



Response to the *National English Curriculum: Framing Paper* from AATE Council

Preamble

The Australian Association for the Teaching of English (AATE) is the national umbrella organisation for the State and Territory associations for the teaching of English. Established in 1964, it represents more than 5,000 English teachers and educators Australia wide. The AATE is part of an international network of teachers with a commitment to teaching and learning in the field of language and literacy.

The following response comes from the fourteen member AATE Council, which comprises six executive officers and eight state and territory delegates. AATE Council members have been involved in the processes of consultation with the membership that has informed the state and territory responses to the framing paper, as well as the writing of these responses. The perspectives garnered from these experiences have been brought to the writing of this response.

AATE Council thanks the National Curriculum Board for the opportunity to respond to the framing paper. We affirm our commitment to a national curriculum for English. We acknowledge the work of Professor Peter Freebody in writing the framing paper, and note the significant development which has been achieved in the movement from the initial advice to the framing paper. AATE Council looks forward to further contributing to the development of the national curriculum as the process moves to the writing stage.

A summary of suggestions for the redrafting of the framing paper is included at the end of this document.

Comments on the framing paper's 'Introduction'

The view of Australia and the goals established for a national English curriculum are welcome, but only to the extent that the curriculum is not held to be able to somehow compensate for society—a qualification that applies also to schooling more generally. As was stated in 1984 by the then Victorian Minister for Education (in *Ministerial Paper Number 6*), 'schools alone cannot provide the answers' to 'social and economic injustice and various forms of discrimination' (quoted in Doecke, 2006, p. 198). How the national English curriculum, in its aspiration to 'equity and openness', will cater for all students through, for example, its structure and the flexibility it will offer teachers, is not adequately spelt out in the framing paper. This 'gap' makes it difficult to conceive of how exactly the national English curriculum can and will promote equity by meeting the needs of all students, given that it is by nature a more *centralised* curriculum and is, on its own terms, sometimes defined by a stated need to exercise greater control over teachers and teaching (eg paragraph 60: the passive construction of 'texts that are judged to have particular potential for enriching young learners' lives' suggests that such judgements are being made by external 'authorities' and not teachers).

Noble rhetoric that cannot be realised can only lead to profound disappointment for those who see merit in the idea of a national English curriculum. ***The stated commitment to democracy in the Introduction can only be sincere if the curriculum and its modes of delivery prove to be democratic, allowing for considerable individual autonomy on the part of teachers in meeting the needs of their students.***

Centralised control that restricts teacher autonomy and does not allow teachers to adequately engage their students with the curriculum because of its failure to recognise students' lives, needs and aspirations (as has been evident in the English National Curriculum, for example) can hardly inculcate democracy.

The Three Elements: Language, Literature and Literacy

The three elements discretely listed in the Introduction (language, literature, and literacy) create tensions for the document from the start. The way these elements sit separately in the opening sentence seems to hark back to an English curriculum that once saw the weekly curriculum divided into a grammar lesson, a comprehension lesson, a composition lesson, a poetry lesson and so on. Moreover, if English is about helping 'individuals participate in society', the identification of the element 'literature' is particularly unhelpful given its colloquial understanding as a form of heightened linguistic and cultural expression primarily print-based. It is clearly the case that most citizens are expected to engage with and produce a range of texts that go well beyond the literary. Paragraph 58 goes on to acknowledge this when it states that textual forms and media such as 'cinema, television, and digital and multimedia' also have an imaginative element, making them 'literary' in nature. This attempt to broadly (re)define literature and yet still foreground a traditional understanding of the term pays heed to a traditional but now only partial understanding of the history of the subject. This limitation might be seen to undermine the intellectual integrity and coherence of the proposed curriculum. This is most evident in paragraph 58, with the line 'present works that aim primarily to make the most of the imaginative potential of the language', again highlighting the forced and unproductive distinctions being made through the elements, particularly those made between language and literature.

There is a need to state that English is the study of language, its central focus being the different processes through which meaning is made and received through different textual expressions—literary and otherwise. This would make meaning—and more specifically how meaning is made and understood in a range of forms, media and expressions—the core organiser of the curriculum, while still incorporating the three identified elements, which have already proven, even before the writing of the curriculum, to be highly problematic.

The three elements do capture a partial sense of the history of the subject and existing practice. However, as has been suggested above, the document is unable to resolve the tensions created by a failure to clearly articulate how the three elements (otherwise discretely identified and defined) work together in an integrated and generative fashion. This undermines the intellectual and structural coherence of the proposed curriculum and moves English away from a central concern with meaning-making in a way that is in contradistinction to the element descriptions themselves. For example, the definition of Element 2 emphasises that the study of literature is intended to lead to 'enjoyment in and increasingly informed appreciation of the English language'. Element 3 is defined as the 'ability to understand and produce the English language'.

A further sense of the tensions and inconsistencies being created in the framing paper because of the three discrete elements is that the definitions become over-determined and begin to lose clear meaning. For example, it is puzzling that to 'convey information' is the sole preserve of the literature element, as if language in use and grammatical processes and formations do not convey all sorts of information about the world, and do not, moreover, raise ethical issues and questions. (The eminent linguist David Crystal, for one, has enjoyed a distinguished career telling us how they do.) Similarly, it is hard to imagine any example of language in use other than, say, as George Orwell has famously remarked, a 'railway guide' (or the like), as not possessing an aesthetic quality. Yet aesthetics has also been identified as the sole preserve of

Element 2: Literature. Such distinctions are patently false, if convenient. They appear to have been determined by the needs of the three element model and the necessity of making it work. The model appears to have no 'organic' grounding in an understanding of what can and should work in rich language learning classrooms. Such a failure to acknowledge the integrated nature of English and the focus it has on meaning making takes the subject backwards beyond 1971 and a ground breaking document such as the highly regarded NSW English syllabus which was able to provide just such an articulation. (This syllabus was the first of its kind in Australia.)

Rather than being understood as discrete elements, Elements 2 and 3 are in fact better understood to be operationalised by teachers as core components of one overarching element: Language: Knowledge about the English language. To this end, paragraph 36 goes much closer than the three elements to articulating the 'heart' of English as teachers around the nation would currently understand it. The three element structure needs to be rethought in light of such a statement. At the very least, a diagram is required to represent how the three elements work in an integrated fashion. Consideration should also be given to naming the elements, Language, Texts and Literacy. While this may lose alliterative appeal, it would be a more productive way of thinking about the subject and avoid attempting to finalise what counts as a literary text—a debate spanning centuries.

Specific Comments Relating to Each of the Three Elements

1. Language

In relation to this section, particular issues are:

- who is to establish the 'consistent way of understanding, connecting, and talking about language' given that such a thing does not yet exist in the field?
- the exclusive emphasis on phonics (paragraph 55, dot point 1), in relation to the needs of some students, comes at the expense of a clear articulation of what is known about the three cueing systems and the importance of balanced reading programs. In short, some students will require extra assistance in the other two cueing systems, and *this should be emphasised in the national curriculum*
- paragraph 55 dot point 5 *must also take account of contexts in the making of meaning*, going beyond the sentence level, as meaning is never purely an outcome of grammatical construction
- paragraph 56 *must take account of such contextual demands as audience, purpose, form and genre* (used in a broader sense, which exceeds the usage of this term associated with functional grammar)
- paragraph 57 does not engage with how language organises the world as humans experience it, and how it creates effects of difference and power. Such processes are inevitable in any consideration of how language works (see Crystal, 2007) and, therefore, in the process of evaluating texts (Morgan, 1997). *This must be recognised in the national curriculum*, as such an omission narrows the scope of the subject.

2. Literature

It is commendable that Paragraph 61 of the framing paper accepts that what constitutes a literary classic is not set in stone and that notions of value are negotiable.

The tensions created by the Literature strand are further evident in this section. The opening sentence, 'Studying literature is a form of arts-related and arts-enriched learning experience', is true to a point.

However, studying literature is also inherently a political action in that it is also about 'nation' building through the dissemination of a 'national' culture, as the framing paper itself argues in relation to the teaching of Australian literature. Studying literature also has historically had an ethical function, contributing to the shaping of a certain sort of person that societies have found desirable (cf Peel, 2000). It is difficult to imagine, for example, that the enduring value of works such as *Animal Farm* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*, both widely taught in schools, rests solely on their aesthetic qualities. The failure of this section to articulate a broader understanding of the educational, social, cultural and political purposes of studying literature has the potential to limit the range of pedagogical approaches that the national curriculum will support and validate. Any narrowing of what teachers understand to be good practice is a highly undesirable and retrograde step. ***The national curriculum must take into account the significant historic models of the subject that inform current curriculum frameworks and syllabuses.***

Statements made in this section as to the importance of literature K-12 are very welcome. Less so the idea that English in the final years should articulate more closely with the expectations and demands of tertiary courses. First, on what philosophical or other basis is it necessary to align the school *subject* English with the university *discipline* of English (which has been experiencing something of an identity crisis for the last twenty or so years, making alignment a very difficult prospect)? Second, when and where has it been established that there is no alignment at present? Academics routinely serve on syllabus and examination committees, and it might be expected that their input has had *some effect* on the shaping of English in this country. Third, the current 'skills shortage' and 'financial downturn' provide a timely reminder that many Australian students now complete Year 12 with no desire to pursue tertiary studies, let alone tertiary literary studies. On the framing paper's own terms, it is in the national interest that these students are fully catered for, with their needs and interests being met through an accessible and relevant curriculum. The senior English curriculum needs to be differentiated.

Therefore, the description in Paragraph 64 of the Literature element in the final years of schooling seems inappropriately narrow. The reference to 'literary criticism, history and informed appreciation' needs to be elaborated in order to consider the different forms English might take (courses, electives, texts, pedagogies, assessment processes and so on) to cater for the different needs, interests, abilities and aspirations of all Australian students whatever their after school trajectories.

3. Literacy

The incoherence of the three elements is again highlighted in this section. For decades, going back to the work of Dixon, Barnes, Moffett and others, it has been accepted that in using language, students are also learning about language. The radical break that the framing paper makes with this tradition, and the scholarship that has underpinned it, is not adequately supported, not least because there is a telling silence with regards to the work of these esteemed teachers, research and curriculum theorists (amongst others) in the framing paper's reference list.

What might be called an 'adult needs' or 'skills' model of English has been of historic significance in shaping the subject. It is acknowledged that, in this section, the framing paper does address this model in a contemporary way, taking into account the demands of the world as we now know it. This can be seen, for example, in the broad range of texts it is said students should engage with in English. But the 'adult needs' model has also emphasised 'learning about' language and texts through 'learning to use'.

The separation of the three elements as discrete elements works against the integration that this section argues is necessary. Further consideration needs to be given to the efficacy of the three strands and their integration conceptually and in practice.

The aims of the national English curriculum

The core problem with the framing paper is evident from the first sentence of the Aims (paragraph 15), which suggests that English is about ‘developing ... knowledge’ and ‘expanding ... skills’ within and across the three elements. The distinction made here between knowledge and process in defining English as a discipline does not sit easily with the history of the subject, which is now commonly understood through certain key models. In short, the sentence reduces disciplinarity to what is known and does not adequately acknowledge that a discipline is also defined by its characteristic ways of knowing and doing (which are enacted by its practitioners). These characteristic ways of knowing and doing are firmly grounded in, and help to define, key historic models of the subject.

The key historic models which have shaped English over the last century need to be openly and fully recognised in the national curriculum. This will more effectively encourage teachers, informed by their professional judgment and knowledge of their students, to utilise the full range of pedagogical approaches that the history of the subject has made available.

The sentence in question appears to direct English back to the skills and cultural heritage models of the subject, which were dominant up until the late 1960s. The subsequent 40 years of the history of English, in this country and others, are not captured in the Aims. Teachers who associate their practice with other significant models—for example personal growth, cultural studies and critical literacy—are unlikely to see their practice, including familiar and well-established aspects of current syllabuses and their understanding of themselves as professionals, captured in the Aims. A national curriculum that does not fully recognise existing subject understandings and practices, those that teachers have found to work with their students and which they identify as significantly informing their understanding of the subject, can only be a retrograde step. It amounts to nothing less than the deprofessionalisation of teachers. As Andy Goodwyn (2003) has shown in relation to national curriculum reform in the UK, teachers’ professional identities are defined to a significant extent by various historical models of English, and the impetus for change can pose something of a psychic threat.

Tellingly, the omission of these other models of English points to the way that the framing paper does not adequately articulate the place of the student in the English curriculum. Forty years of scholarship around the idea that students come to school (and its different stages) as participants in a varied and (frequently) rich range of out-of-school cultural practices—research which has informed the defining strategies of the models missing from the framing paper—is silenced. It is as if the limitations of the skills and cultural heritage models were never identified by such esteemed names in the field as, amongst others, John Dixon, Douglas Barnes, James Moffett, Garth Boomer, Ken Watson, Ian Reid, Wendy Morgan and Gunther Kress. Such thinkers have established that English teachers must acknowledge and draw on students’ existing repertoires of language use and textual practices. (The latter have, of course, become even more diverse in the digital age.)

English is presented in the Aims as a body of knowledge outside the student rather than as integrated knowledge, skills and personal / cultural values learned and assimilated by the student. The document should acknowledge that the content of curriculum needs to be learned by students engaged in the processes of the discipline and reflecting on those processes, so explicitly inscribing active learning and reflection in the document.

Paragraph 15 of the framing paper presents the following eight dot points as aims:

- acquire a knowledge of how English works in its spoken and written forms and in combinations with other communication systems
- understand and compose spoken and written English texts fluently, effectively, creatively, and critically

- understand and compose an increasingly broad repertoire of texts appropriately across a growing range of settings
- gain access to literature and develop an increasingly informed appreciation of literature
- analyse and synthesise texts accurately, critically, and imaginatively
- master the written and spoken language forms of schooling and knowledge
- develop skills in English that provide a platform for lifelong enjoyment and learning
- develop a working knowledge of the English language that can sustain and advance a linguistically and culturally complex country.

These items are all reasonable and appropriate in themselves but the list is repetitious and therefore longer than it need be. ***As listed above, the 1st and 8th points could be readily combined as could the 2nd, 3rd and 6th. Ideally the national curriculum should have a succinct statement of aims rather than a lengthy 'shopping list'.***

A Futures Orientation

In this section the articulation of the profound changes Australia is now navigating, and the implications these have for schooling and an English curriculum, are commendable. In particular, statements as to the diversity of the population and the need to cater for all students (paragraphs 20 and 21) are noteworthy. The emphasis given here to the language resources students bring to school is not, however, as fully recognised in the element descriptions – a point made above. ***Consideration of the place of students in the curriculum could also be further extended in this section.*** Paragraph 17, for example, appears to conceive of the value and importance of language growth and development in terms of 'citizenship'—participation, it is to be presumed, in civic life and the economy. The deep humanist impulse that characterises the history of English is not captured in this statement.

The importance of language growth and development to the imaginative and ethical capacities of individuals—to the formation of a 'self' that goes beyond civics and economics and which is formed and understood in our relationships with others—is not adequately recognised. Yet it is this that many teachers would see as the real purpose of English (see Peel, Patterson & Gerlach, 2000). This is an aspect of English that must be captured in the writing of the national curriculum, else the subject become unrecognisable to teachers and its own past.

Definitional Issues

The definition of literature is contentious. Without wishing to suggest that the study of literature does not have a key historic place in English, it must be said that the definition provided here appears to 'paper over' decades of contestation within the field. Accordingly, it works against the possibility of considering the very definition of literature and related issues such as the politics of canon formation as being integral to an 'apprenticeship' in the discipline, particularly for senior students, even as this possibility is put forward elsewhere in the framing paper (eg paragraphs 64 and 87).

A statement such as 'literature' being defined in terms of 'important permanent or artistic value' is presented unproblematically, not fully acknowledging issues of 'decidability' associated with such a claim. Who gets to decide such things and to what range of cultural artefacts might such a decision remain relevant and meaningful? Many in our society would indeed make such a claim for song lyrics written by, for example, Bob Dylan, Paul Kelly, Joni Mitchell and Tupac Shakur. Does this make such work 'literature' and worthy of study as such in classrooms? A particular group of advertising creative directors might make the claim of 'important permanent artistic value' for a particular ground-breaking advertising campaign. Is

advertising therefore to be studied as 'literature'? (These, of course, are questions being asked in response to the element description. They're not indicative of a position being taken.) Many valued forms and works, which are now accepted to be 'literary', were of course once seen to possess no 'important permanent artistic value'. The classic example is the novel itself, which, in the words of Jonathan Culler (2000, p. 82), was once believed to be 'a modern upstart, too close to biography or chronicle to be genuinely literary, a popular form that could not aspire to the high callings of lyric and epic poetry'. F.R. Leavis famously did not see that most 'literary' of novels, Joyce's *Ulysses*, as possessing the permanent or artistic value he was willing to ascribe to other works (see Lucy and Mickler, 2008). On the other hand, a film such as *Citizen Kane* is now routinely understood to have the very qualities and values that the definition provided in the framing paper ascribes to literature. The point is that the reluctance in the framing paper to use terms such as 'text' and 'texts', apparently on the grounds that these are laden with too much (postmodern) baggage, highlights the problems associated with the term 'literature', and particularly how it might be defined in envisaging a curriculum for the twenty first century.

The slippery and imprecise definition and usage of the word 'literature' in the framing paper is an inevitable consequence of the sort of contests and competing claims that have defined the subject we know as English for its entire history. The determination of the framing paper to continue to emphasise Literature as a discrete element cannot resist or resolve the force of this history. More particularly, such a determination does not adequately acknowledge what is now well known to teachers: the fact that, as Rob Pope (2002, pp. 220-1) has described it, the 'literary' has always drawn upon and mimicked the 'extra-literary', with the histories of various literary forms being deeply implicated in the histories of non-literary forms. With reference to what Culler (2000, pp. 40-1) calls 'the paradox of literature', English might be profitably understood as engagement with the making of meaning and effects of pleasure, reflection on the implications of various means of expression, and analysing and performing different practices for reading, writing and creating. Such a conceptualisation clearly exceeds the three element structure.

The definition of literature needs to be a broad and forward looking one. The framing paper has made an attempt to do this but it is not always clear. The definition needs to include contemporary as well as classic, multimedia and visual forms as well as print. Such a definition calls into question the efficacy of labelling Element 2 'Literature'. The national curriculum will need to provide workable and acceptable guidance about appropriate balance with regard to text forms.

Modalities is also a problematic term (see paragraph 27), in that it might cause confusion for some teachers and students in the way it clashes with existing terminology used in the teaching of language. ***Since the word 'modality' has another, very useful meaning in functional grammar, it would be better to use the term 'modes', as in 'the language modes of reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing and representing'.***

Surprising omissions in (paragraph 28) 'General Capabilities' are critique and design. Critique is obviously a central component of the history of English and its various defining pedagogies, as acknowledged later in the framing paper (in the stage descriptions). Its addition would pick up the emphasis placed elsewhere in the document on agreed national goals for schooling (ie paragraph 37), which emphasise 'flexible and critical thinking'. Design is now acknowledged as a core 21st century capability, and one for which English can assume significant and necessary responsibility (Kress, 2006; Pope, 2005). ***These are terms which should be added to the general capabilities.***

Considerations: Beginnings and 'Basics'

There is no disputing the vital importance of the so-called 'basics' and there can be no denying the commitment of the nation's teachers to these, in spite of the regular criticism of English and literacy teachers by some in our community (as Davis, 2007, emphasises). This section of the framing paper foregrounds just how deeply implicated the framing paper is in the so-called 'literacy wars' (cf Snyder, 2008).

The stress on phonics in this section comes at the expense of the focus on a balanced reading program that has been emphasised in syllabuses around the country for decades, contrary to ill-founded claims as to the supposedly all-pervasive influence of the perverse caricature that some label a 'look and guess' approach to the teaching of reading. In fact, the importance of a balanced program is emphasised in research cited in the report of the Australian National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy, *Teaching Reading* (DEST, 2005). It is most puzzling then that the term 'balanced reading program' is not to be found in this section of the framing paper, which nonetheless puts emphasis on 'flexible' reading programs, catering for the needs of individual students. It is also of concern that all *three* cueing systems, which are so familiar to teachers, are not explicitly named. ***This is an omission that must be corrected.*** The following, taken from the ETA (NSW) website (n.d.), highlights the inadequacies of this section of the framing paper:

'Phonics' refers to that skill which we use in reading which identifies words by their sounds. It is one of three 'cueing' systems we use to make sense of the written word. The others are:

- making predictions about words as we read based on what the whole passage or sentence is about.
- using our knowledge of the kind of word (grammatically) that occurs in a particular place in a sentence (ie we expect and predict as we read that verbs will occur in verb positions, nouns in noun positions etc. In the sentence 'The boy *ran* away', a good reader would not substitute 'rat' for the italicised word, since it would make no sense, despite looking like the actual word.)

For beginning readers, or for children who have had trouble learning to read, all three cueing systems have to be taught since they don't work in isolation. Different readers with different experiences with language - and with different degrees of familiarity with the reading material in front of them - will use these strategies in different 'proportions' in any particular reading situation. Many beginning readers will rely very strongly on letter sounds and shapes for decoding the words on the page in most situations and all beginners will be taught these strategies. However, an inclusive reading program catering for all learners in a class will mean students are also taught to use the other cueing systems. The argument that phonics is neglected tends to come from those who advocate a 'phonics only' approach, which places little emphasis on meaning, which is the whole point of reading.

The stress that the section places on literacy encompassing 'authentic use' and 'genuine language and literacy tasks' is welcomed. However, given that the curriculum has a K-12 scope and that Literacy is presently one of three elements, the question remains of what sense such a statement will retain in relation to the upper years of the curriculum. In other words, there is a need to scope and sequence literacy in English K-12. However, attempting to do this in a linear fashion is likely to prove to be highly problematic, a point acknowledged in this section of the framing paper when it is emphasised that attention on the 'basics' cannot take place without consideration of more complex and 'real life' contexts and requirements. ***English, it seems, is a subject that is best understood recursively.***

Considerations: the Teaching of Grammar in English

The position taken here is not to be taken to mean that grammar should not be taught. Rather, the key issue is what exactly is meant when we speak and write of grammar and its teaching.

Firstly, the claim in the framing paper that teachers and educators have seriously entertained the idea of not teaching grammar is an unworthy simplification of informed scholarly debate and the positions subsequently adopted by some. It is simply a fact that grammar has always been and remains a core mandatory component of English syllabuses around the nation. For example, students in Years 7 and 8 in NSW are expected to learn to 'use Standard Australian English, its variations and different levels of usage appropriately' and to learn about 'sentence structures, grammar, punctuation, vocabulary and spelling'.

(Similar quotations from the syllabuses or curriculum frameworks of other states and territories could be readily inserted here.)

The position of AATE Council accords with that taken by ETA NSW (n.d.) on its web site. This position is in keeping with the positions of other State ETAs and that taken in English syllabuses for the last thirty years:

What...English teachers understand about the teaching of writing and grammar, and what international research has confirmed repeatedly over many decades, is that once students reach high school, whole class instruction on items of grammar does not improve students' written expression. Drilling and rote learning are time-wasting for students once they have attained a degree of mastery of the basics. Students in any secondary English classroom will possess different levels of mastery of grammar. As such, those very few items of actual grammar problems which some students experience are best taught at the point of individual need, in order that other students, who have mastered a particular skill or concept, may proceed with their own learning and further develop their skills and knowledge. When assessment of students' work reveals a particular area of weakness or misunderstanding across a class, it is common practice for teachers to run a 'mini lesson' in order to demonstrate to students the correct usage.

A complicating factor is that the framing paper assumes there is one grammar. To talk of grammar in the singular is to deny the diversity of approaches evident in the field. In addition to Latinate or 'traditional' grammar, we might also identify 'two main contemporary models of grammar' (Pope, 2002, p. 374): generative-transformational grammar and functional grammar. The framing paper itself gives a nod to the latter—without acknowledging this—when it speaks of 'textual patterns' as a concern of grammar, indicating the influence that functional grammar has attained in some states and territories since the mid 1980s. The logical implication of this is that work will need to be done as part of the writing of the curriculum to develop and codify a national grammar for Australian schools, establishing the 'common language' (presumably once and for all!) that the framing paper stresses as being necessary. Whether this is desirable or even possible is a question that requires careful consideration. Unfortunately, the framing paper does not even begin to engage with these issues and the significant body of international research relating to questions of efficacy in the teaching of grammar, particularly the teaching of grammar in a decontextualised manner (which is to say teaching that is typically characterised by such exercises as the correction of sentences in isolation from any meaningful context, parsing as an end in itself, and a limiting focus on 'rules' with no consideration being given to understanding how grammatical choices construct particular sorts of meanings appropriate to social and cultural contexts).

Closer consideration must be given to different grammars and, within broader consideration of the efficacy of grammar teaching in English (see, for example, Andrews et al, 2006 and Myhill, 2005), how and why teachers have found these useful. To this end, consideration might profitably be given to how the Systemic Functional Linguistics framework is being employed in the teaching of visual and multimodal texts, an exciting new area for English.

Considerations: the Texts of English

The framing paper attempts to broaden the scope of what is studied in English. This is welcomed and reflects current practice. In keeping with the forward looking perspective of the curriculum, it is entirely appropriate that the materials studied in subject English should embrace visual and multimodal texts as well as print. To suggest otherwise would be to repudiate much of contemporary English teaching practice and the professional judgement of teachers.

A significant challenge for the national curriculum will be to provide guidance on the appropriate balance to be achieved amongst the available range of legitimate text types. It needs also to be recognised that the

expansion of the range of texts used in English established in this section will necessarily mean a significant reconfiguration of the subject, including a relative reduction in the number of literary works, as the term is traditionally conceived, studied.

In fact, it should be noted that this section creates significant tensions for the Literature element. ***If the texts and activities outlined in this section truly have ‘an important place in a national English curriculum’, then it is very difficult to understand why the second element is not labelled ‘Texts: informed understanding and appreciation of texts’ (or something similar), and made inclusive of literary and other texts. This would appear to be a label that is more in keeping with the scope and intent of Element 2, as well as the description provided for it in the framing paper.***

In this section, the argument being made (which, in and of itself, is acceptable) is supported by an ill-informed and mistaken understanding of the subject. This makes it difficult to agree with a number of the comments it contains. It is wrong to assert that for much of its history ‘English was largely about the reading and writing of print texts’. For many years, drilling in the basic skills was a big part of the subject. In fact, the rise in influence of the personal growth model of the early 1970s brought with it new interest in students as writers—an aspect of the English curriculum that goes unrecognised in the framing paper. On the other hand, spoken language activities (recitation, speech making, debating, group discussion and so on) have always been part of English. Non-print forms—eg drama (as performance), film, television, radio—have been studied for many decades. The key point here is that these texts have not been perceived by teachers as ‘add ons’ that, as the framing paper suggests, ‘accompany’ learning in English. Nor do they merely serve some other purpose, such as the provision of an ‘arts-enriched’ curriculum—worthy though such a goal may be. Instead, they are seen as essential texts in their own right and demand to be studied as such. ***The place and role of non-literary texts in a national English curriculum needs to be rethought in terms that do not see the value of such texts as being predominantly in their potential to enhance the study of literature.***

This section’s inadequate understanding of the history of the subject and current practice creates a rationale for a development that has actually been in place for decades. ***Moreover, the rationale provided here for engagement in English with a broad range of texts actually weakens the case for contemporary practice in this area. This needs to be addressed as the process of developing the curriculum moves to its next stage.***

Considerations: Understanding, Analysing, Appreciating, Constructing

It has already been suggested in this response that paragraph 36 goes much closer than the three element structure to capturing a sense of English that accords with current practice and is capable of taking English into the future. The only proviso here is that further consideration be given to the connotations of ‘vantage point’. In a sense, this term suggests ‘advantage’ or ‘superiority’, which might not always be the case. Alternatives such as ‘perspective’, ‘reading position’ or even ‘world view’ might be more appropriate. Should it be determined that ‘vantage point’ does not carry the connotations identified above, then a dot point needs to be added to 36: ‘ways of evaluating, reading / viewing, responding and writing / creating from different vantage points’ (or perspective / reading position / world view). It is indisputable that texts are understood and created from different ‘vantage points’. This is not a ‘post modern’ idea. Without such an idea, the Socratic method would remain unknown and unknowable, and the writings on rhetoric by Aristotle and Cicero could never have been produced. The second last dot point, being in the singular, ‘how a text’s features reflect the vantage point from which it can be interpreted’, excludes the possibility of students evaluating different interpretations and the ‘vantage point[s]’ from which these originate. This is less than is already asked of students from at least the first years of high school in current syllabuses and curriculum frameworks, if not earlier. ***The national English curriculum should acknowledge the essential notion that the composition and comprehension of texts will be influenced by the assumptions, values and beliefs of writers/speakers and readers/listeners respectively. Accordingly, the term ‘vantage points’ (or one of the suggested alternatives), ie the plural form, should be used as necessary.***

Considerations: Australian Literature

Australian literature must have a place in a national English curriculum, just as it currently does in syllabuses, curriculum frameworks and classrooms around the country. This is beyond dispute. It is also to be welcomed that this literature be placed in regional and international contexts. The definition of Australian literature to be inclusive of works by Aboriginal authors is also most welcome. However, if the goal of this section is to inculcate a broader understanding of Australian identity (or ‘being Australian’), if it has ever been possible to talk of this in the singular, then a number of issues arise.

Firstly, it is not the case that print literature is the sole custodian of Australian identity (or identities). One thinks here of the cultural importance of groundbreaking works of Australian drama and film, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, to a vigorous and developing sense of nationhood and identity. Along the same lines, how could post-war Australia and Australians be understood without consideration of such a phenomenon as the radio serial? In short, the delineation of the second element as Literature works against other and very important goals of the curriculum, as its parameters have been set in the framing paper.

Secondly, the ability of teachers to foster an interest and genuine engagement with Australian literature will require that the national curriculum allow teachers considerable autonomy to match their students with the most suitable works and to teach them in a way that caters for the needs of individual students. Any suggestion that a set, ‘great’ Australian work should be mandated for all students at a particular stage of schooling, including restrictive advice as to how this work is to be taught, will be death to lively and deep engagement with Australian literature. Ironically, it will ensure that many students do not receive their entitlement to ‘knowledge of these matters [ie Australian literary works and traditions]’ because of the very processes for delivery of the curriculum itself.

The issue raised above of a finite amount of classroom time coupled with an expansion of the scope of texts deemed appropriate for English is also relevant here. **Again, the challenge is to strike an appropriate balance in achieving ‘an increasingly informed appreciation of the place of Australian literature among other literary traditions’.**

Considerations: Pedagogy and Disciplinarity

Again, in this section we see an argument or position being advanced on the basis of unfounded claims about the history of the subject, which point to the way that the framing paper remains grounded in the so-called ‘culture wars’ (see, for example, Donnelly, 2007) and disconcertingly presents gross caricatures of informed scholarship and its classroom application in current practice.

The binaries presented in the first sentence—explicit / discovery teaching and correctness / imagination—are unsustainable upon close examination of literature in the field. For example, asking an early reader to make predictions as they read, drawing on the three cueing systems, is not the same as asking them to simply ‘guess’. Nor is it encouraging creativity over correctness. It is teaching them to become aware of how good readers actually read, according to reading research. Similarly, to implement a writing program that involves workshops, peer conferencing and the teaching of grammar, spelling and so on at the point of need with students who have attained some mastery of the basics, does not amount to a rejection of ‘authoritative teaching’. The notion of ‘authoritative teaching’ cannot be limited to whole class instruction by the teacher from the front of the classroom. This is made obvious by the highly skilful and consciously planned and structured teaching evident in Nancy Atwell’s (1987) important work on the teaching of writing, *In the Middle*, as well as the insights into the nature of genuine learning provided in Douglas Barnes’s (1976) *From Communication to Curriculum*.

Paragraph 42 establishes an unhelpful distinction between knowledge of language and the demands of its use to make meaning. This, of course, is an inevitable outcome of the flawed three element structure upon which the framing paper is built. Knowledge about language and meaning are better conceived in an integrated, interdependent and recursive way, which goes beyond the notion of ‘interplay’. The idea of ‘interplay’ as it is used in this section appears to require that knowledge of language precedes the process

of making meaning; that is to say, prior knowledge of language is consciously brought to bear upon a particular situation in order for meaning to be efficiently and effectively made. But it is perfectly imaginable that knowledge can come from exploration of the requirements of making appropriate meaning. One is reminded here of the way that children who are learning to speak will recognise and use the structure of subject / verb / object (eg 'We go pool?') without *knowing* this in a way that might be articulated or tested, and without having been explicitly taught it. English, in other words, is centrally concerned with the study of language in use for the purposes of making meaning.

David Crystal (2007) is clear on this matter:

grammar must never be left to its own devices ... It is not enough just to study the words and structures. Sentences have to be put to use, and that very operation requires that we study the contexts in which they appear ... We know that we need to change our language—as we do our clothes—as we move from one context to another. And there are hundreds of contexts ... This means examining all aspects of ... language in a systematic way. And this is what present-day students are being trained to do'. (pp. 209-10)

Crystal also notes that 'students are being trained to use the same kind of analysis in relation to their own self-expression. They need to discover which words, sentences, and patterns of discourse best suit the purposes they themselves have in mind' (pp. 210-11). Such a description of current practice, which captures what is taking place in Australia as much as it does England, further highlights the limitations of the framing paper's description in this section of disciplinarity as possession of a body of knowledge. It is not as simple as stating that 'Systematic knowledge about English is built around norms and conventions'. In fact, as Crystal argues, systematic knowledge of English comes from exploring English in use, involving students in sustained consideration of their own texts and those of others. When people explore English in use, they are progressively learning about norms and conventions at work in the language.

This section is also difficult to support because it is not always clear. For example, the meaning of the following statement is anyone's guess: 'using the norms of the curriculum to engage and influence the changing, diverse environments in which that knowledge can be applied' (paragraph 42).

Considerations: General Capabilities

In line with the importance of metacognition to current understandings of learning (see, for example, Crystal's views on language learning quoted above), paragraph 45 would be enhanced by the following addition: 'Learners need to be sufficiently aware of *and able to evaluate* processes of knowledge acquisition, access, and management, *including their own*, so that ...'.

The position that all teachers need to teach the English language requirements of their subject is supported by AATE Council and is in line with common practice around the country. At the same time, because of the subject's essential concern with language and language development, it is agreed that English teachers have significant responsibility for knowledge, skills and aptitudes that will contribute to 'students' success in other subjects'.

The Proposed Descriptions of the Elements for Schooling

The proposed descriptions do not work in their current form. The characteristics of learners appear arbitrary and, consequently, rather meaningless. It is hard to fathom, for example, how Engagement somehow becomes more defining of Stage 2 than Stage 1, or how diversity is not something that is foregrounded at every stage, given the emphasis placed on equity elsewhere in the framing paper. Such descriptions are not readily reducible to catchphrases, as they are in this section.

This section attempts to outline content. This is a mistake. It quickly becomes obvious that the stage descriptions, precisely because they are little more than ‘snapshots’, can ask students to do less in the proposed national curriculum than they are doing now. One such example is the fact that, in some states and territories, ‘an understanding of the requirements of different text types’ (paragraph 82), allocated in the framing paper to Stage 3, is in fact a focus of early Stage 2. Similarly, teachers would be more used to the idea of treating the historical context of a text as part of a consideration of meaning in Stage 4 rather than in Stage 3 where it is listed. On the other hand, consideration of plot and character development, listed as a focus for Stage 4, is given greater emphasis in schools at Stage 3.

It is recommended that the descriptions of the elements for schooling focus solely on fully describing the cognitive and social development of young people—their positioning and development within and through the curriculum and its stages—and not discipline content.

A concerning element in this section is that it does not pay due regard to the position of students within the curriculum and the complex negotiations that they undertake as they move between home and school. This is most obvious in the absence of a direct statement about the requirements of students with special needs. Moreover, while a statement such as (paragraph 75) ‘[students] acquire a knowledge of the English language’, rightly emphasises the importance of the ‘basics’ in the early years, it also appears to presume that students do not already possess all sorts of knowledge about language, albeit in ways that the formalised (and abstracted) curriculum intimated here does not recognise. The fact that the youngest students can and do already use language successfully to meet certain needs and desires shows this to be so, further problematising the distinction made between ‘learning about’ and ‘learning to’ in distinguishing Element 1 from Element 3 (see paragraph 68). As such, overlooked in this section is the fact that, as living social beings, students come to their first years of school having already experienced a variety of contexts for language use, and their understanding of themselves and the world has already begun to develop in the significant relationships formed in these experiences. The negotiation of their home and school lives will be easier for students whose use of language at home most closely resembles the ways language is used at school, as Bernstein and others have shown since the 1960s (eg Bernstein 1996). For others, success as language users at school—and therefore success at school—will not come so easily. ***Due acknowledgement must be made of the complexities of these matters, particularly with regards to how they position students within the English curriculum.***

Further evidence of the failing of the framing paper to adequately articulate the place of students within the curriculum is evident in the lack of emphasis given here to speaking as a way of promoting learning and developing understanding, as well as forming productive relationships (eg Mercer 1995). In addition, the framing paper does not address the importance of students developing a necessary self-concept, seeing themselves as language users (eg as ‘writers’). ***These have both been areas of significant research and scholarship in recent decades. They should be addressed in the curriculum.***

What English courses should be included in the national English curriculum for the senior secondary years of schooling?

AATE acknowledges that the framing paper accords English a significant, even unique, role in the education of the nation’s young people. No other subject is concerned so specifically and centrally with language, its powers and its effects. No other subject, it might then be argued, is so concerned with educating the kind of people our society now finds it wants and needs (cf Peel, 2000). Certainly, a statement such as the following (taken from paragraph 67), goes a significant way to acknowledging this: ‘the English curriculum assumes responsibility for helping students broaden their repertoires of usage to equip them for later school learning, out-of-school experiences, and later participation in domestic, civil, and vocational life’. Such responsibility poses many challenges for English teachers. These will only be intensified for secondary English teachers by the movement towards increased school retention rates, a trend now well under way in

this country. Given the emphasis in the framing paper on equity, issues of access, choice and flexibility become crucial. ***The senior curriculum must be structured in such a way as to provide school communities, teachers and students the opportunity and necessary autonomy to be able to set in place curriculum (including courses, electives, texts, assessment processes and pedagogies) that will be inclusive of the full range of students, with due recognition being given the needs and aspirations of all students within particular communities.***

Pedagogy

The emphasis in the framing paper (paragraphs 89 and 90) on the need for a variety of teaching approaches, depth of learning over breadth, and engagement with a variety of texts is appropriate.

Interestingly, the conclusions drawn from Langer in this section can be turned back on the framing paper itself in order to highlight two key weaknesses:

- The absence of key historic models of English from the framing paper, which would—if named explicitly—help to fully define the ‘range of [pedagogical] approaches’ that Langer suggests are needed. The importance of this point has been emphasised in recent Australian research (Sawyer, Brock & Baxter, 2007) examining successful secondary English departments, which were characterised by an informed and principled eclecticism in approach.
- The lack of a clear sense (in a diagram for example) of how the three strands work in an integrated fashion, in line with the stated importance of ‘cumulative connections’ being made. This last point reinforces the recursive nature of learning in English, a notion which has not been directly stated in the framing paper.

There is a need to more fully tease out the implications of a statement such as ‘The school sees its principal job as developing the languages, registers, and genres of schooling, while acknowledging the differences in the classrooms’, particularly as this statement relates to historically situated English pedagogies. Within an Australian context, individuals such as Garth Boomer, Ken Watson, Roslyn Arnold, Wendy Morgan, Ray Misson, Jack Thomson, Wayne Sawyer and Brenton Doecke, amongst many others, have written extensively about the demands and practicalities of such a challenge. It is most concerning that such a rich tradition of Australian scholarship, building on ground-breaking work by leading international names in the field such as Dixon, Barnes, Rosen and Moffett, has not been acknowledged and drawn upon in the framing paper. ***Reference to the work of these individuals is needed to correct the inadequate emphasis of the framing paper on the students themselves, their lives, hopes and dreams, and the language and cultural practices they bring to school. Such work has reminded us that, as it is enacted in classrooms, a curriculum is much more than a set of bureaucratic or adult intentions: it is a complex and highly fluid, often fraught, form of communication arising from an endless series of negotiations between people. A national curriculum must duly acknowledge and respect this reality.***

Assessment

This section is notable for its apparently narrow focus on formalised summative assessment. It does hint at the limitations of standardised testing (ie in relation to NAPLAN), but does not develop such considerations in terms of the implications of testing, as just one form of summative assessment, for what Garth Boomer famously called ‘fair dinkum’ teaching and learning. Indeed, the role of formative assessment is ignored, or at least not made explicit. This is a strange omission given the framing paper’s emphasis on issues of equity and access for students. With the ‘silence’ with regards to historical models of English curriculum, the failure to consider assessment more broadly in terms of the role of the teacher and the individual learning

needs of students, is another example of how the framing paper pays little regard to the roles of teachers and the place of students in the national curriculum. A highly undesirable consequence of these omissions is the movement towards teacher deprofessionalisation. Additional omissions in this section include a failure to make reference to writing and viewing.

This section needs to be revised to include explicit and developed consideration of what might be called 'assessment for learning'. It must also be made inclusive of all of the language modes.

Summary of the Recommendations of this Response

1. The separation of the three elements as discrete strands works against the integration that the paper flags as being highly necessary. Further consideration needs to be given to the efficacy of the three strands. Meaning making in and through language, across a range of forms, media and expressions, should be the core organiser of the curriculum. To this end, paragraph 36 gets much closer to articulating the 'heart' of English as teachers around the nation would currently understand it. At the very least, a diagram is required to represent how the three elements work in an integrated fashion, and consideration should be given to naming the elements Language, Texts and Literacy.
2. The curriculum must recognise the professionalism of teachers and their knowledge of students by allowing for flexibility and significant teacher autonomy in modes of curriculum delivery.
3. The importance to the teaching of reading of balanced reading programs should be emphasised, with explicit reference being made to all three cueing systems.
4. Paragraph 55 dot point 5 must also take account of contexts in the making of meaning, going beyond the sentence level, as meaning is never purely an outcome of grammatical construction.
5. Paragraph 56 must take account of such contextual demands as audience, purpose, form and genre (used in a broader sense, which exceeds the usage of this term associated with functional grammar).
6. Paragraph 57 does not engage with the way that language organises the world and creates effects of difference and power. This must be recognised in the curriculum, as such an omission narrows the scope of the subject as it is currently understood.
7. The national curriculum must take into account all of the significant historical models of the subject that inform current curriculum frameworks and syllabuses, in order to validate for teachers the full range of pedagogical approaches that these historical models have made available.
8. The description in Paragraph 64 of the Literature element in the final years of schooling is inappropriately narrow. The reference to 'literary criticism, history and informed appreciation' needs to be elaborated in order to consider the different forms English might take (courses, electives, texts, pedagogies, assessment processes and so on) to cater for the different needs, interests, abilities and aspirations of students.
9. English is presented in the Aims as a body of knowledge outside the student rather than as integrated knowledge, skills and personal / cultural values learned and assimilated by the student. The document should acknowledge that the curriculum needs to be learned by students engaged in the processes of the discipline and reflecting on those processes, so explicitly inscribing active learning and reflection in the document.

10. Ideally the national curriculum should have a succinct statement of aims rather than a lengthy 'shopping list'. In paragraph 15, the 1st and 8th points could be readily combined as could the 2nd, 3rd and 6th.
11. The importance of language growth and development to the imaginative and ethical capacities of individuals—to the formation of a 'self' that goes beyond civics and economics and which is formed and understood in our relationships with others—must be recognised and duly emphasised.
12. The national curriculum will need to provide workable and acceptable guidance about the appropriate balance of textual forms. The place and role of non-literary texts in a national English curriculum needs to be rethought in terms that do not see the value of such texts as being predominantly in their potential to enhance the study of literature.
13. Since the word 'modality' (paragraph 27) has another meaning in functional grammar, it would be better to use the term 'modes', as in 'the language modes of reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing and representing'.
14. 'Critique' and 'Design' are terms which should be added to the general capabilities.
15. Closer consideration must be given to different grammars and, within broader consideration of the efficacy of grammar teaching in English, how and why teachers have found these useful. To this end, consideration might profitably be given to how the Systemic Functional Linguistics framework is being employed in the teaching of visual and multimodal texts.
16. The national English curriculum should acknowledge the essential notion that the composition and comprehension of texts will be influenced by the assumptions, values and beliefs of writers/speakers and readers/listeners respectively. Further consideration needs to be given to the connotations of 'vantage point'. If this term is to be retained, 'vantage points', ie the plural form, should be used as necessary (paragraph 36).
17. The ability of teachers to foster an interest and genuine engagement with Australian literature will require that the national curriculum allow teachers considerable autonomy to match their students with the most suitable works and to teach them in a way that caters for the needs of individual students.
18. Further guidance is required as to what constitutes an appropriate balance in achieving 'an increasingly informed appreciation of the place of Australian literature among other literary traditions'.
19. The descriptions of the elements for schooling should focus solely on fully describing the cognitive and social development of young people—their positioning and development within and through the curriculum and its stages—and not discipline content.
20. The curriculum must pay due regard to the position of students within the curriculum and the complex negotiations that they undertake as they move between home and school. This includes recognition of the knowledge of language and textual practices students bring with them to school and how these position them within the curriculum.
21. The senior curriculum must be structured in such a way as to provide school communities, teachers and students the opportunity and necessary autonomy to be able to set in place curriculum (including courses, electives, texts, assessment processes and pedagogies) that will be inclusive of the full range of students, with due recognition being given the needs and aspirations of all students within particular communities.

22. Further elaboration upon the statement (taken from the section on pedagogy), 'The school sees its principal job as developing the languages, registers, and genres of schooling, while acknowledging the differences in the classrooms', is required. This should articulate how this statement relates to historically situated English pedagogies, and be grounded in the research and scholarship that has helped formulate and disseminate these pedagogies.
23. The section on assessment needs to be revised to include explicit and developed consideration of what might be called 'assessment for learning'. It must also be made inclusive of all of the language modes.

Australian Association for the Teaching of English (AATE)
PO Box 3203, Norwood SA 5067
Phone: 1800 248 379
Email: aate@aate.org.au
Contact: Mark Howie, President

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