Making Productive Use of Four Models of School English: A Case Study Revisited

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Abstract: At a time when political leaders and media pundits seek to narrow the English curriculum and reduce its knowledge structure to the ‘basics’, it is helpful to revisit the potential of different approaches to learning in English that have evolved over time. In this paper I reflect on the semantic features of personal growth, cultural heritage, skills and cultural analysis models of English and exemplify their uses for engaging students with challenging texts like Macbeth. Following this, I return to case study material collected during the classroom work of one teacher and his Year 9 students, and reinterpret their texts in the light of these four models of the discipline. The development of students’ work over time reveals how this teacher drew on the meaning potential of each model and demonstrates the power of a principled and recursive use of these in classroom teaching.

Introduction

If school English has a discernible knowledge structure, it is marked by diversity. Pre-service teachers who embark on curriculum units in preparation for work in English classrooms are typically introduced to different approaches to English and the enduring relevance of four models of the subject – personal growth, cultural heritage, skills and cultural analysis (sometimes called critical literacy). The curriculum materials offered to pre-service teachers of English make a feature of diversity (e.g. Gannon, Howie & Sawyer, 2009). And when students go on to learn about the genesis of the Australian curriculum for English, their perceptions of struggle over knowledge deepen. English now has a national curriculum organised around three content strands – language, literature and literacy. Because this tri-partite curriculum structure continues from Foundation to Year 10, English should now have greater continuity for students (ACARA, 2012). But the character of disciplinary knowledge (‘what counts’) is still a focus of debate, especially in secondary English and pre-service students often remark on this as they explore different perspectives on English in their reading, in preparing units of work and in classroom practice teaching. Many who are introduced to different models of English ask questions like: How do we work with these models? What do we pay attention to in each model? What does classroom work using the models look like? In an era in which practice-based accounts of teacher education are increasingly significant (Reid, 2011), pre-service teachers deserve guidance about the affordances and pedagogic uses of different models of English. They need guidance about how to draw on each model in principled ways to deepen learning.

In this paper, I return to the classroom of a gifted teacher of English, with whom I collaborated for three years several years ago, and consider his work in light of four models of English. In reviewing the data collected in the course of a research project which aimed to improve literacy outcomes for students from disadvantaged schools in Sydney, I explore texts from William’s classroom in light of my own students’ questions – how to work with different models...
of English, what to attend to in each case and how to generate ‘deep learning for students through recursive work on the models’ (Howie, 2005). The paper considers firstly the genesis and relevance of growth, heritage, skills and cultural analysis models of English. Then it considers a ‘heritage’ text – Shakespeare’s Macbeth – from the point of view of each model. Following this, it returns to a unit developed by William Simon focused on romance narrative and interprets the texts generated by teacher and students in the course of classroom work on romance fiction and film in light of each model of English. The aim is to show how the heterogeneous knowledge structure of English can be explored productively if we develop what Mark Howie calls ‘a principled eclecticism’ – a ‘historically situated understanding of English … which acknowledges, draws together, and calls upon a plurality of practices’ (Howie, 2005, p. 59). The challenge is to explore the productive potential of each model for enriching and deepening students’ work on the (differently complex) texts of traditional and contemporary canons.

Different viewpoints on English curriculum

Whilst part of the agenda of governments calling for a national curriculum was a desire for consistency across stages of schooling and state offerings on each subject, it is also true to say that much was unknown (even chaotic) in the framing of core learning. Many involved in advice and later writing of the curriculum material for English learned first hand about the lack of firm agreement about ‘core business’ (see Brennan, 2011 for an overview of struggles over Australian curriculum). The Framing Paper that guided writing of the curriculum argued that English should be built around three strands: language, literature and literacy (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009). However differences of emphasis were clear very early in the formulation of language and literacy ‘content’. Within language, for example, the emphasis was on building ‘a coherent, dynamic and evolving body of knowledge about the English language and how it works’, whilst in literacy the goal was to ‘enable students to understand and produce the English language accurately fluently, creatively, critically, and effectively in a growing range of modes, and digital and print settings’ (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p. 2). Curriculum debate amongst stakeholders within curriculum development centred on the relationship between ‘knowledge about’ and ‘know-how’ – with language aligned to the former and literacy to the latter.

Competing views about the importance of ‘a body of knowledge about language’ and ‘fluent use of language’ tended to correlate with polarised discourses of curriculum theorists and practitioners. Whilst many teachers endorsed the proposed content strands, professional associations did not. The final submission from the English Teachers’ Association (ETA) to the then National Curriculum Board, for example, challenged the emphasis on the ‘what’ and lack of attention to the ‘who’ of English.

A question that is continually asked by our members is: where, aside from recognition of the need for professional development, is the teacher in this document? What is his/her role in its delivery? How much scope will there be for teachers to program for and shape the learning of their students, in order that dynamism in teaching and a sense of ownership of the curriculum can be captured in classrooms around the country?

(English Teachers’ Association, 2009, p. 2)

If the curriculum designers were hoping for renewed attention to ‘knowledge’ (about language especially), professional associations were calling for a focus on ‘knowers’ (users of language) and ‘knowing’ (processes of learning). It was always going to be difficult to develop a shared agenda for work in English (Macken-Horarik, 2011) and to show how knowledge and knowers could be incorporated in an inclusive curriculum agenda. In fact, these disagreements were mild by comparison with earlier debates in the broader community about what subject English was (really) about.

Furthermore, lack of understanding is easily whipped up into panic by conservative sections of the media. At the outset of national curriculum negotiations, there were media cries that teachers did not have the sensibility ‘proper’ to a cultural heritage English to induct their students into deep understandings of ‘the classics’. Media pundits complained that teachers did not know enough about grammar to teach their students the rudiments of reading and writing and eagerly published grammatical ‘mistakes’ in professional materials they could find. The critiques by newspapers like the Australian have continued, taking on the character of a campaign against the profession in some cases. Then early in its first term of government, the newly elected conservative Coalition government appointed two men through its Education minister, Christopher Pyne to lead a review of the nascent Australian curriculum. Both reviewers are
well known to be critical of the curriculum and the recently released review has constellated disquiet for many teachers. Without a strong commitment to diversity and hybridity in knowledge structure, it threatens to undermine imaginative pedagogic application of the ‘full range of models of the discipline – cultural studies, growth, literacy skills and critical literacy’ (English Teachers’ Association, 2009, p. 2).

In fact, subject English has always had an unstable knowledge structure and defining it has been problematic. As early as 1982, theorists of English like Ian Reid were writing of a ‘crisis’ in English studies – of ‘a radical uncertainty as to the very nature of th(e) subject’ (Reid, 1982, p. 8). In its relatively short history as a discipline of school learning – 150 years – English has been interpreted variously as an induction into basic literacy skills, an engagement with great works of literature, an opportunity for personal growth and for critical and cultural analysis. At least four models of school English emerged over the years, their presence noted by several writers (e.g. Christie et al., 1991; Goodwyn, 2003; Locke, 2005; Green & Cormack, 2008; Sawyer, 2005; Thomson, 2009). Theorists of English like Bill Green acknowledge the problematic nature of the subject – that it means different things to different people – but argue for attention to English as a ‘practice – a form of praxis’ (Green, 2003, p. 135). The complexity of the discipline of English can be managed through a mandated simplification (the wisdom offered in the recent review of the national curriculum) or this can be acknowledged and engaged with productively through principled understandings of the resources of the four models of English.

If we take the latter tack, the question emerges: Is it possible to discover a complex unity beneath the diverse models of subject English? And if we can discern this, can teachers draw on the strengths of the different approaches to enrich students’ learning, thereby producing ‘thick descriptions’ of language and text? These are both epistemological and pedagogical questions and in the remainder of this paper, I explore the latter, highlighting the teaching of William Simon and his Year 9 students as they investigated the genre of romance narrative. Others have explored the potential of related frameworks for work on texts in English. Mark Howie for example, has adapted a framework used in the NSW Visual Arts curriculum to explore artworks, showing how teachers could explore texts using a subjective, a structural, a cultural and a critical frame (Howie, 2005). The potential of historically-generated models of English is also worth pursuing, even if only to see if their appropriate use leads to greater depth of engagement for students in work on complex texts and intertexts.

Before exploring the possibilities of each model in work on a classic text like Macbeth and then in William’s work on romance, I deal briefly with each model and its affordances, beginning with personal growth. The Growth model emerged in the early 1980s in many Anglophone countries in response to widespread interest in the profession in oral language development, calls for greater relevance to students’ lives and interests and popular uptake by teachers of progressivist pedagogies like ‘language experience’ and ‘whole language’.

**Four models of English**

The Growth model of English is close to the personal and communal life-worlds into which children are born and which provide their primary formation. In everyday communication around the home and community, much can be taken for granted. Language is a part of reality. People coordinate material practices and enact the social relationships that go with these largely through oral communication. In the roles and relationships typical of life in family and community settings, children’s interactional styles are influenced by their cultural and linguistic groupings. In small communities, social closeness is assumed, or at least familiarity with the values and role expectations of members of the group. What is learned is enmeshed with the views and value systems of those who share the local environment and is therefore both specific and, from the school’s point of view, largely unknowable. People learn as they were taught, through the wisdom and experience of those who went before them, through observation and a good dose of trial and error. In the Growth model of their discipline, teachers are interested in the formation of students’ life-worlds, while accepting that these are various and often class-regulated. The relationship with students mimics the intimacy of a close relationship and takes on qualities of pastoral care, which some have viewed with suspicion (Hunter, 1994). This approach to English acknowledges students’ diverse and open-ended starting points in schooling. It is alive to the fact that students may be learning English as an additional language and have different expectations of life, depending on gender, ethnic origin, class or religion.

**Growth** in English starts with an interest in students’
their experiences and ‘ways of talking and writing’ as a point of entry to classroom work on texts. In preparing students to read a text, for example, teachers prioritise the ‘here and now of you and me’ in interacting with students. They are keen to ensure that all students can read a text with understanding and they want to explore their reactions to this. Reading offers a journey into self-knowledge and experience and the subjective response to a text is a key concern. Teaching strategies like brainstorming, post-it notes on a novel, journalling are typical. Even literary interpretation tends to be re-cast in personal terms in ‘imaginative recreation’ exercises. At the heart of this model are ‘student selves’ and personal engagement is the source of epistemological validity.

The Cultural Heritage model of English is part of a longer tradition, linked to induction of readers and writers into the great works of the literary canon. It is the pathway into the senior years of English and later academic study. It calls for specialised ways of knowing and privileges immersion in and close study of poetry, novels and drama. Complex texts like Shakespeare’s tragedies, Austen’s novels, Yeats’s poetry are typical fare and students are expected to engage with these in powerful literate ways. The literary canon may have widened to include contemporary classics like Bladerunner (The Director’s Cut), Spirited Away or the Australian war memorial website. But the emphasis remains one of close study of texts and highly literate responses. From a linguistic point of view, complex and highly crafted texts constitute the field of study. Students read and write their way into literate textuality. Cultural Heritage English calls for exploration not just of meaning relations ‘within texts’ but of (implicit) intertextual relations between texts in thematically or generically related groups. The relationship between teacher and student is like that of the incumbent (or mentor). The pedagogy is often implicit, drawing attention to the sensuous particularities of an image, the rhythmic patterning of a sonnet, the influence of, say, Elizabethan world views on Shakespeare’s tragedy, the aesthetic pleasures of the Haiku or, in a contemporary genre, the rap poet. Predictably enough, the specialised practices of the Heritage model are privileged in examinations and, by extension ‘privilege’ those students who control them (Macken-Horarki, 2006). At the heart of this model is the text and this is a key source of epistemological validity.

What can we say of the Skills model of English? In this domain, students gain control of specific forms of expertise and these tend to have a practical or at least an ostensive (pointing) quality. Learning activities are typically ‘hands on’, acquired through a pedagogy of participation rather than through implicit induction into literary understandings. In this orientation, students learn how to structure an essay, identify figurative language in a poem, to handle the apostrophe, correct spelling and so on. Generally speaking, learners are ‘apprentices’, guided by an expert into practical mastery of particular competences. The skills model is explicit in its pedagogy, emphasising the application of knowledge to language and texts. It is typically deployed in classes where students struggle with ‘the basics’ of reading and writing. But it need not be so. Many teachers use a version of the Skills model as they introduce learners to a new genre (text type) or recognise work is needed on conventions like paragraphing, punctuation or spelling. All of these require both knowledge of language and guided practice in the application of this knowledge to texts. At the heart of this model is competence and this is the source of epistemological validity.

The Cultural Analysis model is the most recent arrival on the ‘landscape’ of school English. It is often associated with critical literacy practices, asking questions, challenging assumptions, resisting a reading position invited by a text. This model takes the social context as a starting point rather than the text. Students are encouraged to relate texts to the social and cultural practices out of which they are produced and from which they are interpreted. In fact, all forms of knowledge are seen as enmeshed with the value systems of the knowers. In this model, knowledge is no longer fixed or monolithic and learners must come to terms with its socially contingent nature – even if only at a rudimentary level. The ‘self’ is constructed as mediating varied perspectives on knowledge. This demands an ability to negotiate a path through competing discourses on these meanings. The written and spoken texts for negotiating social contingency and cultural diversity are learned again explicitly through conscious design – although pedagogical strategies for developing them will be characterised by openness, by discussion and by variation in modes and media of communication (e.g. the use of videos, newspapers, and radio programs). In classrooms featuring this kind of analysis, teachers would be alive to the importance of different perspectives on topics, inviting students to pose challenging questions about received ways.
of dealing with a topic. A pedagogy of dialectic and robust, intellectually rigorous, dialogue is essential here. At the heart of the Cultural Analysis model of English is recognition of the influence of the social environment on our readings of texts. Dealing with the relationship between social practices and ways of meaning is a major source of epistemological validity.

Table 1 outlines the distinctive attributes of each model, drawing on an admittedly idealised representation of their character.

How do teachers make use of the four models in teaching: a brief look at Macbeth

Although teachers of English may operate from one or the other ‘model’ as a preference, most deploy a blend of Growth, Cultural Heritage, Skills, and Cultural Analysis pedagogies in classroom work. In fact, different ‘ways in’ to a topic or text can be used depending on the learning needs of students. Each model offers some purchase on these needs and starting points. A unit of work on Macbeth, for example, can engage students’ life-worlds through activities that build shared understandings of the personal motives of characters and interpersonal loyalties and divisions that drive them. The character of Macbeth, for example, offers material for fascinating character study because of his complex relationship with power. Lady Macbeth is fascinating too, though for different reasons. Classroom discussions about the price (and limits) of unfettered ambition, about evil, about the death of innocence in young people and other issues provide points of contact for students with the gritty circumstances explored in the play. In fact, a personal response to Macbeth will depend on processes of identification, taste and judgement – a capacity to make sense of dark currents of meaning in the play. The Growth model provides persuasive ‘ways in’ to texts like Macbeth and reminds teachers of the need to ensure it makes sense to learners. Without a personal understanding of the key players and major movements in the play and a desire to explore its big meaty issues, little else is possible, especially when it come to demanding work on its structure and language.

Engagement with textual features of this dramatic text is also important. In a Cultural Heritage orientation to interpretation of the play, teachers would carefully induct students into the language of the text, preparing them to read (and perform) key scenes and exploring in oral and written interpretations the themes of the play. They would explore the unfolding scenes and their patterning and structure. They would interpret the relationships between characters and groups of characters and their symbolic role in the play as a whole. Teachers could invite discussion of themes

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Models of English</th>
<th>Growth model</th>
<th>Skills model</th>
<th>Cultural Heritage model</th>
<th>Cultural Analysis model</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus of learning</strong></td>
<td>Engagement with students’ interests and lifeworlds.</td>
<td>Apprenticeship into basic processes &amp; conventions of communication.</td>
<td>Induction into the ‘great works’ of the literary canon (traditional &amp; contemporary).</td>
<td>Acknowledgement of the social basis of textual practices &amp; preferred readings of texts.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Orientation to literacy</strong></td>
<td>Reading &amp; writing as journeys into self knowledge &amp; subjective responses.</td>
<td>Decoding &amp; comprehending texts; language conventions; text types and their structure.</td>
<td>Reading and writing as journeys into literate textuality.</td>
<td>Critical literacy in resistant readings, challenges and subversion of received readings.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Relation to the ‘other’</strong></td>
<td>Relating to the ‘other’ as an intimate on a shared learning journey</td>
<td>Relating to the ‘other’ as an apprentice to expert.</td>
<td>Relating to the ‘other’ as a cultural insider or mentor.</td>
<td>Relating to the ‘other’ as a critical friend or ideological opponent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pedagogic strategies</strong></td>
<td>Strategies such as brainstorming, conferencing, journaling.</td>
<td>Explicit strategies such as modelling, demonstrations, text annotations &amp; practical tasks.</td>
<td>Implicit strategies such as close reading, reader response, &amp; literature circles.</td>
<td>Strategies such as critical dialogue, genre play, group designs, debate &amp; dialectic.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Genres typical of</strong></td>
<td>Journals, email, personal letters; imaginative recreation genres</td>
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<td>Deconstructive essays, critiques, spoofs, hybrid &amp; culturally popular genres.</td>
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of violent use of power and the disturbance to the cosmology in the ‘great chain of being’ in Elizabethan worldview. They would investigate the connection between the bloody ambition of Macbeth and his wife and the spiritual sickness symbolised in the witches and their curses. Working within a cultural heritage model would require attention to higher order meanings in the text, big questions about ambition and its consequences, evil and its genesis. But of course, many students would struggle with the language of the play and need to spend time on student-friendly translations and need support with the writing of an adequate interpretive response. In these tasks, the Skills model would be helpful.

A Skills orientation to Macbeth would be useful if students are not already familiar with the conventions of Elizabethan play scripts – divisions into Acts, Scenes, dialogic exchanges and even wordings like ‘alarums’ or ‘Enter Macbeth’. Some would need help with identifying the different personae in the list of characters and ensuring they knew how these were related to Macbeth and his retinue. So much of Shakespeare’s dramaturgy can be taken for granted and leave students locked out of the play without attention to basic work on layout, organisation, structure amongst other things. Beyond skills-based work on the language, teachers would need to make explicit the kinds of response texts students needed to produce as a result of their work on Macbeth. A skills orientation could focus stages of a required written response text like thematic interpretation, or conventions for incorporating quotes from the play in the service of arguments in an essay or even how to reference these quotes in terms of Acts and Scenes from which they are taken. In the later example of this orientation to romance genre, we discover appropriate attention to details of essay writing such as use of appropriate verbs for quoting an author, referencing conventions, the use of topic sentences in paragraphs and other signposting strategies. When a Skills model task is introduced in the context of worthwhile work in English, most students find it immensely helpful and can more easily see the point of work on conventions of reading and writing. The key is to make skills work relevant to larger preoccupations in English.

Last but not least, students can approach Macbeth in terms of Cultural Analysis. This opens onto the interface between social and textual worlds – the fact that the play itself was produced out of particular discourses (institutionally-valued ways of talking about topics). Many attending (or better, participating vicariously,) in Macbeth in Elizabethan England would have taken for granted views of witchcraft and of women involved in this. Many in the audience would have shared understandings of the shocking consequences of Macbeth’s evil acts not just for the monarchy but for the cosmology of the time. Understanding the close connection between the social and the semiotic (or meaning structure) aspects of the play is part of what Cultural Analysis makes available in interpretation in English. Students can learn to read the society in the text and to situation the text in its socio-historical context. Shakespeare wrote Macbeth in a particular context and this influenced not just his worldview but those embodied in the characters and their words and actions.

Just as attention to social environment shaping production of the text is relevant to a cultural analysis of the play, so too is it relevant to its interpretation. Macbeth is open to a range of plausible readings and these are shaped to a large extent by reading positions made socially salient. For example, in an era in which structuralist discourses held sway at university-level study, students were expected to pay close attention to the language of the plays like Macbeth, without being concerned with what were called ‘extraneous’, social factors. Later, in the era of post-structuralist approaches to texts, a wider purview was encouraged. Students were invited to interpret plays like this from the point of view of excluded social actors and alternative discourses. Feminist and Marxist readings were not only possible, but welcome. Acceptance that texts are open to a range of plausible readings has widened the terms of reference in English, made it a site for theorised interpretation. Many would welcome the intellectual opportunities of this approach to English (see for example, Macken-Horak & Morgan, 2008). A Cultural Analysis orientation enriches text interpretation. Young people enjoy learning to devise kinds of ‘evidence’ that buttress different readings of a play. For example, they find exploration of negatively charged discourse of such as those attached to Macbeth’s hags and their symbolic connection to evil interesting to pursue. The gender issues embodied in the character of Lady Macbeth are also fruitful. However, Cultural Analysis is highly abstract and may be a contingent model of English. Students have to come to terms with the language of the text (processing its meanings) before being expected to deploy structuralist, feminist, marxist and post-structuralist readings of this.

The point of this discussion is to highlight the potential of each model of English as a ‘way in’ to a
challenging text like *Macbeth*. It is possible to build depth of engagement with challenging texts if teachers apply the models in principled and knowing ways. They can move through each orientation recursively, helping students to make personal sense of the play (growth), tackle its language and the structure and explore its ‘literary value’ (heritage), understand and experiment with conventions (skills) and explore discourses made salient in the play, and needing re-examination (cultural analysis).

As indicated earlier, English teachers (and clearly professional associations guiding their practice) value the heterogeneity of their discipline. Like the theorists of English, they prefer to work with a rich model of English rather than to see it simplified in the interests of conceptual purity. Some, like Reid, stress the importance of hybridity in English, seeing it as a discipline that amalgamates three main strands – literature, ethics and rhetoric – within the same learning area (Reid, 2003). While recognising that they sit uneasily with one another, Reid has cautioned against dividing the body of English into three independent subject areas, arguing that they be preserved in a ‘strategic alliance’, not least for pragmatic reasons and that a ‘cohesive principle’ be developed for integrating each strand into the knowledge base of the curriculum. Of course, not all agree about the value of diversity. Even within the academy, some theorists, like Ian Hunter, have challenged the productivity of the mix of approaches to English (1994). Both Hunter and Reid acknowledge the persistent pedagogy of ‘growth’ and its complex relationship to textual study in English. But the rich potential of each model offers much to English teaching if we are able to draw on and reconcile the different facets of disciplinary work they offer. It is clear that mirroring the different aspects of English is important to professional associations like the ETA in NSW and the AATE as they endeavour to work with a national curriculum that values diversity in English.

For the foreseeable future, at any rate, the four models in their various instantiations remain manifestations of the complex history of *English in Australia* as in other Anglophone countries. The point is to demonstrate how teachers can work productively with all four models drawing on their affordances to do what they do well, always acknowledging their ‘necessary but insufficient’ character.

**A case study unit of work on the romance genre**

In the remaining section of this paper, I return to the work of an experienced school teacher and ask: How can we move beyond theoretical understanding of the role and value of different models of English to maximise their different pedagogic potentials for teaching and learning? The reflection here draws on case study material collected during the course of doctoral work in a number of Sydney schools. It owes most to one particular English teacher, William Simon, who has taught English for many years in Sydney high schools. In this case study classroom, spoken and written data was gathered in a western Sydney girls’ high school as William trialled, extended (and interrogated) genre-based approaches to teaching writing. William was familiar with categories like ‘genre’, and ‘register’ drawn from functional linguistics but integrated these with other categories drawn from paradigms in literary and cultural studies. An earlier interpretation of William’s work was produced in 1995 (see Macken-Horark, 1995).

I followed the progress of students in one of his classes over three years (Years 8–10) and observed the effect of a shared meta-language on students’ progress with and confidence with English. Explicitness about the language demands of different reading and writing tasks seemed particularly important for this group, as, with the exception of one ‘Anglo’ student, all the girls were from non-English speaking backgrounds. The examples of the different textual practices of English are taken from this class. In this re-analysis of data from William’s classroom, I aim to show how different texts and different kinds of classroom activity and talk reveal the productive potential of ‘the mix’ for enriching engagement with literary and non-literary texts. Like the frames offered in Howie’s transformative model of English, the different orientations William took to the romantic films like *Pretty Woman* and *Pretty in Pink* offered students a recursive introduction to text structure, text meaning and text interpretation. The films are clearly dated now but the issues explored in William’s unit remain current.

The data also makes visible the vital mediating role played by the English teacher in opening up the rich meaning potential of English. This is perhaps most crucial in classrooms dominated by students who speak English as an additional language. Learning not only to read and understand demanding works of fiction but to analyse, innovate on and critique such texts puts pressure on the teacher’s knowledge base, on his or her capacity to engage students in learning to take up such challenging roles.
In the unit of work I explore here, William aimed to introduce his Year 9 students to the romance narrative in literary and filmic media.

The goals for this unit of work were:

- To explore the characteristics of the romance genre in two media – fiction and film;
- To investigate the extent to which the film-makers exploit the possibilities of the genre to suit different audiences – school age and older (e.g. In what ways is *Pretty in Pink* a ‘kid pic?’);
- To write, recreate and critique different texts in the romance genre.

In order to achieve these goals, William introduced his students to a number of written romance narratives from an anthology called *Head Over Heels* (McRobbie, 1990). These short texts offered students a ‘way in’ to the genre and its predictable pattern of stages and language choices. He hoped that close study of texts in this genre would also enable students to write their own romance. But, given that the romance is a filmic as well as print genre, students applied understandings about its structure to films like *Pretty Woman*. Later they would expand their narrative meta-language to explore discourses of sexism and childhood in the texts they had earlier analysed technically. In this way, we can see that a text-based orientation to analysis opened out to more critical ideological perspectives. What is interesting is that each stage of the unit of work employed what we can see as *Growth, Heritage, Skills* and *Cultural Analysis* models of English consecutively and recursively.

A personalist starting point

Because they were going to analyse (and produce) romance texts in written and multimodal forms, students viewed and discussed films current at that time. Early on in the program, they watched *Pretty Woman* and, following the class viewing, discussion about the film’s construction of women took on a life of its own after a throw-away comment from the teacher met with strong reactions from some of the students. Text 1 provides a short extract from this class discussion:

Text 1

William: The film is lovely, don’t you think?
[indistinguishable sounds of agreement about the film being great]
romance paved the way for a later essay which was far more demanding of students than impromptu discussion of their immediate reactions to the film.

The final essay question was as follows:

‘Some people maintain that romantic films are a testimony to the enduring power of love, that can overcome all odds. Some others are adamant that the representation of both love and women in these films is unrealistic and furthermore that it will lead to the continual oppression of women.’ What do you think?

Before they were able to deal with an essay question like this, however, the students needed to build up a working knowledge of the genre itself. In this phase, they needed to become acquainted with the structure and nature of the texts they were reading and would later write.

Text 2

(A ‘creative’ task based on close attention to the romance genre)

**Pride, Progress and Passion**

**Meeting:** He turned to face the most entrancing and tender woman that his dazzling yellow-green eyes had ever encountered. Her beauty bewitched him and the dress she displayed, revealed the figure that every woman dreamed to possess. As Aurora reached the foot of the staircase, her enchanting, innocent eyes gazed up at him behind long, black lashes. She slowly yet elegantly advanced towards him.

**Finding:** He kissed her lightly on the hand, then pulled her hand so it was caressing his cheek. ‘Such soft, delicate hands.’ Kenneth realised what he was doing and instantly let her hand drop beside her. Aurora was blushing. If it weren’t for the rouge, he would have noticed. She smiled at him and he grinned back.

**Losing:** Tonight when everything was so quiet, she could close her eyes and imagine she was back in the rural stillness of her ‘home’ and that life was unchanging, unchanging. But she knew life would never be the same. ‘Oh Eleanor’ she sobbed.

**Ending:** Aurora heard the door click and she hastily raised her head and dashed her hand across her wet eyes. She rose and saw it was Kenneth. Aurora was silent, embarrassed. His eyes flickered with amusement. ‘What luck,’ he said softly, ‘to find you alone.’ Something in his voice made her heart beat pleasantly faster and she felt her face flush. Taking her hand, he turned it over and pressed his lips into the palm. Something vital, electric leaped from him to her at the touch of his warm mouth, something that caressed her whole body thrillingly. His lips travelled to her wrist and she knew he must feel the leap of her pulse as her heart quickened and she tried to draw back her hand. ‘I love you! Your courage and your stubbornness and your fire and your utter ruthlessness. How much do I love you? So much to ask you to become my wife.’ They fell silent and looked at each other.

This was the beginning ‘Yesterday is not ours to recover, but tomorrow is ours to win or lose.’

(Stephanie and Angelique)

The romance written by Stephanie and Angelique absorbed the breathless passion of the models they had analysed and this is evident in the involuntary behavioural verbs recreating Aurora’s passion – eyes
flaunting, heart beating, face flushing and so on. Like all students in this class, the two student authors enjoyed the linguistic mimicry at the centre of this exercise and were rightly proud of their romance fiction. Following their composition of romance texts, William extended the meta-language his students had learned the previous year. In their analysis of the film, *Pretty in Pink*, students tackled features that make it a good example of a ‘kid pic’. Their meta-language now included terms like stages, ‘theme’, ‘types of character’ and ideology (e.g. showing that ‘love conquers all’ effaces differences of class, race and sexual preference).

Students compiled examples of these features in individual work and then shared them with the rest of the class. In this sense they were moving between the close study of texts typical of the *Cultural Heritage* model and the annotation of texts and collection of examples typical of *Skills* model work. This kind of oscillation between one orientation and another is even clearer in tasks reproduced as Text 3, which asked students to examine the linguistic strategies behind a model essay that William presented to them prior to their own final essay writing task (reproduced as Text 4). It is an example of Skills-based work that builds on the language of William’s model essay.

**Text 3**

*All groups*: discuss and jot down the meaning of following words

*adhere, valiant, culminate, protagonists, debonair, anticipated, exemplifies, pretentious, customary, plausible, damsel, anachronistic, submissive.*

**Individual**

1. Count the number of paragraphs. What is the role of each one of these?
2. Examine the verbs used in the essay. What is the most predominant tense used?
3. Locate the topic sentence in each paragraph.
4. Find examples of modality and comment on their usage.
5. Now do the following expressions/words:
   - *On the surface* p. 3
   - *Moreover* p. 4
   - *Although* p. 5
   - *Notwithstanding* p. 6
6. 6) Compare the introduction and conclusion. How effective are they? What makes them effective?

Text 3 contains some well-contextualised skills work, necessary for students learning to produce interpretive essays in Year 9. The exercise built vocabulary, called for examination of the verbs used in the essay and the predominant tense (typically present tense in a genre of this type, and identification of text connectives like ‘On the surface’, ‘Moreover’ and so on. In this way, William showed his students some of the linguistic ‘stitching’ in his essay, as well as exposing them to a text model appropriate for the task they would soon undertake.

Following exploration of the staging and language of his model essay, students learned to investigate the discourses that often remain un-challenged in romance. Text 4 reproduces an essay on which students worked in the above exercises. Again, it prefigures the later work within a *Cultural Analysis* model of English. Note how it builds on the knowledge of the romance formula to develop a more critical orientation to this in films like *Pretty Woman*.

**Text 4**

‘Despite its close adherence to the typical romantic formula, the film *Pretty Woman* is a dangerous lesson for today’s woman.’ Discuss this statement.

*Pretty Woman* does indeed adhere to all the rules of the romance genre. This element of the film is crucial for both its plot development and for the audience’s enjoyment of the film. In spite of this, major concern has been expressed regarding the feeling of contentment generated by the film. It could be claimed that the film’s romantic ending where the modern princess is finally rescued by her valiant prince is unrealistic in today’s society and furthermore will culminate in the perception that women are still passive, submissive and expecting to be rescued by men.

The blockbuster film *Pretty Woman* certainly adheres to all the rules of the romance genre. The two protagonists are strangers in the beginning of the film and it is only when the debonair Edward (played by Richard Gere) stops to ask directions from Vivien, the stunning hooker with a heart of gold played by Julia Roberts, that they meet, thus fulfilling the first identifiable stage of the romantic formula. This meeting results in the characters falling in love despite their opposing socio-economic backgrounds and diverse personalities. True to this very formula Vivien and Edward are in danger of losing their newly discovered love when he concludes his business dealings in Los Angeles. This ‘losing’ stage soon gives rise to the final ending, when Edward, the modern knight in shining armour, realises he cannot face his wealthy future without Vivien and comes to her rescue.

On the surface it might appear that this close adherence to the romance genre is only peripheral but in essence this characteristic of the film is crucial for the audience’s enjoyment. Each event in the film is
went somewhere. Cultural analysis work enabled them to become ‘critical consumers’ of the genre. In this way, William structured the learning so that his students returned to texts of romance with a fresh perspective, thus deepening their understandings of the genre.

Progressing learning through the four models

How do the models work to enrich and deepen learning in the disciplinary practices of English? We can use the four models as holistic views of its multifaceted knowledge structure. Holding onto a rich and inclusive account of its diverse models is important in our theorisation of English. As Ian Reid argues,

> Teaching English – helping students to learn the versatile competence in their uses of language – is too important to be distracted by needless factional disputes and adversarial postures. As Ian Hunter (1997) suggests, we ought to be able to resist false dichotomies between personal development and social skilling, between critical and vocational literacy. Self-discovery is not only a legitimate focus for the learning of literate practices, it can be itself a social skill. Correspondingly, there need be nothing injurious to the individual about formal training in the genres of workplace discourse and public communication media. A fully literate person, skilled across a range of language practices, will combine what we sometimes allow ourselves to separate.

(Reid, 2003, p. 105)

If we consider the texts and associated practices students took up in this unit of work, it is clear that William’s students were shunting between one approach and another. Moving recursively between one orientation and another enabled them to see romance as producers. Skills work was integrated with holistic approaches to romance. It had ‘a point’ – it anticipated by the audience and in effect is very predictable. The famous shopping incident best exemplifies this. Vivien’s ill treatment at the hands of the pretentious boutique owner is well contrasted with the treatment she receives the next day following Edward’s intervention and is certainly anticipated by the audience.

Moreover the film has been so successful at the box-office because it consciously doesn’t challenge the audience’s understanding of romance. As a result, Edward’s business partner serves as the customary ‘baddie’ and her friend provides the necessary contrast to convince all that Vivien is the most exemplary character just like the evil sisters in the universally loved ‘Cinderella’ make the latter appear superior, kind-hearted and virtuous.

Although the success of this escapist film might be considered plausible considering the world’s economy is in recession, many critics have rejected the film as ‘sentimental fluff’. Moreover they bitterly complain that its portrayal of the rich, handsome and wealthy male who comes to the rescue of the attractive, size 8 damsel, is anachronistic and unrealistic. This is indeed reinforced by the fact that Vivien’s education and rescue from her street culture is not only undertaken by Edward but by another male, the hotel’s maitre d’.

Notwithstanding the film’s many fine qualities, including its diligent observation of the rules of the romance genre, it discloses ideas that are very traditional. These ideas mirror contemporary society’s continual representation of women as passive, submissive and helpless – a most dangerous lesson indeed.

William Simon

But there is another aspect to consider here, which may be more productive for pre-service teachers keen to see how they can use the models to progress learning in a unit of work. Learning can occur through personal engagement with a classical text like *Macbeth* or a romance narrative, through systematic induction into their structure and language choices, through

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Figure 1. A representation of four models as touchstones of learning
skills-based work on conventions for presenting and writing about texts and through critical engagement with the social practices that give texts their meaning, invite particular readings and which highlight their gaps and silences. This recursive methodology indicates the possibilities of a ‘both-and’ rather than ‘either-or’ approach to each model.

Figure 1 represents the models as touchstones of learning in a unit of work. Each touchstone provides reference points for planning and progressing learning in English.

A theoretically coherent mapping of the limitations, demands and possibilities of literacy in English takes us far beyond a celebration of ‘good practice’ or collections of units of work (important as this is for exemplification of different practices). So do case studies of classroom pedagogy that demonstrate what teachers like William achieve, perhaps without naming it as I have here. The ‘return with a difference’ that a recursive approach like this makes available is one response to the questions pre-service teachers ask me: how do we make productive use of each model in everyday work on texts?

More than ever, English teachers need to talk to each other in mutually comprehensible terms about what they value. The national curriculum provides a powerful opportunity to build the best of each model into a rich meta-discourse through which teachers can conduct this dialogue and open up English for students. One proviso is that we need to be able to model the contextual environments of each model and their associated textual practices in mutually comprehensible terms. The insistence by professional associations about the importance of diversity and of different models of English in a national curriculum is a reminder of the power of good pedagogy to ‘return with a difference’ to a text, to a genre and to a discourse with fresh perspectives, and thus to enliven students’ reading (and writing) of texts.

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The 50 word story competition was an idea first conceived in an AATE Council meeting in 2013 when Council discussed ways to celebrate AATE’s upcoming golden anniversary. Successfully held this year, the competition was open to students in Years 7–12, and to all ETA members. Students were encouraged to write creative pieces of micro fiction, exactly 50 words in length and to the theme ‘Golden Stories’. Almost 900 entries were received from across Australia for the categories of Junior (Years 7/8/9), Senior (Years 10/11/12) and Masters – ETA/AATE members (teachers and pre-service teachers, Life Members, etc).

Congratulations are extended to our winning authors:

Winning authors received Australian Book Association book vouchers and certificates were issued to national finalists, highly commended, and to all those who entered the competition.

On behalf of AATE, sincere thanks to the students and teachers for entering the competition, and to the judges of the competition who were faced with a massive task in selecting just a few winners out of so many worthy entries.

A special thank you is extended to AATE General Manager Wendy Rush and team at AATE Office for the collation of entries and organisation of the judging process.

A Golden Stories Anthology will be published with the winners, finalists and highly commended entries. Please visit the AATE website for more information on how to order the anthology www.aate.org.au

Junior Category
1st Prize – Freya Cox, The Friends’ School, North Hobart, Tas
2nd Prize – Emily McKeown, Riverside Christian College, Maryborough, Qld
3rd Prize – Onor Nottle, Scotch College, Torrens Park, SA

Senior Category
1st Prize – Brittany Thompson, Aldridge State High School, Maryborough, Qld
Equal 2nd Prize – James Perkins, The Canberra College, Phillip, ACT
Equal 2nd Prize – Erin Jones, Mountain District Christian School, Monbulk, Vic
3rd Prize – David Tighe, Coonabarabran High School, Coonabarabran, NSW

Masters Category
1st Prize – Patrick Wenholz, ACTATE
2nd Prize – Erin Geddes, ETAQ
3rd Prize – Elizabeth Hutchins, AATE