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CONTINUITY AND CHANGE: SOME KEY MOMENTS IN THE HISTORY OF JUNIOR SECONDARY ENGLISH IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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As teachers grapple with a revised English K-10 Syllabus, Professor Jackie Manuel provides a thorough and engaging history of secondary English in NSW...

'Everything is forever imprinted with what it once was.'

(Jeanette Winterson, 2008)

INTRODUCTION

The release of a revised New South Wales (NSW) *English K-10 Syllabus* (NESA, 2022) is an opportune moment to revisit some of the historical milestones that have shaped the subject over the past 113 years. As Reid (2003) reminds us:

[r]etrieving intellectual history is not an antiquarian pursuit. Anyone wanting to be a well informed professional needs to understand certain continuities that link English curriculum discourses and practices with previous discourses and practices (p. 100).

What follows is a version of a presentation to NSW secondary English teachers in 2023 for the Centre for Professional Learning (CPL) at the NSW Teachers' Federation. My aim was to highlight just some of the 'continuities' between the current and previous 7-10 English syllabus documents and to identify aspects of the conceptualisation of the subject that have shifted over the course of more than a century. In other words: where have we come from; what has changed; and what has endured?

The history of English curriculum in NSW is deep and complex[1] . For that reason, the discussion here is limited to a handful of syllabus documents that provide some insights into the formation, continuities and shifts in secondary English since the early 1900s. I focus on particular features of the:

- inaugural Courses for Study in High School released in 1911;
- NSW version of 'Newbolt' English in the 1953 syllabus;
- introduction of film, media, comics in the 1961/1962 syllabus; and the
- 'Growth' 7-10 syllabus of 1971.

WHERE HAVE WE COME FROM?

Secondary English in NSW as we know it today has its roots in the colonial period of the mid- to late 1800s when '[e]conomic and social transformation' in the state 'prompted a widening of the concept of the purposes of education' (Hughes & Brock, 2008, p. 16). During this period, public education was increasingly viewed 'as an important means of creating a skilled workforce to increase Australia's competitiveness with the rest of the world' (p. 16). Following the Public Instruction Act of 1880 the administration of public education became vested in the Minster of the Crown, supported by the NSW Department of Public Instruction. For the first time, public primary school education became accessible for all students and the state assumed responsibility for government secondary education (p. 10).

During the subsequent decades of the nineteenth century, however, criticism of state education intensified, leading to a Royal Commission in 1902 under the stewardship of G. H. Knibbs and J. W. Turner (Crane & Walker, 1957). The published findings of this inquiry identified a 'lack of co-ordination' within the secondary sector (p. 15), with the only unifying factor in secondary education being the attempts by teachers and students to meet the requirements of the Public Examinations held by the University of Sydney (Wyndham, 1967). While the scope of the Knibbs-Turner Report was limited to the reorganisation of the 'administration of education', the major reforms led by the first Director of Education in NSW, Peter Board (appointed in 1905) can be understood to have had the most significant and long-lasting influence on secondary English curriculum in this state (Brock, 1984a; Hughes & Brock, 2008).

1911: *COURSES OF STUDY FOR HIGH SCHOOLS*

Introduced in NSW in 1911, the inaugural *Courses of Study for High Schools (Courses)* (NSW Department of Public Instruction) was part of the systematic reforms to establish universal, secular and free state-based education. The wide-scale changes taking place in education in NSW during the early twentieth century mirrored the rapid advances in education occurring in many countries, fuelled by the trans-cultural New Education movement (see, for example, Brock, 1984a; 1984b; 1986; Cormack & Green, 2000; Crane & Walker, 1957; Green, 2003; Green & Beavis, 1996; Green & Cormack, 2008; Hughes & Brock, 2008; Manuel & Carter, 2019; Patterson, 2000; Reid, 2002, 2003; Sawyer, 2009a, 2009b, 2010; Selleck, 1968). Hallmarks of the New Education are beliefs, discourses, 'ideas and practices' such as:

- child-centred education, drawing on the philosophies and perspectives of, for example, Rousseau, Wordsworth, Arnold, Dewey and Newbolt (Sawyer, 2009a);
- the Romantic ideal of the 'child as artist' (Mathieson, 1975, p. 56);
- experiential and active education or 'learning by doing': 'students are not to be passive recipients, but active participators – they must be fired to do things' (Newbolt, 1921, p. 277);
- education that had a close and 'practical bearing on life' (Newbolt, 1921, p. 3);
- an emphasis on emotions, creativity, imagination, and interiority (Sawyer, 2009a);
- education as a source of emancipation, optimism and aspiration;
- education for identity formation, including the fostering of citizenship;
- holistic child development that was socially mediated and relational; and
- education as a powerful force in shaping social cohesion.

In NSW, these beliefs, discourses, 'ideas and practices' were keenly embraced by Peter Board. His role in championing and carrying forward the spirit and vision of a 'new education' system and the innovations occurring in Britain and elsewhere at the time cannot be over-estimated. Board's determination to establish a centralised system of comprehensive primary and secondary education in NSW was inspired, in large part, by his 'conversion' to the New Education during his extensive study tours of England, Scotland, Europe, the United States and Canada between 1903 and 1911. Whilst abroad, he witnessed first-hand the revolutionary 'ideas and practices' flourishing in schools in those countries. His growing philosophical and practical commitment to the New Education was unambiguously instantiated in the 1911 Courses.

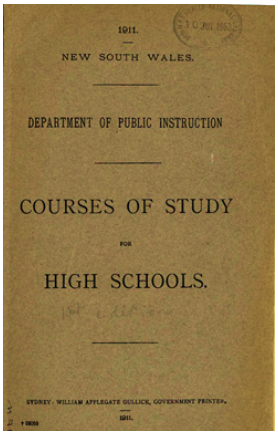


Figure 1: Facsimile of the cover of Courses of Study for High Schools (NSW Department of Public Instruction, 1911).

One of the more immediately striking features of the *Courses* (1911) is the relative brevity of the document compared to contemporary NSW syllabus documents. In a modest 100-odd pages, the 1911 document includes a syllabus for *10 subjects* (English, History, Mathematics, Science, Geography, Languages, Drawing, Domestic Arts, Music and Economics and Commerce) along with:

- a general introduction setting out the aim, rationale and purpose of secondary education;
- timetables for each course;
- Notes and Suggestions for teachers for each subject; and
- prescribed text lists for subjects where relevant.

The Introduction to the *Courses*, which Board himself wrote and signed, enunciates that:

the aim of secondary education should be to combine the ***liberal elements of a curriculum*** *with such studies as will furnish the* ***student with a body of knowledge, hab-***

its of thought and trend of interests that have a distinctly practical outcom*e* (1911, iv) (Emphasis added).

This belief in the need for education to be at the service of developing every student's self-activity, interest, freedom of thought and feeling, identity and citizenship is inscribed in the discourse of the Introduction. For instance, it asserts that 'whatever may be the path to which the teacher has directed the pupil, the pupil himself *[sic]* has travelled it and made all its features his [*sic*] own' (1911, p. 7, p. 8). In fact, the child-centred rhetoric continues throughout the 1911 document in its explicit references to education:

- as growth towards 'self-dependence';
- nurturing the 'art of independent study';
- cultivating 'taste', 'conduct and character'; and
- positioning the student as 'an investigator, an experimenter' (NSW Department of Public Instruction, 1911).

For Board, this new model of liberal education for all promised a singular pathway to forging a unified democracy in a new nation. The 1911 Introduction stresses the role of the high school in creating the 'well educated citizen' (p. 5) through both the study of certain subjects as 'common ground' and the kind of 'fellowship' engendered through the school's social, cultural and intellectual activities: '[o]ut of these will grow the self-government … and the cultivation of social obligations, training in organisation and opportunities for leadership' (1911, p. 8).

THE RATIONALE FOR THE CURRICULUM

The rationale for the inclusion of 10 subjects in the curriculum foregrounds the social, cultural, political, economic and epistemological values and agendas of the time, with stratified courses to prepare the professions, white collar workers, blue collar workers and, for the majority of females, domestic life. The gendered, class-based model of curriculum as an authorised but ideological construct functions to 'preserve and distribute what is perceived to be "legitimate knowledge"' (Apple, 1979, p. 63) and to 'confer cultural legitimacy on the knowledge of specific groups' (p. 63).

At the same time, however, the Introduction lays claim to the non-utilitarian purpose of education: all students were required to study a mandatory common core of subjects in each of the four courses, 'having no immediate bearing on vocational ends' (1911, p. 5): namely, English, History, Mathematics and Science. In the hierarchy of this curriculum, these four subjects were ascribed pre-eminent status as the 'common meeting ground for all students of the High School' (1911, p. 5). Despite the considerable shifts and advances in curriculum theory and educational research, and enormous socio-cultural changes since 1911, the current Australian Curriculum began with the development of curricula in these same four subjects. This reproduction of a curriculum hierarchy, and the attendant assumptions about the purpose of education that inhere in such a hierarchy, point to the powerful continuities in conceptualisations of secondary education, knowledge and the 'well educated' citizen (1911, p. 5).

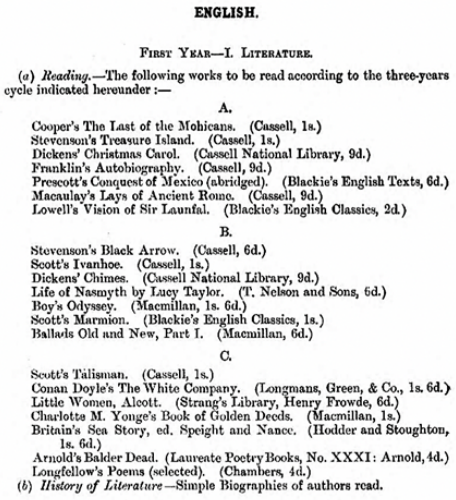
ENGLISH AS THE HUB OF THE CURRICULUM

Of the four mandatory 'common ground' subjects in the curriculum, English is singled out as the subject which, through the study of literature, 'the High School will exercise its highest influence upon the general training of the pupils' (1911, p. 5). Board's blueprint for public secondary education, and for English education in particular, relied not only on the tenets of the New Education movement: it also placed a heavy emphasis on the moral, ethical and aesthetic formation of the child and his or her holistic growth, personal experience, creativity, and 'self-activity' (Hughes & Brock, 2008, p. 20).

From a total of seven-and-a-half pages, the content for English occupies one-third of the syllabus, while the Notes and Suggestions for teachers comprises two-thirds of the syllabus. The content of the English syllabus is structured in two parts.

1.Literature – with prescribed text lists for each of the four years of secondary schooling that included:

- Fiction
- Poetry
- Drama
- Shakespearian Drama
- Non-fiction (e.g. essays, biographies)



ENGLISH.

FIRST YEAR—I. LITERATURE.

(*a*) *Reading.*—The following works to be read according to the three-years cycle indicated hereunder:—

A.

Cooper's The Last of the Mohicans. (Cassell, 1s.)
Stevenson's Treasure Island. (Cassell, 1s.)
Dickens' Christmas Carol. (Cassell National Library, 9d.)
Franklin's Autobiography. (Cassell, 9d.)
Prescott's Conquest of Mexico (abridged). (Blackie's English Texts, 6d.)
Macaulay's Lays of Ancient Rome. (Cassell, 9d.)
Lowell's Vision of Sir Launfal. (Blackie's English Classics, 2d.)

B.

Stevenson's Black Arrow. (Cassell, 6d.)
Scott's Ivanhoe. (Cassell, 1s.)
Dickens' Chimes. (Cassell National Library, 9d.)
Life of Nasmyth by Lucy Taylor. (T. Nelson and Sons, 6d.)
Boy's Odyssey. (Macmillan, 1s. 6d.)
Scott's Marmion. (Blackie's English Classics, 1s.)
Ballads Old and New, Part I. (Macmillan, 6d.)

C.

Scott's Talisman. (Cassell, 1s.)
Conan Doyle's The White Company. (Longmans, Green, & Co., 1s. 6d.)
Little Women, Alcott. (Strang's Library, Henry Frowde, 6d.)
Charlotte M. Yonge's Book of Golden Deeds. (Macmillan, 1s.)
Britain's Sea Story, ed. Speight and Nance. (Hodder and Stoughton, 1s. 6d.)
Arnold's Balder Dead. (Laureate Poetry Books, No. XXXI: Arnold, 4d.)
Longfellow's Poems (selected). (Chambers, 4d.)

(*b*) *History of Literature*—Simple Biographies of authors read.

Figure 2: Facsimile of Courses of Study for High Schools (NSW Department of Public Instruction, 1911, p. 16)

2. Language

(a) Composition – Oral and written.

(b) Grammar, Prosody, Word Composition. Practice in speaking and reading (p. 15).

In contrast to the Literature component of the syllabus, the Language component is brief and general. It discourages the explicit teaching of grammar or decontextualised language skills, emphasising instead the aim of meaningful engagement with language through reading and writing:

Formal instruction in the theory of expression will scarcely be needed. *In any case****, it is doubtful whether such instruction is effective in securing a good style of composition.*** *The aim in this course is to develop an intelligent interest in the mother tongue and* not to acquaint pupils with a body of details (1911, p. 21, p. 22) (Emphasis added).

The syllabus recommends that teachers 'leave scope for variations in detail of the programmes' (1911, p. iv) which extends to the practice of encouraging students to *choose their own reading materials in addition to those prescribed and initiate their own topics for composition*.

The Timetable in the *Courses* allocates the time to be spent in each subject area (pp. 10-14). The mandating of, and legislation for minimum hours for each subject area in the curriculum has remained a feature of education in NSW to the present, although the allocation of *half of the school timetable to the individual student's pursuits* in the 1911 syllabus was steadily eroded as the number of subjects in the curriculum grew substantially in the early decades of the twentieth century.

English is positioned in the syllabus as a subject

having ***no immediate bearing on vocational ends****, but designed to* ***provide for the common needs and the common training for well educated citizenship*** *... it is especially in the use of the mother tongue and the study of its literature that the High School will exercise its* ***highest influence upon the general training of pupils*** (1911, p. 5, p. 18) (Emphasis added).

The 'mother tongue' is of course 'English' – and the literature referred to in this excerpt is predominantly British canonical literature. Foreshadowing the Newbolt Report's (1921) belief in literature as 'a possession and a source of delight, a personal intimacy and the gaining of personal experience, an end in itself and, at the same time, an equipment for the understanding of life' (p. 19) is the view of literature conveyed in the 1911 syllabus:

*The special educating power of Literature lies in i****ts effect in developing the mind, filling it with high ideals and in its influence on refining and ennobling character'*** *... the works in the Literature Course have been chosen* ***not merely for their value as a means of information,*** *but as* ***a source of higher pleasures, as a means of knowing life, and for their ethical or their literary value*** (1911, p. 5, p. 18) (Emphasis added).

Here the English syllabus stakes out the territory and defines the purpose of the subject by proclaiming the ethical, 'moral, spiritual and intellectual value of reading literature' (1911, p. 18). Literature, it states, is a 'source of higher pleasures', knowledge and understanding. The evangelistic tenor of the early twentieth century debates about the centrality of literature as a civilising force in the education of the young was equally captured in more public conversations, such as, for example, in a piece by Professor Perkins published in the NSW *Education Gazette* in 1905. Perkins declared that 'in our literature we have the most sacred relics of our race ... the love of it idealises and humanises life ... in general, unless a taste for literature be acquired in early life, it but rarely lightens our ways in the after times' (NSW *Education Gazette*, 1905, p. 137).

Subject English is conceptualised as the curricular path to the ethical, moral, spiritual, intellectual and social development of the student. On this point, a critical dimension of the 1911 English syllabus is the mission to reclaim literature and literary study from what was perceived to be the overly 'bookish', 'too remote from life' (Newbolt, 1921, p. 165), and elitist nature of the study of Classics. The English syllabus warns that if a 'book is merely to supply the pupil with something which he [sic] has to learn in order that he [sic] may afterwards reproduce it, the book will hinder rather than help the pupil's real education' (1911, p. 7). The belief that the 'book' must be at the service of enriching and expanding the student's *experience* and knowledge is yet another example of the New Education ideas and values being imprinted in the 1911 English syllabus.

THE ENGLISH TEACHER AS THE 'TRUE STARTING POINT AND FOUNDATION'

In the 1911 English syllabus, the teacher is charged with the primary responsibility for fostering a personalist, inquiry-based and problem-solving approach to teaching. The Introduction to the 1911 Courses advises that this goal can be achieved by the teacher selecting

the material that … will best give them ***a knowledge of the most influential thoughts of men*** *[*sic*], what will* ***best stimulate their own thought****, what knowledge will best serve the* ***practical purposes*** *of the type of career they are likely to follow* (p. 7) (Emphasis added).

The Notes and Suggestions for English, addressed directly to the teacher-as-audience, further reinforce the need for teacher professional judgment, informed by the needs of their students. They shed further light on the conceptualisation of English, the view of the student as an active participant in their own development, and the teacher as what Green and Cormack (2008) describe as a 'sympathetic figure' (p. 262) instantiating a Rousseau-inspired vision balancing authority with benevolent intentionality and attentive guidance through the 'artifice and manipulation of "well-regulated" liberty' (p. 254).

SUMMARY OF KEY FEATURES OF THE 1911 ENGLISH SYLLABUS

- English as a compulsory subject in the curriculum;
- literary study as the core of the syllabus;
- prescribed types of texts and a text list for each year of the four years of secondary school;
- sustained emphasis on child-centred approaches to teaching and learning that values student agency, choice and growing autonomy;
- an aim and purpose that relies on discourses about the moral, spiritual, intellectual, social, physical and ethical development of the student; and
- the need for the teacher to ensure student enjoyment, pleasure, aesthetic experience, skill development, knowledge and understanding.

MID-CENTURY REFORMS: THE 1953 SYLLABUS

The 1911 NSW *Courses of Study for High Schools* and the secondary English syllabus within it, remained relatively unaltered through 15 subsequent editions. In 1953, a reformed secondary curriculum was developed (NSW Board of Secondary School Studies, 1953). Appearing more than 50 years after the inaugural 1911 syllabus, the 1953 English syllabus is widely recognised as the syllabus that enshrined the Newbolt conceptualisation of English in NSW (see Brock 1984a, 1984b, 1996). It served to further embed a set of 'ideas and practices', 'epistemic assumptions' and 'disciplinary norms' (Reid, 2002, p. 21) originating in 1911 that remained largely uncontested in successive syllabus documents in NSW.

As a means of more deliberately integrating the content of English so that the student's use and understanding of and engagement with language through reading and listening serve as the overarching organising principle, the 1953 English syllabus saw a change in structure from Literature and Language to:

A. Expression of Thought (speech, writing)

B. Comprehension of Thought (reading, listening)

C. Literature (reading, speaking, listening, composing)

(NSW Board of Secondary School Studies, 1953, p. 1).

The ideological commitment student-centred experiential learning; engagement with literature as a vehicle for expanding language use, knowledge and understanding and thereby self-development; emotions; enjoyment; imagination; and expressing and comprehending their own and others' thought is clearly evident in the aim and

rationale for this syllabus:

Preamble

Intention

The intention of this syllabus is to ***give pupils an experience of their language as a means of transmitting thought.*** *Thought – its expression and its comprehension – is, therefore, the foundation of the syllabus …*

Teachers will not confine themselves to the purely rational processes but will also deal with emotion and fantasy. *Emotion and fantasy are the special care of the teacher of English. Literature, within whose province they come, has been made a separate section (p. 1) (Emphasis added).*

Interestingly, the syllabus reprises the need for teachers to exercise professional judgment, based on the needs of their students. This syllabus explicitly recognises the diversity of both teachers and students. It unequivocally states that the syllabus is '*suggestive rather than prescriptive':*

[i]t is recognised that ***the syllabus will be used by many teachers, each of whom is an individual, instructing many equally individual pupils with widely different abilities and backgrounds****. Under these circumstances,* ***teachers should regard it as suggestive rather than prescriptive****, and should use it with due regard to the varying needs of the pupils* (p. 1) (Emphasis added).

All composition should arise from the needs of the pupil, *i.e. from the kind of thought that he (sic)* needs to express *… opportunity should be provided for* ***personal writing*** (p. 13) (Emphasis added).

The Literature component of the syllabus continues to highlight the crucial elements of student pleasure and enjoyment, wide reading and the cultivation of 'taste':

C. Literature

1. The Objects of the Course in Literature are –

(i) To develop a liking for reading.

(ii) To widen, deepen, and sharpen the literary taste.

General Principles

The first object in teaching literature should be the creation of a liking for reading. No teaching can be held to be successful if it has not encouraged the pupil to read for himself [sic]; and if the pupil has been persuaded to take up a book of his *[sic] own accord and read it f****or pleasure,*** *something has been achieved.*

The second object should be the ***widening, deepening and refining of literary taste****. Literature is a humanising influence, a vicarious experience of man's [sic] thought and actions* (p. 18, p. 19) (Emphasis added).

Teachers are advised that 'Literature should be interpreted very liberally' (p. 19). For the first time, this syllabus includes film, radio and comics. There is a section on the principles that should guide text selection and these once again underline the need for teacher judgement and autonomy, student 'taste and interest', and student enjoyment:

1.Choice of books

- *… the teacher should see that both imaginative and non-imaginative literature receive fair representation.*
- *But other things governing the choice must be considered.* ***The suitability of a book can only be determined by the class teachers. The taste and interests of the pupils must be of considerable influence.***
- *Include* ***Modern literature and Australian literature.***
- ***The first aim must be to encourage reading by making pupils realise the pleasure and satisfaction they can derive from books*** (p. 21) (Emphasis added).

As is the case in the 1911 syllabus, the 1953 syllabus pays special attention to the role of the school library in catering for students' interests and 'directing them to free reading'. It also carries through the 1911 approach to pedagogy by suggesting that: '[a] great deal of the teaching of poetry should be done through performance. Poetry was meant to be read aloud and it is only by reading aloud that pupils can experience the charm of poetic sound' (p. 29). Importantly, the syllabus encourages students' active composition of, for instance, poetry and narratives and advises that teachers should select worthwhile drama 'from all available sources – stage, radio, screen' (p. 19).

The Notes and Suggestions for teachers remained as Commentary in this syllabus, with the syllabus content

on the left-hand page and the Commentary on the right-hand page. As is the case in the 1911 English syllabus, the content comprises around one-third of the syllabus, with the Commentary being two-thirds (with a total of 35 pages, compared to the seven-and-a-half pages in the 1911 English syllabus). The established practice of prescribing texts for each year continued (fiction, poetry, drama, Shakesperean drama, and non-fiction).

REFORMS TO SECONDARY ENGLISH IN 1961/1962

The revised secondary English syllabus of 1961/1962 (NSW Secondary Schools Board, 1961/1962) includes a number of changes to the structure of the content. The tripartite structure of the 1953 syllabus (Expression of Thought, Comprehension of Thought, and Literature) is replaced by five sections:

1. The Speaking of English.
2. Reading and Comprehension.
3. Written Expression.
4. Language.
5. Literature – (a) prose (b) poetry (c) drama.

(NSW Secondary Schools Board, 1961/1962, p. 2)

Although the structure is now broader, the syllabus notes that 'for convenience, the activities of this English course, though ***intended to be integrated***, are set out under separate headings … it is understood that work in the various sections will be ***simultaneous and cumulative***' (p. 2) (Emphasis added). The other major shift in this syllabus is the removal of prescribed text lists for each year. Instead, types of texts are prescribed with the teacher responsible for selecting the titles within the mandatory categories. The change implemented in this 1961/1962 syllabus for junior secondary has remained in place to the present.

The introductory comments, together with the aim and rationale, resonate with the now familiar discourses from earlier syllabus documents:

This syllabus presents a course in speaking, writing, reading and listening in English. Its primary intention is to develop in pupils, by experience in the use of language, a three-fold skill: the ability to express themselves in speech and writing; the ability to understand the speech and writing of others; and the ability to feel and appreciate the appeal of literature (p. 2).

Aim and Rationale

In its importance to the individual and society, however, the study of English goes far beyond the acquisition of mere skills in the subject. For the pupil, no other form of knowledge can take precedence over a knowledge in English … it is basic to comprehension and progress in all studies; it is, moreover, an important influence in the shaping of personality. … Civilisation is based on people's awareness of human qualities, problems and values; and there is no better way of gaining this knowledge than through the reading of literature (p. 3) (Emphasis added).

Like the syllabus documents before it, the 1961/1962 syllabus encourages the use of the library for wide reading and personal interest:

1. To provide pupils with a wide and enjoyable reading experience.
2. To foster in them a desire to read by cultivating an awareness of the values of reading.
3. To develop their powers of comprehension and judgment (p. 11).

It also encourages *participation in drama* as a means of 'liberating personality and of developing clear and confident expression' (p. 36).

These discourses about the purpose of English, student-centred, experiential learning, and the critical role of the teacher's professional judgment and agency are expressed even more fulsomely in the English syllabus that followed in 1971 (NSW Secondary Schools Board).

THE 1971 'GROWTH' ENGLISH SYLLABUS

A substantial corpus of research and scholarship has focused on the 1971 English syllabus. Sawyer's extensive contributions to this research and scholarship are particularly significant. Summing up the influences on and the impact of this syllabus, Sawyer states that:

[c]ommentators on the Syllabus have generally agreed that it was: (1) a 'revolutionary' document, certainly within NSW itself and (2) an institutionalised manifestation of the 'growth model' as then espoused especially by Dixon, Britton and others of the 'London School' (Brock 1984, vol. 1, 204; Homer 1973, 212; Watson 1994, 40; Davis and Watson

1990, 159). Brock (1993, 30) has even called it '[t]he first "personal growth" model syllabus anywhere in the English speaking world'.

Brock sees the two dominant factors in the creation of the Syllabus, so soon after Dartmouth, as the expansion and influence of the NSW English Teachers' Association and the personal commitment of the chairman of the Syllabus Committee, Graham Little (Brock 1984, vol. I, 204–5) (Sawyer, 2010, p. 288).

Breaking with tradition, the first page of this syllabus presents 11 quotes taken from contemporary and historical educators and a previous syllabus, with the leading quote being from Dixon's *Growth Through English (*1967): 'English is the meeting point of experience, language and society'. These quotes signal both the new directions of this syllabus and an acknowledgement of the inheritance of a number of principles and philosophies of previous syllabus documents.

The syllabus contains the 'triangle' as a representation of the integration of the parts to the whole based on the principles, ideas and intended practices informing the teaching and learning. Little himself designed the triangle (Brock 1984, vol. I, p. 248). It is worth noting that this diagram stands as a precedent, paving the way for other diagrammatic representations of syllabuses to follow.

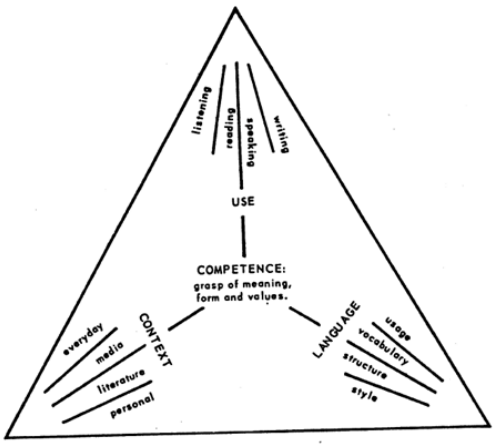


Figure 3: Facsimile of the triangle from the 1971 English 7-10 Syllabus (Secondary Schools Board, p. 7)

This 1971 syllabus includes Stage and Level Statements (another feature carried through to the present) and is organised according to a new layout and a new structure consisting of seven 'contexts':

- Language
- Literature
- Listening and Observing
- Speaking
- Reading
- Writing
- Media

Media and Listening and Observing (what we now term as 'viewing') are added to the explicit 'contexts', thereby elevating their status in the formal curriculum. The syllabus still contains what had previously been known as Notes and Suggestions, and later as Commentary, although the Notes for the 1971 syllabus were updated yearly. The syllabus itself runs to 17 pages, while the Notes total 38 pages.

The Introduction, like those in syllabus documents that preceded it, identifies the rationale, aims and purpose:

Introduction

This syllabus assumes that English for twelve to sixteen year-olds should be ***an active pursuit:*** *a matter of pupils developing competence by engaging in an* ***abundance of purposeful language activities, enjoyable*** *because they are* ***appropriate to needs, interests and capacities …***

For this reason, all objectives of English are stated as ***the 'ability to do something****': to listen, read, speak and write and in doing so to* ***interpret, discriminate, communicate, evaluate*** *… to understand and* ***use words to express ideas and personality and experience past and present culture****. The competence sought is no mere utilitarian skill, but involves essentially* ***human qualities of thought and feeling****, because it is* ***by language that we organise our human experience*** (p. 2) (Emphasis added).

The discourse here is redolent of that discernible in earlier syllabus documents and clearly instantiates the ideas and principles of the Growth model of English. The Introduction goes on to explicitly recognise the agentic role of the teacher and explicitly states that the *syllabus is not prescriptive:*

In stating the aims and objectives of English in this way, ***the syllabus does not prescribe, even by implication****,*

the details of selection and organisation of any English course. Within the broad framework of the syllabus, ***those responsible for course-planning are free to use their professional judgment to develop their own courses according to the needs of their pupils*** (p. 2) (Emphasis added).

To those of us accustomed to lengthy, prescriptive syllabus documents, the notion of teachers being 'free to use their professional judgment to develop their own courses according to the needs of their pupils' (p. 2) may seem striking. It may also be sobering to reflect on the dramatic shifts in the conceptualisation of, assumptions about and professional regard for the teacher that have occurred since this syllabus was released 50 years ago.

Just as the 1961/1962 syllabus insisted that the component sections of the syllabus should be integrated, the 1971 syllabus emphasises 'the integration of the various facets of English' (p. 3). Once again, this principle of integration of the parts to the whole has continued to the present.

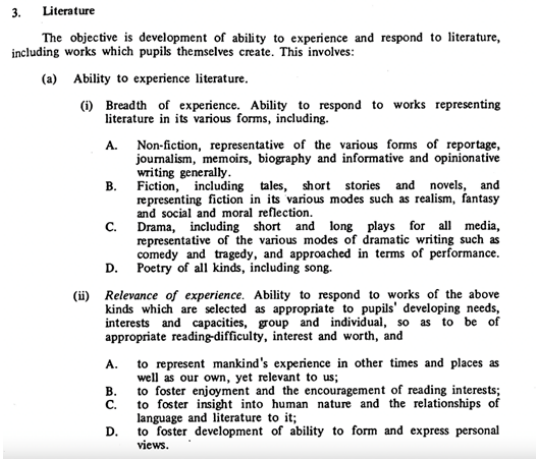
The main objective for Reading is the 'enjoyment of reading', the use of the library, and the critical role of choice in the selection of reading material:

the choice of appropriate texts is crucial … it is ***not necessary for the fulfilment of the syllabus objectives that all pupils read the same texts*** *… English should be very* ***closely integrated with the work of the school library*** *… full opportunity should be given to* ***exploratory reading*** *by pupils and the* ***sharing of their responses*** *to reading experiences.*

Above all, it is the ***pupil's own responses to literature that is to be nurtured*** (Notes, p. 1) (Emphasis added).

Although the 'context' of Literature appears to be on equal footing with the other six contexts, the syllabus states that 'of all the "contexts" of English, none is more important than literature. For the purposes of the syllabus, the term includes ***pupils' own writing***' (Notes, p. 1) (Emphasis added). While the conceptualisation of the subject still relies on the presence of Literature (as it has since 1911), for the first time students' own writing is formally recognised as part of the Literature continuum. This principle is further evidence of the influence of Growth on this syllabus.

The syllabus continues to mandate the types of texts to be included:



3. Literature

The objective is development of ability to experience and respond to literature, including works which pupils themselves create. This involves:

(a) Ability to experience literature.

(i) Breadth of experience. Ability to respond to works representing literature in its various forms, including.

A. Non-fiction, representative of the various forms of reportage, journalism, memoirs, biography and informative and opinionative writing generally.
B. Fiction, including tales, short stories and novels, and representing fiction in its various modes such as realism, fantasy and social and moral reflection.
C. Drama, including short and long plays for all media, representative of the various modes of dramatic writing such as comedy and tragedy, and approached in terms of performance.
D. Poetry of all kinds, including song.

(ii) *Relevance of experience.* Ability to respond to works of the above kinds which are selected as appropriate to pupils' developing needs, interests and capacities, group and individual, so as to be of appropriate reading-difficulty, interest and worth, and

A. to represent mankind's experience in other times and places as well as our own, yet relevant to us;
B. to foster enjoyment and the encouragement of reading interests;
C. to foster insight into human nature and the relationships of language and literature to it;
D. to foster development of ability to form and express personal views.

Figure 4: Facsimile of the 1971 syllabus [NSW Secondary Board, p.13]

SUMMARY

The preceding discussion, albeit partial and at times over-simplified is intended to offer some insights into the providence of secondary English in NSW and to highlight certain features of syllabus documents since 1911 that provide evidence of continuities and shifts in the discourses, ideas, practices and 'disciplinary norms' (Reid, 2002, p. 15) shaping the identity of English.

By briefly sampling aspects of key syllabus documents from 1911 to 1971[2] , it is possible to glimpse 'certain continuities that link English curriculum discourses and practices with previous discourses and practices' (Reid, 2003, p. 100). When we read the Aim and Rationale of the current syllabus (2022), for example, the resonances with past discourses are immediately apparent:

The aim of English in Years K–10 is to enable students to ***understand and use language effectively****. Students learn* ***to appreciate, reflect on and enjoy language****, and make meaning in ways that are* ***imaginative, creative, interpretive, critical and powerful.***

Rationale

Language and text shape our understanding of ourselves and our world. *This allows us to* ***relate with others****, and contributes to our* ***intellectual, social and emotional development.*** *In English K–10, students study language in its various textual forms, which develop in complexity, to* ***understand how meaning is shaped, conveyed, interpreted, and reflected.***

By exploring ***historic and contemporary texts****, representative of a range of cultural and social perspectives, students broaden* ***their experiences and become empowered to express their identities, personal values and ethics.***

The development of these ***interconnected skills and understandings*** *supports students to become* ***confident communicators, critical and imaginative thinkers, and informed and active participants in society*** (NESA, 2022) (Emphasis added).

Obviously, our context in 2024 is profoundly different to the contexts that produced previous syllabus documents. We now contend with a big data driven approach to education manifesting the ideology of performativity, with vastly increased regulation, surveillance, compliance demands and government and bureaucratic intervention. We are also living with ubiquitous forms of technology that did not exist for most of the twentieth century.

To conclude, I want to summarise the discussion by drawing attention to what has shifted and what has endured since the *Courses of Study for High Schools* in 1911. The summary is by no means intended to be a comprehensive representation of syllabus documents over the past 113 years.

WHAT HAS SHIFTED SINCE 1911?

One of the most significant shifts since 1911 is the positioning of the teacher in syllabus document. Most of the syllabus documents from the twentieth century implicitly or explicitly recognise and even celebrate the central role of the teacher. Many are written with a teacher audience in mind. Shifts have occurred in the assumptions about the role of the teacher, especially in terms of teacher professional judgement. From the late twentieth century, there is a steady dilution of discourses that recognise teacher autonomy and agency. It is notable that the teacher as a palpable presence in the syllabus becomes incrementally marginalised and erased from the discourse of syllabus documents of the twenty-first century. By contrast, the student occupies a significant place in current syllabus documents, that now recognise and address students' language and other backgrounds.

The structure and a number of organisational features of the syllabus have shifted. For example, from the structure of Literature and Language in 1911 successive syllabuses have aimed for a greater integration of the literature and language components of the subject with a widening of content cohering around the principles of student-centred learning and development. Since the mid-twentieth century, there has been a broadening of types of texts for study to include media, multimedia and digital texts and the incorporation of the modes of listening, viewing and representing. Importantly, the syllabus documents since the mid-1900s have recommended the inclusion of 'modern and Australian' texts, in contrast to early versions of the syllabus that prescribe text lists dominated by British canonical literature.

The content in syllabus documents is now organised in terms of outcomes and since 1971, they have also included Stage Statements and provision for students from diverse language backgrounds and with special needs. The degree of prescription has not only shifted but also intensified. Current syllabus documents are heavily prescriptive in terms of outcomes, content, types of texts, assessment, and reporting, reflecting the erosion of trust in teacher professional judgement, increasing government intervention, and the standardisation movement. Since 1911, English syllabus and support documents have exponentially ballooned in volume. Until the late twentieth century, standardisation, external testing (7-10) and matters of compliance and surveillance along with performativity measures for teachers did not figure as prominently as they do today. The external examination for the School Certificate at the end of Year 10, however, was phased out after 2011.

All syllabuses for secondary education are contained in one document from 1911 to the mid-1900s when subjects become siloed in separate syllabuses. Hard copies of syllabus documents have been provided for all teachers until the 2022 syllabus. Syllabus and support documents are now online and fragmented. It is up to the teacher to print a hard copy of one or more sections, not only adding to teachers' workload but also potentially undermining the principle of integration and a holistic perspective on the syllabus.

WHAT HAS ENDURED FROM 1911 TO THE PRESENT?

The continuities in junior secondary English from 1911 through to the present are substantial and include, for example:

- a student-centred philosophy and set of beliefs about the affordances of English in the curriculum that emphasise the development of students' skills, knowledge and understanding through increasingly competent and confident language in use;
- a focus on English as a vehicle for promoting identity-formation, citizenship, aesthetic appreciation (formerly referred to as 'taste'), and self-dependence and autonomy;
- Literature (texts) and language as the core with mandated types of texts – fiction, poetry, drama, non-fiction, Shakesperean Drama (until 1953), media (since 1971);
- reading and wide reading for pleasure and enjoyment, and until recently, attention to the crucial function of the school library;
- personal response to reading/texts and writing from personal experience;
- learning as an active pursuit through 'making and doing';
- attention to the centrality of thought, feeling, imagination and creativity; and
- an introduction, rationale, aims, content, and prescribed content.

Importantly, the modes of reading and writing in English are still privileged as they have been in syllabus documents for more than a century. Similarly, from 1911 to the present, syllabus development in NSW has continued according to a top-down model, closely managed by arms and agencies of government.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The quest to 'understand certain continuities that link English curriculum discourses and practices with previous discourses and practices' (Reid, 2003, p. 100) is particularly urgent in our current context as English teachers. As Doecke (2017) argues, when '[c]onfronted by a neoliberal culture that is characterised by a loss of historical memory, we need to posit a history in which we might locate our ongoing practice as English teachers' (p. 236). The pursuit of historical knowledge and understanding is not merely an 'antiquarian pursuit' (Reid, 2003, p. 100): rather, it offers us another potent source of collective disciplinary wisdom and professional agency.

ENDNOTES

1. For a more detailed understanding of the subject's lineage, I encourage you to explore the additional material highlighted in the references.
2. Reforms have certainly occurred since 1971, but for the purposes of this discussion these have not been included.

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