CONSTRUCTING ENGLISH IN NEW ZEALAND: A REPORT ON A DECADE OF REFORM

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Abstract. In 1991, the newly elected National Government of New Zealand set in train a major reform of the New Zealand national curriculum and, a little later, a major reform of the New Zealand qualifications system. These reforms have had a major impact on the construction of English as a subject in New Zealand secondary schools, and the work and professional identity of teachers. This article uses as a basis for analysis a framework which posits four paradigms for subject English and proceeds to examine the current national English curriculum in New Zealand for its underlying discourses. In specific terms, it explores questions of partition and progression, and terminology. In respect of progression, it argues that the current curriculum has imposed a flawed model on teachers and students, in part because of its commitment to the assignment of decontextualised outcomes statements ('achievement objects') to staged levels of student development (levels). It also argues that much of the terminology used by the document has had a negative impact on metalinguistic classroom practice. Finally, while it views the national English curriculum as a discursively mixed bag, it notes an absence of critical discourses and a tendency, in recent qualifications reforms, to construct English teachers as technicians and the subject as skills-based.
Keywords. English, curriculum reform, qualifications, constructions of English, NCEA.

Dutch. Samenvatting. [Translation Tanja Janssen]
In 1991 zette de nieuw gekozen nationale regering van Nieuw-Zeeland een hervorming in gang van het Nieuwzeelandse nationale curriculum, iets later gevolgd door een hervorming van het Nieuwzeelandse systeem van kwalificaties. Deze hervormingen hebben een grote impact gehad op het vak Engels in het secundair onderwijs in Nieuw-Zeeland, en op het werk en de professionele identiteit van leraren. In dit artikel wordt het huidige nationale curriculum voor Engels onderzocht op onderliggende denkbeelden. Als basis voor analyse wordt gebruik gemaakt van een raamwerk waarin vier paradigma's voor het schoolvak Engels worden onderscheiden. Meer specifiek wordt gekeken naar de indeling en vooruitgang, en terminologie. Met betrekking tot vooruitgang, wordt beargumenteerd dat het huidige curriculum een fout model heeft opgelegd aan leraren en leerlingen, deels vanwege het toekennen van gedecontextualiseerde uitspraken over leeropbrengsten ('prestatie objecten) aan ontwikkelingsstadia bij leerlingen (niveaus). Ook wordt beargumenteerd dat veel van de terminologie die in het document gebruikt wordt een negatieve invloed heeft op de metalinguïstische lespraktijk. Tenslotte wordt geconcludeerd dat, hoewel het nationale curriculum een onsamenhangend geheel vormt, kritische verhandelingen ontbreken en dat er een neiging bestaat, in recente hervormingen van kwalificaties, om leraren Engels voor te stellen als technici en het schoolvak als een vaardigheidsvak.

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French. Résumé. [Translated by Laurence Pasa].
En 1991, le Gouvernement National nouvellement élu de la Nouvelle Zélande met en place une réforme importante du programme National d'enseignement de la Nouvelle Zélande et, un peu plus tard, une grande réforme du système de qualifications de la Nouvelle Zélande. Ces réformes ont eu un impact considérable sur l'enseignement de l'anglais dans les établissements secondaires de la Nouvelle Zélande, ainsi que sur le travail et l'identité professionnelle des enseignants. L'analyse effectuée repose sur un cadre théorique articulé autour de quatre paradigmes de l'anglais comme discipline et procède à l'examen de l'actuel programme National d'enseignement sous l'angle des discours sous-jacents. Plus exactement, cet article explore les questions de morcellement et de progression, et la terminologie. En ce qui concerne la progression, il montre que le programme d'enseignement actuel a imposé un modèle nuisible aux professeurs et aux étudiants, en partie en raison de l'attente d'une évaluation des résultats décontextualisée conduisant à hierarchiser le niveaux des élèves. Il montre également qu'une grande partie de la terminologie employée dans le document a eu un impact négatif sur les pratiques métalinguistiques des classes. En conclusion, au-delà d'une image du programme National d'enseignement de l'anglais comme un « sac discursivement mélangé », cette étude souligne l'absence de discours critique et une tendance, dans les réformes récentes sur les qualifications, de présenter les professeurs d'anglais comme des techniciens et la discipline comme un ensemble de compétences à acquérir.
Mots-clés. Anglais, réforme de programme d'enseignement, qualifications, représentations de l'anglais, NCEA (National Certificate of Educational Achievement-certificat national de réussite scolaire).

German. Zusammnenfassung. [Translation Irene Pieper].
1991 brachte das frisch gewählte nationale Parlament von Neuseeland eine Reform des nationalen Curriculums auf den Weg, kurz darauf auch eine umfangreiche Reform des neuseeländischen Qualifikationssystems. Diese Reformen hatten tiefgreifende Auswirkungen auf die Konstruktion des Faches Englisch in neuseeländischen Sekundarschulen sowie auf die Arbeit und professionelle Identität der Lehrkräfte. Dieser Artikel zieht als Analysebasis einen Rahmen von vier Paradigmen des Faches Englisch heran und untersucht das derzeitige Englisch-Curriculum Neuseelands sowie die ihm zugrunde liegenden Diskurse. Er verfolgt Fragen der Partition, Progression und Terminologie. In Bezug auf die Progression wird argumentiert, dass das derzeitige Curriculum Lehrenden und SchülerInnen ein mangelhaftes Modell überstülpt, teilweise aufgrund seiner Orientierung an Überprüfungen von dekontextualisierten Outcome-Statements (‚Leistungsziele') der Niveaus studentischer Entwicklung. Er argumentiert darüber hinaus, dass ein Großteil der Terminologie, die das Dokument verwendet, einen negativen Einfluss auf metasprachliche Praxen im Klassenzimmer ausübt. Schließlich bemängelt der Beitrag, der das nationale Curriculum des Englischen als eine Mixtur von Disursen betrachtet, die Abwesenheit eines kritischen Diskurses und eine Tendenz der letzten Reformen, Englisch LehrerInnen als TechnikerInnen zu betrachten und das Fach als Fertigkeiten (skills) orientiert.

Portuguese. Resumo [Translation Paulo Feytor Pinto]..
Em 1991, o novo governo eleito da Nova Zelândia pôs em marcha uma profunda reforma do currículo nacional e, um pouco mais tarde, também do sistema de qualificações. Estas reformas tiveram um grande impacto na constituição do Inglês (língua materna) como disciplina do ensino secundário neozelandês e no trabalho e identidade profissional dos professores. Este artigo recorre, como base de análise, a um quadro que postula quatro paradigmas para a disciplina de Inglês e que examina o discurso subjacente ao actual currículo nacional da disciplina. Em termos concretos, ele explora questões de segmentação, progressão e terminologia. Relativamente à progressão, considera-se que o actual currículo impôs a professores e alunos um modelo deficiente, em parte devido ao seu compromisso com a atribuição de descrições descontextualizadas de resultados ("achievement objects") de acordo com o nível de desenvolvimento dos alunos. Também se considera que muita da terminologia usada no documento teve um impacto negativo nas práticas metalinguísticas de sala de aula. Por fim, encarando o currículo nacional de Inglês como depositário de diversos discursos, realça-se a ausência de discursos críticos e a tendência, em recentes reformas relativas a qualificações, para encarar os professores de Inglês como técnicos e a disciplina como baseada em competências.
Palavras-chave: Inglês, reforma curricular, qualificações, construções do Inglês, NCEA, currículo nacional.

Polish. Streszczenie [translated by Elżbieta Awramiuk]
W 1991 nowo wybrany rząd Nowej Zelandii rozpoczął gruntowną reformę nowozelandzkiego narodowego programu nauczania oraz – nieco później – poważną reformę nowozelandzkiego systemu kształcenia. Reformy te wywarły istotny wpływ na funkcjonowanie języka angielskiego jako przedmiotu w szkołach średnich w Nowej Zelandii oraz na pracę i zawodową tożsamość nauczycieli. W niniejszym artykule podstawę analizy stanowi rama w postaci czterech paradygmatów dla przedmiotu "język angielski", od której przechodzimy do przyjrzenia się obecnemu programowi nauczania języka angielskiego w Nowej Zelandii, szukając leżących u jego podstaw dyskursów. Precyzyjniej mówiąc, zgłębiamy problemy dotyczące podziału, rozwoju oraz terminologii. W kwestii rozwoju dowodzimy, że obecny program narzucił nauczycielom i studentom model pełen wad, częściowo z powodu jego przywiązania do wyznaczania zdekontekstualizowanych celów kształcenia ("cele do realizacji") na różnych poziomach uczniowskiego kształcenia (poziomy). W artykule dowodzimy także, że duża część terminologii używanej w dokumentach miała negatywny wpływ na metalingwistyczną szkolną praktykę. Na koniec, pokazując dyskursywne zróżnicowanie narodowego programu nauczania języka angielskiego, wskazujemy na nieobecność krytycznego dyskursu i obecną w ostatnich reformach systemu kształcenia tendencję do kształcenia nauczycieli języka angielskiego jako techników i traktowania przedmiotu jako opartego na umiejętnościach.
Słowa-klucze: język angielski, reforma programowa, kwalifikacje, funkcjonowanie języka angielskiego (jako przedmiotu), NCEA

1. INTRODUCTION

What is the subject English? The simple answer is: many things – clusters of practices, not always particularly coherent, more or less related to curriculum and other documents, socially and historically situated, and riven with contestation from the start. A number of debates have characterized its history: literature versus language; the place of grammar; the importance of 'oracy'; the place of critical theory; the place of popular culture; English versus literacy; and most recently the place of information and communication technologies (ICTs).

In this article, I provide an overview of what English has become in the New Zealand educational context in the aftermath of two related reforms set in motion by a National Government elected to power in 1990. The first of these was termed the Achievement Initiative (Ministry of Education, 1991), a comprehensive curriculum reform which set out to establish 'clear achievement standards for all levels of compulsory schooling' in all curriculum areas (p. 1). In the course of the 90s, a range of curriculum working parties contracted by the Ministry of Education were established to design curriculum statements with sets of achievement objectives (AOs) set out in eight levels. The second was a major qualifications reform, which began with the establishment of a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in 1991 and led ultimately to the development of the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) as a senior, secondary-school qualification. The NCEA began its implementation phase in 2002 (at Year 11) and has since had a pervasive influence on the construction of English and its attendant classroom practices.

2. MAPPING THE SUBJECT ENGLISH

My starting point is the concept of 'discourse' itself, usefully described by Norman Fairclough (1992) as 'a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning' (p. 64). In the first

instance then, I will map the various ways in which activities around texts (reading and writing, viewing and (re)presenting, but also speaking and listening) have been discursively constructed. With such a map as heuristic, it is easier to highlight the historical, socially situated nature of English as a subject and to critique current versions of the subject as they are spawned by various national policy initiatives.

To begin, common sense suggests that literacy is about learning to read and write. However, in recent decades this common-sense notion of literacy has been challenged by those who would view literacy as a social practice. In this view, what it means to be 'literate' is socially constructed; different discourses generate different views of what it means to be literate. The social reality is, therefore, best thought of as characterised by multiple *literacies*[1]. A kind of catch-all definition of literacy would view it as a cognitive, social and technologically mediated practice, utilizing agreed systems of signification, to communicate messages about experience.

A number of broad, social and intellectual developments in the last twenty years have affected the discursive terrain – the range of places whereby one might position oneself as part of an ongoing conversation on the nature of literacy and its relationship to the educational policy environment. Sometimes, these developments can be summed up in a kind of ideological shorthand by referring to, say, romanticism, post-structuralism, modernism, postmodernism, neo-Darwinism or social constructionism; or to cognitive, social and functional approaches to literacy; or to neoliberalism, economic rationalism or neo-conservativism in the socio-economic sphere. The trouble with such shorthand is that the use of one term or another becomes a sign of one's subscription to one or other ideological camp. It can also trick one into thinking that terms such as 'modernity' and 'postmodernity' or 'post-Fordism' have somehow managed to *fix* cultural history in descriptions that begin to achieve absolute status through the widespread nature of their usage.

Another way of approaching literacy as multiply constructed is to identity the elements the have a (potential) role to play in the construction itself. How one thinks about literacy depends on the sorts of meanings one brings to such words as:

- writer (more generally the maker of the text)
- reader (viewer, listener)
- text (including oral texts)
- meaning-making mind
- meaning
- language (and other sign systems)
- technological mediation
- and social context.

In turn, the way we make sense of these words produces different 'versions' or 'models' or 'paradigms' of the subject English itself as it manifests itself across a

1 You will find a discussion of this view in Cope and Kalantzis (1993) and Gee (1996), but really, this view is so widespread as to have become an orthodoxy.

range of educational settings.[2] These general versions can be distinguished according to varying emphases. Here is a possible categorization:

Cultural heritage. There is a traditional body of knowledge (including a canon of precious texts and grammatical knowledge) which is to be valued and inculcated as a means of 'rounding out' learners so that they become fully participating and discriminating members of a society or culture. (However, critics would argue that this body of knowledge is often promoted at the expense of groups, communities or discourses that would threaten its homogeneity or sense of superiority.)

Personal growth. This is sometimes called the New English or 'progressive' English. This model argues that it is valuable to engage in literary and language-centred enterprises because this facilitates the personal, individual growth of learners, for whom the acquisition of certain linguistic competencies will play a central role in their ongoing task of making sense of their world.

Textual and sub-textual skills. At its worst, this version promotes a decontextualised knowledge about language and the acquisition of grammatical skills based on narrow definitions of correctness. On the other hand, such an emphasis can also mean valuing the mastery of the forms and conventions of a range of textual practices or genres deemed to be socially significant.

Critical practice. Often called 'critical literacy', this emphasis puts a value on encouraging language-users to see themselves as engaged in textual acts which are part of a wider set of discursive practices that actively produce and sustain patterns of dominance and subordination in the wider society and offer members of society prescribed ways of being particular sorts of people.

Each of these emphases offer teachers of English a particular position or stance in respect of what textual practice is about. These positions (set out in Table 1), to the extent that they reveal themselves in the practices encouraged by educational policy initiatives and/or are adopted by teachers, will impact upon both understandings of what English is (or should be) and how to teach it.

Table 1. Versions of English and textual orientation

Cultural heritage	Personal growth
Textual orientation:	Textual orientation:

[2] *In debates about English, various categories have been used to denote the 'models' or 'versions' of the subject that might be enacted in actual classrooms. See, for example, Andrews, 1994; Ball, Kenny, & Gardiner, 1990; Green, 1997; Morgan, 1997. As one can see, there is no one way of mapping English as a subject.*

Cultural heritage	Personal growth
• Appreciation and emulation • Deference • Acculturation	• Self-realisation through meaning-making • Creative exploration • Personal integration
Skills acquisition	**Critical literacy**
Textual orientation: • Formal mastery of textual practices • Pragmatic competence • Social adeptness	Textual orientation: • Critical linguistic analysis • Detachment • Social transformation

In what follows, I elaborate, in respect of each of these orientations, a view of textual practice.

2.1 Cultural heritage

In their classic 'New Critical' text[3], *Understanding Poetry*, Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren asserted that 'literature is the most sophisticated example of the process by which we come to grasp our own environment, especially our human environment, with its complex and ambiguous values…'. There is an enormous focus on the author, who is heroised as a kind of Everyman meaning-maker. There is a humanistic emphasis on the cultural heritage of literature, because therein lies the record of our best minds 'grasping' our environment on our behalf. Readers, linked to writers through their common humanity, are called upon to participate in an act of imaginative identification with the drama of meaning-making that the text enacts.

> If we find the poem coherent – that is, dramatically significant – we tend to take the leap of sympathetic imagination. We can appreciate it for the sense of the conquest over disorder and meaninglessness that it gives us. Perhaps this sense may be the very basis of the exhilaration we find in poetry – just as it may be the basis for the pleasure we take in watching the clean drive of an expert golfer of the swoop of a hawk, as contrasted with the accidental tumbling of a stone downhill. The sense of order and control in the vital act – that is what in a successful poem confirms us in the faith that experience itself may be made meaningful. *A poem is, in this sense, an image of our life process–and in being that, an enlightening image of ourselves* (Brooks & Warren, 1976: 270).

[3] *The term 'New Criticism' comes from the title of a book by American writer and critic John Crowe Ransom, The New Criticism (1941). Drawing on the work of I.A. Richards in England and the critical essays of T.S. Eliot, it represented a reaction away from an emphasis on author biography and literary history. Notable critics identified with this tradition were Allen Tate and R.P. Blackmur in the United States and the Englishman, F.R. Leavis. A landmark text in this tradition was Understanding Poetry by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, first published in 1938. This book, which is still in print, was one of the instruments which made the New Criticism the critical orthodoxy in universities and schools in English-speaking parts of the world right up until the 1970s.*

The text is everything, in that it is the embodiment of individual meaning-making for the writer and the object of close attention on the part of the reader. In respect of meaning,

> '*The meaning is the special import of the dramatisation of a situation.* In sum, a poem, being a kind of drama that embodies a human situation, implies an attitudes toward that situation….In short, poems do not so much 'state' themes as 'test' ideas and attitudes by putting those ideas and attitudes into dramatic situations, by dramatising human concerns and interests' (Brooks & Warren, 1976: 267).

Literature uses language in a special way and thereby produces a special kind of knowledge. It is powerful means of embodying both the dramatisation of a creative mind responding to a situation (hence the centrality of attitude or tone) and that situation itself. The capacity of language to reference reality is not questioned. Indeed, the resources of literary language (rhythm, imagery and so on) are seen as designed to embody tone. 'Language did not develop in a mechanically 'pure' form without the contamination of emotion, but in a form that embodied and expressed the density of experience – the interpenetration of stimulus and response, of object and perception, of idea and emotion' (Brooks & Warren, 1976: 4).

Such statements, in harmony with a cultural heritage view of English, explains why for years writing was the poor cousin of reading (especially literary reading) in the English classroom. In a cultural heritage model, literature was the product of the best human minds (usually male) putting the best words in the best order. How could merely mortal school pupils ever hope to emulate the feats of the great writers! It also explains the non-valuation by this paradigm of oral language.

The Brooks and Warren statement further explains why certain kinds of non-fiction – 'real world' texts such as editorials, newspaper columns, feature articles, reports, submissions and media texts – had to wait patiently for admission to the English classroom. Somehow such genres were non-canonical, second-rate and therefore unworthy of emulation. Technology did not come into it. A text was a text was a text, whether produced by quill, ball-point or typewriter. If poetry was best words in the best order, as Coleridge claimed, then grammar was the key to the Order itself, and parsing was a rite signaling admittance to the inner sanctum of syntax.

2.2 Personal growth (progressive English)

The discourses that underpin the progressive English classroom are not a radical departure from those underpinning the cultural heritage model of English. In a telling phrase in his book *Growth through English* (1975), John Dixon referred to 'the acceptance of pupils' work as embryonic literature'. Literature has not been knocked off its pedestal. Rather the category has been enlarged to encompass the capability of all human beings to create meaning through language in their engagement with experience. The meaning-making mind is still an individual one; creative genius has simply become democratized.

In the reader response tradition of criticism, which naturally aligns itself with this particular paradigm of English as a subject, the focus moves from the author and text as object to the reader and the reading process. Its key theorists include Louise

Rosenblatt and Wolfgang Iser. In this tradition, reading can be thought of as a performative act, which brings a literary work (indeed, any work) into existence through a transaction between reader and text. Here is Iser's description of the reading process:

> A reality [the text] that has no existence of its own can only come into being by way of ideation, and so the structure of a text sets off a sequence of mental images which lead to the text translating itself into the reader's consciousness. The actual content of these mental images will be coloured by the reader's existing stock of experience, which acts as a referential background against which the unfamiliar can be conceived and processed (Iser, 1978: 38).

Iser's work draws attention to the ways in which readers go through various stages in their response to a text from initial bewilderment, to layers of interpretation, to considerations of the work as generating an aesthetic experience.

Both Iser and Rosenblatt view the text as exercising a control over the production of meaningfulness. For Rosenblatt, whose book *The Reader*, *The Text*, *The Poem* was introduced by Professor Roger Robinson to English teachers in New Zealand at the very first New Zealand Association for the Teaching of English (NZATE) Conference in 1982, the text is both 'stimulus' and 'blueprint':

> First, the text is a stimulus activating elements of the reader's past experience – his experience both with literature and with life. Second, the text serves as blueprint, a guide for the selecting, rejecting, and ordering of what has been called forth; the text regulates what shall be held in the forefront of the reader's attention...The finding of meanings involves both the author's text and what the reader brings to it (1978: 11).

For Iser, the text, through a range of stylistic features, serves to constrain and produce what he calls the 'implied reader', but also contains gaps which are filled creatively by the reader.

Compared with the New Criticism, a shift can be seen in the way the various elements mentioned above are constructed in the reader-response tradition. The writer is still important and actual. One can still talk about high quality literature, for example, but the stage is now very much to be shared by both writer and reader. While the reader is constrained by the text as a purposeful act, the text does not become a literary work until it is read.

While the writer may well be a meaning-maker (as a reader of his or her own text), meaning is very much viewed as transactional or dialogic – the dialectical product of a reader/text interaction. There is not the same tendency to think of meanings as inhering *in* texts as one finds among the New Critics. Having said that, there is also a reluctance in reader-response approaches to allow an unlicensed approach to meaning-making. In varying ways, the text is seen as productively shaping a reader's response. It may, for example, contain images and symbols which connect with elements in a reader's unconscious or non-verbal reservoir of images and symbols. Or it may be seen as reflecting assumptions about the world which stand in contradistinction to a reader's own stance and thereby produce a critical reading. Whatever, the text is viewed as a stable object, however variable the readings it can engender, while the reader tends to be an individual, unitary, sense-making self.

Some versions of reader-response criticism may place an emphasis on the cultural predispositions of a reader. Others may comment on technological mediation as

a factor affecting response. But these are not large emphases. Language, in terms of this tradition, is still seen in terms of what Bill Green (in 1997) called a *correspondence* and *transparency* theory. 'Language in this view is essentially a transparent, self-effacing medium, a means of more or less neutral exchange between the individual psyche and the world as a natural referent, in a one-to-one correspondence between the order of words and the order of things...' (p. 15). This is despite a recognition that language can be imbued with ideological assumptions.

One can see why this paradigm of English favoured a view of writing as a process, as in the expression 'process writing', and why Donald Graves' approach, with its emphasis on 'conferencing' dovetailed with the discourses of personal growth. Teachers of writing, in terms of this discourse, were constructed as sympathetic listeners and facilitators. Indeed, classrooms themselves became viewed as 'talky' places where meanings around texts were to be negotiated as much by talking as writing. As with the cultural heritage model, language was seen as a means whereby inner meanings were communicated – a medium providing a clear window to the world and the possibility of shared meanings between human beings.

The 1966 Anglo-American Dartmouth Seminar[4] was perhaps the first and last time English teachers reached a consensus on the nature of their subject – and, with a few problems glossed over, it was a progressive consensus. Reporting on the conference, the American, Herbert Muller, reported general agreement with the view that grammatical knowledge did little to improve speaking and writing, and that '...the teaching of grammar has been chiefly a waste of time' (1967: 68). However, the seminar was split on the question as to whether knowledge about language should be taught explicitly and, if so, at what stage. Linguists, on the back foot, found it hard to argue for the utility of linguistic knowledge but wanted to defend it as a humanistic study. Almost overnight, the teaching of grammar disappeared from many English classrooms. After all, if language was an instinct (as people like Noam Chomsky and Steven Pinker have argued[5]), and human beings were born with a encoded blueprint that allowed for the generation of an infinitude of correct sentences according to need, then 'grammar' could be considered caught and not needing to be taught.

2.3 English as skills acquisition or social competence

In terms of the textual and sub-textual skills model of English, the classroom textual focus switches to the achievement of a range of textual competencies, at word, sentence, paragraph and whole text level – and sometimes beyond. At its worst, this model offers a field day for skills acquisition advocates, for framers and fixers of

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[4] In 1966, the Carnegie Endowment funded a conference of American and British writing teachers at Dartmouth College. The event was organized by the Modern Language Association and the National Council of Teachers of English. Reports from the conference had a huge impact on the development of the New Zealand secondary English syllabus in the 1970s and 1980s.

[5] Readers are referred to Steven Pinker's eminently readable The Language Instinct (1994) for an account of this view of language acquisition and production.

discrete and often decontextualised learning outcomes, which are non-problematically describable and measurable. This is where you will see reading reduced to simple decoding and semantic practices, basic communication skills, and writing as the successful completion of various substitution drills (with words correctly spelt, of course).

At its best, however, this model recognizes the socially constructed demands for 'literacy' of a particular sort in a range of contexts. Australian genre theorists, for example, take this approach.[6] So do proponents of the 'new' rhetoric, who look to the wider social stage and associate writing mastery with the ability to utilise knowingly and cunningly the language necessary to achieve a desired effect in a particular social context with a particular audience. Arguments about genre are central to this paradigm for English. But proponents of it would agree with Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis (1993) that any definition of genre entails a recognition that textual form varies according to social purpose. 'Texts are different because they do different things. So, any literacy pedagogy has to be concerned, not just with the formalities of how texts work, but also with the living social reality of texts-in-use. How a text works is a function of what it is for' (p. 7).

In terms of the skills discourse, meaning is relatively unproblematic so long as a writer has mastery of a range of skills at sentence and text level. What has also reappeared here is a rationale for the overt use of grammar, or more broadly, knowledge about language, in the classroom. In the American context, Martha Kolln and others have followed this rationale, arguing for a rhetorical grammar, used for a different purpose, she writes, '…from the remedial, error-avoidance or error-correction purpose of so many grammar lessons. I use rhetorical as a modifier to identify grammar in the service or rhetoric: grammar knowledge as a tool that enables the writer to make effective choices' (1996: 29). In Australia, members of the genre school have strongly advocated the place of grammar in the classroom.

One of the drivers of the Genre school was a belief that students were entitled to obtain mastery of those genres which were deemed to be crucial to academic (and ultimately worldly) success. These genres tended to be written. Indeed, writing (including, potentially, presenting/representing with an emphasis on visual modalities) tended to be the language mode emphasized in genre-centred classrooms.

2.4 Critical literacy

If the Genre School put the focus back on the production of texts, it is arguable that critical literacy put the focus back on reading and away from writing. The reader who took centre-stage, however, was a somewhat different sort from the relatively stable entity of the other three models I have described. This reader was to be viewed as a cultural product, 'inscribed' by a range of discourses (not necessarily compatible with one another) and positioned by his/her discursive frames to respond in one way or another to the 'preferred' position offered by a text. The text was also

[6] *A good place to start for readers interested in this school of thought is In B. Cope & M. Kalantzis (Eds.). (1993). The powers of literacy: A genre approach to teaching writing. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.*

destabilised. It was no longer a container of meaning (as per the New Criticism), nor a constrainer of meaning (as per the progressive model), but rather a space within which a play of meaning might be enacted by the deconstructive, 'writerly' reader. Meaning became a function of discourse (always with a capital 'D'), and individual texts lost their discreteness and became meaningful only in an infinitely complex network of intertextual relationships between utterances. The cultural context had become pre-eminent. So, increasingly, had technological mediation. The notion that 'literacy is a social practice' became a slogan, and then a mantra. And with the increased presence of ICTs as mediating textual practices, a growing emphasis was put on literacy, in all its forms, as technologised.

Post-structuralism, as a particular 'take' on the world, was the natural bedfellow for critical literacy, with *discourse* as a central concept. According to Ray Misson,

> The idea of 'discourse' as developed by Michel Foucault is crucial here. A discourse in this tradition is a formation of textual practices activated in a particular social/personal arena which brings with it particular ways of being, ways of doing and ways of thinking. There is a discourse that we use with the family; there is a technical discourse we might use in our work; there are discourses of law, religion, and so on. The idea that we talk in different registers in different situations is an old one. However, rather than conceiving us as putting these different ways of talking on as a covering to a stable essential self, rather like putting on clothes to dress ourselves appropriately for particular situations, poststructuralism radically argues that there is no self apart from these ways of talking. The discourses we partake in are what constitute the self. Therefore the self is a social construct (the constructivist position), rather than being a given essence of a person (the essentialist belief) (1998. p. 148).

An attachment to the concept of discourse tends to replace the unitary self with the notion of multiple selves, each the product of discourse. Discourses are socially constructed ways of thinking about and being in the world reflected in language and other sign systems. The originary self as maker of meanings – the meaning-making mind of the cultural heritage and personal growth paradigms – is replaced by human subjectivity/ies as produced by culture. We no longer tell stories; stories tell us.

Key concepts in a critical literacy pedagogy are 'ideology' and 'hegemony' – both contested terms. For my own part, I define an ideology is an elaborate story told about the ideal conduct of some aspect of human affairs. Its power lies in its 'truth' value, which is determined by the size and nature of its subscription base as much as by some notion of 'explanatory force'. In short, the truth of an ideology is determined by the number of people subscribing to it. The related term, 'hegemony', can consequently be defined as the state of affairs which exists when the subscription base of an ideology is broad enough for it to achieve widespread dominance.

One aspect of the job of the English teacher in the critical literacy classroom is to draw students' attention to the social consequences of the privileging, in their own writing and others', of particular discourses or 'stories' (in the sense that I have just used that word). A resistant reader is one who is enabled to contest the preferred reading of the world offered by a text, and to challenge that reading with their own. Just as the critically literate reader is also a writer, so the critically literate writer is also a self-reflexive reader of the position(s) he/she is offering a prospective reader to take up.

A second aspect of the job is to ensure that writers are aware that the language they use *is not* a transparent medium of communication, but rather an opaque instrument that inevitably constructs its 'object' in a particular way. What Allan Luke says about the relationship between reading and metalanguage (or grammar) for critical readers, applies equally to critical writers.

> By 'critical competence' then, I refer to the development of a critical metalanguage for talking about how texts code cultural ideologies, and how they position readers in subtle and often quite exploitative ways. My argument is that in order to contest or rewrite a cultural text, one has to be able to recognise and talk about the various textual, literary and linguistic, devices at work (1992: 10).

So, 'grammar' retains its place in the critical literacy classroom, but with a different kind of justification, not so much to support pragmatic writing competence as to serve the purpose of linguistic analysis in the service of a critical awareness of the job all texts do in positioning readers to see the world in particular ways.

A point that needs to be made, however, is that while it is possible to envisage classrooms whose practices might reflect, in some 'pure' way, one of these paradigms of English, the reality is generally far more complex. A range of factors contributes to the formation of an English teacher's professional knowledge and classroom practice. These include the critical orientation of their various degree courses, emphases in their initial teacher education, their history of professional development, the theoretical underpinnings of official curriculum and assessment documentation, the modelling of other teachers, the pedagogies embedded in textbook and other resources and last, but not least, understandings related to the production, consumption and dissemination of texts developed in the wider social context. It is to the fourth of these factors – government policy in respect of curriculum, assessment and qualifications – that I now turn.

3. ENGLISH IN THE NEW ZEALAND CURRICULUM AS CONSTRUCTING ENGLISH

The contract to develop the New Zealand national English curriculum was awarded early in 1992 to the Auckland College of Education and coordinated by Margaret Bendall, who was then secondary English advisor for the Auckland region. Once appointed, she established a team of eight developers, each of whom had their own consultative network.

While the developers were English teaching professionals, it should be kept in mind that they were working within a pre-determined set of constraints, not the least of which was time. They were expected to come up with an integrated English language curriculum statement applicable from J1 to Form 7 (Years 1-13) in a time frame of around 20 months. (The then current *New English Syllabus* for Forms 3 to 5 was, by way of comparison, developed over a period of 14 years from 1969 to 1983!)

Regardless of their feelings on the matter, they were also constrained to work within a structure which asked them to establish strands and sub-strands with eight levels of achievement for each strand. In this respect, and despite warnings from a

number of educationalists, most notably Professor Warwick Elley of the University of Canterbury, they were following in the footsteps of their English and Australian counterparts.

In late 1993, *English in the New Zealand curriculum: Draft* was published and interested parties invited to make submissions by mid-1994. In July 1994, the Duthie Report analysing submissions was published and a new team of three appointed to draft the final document which, published in late 1994, became legally binding in 1995.

ENGLISH in the New Zealand Curriculum (ENZC) divided English into the three major strands of Oral, Written and Visual Language, with these being further divided into what the developers rather awkwardly denoted 'function' sub-strands and 'process' sub-strands. For example, in the 'Written Language' strand, the 'Reading Functions' were 'Personal Reading' and 'Close Reading' and the 'Writing Functions' were 'Expressive Writing', 'Poetic Writing' and 'Transactional Writing', whereas the 'Reading and Writing Processes' were listed as 'Exploring Language', 'Critical Thinking' and 'Processing Information'. (This three-way description of 'Processes' was repeated for 'Listening and Speaking' and 'Viewing and Presenting'.)

Table 2 provides an example of two sub-strands from the *ENZC*: 'Close Reading' and 'Thinking Critically'. The table is indicative of the kind of curriculum document English teachers were asked to implement in the 1990s and how they were encouraged to think in particular about subject English.

Commentators on *ENZC* were divided in respect of *what* kind of version of English it was promoting and *what* its virtues were. In an article in *English in Aotearoa,* for example, Gavin Brown (1998) saw *ENZC* as a 'personal growth' document, citing what he saw as its emphasis on the students' language and personal experiences as the starting point for teaching; a view of language as developing naturally and progressively, the inseparability of literature and language, and a desire to integrate modes of language. The chief developer, Margaret Bendall, herself acknowledged the influence of Dixon's *Growth through English* (1975).

Table2. ENZC strands

	Close reading function	Thinking critically process
	Students should	*In achieving the objectives of understanding and using written language, students should*
LEVEL 1	respond to language and meanings in texts	• identify and express meanings in written texts, drawing on personal background, knowledge, and experiences
LEVEL 2	respond to language, meanings and ideas in different texts, relating them to personal experiences	
LEVEL 3	discuss language, meanings, and ideas in a range of texts, relating their understanding to personal experiences and other texts	discuss and convey meanings in written texts, exploring relevant experiences and other points of view

	Close reading function	Thinking critically process
LEVEL 4	discuss language, meanings, and ideas in a range of texts, relating their understanding to experiences, purposes, audience, and other texts	
LEVEL 5	discuss language, meanings, and ideas in a range of contemporary and historical texts, relating their understandings to personal experience, purposes, audience, and other texts	interpret, analyse, and produce written texts, identifying and discussing their literary qualities, and explore and identify attitudes and beliefs in terms of personal experience and knowledge of other texts
LEVEL 6	discuss and analyse language, meanings, ideas, and literary qualities in a range of contemporary and historical texts, taking account of purpose, audience, and other texts	
LEVEL 7	analyse critically language, meanings, and ideas in a wide range of contemporary and historical texts, discussing and interpreting their literary qualities and effects in relation to purpose and audience	interpret, evaluate, and produce written texts, identifying and discussing their language and literary qualities and relating them to personal, social, cultural, political, and historical contexts.
LEVEL 8	analyse, interpret, and respond to language, meanings, and ideas in contrasting texts from a wide range of genres, traditions, and periods, evaluating their literary qualities and effects in relation to purpose and audience	

One of the major introductory sections of *ENZC* ('Characteristics of Learning and Teaching in English') provides ample discursive evidence for a personal growth reading of the document. Its propositions include:

- Language expresses identity;
- Language is fundamental to thinking and learning;
- Language programmes should be learner-centred;
- Language development is fostered by an environment which encourages creativity and experimentation;
- Language learning is dynamic and progressive;
- Language learning requires interaction and active participation, among others.

However, there are traces of other discourses in the introduction, which serve to modify and even challenge such a reading. The discourse of the cultural heritage model is present, though somewhat muted. Students *should* read '...literary texts with established critical reputations' and 'Teachers must ensure that there is a balance between the reading and study of local literature and the wider heritage of English literature and world literature in English' (Ministry of Education, 1994: 16). The emphasis given to Maori writing is also couched in terms of its heritage value. However, in keeping with the personal growth model, a subtle shift occurs in the document's implicit definition of the term 'literary' away from the canonically sanctioned towards the relevant as facilitating literacy development, imaginative development and the development of personal, social, cultural, historical, and national awareness and identity.

Another introductory section, 'Exploring and Learning about Language' also suggests the presence of conflicting discourses. A statement that 'Knowledge about language is an area of intrinsic interest, worthy of attention in its own right' appears to support a cultural heritage emphasis on learning about language for its own sake, whereas the statement that such knowledge '...is important for students' language development' appears to support a personal growth model. Yet again, the statement that 'learning how to make their knowledge of language explicit provides a basis from which they can make informed and conscious choices of language' supports a model of English emphasising textual and sub-textual skills or critical practice (Ministry of Education, 1994: 17).

In terms of an emphasis on critical practice, *ENZC* in its final form is singularly lacking. In a 1993 interview, Margaret Bendall indicated that the developers had wanted the 'Thinking Critically' sub-strand to '...allow people to bring their background knowledge of their own cultures to text, do their own battles with text, ask their own questions of text, relate texts to other texts...', but that the notion of 'literary quality' had been introduced and overlaid by (unnamed) Ministry officials.[7] Levels 7 and 8 of the 'Thinking Critically' strand for 'Written Language' in the 1993 draft referred to the 'construction' of texts in terms of 'social, cultural, political, and historical influences and literary qualities' (Ministry of Education, 1993: 22). The final *ENZC* dropped the word 'construction' and, instead, advocated discussing the 'language and literary qualities' of texts while 'relating them to personal, social, cultural, political, and historical contexts' (Ministry of Education, 1994: 36). As Bendall suggested, a seemingly minor change actually signaled a move away from a critical literacy view of textuality to a view of close reading more akin to the practices advocated by traditional literary criticism.

In fact, the only sentence in the surviving document which can be related unambiguously to a critical literacy paradigm is found in a paragraph headed with the statement that 'Thinking critically is important for learning and language development' and which contains the sentence: 'They [students] should reflect on the different social assumptions, judgments, and beliefs which are embodied in texts, and which different people bring to language and learning' (Ministry of Education, 1994: 12).

On my reading so far, the material contained in the first 18 pages of the document would appear to be orienting teachers towards a personal growth version of English with some emphasis on cultural heritage and skills and very little recognition of the possibility of a version of English centred around critical practice. The trouble with such a reading, however, is that it ignores the discursive implications contained in the pre-set, structural parameters (in particular, the eight-level structure of achievement objectives), which the developers had to work within and which, as we shall see, reified a flawed model of literacy progression and a tendency to reduce English to discrete, decontextualised competencies. As Michael Apple has pointedly

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[7] *Readers are referred to Ronnie Davey's 1993 interview with Margaret Bendall in English in Aotearoa, 21, p. 12.*

argued (1986, 1995), there are two aspects of curriculums that need to be interrogated in an attempt to identify their underlying agendas,

- Content, in terms of what is missing as well as what is present and
- Form, in terms of how the content (or formal culture) is organised.[8]

Implicit in this distinction is the potential for contradictions to be set up between the form and content of a curriculum document. It is to the *form* of *ENZC* that I now turn.

Addressing the NZATE National Conference in 1994, Chief Developer Margaret Bendall wondered pertinently out loud whether:

> ....we are betraying our own professional knowledge and expertise by helping to construct a framework for language learning which is indefensible in educational terms, inimical to learning, and merely supplies politicians with the machinery for making simplistic judgements of the effectiveness of teachers and schools – at the expense of good learning (Bendall, 1994: 14).

Bendall's frame of reference here is the Achievement Initiative referred to earlier, with its emphasis on such formal qualities as 'key stages', 'clear learning outcomes', monitoring and accountability and a belief in the possibility of defining meaningful 'continuity and progression' in a subject as complex as English (Ministry of Education, 1991: 1).

Even though the discourse of skills and competencies is hardly evident in the introductory section of the document, the structural parameters the developers were given (eight levels and the imperative to couch their objectives as learning outcomes) constrained them to couch their eight-level achievement objectives as decontextualised skills (see Table 2). So, while the *language* of the achievement objectives (words such as 'respond', for example) might tempt one to view them as reflecting a personal growth model, their *structure* can be read very differently as embodying a totally different, and even hostile, discursive paradigm.

As Ball, Kenny and Gardiner (1990) pointed out (writing about English in England), English expressed as skills lends itself to a primary emphasis '...upon competitive individuals acquiring skills and competencies required by the market and the economy', where the education system is seen to be a tool of 'industry' and the curriculum is 'carefully pre-specified in terms of grade-criteria, assessment items and levels of achievement' with little room for the consideration of feelings or emotions, or social or moral issues (p. 77).

New Zealand specialists in educational policy, Michael Peters and Jim Marshall (1996) have argued that New Zealand's National Curriculum is a socio-cultural construction reflective of presuppositions underlying what they term 'enterprise culture and competition'. Like Ball, Kenny and Gardiner, these writers view the curriculum framework (of which *ENZC* is an example) as ignoring questions about the nature and structure of knowledge and as instead emphasising skills:

> ...by reducing knowledge to skills, the designers of the National Curriculum have achieved a number of 'political' purposes. First, 'skills' can be more easily related to individual performance and thus are more easily measured than 'knowledge' and 'understanding'. In this sense, 'skills' lead themselves to packaging and to commodifica-

[8] See, for example, Apple, M. (1995). *Education and power* (2nd edition). New York: Routledge, p. 28.

> tion. Second, a skill is like a technique; it is a performance, an action, a doing. Like a technique, like technology more generally, 'skills' are often seen as neutral or as value-free. 'Skills' are, therefore, considered to be generic, separable from their learning contexts, transferable or transportable from one context to another. Third, a skills-based orientation towards learning and the curriculum provides both an analogue of and an easy transition stage to the labour market with its emphasis on employable skills, new skills, skill needs of industry, 'upskilling', etc. In other words, a skills-based perspective contains an inbuilt bias towards a vocational education (p. 34).

If Peters and Marshall are right, then *ENZC* (and other New Zealand curriculum documents of the 90s) is finally, despite the presence of discourses suggestive of personal growth and cultural heritage models of English, a document constructed around a narrow, skills-based view of English literacy serving an economic rationalist agenda. It is a curiously contentless document, confident in its ability to define learning outcomes without grappling with the frames of cultural and subject-specific knowledge which necessarily contextualise language events. Rather it presents English as a ladder of defined competencies, which the learner will mount step by step, to the reassuring sound of credentialising boxes being ticked, on their way to this or that level of accomplishment and its respective qualification.

4. THE NQF AS CONSTRUCTING ENGLISH

Ostensibly, the development of New Zealand's National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in 1991 was about assessment and qualifications. However, it had huge implications for the construction of knowledge in all areas of post-compulsory education and reinforced discursive tendencies in the concomitant curriculum reforms. Like other school subjects, English was refabricated to bring it into line with the demands of the NQF. This refabrication demanded that the 'subject' be partitioned into discrete units of learning (Unit Standards, each with its own NQF number[9]). The result was the Unit Standards matrix for English (see Table 3), which a number of schools began trialing in 1996. The refrabrication of English into a matrix had far-reaching consequences for the construction of English because it locked the 'subject' into a set of assessment practices, dispensed with the idea of a syllabus and established a *de factor* curriculum in the senior secondary school.

Table 3.Unit Standards Matrix

[9] *Non-New Zealand readers unfamiliar with the term need to realise that 'unit standards' as developed for NZQA are used for assessment for national qualifications. They describe both outcomes which students need to perform in order to achieve credit on the National Qualifications Framework (e.g. English 8812 reads 'produce transactional written text in simple forms') and the standard (in the performance criteria) of performance required to meet the outcome (NZQA, 1998 p. 1.5). (The English unit standard 8812 has four separate criteria expressed as competences: writing develops idea(s); ideas are logically sequenced and supported by relevant details and/or examples; conventions of chosen form are observed and appropriate to purpose; final product is crafted to publication standard.)*

Curriculum Reference	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Close reading of written text	12411 (3) Explore language and think critically about transactional written text	12420 (4) Read transactional written text closely	12428 (4) Read closely and evaluate the effectiveness of transactional written texts	12434 (4) Construct a reading of transactional written text
	12412 (3) Explore language and think critically about poetic written text	12419 (4) Read poetic written text closely	12427 (4) Read closely and evaluate the effectiveness of poetic written texts	12433 (4) Construct a reading of poetic written text
Close reading of visual text	12415 (3) Explore language and think critically about moving images	12424 (3) Read moving images closely	12431 (3) Read closely and evaluate the effectiveness of moving images	12435 (4) Construct a reading of moving images
	12416 (3) Explore language and think critically about static images	12423 (3) Read static images closely	12432 (3) Read closely and evaluate the effectiveness of static images	12436 (3) Construct a reading of static images
Close reading of oral text	12413 (3) Explore language and think critically about static images	12421 (3) Read transactional oral text closely	12429 (3) Read closely and evaluate the effectiveness of transactional oral texts	
	12414 (3) Explore language and think critically about poetic oral text	12422 (3) Read poetic oral text closely	12430 (3) Read closely and evaluated the effectiveness of poetic oral texts.	
Personal reading	8808 (v2) (3) Read an inclusive range of written texts and record the reading experience	12905 (4) Read an inclusive variety of written texts and record the reading experience	8834 (v2) (6) Investigate a theme across a range of selected texts and evaluate the outcomes of the investigation	
	8809 (v2) (2) Read an inclusive range of oral texts and record the reading experience	8823 (v2) (4) Investigate a theme across an inclusive range of selected texts		
	8810 (v2) (2) Read an inclusive range of visual texts and record the reading experience			
Processing information	8811 (v2) (3) Collect informa-	8824 (v2) (3) Research a topic		

Curriculum Reference	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
	tion using a range of oral, written, and visual sources and methods	using oral, visual and written sources, and evaluate the research process		
Transactional writing	8812 (v2) (4) Produce transactional written text in simple forms	8825 (v2) (5) Produce transactional written text in complex forms	8835 (v2) (6) Produce sustained transactional writing in a range of complex forms	8841 (v2) (6) Produce results of literary research in an extended essay to publication standard
Poetic writing	8813 (v2) (4) Produce poetic written text in simple forms.	8826 (v2) (5) Produce poetic written text in complex forms	8836 (v2) (6) Produce sustained poetic writing in a range of complex forms	8841 (v2) (6) Produce sustained poetic writing in a range of complex forms to publication standard
Expressive writing	8814 (v2) (2) Write regular responses to texts and reflections on personal learnings			
Speaking using text	8815 (v2) (3) Perform interpretations of poetic text	8827 (v2) (4) Perform interpretations of poetic texts and evaluate performance	8837 (v2) (5) Conduct a seminar using a transactional oral text	8843 (v2) (5) Independently plan, conduct, and evaluate a class seminar
	8816 (v2) (3) Deliver transactional oral text	8828 (v2) (4) Deliver transactional oral texts and evaluate their delivery		
Interpersonal speaking and listening	8817 (v2) (2) Listen attentively during and interact in discussion	8829 (v2) (2) Sustain discussion of ideas and develop the content of discussion		
Presenting	12417 (2) Present a static image using verbal and visual features	12426 (3) Present static images combining verbal and visual features	12458 (3) Present static images based on analysis of a chosen genre	
	12418 (2) Present a moving image using verbal and visual features	12425 (3) Present moving images combining verbal and visual features	12459 (3) Present moving images based on analysis of a chosen genre	

The committee which developed the Unit Standards matrix in English was also chaired by Margaret Bendall and was clearly instructed to ensure that there was a clear relationship between the Unit Standards matrix and *ENZC*. The left-hand col-

umn of the matrix was headed 'Curriculum Reference' and clearly reflected the partitioning strands of *English in the New Zealand Curriculum.* Virtually all of the strands were present, with almost no rewording. At each NQF level (with Level 1 roughly equating with Level 6 of the curriculum, Level 2 equating with Level 7, and so on), a range of Unit Standards, expressed as outcomes, was listed with each accorded a credit value from between two and six. There were 18 Unit Standards at Level 1 (totalling 50 credits), 16 Unit Standards at Level 2 (totalling 57 credits) and 12 Unit Standards at Level 3 (totalling 49 credits). The displacement of a syllabus with what I will be calling a 'pick and mix' facility, which was to become a major feature of the more recent National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA), is already evident here. If one thinks of a year's work in a 'subject' as a notional 24 credits, the intention evident here is clearly for a facility to pick and mix Unit Standards in the design of courses.

Apart from this radical feature of the matrix, it can be contended that the Unit Standards matrix faithfully reflected the English curriculum document, reflecting both its virtues and its vices. One of these vices was its terminology.

5. PROBLEMS WITH TERMINOLOGY

A curriculum document's terminology has a potentially powerful role in the construction of a subject or knowledge domain, because it affects its metalanguage – the way teachers are invited to 'word' their *thinking* about important aspects of a subject. The Duthie Consultancy's 1994 report on the draft English curriculum took it to task for its use of terminology. One of these was its categorising of writing into 'expressive', 'transactional' and 'poetic' functions.[10]

As the 1993 draft of the New Zealand curriculum indicated in a footnote, the use of these categories was developed by James Britton and others in England in the early 1970s.[11] The developers, however, appeared not to recognise that the categories had been extensively critiqued since that time. The English curriculum developed for England and Wales and the Australian English curriculum profile – both developed a short time before *ENZC* – made no use of such categories.

In the first instance, the categorization is flawed because the terms refer to three different *aspects* of writing. For this reason alone, they cannot be used to suggest discrete *categories*. 'Expressive' refers to a possible function of language. 'Poetic' refers the way in which writing is processed. 'Transactional' also suggests function but with the added suggestion of a particular kind of subject matter and relationship to intended audience.[12]

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[10] I wrote about this terminology in a 1996 article in English in Aotearoa, 30, when I was still HOD English at Pakuranga College, entitled 'Yet again: why the levels won't do'. (See also Locke, T. {1998}. Challenging times indeed: A response to Harry Hood and Sheena Hervey. Reading Forum NZ, 3, 26-32.)

11 The key text is Britton, J. (1970). Language and learning. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

12 There is, of course, nothing wrong with taking a single aspect of language, such as function, and categorising texts according to it, as Learning Media's excellent handbook for teachers, Dancing with the pen does (1992, 21-2).

The concept of function is pertinent to the second basis for critique, implied in this statement by Australian-based linguist, Michael Halliday, who had this to say (in 1985):

> ...there has been a lot of misunderstanding of the concept of the functions of language. It has often been assumed that each sentence has just one, or at least one primary, function; or, even if the sentence is recognised to be multifunctional, that it ought to be possible to point to each separate part of the sentence and to say that part has this function, that part has that function, and the other part has the other function. But life in general is not like that, and language is certainly not like that. Every sentence in a text is multifunctional; but not in such a way that you can point to one particular constituent or segment and say this segment has just this function (Halliday & Hasan, 1985: 23).

Halliday is emphasizing here the *multifunctionality* of texts. The purpose in writing a diary may be more than just to express. Most poetry has an expressive function and, more than any other type of writing, is subject to revision and refinement. Poetry does not just tell stories. Satirical and lyric poetry often argue a case, as does didactic poetry. Transactional writing cannot be reduced to the function of passing on information. Much transactional writing is persuasive, for example. *ENZC* was problematical because its use of categories suggested that certain kinds of writing *were* unifunctional, thus offering students a flawed understanding of language in use.

In addition, the terms potentially led to teaching practices in which students were distracted from the important understanding that many literary texts convey information and all, in some way, are rhetorical. The definitions also tended to suggest that the sorts of genres labeled 'transactional' *didn't* value craft. In fact, there are many genres which resist these categories altogether, for example, reviews, editorials, newspaper feature articles, histories, biographies and autobiographies.

It is conceivable that the curriculum writers misunderstood James Britton's intentions. According to Halliday, 'Britton was concerned with the development of writing abilities by children in school, and held the view that writing developed first in an expressive context, and the ability was then extended 'outwards' to transactional writing on the one hand and to poetic writing on the other. Transactional language was that which emphasised the participant role, whereas in poetic language the writer's role was more that of spectator' (1985: 16).

The third reason for critiquing the terminology was the confusion it led to. Teachers must have been very confused when authoritative facilitators like Harry Hood and Sheena Hervey told them that 'poetic' writing was confined to a story-telling role, when the curriculum's definition of 'poetic' language extended to poetry (which is often non-narrative). Or when their definition of 'transactional' writing focused on information, thus putting it at odds with the curriculum's inclusion of argumentation in its definition.[13] My own research into English teachers' responses to curriculum and assessment reforms showed more dissatisfaction with terminology than with any other aspect. A large majority of teachers found the terms inadequate,

[13] See Harry Hood and Sheena Hervey (1998). 'We live in challenging times', in *Reading Forum, 1.* It is little comfort that the English Unit Standards writers' handling of these terms shared in the benumbing confusion. The Level Two Unit Standard, 'Read transactional written text closely' included biography in its range of transactional texts.

with a larger percentage of older teachers (77%) expressing disapproval than newer teachers (50%).[14]

6. SUBJECT ENGLISH AND THE NCEA

The review of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) the led to the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) was prompted by a revolt by the universities, prominent educationalists and a number of schools against Unit Standards. In terms of the NCEA:

- Canonical subjects had their content delineated by a range of 'Achievement Standards' (between five and nine per subject) set out in the form of a matrix (see Table 4);
- Achievement Standards were developed at three levels, corresponding roughly with year 11 (level 1), year 12 (level 2) and year 13 (level 3);
- Some Achievement Standards were assessed internally and some (at least 50%) externally;
- The old Unit Standards were mostly retained, so that students could notionally choose from a range of Unit and Achievement Standards;
- Students sitting Achievement Standards received either credit at three different grades (achieved, merit or excellence) or no credit at all;
- Each Achievement and Unit Standards had a credit weighting, with a notional year's work in a subject allowing for the possible achievement of 24 credits. Credits were accumulated over a range of subjects with a total of 80 credits (including 60 at the award level) required for a National Certificate to be awarded at a particular level;
- Mark percentages, where feasible, were to be calculated for individual subjects;
- Achievement Standards were assessed according to a system of standards-based assessment, with each standard being divided into 'elements', and 'descriptors' for achieved, merit and excellence grades written for each element.

The NCEA as a qualifications framework had virtually no trialing and had no parallel elsewhere in the world. Serious questions in respect of the NCEA's assessment regime were raised at an early stage in relation to validity, reliability, moderation, the lack of uniformity in respect of retesting policy and workload (see, for example, Elley, 2000; Hall, 2000; Locke, 2000).

From the mid-1990s onward, the Unit Standards and Achievement Standards matrices came more and more to operate as de facto curriculum documents for English teachers in New Zealand. Work on the Achievement Standards matrix for English began in April, 1999 and produced its first draft matrix in that year. Over subsequent years, the matrix went through a number of versions before stabilizing (relatively speaking) as Table 4.[15]

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[14] See Locke, T. (2001). Curriculum, assessment and the erosion of professionalism. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies, 36* (1), 5-23.

[15] *For an account and critique of the initial development of the English Achievement Standards matrix, readers are referred to*

This is not the place to rehearse in detail the arguments for the various changes which occurred from version to version. However, three broad observations might be made. Firstly, there is no mention of 'Curriculum Reference' in the Achievement Standards matrix. Instead, the strands have been combined into five major partitions: 'Write in a range of genres'; 'Explore the language of and think critically about a variety of oral, written and visual texts'; 'Speak with confidence'; 'Media or drama production'; and 'Conduct research', with each partition relating to one or more Achievement Standards. There is less *fidelity* to *ENZC,* illustrated, for example, in the omission of 'Personal Reading'.[16] Secondly, there is some acknowledgement of the terminological problems of *ENZC,* with the words 'creative' and 'formal' being conscripted to replace 'poetic' and 'transactional'. (Though, it can be argued that the problem is hardly solved by such verbal sleight-of-hand.) Thirdly, as one English HOD commented (Pooley, 2005), the development of matrices reflected an inexorable movement '…towards a simplistic, reductionist, skills-based model of English designed to meet the measurement and accountability purposes of government and business' (p. 58). In terms of the construction of English, one of the NCEA's major challenges would be the way the Achievement Standards matrix *also* structured progression.

Table 4. NCEA Achievement Standard Matrix: English

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Write in a range of genres	1.1. Produce creative writing Internal 3 credits	2.1. Produce crafted and developed creative writing Internal 3 credits	3.1. Produce an extended piece of writing in a selected style Internal 4 credits
	1.2. Produce formal writing External 3 credits	2.2. Produce crafted and developed formal transactional writing Internal 3 credits	
Explore the language of and think critically about a variety of oral, written and visual texts	1.3. Read, study and show understanding of extended written text(s) External 2 credits	2.3. Read, study and analyse extended written text (s) External 3 credits	3.2. Respond critically to written text(s) studied External 4 credits
	1.4. Read, study and show understanding of a number of short written texts External 2 credits	2.4. Read, study and analyse short written texts External 3 credits	3.3. Respond critically to Shakespearean drama studied External 4 credits
	1.5. View/listen to, study and show understanding of a visual or	2.5. View/listen to, study and analyse a visual or oral text	3.4. Respond critically to oral or visual text studied

http://www.soe.waikato.ac.nz/certstudies/English/CSEngandNCEA/ASMatrices.html which is a page found on the Certificate of Studies website.

[16] The latter was present in early matrix drafts, but was later dropped in favour of the 'Conduct research' element.

	oral text External 2 credits	External 3 credits	External 4 credits
	1.6. Read and show understanding of unfamiliar texts External 3 credits	2.6. Read unfamiliar text(s) and analyse the ideas and language features External 3 credits	3.5. Respond critically to unfamiliar prose and poetry texts External 2 credits
Speak with confidence	1.7. Deliver a speech in a formal situation Internal 3 credits	2.7. Deliver a presentation using oral and visual language techniques Internal 3 credits	3.6. Construct and deliver an oral presentation Internal 4 credits
Media or drama production	1.8. Produce a media or dramatic presentation Internal 3 credits		
Conduct research	1.9. Research, organise and present information Internal 3 credits	2.8. Investigate a language or literature topic and present information in written form Internal 3 credits	3.7. Complete independent research on a language or literature topic and present findings in written form Internal 3 credits

7. CONTINUITY AND PROGRESSION: PROBLEMS WITH LEVELS

One of the themes which exercised the minds of the participants of the Anglo-American Dartmouth Conference of 1966 was the issue of continuity or progression within the subject (however English was to be defined). Its American commentator, Herbert Muller (1967) remarked that:

> At least the seminar agreed unanimously that there should never be a uniform syllabus or fixed program. On the problems of continuity it therefore again agreed in effect that there is no one road, but many. No one tried to define the 'natural' sequence of English studies from the beginning of school to the end because there is no such thing (p. 53).

Muller's British counterpart, John Dixon (1975), approvingly quoted Dartmouth participant Frank Whitehead's contention:

> To the external observer, then, the attempt to derive a rational sequence for the teaching of English from the internal structure of the subject as studied at its highest level seems open to three major objections. In the first place, there is no body of agreement as to the nature of this structure, nor does any such agreement seem attainable; it is not clear whether it should be looked for within the discipline of literary criticism or that of linguistics. Secondly, the search for this kind of 'structure' as a guiding principle leads to a retrogressive emphasis on 'knowledge' (knowledge *about* the language, or *about* literature) as opposed to 'ability to use'. And, thirdly, the desire for a step-by-step articulation leads....to a demand that the English teacher's field of activity be restricted to that which can be made incremental (p. 84).

Inauspicious omens indeed! Yet, in a timeframe of 18 months, between 1992 and 1994, the developers of *ENZC* were asked to solve a problem that had stumped some of the most prominent English experts of their generation.

As early as 1990, even before the announcement of the Achievement Initiative Professor Warwick Elley was warning the National Government's Education Minis-

ter Lockwood Smith, both publicly and in private correspondence, of the foolhardiness of a levels-based curriculum that would embody the kind of progression that the Dartmouth Conference doubted the simple existence of. Among the difficulties Elley cited were the difficulty in formulating statements of standards and the inadequacy of a model which posited neat, sequential ladders of achievement in each subject.[17]

Constrained by the terms of reference dictated to them by the Achievement Initiative and the Curriculum Framework, the initial developers of *ENGLISH in the New Zealand Curriculum* worked hard to divide English up into aspects (substrands) and to 'find', for each of these, eight levels of achievement. In fact, Bendall's original team was able to find eight levels in only six out of 33 sub-strands. Moreover, submissions on the draft document were unanimous in condemning the levels, and the Duthie Report (1994) which analysed these suggested, in its executive summary, '...that the eight level structure be reconsidered in the light of the strong body of critical opinion' (pages not numbered).

Clearly, however, a challenge to such a fundamental structural aspect of the Curriculum Framework (and the 'accountability' agenda it supported) was not to be countenanced and the Ministry-directed final edit of the English curriculum document rationalised it even further to produce the 8/4 fearful symmetry of its final version. This document bequeathed to New Zealand English teachers an eight-level, skills-based progression of achievement objectives in terms of which they were presumably to plan their classroom programmes. While freeing teachers from constructions of English based around the acquisition of certain content (knowledge *about* the language or *about* literature), it landed them with a skills-based construction of the subject, weak with respect to the affective domain and founded on a model for developing 'literacy' that was not only flawed but contradictory of one of its own language principles. ('Language development is spiral, and involves building on previous learning, and using and responding to specific functions of language at increasingly complex and sophisticated levels' {1994: 11}.)

Even a cursory examination of Table 2 justifies Elley's misgivings about the flawed model of progression embedded in its sequential ladder, not only in respect of the problematical nature of its formulations as in fact denoting authentic differences in performance, but more importantly in its failure to recognise that...

> ...difficulty in reading or listening, is more a function of the characteristics of the text – its structure, its complexity, its vocabulary load, and the match between the interests of the student and the content of the text, than it is a function of the particular skills defined in these levels. A skill-based level structure may operate successfully in athletics or woodwork, but not in receptive language modes. The inherent progression in language is not captured by these level statements (p. 14).

In choosing to focus on skills, *ENZC* ironically attempted to differentiate between aspects of the process of making sense of texts which actually *don't* vary with the age and stage of students. Somehow or other, pupils were viewed as 'responding' to language and meanings at Levels 1 and 2, 'discussing' language and meanings at

[17] *A good article to read is Elley, W. (1996). Curriculum reform: Forwards or backwards. DELTA, 48 (1), 11-18.*

Levels 3-5, 'discussing and analysing' at Level 6, 'analysing critically' at Level 7 and 'analysing, interpreting and responding' at Level 8 (see Table 2). As Elley was pointing out, readers of *all* ages engage in *all* of these strategies. In ironical contrast, *ENZC* ignored the singular aspect of reading competence (the level of complexity and sophistication of the text), which *is* age/stage-related.[18]

This flawed picture of developing literacy competence contained a serious potential consequence for English language teaching in New Zealand. If analysis of language and meaning is not seen as appropriate until level 5, critical reading and interpretation until level 7 and evaluation until level 8, then there was a potential danger of reduced teacher expectation leading to a 'dumbing down' and impoverishment of students' text-related experiences in the earlier years of their schooling.

There were other questionable notions of differentiation embedded in the eight-level descriptors. As has been the case in both England and Australia, students in New Zealand have been identified as performing badly in tasks requiring argumentation.[19] Part of the problem may be another assumption about continuity, that is, a belief in argumentation as a later stage of cognitive development than narrative. The progression embedded in *ENZC's* 'Transactional Writing' sub-strand appeared to embed this very assumption. Students at level 1 (supposedly years 1-3) might be expected to 'recount events' but were not expected to 'express and argue a point of view' until level 5 (supposedly years 8-12).

The developers of the matrices in Tables 3 and 4, for the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the NCEA respectively, were required to adopt *ENZC* as their starting point. Such a requirement meant that flaws in the construction of English and literacy resulting from the progressive aspect of ENZC had the potential to become embedded in both matrices.

As a whole, both Tables 3 and 4 adumbrate *de facto* curriculums in their models of progression. Both are clearly couched in the language of competencies. Like *ENZC,* both curriculums construct a progression through age/stage levels. In respect of writing, for example, Table 3 demands that Level 1 students 'produce…in simple forms', Level 2 students 'produce…in complex forms', while Level 3 students 'produce sustained [writing] in a range of complex forms'. In respect of close reading, Level 1 students 'explore language and think critically', Level 2 students 'read…closely', while Level 3 students 'read closely and evaluate the effectiveness of'.

In respect of writing, Table 4 (the AS matrix) demands that Level 1 students 'produce', Level 2 students 'produce crafted and developed [writing]', while Level 3 students 'produce an extended piece of writing in a selected style'. In respect of reading, Level 1 students 'read, study and show understanding of', Level 2 students 'read, study and analyse', while Level 3 students 'respond critically to'.

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[18] *Interestingly enough, the Australian counterpart of ENZC attempted to do just this in its 'Texts' strand organiser. See Curriculum Corporation. (1994). English – a curriculum profile for Australian schools. Carlton, Victoria: Curriculum Corporation.*

[19] *One study which documents this is Lamb, H. (1989). Learning and teaching writing: The IEA written composition study. (SET: Research information for teachers, 1). Wellington: NZCER.*

One might observe that in respect of writing, the US matrix has to an extent taken on board the criticism of Elley, in making the difference between Level 1 and Level 2 contingent on the difficulty of the task. However, the difference between Level 2 and Level 3 hangs on an interpretation of the word 'sustained' and begs the question, 'Can writing at Levels 2 and 3 be 'unsustained'?' In respect of reading, there appears to be no logic at all in the progression of competences. A similar kind of critique can be made of the AS matrix which, while using the same flawed logic, in places contradicts the US matrix. (For example, in respect of reading, the word 'critically' is associated with Level 1 in Table 3, whereas in Table 4 it is associated with Level 3!)

It can be seen, then, that these constructions of progression are susceptible to the same critique as the *ENZC* levels. They tend to construct illogically worded progressions that simply do not reflect what reasonably able students can do, given appropriate texts and appropriate teaching. More seriously, Table 4 appears to construct analysis and critique as beyond Level 1 students and to therefore encourage teaching practices that support such a construction.[20] Ironically, a policy agenda that produced a range of extrinsic accountability technologies with the aim of lifting standards ended up producing a technology with the potential to 'dumb' students down.

8. CONCLUSION

As I argued earlier, there are a range of factors that impact upon the de facto L1 curriculum as taught in an actual classroom. Educational policy-making, coupled with its 'intended curriculum' products, is but one of these factors. But, given the kind of extrinsic accountability regime that exists in New Zealand (and other countries in the Anglophonic world), it is an important one. Moreover, in the New Zealand context, recent curriculum and qualifications reforms have been supported by a barrage of implementation support materials – documents, resources, nationally designed tasks – many of which are but a mouse-click away.

All in all, then, the construction of English in New Zealand in the last fifteen years has been shaped by powerfully centrifugal, discursive forces. The result, I would argue, is a profession increasingly technicised and 'managed'. Many teachers have left the profession and many who remain are dispirited. Under the NCEA, work has intensified. In many instances, teaching has become replaced by drilling. Outcomes fetishism has encouraged behavioral models of learning. The abandonment of a syllabus, and its replacement by the so-called 'flexibility' of the matrix, has led to problems with programme coherence. The packaging into courses of credit-earning units has led to a real sense of commodification, as students play the system as credit accumulators rather than learners. A skills-based model of English

[20] *Interestingly, the broad definition of literacy adopted for the NCEA level 1, as recommended by the Secondary Sector Forum, is 'the ability to use and understand those language forms required by society and valued by individuals and communities. It includes the ability to: speak, listen and respond; read and comprehend; write to communicate.' Higher level literacy skills such as interpretation, analysis and critique are notably missing (Ministry of Education, 2000: 5).*

holds sway. Traditional forms such as poetry are frequently consigned to the 'too hard' basket in favour of easier, credit-earning options. As for critical literacy? What's that?

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