The Misalignment Between the Curriculum and the Classroom: Critical Thinking and Creativity in English Study

Daniel Carrington

A thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Research

School of Social Sciences and Psychology

Western Sydney University, Australia

2017
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.

Daniel Carrington

...........

(Signature)
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisors, Peter Bansel and Brett Bennett, for their invaluable support throughout my candidature. I thank my family and friends for their understanding and assistance, and my partner, Kim, for her constant encouragement.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 1:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Recent History of Education in Australia: Neoliberalism in New South Wales</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 2:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role of Critical Thinking and Creativity in NSW Level 6 English Syllabi, 1983-2017</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 3:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking With Teachers: The Role of Critical Thinking and Creativity in the English Classroom</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conclusion</strong></td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference List</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract:

Arguably, the most striking impact that neoliberalism has had on the Australian education system over the last 3 decades is the move towards mass standardised testing, and the subsequent creation of ‘league tables’ that pit schools and students against each other in a quasi-market. This research focuses on the impact that these changes have had on the role of critical thinking and creativity in the English classrooms of New South Wales (NSW). The research involves both document analysis and interviews with teachers. A thematic analysis of key syllabus documents from the 1980s to the present and beyond maps key features of the documents at different time periods, and identifies articulations of the purpose, value and measurement of these key features of the English syllabus. Interviews with English teachers serve to investigate the ways in which these shifting articulations of curriculum and assessment have impacted pedagogy. These three categorical framings – curriculum, assessment, and pedagogy- provide a framework for an analysis of how the role of critical thinking and creativity in the English classrooms of NSW has changed. It will also contribute to debates about the value of critical thinking and creativity amongst policy makers and other education professionals.
Introduction

The importance of nurturing creativity and critical thinking in education has long been recognised. Specifically, the study of English literature encourages students to engage critically and creatively with texts and ideas in order to develop their higher order thinking abilities. This is particularly important in dealing with the complex issues brought about by globalisation (Lau, 2011). This thesis explores how changes to education policy have impacted pedagogical practices for high school English study in NSW (New South Wales). How has the role of creativity and critical thinking in English curriculum documents changed over time? What were the motivations for these changes? How have these changes altered how creativity and critical thinking is taught?

Before these questions can be addressed, it is necessary to explore exactly what is meant by ‘creativity’ and ‘critical thinking’. There is a vast amount of research exploring philosophical and psychological interpretations of these two ideas (Uden & Beaumont, 2006; Beyer, 1985; Halpern, 1996; Weinstein, 1995). For the purposes of this thesis I will be using the definitions given by the 2017 NSW English syllabuses as this thesis is primarily concerned with how creativity and critical thinking link to education:

“Creativity: The dynamic process of using language to conceptualise, interpret and synthesise ideas in order to develop a ‘product’.

Critical: Exploration of the quality of argument, content, analysis, information or persuasion in oral, visual or written text, to assess the way in which themes, issues or ideas are presented for the audience and purposes intended.” (NSW Education Standards Authority [NESA], 2017, page 62).

With these definitions in mind, I will explore how changes to education policy in NSW have impacted pedagogical practices for creativity and critical thinking.
In chapter 1, I examine how neoliberal politics and policies have impacted education globally, and how education policies in NSW have reflected and reacted to these changes. The key issues identified and explored are managerialism, accountability, and the corporatisation of education, and there is a particular focus on changes to assessment regimes. I then look at how these changes influence high school English study, in particular the nature of how creativity and critical thinking is nurtured. The structure of the chapter is designed to begin on a global scale, then to advance with a focus on Australia, and then finally concluding by reducing the scale further and focusing on high school English study in NSW. This then leads into the second chapter; a thematic analysis of NSW English curriculum documents.

In chapter 2, I investigate the position of creativity and critical thinking in the NSW English stage 6 syllabus, and look at how this position has shifted over time. The documents analysed are the English syllabuses and the relevant assessment and reporting documents from four time periods: 1983, 1999, 2010, and 2017. Given the focus on creativity and critical thinking, these are the two key themes through which the documents are analysed, and I give an account of how the place of these two themes have changed over time. These changes are then linked to the discussion of the impacts of neoliberalism in the first chapter. The NSW English curriculum documents have transformed significantly since 1983, and these changes have impacted pedagogy and assessment, which then leads onto the third and final chapter; a report and analysis of interviews I conducted with NSW high school English teachers.

In chapter 3, I investigate how the ways in which curriculum documents portray the place of creativity and critical thinking have impacted pedagogical practices. This is also discussed with reference to larger shifts in educational practice, as outlined in the first chapter. I do so by reporting and analysing a series of interviews I conducted with NSW high school English teachers on the aforementioned topics. These helped identify a misalignment between the curriculum documents and classroom practice, as the teachers discussed how what is stated in syllabus documents with regards to creativity and critical thinking is not effectively translated into pedagogical practice because of the constricting nature of assessment practices.
This then leads to the Conclusion, which reflects on how the chapters interact with one another, articulates the conclusions that can be drawn from them, and looks to the future and to how they can be addressed. It is my hope that this research signifies the justification for further research and analysis, as the importance of this topic (that is, the role of education as developing creative and critical individuals) is well established in the curriculum and other educational policy documents, and if there is a misalignment identified, then it is of great importance that things are realigned. Education is the backbone of society, and any misalignments within it force us to hunch over and stare at our feet, instead of looking, and moving, forward.
Chapter 1:

The Recent History of Education in Australia: Neoliberalism in New South Wales

Neoliberal politics and policies have reshaped global education policy and practice. This chapter will explore the impact of neoliberalism, with a particular focus on changes to testing regimes, especially in the field of English study. A conceptual framework encompassing a global scale introduces neoliberalism, before the chapter turns attention to the Australian State of New South Wales (NSW). This chapter traces how neoliberalism shaped how creativity and creativity have been in taught high school English classrooms.

Neoliberalism and Education

Neoliberalism is a multifaceted concept in political economy. This chapter uses the term ‘neoliberalism’ to describe the theory that argues that it is in the best interests of society to allow the free market to manage and control most sectors of public life. The state is responsible only for institutions like the emergency services, the military, and for the guaranteeing of private property rights. The critical geographer David Harvey (2005) has noted that one of the implications of this position is that “if markets do not exist… then they must be made, by state action if necessary” (p. 2). The privatisation and marketisation of sectors previously managed by the government has been one result of neoliberal policies. Education, whether delivered by the private sector or the state, has been increasingly subject to market forces in the form of school comparison and competition framed within a discourse of consumer choice.
In *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution* (2015), Wendy Brown articulates and critiques the ubiquity of neoliberal thought. Brown focuses on the pervasiveness of neoliberal thought in society, and defines this impact as reframing all aspects of life in economic terms. Brown (2015) argues that we now find ourselves in a world where “All conduct is economic conduct; all spheres of existence are framed and measured by economic terms and metrics, even when those spheres are not directly monetized” (p. 9-10). Of course, economic concerns are a facet of every aspect of governance, and an institution or sector of government cannot function without prudent economic consideration, but neoliberalism places economics as the arbiter of existence. That is, the value of a thing is defined primarily by its economic output. The purposes for education in a state are, of course, multifaceted, but one of the most important roles for education has traditionally been on forming ethical citizens, a view that can be traced as far back as the ancient Greeks. Finland, long seen as a world leader in education, states in its Basic Education Act (1998), that education should “support pupils’ growth into humanity and into ethically responsible membership of society” (Basic Education Act, 1998). In contrast, a neoliberal view of education transforms it into “a product that can be bought and sold like anything else” (Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 254). That does not necessarily mean that citizenship and ethics have been abandoned, but that these aims are best met by free market mechanisms (Tomasi, 2012). Brown (2015) discusses the impact of neoliberalism on the state and on the individual:

“Neoliberalism thus does not merely privatize – turn over to the market for individual production and consumption – what was formerly publicly supported and valued. Rather, it formulates everything, everywhere, in terms of capital investment and appreciation, including and especially humans themselves.” (p. 176).

This can be seen in a neoliberal view of education as the potential for humans to contribute to a national and global economy. (Ealy, 2014).

Brown (2015) summarises and outlines four major types of criticisms of neoliberal thought and influence. The first is that neoliberalism has not only failed to address growing inequality, but has strengthened and sustained it; the wealthiest are even wealthier, the poor are even poorer, and the “middle strata works more hours for
less pay, fewer benefits, less security, and less promise of retirement or upward mobility” (p. 29) (also see Stiglitz, 2012; Milanović, 2010). The second argues that neoliberalism has become so pervasive that it has subsumed parts of society not fit for marketisation. This is based on the idea that “marketisation contributes to human exploitation or degradation… because it limits or stratifies access to what ought to be broadly accessible and shared… or because it enables something intrinsically horrific or severely denigrating to the planet” (Brown, 2015, p. 29) (also see Satz, 2010; Sandel, 2014). The third is concerned with neoliberal governance, and argues that it leads to too much intimacy between the state and corporations, which results in the “corporate domination of political decisions and economic policy” (Brown, 2015, p. 29) (also see Wolin, 2008). Brown’s fourth and final categorisation is concerned with the economic consequences of neoliberalism, in particular “the destabilizing effects of the inherent bubble and other dramatic fluctuations of financial markets” (Brown, 2015, p. 30) (also see Hacker & Pierson, 2011).

This thesis is primarily aligned with the second criticism, as it discusses the impacts that the marketisation of education in Australia has had on English curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. That is, the next two chapters of this thesis focus on the role of creativity and critical thinking in NSW high school English study, and seek to address whether changes in policy have limited the opportunity for students to grow in their critical and creative capacities. However, all of these critiques intertwine, as the implications of one have impacts on the others, and therefore the critiques with which this thesis more closely aligns link to broader critiques.

Whilst there has been a worldwide turn towards neoliberal policies and practices since the 1970s, the process has occurred in different ways in different places. For example, in Chile and Argentina neoliberalisation occurred via a military coup supported by the upper classes. However, the two key figures in the neoliberal turn are Margaret Thatcher (British prime minister 1979 – 1990) and Ronald Reagan (US president 1981- 1989), who have come to symbolise the implementation of neoliberal policies (deregulation, tax cuts, privatisation) in western democracies. Alongside the neoliberal turn, western democracies shifted from industrial economies to knowledge economies. This refigured the role of knowledge in society, and thereby
the role of education in the production of individual and national wealth, as well as
the massive role these play in global competitiveness; As Ozga and Lingard (2007)
note, “The OECD and the World Bank stress that education and training provide the
entry requirements to participation in the new [knowledge economy]” (p. 71). Harvey
(2005) argues that this happened through the establishment of neoliberal thought as
‘common-sense’, which was achieved through the mobilisation of traditional values
and fears; particular policies were justified by broad notions of freedom,
individualism, and personal responsibility. This was perpetuated by the “powerful
ideological influences circulated through the corporations, the media, and the
numerous institutions that make up civil society” (Harvey, 2005, p. 51). Conway and
Heynen (2006) articulate the neoliberal reshaping of society: “The common collective
interest and the public good has been negotiated away by ideological, political, social
and economic power-plays, which privilege individual accumulation and self interest”
(p. 20). Harvey (2005) argues that neoliberal ways of thinking have become so
pervasive that it has “become hegemonic as a mode of discourse” (p. 3). That is,
neoliberalism and neoliberal ideas are the status quo, and are treated as the accepted
way of interpreting an individual’s value and place in society.

Neoliberal influence did not begin at the moment Thatcher and Reagan were
elected, but is rather linked to decades worth of influence lead by prominent corporate
lobbying organisations and think tanks. The political implementation of neoliberal
ideas was only made possible after enough of those in power were either convinced
by the ideas or by the futility of opposing them. Miller (2010), in his discussion on the
role of corporate lobbying in the rise of neoliberalism, gives the example of the
relationship between the Institute for Economic Affairs (IEA) and the election of
Thatcher. After her election, Thatcher wrote a letter of thanks to the head of the IEA,
declaring, “It was primarily your foundation work which enabled us to rebuild the
philosophy upon which our Party succeeded in the past” (Cockett, as cited in Miller,
2010, p. 27). Neoliberal governance was only made possible in the UK, and in much
of the west, by the success of corporate lobbying organisations and think tanks.

Miller (2010) also goes on to outline four of the most influential transnational
lobbying organisations and policy planning groups that laid the groundwork for the
global neoliberal turn. These are the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), the
Bilderberg Group, the World Economic Forum (WEF), and the Trilateral Commission. The ICC is the “largest international lobby group representing pure corporate interests” (p. 34) and consistently fights against business regulation. The ICC has close connections with the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The Bilderberg Group is a policy planning group that reaches out to rising politicians “who can either be relied upon to agree or have potential for co-option into the neoliberal agenda” (Miller, 2010, p. 36) and connects them with “financiers and industrialists who offer them wise words” (Ronson, 2001, p. 299). The WEF meets annually at Davos, Switzerland, with the intention of bringing together thousands of business leaders, politicians, academics, and media members. The WEF can be directly linked to the creation of the WTO, “the most recent institution to join the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank as the institutions of global economic governance” (Miller, 2010, p. 37). The Trilateral Commission was established in 1973, with its first major goal set as “the dismantling of the democratic welfare states, which were judged to be… incompatible with the long-term aims of capitalism” (Miller, 2010, p. 37). Corporate lobby groups, planning organisations, and think tanks all play an essential role in maintaining the neoliberal status quo.

One of these organisations is the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which asserts considerable influence on educational systems worldwide. The OECD is responsible for implementing the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) since 2000, which is a standardised test administered by 59 nations, and taken by students that are 15 years of age. The results of these tests are used in education policymaking on both a national and international level, and the results of a nation on these tests often equate to an understanding of how effective their education system is (Rey, 2010). The OECD and PISA have had transformative impacts on education in Australia, as Lingard, Sellar, and Savage (2014) note, “The OECD and PISA have had significant influence on the ‘Education Revolution’ in Australia and on the construction of NAPLAN and My School” (p. 716). The influence of the OECD and PISA on NAPLAN highlights a simple example for how global education governance influences Australia’s national education policy.

The shift towards a knowledge economy has transferred the role of education to the creation of human capital, which has led to a demand for more stringent testing
regimes in order to facilitate competitive differentiation (Apple, 2004; Pratt, 2016). The implementation of these testing regimes has occurred on both a national and an international level, and they are related to such an extent that PISA scores are often seen as the measuring stick for the effectiveness of national education systems. Indeed, as Rizvi and Lingard (2010) note, “it is no longer possible to understand education policy without an appreciation of the central role that testing and accountability regimes now play in policy development and evaluation” (p. 114). Further, curriculum and pedagogy have been affected not only by the changes to assessment, but also by the importance of international concerns.

Neoliberalism and Education: An Australian Context

In Australia, the provision of education has historically been the role of the State governments, and has been one of their most important responsibilities. However, in 1963 the national government began funding state schooling, which introduced the commonwealth as a key stakeholder with an interest in connecting the funding provided to initiatives perceived to be in the national interest. In Rethinking National Curriculum Collaboration: Towards an Australian Curriculum, Alan Reid (2005) outlines the history of the move towards a national Australian curriculum, splitting it into four sections: 1968-1988, 1988-1993, 1993-2003, and 2003-2005. Reid discusses the period from 1968-1988 as one where the national government “sought to influence the official curricula of the States without challenging their curriculum authority” (p. 17). The period from 1998-1993 saw the then Commonwealth Minister for Employment, Education and Training John Dawkins attempt to do more than merely influence the States, and sought to establish a national curriculum (p. 17). This attempt, however, failed, and the next decade (1993-2003) saw a return to the more indirect attempts to influence the states’ educational policy. This policy of indirect influence ended in 2003, when the then Commonwealth Education Minister Dr Brendan Nelson “made a vigorous call for a national curriculum” (p. 19). However, it was not until 2008 when the Rudd government established the National Curriculum Board to oversee design and implementation of a national curriculum, which then in 2009 was transferred to the newly established
Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). The national curriculum is still under development, but a national approach to education can be seen in the introduction of national testing initiatives and accountabilities based on that testing, and in a number of national education partnerships between the federal government and the states.

The educational changes brought about by neoliberalism have led to the demand for global comparisons in regards to student ability. To achieve this necessitates the implementation of testing to be compared globally, and for which the individual states (and then the individual schools, and then the individual students) are accountable. These assessments have reshaped the role of teachers and students; Theodore Porter (1996), reflecting on the nature of science, noted that Karl Popper had argued that the real science occurs in the formulation of theories, and “Experimenters had no more than to carry out what the theory dictated” (p. vii). In the implementation of mass standardised testing, teachers become experimenters; the facilitators of data creation, and students become data; dot points on a graph. The need for the creation of data has led to the implementation of measurement methods, which carries with it the risk that what is measured is the easily measurable, and not necessarily what matters. As Lingard (2010) argues, “A focus on improving test scores can lead simply to enhanced ability capacity to take tests, rather than enhanced and authentic learning” (p. 135). However, as Stobart (2008) noted: “It is hard to find a country that is not using the rhetoric of needing assessment to raise standards in response to the challenges of globalisation” (p. 24). Neoliberalism and globalisation have, therefore, in tandem contributed to the ways in which education have become increasingly market-driven, and thereby increasingly assessment driven. The impact of an increased focus on assessment on English teachers and on how they teach English will be explored in the third chapter. What has been gained, and what has been lost?

One of the most significant changes brought about by ACARA was the creation of ‘MySchool’, a website which lists the results of every school’s National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and explicitly compares them to the national average and to other similar schools. The introduction and implementation of NAPLAN is the clearest instance of national accountability in
Australian education. This program conducts yearly standardised tests for students in year 3, 5, 7, and 9 in every school in Australia. The results of these tests are published on the ‘MySchool’ website, which leads to much comparison (between schools and states) and significant media coverage. This website was introduced with large amounts of opposition from teacher unions, but was fully supported by the Murdoch press (Lingard, 2010), who supported the government for pushing the policy through. The pervasiveness of a neoliberal approach to education and assessment can be seen through the bi-partisan support of this policy, despite the opposition from teacher unions. These tests are high-stakes as the results are linked to funding, and the results have a large impact between the federal and state governments.

The neoliberal marketisation of education has led to the demand for ‘evidence-based policy’ in the domains still under government control. Though evidence-based policy is not exclusive to neoliberal modes of thought, in Australia the creation of numbers as evidence has been vital in Australian schooling agendas. This can be seen in the creation of quasi-markets in schooling in the form of league tables between schools and students, enabling and emphasizing parental choice. The introduction of NAPLAN acts as a framing for educational accountability, and the resultant move towards a focus on competition. Lingard (2011) argues that “This policy ensemble demonstrates the role of numbers in assisting a neo-liberal form of national control” (p. 372). The creation of numbers is now a necessity in policy making in areas where these numbers cannot easily be found. That is, where ‘evidence’ is not readily available or is not easily defined, this evidence is created in the form of numbers. This can be seen through the introduction of NAPLAN as the creation of numbers in order to compare Australian education to global standards, as well as to compare individual schools and students (Lingard, Sellar, & Savage, 2014).

The creation of national education curricula and assessment regimes in Australia has taken the form of, as Lingard (2010) puts it, “policy borrowing” from the United States and the United Kingdom. He argues that in Australia, this borrowing has been “blind” (p. 132), as the policies borrowed have had dramatically destructive effects in their own countries (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Taubman, 2009). Lingard (2010) calls instead, for “policy learning”, which accepts the demands for educational accountabilities, but that must be “richer and more intelligent and must be linked to a
new social imaginary” (p. 132). Many education experts argue that one of the best examples to be learned from is Finland, which, in contrast to the U.S, the U.K, and now to Australia, does not hold nationwide high-stakes standardised tests. Instead, Finland has “highly educated teachers with a high degree of professional autonomy practicing intellectually demanding pedagogies for all students” (Lingard, 2010, p. 133).

To understand these changes it is necessary to investigate their justification. Many of the changes can be linked to the rise in demand for evidence-based policy (Wiseman, 2010). What this means in regard to education is that most aspects need to undergo datafication, and things that cannot be datafied will not influence policy decisions. The justification for this data creation is in order to address equity issues in education (Lucas & Beresford, 2010). However, Lingard (2016) argues that “Governments and schooling systems fail to make adequate policy use of such analyses” (p. 11). Sellar (2015) argues that the use of the created data is often to “produce fear or shame as a putative means to improve teacher performance” (p. 140). Beyond this, activist groups such as Save Our Schools analysed NAPLAN data to show continued inequality with regard to equal funding of schools, and an inability to properly recognise and resolve necessary educational interventions (Cobbold, 2016).

Through these practices of policy borrowing, neoliberalism has heavily influenced the education system in Australia, and knowledge has become an asset that should be valued and sold (Miller & Orchard, 2014; Clarke, 2012; Ward, 2012). The neoliberal impacts on education are many and well documented (Hill & Kumar, 2012; Ross & Gibson, 2007). Lakes and Carter (2011) summarise the major changes as implementing:

“high-stakes standardized testing, public and private charters, single-sex schooling, scripted curricula, the deskilling of teachers, alternative teacher training, outsourcing of tutoring, the elimination of teachers unions, and, in general, the underfunding of public education” (p. 110).

These are the results of a shifting view of education from a public good to the achievement of equality as determined by the free market (Blum & Ullman, 2012).
Connell (2013) has commented that neoliberalism has turned education into another market sector, and as with any market sector there must be created “hierarchies and mechanisms of competition” (p. 99). For this competition to take place the government has introduced mass standardised testing initiatives such as NAPLAN, the Selective High School Placement Test, and the Opportunity Class Placement Test (OC). These results are then publicised and scrutinised, and students and schools are forced to compete with each other. Instead of a focus on personal development with assessments in place for diagnostic and formative purposes, we now focus on achieving high scores in assessments, and assert that these reflect personal development (Walsh, 2010). It would be problematic, then, if these assessments do not align with students’ personal development. With this in mind, I have chosen to focus on English study in NSW, and explore whether assessment practices effectively align with the aims for personal development in the forms of creativity and critical thinking.

**English Study in NSW: The Neoliberal Impact**

A significant aspect of neoliberal policy and practice is the reliance on quantification and statistical modeling, through which what comes to matter is determined through recourse to metrics. Nikolas Rose (1999), Professor of Sociology at Kings College London, has commented insightfully on the justification for the creation of numbers as evidence for policy, and argues that the justification obscures the very thing it justifies:

“The ‘power of the single figure’ is here a rhetorical technique for ‘black boxing’—that is to say, rendering invisible and hence incontestable—the complex array of judgments and decisions that go into a measurement, a scale, a number. The apparent facticity of the figure obscures the complex technical work that is required to produce objectivity.” (p. 208).

This thesis attempts to peer into one corner of the educational black box. That is, when student development and achievement is represented in a single figure, how accurate is this figure, and how has its creation impacted pedagogical practices?
The focus of the next two chapters is on the nature and impact of the ‘datafication’ of English study in NSW. This raises a corollary question about how these changes have impacted the English classroom. The move to ‘datification’ requires a move towards the measurable, and so tests focus on what can be quantified, and then compared. What drives the classroom under these conditions, therefore, is the tests, and we find ourselves in a backwards position where we do not test what needs to be learned, but rather learn what is to be tested, which may not adequately reflect what needs to be learned (Walsh, 2010). The nature of the assessments and what they focus on is therefore of particular interest. What should the tests be assessing? With regards to English, it might be assumed that the tests should assess those aims associated with the English classroom. What are these aims? This will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter, but one of the aims of English study is to nurture students’ critical and creative abilities according to the pertinent syllabus documents. Literary discussions can play a powerful role in introducing a platform for critical thinking, and therefore the focus needs to be on the cultural, social, and personal benefits of literary education (Fish, 1980; Gannon, Howie, & Sawyer, 2009). How, then, do these complexities exist within current English assessment practices? The next two chapters will explore this question by establishing how the English syllabi comments on students’ creativity and critical thinking, and how changes have impacted teachers’ pedagogical practices.

Sawyer (2008) skilfully summarises the historical attitude to the importance of English as being “defined not by its content, and not only by processes and skills, but also by the way it contributes to citizen formation” (p. 63). In his article on the place of ethics in English, Misson (2016) argued that the critical and analytical aspects of English study imply ethical stances. He then built on this relationship to argue that English study could be used as a cultural combatant against radicalisation, as “English teaching has the potential to provide critical and imaginative strategies for students that might counter many of the processes by which radicalisation … arises” (p. 14). This is a single instance of the many potential positive implications that fostering critical thinking and creativity in the English classroom could have on society.

The major question this research is concerned with, then, is do our current assessment regimes effectively assess the critical and creative aims for English study?
If not, how does this impact the classroom? Is there a conflict between what counts in the English assessments and what matters in the English classroom? To look at what counts is relatively straightforward – look at the relevant assessment and reporting documents. To look at the aims of the subject is also relatively straightforward – look at the pertinent syllabus documents. To speculate on how these things manifest themselves in the English classroom is more complex, and in the third chapter a series of interviews with English teachers will seek to establish how pedagogical practices have been impacted by curriculum and assessment shifts.

**Policy and its Effects: Curriculum, Assessment, and Pedagogy**

Bernstein’s classic 1971 book *On the Classification and Framing of Educational Knowledge* provides a useful framework for analysis of educational policy and practices, and it is through this framework that this thesis will investigate English study in NSW. Bernstein separates education policy into three classifications: curriculum, evaluation, and pedagogy. The curriculum determines what is valid knowledge; pedagogy determines what is valid transmission of this knowledge; and evaluation determines what is a valid realisation of this knowledge (that is, what is a valid manifestation of this knowledge in terms of the students). Bernstein then goes on to explain the ways in which these classifications exist in symbiosis with each other. They can be examined independently, but they are inherently interdependent, and so a change to one will inevitably have implications for the others. Changes to assessment practices in English study will inevitably result in changes to English teachers’ pedagogical practices, and will therefore change how the syllabus determines what is to be learned in English study.

These three classifications have all undergone significant changes since the turn to a neoliberal approach to education. In *Globalizing Education Policy* (2010), Rizvi and Lingard detail the history of the global shift regarding educational values. Before the neoliberal turn, education was seen as being a democratic good with a focus on equality, but there is now a much greater emphasis on accountability and the creation of knowledge capital that interacts within a global knowledge economy.
(Rizvi, Lingard, 2010). It should be noted here that by no means have the ideals of equality and democracy been replaced, but rather they have been reappropriated and repackaged as being implications of ubiquitous economic concerns. Of course, economic concerns have, and always will be, ubiquitous, but these concerns have transformed from being a pragmatic consideration to the predominant purpose of, and justification for, everything. As Rizvi and Lingard (2010) note, “the social values of equality and democracy have [not] been abandoned, but rather that they have been re-articulated, subordinated to dominant economic concerns” (p. 72). This greater focus on the economics of education has lead to a greater focus on assessment with regards to education policy, and as a result there are further implications for curriculum and pedagogy.

This reshaping of the value of education can be seen in the reshaping of the notion of lifelong education. Rizvi and Lingard (2010) link this back to Thomas Jefferson who, in 1776, introduced a Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge, which proposed that public libraries should be built throughout the United States in order for its citizens to have access to lifelong education. This would, he argued, not only help them acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for a successful nation, but also was vital in the individual pursuit of happiness necessary for a successful nation. In contrast, the neoliberal interpretation of lifelong learning is placed within a nation driven by markets and competition. Education becomes a commodity that “can be used to differentiate people in terms of economic value” (2010, p. 86). Education is defined not by how it serves the community, but how it serves the market. Education that does not explicitly serve the demands of the economy is marginalised and rendered inefficient. This ideology is reinforced by large media organisations and corporations, who espouse a focus on individualism and on accountability for teachers and educational systems (Edwards 1997).

A focus on competition in education means a greater emphasis on assessment, and this has an impact on pedagogical practices and the teachers responsible for implementing them. As a result, many teachers feel disenfranchised from their own profession, as a focus on efficiency and accountability have marginalised other values held dear by many teachers. Rizvi and Lingard (2010) conclude that teachers’ “professionalism has been sapped of any real meaning, as they are required to become
efficient and effective in contexts that are much more culturally, economically and politically complex than many governments and IGOs often assume” (p. 92). In the case of English study, fostering creativity and critical thinking in the context of the classroom is a complex endeavor, the results from which may not be immediately evident. This experience is hampered by the de-professionalisation of teachers. The third chapter of this thesis explores how a focus on teacher accountability impacts the classroom, and on how it might limit teachers’ ability to foster students’ critical and creative endeavours.

Rizvi and Lingard argue that the role that testing and accountability now has in education policy has reformed the roles of principals and teachers. He outlines how schools have been reshaped in a corporate image: “School heads have become new managers, and are expected to implement policies set elsewhere and have their schools achieve according to various league tables of performance and sets of performance indicators.” (p. 122). This has reshaped the role of the teacher and of those working in education, as “The traditional notion of a servant of the public has been ousted by public sector management reforms that have fostered a new elite of senior executives recruited as generalist managers to manage any administrative unit” (Galligan, Roberts, & Trifiletti, 2001, p. 180). The effectiveness of education has been usurped by a focus on economic efficiency. The corporatisation of education can also be seen by the rise of managerialism in schools. In The Managerial School: Post-welfarism and Social Justice in Education Gewirtz (2002) outlined the impact that this corporatisation of education has had on assessment, and thereby on curriculum and pedagogy:

“The new management discourse in education emphasises the instrumental purposes of schooling – raising standards and performance as measured by examination results, levels of attendance and school leaver destinations – and frequently articulated within a lexicon of enterprise, excellence, quality and effectiveness.” (p. 32).

In other words, the corporatisation of education has reshaped the primary purpose as being economic, and this has led to a rise in the importance of assessment. This focus on assessment exists as an instance in particular nations, but is also part of a globalised discourse on education policy. Australia can, therefore, learn from different
countries and their implementation of similar policies. However, it must also be recognised that each country has specific politics and cultures that will have an impact on implementation.
Chapter 2

The Role of Critical Thinking and Creativity in NSW Level 6 English Syllabi, 1983-2017

The NSW English syllabus has undergone substantial changes since its introduction and these changes have significantly impacted pedagogical and assessment practices. The purpose of this chapter is to look at the place of critical thinking and creativity in the NSW English syllabus, and to see if and how this place has shifted over time. Given the focus of this research, Stage 6 of the English curriculum in NSW (years 11 and 12/age 17/18) is specifically examined. This stage has been selected as it is the culmination of high school education, and is either the final stage of schooling or the groundwork for a pathway into higher education. The documents for analysis are the syllabuses and, where available, the relevant assessment and reporting supplements.

Given the focus on critical thinking and creativity, these have informed the themes through which the syllabus documents have been analysed. This chapter gives an account of the role of these themes in the English syllabuses and the assessment and reporting supplements, and tracks any pertinent changes. This will be done by a thematic analysis of the documents based on Guest, MacQueen, and Namey’s Applied Thematic Analysis (2012). This analysis will be based on four time frames, and the syllabus and assessment and reporting supplements from those periods. The years and their relevant documents are:

1983 - English Syllabus for years 11 and 12: 2 Unit (General)
1983 – English Syllabus for years 11 and 12: 2/3 Unit
1999 – English Stage 6 Syllabus: English (Standard), and English (Advanced)
1999 – English Standard and Advanced Higher School Certificate: Examination, Assessment and Reporting Supplement
2010 – English Stage 6 Syllabus (BOS, 2009)
2010 – Assessment and Reporting in English Standard (Stage 6) (BOS, 2009)
Methodology: Thematic Analysis

As the purpose of this chapter is to analyse the two major themes of critical thinking and creativity, I have utilised Guest, MacQueen, and Namey’s *Applied Thematic Analysis* (2012), as the methodological approach to the syllabuses and supplementary document analysis. The authors define this process as “an iterative process of identifying features (i.e., themes) and defining boundaries around those features (i.e., text segmentation)” (p. 2). Given that structural topics are imposed by the research design, and that they have both direct and indirect effects on the resulting data, content or emergent themes describe what is observed or discussed in the context of the research design. (p. 2). In this research, the themes of analysis are critical thinking and creativity, and the boundaries for the analysis are the specific syllabus and assessment documents identified above.

In undertaking the document analysis, I focus on Guest, Macqueen, and Namey’s (2012) “Items to Consider for Inclusion in an Analysis Plan” (p. 16). I do so in order to ensure that the analysis has a solid methodological framework upon which conclusions can be drawn. Guest, Macqueen, and Namey proved to be particularly helpful as they outline the process in a detailed and specific manner, which helps ensure the analysis is based upon a proven methodological approach.
Items to Consider for Inclusion in an Analysis Plan (Guest, Macqueen & Namey, 2012, p. 16)

For each separate analysis specify:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Which research question(s) it will inform and how?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Precisely which data will be used?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many people will be involved in the analysis and their specific roles?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The primary analytic purpose—e.g., to identify, explore, explain, confirm, compare (note the verb used is very important so choose carefully)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How codes will be created and defined, including structural codes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules for applying codes to the data (e.g., will all text be coded?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How coding reliability will be established, including reconciling discrepancies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which data reduction techniques, if any, will be applied?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which between-group comparisons, if any, will be made, and how this will be done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How data from different data collection methods will be integrated (including quantitative data, if any)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What you expect as an output (e.g., in-house report, manuscript for peer-review journal, chapter in thesis)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Specify how many separate analyses will be conducted and the timeline for each.

The documents and the timelines they cover have been outlined in the previous section. The nature of this aspect of the analysis means that each of the specific documents is treated as a distinct unit of analysis, and the analyses of the total corpus of documents creates a narrative designed to respond to the research question.

For each separate analysis specify:

*Which research question(s) it will inform and how?*

The analyses of the documents will articulate the role of critical thinking and creativity in English study in NSW (In terms of curriculum and assessment), and if this role has changed across time.
Which data will be used?

The documents will be analysed for the role that creativity and critical thinking plays in them. That is, what do they say about students’ critical and creative abilities, and how do they link to assessment and pedagogical practices? Parts of the documents that do not address these concerns will not be addressed.

How many people will be involved in the analysis and their specific roles?

Because this project is being undertaken as part of a Master of Research degree, the analysis will be conducted by one researcher. There are two supervisors overseeing the project, but I am the researcher responsible for the conducting and for the content of this analysis.

The primary analytic purpose—e.g., to identify, explore, explain, confirm, compare

The primary analytic purposes of this section is to identify the ways in which the place, value and benefits of critical thinking and creativity are articulated in the various documents, and to then compare how these articulations vary across time in order to establish a narrative for if and how they have changed.

How codes will be created and defined, including structural codes

Critical thinking and creativity are not explicitly distinct concepts with universally agreed boundaries. It is therefore necessary to include in the analysis those ideas and specific uses of language that align with these two themes. For example, if imagination or originality is addressed in the documents, then this will be discussed in alignment with creativity. These are judgments made by the researcher during the process of analysis and production.

Rules for applying codes to the data

Not every mention of something that could be construed as linking to students’
creativity and critical thinking will be examined, as this would lead to unnecessary duplication and detail. Which of the data will be coded will be down to my own discretion, with an aim to give a fair representation of how the document represents the key themes by choosing sections that are particularly relevant to pedagogical or assessment practices.

*How coding reliability will be established, including reconciling discrepancies*

I am the only person responsible for the coding of the data, but my two supervisors help ensure the reliability of the process.

*Which data reduction techniques, if any, will be applied?*

Data reduction is an integral part of this analysis. One of the primary purposes of this section is to identify and report on how the documents portray the themes of analysis, and so the reduction of the majority of the documents is central to this analytical process. Guest et al point towards Miles and Huberman (1994) as an appropriate explanation of the nature of data reduction:

“Data reduction is not something separate from analysis. It is part of analysis. The researcher's decisions—which data chunks to code and which to pull out, which evolving story to tell—are all analytic choices. Data reduction is a form of analysis that sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards, and organizes data in such a way that “final” conclusions can be drawn and verified” (p. 11).

This data reduction is an essential aspect of the analysis, and is the driving force behind the search for conclusions.

*Which between-group comparisons, if any, will be made, and how this will be done*

The documents are analysed in chronological order, and will focus on the two key themes. Comparisons between the documents and how they treat the key themes will therefore be apparent as the ongoing analysis and discussion takes place. After each of the documents has been explored and reported, the conclusion will summarise and
analyse any differences or continuities noted among the documents. This will inform a distinct temporal narrative of changes in content and emphasis regarding critical thinking and creativity from 1983 to 2017.

*How data from different data collection methods will be integrated*

Within this chapter there is only one method of data collection, all of which is qualitative. However, this data features as part of the second chapter, and so it will be integrated within the larger scope of the thesis.

*What you expect as an output (e.g., in-house report, manuscript for peer-review journal, chapter in thesis)*

This analysis will feature as a chapter in a research thesis. It will account for how the NSW English syllabus and assessment practices treat critical thinking and creativity, and this will be discussed in relation to the interviews with English teachers. This articulation of the document analysis with the interviews will seek to account for how changes to the syllabus and assessment practices have impacted the classroom, and how this has impacted critical thinking and creativity in everyday classroom practices. In what follows, these aspects of the thematic analysis are applied to the curriculum and supplementary documents identified in the table above.

**English Curriculum 1983**

There were two primary choices for students in the 1983 stage 6 level English syllabi in NSW: the 2 unit (general) course, or the 2 unit course and the three unit course. There was a 1 unit course called *Language for Learning* that was compulsory for all year 12 students. The 1 unit course was the most basic English course available to be studied, with the 2 unit (general) course being a step higher in difficulty, and the 2/3 unit course being the most advanced course on offer. The focus of this analysis will be on the 2 unit (general) and the 2/3 unit course.
The rationale for the 2 unit (general) course does not explicitly refer to critical thinking or creativity, but does declare that the course “seeks to develop the widest variety of skills in English” (English Syllabus Years 11 & 12 2 Unit (General) Course, 1982, p. 2). Whilst critical thinking and creativity fit within this broad definition, it is more difficult to think of a skill that doesn’t fit within it than one that does. Driving a car is an example of one of the widest variety of skills for English, for to drive safely one must be able to understand road signs. By claiming everything in general, this statement claims nothing in particular. That does not make it a meaningless statement, but rather, it is very open-ended and gives teachers the ability to interpret in the way they see fit. It is also evidence of a holistic approach to English study, and does not break down every detail.

However, the rationale for the more advanced 2 unit course does explicitly refer to students’ critical abilities:

“The course explores the literature of the past as well as the present, allowing both for wide reading and for the closer study of specific texts, and requiring a critical awareness of English in its literary and non-literary forms.” (English 2/3 Unit (Related) Syllabus, 1983, p. 6).

This suggests that critical abilities are to be expected more of the advanced students, whereas the students of the 2 unit (general) course were to focus on other abilities. This creates a sense of hierarchy, where the 2 unit (general) students are restricted access to critical discussion, whilst the more advanced students develop their critical abilities.

However, both the 2 unit (general) and the 2/3 unit syllabuses have a very similar approach to the objectives of the courses. The 2 unit (general) course aims “to develop individual responses to literature, and to promote thoughtful and articulate responses” (English Syllabus Years 11 & 12 2 Unit (General) Course, 1982, p. 2). The 2/3 unit course aims “to develop and refine individual responses to literature” (English Syllabus Years 11 & 12 2/3 Unit (Related), 1983, p. 6).
The syllabuses then go onto outlining how textual study should be conducted. The 2 unit (general) syllabus emphasises the importance of class discussions and the opportunity for each student to put forward their own interpretation:

“Class and group discussion should bring to light and help formulate various reactions, comparing divergent responses and going back to the text to defend or modify them.” (English Syllabus Years 11 & 12 2 Unit (General) Course, 1982, p. 3)

The 2/3 unit syllabus takes a similar approach, but also specifically refers to students’ critical abilities:

“Students will be engaged in reading and in thinking critically about what they have read, defining their attitudes to the text, trying to account for their enjoyment or for their initial ability to respond. They will be occupied in discussing and exchanging opinions as well as in writing their own”. (English Syllabus Years 11 & 12 2/3 Unit (Related), 1983, p. 6-7)

The first reference to students’ critical abilities in the 2 unit (general) syllabus occurs in a section regarding the study of non-literary material, which is reproduced essentially verbatim in the same section of the 2/3 unit syllabus:

“Students are not required to spend time studying the detailed techniques of the medium or its special vocabulary. Rather, they should develop a critical response to English as it is employed in the various media”. (English Syllabus Years 11 and 12: 2 Unit (General) Course, 1982, p. 4) (English Syllabus Years 11 & 12 2/3 Unit (Related), 1983, p. 7)

The first explicit reference to students’ creativity appears in exactly the same form in both syllabuses, and comes under the Writing section:

“[Students] should be encouraged to keep a folder of their writings of various kinds, including a range of personal writing and creative work.” (English Syllabus Years 11 and 12: 2 Unit (General) Course, 1982, p. 4) (English Syllabus Years 11 & 12 2/3 Unit (Related), 1983, p. 7)

It should be noted that this is described as an ‘encouragement’, and not something that needs to be explicitly assessed. It may however be assumed that this encouragement will have some impact on students’ assessments, even if minor.
There is a section in both of the syllabuses discussing how year 11 should be taught, which features a detailed discussion of class discussions, emphasising the importance of students’ originality:

“Students should be encouraged in discussion to develop and justify their own views of the texts they study, and to defend them against contrary views. The teacher’s role will be one of evoking and helping to formulate various reactions, encouraging students to listen to one another, guiding the discussion without imposing a viewpoint on it, testing different interpretations against the evidence of the text itself. This will not be a search for the ‘right’ response, but a demonstration that a response that is honest, thoughtful and firmly based on the text can establish its own right.” (English Syllabus Years 11 and 12: 2 Unit (General) Course, 1982, p. 5) (English Syllabus Years 11 & 12 2/3 Unit (Related), 1983, p. 8-9)

Again, it should be noted that in this section encouraging originality and empathetic discussion, there is no direct link made to how this will be assessed. This suggests that it is up to the individual teacher to use their own discretion to assess in the way they see fit. Greater teacher autonomy allows for more of the spontaneous class discussion discussed in the syllabus. The syllabus emphasises the importance of students coming to and defending their own interpretations and views of a text in these discussions, and they can therefore be seen as one of the key tools of an English teacher in facilitating students’ critical growth. The syllabuses go on to build on these ideas in a discussion of year 12, and then explains how poetry, novel, and drama should be studied. In the 2/3 Unit syllabus, in the section discussing the study of poetry, there is a particularly lucid section emphasising the importance of students’ originality, and the dangers of reaching for the crutches of critics and characteristics:

“So students may be tempted to substitute ‘information’ for thoughtful, individual response. They may be tempted to collect information about poets and their ‘periods’, about the characteristics of genres (eg ‘satire’, ‘dramatic monologue’) or about the general nature of (say) the ‘metaphysical conceit’. Or they may be tempted simply to catalogue the devices that a poem may employ – its rhyme-scheme or stanza-form, its use of alliteration or enjambment. Students may be tempted, finally, to go to ‘the critics’ in order to learn, and then repeat, what they take ‘the accepted view’ of a poem or poet to be. Biographical, descriptive and critical information if often, of course, illuminating and valuable, and it may guide or support a personal response: but such ‘information’ is not acceptable as a substitute for personal response. For it is particularly in the reading and study of poetry that students need to go
beyond the mere acquisition of ‘information’ and nerve themselves to say something on their own accounts.

A response to a poem, then, should be an honest and an individual response, not merely a second-hand restatement of what someone else has said.”

(English Syllabus Years 11 & 12 2/3 Unit (Related), 1983, p. 10)

This syllabus emphasises the importance of students’ personal responses to a text, which requires them to be critical in their understanding of it and creative in conveying this understanding. The syllabus does not, at any point, address how students need to be assessed, which thereby implies a high level of teacher autonomy in both pedagogy and assessment. The guidelines provided are minimal, only saying that students need to find their own voice and reasoning independent of what they are given. This signifies a holistic approach, emphasising a wide palate of English skills, and students had to go beyond the information they were given in expressing themselves. It was the role of the teacher to facilitate this in the way they saw most appropriate, and to assess their abilities in the way they saw most appropriate. This is important as a point of comparison to later versions of the English syllabus, and will be discussed by teachers in the next chapter.

**English Curriculum 1999**

In 1999, the English courses on offer had expanded, and students had the choice to pick from five different options:

- English (Standard)
- English (Advanced)
- English as a Second Language (ESL)
- English (Extension)
- Fundamentals of English

The syllabus begins with eight general sections, and then goes through each different course offered with up to thirteen sub-sections, followed by a section on
assessment and reporting. This is a remarkable growth in detail when compared to the 1983 syllabus, which shows the extent to which a more managerial approach is taken. Whereas the 1999 syllabus is more prescriptive, the 1983 syllabus is more descriptive, and gives the teacher greater control of their assessment and pedagogical practices. The link between teacher autonomy and students’ critical and creative skills is crucial here. The best way for a teacher to encourage these abilities depends on a myriad of factors. Which text are we looking at? What is the background of many of my students? How might they be able to connect with this text? Which method of assessment is particularly pertinent to this text and to these students? There isn’t a blanket answer to these questions, and therefore teacher autonomy plays a critical role in developing students’ critical and creative capacities. This will be explored in greater detail in the next chapter, as this topic is discussed by the teachers responsible for implementing the syllabus.

The Rationale for English in stage 6 argues that English study “enables students to take their place as confident, articulate communicators, critical and imaginative thinkers and active participants in society” (English Stage 6 Syllabus Preliminary and HSC Courses, 1999, p. 6). It goes onto comment that through the study of English students should be encouraged “to adopt a critical approach to all texts and to distinguish the qualities of texts” (p. 6). This is in order to help students “develop a strong sense of themselves as autonomous, reflective and creative learners” (p. 6). The next section states that the aim of English is to help students become “thoughtful, imaginative and effective communicators” (p. 7). English study does this by “encouraging students to explore, critically evaluate and appreciate a wide variety of texts” (p. 7).

English (Standard) and English (Advanced) students make up the vast majority, and so the focus of this analysis will be mainly on these two courses. The difference between them is established in a short summary of the courses:

“English (Standard) is designed for students to increase their expertise in English in order to enhance their personal, social, and vocational lives. The students learn to respond to and compose a wide variety of texts in a range of situations in order to be effective, creative and confident communicators.” (English Stage 6 Syllabus Preliminary and HSC Courses, 1999, p. 12).
“English (Advanced) is designed for students to undertake the challenges of higher order thinking to enhance their personal, social and vocational lives. These students apply critical and creative skills in their composition of and response to texts in order to develop their academic achievement through understanding the nature and function of complex texts.” (English Stage 6 Syllabus Preliminary and HSC Courses, 1999, p. 12).

The Standard course emphasises the practical uses of English, whereas the advanced course focuses more on higher-order thinking and critical skills.

The syllabus then goes into more detail for each course to outline the differences further, but each has a similar focus on critical thinking skills. The standard course aims for students to develop skills in “investigation, imaginative and critical thinking, and synthesis of ideas” (English Stage 6 Syllabus Preliminary and HSC Courses, 1999, p. 23). The advanced course aims for students to develop skills in “imaginative, critical and reflective thinking about meaning” (p. 41). The two courses also have identical outcomes that deal with critical thinking being the intended result of English study:

“6. A student engages with the details of text in order to respond critically and personally…

These outcomes are not explicitly referred to in the Assessment and Reporting section of the syllabus; rather, balance is emphasised, with these two aims becoming boxes to be ticked in particular assessment tasks.

Examination, Assessment and Reporting Supplement

This document features sample HSC examination papers, marking guidelines, and descriptions of the performance bands. The content of the examination papers is not particularly amenable to this analysis, but the assessment guidelines provide
evidence for how students’ critical thinking and creativity translates to assessment marks.

In Paper 1 of the HSC exams (which is taken by both standard and advanced students), in order to achieve a passing mark (at least 50%) students must display either critical thinking or creativity. For example, in Section III, for a mark of 7-9 out of 15, one of the criteria requires students to present “a sound critical response showing developed skills in interpretation and analysis of texts and textual detail” (p. 7). The standard and advanced students then take different paper 2s, and for every question in the standard paper, to achieve a passing mark one of the criteria is as follows:

“Provides evidence of a sound personal response containing some imaginative, interpretive and critical engagement with texts and textual detail”. (English Standard and Advanced Higher School Certificate: Examination, Assessment and Reporting Supplement, 1999, p. 4)

The same is true for the advanced paper 2; in order to achieve a pass students must present a “sound imaginative and critical response” (English Standard and Advanced Higher School Certificate: Examination, Assessment and Reporting Supplement, 1999, p. 3). In order to succeed in the HSC exams from 1999, then, students must exhibit some critical and creative abilities. This can also be seen in the band descriptions, as the typical band 3 student (between 60-70%) must exhibit “an ability to compose imaginatively, interpretively and critically” (English Standard and Advanced Higher School Certificate: Examination, Assessment and Reporting Supplement, 1999, p. 1).

When compared to the 1983 syllabus, the 1999 syllabus has a greater emphasis on the individual student. Where the 1983 syllabus discusses the ideal classroom discussion, the 1999 syllabus comments on the desired characteristics of each individual student.
English Curriculum 2010

In 2010, the English syllabus was unchanged from 1999, and was subject to further consultation. All other syllabuses changed, other than the English (Standard) and English (Advanced) courses. On the 23rd of February, the NSW Minister for Education and Training, Verity Firth, released a statement regarding the changes entitled “Quality the Key in 2010 HSC” (Firth, 2009, p. 1). The statement argued that by providing recommended essay lengths, the emphasis would be on quality rather than on quantity. This is because some students would write up to twenty pages for one section. Multiple choice questions were also introduced to four subjects in order to “provide consistency across similar natured exams and gives greater ability to test a student’s knowledge” (p. 1). None of these changes were applied to the English (Standard) or the English (Advanced) courses, and the reasoning for this can be found in the consultation response document regarding the proposed changes discussed below.

One of the suggested changes was to include planning time for students in the examinations, but “English teachers were often hostile to the idea of reducing the time for writing responses” (Consultation Survey on Proposed Changes to HSC Examinations and Assessment, 2008, p. 6). There was also much opposition to the use of objective testing in English, with many respondents arguing that the differences between subjects were as important as their similarities, and that consistency between them was not justified. Similarly, the proposal to standardise exam time lengths was met with much opposition by English teachers, who “questioned the need and desirability for parity between subjects, and argued passionately that as English is the only compulsory subject it should be treated differently from other subjects” (p. 8). There was also confusion regarding changes to assessment components, which required each assessment to measure all of the components, whereas traditionally English teachers had used them as organisers for individual assessments (p. 9). The document shows that the most opposition to the changes came from English teachers regarding the English syllabus, and so the proposed changes were postponed and subject to further review. This shows a particular resistance by English teachers to prescriptive changes, with a particular emphasis on retaining flexibility, and thereby
autonomy. If teachers were the head chef at a restaurant, a new manager has come in and designed the menu to their own specifications, and measures the effectiveness of the chef by how many dishes he/she produces. Despite this resistance, reincarnations of these changes can be found in the 2017 English syllabus, and this will be discussed in further detail in the relevant section below.

**Assessment and Reporting**

Whereas the 1999 Examination, Assessment and Reporting Supplement gives example papers, marking guidelines, and descriptions of performance bands, the 2010 Assessment and Reporting document goes into greater detail about internal assessment, and examination specifications are provided in separate documents.

The 2010 Assessment and Reporting document is markedly different from its 1999 equivalent. The 1999 Examination, Assessment and Reporting Supplement is primarily focused on the final examination, and then gives descriptions of the typical performance in certain bands. As the focus is mainly on providing guidance in preparing for the final examinations, the internal assessments are therefore delegated to the English teachers. The 2010 document is very different, and features the following sections:

“Assessment in Stage 6
Reporting achievement at the HSC
Internal assessment
The HSC examination
Board requirements for the HSC internal assessment mark
English (Advanced) HSC examination specifications
Summary of external and internal HSC assessment
Resources and advice” (English Stage 6 Syllabus, 2009)

This shows a greater level of detail and description in the curriculum documents, ultimately leaving less to the discretion of individual teachers. Through the development of prescriptive details in the curriculum documents, there is a clear shift in the responsibilities of teachers from autonomous executors of ideals to implementers of extensive specifics. This shows the changing role of critical thinking
and creativity in the classroom; before, these skills were explored and developed to the discretion of individual teachers, but are now boxes to be ticked in assessment guidelines, along with the other facets of English education. This is also less of a holistic approach to students’ learning, and instead their progression is broken into sections, all of which are required to be accounted for, but which may cause a greater loss. In counting every brush stroke, are teachers unable to take a step back and see the painting?

The 2010 document has a more extensive approach to assessment advice, detailing the standards and expectations for all stage 6 English assessments. These standards are not explicitly explained, and instead the reader is pointed towards the syllabus:

“The standards in the HSC are:
• the knowledge, skills and understanding expected to be learnt by students – the syllabus standards
• the levels of achievement of the knowledge, skills and understanding – the performance standards.

Both the syllabus standards and the performance standards are based on the aims, objectives, outcomes and content of the course.” (English Stage 6 Syllabus, p. 4).

Critical thinking and creativity are, therefore, not explicitly referred to in the assessment document, but are referred to throughout the syllabus aims and objectives, and can therefore be seen as an important part of the assessment criteria. The importance of critical thinking and creativity in English study is unquestionable.

On the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) website (previously the Board of Studies), there are examination rubrics detailing requirements for students’ performance. None of the sections of the rubric refer to critical thinking or creativity. Ironically, the section of the exam often referred to as the creative writing section has no explicit mention of creativity or originality. The rubric is as follows:

“Your answer will be assessed on how well you:
• express understanding of discovery in the context of your studies
- organise, develop and express ideas using language appropriate to audience, purpose and context” (BOS, n.d.a)

However, the performance band descriptions still refer to critical thinking and creativity as being key for a high mark. For example, in the highest grade, students are required to exhibit “an ability to compose imaginatively, interpretively and critically with sustained precision, flair, originality and sophistication” (BOS, n.d.b). Just as in 1999, in order to achieve a mark band 3 or higher, students are required to demonstrate critical abilities. And yet, the autonomy and freedom that teachers require to cultivate these critical and creative abilities has, over time, decreased significantly.

**English Curriculum 2017**

These syllabuses are to be taught from 2018, with the first of the new HSC examinations taking place in 2019. Though the Standard, Advanced, and Extension courses will remain, there are a number of changes to the other English courses. The courses offered from 2018 are:

- English Standard
- English Advanced
- English Extension
- English EAL/D (English as an Additional Language or Dialect)
- English Studies
- English Life Skills

As the Standard and Advanced courses are the ones most commonly studied, they will be the major focus of this analysis. In previous years, all of the courses have been together in one syllabus document, but from 2017 each course will have its own syllabus document, with its own assessment and reporting document. This once again shows a substantial growth in the length and detail of the curriculum documents, which thereby highlights a greater sense of managerialism and lessened teacher autonomy.
All of the syllabus documents open with a section on priorities, general capabilities, and other important areas to be a focus for all stage 6 classes. One of these priorities is “critical and creative thinking” (English Standard Stage 6 Syllabus, 2017, p. 9), ensuring that these will be a focus of all stage 6 courses. The rationale for English study in both the standard and advanced syllabuses emphasises how the study of English helps students “to develop their creative and critical faculties and broaden their capacity for cultural understanding” (English Standard Stage 6 Syllabus, 2017, p. 11). However, there is a noticeable difference in a short summary given of both the courses. English (Standard) students “learn to respond to and compose a wide variety of texts in a range of situations in order to be effective, creative and confident communicators” (p. 12). In this description, creativity and critical thinking are aims of English study, but not necessarily something students are expected to demonstrate. In contrast, English (Advanced) students “apply critical and creative skills in their composition of and response to texts in order to develop their academic achievement through understanding the nature and function of complex texts” (English Advanced Stage 6 Syllabus, 2017, p. 12). For English (Advanced) students, then, critical thinking and creative skills must be demonstrated in order to achieve the higher grades. Students are differentiated in their class and ability specifically on their critical and creative abilities, perhaps showing a belief that critical and creative discussions in the English classroom are only possible with the more advanced students. If this is the case, then this doesn’t seem to align with critical thinking and creativity being one of the primary priorities of English study.

In both the English (Standard) and English (Advanced) courses, one of the aims of study is to help students reflect in ways that are “imaginative, creative, interpretive, critical and powerful” (English Standard Stage 6 Syllabus, 2017, p. 15). The Aims section is followed by an Objectives section, which outlines that students will learn to “think in ways that are imaginative, creative, interpretive and critical” (p. 16). This section then goes on to argue that this will help students to appreciate “the independence gained from thinking imaginatively, creatively, interpretively and critically” (p. 16). These objectives are then linked to student outcomes, which later become the basis for assessments in order to ensure students are measured against the objectives.
The 2017 syllabuses have a greater emphasis on learning across the curriculum, and as one of the priorities is creativity and critical thinking there is a section devoted to the role of critical thinking and creativity in English study. Though there are discernable differences in the Standard and Advanced sections, they are ultimately insignificant (sentence structures are rearranged, but the content of the section remains the same), and so the Advanced version is given here:

“Critical and creative thinking is an important feature of the study and composition of texts in English Advanced. Students analyse and evaluate issues and ideas presented in texts. In both thinking about and creating their own texts, they recognise and develop arguments, use evidence and draw reasoned conclusions. They analyse and manipulate the relationship between language and meaning. Students experiment with text structures and language features as they transform and adapt texts for different purposes, contexts and audiences. Students use critical thinking when they use their knowledge of language to analyse a range of texts in relation to their purpose, context, audience, structural and language features, and underlying and unstated assumptions. They investigate the ways language is used to position audiences. Students apply imaginative and inventive capacities in the creation of their own original works.” (English Advanced Stage 6 Syllabus, 2017, p. 25)

Critical thinking and creativity play a significant role in the next section of the syllabuses, which outlines course content, as each objective is linked to student outcomes and content. Each point of content is followed by symbols representing how it links to the core skills, knowledge and understanding of the curriculum, one of which is critical thinking and creativity. The given symbol for critical thinking and creativity appears many times over the rest of the document, to show which content provided is designed to help students grow in their critical and creative capacities. The document then closes with an extensive glossary, and the definitions given for creativity and critical thinking are as follows:

“Creativity: The dynamic process of using language to conceptualise, interpret and synthesise ideas in order to develop a 'product'.
Critical: Exploration of the quality of argument, content, analysis, information or persuasion in oral, visual or written text, to assess the way in which themes, issues or ideas are presented for the audience and purposes intended.” (English Advanced Stage 6 Syllabus, 2017, p. 62).
This is the first time the English syllabuses have come accompanied with a glossary clearly defining key terms. On the one hand, this can be seen as making it easier for teachers, parents, and students to understand exactly what the syllabus is instructing. On the other, this could be seen as yet another example of limiting teachers’ interpretations of the syllabus. It is clear that critical thinking and creativity play an integral role in the 2017 English syllabuses, and are therefore one of the most important aspects of English study in NSW. However, how these depictions of critical thinking and creativity translate to pedagogy is uncertain, and this will be explored in the following chapter.

**Assessment and Reporting**

The 2017 *Assessment and Reporting* documents have a similar format to their 2010 equivalent, and their major focus is school-based assessments and reporting. This is markedly different from the 1999 Assessment and reporting document, which featured exam examples with marking guidelines and typical band mark criteria. The 2017 documents provide outlines for how teachers should implement informal and formal assessment programs.

The biggest change in the 2017 English assessment program is arguably the introduction of *The Craft of Writing* module. This module provides an opportunity for students to compose a creative piece of writing to be assessed by their English teacher. Previously students’ only creative work was in the final HSC examinations. This provides students an opportunity to “demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and skills in creative writing for a range of purposes, audiences and contexts” (*Assessment and Reporting in English Standard Stage 6, 2017*, p. 8). There is a short section on the HSC exam specifications, but at the time of writing the detailed specifications and exam outlines have not yet been released.

**English Draft Syllabus – Consultation Report**
In February 2017, NESA released a consultation report outlining how the English Standard 2017 syllabus was developed. The document primarily focuses on particular complaints made by consultants (teachers, students, academics, and other interested parties), and then outlines the response taken. One of the key matters raised by the consultants was that “There should be more emphasis on creative and critical thinking in the syllabus” (English Standard Stage 6 Draft Syllabus Consultation Report, 2017, p. 7). The action taken in response was as follows: “Creative and critical thinking is a key objective of the English syllabus that underpins all outcomes and content. Opportunities to develop these skills are embedded in the course content and identified by the relevant icon.” (p. 7). This response seems to not be any action at all, and rather simply negates the point and claims that it’s wrong. This is concerning, to the extent that it may reveal a return to the ideas that made the 2010 iteration of the English syllabus require further consultation. This will be discussed further in the next section.

After outlining the consultation from professionals, the document then goes onto discuss feedback given by students who studied in 2016. The two opening sections of student feedback address the unsuitability of formal examinations in measuring creativity and critical thinking:

“Students valued the opportunity to write critically and creatively but found writing creatively under examination conditions stressful and would like more time for creative writing.

Students found that creative writing under examination conditions was inauthentic. There was a preference for it to be assessed internally.” (English Standard Stage 6 Draft Syllabus Consultation Report, 2017 p. 31).

These points can clearly be linked to the introduction of the Craft of Writing module. Students also commented that the previous assessment system “requires more memory than knowledge or skills” (English Standard Stage 6 Draft Syllabus Consultation Report, 2017, p. 32). This may well be addressed in the to be released HSC exam specifications. The exact specifications of the Craft of Writing module are yet to be released, but the removal of external assessment in place of internal assessment would be returning a degree of autonomy to teachers. This is specifically with regards to the creative (fiction) writing element of English stage 6 study, which
shows an acknowledgment of the link between teacher autonomy and students’
creative abilities. That is, the Consultation Report acknowledges that students felt that
the current creative writing assessment (a section of the final exams) did not
effectively assess their creative abilities. In response, creative writing will now be
assessed internally, giving back to teachers a significant degree of autonomy over
how creative writing will be assessed (and thereby taught). Teachers’ responses to the
introduction of this module are discussed in the next chapter.

**Draft Stage 6 English Examination Specifications**

The examination specifications are, at the time of writing, yet to be released,
but I was able to access a submission to the drafting process written by five key NSW
academics (Manuel, J, Carter, D, Dutton, J, O’Sullivan, K & Semler, L, personal
communication, 2017). The submission comments on essentially all aspects of the
HSC examinations, but there are a few key points that link to students’ critical and
creative abilities. The academics argue that there will be a “significant dumbing down
of the English examinations” (p. 9), and that the draft examinations are a
“significantly less rigorous intellectual challenge” (p. 10).

One major proposed change to exams would be to provide approximate word
lengths for students’ responses, one as low as 600 words. The authors question the
evidence and reasoning behind these changes, and argue that this would make it
difficult for students to effectively demonstrate higher-order thinking abilities:

“How can a claim be made for ‘stronger HSC standards’ when students will
write less and be constrained by an arbitrary word length that renders it
virtually impossible for students to meet the current criteria for an A-C range
mark?” (Manuel, J, Carter, D, Dutton, J, O’Sullivan, K & Semler, L, personal

The authors then argue that this would lead to a greater emphasis on memorisation
and essay reproduction, and therefore less emphasis on spontaneity and creativity.
Teachers’ responses to these proposed changes are explored in the next chapter.
Conclusions

From the 1983 syllabus to the yet to be implemented 2017 syllabus, critical thinking and creativity have played an integral role in stage 6 English study in NSW. One of the major aims of English study has been, and will continue to be, helping young people become creative individuals and critical members of society. However, the layout, size, and scope of the syllabus has changed radically, and this has impacted all aspects of the English classroom, creativity and critical thinking included.

The most striking difference between the 1983 syllabus and the 2017 syllabus is the remarkable difference in size. The 1983 English syllabus for the 2 unit (General) course is six pages long, and there was no assessment and reporting document. The 2017 English (Standard) syllabus is a hundred and six pages long, comes with a thirteen page long assessment and reporting guide, as well as a yet to be released exam specifications document. This growth occurred over time and can be tracked over the life of the English syllabus and its supporting documents. What are the implications of this change, and how might this impact the role of critical thinking and creativity in the English classroom? The inclusion of lengthy guidelines and checklists for teachers (as well as parents and students) links to teachers’ loss of autonomy, as the more detailed the guidelines are in the curriculum documents, the less the teacher is responsible for creating individualised assessments. The less flexibility given in the syllabuses gives less scope for teacher autonomy, and thereby less scope for students’ creativity. Béchervaise (2004) comments on the role of criteria in assessments:

“The criteria for assessment become dependent upon the intention of the work being assessed. The developmental nature of the writing process… suggests that the criteria for assessment might, themselves, be developed as the intention of the work is refined. At the point at which summative assessment is finally applied, the criteria may have grown from a collaboration between the student, the teacher and peers as potential audience” (p. 324).

This is distinctly not the case in the more recent versions of the English syllabus. This may well be partly addressed with the introduction of the Craft of Writing module,
which takes the assessment of creative writing out of the exams and into the control of teachers. The extent of control and autonomy they have over this module is, as of the time of writing, unknown. The relationship between teacher autonomy and students’ creativity and critical abilities will be addressed further in the following chapter, as individual teachers reflect on how these changes have impacted their pedagogical practices.

In the 1983 syllabus the focus is very much on the responsibility of the teacher to create a discursive classroom and to create assessments accordingly, but in the 2017 syllabus the focus is on individual students and their abilities. The 1983 syllabus does emphasise the importance of students’ individual responses to texts, but positions them within a discursive classroom environment. In contrast, the 2017 syllabus doesn’t comment on the discursive nature of the classroom, and rather details the abilities each student should display. The focus is on the individual, not the collective. In the 1983 syllabus, the focus was on how the individual and the collective work in tandem, and the role of the teacher as a facilitator for this relationship. For example, the following description of literary discussion in the 1983 syllabus can be seen as an important facilitator of critical discussion:

““The teacher’s role will be one of evoking and helping to formulate various reactions, encouraging students to listen to one another, guiding the discussion without imposing a viewpoint on it, testing different interpretations against the evidence of the text itself.” (p. 5) (p. 8-9).

In contrast, in the 2017 English (Standard) syllabus, an individual students’ critical abilities become a checkpoint to be addressed in assessments and ticked off:

“Objective A

Through responding to and composing a wide range of texts and through the close study of texts, students will develop knowledge, understanding and skills in order to communicate through speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing and representing.

Outcome 1
A student: › independently responds to and composes complex texts for understanding, interpretation, critical analysis, imaginative expression and pleasure EN12-1
Related Life Skills outcomes: ENLS6-1, ENLS6-2, ENLS6-3

Content
Students:

Engage personally with texts
● develop deeper textual understanding that enhances enjoyment in composing and responding to a range of complex texts including those by and about Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander People(s)
● compose considered and well-crafted personal responses to texts and critically consider the responses of others

Develop and apply contextual knowledge
● examine the contexts of composing and responding, for example personal, social, cultural, historical and workplace contexts, and assess their effects on meaning in and through particular texts
● explain how and why texts influence and position readers and viewers (ACEEN040)

Understand and apply knowledge of language forms and features
● analyse and assess the ways language features, text structures and stylistic choices shape points of view and influence audiences (ACEEN024)
● apply and articulate criteria used to evaluate a text or its ideas

Respond to and compose texts
● develop creative, informed and sustained interpretations of texts supported by close textual analysis (ACELR062)
● compose texts that combine different modes and media for a variety of contexts, audiences and purposes” (p. 53).

This reframing of the nurture and assessment of students’ critical abilities impacts teachers’ pedagogical practices. Whereas the former example emphasises the teachers’ role in class discussions as being essential in students’ critical development (see also: Sawyer, 2004; Mitchell, 2004), the latter extensively explains the qualities to be demonstrated in individual assessment tasks. This links to the rise of managerialism and accountability as discussed in the first chapter, as domains previously under the discretion of the teacher are now explicitly and extensively detailed; all that is left is for the teacher to implement as described. Teachers have transformed from public servants to admin managers. (Galligan, Roberts, & Trifiletti, 2001).

Critical thinking and creativity are clearly a pivotal part of both the 1983 and the 2017 syllabus, but the ways in which the syllabuses convey them greatly differ.
This can be explained as a result of a greater focus on accountability and parental choice. That is, in order for quasi-markets in education to exist and for parents to have meaningful choices about different schools, a detailed description of what exactly teachers should be doing is required, in order for parents to make informed decisions (Van Dunk & Dickman, 2003). One of the consequences of this is that as the role of the teacher and the content of the classroom has become further defined and outlined, the freedom and autonomy teachers require to conduct creative, spontaneous class discussion has diminished. This reduction of autonomy diminishes teachers’ sense of professionalism, as teachers’ ability to make value judgments are an essential part of this professionalism (Biesta, 2009). The following chapter will explore how this has impacted the classroom. In particular, the interviews will give a voice to how this has impacted students’ critical thinking and creative abilities and their relationship with past, present, and future assessment regimes.
Chapter 3

Talking With Teachers: The Role of Critical Thinking and Creativity in the English Classroom

In the previous two chapters I have articulated some of the impacts of neoliberalism on education and examined the role of critical thinking and creativity in the English curriculum and assessment systems in NSW between 1983 and 2017. Those chapters contextualise the interviews undertaken with high school teachers of English that form the basis of this chapter. This chapter investigates the place and function of critical thinking and creativity in the English classroom, and links it to the changes in curriculum document discussed in the previous chapter. It specifically focuses on the ways in which shifting articulations of curriculum and assessment have impacted pedagogy, and also identifies potential misalignments between curriculum, assessment and pedagogy. Curriculum, assessment, and pedagogy serve as categories for the thematic analyses of the interviews, with the themes being critical thinking and creativity.

The Interview Methodology: Designing the Interview Process

In designing the interview process I drew on Kvale’s “Seven Stages of an Interview Investigation” (Kvale, 1996, p. 88), because it provided a practical framework for designing, collecting, and organising the data. Kvale’s direction was essential in preparing for the planning, conducting, and reporting of the interview process. In what follows I elaborate each of the seven steps, and discuss how they informed this research.
Seven Stages of an Interview Investigation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Thematizing</td>
<td>Formulate the purpose of an investigation and describe the concept of the topic to be investigated before the interviews start.” (Kvale, 1996, p. 88)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Designing</td>
<td>Plan the design of the study, taking into consideration all seven stages of the investigation, before the interviewing starts.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Interviewing</td>
<td>Conduct the interviews based on an interview guide and with a reflective approach to the knowledge sought and the interpersonal relation of the interview situation.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Transcribing</td>
<td>Prepare the interview material for analysis, which commonly includes a transcription from oral speech to written text.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Analyzing</td>
<td>Decide, on the basis of the purpose and topic of the investigation, and on the nature of the interview material, which methods of analysis are appropriate for the interviews.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Verifying</td>
<td>Ascertain the generalizability, reliability, and validity of the interview findings.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Reporting</td>
<td>Communicate the findings of the study and the methods applied in a form that lives up to scientific criteria, takes the ethical aspects of the investigation into consideration, and that results in a readable product.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Thematizing

The purpose of the interviews was to establish an understanding of: how changes to the curriculum and assessment regimes in NSW has impacted teachers’ pedagogical approach; and to also discover the role that creativity and critical thinking currently plays in the English classroom. The three themes applied to the interview questions and analysis are critical thinking, creativity, and change. Each category has two sub-categories that capture the most prevalent topics discussed and
that reflect the neoliberal impact on English education in NSW. These categories and sub-categories are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curriculum</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Pedagogy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managerialism</td>
<td>Effectiveness of Assessment Practices</td>
<td>Creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>The Intrusiveness of NAPLAN</td>
<td>Autonomy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This framework allows for links to be made from the perspectives of teachers to the ideas explored in the previous two chapters.

2. Designing

I designed the interviews to be semi-structured and conversational in nature in order to allow the interviewees to comment in ways they deemed to be most appropriate. The interview questions were designed to be as open as possible without losing focus so as not to project any bias, but to also be clear enough to guide the discussion in a way that was conducive to the aims of the research. Whilst the following questions were prepared as a framework for the discussion, the conversational nature of the interviews meant that not every question was asked verbatim, as the topics of discussion were often touched upon by the interviewees before the question was asked.

In designing the interview process I planned to interview as many as nine teachers and capture different levels of experience in order to convey how stage 6 English study has changed over time. The initial plan was to interview nine teachers in total, with three teachers from three time-frames of experience: <10 years, 10-20 years, and 20+ years. This was in order to capture a sense of the historical changes to the curriculum and to how teachers with differing levels of experience approached their pedagogical practices. However, due to time constraints I was only able to interview four teachers, two with 20+ years of experience, one with between ten and
twenty years, and one with less than ten years of experience. The cohort reflects the three time frames and provides enough data to make inferences about changes to teaching and policy over the last 20+ years.

3. Interviewing

As the interviews were semi-structured and intended to be conversational, the questions provided a guideline for the interviews but were flexible. As interviewer I actively listened to the answers given and asked appropriate follow up questions. Often these follow up questions simply took the form of: “I found what you were saying about x to be really interesting. Would it be possible for you to expand on that?” The interviews were therefore a combination of introducing, specifying, and probing questions, as defined by Kvale (1996, p. 134).

In preparation for the interviews I consulted Kvale’s (1996) “Quality Criteria for an Interview” (p. 145). Among the many pertinent points was Kvale’s suggestion that “The shorter the interviewer’s questions and the longer the subjects’ answers, the better” (p. 145). This was something that, prior to the interviews, gave me much anxiety as this was my first time interviewing for research purposes, and which I reflected on in order to adapt my questions and my interviewing style. The simplest of these changes was to revise any question that could possibly be answered with a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’. I anticipated that the interviews could last for anywhere between twenty minutes and an hour, depending on the extent of the answers given. The interviews did indeed vary in length, but each provided valuable and unique insights to the research.

According to Kvale (1996), the interviewer should “attempt to verify his or her interpretations of the subject’s answers in the course of the interview” (p. 145). At the end of each interview I felt that I had a clear understanding of each teachers’ thoughts and concerns, which I was able to clearly articulate in my analysis. This is because after most answers, I would give my own interpretation of their answer in order to confirm my understanding. This would either result in confirmation or further clarification. This accords with Kvale’s view that an interview is “‘self-communicating’ – it is a story contained in itself that hardly requires much extra
descriptions and explanations” (p. 145). My descriptions and explanations were for confirmation purposes, not to explain my view on the topic.

Before each interview the interviewee was given an information sheet that featured an outline of the aims of the project. They therefore had an idea of what was to be discussed and that they would be given an opportunity to put forward their own perspectives. This helped provide clarity to the conversations, and ensured that the points of discussion were clearly outlined. This, along with additional questions seeking clarification and confirmation, contributed to the extent to which the interviews were understood to be self-explanatory.

4. Transcribing

The interviews were recorded on two separate devices (a phone and a laptop) in order to provide security in case one device failed. The transcription was done by Pacific Transcription services.

5. Analyzing

As outlined in the thematising and designing stages, there are three major themes of analysis – critical thinking, creativity, and change. These themes provided the framework for the analysis, and the discussion of the interviews was framed around these ideas. The presentation of the analysis simultaneously combines both the reporting and the analysis of the interview data, with “the analysis of the interviews becoming embedded in the writing of the findings” (Kvale, 1996, p. 257).

6. Verifying

Kvale (1996) defines analytical generalisation as “the extent to which the findings from one study can be used as a guide to what might occur in another situation” (p. 233). This project does not purport to have the solutions for any issues identified, but rather is focused on identifying the nature and cause of any issues concerning the role of critical thinking and creativity in the contemporary English classroom in NSW. With this in mind, analysis of the interviews seeks not so much to
generalise the findings, but to explore the extent to which the teachers’ accounts of experience align with two major concerns. First, with the broad outline of the history of neoliberalism and education in Australia and its particular connection to English high school study, and second, to provide insights into particular issues and stories that helps demonstrate how changes to the curriculum have impacted classroom pedagogy and assessment. These stories will also help to investigate the impact that the HSC examinations are having on English classrooms, and will address the question: are our tests concordant with the classroom or is the classroom concordant with the tests? That is, do the English tests examine the learning outcomes specified in the English syllabus, or are classrooms burdened by an adherence to an examination regime that does not cover the range of capabilities and competencies that need to be covered? The findings of this project will inform possibilities for further research in this area. This project begins with a wide focus and then slowly narrows down the main grounds of investigation. That is, the project will give an overview of the neoliberal impact on education in Australia, and will then focus on discovering how these changes manifest themselves in NSW English classrooms. This acts as both a justification for the research, and also reveals the potential for generalisation. English study can also be seen as the centre of education as its study permeates throughout many other aspects of education. Much has been written about the neoliberal impact on education in Australia, but little specifically on how this impact materialises in English study in NSW.

Kvale (1996) defines reliability as “the consistency of the research findings” (p. 235), and the interviews provided interviewees with an opportunity to convey their thoughts on the major themes of discussion. Whilst there may be variability in the perspectives offered, the extent to which the teachers’ narratives align with the analysis of neoliberalism and education, and its impact on English pedagogy and assessment, some reliability and consistency may be assumed, as each interviewee articulates similar perceptions and concerns regarding the key themes. This links to the validity of the project, which Kvale (1996) defines as “whether an interview study investigates what is intended to be investigated” (p. 88). The extent to which this is the case will be seen in the findings and the analysis later in this chapter.

7. Reporting
The findings of the study will feature as an integral part of this research project, and may provide evidence of the need for further research and investigation. The preparation for the interviews was also done in cooperation with my two supervisors, who helped ensure both the integrity and ethics of the process. They also helped make this result in a readable, consistent thesis.

The Interviews

There were four interviews with four high school English teachers. Two were male, and two were female, and the teachers had 20, 21, 13, and 4 years of experience. The interviews have three major themes: critical thinking, creativity, and change. These three things permeate through the discussions, as well as the categories of English study previously outlined – curriculum, assessment, and pedagogy. They also informed the design of the questions, as outlined below. The interview questions provided a framework for the interviews, though as topics were covered and follow up questions were asked, the time in the interviews in which certain topic were covered differed. Nevertheless, the teachers, at a minimum, covered the topics outlined by the following questions:

How long have you been an English teacher, and what changes, if any, have you noticed regarding curriculum, teaching practice or assessment?

Are you aware of any specific policy changes that have impacted your work?

Have your pedagogical practices changed in reaction to policy changes?

What are your thoughts on NAPLAN and its impact on your teaching?

Some people think that what is tested in current testing regimes is different than what is, or what should be taught in the classroom. What are your thoughts on this issue?
a) If there is a misalignment there, what strategies do you employ to overcome this?

To what extent do you feel policy supports your ability to develop your students’ creativity and critical thinking abilities?

How much autonomy do you feel you have within existing curriculum structures?

Much has been written on the de-professionalisation of teachers. How do you feel in regards to this?

In some of the proposed changes to the HSC exams, there has been a recommendation to shorten the exam times and have recommended essay lengths as low as 600 words. What are your thoughts on this?

a) Some have argued that this would encourage memorised and reproduced responses. What are your thoughts on this?

Another proposal is the introduction of multiple-choice questions into HSC English examination. Some have argued that this would lead to a “dumbing down” of the exams. What are your thoughts on this?

What is your vision of the ideal English Classroom, and how can we get it?

What is the role of English teaching, or English study in society?

Do you think assessments effectively deal with this role of English? Why/why not?

Are there any other thoughts or comments that you would like to contribute?

In order to be completely transparent and to ensure that each interview is fairly represented, after each contribution from the teachers I will include the years of experience and gender of the interviewee.
Curriculum

Changes to curriculum and assessment documents have impacts on pedagogical practices, as teachers amend their teaching methods to suit new ideas. There was a focus throughout on the three themes of critical thinking, creativity, and change, and the categories of curriculum, assessment, and pedagogy provide a framework for the analysis. Under the category of curriculum, there are two sub-categories that refine the topic further and introduce key ideas that were touched upon in the interviews. The two sub-categories are managerialism and accountability. These are two topics addressed in the previous two chapters, and the interviews capture their impact on English high school pedagogy.

Managerialism

Teachers consistently raised the idea that curriculum documents have become more managerial in nature, and that this has had a controlling impact on their work. A teacher with 21 years of experience discussed how changes to the syllabus has changed her pedagogical processes:

“The first faculty I entered formally, there were no programs written, you went and grabbed the syllabus and you make sure that you were teaching what you were supposed to teach. But it's migrated from go to the book room and have a look and see what's there and pick out what you think would suit the kids, to these are the programs, 7, 8, 9, 10 for each year group. This is the sequence of the programs, these are the assessments, they're weighted, it's much more structured, it's much more formal.” (20 years, female).

This teacher then went on to point out how this heightened sense of managerialism links to greater accountability, which has impacted teacher workload:

“There’s an enormous amount of red tape, an enormous amount of administrative work in the last decade and that's policy, that's in order to make teachers more accountable, and that's increased the workload significantly.” (13 years, male).
The teacher then emphasised that these changes have had both positive and negative impacts, and noted that the changes do “curb spontaneity”, but it is also now more reassuring and fairer for the students as they know exactly what to expect.

Another teacher discussed how the increased managerialism had transformed how teachers prepare for classes:

“Some of the beautiful things that used to exist in teaching, where it was professional engaging in professional dialogue about their content, has gone… The department will say to you on one level please organise your own local area groups. This is what we encourage you to do, but in your own time and on your own. Once upon a time there used to be an English consultant for not only every region but every district, that would be services where teachers would go and share ideas and develop units and whatever else. Now there is one for the state - one for the state.” (21 years, female).

The changes to English curriculum documents have transformed the position of English teachers from the authority of their own classroom using their professional judgment, to implementers, performing an act written by curriculum documents. It is interesting to note that two of the teachers commented about one of the major benefits of this external prescription being that students knew exactly what to expect, which helps to reduce anxiety. The impacts of any changes are, of course, multifaceted, but there is consensus among the teachers that the increased sense of managerialism has caused a loss of spontaneity and opportunities for creativity. One teacher succinctly argued that the changes had “raised the floor but lowered the ceiling”. Despite the loss of autonomy implicit within increased managerialism, the teachers also argue that there had been a significant rise in accountability, and that these pressures limit their pedagogical practices.

**Accountability**

The issue of an increased awareness of teachers’ accountability was consistently raised as a concern that impacted the teachers’ work. One teacher
described how heightened accountability in the form of parental oversight had limited what she wanted to teach in the classroom:

“You question what you teach and how to teach every conceivable moment and then also you have to be aware that also there might be parents that object to certain things. I said to my students we're going to be looking at this novel next term. The parent went and bought a copy, read it and was really, really offended and so we changed the unit, we changed the novel that was to be studied because we had a parent who had moral objections to what the text was. Everything impacts your teaching, all the red tape.” (20 years, female).

Each of the teachers interviewed described how this constant consciousness of accountability impacts their creativity and creates a sense of unease. They also articulated an important relationship between assessments and accountability; students’ results are provided as evidence of an effective or ineffective teacher. This, of course, impacts teachers’ work and some feel that they are teaching towards a test as opposed to a test measuring the effectiveness of the lessons. One teacher pointed out that as he was in a temporary position, he felt even more inclined to teach towards the assessments in order to justify why he deserved to remain employed:

“I'm a temporary teacher, I don't have a permanent contract and I've only got a small English load, so in order for me to justify my position... and it's not - they don't come in and say, hey if you don't get five A's and 10 B's, we're going to fire you. But I need to be able to go, hey look, in term one my kids were getting D's and C's and now I've got three A's, four B's and majority of them are C’s, and they go, oh wow, that's great, yeah we'll keep him next year. That's what happens in my head. So unfortunately, yeah, I've always struggled with it and I find I am trying to move away from it and in parts I am, but I think across the whole school that I'm in, we do find ourselves unfortunately stuck to teaching to assessments.” (4 years, male).

The precarious nature of the teachers’ work and the constant sense of accountability force him to teach to assessments, and don’t give him the freedom to take a holistic approach. The teachers with more experience noted that this sense of accountability had increased over time, and that it has had transformative impacts on their work. In particular, their ability to be creative and conduct critical discussions in the classroom has been hindered. However, creativity and critical thinking has always been emphasized in the syllabus, and in the 2017 version of the syllabus, creativity and critical thinking are one of the priorities of the curriculum. There is, therefore, a
misalignment between the priorities of the curriculum and the priorities in the classroom. This is because teachers feel unable to focus on creativity and critical thinking as they are pressured (by an increase in managerialism and accountability), and instead must focus on assessment results, which, as they argue below, do not effectively measure these abilities.

**Assessment**

Issues regarding assessment practices were the most frequently raised concern during the interviews, and teachers commented on the relationship between assessment practices and students’ creativity and critical thinking. There were two major subcategories discussed concerning English assessment regimes, and these were the effectiveness of assessment practices, and the intrusiveness of NAPLAN.

**Effectiveness of Assessment Practices**

Assessments play a huge role in English study, and for stage 6 students they are especially important, as these are the final years of high school. The effectiveness of assessment practices is therefore vital, and this was frequently discussed, especially in terms of measuring students’ creativity and critical thinking abilities. One teacher commented on the difficulty of measuring students’ critical thinking abilities in assessments:

“Even though it's written down in the syllabus that critical thinking is important, I think it's quite challenging. I think schools want to see data in terms of quick turn, quick results. A process of developing that skill takes time. You may not see the benefits of it until five, six years later.” (13 years, male).

This sentiment was expanded on by another teacher, who commented on the role of assessments in a more general, holistic view of English study:

“I think the data-driven stuff is important, okay, measurement of results is important but when you've got the time pressure to have those results
delivered in a short timeframe and it's constantly being assessed in that short timeframe that it takes away from the bigger journey of education. Really, English is a subject where that journey you need a longer timescale to explore I think and to learn. It's not memorising knowledge, it's an ever-evolving process I think.” (21 years, female).

The teachers felt a sense of misalignment between the extensive process of creative and critical growth and the short-termism of directed assessment tasks. Another teacher reflected on this misalignment thusly:

“In terms of policy when it comes to assessment there's not a lot of room to be creative, you have to tick a lot of boxes. As much as you try and be creative with students when it comes to assessment you are restricted by the requirements of the syllabus and eventually the program that you write. And it does curtail a little bit your practice in the classroom.” (4 years, male).

The misalignment between the priorities of the curriculum and the short termism of the assessment tasks curtails the ability of the teachers’ to foster their students’ critical and creative abilities. One teacher commented on how this misalignment impacts her students, and how she helped the students and their parents deal with this:

“I say sometimes to students, that number from the half yearly, that mark you got that's not who you are. Often at parent-teacher interviews I'll say that as well. The last parent-teacher interview I spoke to a parent, 55 percent? How did he get that? That number isn't who he is, he's a great student, he just needs to learn how to write in exams and he needs to organise his time better in exams which is a structural thing. It doesn't say who he is, he's a marvelous English student, with a great deal of insight and incredibly empathetic. It doesn't come through in that exam because he again, never sat an exam like that before, so it threw him.” (20 years, female).

The formal assessment tasks often don’t give students the scope to effectively demonstrate their knowledge and capabilities. This misalignment has significant impacts on students, as results may not align with their abilities.

During the interviews there were two questions that frequently solicited an interesting and relevant response on the effectiveness of assessment practices. These two questions are:

- What do you think is the role of high school English study in society?
- Do you think assessments effectively deal with this role of English?

The role of English in society is captured in the opening sections of the syllabus documents, such as in the Aims, Curriculum Priorities, and the Rationale sections. These were explored in the previous chapter. The two most pertinent examples of answers to these questions clearly elaborate both the nature and impacts of the misalignments between curriculum and assessment, and student capabilities and performance on formal assessment tasks.

“What do you think is the role of high school English study in society?

The role of English? I think that reading, to quote - we study a novel called Letters to Alice on First Reading Jane Austen. I know a lot of people hate that text, but I think that a well-read person would be a far better citizen than a person who is poorly read, and I think you can change the world much more significantly by changing ideas and changing a student through a great novel. A well-read person is more empathetic. A well-read person is more open minded, and I think we need more people like that. Reading develops the whole person and teaching literature develops the whole person and teaches people to be I think better citizens overall.”

“How do assessments deal with this role of English being in citizen formation? Do you think assessments measure that?

I don't think assessments measure that, no. Assessments don't measure that. There's no way, for example, that the last assessment task that I administered for that unit was the half yearly exam, where they did a response where they compared Pride and Prejudice and Letters to Alice. I can't measure empathy, you can't measure how that person has changed from reading those novels. So, assessments are a way to satisfy the boffins at the department, and parents, so that there's a number at the end of that process that says, my student is worth 87 out of 100. Structures need that number in order to obviously allow that student to go on to further study and achieve what they want to achieve, but the goal that's unspoken that sits underneath all of that is the idea that you're developing a whole person. (20 years, female).”

“What do you think is the role of high school English study in society?

Ideally it would be to foster that creativity and the ability to look at things from different perspectives, which should be able to be seen in most - it can have applications everywhere. You should be able to be provided with an argument and then automatically going, okay, what are the counterarguments to that. Or you should be able to say, this is my issue, what are the best ways to get around that? You should be able to discuss your issues and you should be able to, I guess, have a healthy debate about why it's good or why it's not.
Do you think assessments effectively deal with measuring this role in English?

Not overly. I think - I guess you have to - the higher students, they're still going to be fine and they're still going to come out, I guess, but you're going to lose, I think, a lot of the people in the mid-range that could do much better because of it, because that's not how they learn and they're more adapted to that creative and open-flow thinking. Whereas they're going to get into an exam and not be able to kind of put that all into that paper they have to do.” (4 years, male).

However, the teachers consistently showed hope for the new *Craft of Writing* module, which changes creative writing from being a section of the final exams to being administered internally. They were optimistic that it would assist in implementing creative pedagogies:

“I don't think there is often a lot of room to develop students' critical thinking and creativity. If we're just talking about stage 6, the changes in the HSC that are coming, I think do compensate for that, because there is an entire module now that is devoted to creative writing. I'm hoping it won't be assessed in the exam, and it's all internally assessed. So what I think the aim is to develop a body of work over a period of time, which I think is much more constructive.” (13 years, male).

This is evidence of the link between creativity and teacher autonomy; teachers felt that being able to use their professional judgment would greatly improve the effectiveness of assessments for creativity in contrast to external standardised assessments. Another teacher shared the same hope, but noted that the benefits from the changes may well take a while to materialise:

“With the new Craft of Writing course they're really - I suppose they're wanting the students to find their voice again. I think that's going to take time for it to develop because really in the junior years it's a lot more structured, here are the rules of the text type, here are some examples, let's deconstruct it, you do a version. It's much more - it's not necessarily that creative. Students are not confident with their creativity, which is hard. I think - but it will take time for that - what they're wanting to develop from that craft of writing I'm not sure - I think we're going to go have to go back and relook at the 7 to 10 syllabus to start embedding some of those skills that they're wanting in stage 6. We didn't have that stage 6 syllabus so it hasn't come through as strongly in their junior year. We're going to have to relook at that again.” (21 years, female).
This again emphasises the long-term nature of students’ creative growth, which is not properly measured with short-term assessment regimes. In stark contrast to the attitude towards the Craft of Writing module, there was ubiquitous hesitation to the idea of introducing multiple-choice questions to English HSC exams, which is one of the many proposed changes as discussed in the previous chapter:

“All another proposal is the introduction of multiple-choice questions into the HSC English exams, what do you think of that?

I don't like that. That to me is moving to - that is just money saving on the Board of Studies part, that's all it is. What are they testing? It's not creative or critical thinking.” (20 years, female).

There was a perception that the changes to assessment were not driven by learning, but rather on economic efficiency. This perception that multiple-choice questions in stage 6 English are not effective was echoed by another teacher, who argued that they cannot capture the nuances of English study:

“All another proposal is the introduction of multiple-choice questions.

I can't even fathom that.

What are your thoughts?

We like to call multiple-choice multiple guess because the structure is that there are always chances that are very similar and you kind of take a shot at one of them. It doesn't test knowledge… with English you need to develop a holistic view of the text and asking a question about a text, you know, in To Kill a Mockingbird, what does it main message of the text? Is it A, B, C - no, you can't do that. You have to come that conclusion yourself after reading and understanding it.” (21 years, female).

This again points to a misalignment between what the teachers value as knowledge and ability in English, and what it is that the assessments measure. One teacher summed up well the general attitude towards the role of assessments in English study and the impacts that they have in the classroom:
“I just wish there was more freedom. Because we're teaching to a test, we always feel restrained and we've gone, okay well you've got your test in three weeks, we've got to do the scaffold, we've got to have the practice, you've got to hand in the draft, you've got to do this, this and this kind of thing. So there's not that much room for that freedom of thought. I would love to get into the why Shakespeare wrote this and why he did that and I'd love to get into, okay yeah, this poem isn't really on our syllabus but if you like it, cool, let's talk about it. What do you think the poet's trying to do here and that kind of stuff?

But instead, I find myself going, okay guys, talk about it with me later. They don’t, it's their free time, they're not going to come and chat to me then. But it's always constantly going, okay now let's get back to what's going to happen in the assessment. I find myself at times, I guess, I wouldn’t say hypocritical, but when I'm saying, you know, the reason why you learn English or you learn Shakespeare is because of that analysis and that creative thinking, et cetera, et cetera. Then at the same time, I'm trying to steer away from that freedom of that and move back towards just the assessment task. So yeah, I struggle.” (4 years, male).

The teachers’ perceived that the loss of their autonomy and their creativity diminishes students’ critical and creative learning. These losses are directly linked to assessment practices, and one of the major assessment practices discussed was NAPLAN and its impact on pedagogical practices.

**The Intrusiveness of NAPLAN**

The teachers consistently argued that the NAPLAN examinations were intrusive and had forced them to change their pedagogical practices. NAPLAN is a yearly standardised tests for students in years 3, 5, 7, and 9 and one teacher discussed how these tests focus on things that are not usually a main focus of the English classroom:

“The questions are just not anything that our students encounter normally. It's completely out of their scope of experience and often test things that - I think one of the examples from last year was that they talked about independent clauses within sentences. If you ask a teacher, I don't think I've ever sat down and run a lesson looking at independent clauses and dependent clauses. Because unless you're studying linguistics, is there really a need for a 12 or a 13-year-old student to have to know that kind of intricacy? Do you they need to know about clauses in sentences? No, they don't.” (21 years, female).
Another teacher followed on from this point, and discussed how NAPLAN had changed her pedagogical practices:

“I think the testing doesn't always target or analyse the students fairly because it's done in isolation. When you're teaching some of these literacy strategies, teaching students how to use full stops and capital letters that's supposed to be integrated in your teaching. You're not supposed to have a lesson - and we've started doing this, which I absolutely hate, where we have lessons where, oh, we're just going to focus on nouns today. What's a noun? What's a proper noun? Nobody learns like that in isolation, it needs to be contextually situated, so the testing is just completely out of sync with their experiences and I don't think it actually tests what they're capable of doing.” (4 years, male).

This idea of testing being out of sync is critical; if there is a misalignment between what the curriculum sets out as the aims for English study and that which is tested in the assessments, and if teachers feel more and more pressure to teach to the assessments, then some of those aims for English study may become lost. This is particularly true with NAPLAN, which, as discussed in the first chapter, has become increasingly high-stakes, and the results of the test are published online, are linked to funding, and are now linked to future student possibilities (that is, they must attain a certain mark to be able to attain their HSC). The teachers felt that this was problematic, as they felt pressured to focus explicitly on that which is covered in the NAPLAN tests, but that they viewed as being just a fragment of the bigger picture of the purposes of English study. The high stakes nature of NAPLAN was of particular importance to the teachers, and they discussed how this had added pressures to students and to teachers:

“I think if you're having a good day you'll do well, and if you're having a bad day you'll do poorly, and it doesn’t reflect who you actually are and what your skills are. I used to say to students, this test is one day of your life, whatever your results are, look and them and go, alright, that's a fair go, that's what's happened, that's what I'm like. If you've had a bad day, it's not who you are, and then walk away. I can't say that anymore because now it's become much higher stakes because they're trying to counter this attitude that parents and teachers have adopted that it's a one-off test, who cares? Do it. Don't do it. Now, you have to do it because if you want your HSC results in Year 12 you have to have met a minimum standard, and a Band 8 standard is not - I can't tell you how many students, even in my own school will not achieve that in Year 9 and how many online tests we're going to have to run to compensate for that. It's very much in isolation.” (20 years, female).
This idea of additional and compensatory tests needed in order to achieve the benchmark is evidence for the relentless pursuit of numbers, of evidence, which takes precedent over development of knowledge. Knowledge that doesn’t translate to a number is not accounted for. Another teacher commented on the introduction of NAPLAN results influencing students HSC future, and emphasised the anxiety it causes on young students:

“The new, I guess, rules that have come in with NAPLAN, I think it's terrible, to be honest. Like I said, I've got kids that are lower ability and kids that may not even get the HSC and if they do, it'll just be a well done, you've got your HSC, good luck kind of thing. But now you've got kids struggling with ruining their HSC before they even get there. So you've got this pressure of HSC, which a 17-year-old doesn't really cope with well, but now you've got a 13/14-year-old dealing with that same sort of pressure.” (21 years, female).

The increased accountability for teachers to produce certain results is mirrored by the increased pressure on students to produce results at an early age that will impact their schooling future. This is aggravated by the fact that the teachers believe that the benchmarks provided are inappropriate or unrealistic. This leads onto the question of how these assessment regimes impact pedagogy – what do teachers teach, and what do students learn?

**Pedagogy**

The impacts of curriculum and assessment on pedagogy have permeated throughout the previous section. However, there are two sub-categories worth highlighting and expanding on further, as they capture key impacts that changes to the curriculum have had on pedagogical practices. These are creativity and autonomy.

**Spontaneity/Creativity**

In one of the interviews, a teacher with 21 years of experience discussed how the creative and spontaneous nature of the classroom had been curtailed over time:
“I seem to remember we had a lot more - my impression is we had a lot more time to explore things in a more creative way. Whether it was a theme based study or whether it was studying a novel there didn't seem to be the same time pressure to have to tick off particular text types to - we taught them all but it was more fun. The children had - they talk a lot now about differentiating in classroom, but I think that's probably what we've always done, and English has been able to do to cater for that I think a little bit more, especially when you had creative tasks.” (21 years, female).

The teachers with the most experience recalled having more time in the past to be creative in the classroom, whereas now they have less. This links to increased managerialism, the loss of autonomy, and the increase in high stakes testing, as teachers have lost the time and the autonomy necessary to explore texts in creative, spontaneous ways, and must instead focus on teaching to the tests. These tests were depicted as being ineffective at measuring students’ critical and creative abilities.

Another teacher with similar levels of experience similarly linked the greater levels of accountability to a reduction of classroom spontaneity:

“There's more accountability, which of course has positive impacts, but there's far less spontaneity… you have a register at the end of the year, have you taught the program? Have you administered the assessment tasks? Did they meet the outcomes? Did you cater for life skills students? Did you differentiate? This incredible amount of red tape did not exist when I first started teaching.” (20 years, female).

There is a clear tension between an understanding of the benefits of accountability and what is lost in the reduction of autonomy. This tension points towards a misalignment between what teachers expect pedagogy to focus on and mandated curriculum and testing regimes. This leads back to the issue of autonomy.

**Autonomy**

A key aspect of the teachers’ accounts of being able to facilitate a creative and spontaneous classroom is having the autonomy to create lessons appropriate for the particular classroom. Teacher autonomy was frequently raised as an important issue, and the role of the teacher in the classroom inevitably impacts the ways students engage with critical ideas and creativity. One teacher commented on how teacher autonomy has changed and the impacts that this has on her teaching:
“When I entered the profession, I noticed teacher autonomy was greater, and it's one thing that has stuck out really over the last four or five years is that we are expected to adhere to programs and the syllabus in a much more rigid fashion. This idea that anyone can do it is the push, so the programs are so detailed, so intricate, that it doesn't matter if you're an English teacher or not, you can teach it anyway. The implication is that we're not specialists and it does impinge on our professionalism, and the idea is that you're not the expert in the classroom anymore.” (20 years, female).

In depth, prescriptive curriculum documents diminish teachers’ autonomy and professionalism, which thereby impacts classroom practices and student learning. Another teacher commented on the link between accountability and autonomy, noting how the feeling of being constantly surveilled impacts her teaching practices:

“The march towards red tape in teaching is far greater now than I've ever experienced in my entire career, and young teachers don't know what it used to be like before that time, before that idea that the programs are what they are and you must follow everything to the letter. I feel bad for younger teachers, and they don't understand what it's like to have that odd spontaneous lesson where you do something out of the box and something different and you make a decision, and not worry about, I hope the principal doesn't come down on me. I hope the deputy doesn't find out about this. I hope the parents don't complain. That's a tape that runs in the back of my head all the time.” (21 years, female).

The rise of managerialism and an increased sense of accountability have had transformative impacts on pedagogical practices. As these things have risen, teaching practices have focused more and more on assessment regimes. This is problematic if these regimes are only effective to certain aspects of English study, and the teachers felt that creativity and critical thinking are neglected to a meaningful extent. This captures a misalignment between the aims and priorities of English studied as outlined in curriculum documents, and what teachers see as what learning actually happens in the classroom.
Conclusions from the Interviews

The three key themes of the interviews were creativity, critical thinking, and change. What conclusions, no matter how tentative, can be drawn from these interviews with reference to these themes?

In terms of creativity, teachers consistently questioned how effectively assessments measured students’ creativity. Particularly, they suggested that this has become more difficult over time as teachers are ever more accountable, and this increased accountability has limited spontaneity and creativity in both the classroom and in assessments. There is, therefore, a direct link to the issues of managerialism and professionalism as discussed by Gewirtz (2002) and Galligan, Roberts, & Trifiletti, (2001), and the ability of English teachers to foster their students’ creativity and critical thinking. However, there was significant hope for the new Craft of Writing module, which seems to break away from the managerial moves, and will give back a degree of autonomy to both teacher and student.

Put simply, the teachers thought that assessments did not effectively measure students’ critical thinking abilities. Though critical thinking is featured throughout the syllabus, the teachers argued that current assessment regimes do not accurately capture the nuances inherent in critical abilities. For example, one teacher reflected on how she would have to explain to a student and their parents that test results are just a number, and that she knows how critical and empathetic that student really is, and that wasn’t captured by the test. This misalignment is concerning as things that are deemed by the curriculum documents to be key priorities of English study are actually neglected by assessment regimes. This is especially impactful as assessments become increasingly high stakes, and thereby classrooms become increasingly test-driven (Walsh, 2010).

The teachers discussed a myriad of changes they had experienced and that had impacted their pedagogical practices and their professional life. The move towards greater accountability was also followed by a greater sense of managerialism in order to implement policies ensuring accountability. That is, to ensure teachers could be
held accountable, there needed to be put in place an explicit guideline for teachers to follow. This caused a reduction in teachers’ autonomy, as instead of creating courses more holistically, the process became more of a checklist of issues to be covered. To ensure all these issues were effectively ‘checked off’, assessments became more high stakes so data could be created measuring teachers’ effectiveness. As a result, the teachers’ pedagogical practices became less spontaneous, and catered more to specific upcoming assessments. This favours certain aspects of English – knowledge of the content of a text and understanding of historical context – but marginalises the aspects of English that take longer to develop and longer to portray – critical thinking and creativity.

The historical changes evident across the range of teacher experiences elaborated in the interviews reflect the changes associated with the rise of neoliberalism and its impacts on education. Over time the curriculum documents have become more and more expansive, and now answer in detail the aspects of English study that were previously open ended and up to the teacher to use their professional judgment to administer appropriately. This captures the increased managerialism and the concurrent decrease in teacher professionalism as outlined in the first chapter (see Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Managerialism also links to increased accountability, as aspects of English study have become boxes to be ticked by teachers. To ensure these boxes are ticked, there has been a rise in high stakes testing, in particular NAPLAN, which has caused teachers to, against their judgment, teach to the tests. The interviewed teachers felt that these tests neglected students’ creative and critical abilities, which thereby caused the teachers to neglect these abilities in favour of what features strongly in assessment regimes. That is, there is a misalignment between the aims and priorities of curriculum documents (in particular, creativity and critical thinking), and that which is covered in assessment regimes. Increases in high stakes testing and accountability have forced teachers to teach to the assessments, which thereby causes a misalignment between the curriculum and pedagogical practices.
Conclusion

In the first chapter I outlined how the rise of neoliberalism has led to the corporatisation of education. Neoliberalism reframes the primary purpose of education as being economic; schooling provides effective contributors to the economy. This is evident in the rise of managerialism and accountability, as well as an increased importance placed on assessment regimes. The link between global education discourses on Australian education policy is clearly seen in the influence of PISA on NAPLAN (Lingard, Sellar & Savage, 2014). This is evidence of the impact of the neoliberal emphasis on quantification and accountability. I then went on to discuss how these things might impact high school English study in NSW, and reflected on the issues associated with quantifying the complexities associated with English study. That is, how do the rise of managerialism, accountability, and an increased emphasis on assessment impact how students’ creativity and critical thinking abilities are nurtured? This leads into the second and third chapters, where I gave an account of these changes and looked at their consequences.

In the second chapter I explored how creativity and critical thinking are accounted for in the NSW English curriculum documents from 1983 to 2017. Though creativity and critical thinking played a central role in all of the curriculum documents, the ways in which they have been conveyed have transformed greatly. The most striking difference is the gradual substantial increase in the scope covered. That is, whereas the 1983 syllabus is much shorter and is more open ended, the 2017 syllabus featured lengthy and detailed guidelines for teachers to follow. This signifies a significant loss in teacher autonomy, as what was previously the domain of the teacher – interpreting and exploring the ways best to develop and evaluate students’ critical and creative abilities – has become one of many boxes to be ticked in assessment criteria. There is also a significant difference in the framing of the focus of pedagogical practice. The 1983 syllabus focuses on the responsibility of the teacher to create a discursive classroom environment where individual students offer their own interpretations and listen to others, and the assessment program is up to the teacher to decide the most appropriate method. In more recent iterations of the syllabus, the
focus is on specific abilities students are supposed to display and assessment and reporting guides details the ways in which these are to be measured. The holistic development of students as part of a learning space slowly became separated and placed in assessment criteria. This is linked to the increased managerialism and accountability as outlined in the first chapter, and flows into the final chapter, which builds upon these observations and looks for how they have materialised in the classroom through interviews with NSW high school English teachers.

In the third chapter, I reported and analysed a series of interviews I conducted with NSW high school English teachers. Regarding measuring students’ creativity and critical thinking, teachers consistently questioned the effectiveness of current assessment regimes. They specifically noted that over time it has become more difficult to foster students’ creative and critical abilities as they have felt increasing pressure to teach to the tests. It seems, therefore, that though the curriculum documents emphasise the importance of critical and creative abilities, the assessment regimes do not effectively measure them. As teachers have felt more and more pressure to teach to these ineffective tests, there is therefore a misalignment between the aims of the curriculum and the nature of the English classroom. This misalignment is linked to the changes brought about by neoliberalism as outlined in the first chapter, as the increased managerialism and accountability is responsible for the pressure teachers’ feel to teach to the tests. However, the teachers showed hope for the introduction of the *Craft of Writing* module, as this returns the creative writing section of assessments to the teachers, establishing a clear link to teacher autonomy and student creativity.

There are a number of concerns raised by Porter (1996) that need to be considered when considering how a proxy should be created in education:

“There is a strong incentive to prefer precise and standardizable measures to highly accurate ones… accuracy is meaningless if the same operations and measurements cannot be performed at other sites.” (p. 29)

In the case of English, how can the more complex characteristics, such as creativity and critical thinking, be proxied?
“if the real goals of public action must be set aside so that officials can be judged against standards that miss the point, something important has been lost.” (p. 216)

How can we ensure that the curricula, pedagogy, and the assessment are all properly aligned? Drawing on Linda Darling Hammond’s (2010) critique of education in the U.S, Lingard (2010) proposes six key points on which future reform could base itself:

- recognise the responsibilities of all actors, including governments, systems, schools, students, communities and parents to learning outcomes;
- acknowledge the broad purposes of schooling;
- reject the view that improved test results on NAPLAN are indicative of improved schooling or a more socially just school system;
- reject the top-down, one-way gaze upon teachers as the sole source and solution to all schooling problems;
- recognise the centrality of informed teacher judgment and quality of pedagogies to achieving better learning outcomes for all students; and
- recognise the need to address poverty” (p.144).

These are highly useful points to consider when attempting to implement future policies that address the concerns I have outlined in this thesis.

In what might at first seem to be paradoxical, the more the curriculum documents have emphasised and expounded on creativity and critical thinking, the less it has been effectively nurtured in the classroom. Instead of allowing the teacher to nurture their students’ creativity in the way they deem to be appropriate in the context, creativity and critical thinking has become one of many boxes to be ticked in ineffective assessment criteria. There is a clear misalignment between the curriculum and the classrooms in their treatment of creativity and critical thinking, and this is negatively impacting the development of students in these areas.
Reference List


Fish, S. E. (1980). *Is There A Text In This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.


