’ pedagogy (Cope and
Kalantzis, 2000). Green (2003b) presents a formulation derived from post-
structuralist thought and contemporary critical theory, which provides a
dynamic, tri-stratal view of historical practice through considering discourses,
programmes and effects within and across past(s), present(s) and future(s). Buckingham (2003) presents a series of guiding principles for English, which he describes as a self-consciously provocative attempt to suggest how media studies, and the challenges it represents to 'traditional' language and literature teaching, might form the basis of a reformulation of English into the future.

For my own part, I have been working for some time now with a framework I have written about elsewhere as a transformative model of English (Howie, 2006; 2005). This programming framework differs from others in that it directly addresses, and seeks to bring together, different historical understandings or models of the subject. It takes as its starting point the fact that the key enduring feature of English in its various theoretical guises is its central concern with the formation of the self (Green, 2003b; Peel, 2000; Reid, 2003)\(^\text{10}\). It is precisely this focus on the 'personal' that can be said to create a particular synergy between English and Media Studies. In light of Buckingham's (2003) emphasis on media education as having been historically conceptualised as an 'inoculation' against all that is bad in contemporary culture, as well as his argument for a new, less defensive paradigm of 'preparation' and 'participation', the central historic concern of English with the ethical formation of the individual could also be said to be a core component of the historical function of media education.

The framework (figure 2) I have been working with goes someway to realising the goal of the lessening of the subject's classification strength (Bernstein, 1975), or its boundary maintenance, in the interests of promoting a more

<table>
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Figure 2

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inclusive subject field. The framework promotes a principled eclecticism in teaching practice, breaking down the sort of hierarchical oppositions between 'sacred' and 'profane' sources of knowledge (Bernstein, 1975) about English teaching that are effective of stanch allegiance to a particular 'model' of the subject. The model does this by working towards the integration of the key historic theories or versions of English, and also allowing a more ready transference of pedagogical practice across the different types of texts taught in the English classroom. Consequently, a less rigidly classified 'English' is conceptualised and enacted in the classroom.

As a starting point, the subjective frame draws on the personal growth model of English, and the familiar practices of reader response theory and 'writing for understanding' (see Adams, 2004 and Sawyer, 2004b). It seeks to have students personally engage in an active process of meaning making in their reading, viewing and writing. With regards to media education, this obviously acknowledges the importance of a student-centred approach, and a curriculum that begins from students' existing knowledge and experience of the media (cf. Buckingham, 2003). However, in anticipating the cultural and critical frames, the subjective frame also acknowledges that (personal) responses are culturally constructed. That is to say, culturally dominant and accepted readings of texts do exist, and texts work to 'invite' particular readings (Morgan, 1997).

The structural frame draws on a social view of language in working to extend students' understanding of the structures and processes of language and text and how they work to make meaning. It works with the subjective frame in picking up John Dixon's (1967) emphasis in the seminal Growth Through English on the need for students' increasing mastery of the use of language in a range of social contexts to be fostered through the valuing of personal experience. Further, the structural frame enables teachers to draw on familiar close reading and viewing practices, as well as common approaches to the teaching of writing (e.g. process and genre approaches), in order to increase the sophistication of students' own texts. The traditional emphases of media educators in studying media languages (see Buckingham, 2003: pp. 55–57) are readily locatable in this frame: meanings, conventions, codes, genres, choices, combinations, technologies.

The cultural frame highlights for students that their processes of reading, viewing and writing are manifestations of particular cultural 'norms'. In this way, for example, students might understand that an initial, so called personal
response in fact draws on or accords with a particular set of reading, viewing or writing practices. Other ways of reading or writing texts can then be explored and new meanings generated. The emphasis media educators typically place on certain key elements of media production (see Buckingham, 2003: pp. 54–55) and communal reading (Buckingham and Sefton-Green, 1994) is encompassed by this frame, including: technologies, professional practices, the industry, connections between media, regulation circulation and distribution, access and participation.

The critical frame promotes critical literacy, allowing students to evaluate, challenge and resist particular ways of reading, viewing or writing a text. It requires students to question and even reconsider initial responses generated within the subjective frame. The critical frame also draws on poststructuralism and postmodernism in giving students freedom to ‘play’ with texts, including their own, and to transform them. The notion of Representation, a core principle of media education (see Buckingham, 2003: pp. 57–59) has a central place in this frame. In exploring how texts of all kinds do not simply hold up a mirror to the world and reflect it back to us, students will consider issues relating to a number of key concepts: realism, truth and authenticity, presence and absence, bias and objectivity, stereotyping, interpretation and audience acceptance, influences.

The recursive nature of the model makes it inevitable that by the stage of a unit or lesson sequence in which students are working within the critical frame, their initial understandings would have been extended or transformed. They are now in a position to revisit the understandings initially generated in the subjective frame and articulate how their learning has given them a new set of understandings of not only language and text, but also of themselves as English students.

In the context of the current discussion about the potential for media studies to transform the subject field of English, the transformative model I have been working with is perhaps best illustrated by highlighting how it might confirm and extend teaching practices commonly associated with media education in the study of film in the English classroom, with particular reference to the teaching of Star Wars.

The following explication of the model I have been working with takes the form of a generic set of questions which might inform the development of teaching and learning activities for the study of any film in English, supported
by suggestions for how these might be translated into possible teaching and learning activities for *Star Wars*, which is set for study for Year 12 in NSW. The generic elements of this framework draw on two other conceptual frameworks—both from the field of media education—which I have found useful in my own teaching (Film Education, 1992; O'Shaughnessy, 2001). Given the thrust of the argument I have made in this chapter and the more familiar nature of the structural frame, in offering suggestions for an approach to *Star Wars*, I will focus on the subjective, cultural and critical frames. The activities I have devised for the film in the cultural and critical frames in particular are obviously dependent upon the sort of close textual knowledge and analysis that is promoted in the structural frame.

**Subjective Frame**

- What do students already know about this film? What do they have to say about how this might influence their viewing of the film?
- What do students already know about the major star(s) of the film? What do they have to say about how this might influence their viewing of the film?
- What do students already know about the director of the film? What do they have to say about how this might influence their viewing of the film?
- Do students know anything about the company/companies under whose auspices the film has been produced? What do they have to say about how this knowledge might influence their viewing of the film?
- Is this a film that students would have gone to see at the cinema themselves? What thoughts do they have about why they would or would not have gone to see the film?
- Is this a film that students believe they are likely to enjoy (or have, in fact, enjoyed)?
- What range of knowledge and experience(s) of the film's subject matter do students have? How might these elements of the film viewing experience be shared and considered before the initial screening of the film?
- What knowledge and experience(s) of the film's form, structure and genre do students have? Are these elements of the film that might be unfamiliar to students? If so, how might they be made familiar with these elements before the initial screening?
• What thoughts do students have about the difference between viewing a film as an experience outside of school and as part of the (English) curriculum? Is there a need to try to more closely align these experiences for the students? If so, what room is there for the teacher to negotiate this process with the students?

After initial screening
• What initial responses to the film do students have? How do they account for these? How else might they be accounted for?
• Do the students identify themselves as part of the intended audience for the film? Why/why not?
• What processes for making meaning of the film have students been able to draw upon? Of these, which are they conscious of using and which are they not?
• Have students been able to read the film at an applied level of comprehension, thinking about ideology and the positioning of the audience?
• What aspects of the film are students willing to endorse? Is there anything they are willing to question or challenge?

Teaching Star Wars (Subjective)
1a. Journal Writing: students choose one of the following tasks (completed before the first classroom screening).
   i) Write about your experience of first watching the film Star Wars. Use some or all of the following questions as stimulus for your writing.
   What made you watch the film? What were you expecting? Were your expectations realised? Where did you watch the film and who were you with? Was it usual for you to watch a film in this location and with these people? What sort of impact did the film have on you, and how would you explain this? Do you think your response to the film is a common one? What pleasure did you find in watching Star Wars?
   Or (if you have not watched Star Wars before)
   ii) Interview two people who watched the film: an adult and a younger person.
   Ask them the above questions (as well as any of your own choosing, which you believe will help you more fully understand the nature and basis of the interviewee’s response to the film).
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1b. In groups (formed from students who completed (i) and students who completed (ii)), students share their journal writing and interview responses. They attempt to arrive at initial responses to the following questions:

- What has made *Star Wars* an important film for people?
- How is that importance reflected in what people have said about the film and their viewing of it?
- In your experience, how is the importance reflected in other ways?
- Where you have encountered a lack of enthusiasm for the film, what has given rise to this feeling? How widely shared do you believe this sort of response to the film to be?
- What makes the film worthy of study at school in English? What objections might there be to studying this particular film in English (ie beyond the argument that studying any film is inappropriate)?

2. Students extend their responses to these questions by undertaking research using resources such as:

  www.imdb.com
  www.theforce.net
  www.starwars.com

3. Working in pairs, students use the material gathered in steps 1 and 2 to synthesise and develop a research question for independent investigation. This question will relate to the making and/or viewing of *Star Wars*. Class and homework time is to be allocated to this throughout the unit. The findings of the research are then presented to the class.

**Structural Frame**

**CONSTRUCTION**

- reading film as text
- analysis of scenes/sequences
- film techniques (including Mise en Scène)
- directorial choices

**NARRATIVE**

- through whose eyes do we see the story?
- what part does music play in the story/how does it influence our reactions?
• which elements of the story are emphasised in the film?
• what oppositions are represented in the film and how do they influence the reading of the film (e.g., male/female, old/young, middle class/working class, rural/urban)?
• how do particular scenes function within narrative (e.g., the ending)?
• what function(s) do particular characters play within the story: who makes things happen?

Teaching Star Wars (Structural)
1. Using extracts and teacher-identified key scenes, students trace the development of the character of Darth Vader during the series of six films. What evidence (i.e., in narrative, thematic and visual sense) is there to suggest that he is in fact the key character in the series?

2. Students write a critical evaluation of Lucas’s exploration of good and evil in the Star Wars series through the character of Darth Vader.

Cultural Frame
AUDIENCE
• what audience has the film been made for?
• what is such an audience likely to enjoy about the film?
• how has the film been/how might the film be promoted?
• how is casting influenced by the need to attract audiences?

GENRE and CONVENTIONS
• does the film fall into any particular genre?
• how is this genre identifiable?
• what comparisons/connections can be made with other films (and texts) in this genre?
• does a particular genre affect the way we read the film?
• how did/might the genre influence the marketing of the film?
• does the film subvert the genre in any way?
• does the film draw on culturally familiar archetypes, e.g., the hero’s journey?
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INSTITUTION
• why might this film have been made?
• how have commercial imperatives influenced the making of the film?
• how does the screening venue affect readings of the film?

Teaching Star Wars (Cultural)
1. In depicting a futuristic, new world, George Lucas has appropriated stories from the past through drawing on mythic structures in both the plot and characterisation of Star Wars. Students develop their reading of Star Wars and evaluate the appeal of the film through considering how Lucas has drawn on:
   a. The Hero’s Journey: eg Christopher Vogler’s (1999) 12 narrative stages.
   b. Jungian Archetypes: eg archetypes as they have been understood and utilised by Hollywood screenwriters, including Lucas: the hero, the catalyst, hero, the mentor, the shapeshifter, the shadow, the trickster (see Vogler).
   c. The Science Fiction genre.

2. In order to more fully understand how, in projecting his imagination into the future, Lucas has drawn upon the great tradition of storytelling in European culture, to create a compelling narrative structure which depicts a changed, yet familiar futuristic world, it would be worthwhile exploring how the film draws on some of the great heroic quests and myths from the past. Homer’s Odyssey and the tales of King Arthur would be good places to start.

3. Explore how Lucas continues another great story telling tradition – Hollywood genre and action filmmaking, as represented by Saturday afternoon matinee serials such as Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon, the epic romances of a John Wayne, the swashbuckling of an Errol Flynn pirate movie, and the high drama of aerial warfare in a film such as The Dawn Patrol.

4. Having considered how the structural elements of Star Wars reflect Lucas’ desire to create a new mythology in his film, drawing on the rich traditions of European and Hollywood story telling to provide his audience with a clear moral message (the triumph of good over evil), students explore why he might have wanted to provide his audiences with such a message.

   To answer this question, students research American society and politics in the period between when Lucas began to develop the film in the late 1960s and
when it was first screened in 1977. They seek to understand how the futuristic world of the film can be understood as a projection of Lucas’s own time, in particular as an allegory of America’s involvement in the Vietnam War in the 1960s and early 1970s, Nixon’s presidency and the social upheaval that occurred in America during this period. (Note: Lucas himself has stated that the Emperor was based on President Nixon).

5a. Students use www.theforce.net and www.starwars.com to explore the notion of ‘fandom’. What continues to draw fans to Star Wars (and the other films in the series)? Are these the same things that drew older fans to the film? How are dedicated fans expressing their enthusiasm for the film? In what ways has Lucas acknowledged, and even sought to use the energy and initiative of fans of his films? What role does the ‘imaginative recreation’ of the films play in fandom, and what outlets are there for this? How important is the purchasing of product tie-ins to being a fan of Star Wars? What similarities and differences in both content and tone are to be found on these two websites? How do the identified differences reflect the unofficial and official status of the web sites?

5b. Students compare and contrast the response of dedicated fans to published criticism of the film (and the series) by professional film critics and film academics. What similarities and differences are to be found? What particular responses to the films are closest to the response to the film of individual students?

5c. Debate topic: ‘Star Wars fans have been exploited by the relentless marketing of the films and product tie-ins’.

Critical Frame
REPRESEnTATION
• how are particular people(s), culture(s), and cultural institutions represented (eg women, people of different races, the family, work etc)?
• in what way(s) do such representations reflect the historical and social context in which the film was made?
• how are particular characters portrayed?
• who are the goodies/baddies? How do we recognise them?
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**IDEOLOGY**

- what are the values/what is the world view in the film?
- what ‘invited’ reading is offered to the viewer?
- what pleasures are to be had in this viewing position?
- what other reading positions are available to the viewer?

**Teaching Star Wars (Critical)**

1. Students examine a range of ‘spoofs’ of *Star Wars* (these are available at www.theforce.net and elsewhere on the net, particularly YouTube). They consider the aspects of the film and its viewing that are being satirized, as well as the elements of the film (including how it is marketed and viewed by some) that they believe are ripe for satire. Students then work in groups to create a short satirical trailer for the film on its anniversary re-release.

2. Essay: In evaluating the impact of *Star Wars*, American film director William Friedkin has used a food metaphor, claiming that the film is the cinematic equivalent of McDonald’s fast food. According to Friedkin: ‘What happened with *Star Wars* was like when McDonald’s got a foothold, the taste for good food just disappeared’. Write an essay in which you critically evaluate arguments for and against the idea that *Star Wars* provides an insubstantial and unfulfilling viewing experience, which is more about easy consumption than anything else.

**Subjective (Re)framing**

- What do students now understand about the film that they did not understand at the start of the study, in terms of:
  - how the film makes meaning?
  - what it seems to have to say about the world and human experience (aspects of ideology and representation)?
- How have the students’ initial responses developed and changed? What are students now willing to endorse about the film? What are they willing to question or challenge?
- What other ways of depicting the same (or similar) events, personalities and ideas can they identify?
- Do the students identify themselves as part of the intended audience for the film? Why/why not?
- What did/did not students enjoy about the film?
* In what way(s) have students’ perceptions of themselves as viewers and English students developed or changed?

**Teaching *Star Wars* (Re-framing)**

1. Students write a feature article for a Sunday supplement: ‘May the force be with you: Star Wars and me’. The context for this piece is the interest aroused by the anniversary of the release of the film. In their piece, students explore their personal relationship with the film and its cultural significance.

**Conclusion**

Australian English teachers are currently working in a volatile political and cultural climate. A nostalgic hankering after a return to English as it once was is being vocally expressed by media commentators, politicians and— it must be acknowledged—some within the profession. A compelling effect of this is the curious position in which it leaves students in relation to the curriculum. The balance of the available evidence—at least as it relates to the teaching of film—suggests that reticence about the teaching of popular culture in English is driving a wedge between the subject and media education, and militating against due recognition: being made in English classrooms of the complex literacy and cultural practices students engage in on a daily basis. Consequently, there is a danger that, as the English curriculum continues to fail to appropriately harness the energy and enthusiasm evident in students’ out of school cultural practices—for example the ‘fandom’ that a student such as Dom speaks so enthusiastically about, they will become increasingly alienated from the subject. English will struggle—even more than it is perhaps doing now—to remain relevant. A subject that has been concerned with the formation of the self will have largely turned its back on its historic project by turning away from the lives, interests and concerns of students.

For this reason, Julian Sefton-Green and Helen Nixon are correct to call for the breaking down of the exclusionary binaries which dominate in current debates about English teaching. English teachers need to be, as David Buckingham has argued, working towards a more inclusive subject field. This is not easy at the present time, but it is possible. Key to this process is directly addressing the allegiance English teachers typically have to a particular historic model or understanding of their subject.

If, as Robin Peel has argued, English is seen as being less about a body of
identifiable subject content and a range of practices which contribute to the formation of the person, then bridges can be built; what Bill Green describes as the 'more fluid, dispersed, flexible practices of self and textuality' needed to take English into the future can be promoted. It does not have to be, nor should it be, an either/or debate. If the study of literature can assist in the ethical formation of the individual and the development of an aesthetic sensibility, so too can the study of film—and not just the study of a film that has critic cultural cachet because it is non-mainstream. Traditional print-based literacies are certainly important to the life success of the individual, but equally so are visual and critical literacies. The silent contemplation of the print reader might be necessary for the social efficacy and psychological health of the individual, but equally necessary will be the skills teenage Star Wars fans develop in their online worlds: the ability to network and engage with others through shared experience and the pursuit of a common objective. Above all, what should not be forgotten is the deep pleasure students take from the communal activity which surrounds their consumption and creation of popular culture, and its importance to their developing identities.

The imperative of these times is to (re)position the students themselves at the centre of the English curriculum. I have attempted to illustrate how I have gone some way towards doing this through the programming model I have presented here and its possible application in teaching a 'blockbuster' film like Star Wars.

Notes

1 Here I am following Buckingham (2003) in identifying film as a media text and locating the study of film within media education in English more generally, in order to distinguish the study of film from the more central historical concern of English with the study of literature. Andrew (2001) notes that the study of moving images is a comparatively recent concern of English, and the site of significant curriculum development only in the last two decades.

2 The source for financial information relating to Star Wars is Biskind (1998).

3 Bill Green (2003a) describes the 'cultural turn' as a broadening of the range and types of texts studied in the subject, as well as how they are approached pedagogically, which has been promoted primarily through the increasing influence of both cultural studies and media education on the study of English.

4 The most extreme media purist has depicted the use of film in English and approaches to teaching and learning more typically associated with media education as virulent and corrupting influences, which are sapping the nation's intellectual and moral strength. Writing in the Sydney Morning Herald, one columnist went so far as to link the teaching of popular culture in schools and critical literacy to the possibility of terrorism in Australia (see Sweeney, 2006).
Writing of the history of the relationship between the two subjects, Buckingham (p.65) makes the broad generalisation that continuing differences remain between the two subjects when media is taught in English because of entrenched differences in approach. Where the teaching of literature has been understood as primarily being about 'developing students' responsiveness to something which is seen as something which is fundamentally good for them', media teaching has been 'a matter of enabling them to resist or "see through" something which is fundamentally bad.' This, it must be said, is not a view of the primary purpose of either subject that Buckingham personally endorses. Both Buckingham and Sawyer (2001) note the ready association of critical, socio-cultural approaches with the teaching of film in media education, attributing this to the influence of the journals Screen and Screen Education.

Indeed, while it has been commonplace for critical literacy to be represented in academic discourse in Australia as a new orthodoxy or norm (Corson, 1999; Sawyer, 2001a), teachers writing about their own practice from a critical literacy perspective continue to identify themselves as being professionally isolated, and very much working against what is common practice amongst their colleagues (cf. Howie, 2005).

Much of this will be very familiar to readers outside of Australia. The vulnerability being experienced by many English teachers in response to the rise of screen culture and the 'textual turn' in English has become a common theme in UK research pertaining to teachers' perceptions of English and contemporary English teaching (Anderson, 2001; Joddoy, 2005).

See Andrews (2001) for an overview of research in these areas.

It is now commonplace to discuss the professional identities of English teachers with reference to certain historic models of the subject. Peel (2000a) cites five models described in the 1988 Cox Report: Cultural Heritage, Personal Growth, Adult Needs, Cross Curricular and Cultural Criticism. For the purposes of the present discussion, the teaching of literature in English is best placed within the Cultural Heritage and Personal Growth models, and the teaching of film within the Cultural Criticism and Personal Growth models. The notion of models of English will be further discussed below and recontextualised within my own experiences teaching in NSW.

Peel (2000) puts this concept in the following terms: 'the formation of a particular kind of person that societies have found they need, and which English is able to help produce' (pp. 77–78).

The model was developed as a programming framework for the NSW English Years 7–10 Syllabus (BOS, 2002). The theoretical models identified in the syllabus as being historically significant are personal growth, critical literacy, cultural literacy, cultural heritage, and the social view of language. The content and text requirements of the syllabus require the study of a variety of literary and non-literary (including media and multimedia) texts, encompassing spoken, print, and visual forms.

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Chapter 4

Considering Ethics and Responsibility in Professional Engagement and Advocacy Related to the Teaching of English in Australia
4.1 Response-abilities: ethics, pedagogy and subjectivities in secondary English teaching and advocacy

Table 9: Content of Chapter 4.1

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<tr>
<td>7. ‘Authenticity was never really the question’: reading, ethics and the historical interruption of Literature teaching by English</td>
<td>In P. van de Ven &amp; B. Doecke (Eds.) (2011). <em>Literary Praxis: A Conversational Inquiry into the Teaching of Literature</em> (pp. 169-188). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers</td>
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**Text 6: Embracing the other within: dialogical ethics, resistance and professional advocacy in English teaching**

This paper was published in an edition of *English Teaching: Practice and Critique* dedicated to policy, identity and English as a mode of resistance.

I extend the general concern of the ‘transformative model’ with ideas such as ‘otherness’ and ‘difference’ in English to the realms of professional representation, advocacy and activism. I explore how I have (re) read and (re) written my teaching self and practice in response to public criticisms of my support for critical literacy by Kevin Donnelly, a prominent neo-conservative educational commentator. Drawing on a dialogical understanding of ethics, I affirm the importance of an open and unfinalisable understanding of the teacher subject as a generative response to the conservative re-centring of the teaching subject.
Embracing the other within: Dialogical ethics, resistance and professional advocacy in English teaching

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ABSTRACT: The neo-conservative subjectification of English teachers (as “language technicists” and “preachers of culture”) is being resisted in Australia (for example, Doecke, Howie and Sawyer, 2006a). In this climate of contestation, the (re)conceptualisation of English as a critical space promoting social justice cannot be ethical or just if it effaces other ideas and ways of being. For “resistance” then ends up being indistinguishable from the totalizing force it opposes. As an experienced teacher and professional representative of others, I explore how I have (re)read and (re)written my teaching self and practice in response to public criticisms of my support for critical literacy by Donnelly (2007), a prominent neo-conservative educational commentator. Drawing on the work of Kostogriz and Doecke (2007; cf. Bakhtin, 1981, Levinas, 1998), I argue that the ethical experience of encountering the Other can generate new understandings of the teacher self. I go on to affirm the importance of an open and unfinalizable understanding of the teacher subject as a generative response to the conservative re-centring of the teaching subject.

KEYWORDS: Advocacy by English teachers, critical literacy, dialogical ethics, English education, neo-conservatism and education, teacher identity.

INTRODUCTION

The professional self that I or others might speak and write of as Mark Howie is brought into being in a complex network of dialogic relationships and the attendant discourses in and through which these operate (Doecke, Homer, Nixon, 2003; cf. Bakhtin, 1981). Every working day I come face to face with one hundred or more students. As President of the English Teachers’ Association of NSW (ETA) and President of the Australian Association for the Teaching of English (AATE), I am in a less direct but – at least from my perspective - no less compelling relationship with over 8 000 fellow teachers. My advocacy worka and duties as a professional representative require me to move between the educational domain and other spheres of public life, including the academy, the media and government. As I do so, I am charged by those who have elected me, as well as by my understandings of myself as an English teacher, with the responsibility of promoting an eclectic but principled vision for English that at once acknowledges the subject’s past, addresses contemporary socio-cultural and political imperatives and looks to the future in...

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a In Australia in recent years, different national teaching standards frameworks, including those developed by English teachers for English teachers, identify professional “commitment” and “advocacy” as elements of professional accomplishment (AATE & ALEA, 2002; cf. Teaching Australia, 2007). In relation to advocacy by English teachers, STELLA defines advocacy as a willingness to “articulate educational ideas and take action to develop support for policy and curriculum change in the school and wider community”.

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meeting the needs of Australian students in all their diversity. As a consequence, I am necessarily connected – whether directly or indirectly – to those who inhabit these other worlds and, more significantly, required to engage with and respond to the ways in which they envisage English and its future. The understandings of English and English teaching I might possess remain located in, but necessarily exceed, the classroom negotiations that I establish and maintain on a daily basis between my students and the curriculum frameworks and official policies which function to classify the subject and frame (Bernstein, 1975) my practice. Indeed, the possibilities I see and create in my classroom, including the ways in which I understand my students and the curriculum I am required (or allowed) to implement, are also understood dialogically: they are informed by my various professional experiences beyond the classroom but, at the same time, also inform these activities. A key example, and the focus of this paper, is writing about – and consequently (re) reading – my own practice.

In what follows I will explore some of the ways in which contested engagements in the textual space of public commentary about my professional self and my teaching practice afford me new understandings of English, particularly as these relate to certain consequences for understanding teacher identity stemming from the central place critical literacy now has in the project of addressing issues of social justice in secondary English classrooms. In so doing, I identify the teaching self as a site of contestation upon which the future prospects of English significantly depend – such is the investment being made in the representation of the “skilful” English teacher in educational debates about English in Australia. Teacher identity, I argue, is central to the very possibility of conceptualising English as a site of resistance to dominant subject positions and the promotion of alternative ways of knowing, learning and being through its (traditional) concern with the study of literature. I will go on to affirm the importance of an open, unfinalizable and dialogically ethical (Kostogriz and Doecke, 2007) understanding of the teacher subject as a form of resistance to the conservative re-centring of the teaching subject currently in play in Australia.

THE (ENGLISH TEACHING) SELF AND OTHER

Writing about my work in its various guises connects me to the past, the present and the future of subject English in this country and beyond, as well as to those who would seek to give voice to, influence or control these things. In entering the public sphere through writing, I am my text (cf. Derrida, 1997, pp. 158 – 160). I write my (English teaching) self into being not through making manifest a “natural presence” (Derrida, p. 159), but dialogically through the language of contemporary English teaching in Australia and the discursive relations that this entails (cf. Green, 1990). My writing is inevitably informed by and, in turn, informs my reading of this larger and complex heteroglossic text. In “storying the self” as a means of “making sense of [my] conditions of working and being” (Goodson, 2005, p. 182), my professional self

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b Such a vision is captured in AATE’s (n.d.) Statements of Belief, which I played a significant role in writing. One use of the statements has been to provide association representatives with a shared “language” for their advocacy work.

c Following Morgan (1997), critical literacy is understood here as a differentiated reading practice, making available different reading positions to students (that is, reading “with”, “across” and “against” the text) as the discursive shaping of meaning and interpretation is explored.
becomes an ongoing narrative project (Howie, 2006a; 2006b; 2002) within the historical, “determined textual system” (Derrida, p. 160) that is contemporary English teaching. My published public commentary on matters relating to English teaching is therefore formed in and contributes to the textual space of competing readings and (re)writings of the history of English in Australia, if not internationally. As a (teaching) subject, I enact the past, present and future of the subject (English) through this sort of professional activity.

Bakhtin’s (1984) emphasis on the “multivoicedness” of all discourse suggests that in my public utterances about English will be heard the voices of those who have and yet might comment upon such matters as the “proper” constitution of the subject. In my professional endeavours, I am required to engage with and respond to (for example, Doecke, Howie & Sawyer, 2006b) what might be called the “loud, recognized reigning voices of the epoch” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 90). Being a professional representative of English teachers at state and national levels has elevated me into a signifier of what can be said to constitute a skilful English teacher, making me the public “face” of what is acceptable or unacceptable in contemporary English teaching (for example, Devine, 2007). As someone charged with the professional responsibility to publicly make the case for an expansive vision of English teaching, I cannot avoid entering the rough and tumble of the public arena, typically as a voice of resistance to those who are seeking to re-centre English within a more restrictive and restricted understanding of the subject – one which sees it as dealing exclusively with the necessary but not sufficient “Basic Skills” and “Cultural Heritage” curriculum models.

My teaching “self”, and the ways in which this might be represented, can accordingly be understood as a textual “space” in which dominant subject positions are being contested. This suggests that to the extent that teacher identity is part of the “boundary maintenance” of the subject (Bernstein, 1975; 2000; cf. Peim, 2003), the (re)imagining of English and its critical project of addressing issues of social justice (cf. Doecke and Kostogriz, 2007; Kress, 2006) cannot – and should not – be located solely in English classrooms, curriculum frameworks and policy documents. The significant social and political investments in English which are generated from beyond these “spaces” make it impossible to believe otherwise. Neo-conservative critics of contemporary English teaching in Australia have certainly realised that the struggle to (re)centre subject English requires the discrediting of representations of the English teacher subject which do not support their anachronistic and restrictive views, and therefore their particular cultural and political project (cf. Lucy and Mickler, 2006, pp. 11-28). To deny the possibility of more diverse ways of

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4 Miranda Devine is prominent conservative opinion writer for The Sydney Morning Herald. In a column on English teaching and the influence of critical literacy, she cited a unit of work I had published in mETAphor (Howie, 2005) the journal of English Teachers’ Association (NSW), on reading The importance of being Earnest through the critical lens of Queer Theory, as evidence of how the association’s representatives are more interested in “left-wing political activism” and “ideological posturing” than teaching literature. Her naming of me as the President of the Association invests the Levinasian “face” with a symbolic quality that leads me to recontextualise his thinking on ethics from the realm of the physical encounter with the Other to that of the textual realm of public media commentary about English teaching.

5 Such a tactic might be located more generally within the wider political culture of Australia under the Howard government (1996-2007) and the manner in which its neo-conservative agenda was pursued by it and its media supporters. Howard’s decade long-rule has been described by critics as being...
professional “being” within the subject works to silence, or at least marginalise, public expression of how alternative conceptualisations of the subject can and do work in the nation’s English classrooms.

The truth of this last statement was recently brought home to me over the space of a fortnight. One Saturday morning I opened the arts supplement of Australia’s only national newspaper and was surprised to find myself represented in a piece on the moral power of literature (Donnelly, 2008) as favouring the teaching of electronic texts at the expense of literature. (The irony here is laughable. Publication of this article came just days after I had delivered an address to the 200 individuals from around Australia selected to attend the inaugural Australian Government Summer School for Teachers of English. My topic was “Teaching Shakespeare in the mainstream classroom”.) Just over a week later, I received in the mail a newly published book on English teaching in Australia (Snyder, 2008), which has been written for that general audience which politicians like to call the “mums and dads” of Australia. Within its pages, I read a significantly more positive depiction of my (teaching) self: “For Howie ... teaching is far more complex and principled than simply taking on the ideas of the latest theory. His eclectic approach includes understandings from cultural heritage, personal growth and critical literacy models of English” (p. 83).

My writing about my practice is a connecting thread between these two “colonisations” (Goodson, 2005) of my professional self. Snyder’s representation of my teaching is written in response to criticisms made by Donnelly (2007; 2006), a prominent conservative educational commentator, of an opinion piece I wrote for the AATE website (since reproduced in Doecke, Howie & Sawyer, 2006a) describing a series of lessons in which I taught Marvell’s “To his coy mistress” to a Year 10 class. Such an exchange provides some sense of how English teaching in Australia has become a particular site of struggle and controversy in recent times (cf. Doecke, Howie, Sawyer, 2006b). The professional autonomy enjoyed by Australian teachers of English has been strongly questioned by prominent media commentators and politicians (cf. Cambourne, 2006; Gannon and Sawyer, 2007; Sawyer, 2006). Such has been the prominence and ubiquity of “crisis” commentary in recent years that The Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Workplace Relations and Education (2007) report Quality of school education notes: “[English] has been subject to considerable criticism, much of it...based on “culture wars” beliefs, and betraying an ignorance of the needs and interests of contemporary students” (p. 90). If, as Gale

characterised by a determination to stifle public debate and dissent on issues relating to culture, identity, values and the direction of the nation (Hamilton & Maddison, 2007).  
A former English teacher, Dr. Kevin Donnelly is now an educational consultant and prominent educational columnist for The Australian, the only national broadsheet. Donnelly enjoys close ties with the Liberal party, the major conservative political party in Australia. Donnelly has worked as Chief of Staff to a former federal Liberal minister. His most recent book was launched at Parliament House by the parliamentary leader of the Liberal party and then Prime Minister, John Howard. 
Morgan (1997) suggests that Australian teachers of English have historically enjoyed a high degree of autonomy in terms of curriculum development and implementation, pedagogy and assessment. 
In 2007, The Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Committee conducted an inquiry into the current level of academic standards of school education. Within the terms of the inquiry, this included particular reference to the extent to which schools provide students with the core knowledge and skills they need to participate in further education and training, and as members of the community.
McIntyre (2006) has recently argued, teachers are now seen as the “problem” when it comes to the future of schooling in Australia, there is ample evidence to suggest that English teachers are viewed by some as the most problematic of all.

As has also been seen in the US (cf. Apple, 2006) and the UK (cf. Griffith, 1992; Peim, 2003) in recent times, a dominant strain of neo-conservative media and political criticism of contemporary English teaching in Australia has typically sought to pit certain historic conceptualisations of the subject against others. The primacy of a “traditional” curriculum, as manifest in the teaching of so-called “basic skills” and the “cultural heritage”, has been promoted over a grab-bag of supposedly corrupting and corrupted innovations, including critical literacy, post-modernism and cultural studies. Donnelly (2007) has perhaps been the most vocal of such critics in Australia. The sorts of criticisms of contemporary English teaching in Australia he makes are spelt out in the introduction to a recent book, *Dumbing down*:

> Imagine a politically-correct curriculum where students are taught to feel guilty about the achievements of Western civilization…. Imagine English examinations and literacy tests where students are not penalised for faulty spelling, punctuation and grammar…. English courses where great literature is on the same footing as *Australian Idol*, SMS messages and movie posters…. Welcome to the parlous state of Australian education (pp. 5-6).

These are strong charges. In response to suggestions of betrayal, ignorance and the abrogation of professional responsibility, I have felt compelled to step back from my professional self in order to (re)evaluate my responsibilities to those around me. More particularly, I have been left asking how I might best respond to the way that my public utterances about English and English teaching, my public representations of my work, have been evaluated and responded to by others.

In order to explore what Goodson (2005) describes as the mediation which inevitably takes place between the [personal] “voice” and wider cultural imperatives when we tell our stories, or have them captured by others (p. 215), I will endeavour here to establish a non-essentialist, dialogic relationship (cf. Bakhtin, 1984) with my own public utterances. In order to do this, I must inevitably attain a sense of distance from and inner-reservation about my writing and, therefore, myself.

If I tell (orally or in writing) an event that I have just lived, in so far as I am telling (orally or in writing) this event, I find myself already outside of the time-space in which the event occurred. To identify oneself absolutely with oneself, to identify one’s “I” with the “I” that I tell is as impossible as to lift oneself up by one’s hair ...


Following the recent work of educators who have begun to advocate dialogical ethics as a way of teaching English to and for a community of difference (Kostogriz and Doecke, 2007; Kostogriz, 2006), the response to Donnelly I provide here draws on the thinking of Bakhtin and Levinas. While acknowledging significant difference between Bakhtin and Levinas, proponents of dialogical ethics argue the two are united in the idea that ethics is not imposed from the outside. Instead, it is part of the “dialogical nature of the life itself” (Kostogriz, p. 7) and is present in any encounter with difference. Dialogical ethics allows me to understand the call for action – the advocacy move – in response to criticism from Donnelly to be a “demand that comes
from the Other”, where the Other is someone who puts me into question and makes me responsible (Kostogriz, p. 7; cf. Levinas, 2000). Resistance, therefore, cannot be effacement or domination if it is to be ethical. In working towards the goal of an unfinalizable model of English, resisting a restricted and restricting version of the subject, my challenge is to interrupt the cultural and linguistic “violence” evident in Donnelly’s neo-conservative educational discourse, while still recognizing the ways that the questioning gaze of the Other has the power to expand my understanding, and therefore the possibilities for transformation, of my professional self (cf. Kostogriz, pp. 8-9). In short, I must “resist” the closure of my own beliefs and practice, and therefore the finalization of my teaching self, by allowing the “accusations” of Donnelly to put me into question.

In keeping with the acknowledged influence of Levinas on Derrida’s thinking (Critchley, 1999, pp. 9-13; cf. Caputo, 1997), the deconstructive impulse at work here should be recognised as aspiring to move beyond “culture wars” rhetoric. Instead, I wish to move towards what one interpreter of Derrida (Caputo, 1997) calls a “responsible affirmation of the other” and a delimiting of the “narcissism of the self” – the latter being something the federal Senate Committee (see above) detected when considering commentary about English teaching in Australia, as is made evident in the stated belief that “debate” is being pursued by some without due regard to the needs of students. The key move here, in responding to Donnelly, is to ensure that my “resistant” conceptualisation of English and the English teacher does not simply allow the usurper to become the usurped (cf. Lucy, 1997, p. 244), reinforcing an already existing and unjust structure of domination and suppression in public exchange between those with differing positions on the proper constitution of the subject.

(Re) Reading and (Re) Writing Howie

Referring to a piece I wrote on teaching of the theme of carpe diem and Andrew Marvell’s “To his coy mistress” to Year 10 students (reproduced in Howie, 2006a), Donnelly (2007) challenges my professional expertise by reprising criticisms which he originally made in the conservative journal Quadrant in 2006. According to Donnelly, I have “misread” the poem (p. 164), propagating a “distorted” and “ridiculous” interpretation under the warrant of “political correctness” (pp. 163-164). However, claims about misreading and distortion boomerang on Donnelly when my original and complete text is compared to what he intimates I wrote. Donnelly’s selective editing of my original copy strips it of significant contextual information that puts a very different set of emphases on my text.

Before quoting from my piece, Donnelly provides the following lead in:

[Howie] criticises it (i.e. Marvell’s poem) for presenting “a view of the world that is once partial and chauvinistic”. In explaining how he teaches the poem to Year 10 students, Howie asserts that countries in the industrialised, Western world have not done enough to support poorer countries in Africa (p. 164).

He then goes on to quote from my piece:

My group of fifteen year olds found the seize the day theme to be particularly relevant to them at their stage of life. However, what became quickly obvious
to them as they were concurrently following preparations for the Live8
concerts on television and the web, was that not everyone is free to seize the
day. That such things as our gender, age, nationality, economic circumstances,
and even where we live determine our possibilities in life.

This, however, is what follows in the original and what Donnelly dismissively
reduces to “political correctness”:

Having first read Marvell’s poem for pleasure and understanding, the students
came to see the necessity of reading it critically. In short, they felt compelled to
consider how the poem reflects a view of the world that is at once partial and
chauvinistic. They understood that the call to seize the day is not one to which all
of humanity may subscribe, contrary to the claims of some that the poem presents
a universal and timeless truth.

My work as a teacher in assisting students to arrive at these different
understandings of the poem was not about ideology or political correctness. What
I was doing was encouraging the students to move from the poem to considering
the factors that shape who they are and what they may yet become.

I was also encouraging them to imaginatively and empathetically connect with the
experiences of others outside of their classroom, in order to give them a deeper
understanding of the human experience in an increasingly globalised world.

This critical literacy does not amount to a “dumbing down” of the curriculum. It is
a necessary and logical extension of the traditional concerns of English (p. 13).

Donnelly’s “culture wars” rhetoric, his damning of me with the handy, catch-all but
ultimately vacuous criticism of “political correctness”, allows him to dismiss out of
hand the now commonly accepted and hardly radical idea that the meaning of a
literary text cannot be constrained by its own circumstances of production, as a
reader’s context will frame the way in which that reader approaches the very act of
reading and accordingly inform his or her interpretation (MacLachlan and Reid, 1994;
McCormick, 1994; Pope, 2002). As a consequence of his rigid, if not anachronistic
certainty about what it means to read and what English should be about, Donnelly
silences the ways in which my text centres around a personal struggle to find
continuity and coherence in English (cf. Howie, 2006a) – something Snyder (2008,
pp.82-84) more readily recognises. Donnelly does not engage with my attempt to
reconcile what have been seen as historically significant but not necessarily congruent
“models” of the subject (cf. Peel, 2000): personal growth, cultural heritage and critical
literacy. He does not allow that I am seeking to strike a balance between different
conceptualisations of reading in English, particularly the affective and the critical (cf.
Misson and Morgan, 2006). Moreover, the agency my students exhibit in their own
reading: the manner in which they thoughtfully bring their knowledge of the world
around them, as well as their out-of-school cultural practices, into the classroom; is
not acknowledged by Donnelly. Instead, Donnelly represents my students as the
victims of my supposed anti-Western guilt.

Donnelly also refuses to give me credit for actually taking seriously, and wanting to
consider in depth with my students, an idea Donnelly himself fervently espouses: that
great literature provides invaluable insight into the human condition (see Dumbing
down, p. 165). Consequently, my teaching of various poems (including “To his coy
mistress”) from different times and cultures as part of the broader study of the very traditional theme of carpe diem is not remarked upon.

Donnelly asserts himself and his world view over my students. He pays no regard to them as the Levinasian third party. He cannot imagine them to be independent thinkers and learners, who very readily – without being led by me – draw connections between what is being studied in class and the wider world as they experience it. Constructivism is a cardinal sin in Donnelly’s educational world (for example, Dumbing down, pp. 52-60). For this reason, he denies my students their full humanity: within his “I think”, which is geared towards discrediting pedagogical practices he opposes, the students are controlled by Howie’s “I think”.

Rather than seriously engaging with my experiences and those of my students, Donnelly is clearly more concerned with perpetuating the “culture wars” by representing me as someone who is unfit to professionally represent English teachers. This sort of attack transcends educational debate about how English should or should not be taught, and has clear and ongoing political and cultural reverberations - an obvious pointer to this being the fact that Dumbing Down was launched at Parliament House by the then Prime Minister and leader of Australia’s largest conservative political party, John Howard. In the Levinasian sense, Donnelly combatively turns away from the ethical imperatives of his textually mediated encounter with my professional or public self (Howie), subjugating the narrativised me within his conceptualisation of English and (un)skilful English teaching.

In addressing Donnelly’s criticisms to this point, I have been careful to limit my discussion to describing their (un)ethical consequences. I have been very conscious of not setting out to make any claims to insight into the truth of Donnelly’s motivations. Levinas (1991) emphasises that the Other cannot ever be truly comprehended, as to make such a claim would be to reduce the Other to “sameness”, to strip him or her of their individuality towards the ends of control and dominance (p. 45). I remain conscious, therefore, of the fact that the Other must remain ineffably inscrutable, as to claim to understand the Other is, in short, to betray the primacy of the face to face (or, in the mediated textual encounter, typeface to typeface) relationship.

However, at this point in my response I might draw on Levinas’s (1998) distinction between the “saying” and the “said”, in order to further explore Donnelly’s response before I turn my attention back to my own piece. The distinction Levinas makes between the “saying” and the “said” can be explained as the difference between the expressive or ethical function of language and its ontological function (Atterton & Calarco, 2005, p. 55). For Levinas, dialogue consists of a series of utterances, each of

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1 Atterton and Calarco (2005) note that in responding to the idealist philosophy of Kant, Levinas argues that the notion of the “I think” leads to the violence of the domination and exploitation of others: “By being placed under a concept, the Other falls within my powers, and is thus exposed to violence and disrespect” (p.10).

2 Here I consider the implications of Levinasian ethics for a different sort of encounter – one which goes beyond the realm of the physical – and think about the “face” in another sense. Just as Donnelly represents me as the public “face” of what is unacceptable about contemporary English teaching in Australia, so others, including myself, have made him the public “face” of the neo-conservative educational backlash: “we use [‘Donnelly’] to designate a cluster of neo-conservative views about education and schooling being propagated by mainstream media in Australia” (Doecke, Howie & Sawyer, 2006b, p.1).
which consists of two distinct and mutually irreducible phenomena: an expressive (and ethical) act of meaning on the part of a speaker (“saying”) and a theme which is expressed and understood (“said”) (cf. Hutchens, 2006, p. 5). In evaluating the actions of the Other, we can therefore focus our “reading” of those actions on the rhetorical shaping, as well as the social and cultural reverberations and consequences of the “said”, in order to reveal the ethical “saying” which is at work in the text (Critchely, p. 31). This can be done without compromising that dimension of incomprehensible separateness the Other possesses if we employ what Critchley defines as a clôtural reading: “double reading extended to include the analysis of closure and the question of ethics...[it] is history read from the standpoint of the victims of that history” (p. 30).

With this in mind, Donnelly’s capture and appropriation of me and my students might be understood in a number of ways. Reading Donnelly’s response with reference to Apple’s (2006) critique of neo-conservative and neo-liberal educational policies can allow it to be identified as a typical example of neo-conservative educational discourse. That is to say, a familiar response to fears of moral decay and cultural and social disintegration, which sets out to expunge “difference” and restore cultural order and stability through cultural literacy education (cf. Hirsch, 1987). (In this case, Donnelly seeks to establish a transcendental, ideal form of English, which consists of the unproblematic study of the timeless truths of certain incontrovertible “great” works of literature, as well as drilling in basic skills.) Following Levinas, Butler (2004) allows a different response to Donnelly’s writing, through which we can see a particular form of normative power at work, regulating what can appear and what can be heard in public and laying claim to what is and is not recognisably human. Drawing on Levinas’ conceptualisation of the primacy of the ethical encounter with the Other in order to critique the open hostility to “difference” exhibited post-9/11 by media commentators on the right of US politics, Butler argues that the “symbolic identification of the face with the inhuman, foreclose[s] our apprehension of the human in the scene...something that has already emerged into the realm of appearance needs to be disputed as recognisably human...” (p. 147). Naming me as an office bearer of a professional English teaching association allows Donnelly to put a symbolic “face” to the enterprise of contemporary English teaching in Australia, which he believes to be in a parlous state. Representing me as inept then self-servingly negates any responsibility on his part to acknowledge my humanity, or to engage with me and my thinking in a responsible manner. It allows him to dominate and control me, to subsume me within his language and argument.

Conversely, Bauman’s (2000) thinking on “liquid modernity” makes it possible to suggest that Donnelly and I have more in common and are closer together than might otherwise be believed. When my text and Donnelly’s response are read in conjunction, it becomes evident that we are both attempting, in different ways, to come to terms with what Bauman identifies as a distinguishing characteristic of the fluid nature of late-modernity: “The absence of guaranteed meanings – of absolute truths, of preordained norms of conduct, of pre-dawn borderlines between right and wrong, no longer needing attention, of guaranteed rules of successful action ...” (pp. 212-213). Both of us can be understood to be seeking forms of reference, “patterns of acceptable behaviour” or a “cohesive and consistent strategy” (Bauman, 2006, p. 1), that will allow us to make sense of the project of English teaching in what Bauman calls “liquid” times, when the old social forms have lost their solidity and can no longer be relied upon. The key differences between us lie, of course, in our individual
orientations to the past and the future of English, as well as the Others we have encountered in our pursuit of this project.

Reading Donnelly’s response to my original text with reference to Apple, Butler and Bauman allows understanding of the fact that his pre-formed subscription to the totalizing system of a particular ideology (that is, neo-conservatism) and related educational practice (for example, cultural literacy) requires him to turn away from the ethical demands of the face-to-face relationship. His “concepts” precede and determine how he encounters the textual expression of my consciousness. This leads Donnelly, in responding to me, to fall into unproductive, vituperative rhetoric because he does not believe, as Levinas would have it, ethics to be a “first philosophy”. Kostgriz explains this idea in the following way:

The Other … is the origin of our experience for we enter the world, as Bakhtin (1981) put it, that has been already populated with the words of others. Because the words precede us we can only respond to what has been already said by appropriating these words and through this developing our understanding of self and the Other (p. 8).

This last point is crucial. The “said” of his criticisms indicate that, within the dialogue that has taken place between us, Donnelly demonstrates no interest in (better) understanding himself and no interest in understanding me. (Both his sense of himself and his understanding of me are closed and complete.) In seeking to assert the correctness of his pre-formed and fixed view of the world and himself, and therefore his authority to propound that view by asserting his presence over my own, Donnelly denies the humanity evident in my endeavours to make sense of my subject, its history and future, and my efforts to respond ethically to the complex needs and interests of the students before me. Highly characteristic of Donnelly’s writing is what Bauman (1993) describes as a strain of intolerance that is a defining element of the present age: “the sectarian fury of neotribal self-assertion, the resurgence of violence as the principal instrument of order-building, the feverish search for home truths hoped to fill the void of the agora” (p. 238).

And yet, can I say that I am innocent of these very same charges? In responding to Donnelly in the manner I have here, I am required to ask this as he calls me into question. He is present in my language, and in my words I see his “gaze”. (I am even more urgently compelled to meet it under the influence of Bauman’s challenge to whatever possible motivation I might have for the advocacy I undertake.)

Certainly, there is also a strain of Bauman’s “neotribal self-assertion” in my writing. My piece was originally conceived as a defence of critical literacy, which was at the time under attack – and has remained so – from various media commentators and politicians, with Donnelly being amongst the most vocal of these (cf. Freesmith, 2006). I must also concede that this framing of my piece as a defence also leads, rhetorically speaking, to obvious disingenuousness on my part. It is patently untenable for me to assert that my work was not about “ideology or political correctness”. In the first instance, it must be accepted that, informed as it is by particular literary theories, the reading and interpretation of literature in English classrooms is inherently and inevitably ideological (cf. Belsey, 1989; Eagleton, 1983). Secondly, in the knowing allusions in my piece to Donnelly’s favoured slogans, “political correctness” and “dumbing down”, which have since been included in the title of his latest book, there is a barely disguised intertextuality at work – at least for keen observers of “debates”
about English teaching in Australia. My writing about my practice, if not the unit of work on *carpe diem* itself, is clearly informed by Donnelly’s thinking and writing. In my piece I attempt to reframe (Lakoff, 2004) Donnelly’s use of a phrase such as “political correctness” within the broader history of English as a subject and, not least, as a deliberate act of professional advocacy for an eclectic model of English that resists the neo-conservative agenda. (This is made even more obvious in the recontextualisation of the original piece in Howie, 2006a).

So, I concede that these are acts of bad faith on my part. These are instances in which I placed my need to establish the rhetorical persona of being reasonable and moderate, in a piece of writing that was intended for broad public consumption as a counter to media and political claims that English teachers are relativistic and extremist, ahead of making my argument on the basis of what I believe to be the more complex realities of English and English teaching. I can see now that I had traded in my autonomy – or committed an act of violence against myself in Levinasian terms – by acceding to and therefore reinforcing the dominance of an Other. By being concerned primarily with strategizing in the “said”, I was compromised ethically in the “saying”. I allowed myself to become ensnared in contestation on terms that were being set by Donnelly, passively accepting the ground rules he established as to what is acceptable and not acceptable to say. I did so in order that I might represent myself (on his terms and not my own) as someone recognisably “human” and qualified to speak (cf. Butler). In retrospect, what is even more galling about this is the way that it led me to not accept my responsibility to significant third parties: my students and those theorists of critical literacy who, as I have written about elsewhere, have been a significant influence on my work (Howie, 2002).

By generalising about the experiences of my students, I do not even begin to do justice to the complexities of their individual experiences of the dynamics of the teaching and learning taking place in my classroom. I fail to acknowledge their generosity and the trust they place in me by bringing their outside experiences and a questioning spirit into my classroom, ably “co-writing” the curriculum we enact together. They become faceless and nameless ciphers, props to my rhetorical positioning of my teaching self for public consumption as the acceptable “face” of contemporary English teaching.

Similarly, my reassuring representation of critical literacy as “a necessary and logical extension of the traditional concerns of English” is, I would maintain, a defensible position (cf. Howie, 2006a) but being “said” as it was in my original piece, it still amounts to a rhetorical “glossing over” of complex and fraught issues. In what some might see as a shoe-horning of critical literacy to fit the familiar liberal humanist discourse of history as progress, it might well be said that I have denied the profound challenge to dominant, historical understandings of the world and English as a subject presented by critical literacy because of its post-structuralist underpinnings (cf. Morgan, 2007; 1997). If this is so, it follows that I have not done justice to the complexity of thought and depth of learning which has informed this understanding of the subject, and the struggles of those educators who have sought to propagate it. I have responded, it must therefore be admitted, to the words of these Others, and therefore to them, in a very selective and limited sense. They have been subsumed by own pragmatic needs, my “I think”, no matter how or necessary or valid I might have believed this to be at the time, and beyond my obedience to the rhetorical requirements and limitations of a chosen form of writing. In summary, the “failure” of
my original piece might be understood as a failure of imagination and an ethical failure. I was unable to imagine how I might respond to Donnelly in a way that resists and exceeds the limitations imposed by the genre and rhetorical demands of argumentation. I was also not open enough to the experiences of my students and intellectual influences to find a way to make them more present in my piece, to allow their “consciousnesses” to exist alongside my own dialogically (cf. Bakhtin, 1984).

CONCLUSION

Dialogical ethics holds that “self is dependent for its existence on the Other who provides a source of new meanings and a new semiotic basis for becoming, or enabling new selves to come” (Kostogriz, p. 10). Responding to Donnelly, as I have done here, is a logical continuation of the storying of my professional self: a necessary, open-ended and ongoing response to changes in my conditions of working and being, as I continue the process of “person building” or “self-definition” (Goodson, 2005, p. 85) in and through the dialogic relations I have with others. In short, this response is both a form of critical enquiry into my own work as an English teacher and a representative for other English teachers and a professional responsibility, if I am to understand myself as an accomplished teacher of English according to the standards developed by the professional body I now head (AATE & ALEA, 2002).

In writing this paper I have acted knowing that the Levinasian understanding of ethics affords me a form of (critical) response that goes beyond defensiveness or opposition. The idea and the ideal served here is justice, which Levinas understands as the relation to the Other. The Levinasian Other is manifest as a “disturbance” (Levinas, 2000, p. 89), which calls me to apology; to justify myself and my freedom (of praxis), not to prove that such freedom exists but to render it just. As Derrida has emphasised in explaining the influence of Levinas on his own thinking, in relating to the other as the other – not as someone I can presume to know from the “inside”, as if we are one – I must retain a distance, or dissociation (see Caputo, 1997, pp. 14-15). In other words, I have had to resist any temptation to assert myself over Donnelly or to presume to “know” him. Here, I have not sought to claim to speak for Donnelly, subsuming his thoughts and language within my own. I have attempted to avoid simply trumpeting the correctness of my thinking above his. Instead, I have tried to find ways to be hospitable, resisting the egotistical impulse to win a curriculum debate. As I have critiqued Donnelly’s “power”, highlighting the arbitrary elements and violence of his reading of English and Howie, I have inevitably had to seek out and pass judgement on the same forces at work in my writing. As Levinas would have it, notions such as “conscience” and “justice” mean this is only to be welcomed.

The call by proponents of dialogical ethics for teachers to “extend the ethic of responsibility by learning first to embrace the Other within [ourselves]” (Kostogriz and Doecke, p.22), in order that we might become responsible for those we encounter, has left me very conscious of how necessary – if difficult – it is to conceive a generous, open-ended response that escapes the sort of monologic discourse that inevitably emanates from a combative reading and writing position. To adopt the latter position can only “finalize and deaden” (Bakhtin, 1984, p.59), or work against
the unfinalizability and indeterminacy of consciousness, and the possibility of new understandings and new ways of being in the world.

For this reason, there is a broader social good arising from the politics of representing English and English teachers as they have been explored here. Derrida argues that it is a hospitable (Levinasian) orientation to the Other that constitutes democracy (Caputo, 1997, pp. 41-44; cf. Lucy, 1995). Moreover, according to Derrida, such a welcoming of the Other is the cultural inheritance of the Enlightenment, and best promoted through the will to question and freedom of interpretation (Caputo, 1997; cf. Lucy and Mickler, 2006). In responding to Donnelly in a dialogic and ethical manner, I might modestly, within the limits of my professional and personal powers and the social relations in and through which I work, claim to be contributing to the ongoing, non-finalizable project that is democracy:

... we must always welcome [others] and let them remain other than us. We must do so, always. For there could never come a time when there were no more strangers left to welcome, no more differences to acknowledge and affirm, which is why Derrida always speaks of democracy as democracy to come (Lucy and Mickler, p. 37).

Such professional work as writing this piece can also be located in the project of democracy to the extent that issues of representation, or who is said to be entitled to “speak” on social and cultural issues (such as English education) and what is said to count as valid knowledge, relate to the possibility of advancing, and not limiting, diverse ideas, interests and ways of being in the world (cf. Lucy and Mickler, p. 5). I am not alone in arguing that such a possibility is central to the historic project of English (for example, Green, 2006; Kress, 2006). Advocacy by English teachers is therefore more than a professional responsibility: it is a democratic necessity because, as Bakhtin and Levinas remind us, one more response is always required. The catch is, of course, that a response to the (Othered) self is just as much required as it is to the Other. What dialogical ethics adds to our understanding of critical literacy as a mode of resistance is that a finalized understanding of the English teaching “self” is to be resisted by individual English teachers seeking to resist a restricted and restricting understanding of their work and their professional identity. Refusing the limiting of ways of being an English teacher is essential to the public struggle to prevent the neo-conservative closure of the subject.

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Text 7: ‘Authenticity was never really the question’: reading, ethics and the historical interruption of Literature teaching by English

This book chapter was published in Literary Praxis: A Conversational Inquiry into the Teaching of Literature. This book was structured as a “conversational inquiry”, or a set of dialogic exchanges between teachers and educators from around the world about the teaching of literature. I highlight the place ‘Literature’ and ‘epi-reading’ appear to retain in the classroom practices of two of my co-contributors, going on to describe the enduring challenge a dominant liberal humanist model of literary criticism consequently presents to ineffable ‘otherness’ in English. Engaging with the original critical-creative work of a Year 12 student, I highlight counter possibilities for an ethical form of ethical criticism and expressive writing in English teaching, aligning such practices with the Derridean notion of democracy that is always to come.
11. ‘AUTHENTICITY WAS NEVER REALLY THE QUESTION’

Reading, Ethics and the Historical Interruption of Literature
Teaching by English

‘Criticism must be sensitive to the way in which language reveals the other and our responsibilities to the other’ (Eagleton, 1997, pp. 7–8).

ONE

The teaching of literature has historically had a concern with ethics (Eagleton, 1997; Hunter, 1997; Scholes, 1989). Thus it is not surprising that the pieces by my Australian and Dutch co-contributors should emphasise the sort of reflection and judgement that allows readers to connect what is represented in texts to aspects of their being in the world. Evident in their contributions are practices which accord with Hunter’s identification of an enduring ethical emphasis in the teaching of literature in schools. We see in them what Hunter describes as the ‘superimposition in the ... classroom’ (p. 315) of an ‘aesthetic pedagogy and its use as an instrument for ... social and moral training’ (p. 319). Ramon, Mies and Piet-Hein begin by emphasising the importance of self-reflection in reading: ‘We will assume that identification and recognition of personal experiences can grant access to a text, so the text can be used for further personal development’. Prue writes of the importance of reflection, depicting it as a step to self-actualisation for students. Through engaging in reflective writing in response to literary texts, she argues, students can learn to ‘speak in their own voice’.

In both of these examples we can also see the influence of ‘epi-reading’, a concept Eagleton takes from a schema developed by Donoghue (1981), as perhaps the dominant reading practice in English studies, if not, as the Dutch contribution suggests, mother tongue education more generally. As Eagleton explains it, the practice of epi-reading is founded on intentionality, or ‘the desire to hear ... the absent person’ (Donoghue, quoted in Eagleton, p. 7). In this practice, the reader transposes the words on the page into a ‘somehow corresponding situation of persons, voices, characters, conflicts, conciliations’ (Donoghue, quoted in Eagleton, p. 3).

I have, for the most part, read the texts of my co-contributors with a sense of affinity. As an Australian teacher of senior secondary English, I recognise the reading pedagogy depicted in these texts to take place in the space between two key historic models or discourses that also continue to underpin the curriculum in

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my home state of New South Wales (NSW). These are the ‘cultural heritage’ model, which understands literature as ‘Literature’, a canon of writing that is supposedly universally valued for being the best (intellectually, aesthetically and morally) that has been thought and written, and ‘growth pedagogy’ (Reid, 2003), which locates the focus of English teaching in the language and experience of young people, in contradistinction to any valuing of the ‘great’ texts of ‘our’ cultural heritage. It is certainly the case that tensions exist within senior secondary English in NSW, where traces of the past dominance and prestige of Literature have remained highly influential following the historical interruption of Literature teaching by (the New) English after the famous Dartmouth conference of 1966 (cf. Dixon, 1967; Peel, 2000). Dartmouth, of course, is associated with growth pedagogy, a subject model which opened up the possibility for young people to appropriate literary texts as a moment in the formation of their identities, in a way that is akin to – though not, as I shall explain, identical with – the ethical imperative that Eaglestone describes. As such, growth pedagogy has offered a sense of the possibilities for an ethic of reading that has perhaps never been fully realised in senior Secondary English in Australia.

I will go on to argue that this has been so primarily because of the paradoxical reliance of personal growth on the enduring and overshadowing influence of Literature, through a shared grounding in epi-reading, for whatever purchase it has attained at this level. My contention, in short, is that the enduring influence of the discourse of Literature in schools exceeds the inclusion of ‘classic’ works on reading lists. It is perhaps even more evident in the prevailing influence of epi-reading, and the way this practice has come to be applied to a more expansive range of texts and textual forms. As Hunter argues, the notion that English and literature teaching offer ‘a privileged moral insight into all departments of ethical life’ (p. 332) has been remarkably enduring, despite changes in curriculum, including changes to reading lists and course structures and content (cf. Patterson, 2008).

Recontextualised in terms of the secondary English or mother tongue classroom, Eaglestone’s understanding of ethical criticism enables a different sort of focus on the relationship between ethics and literature teaching to that of Hunter. Eaglestone moves considerations beyond the superimposition of ethics through particular pedagogies of reading and responding to literature. His thinking shifts attention instead to how particular pedagogical practices employed in the teaching of literature are being experienced by students as ethical subjects. In other words, Eaglestone’s notion of ethical criticism offers a way of ‘attending to the ethical in the textual’ (p. 7), and not just the ethical capacities that students might develop through an experience of texts that is defined by ‘a strong tradition of pastoral guidance and self-reflective practice’ (Patterson, 2008, p. 314). Student readers are not simply trained in ethics; rather, their lived experience of the classroom is ethically implicated and has ethical significance.

As my prefacing quotation from Eaglestone implies, the act of reading bestows upon the reader the responsibility of responding in some form. Accordingly, I respond to my co-contributors by reflecting on my teaching of the NSW English Extension 2 course. In this course, as I will make clear, the ongoing tensions in secondary English between the historic subject discourses of Literature and growth-influenced
English are very obvious. (Patterson suggests that the senior years curricula of other Australian states put greater emphasis on ethics than the NSW curriculum [2008, pp. 320–321]. This could well indicate that such tensions will also be obvious in classrooms in other states; certainly, as shall be seen, my reading of Prue's contribution suggests that this is the case in Victoria.) Taking my lead from the work of Eaglestone on ethical criticism, I explore the possibilities for ethical self-reflection when students write in response to texts in an expressive manner, a pedagogy I associate most strongly with personal growth. Expressive writing of this sort might also be characterised as the translation of epi-reading into an overtly subjective critical writing practice, and therefore in keeping with the idea that such a reading is also the translation of words to acts (Eaglestone, p. 3), such as – in this particular example – the expression of a new moral sensibility. My engagement with the thinking of Eaglestone will take me in turn to the philosophy of Levinas, which informs Eaglestone's understanding of ethics.

My contention is that the defining practices of Literature teaching and personal growth pedagogy do not adequately prepare students to recognise and act in response to the way 'language reveals the other and our responsibilities to the other'. This, it must be stressed, is not to deny that personal growth otherwise appears to have been a historic interruption of Literature teaching, its pedagogical 'other', promoting an alternative ethic through its emphasis on teachers engaging with the 'otherness' of their students, making space for their lives, language and voices in the official curriculum. However, as I will go on to explain, (growth-influenced) English retains the paradigmatic assumption of Literature teaching that the 'realm of ethics is separate from the realm of the aesthetic, or from works of literature', making it necessary for readers to proceed 'through the text to a realm of ethics' (Eaglestone, p. 30). In other words, both subject discourses, for all their differences, assume the separation of ethics and language.

My own commitment is to a form of English studies that involves a revivalised commitment to ethics, heeding the 'ethical call for interruption' (Eaglestone, p. 164) by promoting a pluralistic understanding of reading and response and, consequently, the subject positions available to students. This is as distinct from the 'cultural heritage model', which advocates of growth pedagogy criticised, and from growth pedagogy itself.

The ethic of reading to which I aspire understands the different reading positions available to student readers to be grounded in key historic models or discourses of the subject English. These models or discourses are sometimes represented as competing (Morgan, 1997, p. 17). A concern with ethics that welcomes the arrival of the other, in this instance the pedagogical other, is likely to suggest that these discourses are best approached in a way that resists the reductive logic of the same, which is characteristic, for example, of dialectical synthesis, or reading in a manner that is simply oppositional. Certainly, this is the position to the different subject discourses that I am advocating here, when considering their pedagogical recontextualisation. I have sought in my teaching to bring the subject models or discourses underpinning the NSW curriculum into a dynamic, transformative relationship (Howle, 2005). This is one that requires students to engage with the idea that
reading and the making of meaning are open-ended, contingent and provisional activities that are fully mediated. Meaning, as I understand it, is not transcendentally derived from, nor does it originate in, the unique and singular consciousness of the individual, be it the author or the reader. On these terms, an ethical understanding of reading and reading pedagogy is one that remains open to difference and even surprise, recognising – and, importantly, keeping in play – the meaning making possibilities stemming from the characteristic approaches of different subject models. In short, I argue that an ethical reading is one that instantiates a centrifugal movement outwards from a fixed centre, resisting a singular, definitive response or a ‘final’ word, all the while keeping students’ attention on the relationship between language, text and self-expression. Having worked through to this understanding, it is here that I find my sense of affinity with my co-contributors’ representations of their pedagogy lessens and becomes problematic.

TWO

In my text I signal a particular stance towards a certain historical understanding and discourse of literature and its teaching, using grandiose capitalisation to represent it as ‘Literature’. Following Widdowson (1999), I do this to signal the rarefied nature of Literature as a concept and pedagogical instrument. Historically, exorbitant claims have been made for the institutionalised study of Literature. These claims have been succinctly summarised by Widdowson, who suggests that ‘By the middle of the twentieth century, in the Anglo-American tradition, the concept Literature was centrally established [as] a selective and valuable aesthetic and moral resource to replenish those living in the spiritual desert of a mass civilization’ (p. 59). As a consequence of this historical development, students, particularly in the senior secondary years, have been expected to access such replenishing ethical and civilizing resources by learning the practices of criticism, in order that they might internalise – or make their own – certain moral messages. The aspirations held for Literature teaching in its liberal humanist guise, which give it a prophylactic function in response to rising secularism and the supposed depravities of modernity, set before it what Eaglestone calls an ‘emancipatory ethical mission’ (p. 15).

The enduring influence of Literature has been particularly evident in 2010, with widespread attention being given to the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of Harper Lee’s To Kill a Mockingbird. Noteworthy in commentary surrounding this event has been the emphasis placed on the ubiquity of the novel in classrooms throughout the western world (see, for example, Craven, 2010). In general, commentators have depicted the novel’s main character, Atticus Finch, as the supreme liberal individual. He has also been understood to reflect the humanistic, ahistorical and apolitical values of his creator. Craven’s epi-reading of Mockingbird, for example, rests on both his assertion that Atticus Finch is indisputably an archetype of goodness and his contention that Lee has escaped the net of racial politics and American history, instead writing in a universal and timeless voice that is ‘something like moral truth’.

At this point, I feel it necessary to emphasise a certain problem, or paradox, for the ethical claims of the sort of reading practices Craven applies to Mockingbird
when they are used in the classroom. In a liberal, humanist model of teaching
Mockingbird, the student 'self' is brought into being and validated to the extent
that he or she is willing to be subsumed by the literary other, identifying with
Atticus Finch in order to take on the values of Harper Lee as his or her own.

By the same token, as all of this suggests, the idealised other of any Literary text
has always already been conjured into being before the act of reading begins. As
I have argued above, within a humanist model of Literature teaching it is in fact
this conjuring act that largely enables a text to be defined as Literary and worthy of
study. It is entirely unremarkable that To Kill a Mockingbird should be so popular
with teachers, for it presents an ideal of selfhood that is congruent with the ideals
of liberal democracy. As Craven describes it, the novel is a 'morality tale for
millions'. It consequently depicts values and ways of being in the world that are
certainly not going to be discovered for the first time in the didactic exchanges that
ideally characterise an English or Literature classroom. To the contrary, how most
teachers will want students to respond to this novel has, half a century on, been
well and truly decided before the students begin reading it. For example, one
Australian teacher (Spries, 1999:2000) has outlined the professional isolation she
experienced in seeking to question the dominant liberal, humanist approach to
teaching Mockingbird of her colleagues.

To the extent that reading Literature is indistinguishable from a particular under-
standing of criticism, the Literature student is by definition required to learn how to
perform such criticism. Studying Literature might consequently be characterised
as learning to operate from a set of pre-given strategies and understandings, or
learning to do and be the same as every other reader-critic. A paradox is evident
here. The great individualising mission of liberal, humanist criticism – Bloom
(1994) writes of reading Literature as the 'relation of an individual reader and
writer' (p. 17) – seems to be of a piece with normalisation, reducing 'difference' to
'sameness' by ascribing for students a particular way of approaching the task of
reading, and setting in place boundaries of acceptability in terms of what can be
said or written in response. I can return here to the example of To Kill a Mockingbird.

Operating within the liberal, humanist model of Literary criticism, renowned
Australian critic Craven responds to those who would dare to suggest that the novel
has racist undertones by delimiting its meaning in definitive terms: 'it should not
be sneered at in the light of politically pious hindsight'.

It therefore seems clear to me that Literature teaching strives for wholeness,
completeness, unity, symmetry and closure. There is little room here for ineffable
'otherness'. Evident in the emphasis that Literature has traditionally placed on
attaining a definitive reading that makes clear an indisputable and universal moral
message is a paradoxical quest for certainty that might be understood to be ethically
lacking. This is so because of its reliance, as is evident in Craven's reading of
Mockingbird, on a 'standard of correctness set by an author's sense of life'
(Nussbaum, quoted in Eagleton, p. 51). Such reliance on authorial intention, which
does not hold up to sustained examination, as Eagleton has shown,
creates a totalising system which enacts a form of 'violence', in that it disallows
'multiplicity in being' (Leviathan, 1969, p. 216). Admittedly, the humanist
understanding of reading as a process of identification and enactment made possible by authorial intention would appear, at first glance, to be defined by sympathy for the other, and consequently entirely ethical on the terms I have begun to outline here. This is an understanding, for example, that I recognise as underpinning the teaching of my co-constructor Mies, who describes using empathetic responses to fiction to open her students’ eyes to social inequality and injustice. However, Levinas argues that an ethical relationship with the other cannot be reduced to ‘a movement of sympathy merging us with him [sie]’ (p. 89). Moreover, taking his cue from Levinas, Eaglestone (pp. 48–52) makes the case for how identification and enactment demands a certain solidarity and symmetry – a refusal of surprise – that calls into question the ethical claims of empathetic reading. Without denying its necessity at some point to teaching and learning in a Literature or English classroom (cf. Thomson, 1987), this sort of thinking about ethics gives us, at the very least, pause to reconsider the claims made in Mies’s piece and Craven’s commentary on Mockingbird as to the primacy of empathetic reading as a pedagogical goal.

A further defining element of Literature teaching, in contradistinction to English, is its emphasis on reception at the expense of composition (Sawyer, 2006). I will subsequently go on to consider the implications of this hierarchy for varied types of expressive writing undertaken by students in response to texts, which True describes as students ‘speak[ing] in their own voice, of their own response’. My particular focus will be the possibilities for an ethical (self) criticism of the sort that Scholes (1989) advocates, in which we rewrite our lives as we read, through the pedagogy of having students reflect in writing on their own reading responses.

THREE

The teaching of English in secondary schools has historically sought to differentiate itself from the teaching of Literature. English has come to include texts drawn from popular culture and – most significantly – students’ own texts (cf. Peel, 2006; Sawyer, 2006). Such a shift in orientation has significantly involved the movement from a central concern with Literary criticism, or responding to and evaluating the writing of others, to valuing student composition. The study of English is concerned with students reading the texts of others, the text that is the world around them, and the text of their own lives in order that they might actively give shape to their own experience in their own compositions. This echoes Scholes’s ethical injunction that we keep on reading in order that we might ‘keep on rewriting the texts that we read in the texts of our lives, and keep on rewriting our lives in the light of those texts’ (p. 155). English would appear to have embraced difference and heterogeneity, rather than the sameness reflected in a shared Literary tradition and the practices of liberal, humanist Literary criticism. It seemingly remains open ended and does not seek a definitive understanding or final word. Students are working out how to be in the world, in their own way and largely for themselves, in dialogue with significant others. To the extent that it is accurate to suggest that English students are expected to do more than internalise particular (already) authored and authorised views of being in the world, English seems to be ethical in the sense in which
Scholes and Eagleton appear to misunderstand this word. English brings the realm of the ethical into the classroom and the realm of language, in a spirit of 'fraternity and discourse' (Levinas, p. 216) that remains interruptive and asymmetrical. This allows students the space to reflect upon and 'rewrite' their lives in response to the texts they read, meaning English resists the reduction of the other to the same, which is essentially the 'mission' of literature teaching as I have described it above. Such, at least, is the ethical promise of English, not least because of the defining influence of personal growth pedagogy. For the way these arguments have been played out at the level of policy and in classrooms is obviously very complicated.

One particular complication relates to the highly problematic notion of authorial intention, and how it is implicated in both the study of literature and English. A concern with intentionality, which plays such a key role in the study of literature, did not disappear with the historic movement from literature to English. To the contrary, authorial intention - and its corollaries of presence, truth, and authenticity - can be understood to have actually made possible the shift from literature to English. As Gilbert (1989) argues, (so-called New) English took the idea of criticism as a direct engagement with an author's mind, intentions, preoccupations, and recontextualised it in terms of student composition, establishing the primacy of the pedagogical goal of students writing in a personal manner that is at once honest and sincere. This view of English accords with Eagleton's description of epireading, highlighting how authorial intention is actually as essential to the identity and being of English as it is literature. Intention is an enduring and necessary supplement to students' understanding of themselves as readers and as writers in both of these significant discourses of English studies, and this stems from the shared grounding of these discourses in the critical practice of epireading. Intentionality is essential to any understanding of texts, whether those written by established writers or students, as a direct expression of 'self', and elides contradiction and difference, collapsing meaning and form into one. Largely ignored by the proponents of epireading is the fact that 'self' expression, as a type of response that follows on from that form of 'reading' which is making sense or meaning of one's own being and the surrounding world, is no less subject to the exigencies of rhetoric and the vices of interpretation ... to the whole regime of temporality and sexuality (Scholes, p. 154) than a literary critical response. Phenix (1990), for example, describes expressive writing as a form of self-talk, that allows us to 'be ourselves' (p. 73).

As Scholes's formulation of the 'whole regime of temporality and sexuality' suggests, it is never possible to posit a notion of 'voice' that is singular, authentic and present to itself, whether one is referring to writing done by students, or writing done by others to which students are responding. As it is impossible to appeal to the presence of the author behind the text as a way to secure meaning, an appeal to intention also cannot function as a gauge of the validity of a student's interpretation. Moreover, if the 'presence' of the author behind the 'text' cannot secure the meaning of a literary work, students' expressive writing similarly cannot be understood as the authentic expression of a transcendental consciousness. Such writing is always
constructed, always produced according to a set of protocols set in advance. There are always gaps (temporal, intellectual, emotional, physical ...) between the student author and the autobiographical subject. This is the case with both the critical and the expressive writing students are required to produce in response to Literary texts. There is no 'personal' response in either case. Both forms of writing are examples of school writing, by which I mean writing that is doing certain kinds of identity work sanctioned by schooling.

On these grounds, English and Literature teaching become largely indistinguishable because they are unified in (impossibly) presupposing a singular, whole and complete human agent. The 'interruption' of Literature teaching by English has perhaps not been as abrupt and definitive as some have suggested (see, for example, Donnelly, 2007). This suggestion of an 'alternative' history calls into question the (interruptive) ethical promise of English in its relationship with Literature, and focuses attention on the work being done in classrooms by teachers to bring some sort of disciplinary order to the relationship between Literature and English.

FOUR

In the texts by my Australian and Dutch co-contributors, I see an evident tension between the power and status of Literature and the ethical promise that arises from reading and responding to Literary texts under the influence of other subject discourses or models. Such a tension inevitably creates paradoxes in reading pedagogy, as is evident in the way that – returning to the example at hand – the ethical promise of English in its interruption of Literature has been stymied.

On my reading, Prue sets herself and her students the apparently impossible task of melding a liberal humanist discourse of Literature teaching with an emphasis on the (supposedly but impossibly) authentic self-reflection that English values. This is evident when one of her students reflects, with no hint of irony or incongruity, on the efforts she and others have made to 'understand both the meaning Farrier had intended and what the stories meant to us'; as if these two different types and levels of interpretation can be reconciled and held at the same time in a Literature course. Prue's emphasis on the presence of the author behind the text to secure 'authentic' meaning, which is actually made manifest in a rare classroom visit – 'Fortunately for us' – by the author being studied, has clearly been internalised by this student. Certain of Prue's students have apparently come to believe – even if they remained unaware of this or could not express their awareness in the manner I am here – that the extent to which they are allowed to be able to 'speak in their own voice' is delimited by the degree of correlation between 'their own response' and what it has already been agreed that the author was likely to have meant, if not what she actually said she meant when she visited.

A type of symmetry is clearly at work here. The responding student must genuflect before the implied figure of the author, her response being little more than a variation on the same, by which I mean a socially agreed interpretation as to what the author might have meant that has already been determined by and within the interests and 'boundaries' of liberal, humanist criticism. The apparently otherwise
ethic movement towards self-realisation, or students finding their own ‘voice’ and in so doing interrupting a fixed and monologic understanding of the studied Literature, in effect sees them echoing a collective voice that is also somehow attributable at the same time to the monolithic figure of the author. Consequently, in Prue’s text we see the responses of students being disciplined, in the sense that they are brought into line with the sort of criticism demanded by the discipline of a liberal, humanist study of Literature. This eventuates despite Prue’s attempts to open her Literature classroom to influence of pedagogical strategies more directly associated with personal growth and English, as seen in her emphasis on students writing expressively, in an online and collaborative environment, to their reading.

Despite Prue’s ethical orientation towards ‘opening up’ her Literature course to a pedagogical other, I still detect in her piece a sense that the reflective writing she has required of her students is not of the same value as meaning making processes more closely associated with Literature teaching. In other words, the relationship between Literature and English in Prue’s classroom appears to remain hierarchical and symmetrical, even as she stresses the disruptive value of pedagogies that are more growth orientated in nature. Of the classroom visit by the author her class is studying, Prue writes:

She draws them in with her funny stories against herself and paints a picture of a young woman with whom they can all identify. The students are in awe.

They find that she is not a rabid, man hating feminist at all. This is arresting for them, some comment that they need to rethink their hasty conclusions, that they might read her work differently now.

In effect, by inviting the author (and her intentions) into her classroom, literally and otherwise, Prue is arguing that reading Farmer’s work ‘differently’ for her students means they should actually begin to read it as it should be read; that is, the way it might be conceived Farmer would have it be read. This amounts to the closing and fixing of a desired set of meanings. Farmer’s presence certainly provokes recognition of values and ways of being that initially went unrecognised by Prue’s students. In this way, the students do appear to be rewriting their lives in light of the text they have been reading. But paradoxically this also involves a kind of identity or identification with the author, a kind of collapsing of their ‘selves’ within the ‘self’ that Farmer offers them.

Here we see Prue’s emphasis on expressive writing run smack against the enduring force of liberal, humanist criticism and the requirement that students read and respond to Literature in a sanctioned manner. The necessity of certain critical protocols, particularly the notion of authorial intention guiding students’ reading, does not sit readily with Prue’s professed belief that reflective writing (as an expression of the student self) will help them to refine and extend their understandings of Literature. In the context of a senior secondary English curriculum, emphasis on expressive writing is clearly underpinned by competing, perhaps even irreconcilable impulses. One impulse values instinctive (or pre-reflective) self-expression. The other is rather suspicious of self-expression, instead valuing critical refinement and emphasising (self) discipline. Prue herself describes this as rectifying
students' 'blind spots'. As such, her emphasis on what she calls metacognition runs the risk of opening the space of interiority only to close it, doing violence to her students' understanding of themselves and their being by making alien aspects of themselves which they might otherwise value.

I would emphasise that such a consequence is a structural inevitability, likely to be brought about by any attempt to open Literature to the influence of pedagogies more closely associated with English and personal growth. Certainly, it is a consequence that is clearly evident in one example of a student's expressive writing that Prue quotes: 'Unfortunately I'm not very good at metacognition ... and sometimes I abandon logic for emotion and intuition.' Represented here is a surprising turn of events: a student feeling they must apologise, in an English studies class no less, for feeling different and not wanting to be constrained by an imposed interpretation (in this case of their very being as a student). For all the work Prue's students have done on learning how to continue to refine and extend their responses to Literature, the student in question at least has found this to have limited applicability to her own developing sense of self.

Prue's efforts to interrupt the study of Literature in her class, working towards a very different ethic of reading from that propagated by the powerful liberal humanist discourse, would seem to have been undermined by the enduring force of authorial intention. Her efforts to create the pedagogical space for a very different understanding of the act of response, which acknowledges the value of reflective writing by students, actually reinforces the notion of authorial intention, and paradoxically serves to highlight the gap between the more instinctive nature of students' personal responses and the more disciplined responses they are apparently still expected to produce within the enacted curriculum. That this is so is attributable to the fact that such expressive writing is still intended to be critical in nature, which is to say it is the product of epi-reading. The very idea that drives Prue to open her pedagogy to other, asymmetrical influences, paradoxically also becomes the reason for effectively closing it off, as she does by literally inviting the author into her classroom and consequently (re)establishing a symmetrical relation between her students and the 'otherness' of the text they are studying. Prue's thinking appears to be that if she can go directly to the original source of meaning, why not go beyond the text and do so. Her pedagogy ultimately cannot engage with Otherness, at least in the way that Eaglestone and Scholes suggest, because of the enduring disciplinary power of epi-reading, with its emphasis on authorial intention.

FIVE

Prue's 'failure' to bring about an ethical criticism in her classroom, as reflected in the examples she provides of her students' expressive writing, is clearly not a consequence of some personal or pedagogical failing. It is a failure, as I have argued, that was structurally determined by a curriculum that has been formed not from the interruption of Literature by English, but from the sunsumming of English by Literature, when the latter is understood as being of a piece with a form of criticism that privileges intention. Subsequently, hierarchies of power and value in
relation to criticism and composition were consequently (re)formed in Prue’s classroom, and these appeared to marginalise the more growth-like expressive writing by her students that she otherwise sought to privilege.

The structural limitations that inevitably made problematic the status of the expressive writing undertaken by Prue’s students would seem, from Piet-Hein’s contribution, to be more generally an issue of mother tongue education when it has a literary focus. Piet-Hein notes that ‘one can have a reading experience and subsequently reflect upon it in writing’. He also notes that experience ‘can be a skill as well as a discovery’. This sense of key structural differences being inherent in acts of reading and response, dividing each from the other, is very useful in highlighting that the experience of reading, and whatever understandings and reactions this might produce, is not to be conflated with the act of writing about this experience. It cannot be assumed that the writing a student produces about their reading is in fact an immediate and faithful transcription of the authentic, pre-writing ‘discoveries’ he or she has made in the act of reading. An example from Mies’s contribution highlights what I mean.

Mies expresses every confidence that the reading log entries her students have made in response to Blue is Bitter are authentic, or somehow ‘pre-textual, a-contextual, [and] utterly unmediated’ (Lucy, 2010a, p. 17). They are, it would seem, understood by her to be significant indicators of moral development and the realisation of the ethical goals informing her teaching. However, a response such as that by Anna, who is quoted as having written ‘I did not know that boys can also be prostituted, how awful!’, casts doubt on this assertion. Anna might well have felt awful. However, given the confronting and distressing content of the book she was reading, as outlined by Mies, it could be argued that she was always going to write such a response, once the reading log task had been set. I remain unconvinced that Anna’s emotional response, as heart-felt as it appears to be, originates purely from or with her. From my experience, and as Prue’s reflections indicate, students are able to ‘read’ the hidden curriculum very incisively. It is not hard to imagine that Anna knew that the writing task before her required a certain sort of response, and that only a certain sort of response would be acceptable to her teacher, who had, after all, selected the novel for very overt reasons related to social justice education. Knowing her teacher was going to read and evaluate her response, Anna could hardly have written, say, ‘I did not know that boys can also be prostituted. It is pleasing to see that gender equality is now evident in even the most heinous of criminal activities. Our society has truly advanced.’ In the formation of Anna’s response, her ‘reading’ of her teacher’s intentions and desires will be integrated with her pre-existing understandings of sociality, community and morality, helping her to intuit the sort of ethical ‘self’ that is best (or most prudently) expressed in her present circumstances. And this is a ‘self’ that Mies was clearly already anticipating, displacing Anna’s inner-life as the singular and originating centre of her reading log response, including its morality.

As I would suggest is the case with any form of expressive writing, a reading log is a performance. In it students perform being a reflecting reader and writer, creating a complex persona with which they should not be immediately equated. In
this sense, and despite the attempts of Ramon, Mies and Prue to distinguish between Literary (i.e. critical) and expressive responses to text, the subject position a reading log makes available to students is not so very different to that made available to them by a traditional critical response. To describe a reading log as a performance does not make the responses students have recorded untruthful or not genuine. But it does emphasise that intentionality cannot be secured by the apparent presence of the (student) author behind the text; it reminds us that, contrary to the claims of liberal, humanist criticism, intention is a 'particular textual effect, distilled by critical readings but always exceeded by the text' (Culler, 1983, p. 218).

Mies is, by her own admission, more interested in promoting empathy for others, or epi-reading, than exploring issues of textuality. As she describes her pedagogy, she appears to treat the characters and the events in the novel she has selected for class study as if they have a life of their own, and are not representations. She expects her students to do the same. As a consequence, in this particular representation of her teaching, she apparently takes little concern with the textually mediated nature of the relationship between her students’ responses to their reading and the type of writing they are expected to do in their logs. She does not, for example, read and evaluate Anna’s response beyond its intentionality, or as anything other than the expression of her student’s inner-life. For this reason, at least on my reading of what is only a very partial representation of her classroom, she appears to have little interest in the sort of ethical questions relating to reading that theorists like Eagleton pose, offering instead a genuine but problematic vision of ethics being engaged in the teaching of literature.

In responding to Prue’s text I have observed that she encouraged her students to engage in metacommentary and online discussion that was supposed to somehow reflect their authentic ‘selves’ – the ‘self’ that freely engages with and responds to the text. I argued that this notion of writing as an expression of self elides the ways that writing is also a taught practice. So, too, with Mies’s class and the reading logs students were writing. In the interests of promoting a particular ethical understanding of reading and responding to Literature (or, as is more accurate for Mies’s class, literature), I have replied to both Mies and Prue by highlighting the limitations of appeals to authorial intention, whether in students’ own texts or those of others, to secure meaning, and the consequent need to teach students to be reflective about their reflective and expressive writing. It has been my contention that teachers need, in the interests of an ethical understanding of reading and response, to help students to come to understand their expressive writing in response to Literature as a constructed, textual artefact, bringing into being a certain sort of self in a way that bears comparison with their supposedly more impersonal and objective critical writing. As a consequence, students might come to better understand the performative elements of such writing, and the reading practices upon which it depends. In fact, in my teaching of the Extension 2 course in NSW, I have found it to be the case that helping students to come to a deep understanding of reflective and expressive writing in response to texts, including their own, is integral to their success. In this course, responding to text in a personal way is a ‘skill’ as much as it is a discovery, and consequently it is something that can be enhanced by teaching
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students to understand their own authorial presence as an effect of textuality rather than intention. This, I would suggest, requires an ethic of reading that recognises the ethical dimensions of lived classroom experience, and which is sympathetic to the points of convergence to be found in the thinking of Scholes and Eaglestone.

SIX

Since the introduction in 2000 of the current NSW syllabus (Board Of Studies, 1999) for the final two years of school, an elite minority of students have been able to undertake a major independent project as part of their matriculation year studies of English. This project takes the form of a major composition, which is submitted for external examination. Given it is centred upon composition, as opposed to reception, the course might be said to be the most overt manifestation in Australia of the historic interruption of Literature by English. Composition is broadly defined in this course. Students choose from options that allow them to work with and in traditional (or Literary) textual forms and non-traditional forms; students are also able to elect to complete a major critical study. It is a further requirement of the course that an accompanying Reflection Statement of 1500 words be completed and submitted with the major work. The main purpose of this document is to explain to the examiner the process the student has undertaken in completing their major work, as well as the work's intended meaning and how this meaning has been realised through aspects of language and form.

My critique of the assumptions of both 'English' and 'Literature' in no small part derives from the fact that I teach the Extension 2 course. Teaching in this course has provided me with an opportunity to think again about the relationship between the subject discourses of Literature and English, reflexively inquiring into the assumptions that underpin my own professional practice, and to explore possibilities for kinds of reading and response that have not hitherto been available to me in my work with students. In the course of teaching this new course, I feel that I have been able to reconceptualise what it means to 'read' and to 'write' in an English classroom. The very process of implementing this course – of grappling with the issues of curriculum design and implementation that a new course involves – has prompted me to rethink these dimensions of my practice.

In particular, it has allowed me to me to recontextualise, and test out in new conditions, the 'transformative model' of programming for response that I have proposed elsewhere (Howie, 2005). In keeping with my theme here, I would like to recast that model in ethical terms. The way the model asks teachers and students to work, in a recursive manner, in and through certain 'frames', each derived from a different subject model or discourse underpinning the NSW curriculum, seems to me to be congruent with Eaglestone's definition of ethical criticism as an 'inter-ruption ... in many different forms' (p. 170). Such an approach to programming seeks always to open out meaning, to encourage another response through different understandings of language and text, enabling – to the extent that this is possible in a school context, with imposed assessment requirements and so on – students to enact the ethic of 'There [being] no final reading, no last word' (Eaglestone, p. 179).
Space does not allow me to show how this programming model works, which is something I have done elsewhere (Howie, 2008 and 2009). Instead, I would like to focus here on some outcomes of its use, highlighting how it has helped one of my students, Sara, to come to rewrite a text she has read in the text of her life, and to rewrite her life in the light of this text. By way of comparison with the sort of expressive writing being undertaken by students in the classroom snapshots provided by my co-contributors, I will seek to highlight the textual strategies Sara has employed in her Reflection Statement, as she strives for an ethical form of textual criticism and expressive writing, resisting any appeal to intention for meaning or the validity of her interpretations.

SEVEN

Sara’s major project was entitled Defining Obama: Exploring Performativity and Authenticity in the Language of Identity Politics. (Her choice of a set of speeches as the basis for her project suggests a further interruption of Literature in the NSW curriculum, in this case by a broad definition of literature, which is able to accommodate the tradition of belle-lettres.) In her Reflection Statement, she summarised her project as follows.

My major work ... seeks to respond to questions of truth and ‘authenticity’ which arise in the study of language. Its exploration of the role and distance between language and identity inevitably leads to consideration of the fluidity identities assume apropos the ethical dimensions of response and criticism. A close reading of the language of Barack Obama, a figure who arguably epitomises the notion of ever-changing identity characteristic of postmodern times, highlights the inherent link between language and identity. In studying and responding to these themes in Obama’s speeches, through the critical frameworks of speech act theory and Derrida’s notion of iterability, my essay seeks to evaluate the validity of a distinction being drawn between authenticity and performativity in communicative acts. From here I consider the implications of this for understanding identity.

Eaglestone’s ethic of (critical) disruption is a very apt description of the different critical-creative strategies employed by Sara in her project. Sara actively writes against the ‘gap’ between the major work and the Reflection Statement, resisting the otherwise reductive functioning of the latter as a means to expound her supposed intentions as the singular author of the former. This is most obvious in certain choices she made in relation to the structural organisation and textuality of her Reflection Statement, which she chose to place before her major work when it was submitted to the NSW Board of Studies for examination.

Sara’s Reflection Statement begins with a heading that reads ‘The Last Word ... or, rather, not’. Tellingly, she does not close this off with a full stop. It then continues with a piece of italicised text that is placed between a top and bottom border, and which does not include a fully formed last word or—again—a full stop. ‘In a final gesture I return to the stage and stand upon it, perpetually. It seems that regardless of how I might try to resist, my performance will never come to an’.
A series of three rhetorical questions follows: ‘What were my intentions? Were they authentic? Do these things matter?’. Here we see a carnalised attitude (cf. Baidstian, 1984) to the reflection statement being adopted, a critical-creative strategy that calls the whole enterprise of the reflection statement into question, most overtly its supposed instantiation of an authorial presence behind the composition. This, of course, is occurring even as Sara sets about fulfilling the formal requirements of this course component. Her central concern with performativity runs on from her essay on Obama, which actually comes after the reflection statement, blurring the lines between critical and expressive forms of response, but without recourse to intentionality. Sara’s experimentation, her performance, has not originated with her, as she acknowledges, but is being depicted as a condition of writing in general. The placement of the reflection in front of the essay is also a form of response by Sara to the task and subject position of being a critical reader of her own text. In this move, she takes the expressive writing required of her beyond the bounds of self-revelation and into an entirely other ethical realm, indicating that the project has left her with the responsibility to fashion and express her (reflective) self in a certain way. She apparently does so in order to enact the conclusions she has arrived at in her essay with regards to the ethical possibilities enabled by certain perspectives on language and text. Sara responds first and foremost in a textual manner to her understanding that she has been called into question by completing her project, as indicated by the first of her rhetorical questions. Sara’s critical reading and writing, in other words, become a way of being that interrupts the very idea of a singular, self-present consciousness and identity, which the Reflection Statement is otherwise expected to establish, and to which both traditional Literary criticism and growth orientated expressive writing refer for meaning and validation. In a sense, in keeping with the ethical aspirations of the transformative programming model I have been working with, Sara has interrupted the historical interruption of Literature by English, practising an alternative form of reading to epi-reading. (Of course, this not to suggest that such a disruption was something she intended.)

The interruption of particular understandings of identity and being is certainly the focus of Sara’s writing in response to her own composition. The refusal of closure is a key element of the ethic enacted through her expressive response to her own writing, as well as her response to the various texts that she read in completing her project. The start of Sara’s Reflection Statement actually picks up from, but – most significantly – refuses to complete the ending of her essay. To help make this clearer, the final two paragraphs of Sara’s essay are reproduced below, with a minor edit for the sake of coherence.

No, the performance is not yet over … it seems that as long as I continue to go on writing, this performance will also continue. Regardless of what I do, I, like Obama, will never escape the performance; the Other will always be watching and the authenticity of my performance will always remain questionable, even when that Other is myself, as this conclusion makes clear.

I have come this far and can only conclude, as my social contract with my reader necessitates, that authenticity was never really the question, even if it
was the question that got me this far, which is nowhere near as far as performance has taken President Barack Obama.

In self-consciously adopting highly performative writing strategies, such as the creative use of punctuation and syntax at the start of her reflection statement, Sara displaces her authorial self from the centre of her expressive writing. Instead, we see a self that is inextricably textual and textualized, one that is made possible by the reading and writing she has undertaken in completing her major work. Moreover, it is expressed through practices that self-reflexively refer outwards to the very conclusions with regards to the relationship between language and identity, authenticity and performativity that she arrives at in her essay.

Thus it seems that the questions of paradox and contradiction raised by the Obama persona and its use of rhetoric are not ones for dismantling by rhetoricians or academics with a totalizing system or theory, but instead might be observed for the ethical impact the performance has on society and what good the President might bring about. However, notions of ethicality, like democracy, can never be said to be complete, pure or entire in that the communications and text required to disseminate such ideals through society are inevitably caught in questions of paradox and contradiction. Regardless of the words or utterances that Obama uses in his attempt to move somewhat closer to democracy, he is inevitably, like anyone attempting to communicate, caught up in the limitations of the text. Therefore, the crafting through language of an identity that is pure and whole and entirely singular in meaning becomes an impossible task.

In the organisation, physical placement (with regards to her essay) and language of her Reflection Statement, Sara seems to be making a case for the fact that she has not so much authored her essay, as it has authored her – at least the ‘her’ who is writing the Reflection Statement. This allows her to refuse the closure that comes with the last, all-defining last word of a singular and centred authorial presence. She further: ‘opens out’ her work, and its (proper) being or identity, by taking it from the context of an examination process, and (re)defining it, as both a (literary-cultural) work and a form of work, in a spirit of affinity with Derrida’s (Derrida, 1994) notion of a new international, particularly the idea and ideal of democracy to come. (Sara had, in the process of completing her project, undertaken some reading in this area.) She writes in her Reflection Statement, ‘Like all texts, [the] identity [of mine] may be unfixed; however, its role is evident and perpetual: to be read, reflected on, responded to and, as a consequence, open minds to the possibilities of democracy – the very promise inherent in Obama’s ascension’. In these words, I see the non-originary trace of what Eagleton describes as the necessary ‘witnessing’ that is the ‘responsibility and duty’ of criticism (p. 170). As Sara’s teacher, it has been my great honour to be here, in this piece, a ‘witness’ to her work. It has been my privilege to respond to her writing, recontextualising it as part of a new and different dialogue, and consequently reshaping its identity and state of being, along with hers. This is a responsibility I have been willing to embrace with a sense of affinity – shared with Sara – for the new international.
is an affinity that I believe to be a defining element of English studies and essential to any understanding of ethical criticism (cf. Lucy, 2010b).

The self-reflexive interruptive approach adopted by Sara conveys a very real sense of the way that students can, by embracing the idea that expressive writing is a textual performance, as opposed to the authentic expression of a present and singular self, begin to understand how they might rewrite the texts they have read in the texts of their lives, and consequently rewrite their lives and selves in the light of those texts. Such an outcome requires awareness on the part of teachers of the ethical limitations of the epi-reading practices that have come to define the discourses of Literature and English, most particularly their shared emphasis on intentionality and the symmetrical relationships this creates in classrooms.

CONCLUSION

In my reading of the texts of my co-contributors, I have endeavored to instantiate my belief, following Levinas and Derrida, that an ethical response is one of recognition, even fellow-feeling, but which nevertheless refuses absolute solidarity. I have therefore understood my ‘response-ability’ (Pope, 2002, p. 261) to be to locate through close and generous reading, in a non-traditional or Leavisite sense, ‘an interruption or alterity within a text’s dominant interpretation where reading discovers within a text insights to which the text is blind’ (Critchley, 1999, p. 30).

In other words, to identify what the ‘said’ of the texts of my co-contributors cannot say. In this way, what Critchley (p. 31), paraphrasing Levinas, describes as the ‘passage to … the transcendence of the Other’ is produced. This brings us close to what Eagleton refers to mean when he emphasises ‘interruption’ as a key defining feature of ethical criticism. My own text, of course, is now open to critical interruption. I make no claims as to a ‘final word’, or a definitive statement on my chosen themes. Instead, I only hope that this text will promote further dialogue.

In the exploring the expressive writing of my own student, Sara, I have sought to illustrate how students might come to practice an ethical criticism in their expressive writing. I believe that Sara’s writing provides a real sense how students can, by embracing expressive writing as a textual performance, rather than the authentic expression of a present and singular self, find a way to negotiate the historical tensions that continue to exist between Literature and English – tensions that are very visible when students are required to conform to a systemic requirement to write in an expressive manner in response to their reading. The ethical critical alternative, as Sara’s writing appears to confirm, is not one that is reducible to common sense. Indeed, it requires teachers and students to remain open to the idea that we should resist a sense of solidarity with the self that is brought about by writing of a self-revealing nature, a notion which can help us move beyond the compromised promise of an ethic of reading that has resulted from the enduring influence of intentionality, as has been passed on from Literature to English. The idea, of course, that ‘There is nothing outside of the text’ (Derrida, 1997, p. 158) remains a controversial one, to the extent that it is now routinely depicted in public commentary in Australia and elsewhere to pose a threat to Western civilization (cf. Lucy, 2010a). I prefer to believe it an entirely ethical belief, and one that actually
promotes ethical practices in English studies. Sara’s writing emphasises that it is also a belief that is on the side of nothing less than the idea and ideal of democracy.

REFERENCES


'AUTHENTICITY WAS NEVER REALLY THE QUESTION'


Mark Howie
Springwood High School
NSW, Australia
4.2: Advocating an enabling and expansive vision of the English subjects in response to national initiatives

Table 10: Content of Chapter 4.2

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**Text 8: STELLA as a compass for leading change**

This book chapter appeared in a publication which followed the 2008 Australian Government Summer School for Teachers of English, *English for a New Millennium: Leading Change*. As the incumbent President of the Australian Association for the Teaching of English (AATE), I was invited to deliver the opening address for this ground-breaking event – the first and last one to be held. Part of my brief was to highlight the relevance and value to English teachers of the underpinning philosophies and content of the Standards for Teachers of English Language and Literacy in Australia (STELLA), developed by AATE in partnership with the Australian Literacy Educators Association (ALEA). I place the Summer School in the context of what I believe to be troubling neo-liberal initiatives in Australian education. In line with the ethical underpinnings of ‘the transformative model for programming secondary English’, I argue that STELLA provides a process for resisting the totalising discourse of certain politicians and media pundits that would ascribe a fixed and unchanging centre to English.
I emphasise the importance of STELLA therefore to the promotion of a dialogic understanding of the English subjects, which encompasses the generative possibilities of ‘difference’.
Chapter 2

STELLA as a compass for leading change

Mark Howie
(AATE President)

English teachers are very aware of the importance of context. Those of you who believe there is a place for critical literacy in your classroom -- admittedly not an easy argument to make at this time given the contestation surrounding English in the public sphere (see, for example, Donnelly, 2006) -- would probably argue that English teachers are aware of the importance of refusing 'closure' by disrupting contexts, not least in the name of democracy that is always to come. For this reason, as we gather here in Geelong as part of this significant national initiative, it is important to keep at the forefront of our thinking some significant social and cultural forces which are informing and impacting on our work, and which have had an obvious influence in bringing us together today.

The imperative here is not so much to be political, although I will be talking about political matters. It's hard not to, given the politicisation of education, and particularly of English and English teaching, in recent times (see contributions to Doecke, Howie & Sawyer, 2006). The very notion of 'we', of what constitutes a community, is, after all, a deeply political one (Lucy, 2001). Nevertheless, there are other -- albeit related -- issues that we face today, as the Summer School begins. These include the questions of what value we might find in the next fortnight, and what values we see as being at the heart of this experience. It is important to ask such questions from the outset because how we
make this Summer School work for English teachers (as opposed, say, for politicians) is at stake.

What I intend to do here, in the time that I have, is ask you to consider the ways that STELLA (Standards for Teachers of English Language and Literacy in Australia) will inform our work here in Geelong, and also help us to collectively understand why we are here and what might desirably eventuate from our time together. This requires me to provide a brief history of the STELLA project, explain the importance of the project from AATE’s point of view, and consider the question of ‘where to?’ for STELLA with reference to what the Summer School initiative might bring to advancing the spirit and intentions of STELLA. From the outset, I must, on behalf of AATE, acknowledge the efforts of Catherine Beavis, Cal Durrant and the entire organising team in placing STELLA at the centre of the program, both conceptually and in practice. But, at the same time, STELLA places on me a responsibility to be critical (cf. Doecke, 2007). And I intend to be so, particularly in discussing the genesis of the Summer School’s initiative in its broader political and cultural context. After all, one of the STELLA Keywords is Critique. So, in order that there might be no mistaking that what follows has been developed without input from or consultation with those individuals I have just thanked, I make this disclaimer upfront: any comments I make here today are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the organisers of the English Summer School.

II

‘Teacher quality’ and ‘teacher effectiveness’ are two ideas that will inevitably feature in presentations and discussions that take place over the next fortnight. The actual words themselves may not always be used, but their trace is bound to be ubiquitous. The previous federal government’s rationale for establishing the Summer Schools, and the language it used to promote the initiative, ensures this is so. Therefore, the language of ‘teacher quality’ and ‘effectiveness’, and the different ways these terms might be understood and put to work ideologically in shaping the sense the general public has of the enterprise we call ‘English teaching’, are things we must grapple and come to terms with, perhaps even ‘populate’ with our own intentions (cf. Bakhtin, 1981), as we think about why we are here and what we hope to get out of the next fortnight.

Instructive is the letter to school principals from the Hon. Julie Bishop (2007), the federal Education minister at the time, seeking their assistance in pro-
noting the Summer Schools. Bishop’s letter describes the Summer Schools as an ‘exciting new initiative for professional learning’ and those selected to attend as being among ‘Australia’s best teachers’. These teachers deserve to be ‘recognised[ed] and rewarded[ed]’, the Minister goes on to add, and those who are successful in the selection process consequently will be paid a ‘bonus’.

Now, let me be clear here. I do not doubt that all of you in this room deserve to be here and that you deserve your ‘bonus’. Your very presence attests to your commitment, passion and expertise. It is important that Australian teachers are better recognised and their professional learning better supported – both were important reasons informing AATE’s determination to be part of this initiative. There is also no doubting that Australian teachers are underpaid. My point is that Minister Bishop’s language directly points to another issue, which has been much commented upon in Australia in recent times: the idea of merit pay for teachers. And, so, we do not want to be naïve about the genesis of this initiative and its philosophical, ideological and possible future practical implications (the actual program, and the nature of the learning which takes place in this Summer School, are, of course, very different things, and not the focus of my critique here).

The Minister’s language directly links ‘teacher quality’ and ‘teacher effectiveness’ to industrial matters. This means that here, today, the line between professional issues (such as curriculum and professional learning) and industrial matters (such as the proper payment of teachers and how this is to be negotiated and determined) begins to blur. The notion of ‘rewarding’ the so-called and identifiable ‘best’ teachers is the language of neo-liberal individualism, and is linked also to the notion of a meritocracy. Such language, at least on the surface of things, is set against the notion of collectivism and the related idea (if not ideal) of a broad professional community. It highlights how the very idea of community is structured in such a way as to rightfully put us on our guard whenever the word is uttered. This structure Lucy (2001, p.6) describes as:

* a particular structure of identity, based on the structure of identity in general, which binds community members together against others, marking the limits between insiders (us) and outsiders (them).

Such a play of difference can be seen in the hierarchical organisation of the follow-up work for participants anticipated by Minister Bishop, as part of a broader process of leading change in schools. She writes: ‘They [i.e. Summer
School participants] will play a role in supporting the professional learning of their colleagues in the area of their expertise upon completion of the program'. At first glance, the notion of the 'expert' leading and supporting others in their learning (or is that leading others to their learning?) appears reasonable enough, if not just a matter of 'common sense'. But it is an idea that demands interrogation, as public expressions of so-called 'common sense' perhaps always do precisely because of their ideological function and limiting effects (see Lucy & McAllister, 2006).

The idea of a 'bonus', in the sense that this word might be understood as recognition in the form of monetary payment for work already done and a level of professional standing already attained, evaporates in the Minister's letter. I am willing to acknowledge that the idea of a 'bonus' has some semblance of being a 'community' minded orientation, akin perhaps to volunteer bush fire brigade members being publicly recognised with a street parade and civic reception. That being said, I maintain that it cannot be denied that a particular sort of (neo-liberal) economic logic is at work in the demands to be made of participants following completion of the Summer School: the individual is only valuable (and therefore valued) to the extent that they are ever more productive. By attending this Summer School, teachers have apparently been contracted to do more work: to lead change in their schools. The irony for participants is that you are probably already doing this — it's likely to have been a factor in your nomination and selection. This state of affairs draws attention to the fact that effective teachers are not being paid enough. This, in turn, leads us to ask if not, why not? Consideration of this question then leads us to the issue of federalism, particularly as this relates to state budgetary processes and the history of federal funding to the states (but I have no desire to talk further about such particular subject here). By Minister Bishop's own logic, or logic she put her name to, the 'bonus' paid to Summer School participants becomes a supplement to their (obviously inadequate) wage, and might be understood — particularly by the cynics amongst us — as allowing the Liberal government to bypass state industrial relations processes (and teacher unions), just as it sought to channel funds more directly to parents and schools through a variety of programs (see Bonner and Caro, 2007).

Again, let me clarify my intentions here. I am not questioning the importance of building leadership capacity within the teaching profession or the significance to English teachers of this Summer School and what might eventuate
from it. Instead, in highlighting the instability of the language used in the Minister’s letter to principals, I am asking whether such notions as teacher ‘expertise’ and ‘leadership’ might be understood in other ways, once detached from the previous government’s determination to link them to a philosophy of individualism and an ideology that promotes meritocracy and hierarchy over ‘community’ – for all the ‘baggage’, as I have explained earlier, that the latter carries. At this point, I would also highlight the fact that the determination of the government to pursue a ‘meritocracy’ in teaching actually dovetailed with its anti-collectivist industrial relations policies in the lead up to the last election. It would seem Culler (1983, p.128), following Derrida, is right: ‘meaning is context-bound but context is boundless’. This, of course, is something of an irony, and one which will not be lost on English teachers, given the way deconstructionism, broadly – if mistakenly (cf. Lucy, 1997) – understood as a synonym for postmodernism, was attacked by the Liberal government and their boosters in the national press for its supposed widespread influence in classrooms (cf. Lucy and Mickler, 2006, chapter two).

If you think I am drawing a long bow here, might I remind you of the policy the Liberal government took to the election with regards to a national curriculum? Minister Bishop announced, in the weeks before the election, that curriculum frameworks for certain key subjects (including English) would be written by a ‘panel of experts’ to be selected by the government. A preview of this sort of elitist, anti-democratic process was provided in 2007 by the Australia Council Literature Board’s round-table on the teaching of Australian Literature. The only then/recently still practising classroom English teacher present at this event has limited secondary teaching experience but gained, on the strength of her doctoral thesis about the theoretical underpinnings of the NSW Stage 6 English Syllabus, a national media profile as a critic of contemporary English teaching (see AATE, 2007). I would suggest that the Summer School – as an idea, I must emphasise here, rather than an actuality – has its genesis in the same world view that gave us the Work Choices proposals and the literature round table in 2007.

III

Raising the possibility of understanding ‘expertise’ and ‘leadership’ at this point will, in due course, bring me to the importance and relevance of the STELLA project. But first, let me ask a further question: why is it important for us to
think about how an idea and an ideal such as ‘community’ relates to issues of ‘teacher effectiveness’ and ‘teacher quality’, precisely because of its problematic structuring effect? The answer is because there is a body of research (Sawyer, Brock and Baxter, 2007) to suggest that highly effective English faculties, by the measure of sustained, superior student learning outcomes, are highly collective in their philosophy, policies, programming, teaching and management, and also exhibit strong connections to their local community. Such faculties that might be characterised as genuine ‘learning communities’ are very successful in enabling and enhancing the talents of individual teachers. In light of such research, effective teaching is best characterised as a social enterprise, which takes place in and through a variety of communities. This runs counter to much media and political commentary, which represents teaching as a highly individualised activity. (As Doecke (2006) has reminded us, Hollywood portrayals of the ‘heroic’ individual teacher, frequently in rebellion against stultifying ‘group’ think, are an obvious example of this broader representational tendency.) I am most concerned that the very narrow, exclusive and exclusionary ‘community’ of merit promoted by Julie Bishop can only serve to further propagate the distorting myth of the ‘heroic’ teacher. I believe little that is good for the profession can come of such a development, should it become in any way even more influential.

The AESOP study in NSW (Sawyer, Baxter, Brock, 2007), the acronym standing for ‘An Exceptional Schooling Outcomes Project’, identified and explored demonstrably superior outcomes in public education in NSW. Supported by an Australian Research Council grant, the project was undertaken by a team of researchers from a consortium comprised of the NSW Department of Education and Training, the University of New England and the University of Western Sydney. The project was based on case studies of schools. Quantitative and qualitative data were used to identify a number of ‘sites’ in which four years of student cohorts had either scored highly on value-added measures or demonstrated consistent improvement on the same scores. Importantly, sites had to demonstrate their ability to ‘value add’ for students in low, middle and high achievement bands. Sites were selected to cover as wide a socio-economic and geographical cross-section of schools as possible.

In relation to English faculties, key findings of AESOP were that high-performing faculties establish and maintain:
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- an identifiable faculty group focus on improving student performance;
- an identifiable faculty group focus on the professional development of teachers;
- systems to support pedagogical approaches on the part of individual teachers that are a clear expression of professional development and dialogue at the faculty group level;
- prominent feedback loops (i.e. faculty evaluation and review processes) for programs, resources and ideas;
- teaching programs that reflect 'an intelligent pragmatism' with regards to different 'models' of or approaches to English; and
- approaches and processes that are in keeping with the goals and aspirations of the school community, with evidence of engagement with parents and students in expressing their expectations and aspirations for English at the school.

The common thread throughout the AESOP findings is clearly a sense of the power of the 'collective' and the importance of communities — the plural form being highly significant — in enhancing the capacity of individuals. In other words, we see a notion of community that resists closure and seeks, as far as possible, to resist or delay the delimiting of 'us' and 'them' — a stark contrast to Minister Bishop's willing embrace of this structure.

IV

To make the argument for the sort of idea of a professional community and collective endeavour described in the AESOP findings for English is to run counter to what has become mainstream thinking in many areas of society today. In a recent paper (published in English in Australia in 2007), Brenton Doecke, Wayne Sawyer and I wrote about our sense that the triumph of neo-liberal and neo-conservative economic and social reforms have made it difficult to speak and write of alternative, more democratic ways of understanding and being in the world. Following thinkers such as Giroux and Apple, we suggested that this conservative triumph has been spectacularly evident in reforms promoting the privatisation of the public sphere, and the implementation of standards-based reforms focusing on individual performance and accountability (I have suggested here that the Summer School initiative appears to also have had its genesis in these sorts of philosophies). At the same time, we acknowledged
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(and welcomed) the fact that the new information and communication technologies that are deeply implicated in the neo-liberal project are also providing adolescents with a range of semiotic modes to make meaning and to construct identities and make sense of their place in the world in ways that do not immediately conform to the needs of the new economic order (cf. Kress, 2002). In other words, change is not simply happening to local communities, but is being enacted by them.

In this context, with an understanding of the sense of possibility Kress has captured, English might yet be understood (once again?) to play a central role in the articulation of alternatives to highly individualised understandings of the world, which seek to rank, sort and divide people. English can be (re)understood as a way of promoting new and ever expanding communities, and as being all about the process of democracy to come (Derrida, 1994); a site where the Other, and the different understandings and experiences they bring, is to be welcomed. Lucy and Mickler (2006, p.2) put it this way:

the democratic project remains, and must always remain, unfinished, since there could never be enough democracy, enough freedom, equality and friendship for all the different social differences there are today and others that may come into the future. In other words, there is no end to the work of democracy.

Such a powerful statement has helped me to clarify my thinking about English teaching and its history. It is my understanding that English has, over the years and in its different guises, generally sought to promote understanding of difference, to reach the democratic hand of friendship out and over social divides of all sorts (granted, as with any structure of identity, the subject will remain deeply implicated in tendencies that work against the identity I have just ascribed to it. This allows Downey (2006), for example, to provide a very different reading of the subject's history). More recent manifestations of the subject, such as critical literacy and multi-literacies, are very obviously focused on such issues as questioning and overcoming social, cultural and linguistic divides. They have, in fact, been criticised for being overtly political and promoting cultural relativisms. But what was 'personal growth' (so dominant in the 1970s through to the 1990s) about if not helping students better understand their place in the world through better understanding others and social relations in their many forms (cf. Doecke and McCleraghan, 2004)? Was there not
necessarily an element of critiquing the divisions societies create between people in this as well? (Think about the way teaching a theme such as ‘Prejudice’ has been an English teaching staple for some decades now.) And has not the central concern of English with literature been about the supposed great ‘truths’ of human experience as great minds have represented these through time and across cultures? In short, the way that English deals with – and has dealt with throughout its history – the textual representation of human experience in many different forms means that those who teach the subject must inevitably be orientated towards reaching out to the Other, towards a sense that the collective and the dialogic enhance the capacities of the individual. (Otherwise, why bother with the ‘truths’ of human experience, which are by definition truths for all of us, and which, when known, understood and evaluated on an individual level, will give us access to a ‘good’ [or examined] life? We might as well call it a day now, and go and teach ‘Communication Studies’ or ‘Workplace Writing’.)

V

The notion of English teaching as a collective endeavour, and with it the importance of ‘community’ broadly defined and ever widening, is highlighted in STELLA. Amongst the STELLA key words are difference, negotiation, participation, inclusiveness and involvement. All are suggestive of a belief that we understand ‘I’ (self) in relation to ‘we’ (other(s)). Indeed, such key words suggest that social relations with others precede any understanding of self (Bakhtin, 1981).

The notion of ‘professional learning’ as it is conveyed in the Minister’s letter also demands interrogation. This takes me back to the genesis of the STELLA project in the late 1990s. What follows is taken from a paper from Brenton Doecke, forthcoming in English in Australia. Brenton was, and remains, a leading figure in the STELLA project.

STELLA is the product of work by members of the Australian Association for the Teaching of English (AATE) and the Australian Literacy Educators’ Association (ALEA), the two key professional bodies in Australia representing secondary English teachers and primary school literacy teachers respectively. This work was undertaken at a time when considerable work was being undertaken, both nationally and internationally, to define standards for teaching. As Margaret Gill (1999) wrote at the time in English in Australia, ‘If we [i.e. the profession/English educators] don’t do it someone else will.’
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(At this point, and by way of a personal aside, I’d argue that in Margaret Gill’s words there is, at least in retrospect, some sense of the inevitability, or irresistible momentum, of what might be called neo-liberal educational reforms, and the way these create connections between two dynamics: ‘free’ markets and increased surveillance (Apple, 2006). Parental choice of the ‘best’ school for their child is supposedly more effectively mobilised when the community has the ability to judge the quality of the performance of schools and teachers. Within this logic, curriculum and pedagogy standards can be ensured by the testing of both students (e.g. basic skills tests) and testing of teachers (e.g. certification processes linked to a regime of teaching standards). It is not hard to see how a philosophy of competition and reward (for schools and teachers) can begin to operate, even appear ‘natural’ and the way things should be, in neo-liberal education policies and practices. But back to Brenton …)

STELLA provides a framework for practitioner inquiry and the renewal of the English teaching profession in contradistinction to managerial pressures to impose standards for regulatory purposes. A major goal of the STELLA project has been to establish a framework for English teachers to collaboratively reflect on their professional practice and engage in continuing inquiry into their own teaching. The focus of STELLA has been on identifying the forms of knowledge, practice and engagement that constitute the professional field of English literacy teaching and that teachers can accept as a salient frame of reference for professional renewal. This is as distinct from developing standards that might provide a regulatory mechanism for individual performance (cf. Mahony and Hextall, 2000). (Author’s note: and a mechanism, picking up Brenton’s line of thought, which I would suggest readily enables teacher remuneration in the form of performance or merit pay). For the teachers and researchers involved in STELLA, professional renewal has meant renewal of the profession as a whole, including the creation of a professional culture characterised by continuing inquiry and reflection in which all (my emphasis) teachers can participate.

AATE supported the development of teaching standards (as they are formulated in STELLA) because such standards are potentially and ideally a hallmark of our professionalism; an acknowledgement of the trust the public places in the teaching profession to successfully perform the essential social function of educating its young (this is something that the founding president of AATE,
A.D. Hope said forty years ago. His ‘call to arms’ remains integral to STELLA, and is featured on the website as a ‘framing’ statement for STELLA. However, even as they become part of our everyday working lives, teachers cannot afford to be complacent or naïve about teaching standards, particularly in the way that standards can be used to shape understandings of what counts as professional learning. I would like to continue to quote Brenton Doecke at some length:

We are repeatedly being told that the teacher is the most significant factor affecting student achievement (Rowe, 2003). The trouble is that rhetoric about improving pedagogy often boils down to a narrow scrutiny of an individual teacher’s performance that ignores the complexities of their work in particular contexts. For neoliberal politicians and media pundits, nothing more is required for improving the quality of teaching and learning than judging a teacher’s performance against the results his or her students achieve in standardised literacy tests. You can easily calculate whether individual teachers have ‘value added’ by comparing the scores their students get on standardised tests at the beginning of the year with those they get at the end. You can also compare the students’ results with results achieved by students at other schools, both those that cater for similar socio-economic communities and those with different cohorts of students. Teacher quality, according to this view, is a far more powerful determinant of student success than things like ‘socio-cultural and socio-economic factors’ (cf., Rowe, 2003).

In his chapter in the AATE/Wakefield Press publication Only Connect (Doecke, Howie & Sawyer, 2006, p.108), Trevor Gale notes an interesting, if not troubling, ‘sleight of hand’ in the way that pedagogy has ‘come under the influence of a standards discourse’ and the establishment of state and national Institutes of Teaching or registration bodies.

As Gale sees it (p.107), the effect of the ‘standards discourse’ has been to contribute to a disturbing shift in broader educational discourse, and he identifies some very significant implications of this shift. Where once it was said that teachers ‘can make a difference’, Gale’s evidence suggests that teachers are now spoken about as ‘the difference’. The corollary of this, of course, is that when an educational problem (or ‘crisis’) is identified, teachers are now the ones to blame, as socio-cultural and socio-economic factors influencing students’ educational outcomes have been removed from the educational equation.

The recent and ongoing ‘debate’ about the teaching of reading in this
country is an instructive example. According to Ms Bishop's predecessor (Dr Brendan Nelson) and certain vocal media pundits (e.g. Miranda Devine and Kevin Donnelly), one out of every ten students do not reach national reading benchmarks because their teachers do not know how or refuse to teach phonics. OECD data which indicates Australia has a very strong international record in teaching reading but a less than desirable one in achieving equity in educational outcomes for the disadvantaged in our society has been largely silenced by the foregrounding of pedagogy as the real (i.e. only) issue in the reading 'debate' (see Sawyer, 2006) (although it must be acknowledged that renewed focus on the lives of Aboriginal people in this country in 2007, stemming from the federal government's 'intervention' in the NT, did alert reporters and commentators to the performance data for Indigenous students in the latest PISA results, released in early December of that year). Of course, it is no coincidence that reading outcomes are weakest amongst the most disadvantaged children in our nation. What social policy has been unable to do over many decades, particular teaching methodologies now apparently can: to ameliorate significant social and economic disadvantage. Again, this time in the area of reading pedagogy, we see an ethic of individualism to be infusing educational debates in this country at least as these are being driven by particular individuals and interest groups aligning themselves with the interests of neo-conservatism or neo-libertism. Such an ethic denies the idea of the social or the collective, if not an actual empirical grounding — the need for hard evidence hardly matters to ideologues.

VI

In the current political climate, teaching standards have all-too-readily been co-opted into a regulatory model of accreditation, just as they were in the US (Petrosky, 2003). Such a model establishes a deficit view of teachers by identifying what they cannot do. A consequence of this is the quick fix of externally developed, mandated and imposed professional learning activities, which have no direct connection to the demands of teaching in different school contexts. (When effective or accomplished teaching is understood as a generic set of readily transportable skills, teaching in one school is just like teaching in another. When teacher quality or effectiveness is understood to determine the educational outcomes achieved by students, one group of students becomes just like any other.) Teacher autonomy and the notion of sustained, independent inquiry into effective teaching in particular contexts by practitioners themselves, both
individually and through a variety of networks, is consequently sidelined. As a result, professional learning becomes an exercise in Taylorism and bureaucratic hoop-jumping – the obstacle course in a version of teaching 'boot camp'.

To her credit, Ms Bishop highlights in her letter the importance of locating professional learning in the local school context. However, there is still an ‘us’ and ‘them’, or an ‘insiders’ versus ‘outsiders’ mentality at work in her efforts to enrol principals to support the Summer Schools initiative. The ‘change’ imperative is couched implicitly in deficit terms, suggestive of a current lack in teachers’ knowledge and skills. The opportunity for Summer School participants to ‘enhance’ their knowledge and skills becomes a requirement to lead others, who are evidently yet to attain the same level of knowledge and skills. The logic of the Minister’s letter is that the solution to this apparent knowledge and skills short-fall can be determined externally by a federal body and set of processes, well removed from the local school context, and based on what they define as ‘evidence-based research’ and ‘best practice teaching methods’, as if these are not contestable terms (see Doecke and Parr, 2005). The solution is then ‘exported’ into schools by suitably trained individuals (this having been said, it is to the great credit of the organising team that such issues, and potential pitfalls, relating to the generic set up of the Summer Schools have been avoided in the specific design of the program and learning processes for the English Summer School. This might be traced back to the educational philosophies of the organising team and also their determination to put STELLA at the centre of learning in the structure and processes of the program here. These two factors are obviously not unrelated).

In contrast to a ‘one shot inoculation’ model of professional learning, administered by an external authority, the STELLA project endeavours to foreground the principles of ‘situated learning’ and ‘communities of practice’. Both are concepts that offer a critical perspective on dominant, regulatory modes of professional learning in schools (see Doecke and Parr, 2005). The STELLA process developed standards through specific accounts of the knowledge and practice of English literacy teachers that had currency amongst teachers working in diverse settings around Australia. These accounts took the form of teacher narratives. Of this process, and the alternative ‘vision’ for generating knowledge of teachers’ work and expertise upon which it was based, Brenton Doecke writes, in the same (forthcoming) paper to which I have previously referred to at length:
Any statement about 'accomplished' teaching typically struggles with the deeply contextualised nature of teachers’ work, and such statements always run the risk of being empty generalisations that fail to capture the specific characteristics of professional practice enacted in different school communities. To address this problem, teachers who participated in STELLA wrote narratives about their professional practice in order to share their professional learning and experience. These narratives evoke the rich complexities of school communities, testing general claims about 'accomplished' English literacy teaching against specific accounts of professional practice. Together, the narratives prompt critical reflection about the domains that constitute English literacy teaching as they have been conceptualised by teachers and researchers involved in the project. The standards have now been published in the form of a hypertext that juxtaposes abstract statements typical of standards documents with specific accounts of classroom practice, thus inviting readers to consider how each text speaks to the other, and how each might be used to interrogate the claims that the other is making.

In short, STELLA offers a dynamic, enabling model for considering standards, which puts real and sustained professional learning at the heart of things. The principles informing STELLA have much to offer teachers at all stages in their career in establishing a collegial, dialogic (cf. Bakhtin, 1981) and inquiry-based approach to professional learning. The table on page 49 (taken from the work of Doecke & Parr, 2005) indicates how the intent, purposes and principles of a developmental understanding of professional learning, the very basis of STELLA, provide a stark contrast to a limiting regulatory model.

VII
The focus on situated learning and professional dialogue that STELLA pursues brings me to another significant contextual factor influencing the fact that we are meeting here over the next two weeks: the media and political contestation which has surrounded English and English teaching in this country in recent years. Debate surrounding the proper provenance and scope of English in this country has been given extra impetus in 2007 by such things as the determination (prior to the recent federal election) of both major parties to move the country towards a national curriculum, the ACER study on Yr 12 curriculum standards, the Australia Council’s round table on the teaching of Australian literature, the federal Senate inquiry on academic standards and secondary
Models of Professional Learning (PL)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regulatory models of PL</th>
<th>Developmental models of PL</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers are positioned as ‘individual professionals’ (Caldwell &amp; Hayward 1998)</td>
<td>Teaching is a collaborative endeavour; a function of the network of relationships in which teachers operate both individually and in groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL is presumed to be generic in nature, and can be applied to all educational settings regardless of their particular character. It can be unproblematically transferred or exported from context to context.</td>
<td>PL is anchored in the specific contexts in which teachers work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of teachers and teaching is imported from outside and delivered through professional development programs.</td>
<td>Knowledge of teachers and teaching develops from, and involves, sustained inquiry into teaching &amp; learning, including focused observations of learners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of teachers and teaching is unproblematically assumed, and is typically delivered as a remedy for deficiencies in existing practices.</td>
<td>The findings of research into the knowledge of teachers and teaching are provisional &amp; contestable, particularly in how the findings might be applied in other settings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of the knowledge of teachers and teaching is often demonstrated in large-scale surveys that systematically bracket out the specific nature of school communities.</td>
<td>Evidence of the knowledge of teachers and teaching are best understood through non-canonical methods (e.g. action research, narratives &amp; other qualitative methods) which include some focus on local context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ professional practice is judged against pre-existing or traditional outcomes – outcomes which are unproblematically measurable, e.g. standardised test scores of students.</td>
<td>Teachers draw on academic and practitioner research &amp; theory to evaluate &amp; critique their existing practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers are rendered accountable through performance appraisals which require them to specify targets (for themselves and for their students) and to demonstrate that these targets are achieved.</td>
<td>Teachers work together &amp; create a culture of critical inquiry at their school (in which all members of the school community can participate). They remain mindful of the managerial systems within which they continue to be accountable.</td>
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schooling and, in the last month or so, the fall-out from Australia’s laudable but none-the-less disappointing performance in the 2006 PISA survey of reading literacy.

We are gathering here at a time when the very constitution of our subject is under question. There is a feeling about in the community that teachers – particularly English teachers – have been allowed too much ‘licence’; some believe teachers have, if you like, been too concerned with ‘thrills’ and not concerned enough with ‘skills’. The impetus in such criticisms is what might be described as a re-centring of the subject: the movement back to a more stable, fixed, restricted and restrictive understanding of English, which somehow resembles what it was in the (necessarily idealised?) past.

Published in early December, 2007, directly in response to the PISA findings and the result of the federal election, an editorial (2007a) in the Australian thundered, ‘The sooner Julia Gillard takes on teachers the better’. Writing in the Sydney Morning Herald in the same month, Miranda Devine (2007) used highly inflammatory language to portray ETA(NSW), my state association, as ‘a body promoting extremist ideology’, describing what she called its ‘operatives’ as ‘barbarian ideologues’ and ‘ideological guerillas’. I could go on (and on and on ...).’

While more measured and less inflammatory in their language than the likes of Miranda Devine, even moderate commentators and interested parties have still been arguing for more centralised control over what is taught in English. Some have even been arguing for tighter prescriptions – and indeed prescriptions – on how it is taught. For example, the ACER, (2007) standards findings float this idea.

So, these are challenging times for English teachers. Some days it feels like we are under siege. Some of us holding leadership positions in professional associations, all volunteers, it should be remembered, have had to sustain nasty personal attacks in the media for advocating an understanding of English that is about teaching to and for difference.

It is therefore understandable that some teachers might want to retreat back into the comparative quiet of the classroom, and try to ignore the sound and fury of public debate. We see this in Western Australia, for example, where curriculum debates have been heated and very destructive.

In this context, I find the following postings at the PLATO website³ interesting but disturbing:
Post: I realise that curriculum writing is an extremely non-trivial task and it is unfair on teachers having to invent their own syllabi where they have been failed by the bodies that have been charged with this task and paid well for the responsibility.

However, with some curricula, e.g. English and Maths, this should by now be a solved problem.

I would appreciate an answer to the question that I posed on the SCHOOL AUTONOMY thread:

‘Why not adopt a ready-made syllabus and tweak it, or is that what teachers are doing already and not telling anybody?’

Would this not be a pragmatic stop-gap if Plato contributors were to agree on the adoption of a ready-made syllabus for each subject, one that met the requirements of the CoS (and surely almost anything would satisfy such vague descriptors)?

Examples of Curriculum Excellence already exist as a link from the Plato sidebar, and previous syllabi existed before the tidal wave of OBE came in.

As I said on the other thread, this sort of thing has already been done in New Zealand, with the NCEA (their version of OBE).

Post: Plenty of good curriculum materials already exist. I do not see the need to embark on such a task right now when I have 3 Year 12 TEE classes. I agree that Plato might, if contracted to do so, produce some material that satisfies our concerns. But I’m sorry; I’m too busy right now.

Post: I find it quite incredible that WA, with a population of less than 2 million, thinks it needs its own unique curriculum, and also seems to think that it can improve upon EVERY curriculum written by every educational authority in the world.

Surely there is not a uniquely Western Australian method of teaching algebra (or music, or ancient history, or chemistry, or …).

I find the defeatism in these views to be adolescent, even unprofessional, by the standards that STELLA establishes. It greatly disturbs me that teachers are prepared to reduce themselves to the level of technicians, paid to implement a script. Moreover, this bunch seems to have little interest in, or regard for, the particular interests and needs of their own students. They apparently care not a jot
that this script might be written by someone on the other side of the world, with no direct knowledge of the needs and interests of the students in their classes — they’ll just be happy to implement it, if they don’t have to write it.

That having been said, I am not complacent about the demands of teacher workloads or the complexities of our work. Just a few weeks ago, in the midst of an evaluation of our HSC assessment regime, a member of my own faculty expressed similar views to the PLATO members. A staunch unionist, he is otherwise a very strong supporter of teachers’ professional autonomy. He is certainly also a very hard working teacher and respected by me, his colleagues and his students.

I cite these examples not to engage in teacher bashing (I’ll leave that to certain individuals in the press). Instead I am endeavouring to highlight the unproductive nature of the warped (i.e. limited and limiting) sense of ‘community’ that PLATO encourages and, more importantly, to stress the point that the moment we begin to feel it is all getting too hard and too political, then we need to keep the past — the history of our subject both nationally and internationally — in mind.

If history and the experiences of our colleagues overseas teach us anything, it is that to bury our heads in the sands and not engage in debate — or to ask someone else to write the script for us — will be disastrous for students and for the profession. When the proper constitution of English, its scope and intent, is questioned, then much larger, inherently political issues are being raised. What counts as knowledge and who will determine this? How will the authority of this knowledge be maintained? In what ways do dominant conceptualisations of English and the curriculum we are required to implement shape our students as people? In what way do they enable or limit our work as professionals? What vision does the curriculum provide for our democracy into the future? These are questions, with all of the responsibilities that they entail in their answering, which have largely been taken out of the hands of teachers in England and the US (see, for example, Goodwyn, 2003 and Taylor, 2003).

These are all questions with which STELLA engages directly, and questions to which I imagine discussions here will inevitably turn as well. In fact, the opportunity to take up these sorts of questions in discussions that take place over the next fortnight means this Summer School is a timely initiative, and one that potentially has great significance for the future of English and English teaching in this country. The challenge is to maintain the discussion, to take it back to
schools and districts, and involve others in genuine dialogue. It is also important
that we can come to see English as an unfinisable project, something we are –
and always will be – bringing into being, ever mindful of what we have inher-
ited from our subject's past.

The AESOP research, to which I referred earlier, made reference to what it
called an 'intelligent eclecticism' as informing the teaching programs of the
English faculties it studied. Inflexible and unchanging allegiance to a particular
'model' or understanding of English was eschewed in favour of a diverse, ever
evolving understanding of the subject. The emphasis STELLA places on profes-
sional dialogue and learning in localised contexts has obvious synergies with
such an approach to English. It provides a process for resisting the totalising dis-
course (of certain media pundits and politicians for example) that would ascribe
a fixed and unchanging centre to English. Instead, it promotes a dialogic under-
standing which encompasses the possibilities of 'difference': different ways of
understanding language, different ways of understanding texts, different learning
goals for students, different ways of teaching students, and different ways of being
an English teacher.

As you negotiate the Summer School program, ask yourself what you
would have remain at the centre of English and the extent to which we can
accommodate diverse views of the subject. How do your views, for example,
accord with those of your colleagues at school, your students and the parents of
your students? Moreover, how might we, collectively, go about articulating this
centre, which is no longer really a centre once it is opened to ever-increasing
diversity, in a theorised way that might also be explained in a coherent and
accessible way to the public?

VIII

In conclusion, I'd like to articulate a series of challenges that I see as facing you,
the Summer School participants and organisers, and AATE, the peak national
professional body, as we look beyond the next fortnight to the ongoing work
that might productively follow. Each of these speak to my earlier injunction with
regards to making the Summer School initiative work for teachers, rather than
politicians, who, on the basis of Minister Bishop's letter, we might suspect to be
pursuing agendas that are less immediately apparent than their avowed support
for the professional learning of teachers.
English for a new millennium: Leading change

1. How is the sense of a professional community that this Summer School has the potential to foster, and which the organiser are clearly attempting to generate via initiatives such as web based discussions, to be sustained and made inclusive of others (particularly in more local contexts)? What roles do AATE, STELLA and other networks (including state associations) have here?

2. How committed are participants to the ‘aspirational’ model of ‘teaching standards’ articulated in STELLA, and the way that the STELLA processes link ‘teacher quality’ and ‘effectiveness’ (through professional inquiry and learning) to collective endeavour in localised communities? If there is commitment, how might the STELLA project be furthered in new contexts (e.g. the schools and districts in which Summer School participants work) and how might AATE (and the state associations) assist you in this advocacy work, collectively and individually?

3. How will participants define ‘change’ in going back to their schools? In what ways will the next fortnight extend our understanding of the sort of professional learning we might lead and how it is most desirably led? What role do you see your professional association as playing in this?

4. Is the re-centring of English to be resisted or encouraged? Are participants supportive of contemporary developments in English teaching? In the context of the movement towards a national curriculum, what would participants identify as the ‘core’ of English? (Here’s a mental exercise for you: being amongst the ‘best’ English teachers in the nation, what sort of communiqué about the teaching of English in Australia in the twenty-first century could you develop and be willing to issue (if such an opportunity were to arise)? AATE has been working in this area through STELLA and also its Statements of Belief. A conversation thread after the Summer School might be to take up the adequacy of these. More particularly, some of you might like to take up the opportunity to continue the discussion about STELLA and the SOBs by writing about your experience of the Summer School for English in Australia).
STELLA as a compass for leading change

Notes
1 This paper was published as Doecke (2008).
2 Apple (2006) provides a useful description of the differences between neo-conservatism and neo-liberalism, particularly as these relate to policy setting in education.
3 PLATO is a Western Australian group, the acronym standing for People Lobbying Against Teaching Outcomes. Their 'lobbying' now apparently extends well beyond so-called Outcomes Based Education (OBE), covering any educational ideas or innovation which strikes online participants at its website as being overly bureaucratic or suspiciously progressive. The online exchange quoted here has been edited due to space restrictions.

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This book chapter appeared in a volume considering what it means to teach Australian literature. The context for this publication was the development of a national curriculum for English in Australia, and the introduction of standards-based reforms that are perceived by many contributors to the volume to be constructing literature teaching and the professional identities of teachers in a highly restrictive and restricting manner. I employ framing theory to address the question of how nationalism informs the reading of literary texts. Taking as my example a significant national anthology I was using with a senior English class, I also explore how the issue of canonicity can play out in the teaching of a national literature. I argue for an ethic of commitment on the part of English teachers, whereby critical theories – my chosen example being carnival – can be employed to hold up to scrutiny and re-territorialise dominant discourses, as well as prevalent understandings of the self and identity. In so doing, I make the case for a critically responsive pedagogy within a vision of English that holds the subject to be open-ended and unfinalisable.
Chapter 7
A text for this time?
Theory, ethics and pedagogy in teaching the
Macquarie PEN Anthology of
Australian Literature
Mark Howie

Preface
Remember the days of the old school yard? I do. More precisely, I remember much of what took place in my senior English classroom. More than a quarter of a century later, I can still recall the excitement I felt in reading particular books and authors for the first time. What I do not recall, however, is an instance of the nationality of an author influencing my engagement with their writing. For example, thinking back on why I enjoyed reading My Brother Jack, I recollect I found George Johnston’s central character David Meredith appealing, but not as a representation of what it is to be an Australian. The Australia of My Brother Jack is certainly not the Australia I knew in the early 1980s, and David Meredith’s experiences seemed as foreign to me then as the ports-of-origin of the clipper ships which so fascinated him. I was drawn to Meredith because of his determination to be free and – if I am honest – I hoped that I might one day end up partnered with my own Cressida Morley. Is there anything exclusively Australian about David Meredith’s yearning for freedom? I don’t think so, not least because my reading of The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn and Tennyson’s ‘Ulysses’ in that same school year suggested parallels in the motivations of all three characters.

So, when I think back to my days at school, I am left unconvinced by certain claims as to the role the teaching of Australian literature should play in the nation’s classrooms, such as those made by Donnelly (2007).
It is ironic, in an increasingly fragmented and disjointed world where global communication is instant and national cultures no longer exert the influence they once did, that many young people continue to seek a sense of local identity and place.

Witness the numbers attending Anzac Day dawn services or travelling to the beaches at Gallipoli. Studying Australian literature provides an opportunity for young Australians to appreciate, value and celebrate this nation’s identity and history.

I think I know what Donnelly is getting at, as I too have seen the television footage from Gallipoli, and have myself visited battle sites of the Western Front. But I also know that many of my former students have gone on to pursue university degrees that offer them the opportunity to live, study and work overseas. ‘[A] sense of local identity and place’ was the last thing on their minds as they moved through their Higher School Certificate studies in English and onto university. In fact, it is the very thing they have sought to leave behind, much like Joyce’s Stephen Dedalus (Joyce, 1994), trying to fly by the nets that hold back a soul, including nationality and language. They want to live free of borders and boundaries, not strengthen them. In this they are perhaps at odds with the national psyche, given that border security has become something of a national obsession, as poll-driven federal politicians pursue what Marr (2009) has described as the ‘expensive, deeply satisfying, national farce’ (p. 32) that is the attempt to preserve the integrity of Australia’s borders through policies of mandatory detention and off-shore processing for asylum seekers travelling by boat.

Why, then, is the impulse of literature, including Australian literature, necessarily to be understood in terms of putting people, ideas, and events securely in their place? As I surmised from my reading as a student, it is possible instead to understand this impulse to be the refusal of borders and boundaries—a carnivalesque ‘affirmation of enjambment . . . of running on, spilling over, re-territorialising’ (Lucy 2010, p. 106). If advancing such an argument in the present moment seems somehow ‘unAustralian’ (boo, hiss!), my well-read and bilingual ex-students nonetheless continue to board the international flights that will take them to live elsewhere. Attempts to (more) narrowly define and delimit Australian literature and its teaching are worth examining, not least because they are directed towards the imposition of cultural and pedagogical borders that I believe necessary to investigate as I
Teaching Australian Literature: From classroom conversations to national imaginings

set about educating my students for life in what Bauman (2007) calls ‘liquid times’, an age characterised by ‘continuous yet vain efforts to fortify and stabilize ... vexingly unstable boundaries’ and the consequent ‘recycling of diffuse fears into targeted prejudices, group antagonisms, occasional confrontations and perpetually simmering hostilities’ (p. 80).

Introduction

In Australia in recent years, media commentators and academics have lamented the supposed colonisation of secondary English by critical theory and cultural studies (e.g. Slattery, 2008; Turner, 2007). This has furthered a general sense of crisis in English, particularly in the teaching of literature, and has given added impetus to the development of a national curriculum (Doecke and Parr, 2008). That English is in a parlous state is a perspective that has been promoted by organisations and individuals with an institutional or professional interest in the teaching of literature, and a renewed emphasis on the teaching of Australian literature has come to be championed by some as a driver of much needed change in secondary English (see, for example, Australia Council for the Arts, 2007).

In these conditions the call to return English to having a central concern with literature, including a renewed focus on Australian literature, can be said to constitute an ethical demand on secondary English teachers. In effect it requires teachers to acknowledge and respond to what Critchley (2008) describes as the essential challenge of the ethical experience, ‘a moment of rebellious heteronomy that troubles the sovereignty of autonomy’ (p. 37). We recently have witnessed in this country a broadly conservative remotivation of the idea of literature as a transcendental absolute, or what might be represented as ‘Literature’ (Green, 2008; McLean Davies, 2008; cf. Widdowson, 1999). As Green and McLean Davies argue, this has been evident in two particular interventions in public discourse about the teaching of Literature and Australian literature: the communiqué released following the Australian Literature in Education Round Table (Australia Council for the Arts, 2007) and the paper developed to guide the writing of the national curriculum, Shape of the Australian Curriculum: English (National Curriculum Board, 2009). By their very nature, both documents are implicated in the restorations of certain politico-socio-cultural hierarchies in terms of what is taught, how it is taught and who gets to shape and control such matters. For the Literary absolute ‘is vested in the interests of a theory of social order based on
hierarchy and division', meaning it functions as an 'effective social practice of control' (Lucy, 1997, p. 216). One manifestation of such control in action has been public commentary arguing for tighter limitations on the professional autonomy of English teachers, an argument that has been advanced on the grounds that such measures are needed to ensure that what should be essential content in a national English curriculum does actually get taught (see, for example, Salusinszky, 2007).

Such interest in the development of what has now been published as The Australian Curriculum: English K-10 (Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority, 2010), with its delineation of Literature as one of three content organisers, signals that the teaching of Literature is, as Lucy suggests it to be, undeniably invested with social, cultural and political significance. The interventions in the teaching of Australian literature I have identified seem to me to demand that English teachers become more socially engaged, individually and collectively, articulating a diverse, multifaceted and compelling vision for their subject (cf. Doecke, Howie and Sawyer, 2006). In particular, what should be more widely acknowledged is that present debates about the teaching of Literature and Australian literature are also debates about identity and ways of being, as the quotation from Donnelly in my preface makes evident. For me, this highlights a need for teachers to frame their reflections on English teaching, identity and culture in ethical terms (cf. Kostogriz and Doecke, 2007). In advancing his case for an ethics of commitment, Critchley argues that 'politics without ethics is blind' (p. 13). This would appear to hold for curriculum politics as much as it does any other form. What strikes me as being telling about the present moment is that much of the criticism of contemporary English teaching has no empirical basis in — and is therefore 'blind' to — the realities of secondary English teachers’ work (cf. Doecke, Homer and Nixon (eds.), 2003). All sorts of claims are being made for Literature and Australian literature without any reference to the diverse conditions facing students and teachers as they work together in different school settings (McLean Davies, 2008; cf. Doecke, 1997).

This chapter critically examines my engagement with a third recent and significant intervention in the teaching of Literature and Australian literature, the publication of the Macquarie PEN Anthology of Australian Literature (Jose, 2009a). This coincided (more or less) with the Round Table and the development of the national curriculum, and the anthology has been said by its General Editor similarly to have its genesis in the supposed ‘crisis’ in literature
teaching (Jose, 2009b). Critical examination of the Round Table communiqué and the Shape of the Australian Curriculum: English has been undertaken by English educators, with a particular focus on the manner in which the documents represent Literature and Australian literature and the implications of these representations for English teachers (see Green, 2008; Homer, 2007; McLean Davies, 2008). Part of my response to the Round Table and the development of the Australian Curriculum was to think about how I would teach the Macquarie PEN Anthology in order to critically examine with my students the claims made for Literature and Australian literature in the Round Table communiqué and the Shape paper for the national curriculum. I understood this response to require consideration of the affordances of each, as well as the alternative understandings and possibilities suggested by the anthology.

I therefore frame my chapter in terms I understand to have been set for me, as a teacher, by the three interventions I have identified. In their own ways, I understand each to call into question my practice and my sense of self, the latter both as a teacher and a citizen. These three interconnected terms are disciplinary border protection, a sharpened national identity and cultural renewal. As my preface suggests, these ideas have come to underpin a rationale for the teaching of Australian literature that is now predominant in political and media commentary (cf. McLean Davies, 2008). As a form of critical engagement with this rationale, I offer possible approaches to teaching the Macquarie PEN Anthology through the critical lens of carnival (Bakhtin, 1984), seeking to highlight how, when understood and approached in this way, the anthology problematises many of the assumptions of the conservative remotivation of both Literature and Australian literature evident in the Round Table communiqué and the Shape paper. The NSW Extension 1 English course (Board of Studies, 1999) provides the context for these suggestions.

It is my contention that consciously theorised practice in the teaching of (Australian) literature can be an engaging and rewarding experience. Contrary to the claim by some critics of contemporary English teaching that ‘theory’ is a deadening influence, a criticism repeated in the Round Table communiqué, I believe ‘theory’ can help to illuminate for able senior secondary students the central question of literature: ‘the question of what literature could be’ (Wark, quoted in Cunningham, 2009; cf. Lucy (ed.), 2000). The notion that Australian literature is a ‘problem’ to be explored with students, and not simply a ‘moral technology’ (cf. Green, 2003), provides a basis for inquiry-based teaching and learning. The significance of this is not
to be underestimated at this time, given the raft of educational reforms being implemented in this nation and claims about a supposed decline in standards (cf. Doecke, Howie and Sawyer, 2006; Snyder, 2008). Luke (2010) argues that a huge educational challenge for governments, education authorities and teachers is to ‘up the ante’ for students by making the enacted curriculum more intellectually demanding and culturally meaningful. The suggested approach to the anthology that I offer here is directed towards these ends.

Reading the *Macquarie PEN Anthology* as an example of carnivalised writing

Reading the *Macquarie PEN Anthology* in the context provided by the Round Table and the development of the national curriculum indicates it is a very different sort of intervention, and would seem to aspire to a less restrictive and restricting influence on the thinking of teachers and students about the processes of defining a national literature and attributing value to individual works. In other words, the anthology presents a markedly different attitude to borders in the teaching of both Literature and Australian literature. Writing about the Round Table communiqué, McLean Davies argues, correctly I believe, that it ‘sought to silence … debates [about the definition of Australian literature] and recolonise Australian literature for a twenty-first century readership’ (p. 47). Ruminating on the prospect of national curriculum, Green (2008) expresses concerns about the ‘curiously reactionary, and even rather wilfully uninformed’ position taken on literary education in the *Shape* paper (p. 39). Where the Round Table and the *Shape* paper are held to deny difference, I contend that the *Macquarie PEN Anthology* celebrates the excessiveness of difference in literature — the refusal to be neatly defined and tightly constrained. Accordingly, I believe it is possible to read the anthology as a source of democratic and popular cultural renewal along the lines envisaged in Bakhtin’s understanding of carnival. I certainly found the *Macquarie PEN Anthology* to offer exciting pedagogical opportunities — in stark contrast to the vision of the classroom implicit in the Round Table communiqué and codified in the retrograde structure and elements of the content of the *Australian Curriculum: English*, with its convenient but simplistic organisation of content within three strands.²

As a ‘cultural analytic’ (Stallybrass and White, 1986, p. 6) of transgression, Bakhtin’s notion of the carnivalesque has much to offer in the analysis of cultural politics, drawing attention in particular to the discursive formulations
that underpin the political antagonisms inevitably associated with the bodies of classification – a national anthology of literature, for example – demanded of a culture in order to establish its identity. While acknowledging critical debates as to the politics of the carnivalesque, and disagreements as to whether it is inherently conservative or transgressive in nature, I am drawn to the positivism of Bakhtin’s thinking and writing, its emphasis on the democratic possibilities of reformed social relations, as I try to make sense of the ethical issues I face in my present conditions as a teacher of English and literature.

In this time of obsession with border protection, I am drawn instead to Bakhtin’s iconoclasm. Bakhtin writes,

“No dogma, no authoritarianism, no narrow minded-minded seriousness can co-exist with Rabelaisian images; these images are opposed to all that is finished and polished, to all pomposity, to every ready-made solution in the sphere of thought and world outlook. (p. 3)

I see such writing as offering an enlarging vision of life, providing a powerful counter to what Nobel prize-winning economist Sen (2006) describes as the present ‘miniaturization of people’ (p. xiii), which he understands to stem from a global movement towards partitioning – the creation of singular, all-dominating systems of classification of a social, cultural, religious or political nature – that is divisively working against the ‘universe of plural and diverse categories that shape the world in which we live’ (p. xiv). In much of the present public discourse about the teaching of Literature and Australian literature, I detect an unintended trace of Bakhtin’s language. His references to the ‘classical body’ and the ‘grotesque body’ seem particularly apposite in terms of understanding both the intents and reception of the Macquarie PEN Anthology, and what these reveal about attitudes to canon formation and systems of cultural valuation in this country. As I shall go on to argue, the discursive norms of the ‘grotesque body’ (cf. Stallybras and White, p. 23) – including impurity, exorbitance, and decentralised or eccentric arrangements – are readily evoked in relation to the Anthology, whether it is understood in positive or negative terms.

Jose’s (2009c) assertion that the Macquarie PEN Anthology continues a proud literary tradition in Australia of the ‘intervention of many ... black swans of trespass, making their arresting and beautiful appeal’ (p. 6) appears to me to echo elements of Bakhtin’s thinking about carnival. Bakhtin argues, ‘In the
world of carnival the awareness of the people’s immortality is combined with
the realisation that established authority and truth are relative’ (p. 256). This is
analogous to Jose’s understanding of tradition, which suggests that old certain-
ties and systems of valuation and categorisation are never entirely imperme-
able and stable, and that historical traditions are never singular or linear. (Jose
appears to be arguing that when it comes to a national literature, trespassing
cannot be forbidden; to the contrary, he seems to suggest, trespassing will be
prosecuted, as in enacted. More to the point, prosecutions of this kind are
most welcome, even a cause for celebration, as (literary) borders are things to
be crossed.) There is an impossibility evoked by Jose’s borrowed metaphor —
one more generally made manifest with the first recorded European sighting
of a black swan, as pointed out by Lucy (2010). This is the impossibility of
securing a singular and stable identity for anything, including Literature and
its teaching in secondary English. Just like the nation itself, the identities of
English, Literature and Australian literature will always already be in the
process of becoming something else. History seems therefore to offer a very
pertinent lesson in this ‘liquid’ age of anxiety about threats to our supposedly
singular and unitary national identity: in frontier encounters, transformative
exchanges can take place, creating new connections and allowing previously
unforeseen possibilities to emerge (Jones, 2008).

On these terms, the study of Australian literature in schools is bound
to call into question singular and rigid understandings of the identities of
Literature, Australian literature and the nation itself, as well as the way these
are allowed to be reasonably expressed in public discourse. Openness to
difference is an issue that I have sought to address in my own teaching, recog-
nising this to be an ethical imperative — one that is defined by my ‘infinite
responsibility’ (Critchley, p. 69) to an open conceptualisation of a future that
I understand as not being predetermined, the efforts of the authors of the
Round Table communiqué and the Australian Curriculum notwithstanding.
For this reason, I took the authors of the communiqué and the Shape paper
seriously enough to want to devise a curriculum for my students that would
re-explore Australia’s literary heritage, and the processes by which this is
defined and disseminated. I saw this engagement as my own sort of (peda-
gogical) frontier encounter. In developing the programming ideas I will go
on to describe, I have acted from a sense of affinity with Jose and Lucy, and
their welcoming of the ‘black swans of trespass’ that disturb our understand-
ings of identity and being. This is a metaphor that has helped me to scrutinise,
question and, paraphrasing the title of Graham Parr’s recent book, speak back to externally imposed reforms (Parr, 2010).

Which brings me back to Jose (2009b) and his line about ‘put[ting] the body of Australian literature into new hands, so they can make it theirs’ (p. 24). In these words, I further detect the notion of carnival in a number of ways. Jose’s discourse of ‘the body’ of Australian literature draws direct attention to the heart of the anthology and how it might be understood, in keeping with a key element of Bakhtin’s understanding of carnival, to celebrate the ‘positive, assertive character’ of bodily ‘exaggeration’, or the manner in which the growth and renewal of ‘a people’ is made manifest when ‘all that is bodily becomes grandiose, exaggerated, immeasurable’ (p. 20). Echoing Bakhtin’s championing of popular renewal, Jose (2009c) aligns with the Australian people the ‘body’ of work his editorial team, has collected together, both reflecting and encouraging their growth and renewal, as the work is placed into ‘new hands’. Jose writes, ‘The moment seems right to look again at the Australian literary archive with a view to framing Australian literature afresh for contemporary needs’ (p. 3).

At the same time, I also recognise an analogous trace of the carnivallised body in some of the more vehement criticisms that have been made of the Macquarie PEN Anthology, particularly in the way these criticisms have emphasised the ‘grotesque’ elements of this particular corpus. This is best exemplified by Peter Craven’s controversial review (Craven, 2009a; cf. Cunningham, 2009).

In his general critique of the editorial selection process, Craven appears to argue that the dutiful inclusion of work by the likes of Ania Walwicz, whose writing might be described as ‘of the moment’ and ‘socially and politically engaged’, must come at the cost of more worthy, enduring and universalistic – which is to say Literary – pieces by the likes of Gwen Harwood. This criticism is subsequently amplified in Craven’s strong objection to what he sees as an over-representation of Aboriginal writing.

This leaves the final glaring failure of the PEN anthology. It overflows with Aboriginal writing, much of which has no literary value whatever … It is hard to see what can have possessed the editor … to publish reams and reams of everything from Bennelong’s letter to speeches by Marcia Langton – and every kind of doggerel and naıve bit of memoir besides … The sheer quantity of
Aboriginal writing included in the volume — much of it devoid of literary quality or even literary ambition — is an egregious mistake. (p. 8)

Clearly, in his criticisms Craven condemns the excessiveness of the anthology, taking issue with the way in which the editors have apparently compromised the transcendental idea and ideal that is Literature. Craven appears to read the anthology as bringing Literature down to earth, leaving it mired in ephemeral social and political concerns of, at most, passing interest.

I find great irony in the fact that Craven should criticise the contents of the Macquarie PEN Anthology in terms that unintentionally echo Bakhtin's ideas about carnival. For instance, the emphasis Craven puts on the excessive physicality of the anthology recalls for me Bakhtin's argument that 'The essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation' (p. 19). It certainly appears to be the case that Craven is arguing that the focus of the anthology on certain realities of Aboriginal history, the migrant experience, and more 'everyday' genres of writing effectively constitute a grotesque degradation of a higher ideal.

If Craven inadvertently helps us to understand the Macquarie PEN Anthology as an example of carnivalised writing, there is an important caveat. Where Bakhtin writes positively of the carnivalistic 'lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, and abstract' (p. 19), Craven depicts what he sees as the flaws in the anthology in much the same terms. The language and tenor of Craven's criticisms are antithetical to Bakhtin's writing about the possibilities for democratic renewal that carnival allows to be imagined. As Pomorska (1984) notes in her foreword to Rabelais and His World, Bakhtin opposed the 'authoritarian word' of 'any official culture that considers itself the only respectable model and dismisses all other cultural strata as invalid or harmful' (p. viii). She notes that one of the inherent features of carnival emphasised by Bakhtin is its 'emphatic and purposeful 'heteroglossia'... and its multiplicity of styles ...' (p. 8). These are the very qualities of the Macquarie PEN Anthology to which Craven appears to most vehemently object.

Bakhtin's vision for social, cultural and political renewal is built upon subversion of 'tight canonical formulas' (Holquist, 1984, p. xvii), and this is a vision that the editorial team of the anthology collectively appear also to share. As Josc (2009c) writes in his General Introduction, 'The anthology... implies different ways of being Australian as well as displaying different kinds of literary creativity' (p. 2). The idea that 'literary creativity' might include what
Jose describes as 'a jostling variety of genres and styles, including letters, journals, speeches and songs' (p. 2), chimes for me with Bakhtin's description of carnival as belonging to 'the borderline between art and life', being life itself 'shaped according to a certain pattern of play' (p. 7). The way that the editors of the Macquarie PEN Anthology have found a degree of 'play', or plasticity, in Australian literature – and indeed Literature itself – seemingly appears to Craven to be nothing less than a moral outrage. This sense is certainly conveyed in his language when he writes of the editors' 'egregious mistake', and asserts that they 'wasted so many pages of material' that compromises the 'real heritage' otherwise evident in the book (p. 8). It is as if Craven believes the editorial teams is mocking the idea and ideal of an Australian canon, and are taking the piss, so to speak, by introducing an element of unreality.

My use here of a familiar vulgarism is deliberate. It points to the particular nature and role of humour in carnival as described by Bakhtin, who argues that a key defining element of earthy carnival humour is its ambivalence, 'It is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives' (p. 12). Craven's ambivalence about the anthology, the combination of admiration and hostility characterising his review, seems to me to carry the sense that he feels its readers are the victims of an elaborate (black?) joke. Writing about carnivalesque displays of humour, Lucy (2010) suggests that taking the piss depends on a straight-faced refusal to be 'interpellated as the obedient subject of a discourse' (p. 101). In this sense, to take the piss is to provide a double reading of a discourse, whereby the line between what is serious and what is ironic, what is real and what is unreal, is blurred momentarily. Craven appears unwilling to accept the double reading of the discourse of canonicity that the editors of the Macquarie PEN Anthology can be understood to provide in the way that they both celebrate and transform what he believes to be the real literary heritage of this nation, as if this is something both self-evident and incontrovertible. Interestingly, Bakhtin writes that the prevailing forms of 'medieval humorous literature composed in the vernacular' were 'secular parody and travesty' (pp. 14–15). Craven, in his vehement reaction to the more vernacular and worldly elements of the Macquarie PEN Anthology, could very well have been describing it as an unwitting or accidental continuation of this tradition.

Possible classroom Approaches to the Macquarie PEN Anthology

I will now move to considering aspects of how the anthology might be
approached in a senior secondary classroom. The questions and activities I put forward here have been devised with the English Extension 1 course in NSW in mind, and would form part of a three term study in the Preliminary HSC year (i.e. Year 11). This course is a non-compulsory elective. It is allocated 60 indicative hours and studied in addition to the compulsory two units of English, or 120 indicative hours, required of all NSW students sitting for the Higher School Certificate (HSC). The Extension 1 course is, as its name suggests, designed for very able and interested students wishing to extend their knowledge, skills and understanding through more specialised and intensive study of literary concepts and texts. The syllabus for the Year 11 – or Preliminary – course gives teachers considerable flexibility in designing learning programs for their students. Students undertaking the Preliminary Extension course must complete one module, for which schools are able to develop their own elective or electives:

Module: Texts, Culture and Value

Students explore the ways in which aspects of texts from the past have been appropriated into popular culture. The module develops students’ understanding of how and why cultural values are maintained and changed. (Board of Studies, 1999, p. 80)

A unit on carnival from a Bakhtinian perspective seems a natural fit for this Module. A possible course outline for students might read as follows.

In the elective Carnival you will explore aspects of the thinking of Russian cultural theorist and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975) on language, literature, cultural values, and processes of evaluation. The particular focus for study will be the concept of carnival, and the ways it can be understood to be given expression in literary and popular culture texts. You will explore carnival as a critical framework for understanding and responding to literary and popular culture texts, for creating your own texts, and for considering the value ascribed to texts. You will study three set texts and additional texts of your own choosing.

The texts studied by students could include introductory extracts from Rabelais’s Gargantua and Pantagruel, works by Shakespeare, novels by writers such as Angela Carter and Jeanette Winterson, Michael Moore's film Bowling
for Columbine, and the Macquarie Pen Anthology of Australian Literature.

In what follows, I offer a general description of some possible teaching activities for the anthology. These suggestions are not meant to be definitive or exhaustive. It is important to stress that the activities have been written for a very able group of students, my most recent teaching role being in an academically selective high school. I do not propose that the approach I describe will be readily transferable to other teaching contexts. While it might be said that the Extension 1 course is in and of itself ‘selective’, as it is designed for highly able and interested students, I remain cognisant of the fact that my particular experience of the frontier encounters between theory and practice and Literature and popular culture have, as all frontier encounters do, taken place in a specific local context (cf. Jones, p. 2). Further, while I have framed the activities as questions, they should be read as being dependent upon a good deal of explicit teaching and support for students; they could not be implemented in the classroom without adaptation. The activities also presume that close reading of the texts will be undertaken individually by students, but also in groups and as a class, in order to inform and support the conceptual understandings they will be expected to express. Close reading practices and aesthetic understandings retain a central place in secondary English in NSW. The approach I outline here should not be taken by readers to be representative of all that would take place in my classroom in such a course of study.

The activities I present have been organised according to acts of framing identified by MacLachlan and Reid (1994), the numbers indicating what I believe to be the most productive and supporting sequence for students. As I see it, the value of making recursive acts of framing explicit to students is that it can help them to more fully realise the nature of interpretation. MacLachlan and Reid argue, ‘Interpretation of the simplest utterances depends … on acts of framing of which readers are generally unaware’ (p. 4). Their understanding of interpretation takes account of extratextual, intratextual, intertextual and circumtextual acts of framing, invaluably drawing attention to the complex, situated (intuitionally, socially, culturally, ideologically) meaning-making resources students bring to their encounters with texts. I would argue that developing students’ awareness of how interpretation takes place in and through these frames is not only a form of disciplinary knowledge building, it is crucial to their engagement with the ethical and ‘political’ elements of disciplinarity, something Dixon (2008) argues to be essential for a cohort it is
hoped will continue to pursue literary studies at a tertiary level.

In this particular instance, exposure to the idea of framing will likely enhance students' understanding of how debates about the question of literature, including the boundary maintenance strategies that are being put in place with regard to Australian literature and different reactions to these, are integral to understanding the Macquarie PEN Anthology. It will also give them a basis by which to explore the broader issue of 'how and why cultural values are maintained and changed', which is a requirement of the syllabus. The way that conscious acts of framing and reframing require students to continually revise and add to their interpretations, resisting a final or concluding word for as long as practical realities such as assessment requirements allow, strikes me as something of a parallel to Bakhtin's emphasis on transformation and renewal in carnival, and also the emphasis Jose (2009c) implicitly places on renewal in describing his editorial team's own act of framing and reframing a heritage: 'The transforming struggle with existing realities and existing forms of expression is characteristic of Australian literature as it reaches beyond normative bounds for new kinds of utterance' (p. 6). The pedagogy I propose might consequently be understood to be much more than the expression of a faddish concern with 'theory'. As an approach, it might be said to be both grounded in and entirely consistent with the (non-singular and non-unified) literary heritages, international and national, that time has bequeathed my students.

I envisage that the following activities would be completed after students have completed introductory work on carnival and Bakhtin's understanding of language over a period of some weeks. This would include using these ideas to critically respond to a range of texts, and also as a framework for their own creative work. The numbering of the activities indicates a proposed sequence of lesson ideas that moves back and forth between the frames, requiring students to consider how previous learning experiences can be further developed, refined or recontextualised as a result of considering new ideas and questions.

A. Extratextual Framing: 'acts of extra textual framing are always involved ... [they] depend on seemingly “outside” (extra) information, unspecified by the text but felt to be presupposed by it ... we frame extratextually by drawing on our accumulated knowledge of the world, both experiential and textually mediated.' (MacLachlan and Reid p. 3)
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1. Introductory questions:
   • How would you define literature?
   • What distinguishes literary texts from other sorts of texts?
   • For what purposes is literature studied? What does your answer reveal about the role literature plays in society and culture?
   • What do you know about the processes by which a text might be determined to be ‘literary’ or as having the qualities of ‘literature’, as opposed to being given some other label (e.g. ‘popular entertainment’, ‘pot boiler’, ‘an airport novel’, ‘doggerel’)?
   • What frames of reference have you drawn on to determine your answers (e.g. personal experience, the views of other people, some form of textual evidence)?

2. Research recent political and media commentary on the teaching of literature in Australian schools. What range of views can you find on the questions posed in section one? Which opinions accord most closely with your own? Which diverge most from your own?

5. Research the critical reception of the Macquarie PEN Anthology. What trends have been evident? How does the reception of the anthology add to your understanding of some of the issues raised in section 1 and section 2?

10. Representing the nation. Some commentators on the writing and teaching of Australian history have identified two competing views: the ‘black arm band’ view and the ‘white blindfold’ view. As a history of Australian literature, does the anthology fit readily into either category? Which texts most obviously support your answer and why?

B. Intertextual Framing: ‘Intertextual frames relate one text or text-type to another.’ (MacLachlan and Reid, p. 4)

6. Spend time reading an anthology of literature other than the Macquarie PEN Anthology. Refer to both the editorial introduction and the collected texts in answering the following questions.
   • How is literature defined, explicitly or implicitly, in the anthology?
   • How does the anthology ‘secure’ its explicit or implicit definition of literature?
   • How is the anthology organised (e.g. chronologically, thematically, by textual forms, by author – or a combination)? What does this reveal about the way literature is being defined? What does it reveal about literature’s socio-cultural functions?
   • Does the text identify the institutional affiliations of the editor(s)? What is the significance of adding or leaving out such information when you consider the processes by which literature is defined?
A text for this time?

- Does the anthology appear to have a single or a multiple 'vision' of the world and human experience? How is this made obvious to readers?

7. Editorial visions. Considering the 'vision' and raison d'être for the *Macquarie PEN Anthology*, as outlined by Nicholas Jose in General introduction, compared to the editorial introductions for two other significant anthologies of Australian literature: the *MacMillan Anthology of Australian Literature* (1990) and the *Oxford Anthology of Australian Literature* (1985). What do you find to be the key similarities and difference between each? How might some of these similarities and differences be explained?

- Survey the contents of each of the anthologies. What does this reveal? Are there grounds to suggest that each represents Australia in a different way? If so, which of the anthologies most closely matches your own understandings of Australia and why?

8. Synthesis and evaluation. What do your responses to parts 1–7 reveal in relation to each of the following?

- The definition of literature.
- The processes for defining literature.
- The question of who gets to decide what is and isn't literature.
- The functions literature can have in society and culture.
- The stability or instability of the identity that literature has had over time.

C. **Circumtextual Framing**: 'The *circumtextual features* (circum, “around”) of a text's material presentation and location in space.' (MacLachlan and Reid, p. 4)

3. Metaphors to read by. The General Editor of the *Macquarie PEN Anthology* frames the book in terms of an Australian literary tradition of 'disruptive writing' and 'black swans of trespass' (p. 6).

- What do you understand him to mean by this?

- How is this metaphor designed to frame your reading of the anthology?

- What are 5 texts in the anthology that you believe best exemplify the metaphor?

9. Performativity. In their joint commentary, contributing editors Anita Heiss and Peter Minter emphasise that the selection of Aboriginal writings 'reveal modes of performativity that are central to literary writing' (p. 8).

- Research what this might mean. How might this idea be related to the idea of *Carnival* and Bakhtin's thinking on language more generally?

- Explain how 'performativity' helps you to understand two different examples of Aboriginal writing. One should date back to the early decades of white settlement, and one should be more contemporary.

- Where and how is the notion of 'performativity' revealed by non-Aboriginal writings?
D. **Intratextual Framing:** ‘... occurs when we pay attention to the way in which the flow of words “within” (intext) the text is affected by subdivisional or other internal framing devices.' (MacLachlan and Reid, p. 4)

4. Trace the ideas, attitudes and values conveyed by such different poems as Frank the Poet’s ‘A Convict’s Tour to Hell’, Caroline Carleton’s ‘The Song of Australia’, Dorothea Mackellar’s ‘My Country’, A.D. Hope’s ‘Australia’, Jack Davis’ ‘The First Born’ and Ania Walwicz’s ‘Australia’. In what ways does this sort of reading strategy serve to highlight aspects of Bakhtia’s thinking on Carnival and language?

* Construct your own series of intertextual connections, developed around key ideas you have taken from Bakhtin. Explain how this has illuminated your reading of each text as well as the anthology itself.

**Synthesis and Evaluation: essay question.**

11. ‘The Macquarie PEN Anthology of Australian Literature can be read as an example of carnivalised writing.’ Critically evaluate this statement in light of your own reading of the anthology and the views of others.

**Conclusion**

In considering the possible affordances of a national curriculum, McLean Davies argues for a ‘nexus approach’, whereby ‘critical engagement with both Australian literature and the local and global society that has produced it’ (p. 49) takes place. I believe the approach to the *Macquarie PEN Anthology* I have proposed is a particular version of this sort of critical engagement in the liminal zones that are the frontiers between Literature and literature, theory and practice. Perhaps more significantly, what I have sought to emphasise is the way a ‘nexus approach’ requires a certain critical orientation on the part of English teachers: an ethic of commitment that sets itself against the ‘consensual idyll’ (Crichtley, 2008, p. 130) in relation to the teaching of Literature and Australian literature that has been promoted by certain media commentators, the Round Table communiqué and the *Shape* paper for the national curriculum. In so doing, I understand my own motives to be conservative. I wish to pass on what I, in my own schooling, came to understand to be the (non-unifying) impulse of literature through time and across cultures: disobedience in thought, actions and language – or what Lucy (2000) has described as the ‘right to defiance’ (p. 5). Literature, as the *Macquarie PEN Anthology* suggests in relation to Australian literature, is always already exceeding and reshaping its own corpus. It has certainly been my experience as a reader.
that the carnival spirit of literature is undeniable, and not easily occluded or disguised.

I have argued here for an ethic of commitment on the part of English teachers. An ethic of commitment, as I have described it in this chapter, is not a warrant simply to be oppositional. Dominant discourses presently shaping the work of English teachers cannot be escaped; they are not Joycean nets to be flown past on the way to a transcendental paradise where unalloyed professional autonomy is the norm (cf. Parr, 2010). However, discourses can be held up to critical scrutiny, challenged and re-territorialised. In the ways that they variously help us to better understand the workings and consequences of dominant discourses, ‘theories’ – carnival being my chosen example here – can help teachers and students to respond in productive ways to forces shaping their work and subjectivities. When the specific needs, interests and capabilities of their students are at the forefront of a teacher’s planning and practice, ‘theory’ has the potential to generate new and interesting readings of texts being set in class, as well as different understandings of the self and experience. From my perspective as a teacher of able secondary English students, theorised practices of reading and response disrupt what Reid (1984) has labelled ‘mirages of unity’ (p. 53). On these terms, the pedagogy I have proposed here can be understood to promote ‘democratic dissensus’, working against singular understandings of the nation and a national literature and acknowledging that the ‘exorbitant demand at the heart of my subjectivity defines that subjectivity by dividing it to otherness’ (Critchley, p. 130). As I have sought to illustrate, the Australian Literature in Education Round Table, the development of the Australian Curriculum and the publication of the Macquarie PEN Anthology have been decisive forces in shaping my thinking, teaching and professional identity in recent times, if not in ways that some of the people associated with these interventions in public discourse about the teaching of Australian literature would endorse. The three interventions made particular demands of me, and I have endeavoured here and in my classroom to respond. Of course, the logic of the argument I have presented here is that my own students should begin to carnivalse the curriculum and classroom, questioning and challenging my approach and the demands I make of them. I have witnessed students developing the skill and confidence to do this, but how this has been made manifest is a subject for another time.

For now, let this chapter stand as my affirmation of the power and value of literature. And there is nothing about it that is definitively Australian.
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Notes

1 Eaglestone (1997), for example, explores the ethical commitments of different understandings of literature.

2 As far back as 1971, the Inspector of English in NSW (Little, 1971/2010) had rejected the idea that a renewed identity for secondary English could be secured through a three-strand curriculum structure. He wrote, ‘To say that English is language, literature and composition and so on is like saying that this audience compromises some red-haired people, some people who had a merry Christmas, and some people with a small bank balance. True – but it doesn’t “add up”.’ (p. 19).

3 Jose acknowledges (p. 6) that the phrase originates with Ern Malley and was also used by Humphrey McQueen as the title for his 1979 study of Australian modernism.

4 Lucy (2010) also draws on the metaphor of the black swan, exploring the notion of identity in relation to poetry and Australian poetry in particular. In a piece originally written to introduce a collection of poems by John Kinsella, and published before the release of the Macquarie PEN Anthology, Lucy writes, ‘From black swans to egg-laying mammals, difference is the norm downunder; and since everything belonging to the history of metaphysics was decided on in the certain knowledge that all swans are white, we are both surplus to the requirements of an idea of the West and an affront to metaphysics’ (pp. 111–112).

5 A qualification is required here. It must be acknowledged that beyond the controversy caused by his criticisms of the Macquarie PEN Anthology, Craven certainly has a noteworthy record as a champion of new writers and new writing. His vision for the ‘canon’ of Australian literature is by no means as limited as this single review might otherwise suggest. This is a point he takes up in a response to Cunningham (Craven, 2009b).

6 The latter might be seen, for example, in the emphasis contributing editors Heiss and Minter (2009) place on ‘modes of performativity that are central to literary writing’ (p. 8) in their essay about the Aboriginal texts in the anthology.

7 The objectives for the Extension course include the statement that students will ‘come to value and appreciate’ the ‘pleasure and diversity of language and literature’ and ‘appropriateness, subtlety and aesthetics in language use’ (Board of Studies, p. 85).

References


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