Writing (in) the Nation

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ABSTRACT: The current version of the draft National Curriculum (1.0.1) remains a document which dis-integrates the subject through its three strands and fails to conceptualise a relationship between these strands. Drawing on curriculum history, I argue that this stands in strong contrast to a curriculum such as the 1971 NSW Syllabus for Years 7–10, which was integrated by an overarching vision that dealt with language modes, contexts, knowledges and skills. This vision was partly provided by the work of James Moffett, on whose work I draw to address the National Curriculum approach to writing in particular. I adapt Paris’s notion of ‘constrained’/‘unconstrained’ skills in order to argue for a renewed concern with rhetoric and style and for actively teaching towards ‘surprise’.

Introduction

I felt greatly honoured to deliver the 2010 Garth Boomer address, especially in a year in which national concerns – so central to Garth Boomer’s great contribution to curriculum development (cf. Green 1999, Kennedy, 1999) – were paramount.

In this paper, I will be addressing curriculum history in order to make an argument about the National Curriculum and about writing in particular in that (draft) document. I will also be staking a claim for the importance of history and I hope indicating something of the complexity of our curriculum history.

The National Curriculum in English K-10

Reid and Thomson (2003, p. xiii) view curriculum as a process of making ‘democratic publics’. In traditional idealist (e.g. Kariel, 1970) conceptions of democracy, democracy flourishes in a society where there is an informed and active citizenry who can participate in political debate and public decision-making (Reid and Thomson, 2003, p. xv). This calls for a citizenry with communicative competence and English therefore is strongly implicated in the idealist democratic project. In addition, as William Reid argues, ‘National curriculums are cultural artefacts’; curriculum is ‘one of those places where we have told ourselves who we are’ (in Reid and Thomson, 2003, p. xviii).1

The National Curriculum for English K-10 has consciously presented itself as an exercise in nation-building. Before it says anything about students, the draft curriculum in its Rationale argues that the English curriculum ‘contributes to both nation-building and internationalisation’ (ACARA, 2010, p.1). Particular constructions of both curriculum history and of future curricula could be expected to be both inscribed in the document, and also to bring such constructions into being.

Media approaches to the curriculum have focused on:

- the alleged decline of grammar (e.g. Ferrari, 2008) and
- literature as part of the broader culture wars and as manifested in the media attacks of the last five years on critical literacy (e.g. Slattery, 2008)2

1. Reid and Thomson (2003, p. xiii)
strands themselves are unproblematic as key ideas in the history of the subject. At Dartmouth, for example, Kitzhaber found a subject whose history was chaotic, but could at least be said to be characterised by ‘a body of knowledge called grammar, and a body of knowledge called literature, with the skills of communication as a unifying element’ (Kitzhaber et al., 1966, Abstract). These three notions are easily mapped onto language, literature, literacy. Similarly, Ball (1982, 1983, 1985) labels the period before WW2 in England as driven by a tripartite curriculum of grammar, literature and pupil self-expression (or composition). Again, these are easily mapped onto language, literature, literacy. Thus, the National Curriculum’s three ‘elements’ could be said to reflect some international historical consensus about key ideas in English. However, to say that elements constitute a part of historical understandings about the subject and turning those historical understandings into specific strands and then to effectively, as I’ll argue, leave these strands as silos are quite different curricular moves.

Certainly the Rationale of the Curriculum itself (ACARA, 2010, p. 1) as well as the papers that led up to it (e.g., NCB, 2009), stress the interrelatedness of the strands. But, at the time of writing, we do not yet see in the document an attempt to achieve this integration at the level of the Content Descriptions. And I think this problem issues out of a slightly different, though related, issue, viz. the lack of discussion about the relationship between the strands.

Those who like to declare the failure of English teaching often link these two areas (‘This new orthodoxy finds little value in grammatical correctness and has no place for literature as a heritage’ – Marenbon, 1994, p. 16). However, in the history of the subject, as I have argued elsewhere (Sawyer, 2009), the grammar-literature nexus has often been an uneasy one. Ball’s histories of the subject show, for example, that debates in the early twentieth century which concerned the prestigious role of literature versus the need for a literate workforce often played out as literature versus grammar (see, for example, Ball, 1982, 1983, 1985). The Newbolt Report bundled grammar, philology and the Classics in the one camp as ‘training of the intellect’ to be equated with ‘science’ and English literature in another camp as ‘training of the emotion’, to be conceptualised as ‘art’ (Newbolt, 1921, p. 9). Nevertheless, the nexus between literature and grammar does exist in the politico-media mind (and here I am making a distinction between what I will call the ‘politico-media mindset’ and the profession). Within the profession, what we mean by a concern with grammar, of course, revolves around issues of increasing syntactic maturity and syntactic versatility. This is what the Shape Paper for English (NCB, 2009) emphasised about grammar. However, in the politico-media mind, as Cameron (1994) argues, both grammar and literature operate as a metaphorical correlate for a cluster of related moral terms: order, tradition, authority, hierarchy and rules. Grammar in particular, she shows, occupies the centre of a complex discursive web, able to represent all these key moral terms. The politico-media approach to grammar creates a tension for the curriculum, since it is constructed as a backward-looking agenda around the idea that ‘things like grammar … haven’t been taught for years’ and thus sits uneasily with the futures orientation of the ‘world-class’ discourse.

But what of the profession? What are its responses to the National Curriculum? One key critique to make of the draft document is that the three strands – Language, Literature, Literacy – lack integration. The
attempt to describe a relationship between the strands was made in the lead-up papers:

5.2.6. ... The overall goal is conversion of 'knowledge about' language into a capacity for effective listening, speaking, viewing, reading, writing and creating (NCB, 2009, p. 7)

5.4.3 The Literacy strand will emphasise the breadth of repertoire and depth of mastery gained through applying an increasing understanding about the English language ... (NCB, 2009, p. 9, my emphasis)

The section of the Shape Paper entitled The relationship between the strands, provides 'examples' only, which are, however, instructive:

5.5.2 How the Language strand works with and supports the Literature Strand...

5.5.3 How the Language strand works with and supports the Literacy Strand...

5.5.4 How the Literature strand works with and supports the Literacy Strand (NCB, 2009, p. 10)

Notice the direction of support in each case, especially with regards to Language. Taken together, all of these statements seem to me to imply a relationship which looks something like this:

This is not an unproblematic relationship; nevertheless, it is an articulated one. One of the key problems with the draft curriculum at the moment is that the direction of relationship between the strands is not articulated, nor is its nature. Importantly, the Content Descriptions of the Literature and Literacy strands are each introduced by verbs (‘Appreciate how...’, ‘Identify...’, ‘Recognise...’, ‘Interpret...’, ‘Discuss...’, ‘Evaluate...’) – a structural feature noticeably absent in the Language strand. Language exists as a lists of topics ('Verb groups and clauses...', 'Features of texts...', 'Texts...', 'Languages...', 'Sentences, clauses and word groups...'). Without a clear articulation of the relationships between the strands, this is what has led many to fear that Language can easily become a list of topics to be covered, hence moving the central emphasis of the subject towards lists of content and at the same time de-contextualising the grammar work. Even the Elaborations which supply the verbs absent from the Content Descriptions largely do not engage with how this knowledge about is to become knowledge for or become the ability to do (the verbs include, for example: 'noting how...', 'being familiar with...', 'observing how...'; 'recognising that...'). These remain essentially lists of knowledges, not capabilities – cf. Sawyer, forthcoming, 2010). As always, the key issue will be assessment and as Garth Boomer himself argued, 'the more the curriculum is fragmented (and then tested in fragments), the less likely it is that the learners will reach deep understanding which might inform action in their own lives' (Boomer, 1999b, p. 106)

Curriculum history

Here I would like to turn to history more directly. I have said that the politico-media landscape has emphasised a turning back, a return to..., yet in another real sense, history has tended to be bypassed in the writing of this curriculum. Howie has recently argued that in presenting the three strands as the core of English, the curriculum has confused what should be points of departure for thinking about English with the core elements of the subject itself. In ignoring, for example, the commonplace practice of representing and organising English in terms of subject models or discourses, there is a move away from history. English is about, says Howie, (competing) interpretative systems which a curriculum would do well to recognise, even foreground (Howie, 2010, pp. 2–3). The NSW Syllabus for Years 7–10 does this and tries to reflect what its underpinning theoretical paper calls an ‘intelligent and intellectualised eclecticism’ (Sawyer and McFarlane, 2000, p. 25). There is a strong sense in the National Curriculum document that existing state-based curricula have not attempted to deal with its key issues previously or proposed solutions – a sense, driven, no doubt, by a political/bureaucratic imperative rather than by the curriculum writers.

Because of this aspect of the curriculum, it is to a specific episode from history that I wish to turn to further discuss its implications. I do so in the spirit
In keeping with the central tenets of the then still relatively new Growth model of English, the 1971 document stressed the active use of language to achieve ‘competence’, thus representing ‘a deliberate shift of emphasis from English as information to English as activity’ (NSW Secondary Schools Board, n.d., p. 6):

This syllabus assumes that English for twelve to sixteen year-olds should be an active pursuit: a matter of pupils developing competence by engaging in an abundance of purposeful language activities … For this reason, all objectives of English are stated as ‘ability to do something’ (NSW Secondary Schools Board, 1971, p. 2).

‘Competence’ was defined as the ‘grasp of meaning, form and values’ (NSW Secondary Schools Board, 1971, pp. 6–7) and the Syllabus presented an alternative formulation of the triangle as:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{WHO} & \quad \text{says} \quad \text{WHAT} \quad \text{to} \quad \text{WHOM} \quad \text{?} \\
\text{WHY?} & \quad \text{HOW} \quad \text{with} \quad \text{WHAT EFFECTS}^4
\end{align*}
\]

(NSW Secondary Schools Board, 1971, p. 5)

What possibilities for the subject were brought into being by this formulation? The Syllabus was certainly regarded as revolutionary as a result of its adoption of the then still relatively new Growth model, Brock citing it as ‘The first “personal growth” model syllabus anywhere in the English speaking world’ (Brock, 1993, p. 30). David Homer contemporaneously referred to it as ‘the most carefully considered application of “growth” principles yet seen in Australia’ (1973, p. 212). Later reflections on the document have rarely changed such views (cf. Davis & Watson, 1990, p. 159; Nay-Brock, 1984, p. 204; Watson, 1994, p. 40). This manifested as:

- stress on the active use of language, replacing an ‘English-as-content’ model with an ‘English-as-activity’ model, thus
- ‘competence in the language in a wide variety of situations’ becoming the central aim
- stress on the importance of personal experience and, in turn,
- an integrated approach to curriculum structure
- widening the key ‘contexts’ beyond ‘literature’ to three others explicitly – the media, ‘everyday communication’ and ‘personal expression’.

However, what I would want to draw attention to here are other issues. I think the 1971 document contained a sense of itself as occupying a key historical
moment in re-defining the subject. Left behind in the move to the 1971 document was a systemic tradition of heavily prescribed content based around a large quantity of Latinate grammatical terminology (though I should say at this point that this did not mean that the syllabus intended grammar to be neglected – grammar was regarded pedagogically ‘like any other teaching-aid’ (NSW Secondary Schools Board, 1976, p. 1). It was to contribute to the work on usage, structure and style. The key position on grammar was simply that ‘competence’ was the central issue and the naming of parts was not to be used as a proxy for assessing that competence. A document that focused on usage, vocabulary, structure and style as the areas to be developed could hardly be said to be neglecting very much about language, including grammar). The document was not only a major shift in the way the subject was defined, it was also very short, the central document being only 17 pages long. This meant that the NSW English Teachers Association necessarily put a huge effort into providing professional development around the Syllabus, and it represented a trust in the professionalism of teachers to be able to translate its breadth of vision into Faculty and classroom programs. Above all else, though, it presented a highly unified vision as represented in the triangle in which every element is given a place in relation to the central notion of competence and every line is related to every other as in a matrix: the language modes (reading, writing, listening, speaking) were what were to be pursued; these ran across named contexts in which those modes were to be pursued (literature, media, everyday communication, personal expression) and the aspects of language to be developed were very specific (viz. usage, vocabulary, structure and style). It was all very neat and self-enclosed and in some ways represented not just the moment of ‘Growth’, but also of modernism and structuralism – a totalising, unified vision.

James Moffett

This was largely because 1971 Syllabus owed much to the influence of a key figure of the period: James Moffett as represented in Teaching the universe of discourse. The Chair of the Syllabus committee, Graham Little, a recently deceased life member of the NSWET, whose personal influence on the Syllabus was enormous as the chair of the Committee (cf. Nay-Brock, 1984, p. 210), contended that ‘the single most important influence upon him, immediately prior to his being appointed chairman of the Syllabus Committee in June, 1969, was his reading of Moffett’s book’ (Nay-Brock, 1984, p. 212). If I am representing it correctly, the dis-integration of the subject represented so far by the draft National Curriculum is a world away from the kind of curriculum James Moffett presented in 1968 in the seminal Teaching the universe of discourse, with its two central continua capturing the classic communication triangle of ‘Who says what to whom?’:

I/It continuum: Increasing degrees of abstraction

- Recording: what is happening
- Reporting: what happened
- Generalising: what happens
- Theorising: what may happen

I/You continuum: Control of increasingly distant audiences

- Reflection – intrapersonal communication
- Conversation – interpersonal communication between two people in vocal range
- Correspondence – interpersonal communication between remote individuals or small groups with some personal knowledge of each other
- Publication - interpersonal communication to a large anonymous group extended over space/time

Moffett argued that a curriculum in English could be based on these two continua of development. Now, one point to be made about Moffett’s work is its concern with elegant, precise, scientific structures, as manifested in the ‘I-It’ and ‘I-You’ continua and in the simple elegance of his tables. His table representing language development in terms of degrees of abstraction (‘I/It’) filled out to include the mapping of particular grammatical structures onto specific genres (drama, narrative, exposition) is shown over the page.

Moffett’s design of structures which encapsulate all elements of discourse in all modes goes beyond any straightforward statement of the Growth model and begins to resemble a typically structuralist ‘totalising’ theory (Pope 1998, p. 127), a 60s version of a Grand Unified Theory, a universe of discourse.

One can see in this the attraction for writers of the 1971 Syllabus. Contained in the Syllabus’ triangle is something of their attempt to capture the same sense of a complete system, another Grand Unified Theory. Certainly, Little’s ‘WHO says WHAT to WHOM? WHY? HOW with WHAT EFFECTS?’ schema exactly echoes Moffett’s formulation of the totality of discourse and the totality of the concerns of English as the Syllabus writers saw them.
I introduce this Syllabus and some of its theoretical underpinning to make three points:

- One is the sense of unity which comes when the elements of a curriculum are subsumed to a larger overarching vision of the subject – a sense of unity which the current iteration of the National curriculum lacks, partly, I believe, through a turning away from history.

- The second is the role of teachers. Teachers did have to work to come to terms with the 1971 Syllabus and the NSWETA, as I have said, put an enormous effort into teacher professional development, largely again guided by Graham Little. Teachers will also have to work hard in this historical moment, but I believe the work is of a different order.

In 1970s New South Wales, teachers were presented with a unified vision of the subject – a vision which was new relative to the previous Syllabuses – and the work consisted of developing programs and units of work which would enact the vision. The professionalism of teachers was trusted to make the Syllabus work.

The difference in 2010, I believe, is that teachers will have to work to create the vision of an integrated subject that is contained in the Rationale of the National Curriculum, but is, I believe, so far undone in the three-strand structure as currently conceptualised. It is not so much a case of translating the vision into local contexts, but of having to create the vision. In 1971, one would have had to ignore the Syllabus to implement a fragmented curriculum. In 2010, if the current draft were to become the curriculum, it would be very easy to implement a fragmented curriculum and still be within its structure.

- My third point is really to use the discussion of Moffett and the 1971 Syllabus to move to a consideration of Moffett on writing in particular.

Writing in the National Curriculum

Though the mode ‘writing’ might sit uneasily in a digitised, multimodal, mediated world, carrying with it, as it does, all of the weight of a print-based literacy, the considered shaping of experience which writing represents will continue to remain a fundamental mode for us, whatever the medium, as long as making meaning through language remains the core of our subject. I would argue that the larger politico-media culture does not have the same urgency about writing education as it does about reading education. Brendan Nelson’s 2004–5 ‘National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy’ was of course an inquiry into reading only, its report entitled Teaching Reading. The importance of early reading for later success in school is continually kept before us by the media. Though we had the great genre debate in the 1980s, this was largely played out within educational circles and did not impinge on the politico-media world in the way that debates about phonics do. However, as a democratic public, we should have an equal cultural urgency about writing. After many false starts over the last 25 years, a national curriculum appears to be coming to fruition at a historical moment when we are technologically able to realise a mass audience for every citizen’s ideas and imaginings. While not being naïve about the possibilities for democracy opened up by blogging or about phenomena such as citizen journalism shifting the dominant voices of the big media players (Sawyer, forthcoming), it is nevertheless the case that if the internet is to go anywhere near to achieving its potential as a genuinely democratising force, then writing matters a great deal.

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<tr>
<th>Interior dialogue</th>
<th>What is happening</th>
<th>Drama</th>
<th>Recording</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Vocal dialogue</td>
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<td>Correspondence</td>
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<td>Personal Journal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Metaphysics</td>
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(Moffett, 1968, p. 47)
James Moffett and writing

In his essay ‘Integrity in the Teaching of Writing’ which appeared in the 1981 collection, *Coming on Center*, Moffett listed different categories of writing according to a hierarchy of the degree of *thinking* involved and – related to this – in terms of the degree to which writing reflects real concerns of the writer, as opposed to completing writing exercises on pre-set topics. His hierarchy was:

- **Handwriting**: drawing letters
- **Transcribing**: turning speech sounds into symbols; this includes spelling and punctuation
- **Copying**: imprinting spelling, punctuation, vocabulary and sentence structures
- **Paraphrasing**: summarising, including re-wording
- **Craft**: constructing good sentences, paragraphs and overall structure – where practising language forms predominates over concern for developing thought
- **Authoring**: finding and developing subjects: focused and edited revision of inner speech

(Moffett, 1981, pp. 83–90)

It is important to emphasise that for Moffett only true authoring should be the key focus of writing pedagogy. What Moffett regards as true authoring concerns the writer grappling with ideas – and ideas of concern to them. The following quotes capture some of this sense:

- Teachers have no … choice but to work in the gap between thought and speech (Moffett, 1981, p.88)
- Writing is a manifestation of thought (Moffett, 1981, pp. 87–88)

Educators would do best … to conceive of writing … as full-fledged authoring, by which I mean authentic expression of an individual’s own ideas, original in the sense that he or she has synthesized them for himself or herself. True authoring occurs naturally to the extent that the writer is composing raw material, that is source content not previously abstracted and formulated by others. Teaching aimed this way would emphasize … firsthand content like feelings, fantasies, sensations, memories reflections, and second-hand content as drawn from interviews, stored information, and the writings of others to the extent that the writing truly re-abtracts these in his own synthesis. Insisting on maximum authorship should stave off the construing or treating of writing as only some sort of transcription or paraphrasing or verbal tailoring from ready-made cloth (Moffett, 1981, p. 89)

A strongly theorised questioning of the idea of ‘personal voice’ might baulk at some of this (cf. Gilbert, 1990; Kamler, 2001). This latter work argues that the metaphor of ‘voice’ obscures the difference between the writer and the text, serves to equate the text with the life and thus obscures the processes of production in favour of less tangible concepts like ‘student expression’ and ‘creativity’. Even accepting this point, however, I believe there is much to be gained from Moffett’s approach to writing as intellectual work and particularly to writing as the intellectual work of synthesising. I would want to put in a plea for aiming for a ‘maximum (possible) authorship’ in these terms, particularly in the face of approaches to writing that might be driven by NAPLAN.

It is possible to map all of the Content Descriptions in the draft National Curriculum which refer to writing against Moffett’s hierarchy. Many Content Descriptions fall easily into one of Moffett’s categories – there are, for example, eight Content Descriptions that refer directly to handwriting in the sense Moffett intended: the simple drawing of letters. And these run from K to Year 7. Others, though, are more difficult to categorise. Just because a Content Description refers to grammar, for example, one should not automatically categorise it as belonging in Moffett’s category of *craft* if the intention is to emphasise textual creation and the student having something to say, with the grammar seen as a resource for this saying. Thus, one might put 10Lcy8: Select subject matter from multiple sources and perspectives to create original texts using appropriate grammar and punctuation into Moffett’s highest category of *authoring* because the emphasis seems to be on creating original texts. In contrast, one might put 8Lang6: Sentences can consist of a number of independent and dependent clauses combined in a variety of ways into Moffett’s category of *craft* because the emphasis here is on relatively low level information about sentences and clauses. These decisions are not always easy, and the Elaborations can be used to aid the categorisation. The trick is not to distort the categorisation and to be fair to the National Curriculum. Following is a small selection of some of what I would include in Moffett’s *authoring* category:

- **K Lit 8**: … write about imaginative elements of literary texts
- **1 Lit 7**: Adapt literary texts through talk, drawing, writing and performance
- **2 Lit 5**: Create imaginative literary texts that incorporate dramatisations and digital technologies
- **3 Lcy 13**: Express ideas and information by combining written, oral, viewing and technical skills in the
creation of multimodal texts, incorporating visual and auditory conventions and utilising digital technologies
4 Lit 7: Create imaginative, literary texts using a range of text types and media, experiment with characters and events from texts they have read and viewed, and begin to use literary features for particular effects
5 Lcy 4: Build an emotive and persuasive vocabulary in order to develop sensitivity to feelings and perspectives
6 Lit 3: Use evidence from literary texts to develop arguments that support or refute opinions on aspects of literary texts
7 Lit 6: Use personal knowledge, life experience and literary texts as a starting point for creating imaginative texts in a range of literary forms
8 Lcy 9: Create representations (of people, places, events and things that are shaped by context, purpose and intended audience) to explore challenging ideas and ethical dilemmas
9 Lcy 9: Make appropriate selections of subject matter from various sources, synthesising and organising these in a logical sequence, to speculate about their place in the world and the future
10 Lit 8: Create logical arguments that explore and analyse the attitudes and values revealed in literary texts

In the event, my own analysis reveals the following about the semiotics of the document with respect to writing, using Moffett’s hierarchy:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Handwriting</th>
<th>Transcribing/Copying</th>
<th>Paraphrasing</th>
<th>Crafting</th>
<th>Authoring</th>
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<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>8</td>
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How might we read this?
(a) First, we will have to be careful that the knowledge represented here about the nature of sentences and their structures is transferred to the ends to which this knowledge can be put
(b) We will have to be careful that schooling doesn’t become a pattern of students mostly having things to say in Years 9–10 and the rest of schooling seeming to be just preparing for that day
(c) We will have to be careful about the distortion of our purposes for learning about grammar (or learning about language) in particular years, especially Years 4, 5 and 7.

Developing syntactic versatility is important. But that emphasis needs to be foregrounded in the structure of the document – because of the disintegrated structure of the strands, the curriculum for Language, for example, can be read as largely identifying aspects of grammar which can easily become decontextualised.

To be fair, there is some discussion in the document of exploiting the possibilities of grammatical knowledge, but this tends to be mostly presented within a closed reference system, by which I mean that when there is discussion of exploiting the possibilities of grammar, it often tends to be in terms of more structure:

- Certain abstract nouns can be used to compact preceding or subsequent stretches of text
- Information can be condensed by collapsing a clause into a noun phrase (nominalisation)
- Resources for creating cohesive texts including identifying reference items, the use of substitution and ellipsis, relationships between vocabulary items, and the role of text connectives

Why one would want to do these things is not addressed. What effects one might create are not discussed in the Elaborations. Myhill (2010) has referred to the new grammar mantras – ‘use connectives’, ‘use complex sentences’, ‘put in more adjectives’ – that could too easily find a home here. Directly addressing the issues of why? and for what effects? would avoid this and would also go some way towards curriculum integration.
Above all else, given that there is so much reference in the curriculum to audience and purpose, there is no attempt to engage with engaging-ness. How do we engage an audience? How do we create a particularly effective piece of writing? In the name of engagement, I want to promote strongly the notion of audience for this curriculum. Let me return briefly to the Shape Paper:

5.2.6 The goal of teaching grammar and text patterns should be on expressing thought clearly, persuading and arguing more convincingly and reasoning more carefully (NCB, 2009, p. 7).

Notice the adverbs here – they are all about effects, especially effects on an audience. If I return to the necessarily selective list above of what I have called authoring statements in the National Curriculum (‘K Lit 8: …write about imaginative elements of literary texts …’ etc) each addresses what to include and even how a piece might be structured, but where we need to go next is how to do that most effectively, how to engage an audience – i.e. we need to focus on why we would do these things. Let me make a very obvious point with a well known text:

They murdered him
As he turned to take the ball, a dam burst against the side of his head and a hand grenade shattered his stomach. Engulfed by nausea, he pitched towards the grass. His mouth encountered gravel, and he spat frantically, afraid that some of his teeth had been knocked out. Rising to his feet, he saw the field through drifting gauze but held on until everything settled into place, like a lens focusing, making the world sharp again, with edges.

The book from which this extract is taken is recognised as a classic of the young adult literature genre, and for students the opening of The chocolate war (Cormier, 1974/2004) can provide a number of interesting teachable points about potentially engaging a reader. These include:

- the use of the short, sharp opening sentence
- the violence of the language carried through the verbs (is ‘encountered’ too weak?)
- the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the metaphors of the dam and the hand grenade (are they overdone?)
- the precision of the simile of the lens
- things to be said about focalisation and point of view
- above all, the way Cormier raises to leave unanswered (at this point) a number of questions: who is the ‘him’? why are they murdering him?

There is clearly class discussion to be had here, perhaps some modelling and the potential adoption by students of quite specific local linguistic effects for a total effect in their own writing. A teachable moment like this for students’ own writing is a very simple example of the kind of thing I believe the Shape Paper had in mind. But there is a lot of work to be done either in the Content Descriptions or in the Elaborations or in the support units of work if the vision of the Shape Paper is to be realised in the National Curriculum. And here I would like to turn to what I think is a problem with the Moffett model itself by presenting a different view of how we might think of writing:

This model firstly takes the essential (rather limited) elements of the National Curriculum’s definition of Language (viz. spelling, punctuation, patterns of usage and grammar – ACARA, 2010, p.2) and treats them as sets of knowledges in the service of a larger set of knowledges or strategies here characterised as rhetoric (the separation of spelling from punctuation/grammar is explained further below). The assumption is that sets of rhetorical strategies need to be foregrounded and taught, through the kind of modelling discussed above with respect to the opening of The chocolate war.

Moffett invokes Einstein as saying that ‘matters of elegance ought to be left to the tailor and the cobbler’ (1981, p. 88) and his notion of craft as being about ‘mere carpentry’ I think misses a step about shaping for effect in his hierarchy. This is odd, because Moffett himself talks quite specifically about revision of inner speech being a process of shaping, of processing, of distillation in particular, i.e. of focusing and editing. So shaping is central to Moffett’s agenda. I want to mark the area I’ve called rhetoric in this model here as that area where teachers are concerned with such shaping for effect – with the why! of, especially, aspects of grammatical versatility. I think this is a question of
addressing and aiming at effects in writing and a question of taking audience seriously, of coming to terms with engaging-ness.

In her important text, In the middle, Nancie Atwell (1987) introduced the idea of the mini-lesson. The structure has changed over time in her work (cf. Atwell, 1998, 2007) but the key notion remains the same: directly addressing through teacher input areas of writing she wants her students to develop. Some of these mini-lessons are conventions: spelling, punctuation, grammar. Others are what she calls craft and in the terms I’m using here are aimed at teaching specific effects and effectiveness. In her latest work, Lessons that change writers (Atwell, 2007), for example, she has a series of lessons on creating and developing characters in stories. I would want to add the issue of local effects, as well – ways of grabbing a reader’s attention at the beginning of a narrative, creating a specific atmosphere or building suspense. These things, based on literary models, are what I would want to include at the level of rhetoric in this model. Rhetoric is concerned with effects and craft at a level above the tools – rhetoric names the effects that the tools create and rhetoric works at creating them.

Now, to be fair, there are a number of references in the National Curriculum to ‘creating particular effects’. The problem is that while we name the parts that are the tools for creating effects – for example in Year 3, Content Description Lit 4 talks about alliteration, onomatopoeia, repetition, rhyme and rhythm, to express ideas and create images and particular effects – we do not really gain any insight into the discussion of effects themselves or of how audiences might be engaged. We could not – indeed should not – try to second guess all the possible areas of the craft that could be taught in that space I’ve called here rhetoric. But the National Curriculum needs to address somewhere at some point the issue of why we might want to use particular language structures in particular contexts – to address this why? issue forthrightly and in some detail, which at present it does not. The disintegrated curriculum structure we have so far means that the Curriculum deals with the grammatical tools rather than with aspects of, or even examples of, why we might use them in a particular way. In other words, what we see overwhelmingly are the parts. What we need, I think, is a far more detailed discussion of the uses to which the parts could be put. I’d personally favour sections of the curriculum at some point containing some of what I might call exemplar discussions: what effects particular grammatical constructions achieve in particular contexts as models for discussion and adaptation. These would not be exhaustive, but function as a kind of case study. Ideally, these would belong in the central document in order to immediately signal that the grammar is in the service of rhetoric. Such exemplar discussions could also appear in the Elaborations or support documents as long as the central document signalled very clearly the place of the parts in the service of the whole.

Style
What I would like to re-introduce into considerations of writing in the National Curriculum is one of the terms from the Language area of the 1971 Syllabus. There, Language was concerned with usage, vocabulary, structure and style. There is much focus in the National Curriculum, on structure and, to a lesser extent, on vocabulary and usage. There is almost nothing on style at present and here I want to adjust my earlier model, as follows:

‘Style’ as an idea might carry with it notions of elegance or cleverness for its own sake. However, the concept of ‘style’ also has a number of advantages in writing pedagogy:

- it has the potential to re-focus us from a functional literacy-oriented curriculum back to one which is English-based.
- it has the potential to re-focus us from the minimalism of NAPLAN to a more expansive view of writing
- it saves us from the problems of voice because it accepts the constructedness of voice, indeed, makes a virtue of it.
- it emphasises writing as intellectual work – as the struggle to shape what one has to say into forms
which are most effective; it demands attention to
shaping strategies
• it focuses on deliberate-ness around writing.

I think it also carries with it the notion of modelling and using the models from literature being read. Models from what is being read become very important in a curriculum focusing on effects and intentions in writing. Scholes (1998) makes the point that in the history of English as a subject, English literature entered the curriculum by taking the place of Latin and Greek, and by replacing the study of rhetoric with the study of criticism. The decisive shift this engendered was to shift the balance of emphasis from the production of texts to their reception (Scholes, 1998, pp. 10ff). Scholes is referring specifically to university-level English, but his argument has relevance here. Scholes pleads for an approach to English literature that is based in writing, in students producing texts of their own – writing that is ‘creative’ as well as critical (Scholes, 1998, pp. 160ff). This is partly a matter of writing back to, into, and out of, texts – variations on’ imaginative recreation’ (Stratta et al., 1973), ‘textual intervention’ (Pope, 1995), or ‘dependent authorship’ (Adams, 1996) which we have been doing for a long time. It is also a question of using texts read as models of more general textual production: ‘What can I learn from this text, this writer, about how to express myself most effectively?’ is a key question in Scholes’ curriculum, part of his ‘canon of methods’ (Scholes, 1998, pp. 145ff). A focus on style, I believe, becomes an organising concept that has the potential to achieve some integration of the strands.

Constrained/unconstrained: making surprise ordinary
In a now justly famous article, Paris (2005) argued that in reading assessment we have to distinguish between what he called ‘constrained’ and ‘unconstrained’ skills. Constrained skills are:
• important
• low level/ foundational
• quickly learnt and mastered entirely.

These might include knowing letters of the alphabet, for example. On the other hand, vocabulary development is unconstrained – it can continue to develop forever.

I think this distinction is generative in a number of other areas of the curriculum, but before discussing these, I would first like to consider the following position:

We know we are teaching well when we are surprised by our students’ insights, when what they accomplish exceeds our expectations or even challenges our preconceptions about how an exercise should be done or a text might be read.

(Doecke and McClenaghan, 2005)

The argument that is often held up against this position for English is that it has the potential of trapping students in their current ability levels by seeming to abrogate the possibility that the teacher can influence the outcome greatly. It seems to depend too much on individual genius. I would, however, strongly support this view of ‘teaching well’ by arguing that surprise should be the ordinary expectation of our work in English – and, that if we think in terms of some things being more constrained/unconstrained than others, then we can view surprise paradoxically as what we teach towards.

In a now justly famous article, Paris (2005) argued that in reading assessment we have to distinguish between what he called ‘constrained’ and ‘unconstrained’ skills. Constrained skills are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Towards the most constrained</th>
<th>Towards the most unconstrained</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>common</td>
<td>different</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>known</td>
<td>unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>correctness</td>
<td>surprise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘sufficient’</td>
<td>‘at least’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If we reconsider the model in Figure 5 above, but now as marking degrees of ‘constrainedness’, we can see that when moving from spelling towards style, that one moves:

• from knowledge that is entirely common (how to spell a particular word, which has only one answer) to what is inherently different (the way particular students might achieve certain rhetorical effects) and thus
• from what is known and taught to what is unknown and taught towards and thus
• from what is correct to what is surprising
• from what is sufficient to know in order to be correct to what one must at least know in order to surprise.

The most constrained area of language skills for writing in the National Curriculum is spelling – the only point of addressing spelling is to be correct (notwithstanding invented spelling as a pedagogical
stage in the early years). Somewhat less constrained are punctuation and grammar, which can be exploited and varied for effect (i.e. correctness is not their only criterion for inclusion in the curriculum). The kind of effects I’ve been discussing as belonging under rhetoric are huge in number and can be achieved by a huge set of possibilities for what can be modelled and taught. Most importantly, there is rarely only one way of achieving effectiveness. As Myhill says of the lessons she observed in which grammar was taught in the context of developing students’ writing:

The teaching goal is to open up a repertoire of possibilities, not to teach ‘correct’ ways of writing (Lessons observed had the) clear goal of making connections between the grammar being taught and what it might ‘do’ for the writing. (Myhill, 2010)

The pedagogy I am suggesting is one in which students take the tools we teach them and use them increasingly for their own purposes. I distinguish rhetoric from style as the point where the student moves across the line into independence. Here we can expect surprise – not because of individual genius but because we’ve prepared students to surprise us as a result of what we’ve taught them at the other levels. If we don’t expect surprise as ordinary, then I think we’ve taken a very constrained view of the subject – one reflected in, perhaps even driven by, NAPLAN. If we take a view of the subject as driven by making surprise ordinary we’re more likely to be working at the level I’ve called here rhetoric. My worry about the disintegration of the National Curriculum is that the levels of spelling, punctuation and grammar easily become ends in themselves – capturing a narrow sense of literacy not necessarily intended.

This pedagogy also gives, incidentally, recognition to creativity – not as something that depends on individual inspiration/ genius or magic, but as something that we continue to actively teach for. Raymond Williams – who should always remain an intellectual mentor for us all – defines creativity as the movement from the known to the unknown (Williams, 1977, p. 212), highlighting for us in education the idea of teaching towards surprise.

Finally, I would like to conclude with a return to Garth Boomer, who closed an important 1990 essay on curriculum with these words, which I present in order to bring textual creation back from a discussion of history into the contemporary multimodal, multi-mediated world:

... we need all our young people to learn to be at home with technologies and various media so that they can with confidence make things, make things work, and tell others about it ... schools ... [must be] allowed to become places of engaged production ... [and include] reflectiveness, civilized conversation, story, wonder and critique. (Boomer, 1999a, p. 143)

The National Curriculum in English itself could do worse, I think, than to achieve ‘engaged production’ around ‘reflectiveness, civilized conversation, story, wonder and critique’.

Notes
1 In my original talk, at this point I addressed the social and cultural discourses surrounding current ALP policy on education. Space prevents my pursuing this here, but I drew heavily on the arguments of Allan Reid (2009), pp. 4–6, in terms of human capital discourse and the marketisation of education.
2 This particular issue is an exemplary manifestation of why Kennedy refers to debates over national curriculum as ‘debates about...its values. About its beliefs’ (Kennedy, 2009, p. 6).
3 Such claims about the neglect of grammar are belied by the simple reality that at the time of writing seven of the eight states and territories in Australia include in their Syllabuses for English explicit reference to some variation of the phrase language structures and features as a basic organising principle of the Syllabus itself.
4 Punctuation is as per the original document.

References
Adams, P. (1996). At the far reach of their capacities: Case studies in dependent authorship, Norwood: AATE.


