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Draft National English Curriculum Does Not Match Expectations

The Australian Association for the Teaching of English (AATE) maintains its commitment to the development of an Australian Curriculum that is in the best interests of students and also of the highest quality.

However, AATE President Guy Bayly-Jones feels that, for all its positives, the draft curriculum has serious limitations. He has expressed initial reservations about the extent to which the draft English curriculum constitutes the revitalization of the discipline of English for a new century that was promised at the beginning of the development process.

“Many parents and grandparents will remember with horror and dread chanting the parts of speech and the mind-numbing activity that is filling in blanks on a worksheet. Yet, this sort of classroom from the past could be back. There is a good deal of emphasis on lower-order knowing in the Language strand, and not enough emphasis on the necessary relationship between knowledge and application. The issue is not whether grammar should be taught, it is on how grammar should be taught. It is puzzling, given our Prime Minister’s emphasis on evidence-based policy, that the Language strand does not have a firmer grounding in what research shows about how students best learn language and become better communicators.”

“Many members of the community might also be surprised to find that the place of Literature in the secondary English curriculum is rather overshadowed by other things. In each year of schooling, 7 to 10, the study of Literature appears to constitute less than 20% of the total described curriculum content.”

Mr Bayly-Jones’ misgivings about the secondary English curriculum in its draft form date back to the framing paper stage of the development process and, as such, have been known to ACARA throughout the writing of the draft curriculum.

“There is a lack of overall coherence, as the necessary inter-relationships between the three discrete strands of Language, Literature and Literacy are not highlighted. This turns English teaching into a reductive exercise of ‘join the content dot points.’”

“On the positive side, English teachers are likely to see the Achievement Standards as clear and reasonable. The Literature strand has a clear developmental sequence. The glossary is extensive and the descriptions are clear. The curriculum is also inclusive of Indigenous perspectives. The online publication will no doubt have teething problems but we believe it has potential.”

“We welcome the opportunity to consult with our members on this first draft of the Australian Curriculum: English. The new curriculum will be trialled in a number of schools across the country and we will be keen to hear from teachers about their experiences.”

End

For comment or further information please contact AATE President Guy Bayly-Jones on 0401 122 887