MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY

Contestation over literary theories:

English teachers as syllabus interpreters

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Abstract

This thesis investigates how teachers responded to various perceptions that a new senior English curriculum was influenced by conflicting literary theories. It analyses teachers' responses to the English Stage 6 Syllabus, introduced in 2000 in New South Wales, Australia, which challenged existing paradigms, unsettling established beliefs and practices. Controversy about whether and how teachers of this Syllabus were to emphasise multiple literary theories significantly affected teachers' work. The major focus of the study is how teachers respond to syllabus innovations which they see as ambiguous or in conflict with their personal epistemologies and pedagogical beliefs. The participants in this study were 50 teachers of the final year of secondary school English at government and non-government schools in metropolitan and non-metropolitan centres in New South Wales; 26 were also Heads of Faculty.

This study was developed within a qualitative framework, with an interpretivist theoretical perspective informing data analysis. The 50 teachers were interviewed and/or surveyed in three phases, providing a picture of teachers' responses to the syllabus over six years.

The study found high levels of teacher anxiety associated with an educational innovation seen to de-stabilise existing attitudes and practices without commensurate benefits to students. Lack of theoretical clarity in a mandated syllabus is seen to lead teachers to assign paramount authority to examiners' reports, causing the assessed curriculum to dominate the other dimensions of curriculum in practice.

A diagram is developed to show teachers testing an innovation as an educational hypothesis, and drawing contrasting conclusions about its value. The degree of

alignment between teachers' personal epistemologies and their perceptions of the theoretical bases of the Syllabus was strongly linked to take-up of the innovation. Implications are drawn in relation to curriculum theory, design, and change management, with relevance for teachers, curriculum theorists and designers, and policy-makers.

Certificate

I hereby confirm that this work has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

Signed:

JR. Ireland

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Chapter One

Contestation over Literary Theories: English Teachers as Syllabus Interpreters

This study is concerned with teachers' exercise of professional judgment as interpreters and enactors of a mandated written syllabus. It analyses a particular instance of contestation and uncertainty about the expectations embedded in a new syllabus, and investigates how teachers work to achieve congruence between perceived expectations and their own personal epistemologies, and between their existing pedagogies and those which they see as arising from new syllabus expectations. It considers the way divergent interpretations of a syllabus innovation reflect contrasting subject conceptualisations and assumptions about knowledge, which profoundly affect teachers' curriculum processes. The particular case in which these ideas are explored is the inception of the English Stage 6 Syllabus introduced in 2000 in New South Wales, Australia.

In 1999, the New South Wales Board of Studies (NSW BOS) published a new English Stage 6 Syllabus, which constituted a significant shift in aims, approaches and materials (Manuel & Brock, 2002; McGraw, 2010; O'Sullivan, 2005). Different stakeholders interpreted this shift in varying ways, resulting in its contents being "distorted, by all of the stakeholders, for a variety of reasons" (McGraw, 2010, p. 1). Understanding how these distortions arose, and their consequences, could be of strategic benefit to curriculum developers in English and in other subjects.

Manuel and Brock note that a consequence of the NSW English Stage 6 Syllabus (1999) (hereafter "Syllabus") not explicitly stating its theoretical foundations is that it

> leaves teachers to interpret and to assimilate what is essentially an eclectic amalgam of elements of poststructuralism, new historicism, feminism, cultural studies, reader-response theory, critical literacy, cultural heritage and personal growth perspectives. (2003, p. 25)

English teachers were engaged in this work of interpretation and assimilation in what has been called "a particularly fraught policy environment" (Kamler & Comber, 2008, p. 1). This was connected with sustained media debate about "the inclusion of critical literacy, popular culture and new digital literacies in the English curriculum" (Kamler & Comber, 2008, p. 1), paired with contestation about the role of literature in English as a subject (Doecke, Howie & Sawyer, 2006). The effects of such contestation on English teachers' identities is noted by a number of Australian scholars (Green, 1995; Kerin, 2005; O'Sullivan, 2005).

This study explores how curriculum contestation is experienced by teachers of senior secondary English. Curriculum, literary theories, and English as a subject are all sites of contestation, which teachers interpret in diverse ways. In the Syllabus these three areas of contestation coincide, so it presents an important research opportunity.

The research question for this study is:

How do teachers respond to difficulties in enacting a contested innovation in a new English senior syllabus?

Justification for the Study

This type of study is important because the pivotal role teachers have in developing students' understanding and skills (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012) makes them

an important source of insight into the impact of curriculum change, whether they are welcoming of, sceptical about or resistant to a particular syllabus innovation. This means that the difficulties that teachers see as impeding their work need to be taken seriously, and not dismissed as habitual complaining or in-principle resistance to change. Despite this, Hargreaves believes that "in much of the writing on teachers' and teachers' work, teachers' voices have either been curiously absent, or been used as mere echoes for preferred and presumed theories of educational researchers" (1996, p. 4). This study highlights teachers' insights into their experience of a contested syllabus innovation, analysing their reflections on the interactions between the theoretical bases of that innovation and their own epistemological outlooks or worldviews. It also listens to teachers' voices about how a contested syllabus innovation may present such a profound challenge to existing pedagogical practices that it constitutes a threat to their subject conceptualisations and even to their professional identities as teachers of that subject.

Listening to the voices of teachers provides curriculum planners and educational leaders with feedback needed for understanding the gaps between the intents behind a syllabus innovation and the impacts the innovation has on teachers and learners. Indeed, rather than dismissing teachers who resist an educational innovation, it is more productive to empathetically explore teachers' reasons for resisting the innovation. As Hargreaves and Fullan argue, when teachers show caution about accepting changes, this is

> often a rational response to bad changes or bad experiences with change ...
> Resisters may be right. They have "good sense" in seeing through the change as
> faddish, misdirected, ideological or unworkable. At the very least their

perspective on change will be different and divergent from yours. Quell

resistance and you remove the opportunities to learn. (2012, p. 120)

This study listens to what teachers have to tell us about their experience of a

particular syllabus innovation, in a context of ongoing professional and public

contestation. It aims to illuminate how teachers' curriculum practices can be affected

by such contested innovations, and to consider the possible reasons for teachers'

divergent responses. This study recognises that "The disjunctures between the

assumptions embedded in mandated reform and teachers' realities can marginalize

teachers" (Bailey, 2000, p. 116), but that listening to the voices of teachers with

divergent views of the innovation may help curriculum designers better understand how

teachers' curriculum processes are affected by their epistemological and pedagogical

beliefs, and by their experience of everyday classroom realities. The history of

unsuccessful educational innovations demonstrates the need for further insight into both

the impact of curriculum innovation on teachers' working lives and the role of personal

epistemology and pedagogy in syllabus interpretation.

Context of NSW English Syllabus

The NSW English Stage 6 Syllabus (1999) was designed for students in Years

11 and 12, the final two years of secondary schooling in Australia, and leads to the

award of the NSW Higher School Certificate (HSC). It was implemented for Year 11 in

2000 and first examined for Year 12 in 2001. The subjects offered are English

Advanced, English Standard, Fundamentals of English, and English as a Second

Language. Every Year 11 and 12 student in NSW must study one of these courses.

This study focuses on Year 12 English Standard and English Advanced. These courses

share a core of common content, but each has different elective modules, of which three

are selected. Advanced students have the opportunity to study one or both of the

following in addition: the Extension 1 course and the Extension 2 individual project.

To give an idea of the spread of English candidates across the courses under discussion,

of the total 2012 cohort of 68,611 students enrolled in a NSW HSC English course, the

proportions of students in these courses were as follows:

- English Standard: 47%

- English Advanced: 40%

- Extension 1: 7.8%

- Extension 2: 3.2%. (Board of Studies, 2012, p.1)

Public controversy

The commencement of the "new" Syllabus met with considerable controversy in

the educational sector and the wider community:

Public debate and opposing views about the substance and direction of the new

courses reflected an equally robust debate within the ranks of the English

teaching profession itself. (Manuel & Brock, 2003, p. 23)

The debate centred on perceptions of a shift away from literature study in the

cultural heritage tradition exemplified by Matthew Arnold and F. R. Leavis, towards

critical literacy approaches to "texts" very broadly defined to cover all forms of

communication including popular culture, and approaches derived from a diverse range

of literary theories (Manuel & Brock, 2003; McGraw, 2005). In evaluating the new

English Syllabus (1999) Manuel and Brock observed that, notwithstanding students

being encouraged to analyse texts critically in order to come to their own value

judgements,

(albeit, arguably still through the influence of external critiques and views of the

work forming part of this response)—the influence of post-modern theory is

clearly discernible among a range of other theoretical positions. (2003, p. 24)

Postmodernist views of the fluid and contestable nature of value and the unstable

nature of meaning produced strongly divergent reactions. From one perspective this

opened up "the universe of discourse" with all its possibilities (Moffett, 1983). From

another perspective it posed a challenge to the authority of the author, which implied a

challenge to the authority of the teacher. In both cases, engaging in the hermeneutics of

suspicion meant taking nothing for granted and questioning everything. These

divergent reactions are described vividly by Manuel and Brock:

> Absolutism and definitive readings are replaced with hesitancy and an
>
> exploratory stance, which for some teachers and students marks a welcome
>
> expansion, but for others is tantamount to being set adrift in a murky sea of
>
> relativism with only one oar. (2003, p. 24)

This striking contrast in reactions is highlighted also by McGraw's (2005) work

on how newspapers reported the contestation about the "significant paradigm shift" (p.

27) in the new English Syllabus. While recognising that media representations may or

may not be representative of the views of the community at large, McGraw (2005,

2011) raises the vexed question of whether the democratic freedom of dispute and

contestation leaves room for differential weighting of expert and non-expert views. She

acknowledges that the newspaper coverage offered evidence of continued contestation

"between cultural heritage perspectives on what ought to constitute the study of English,

and the renewed focus in this HSC syllabus on critical literacy and the broader study of

texts" (p. 34), and suggests that the way postmodernism was depicted in the media debate may have underscored "professional concerns that the theoretical foundations of the syllabus are not always fully synthesized into professional practice" (p. 33).

Uncertainty about whether an effective synthesis of the Syllabus documents' theoretical foundations was being achieved can be seen in HSC English examiners' observations about student treatments of literary theory. These noted students' superficial use of critical readings derived from literary theories:

> less successful candidates relied upon a narrow focus on critical readings which prevented them from engaging with their text and the question. There was evident merit in evaluating critical readings in a discerning manner, responding to the set text and to these readings from a personal perspective. Many of the weaker responses relied upon or provided a list of critical views and/or theories where the candidates had not engaged personally in an evaluation of these responses. (NSW Board of Studies, 2003, p. 18; repeated verbatim, 2004, p. 26)

Professional concerns about synthesis of theoretical foundations could also arise from teachers' differing levels of adjustment to contested concepts from literary and critical theory. Manuel and Brock's survey of English teachers' responses to the Syllabus reveals a great diversity of teacher attitudes to the changes it brought. It notes that many English teachers confronting it

> found themselves ill-equipped—practically, theoretically, and philosophically— to implement English courses that demanded of them a radically different set of assumptions about the teacher, the student, the text, the act of reading, and the "art" of responding to and, now, composing literature (2003, p. 23).

This suggests the task of Syllabus implementation brought cognitive, philosophical and pedagogical challenges for teachers of English.

Syllabus Comprehensibility and Conceptual Clarity

Comprehensibility of syllabus documents is a key factor in teachers finding a syllabus *workable*. Official documents which are very hard to comprehend are, by definition, hard to act upon. It could be argued that comprehension precedes interpretation, and so incomprehensibility will impede it. Teachers officially raised concerns about the comprehensibility of the Syllabus as early as 1997 as part of the draft syllabus consultation process, as the following review submission indicates:

> My major objection to the draft Syllabus is its lack of precision in many places. The effect of this is that it is difficult for a reader to grasp exactly what is being proposed and I believe that it would also be difficult for a teacher to know what was required to be implemented. (Board of Studies, 1997, p. 27)

The pervasiveness of research respondents' complaints that Syllabus expectations were unclear indicates that this problem was not resolved by means of the draft syllabus consultation and review process. More than half of the participants in this research study made observations about the difficulty of knowing what was meant by the language used in the Syllabus document.

In addition to concerns about linguistic comprehensibility, teachers made complaints that the theoretical bases of the Syllabus were not clearly outlined in the document. This was raised in the draft consultation stage; it was still a concern expressed during Phases One and Two of this research. The NSW Board of Studies noted that

Concerns were also expressed in the consultation material that while the draft syllabus refers in the *Rationale* to "the study of English as it is today", the syllabus does not appear to acknowledge overtly or explicitly how developments in critical and literary theory, cultural studies and communications theory and pedagogy, as mentioned in the *Rationale*, have formed the underpinnings of its components" (1997, p. 44).

Here the statutory body overseeing curriculum development is recognising teacher uncertainty about *how* the theoretical bases of the Syllabus mentioned in the Rationale underpin the Syllabus as a whole. The word "how" captures a key challenge for English teachers concerning literary theories. Teacher knowledge of theories will not in itself fill the gap being signalled here. Instead the Syllabus consultation report (1997) notes that teachers were asking *how* these theories might shape the slant or direction of the Syllabus. Different answers to this question lead logically to diverse classroom practices. The Rationale seemed to set teachers on a course of reading the Syllabus through literary-theoretical lenses, looking for the issues of importance in particular literary theories, detecting key literary-theoretical terminology, and noting the "gaps and silences" in the Syllabus document. The statements in the Rationale about the Syllabus taking account of influential literary and cultural theories were reinforced by the focus on literary theories in the recommended professional readings and in the professional development provided at the English Forum of 1998.

A key factor influencing the way teachers read the Syllabus (1999) as calling for a shift to practice emphasising literary theories was curriculum designers structuring the subject around *Areas of Study*, in which a *concept* guided all facets of interpretation. This signalled a shift to Cultural Studies practice. This was recognised by teachers as

calling for a change of mindset, as it moved away from studying the text for the text's

sake. Texts were now to be studied for their links to the focus concept: Shakespeare's

The Tempest was to be studied for its presentation of *Imaginative Journeys*, and *Twelfth*

Night for *Gendered Language*, while Jane Austen's *Emma* was to be studied along with

Heckerling's film *Clueless* in an elective entitled *Transformations* within a module

focusing on *Comparative Study of Texts and Contexts*. Respondents pointed out that

this led to a funnelling of ideas which could narrow students' experience of the richness

of a text. As O'Sullivan (2005) observes and the teachers in this study reiterated,

pairing the poetry of Bruce Dawe with the focus concept *Consumerism* led to

widespread teacher complaint about the guiding concepts limiting the potential of texts.

As teachers began to implement the new Syllabus (1999) they needed to teach in line

with these focus concepts, and justify the new course structure to students. The *Area of*

Study form of structuring HSC English was one *explicit* sign to teachers of the shift in

theoretical basis which the new Syllabus represented.

The Report on the Draft Syllabus Consultation (Board of Studies, 1997) also

commented on teachers' concerns about the pedagogical implications of the shortage of

overt or explicit explanation of how the theoretical bases of the Syllabus were to be

understood. This line of criticism asserted that "the draft syllabus does not explicitly

identify which theories of language and literature are driving the syllabus, where these

paradigms are to be found in the content of the syllabus, or how these paradigms are

related to the teaching practices outlined in the work units of the core and electives"

(Board of Studies, 1997, p. 44); this concern about the lack of conceptual clarity in the

Syllabus, and the consequent difficulty for teachers trying to infer its expectations,

continued from the Syllabus review in 1998 at least until 2007 when *Module B: Critical*

Study Support Document (Board of Studies, 2007, hereinafter called "Clarification") made it clear that students were not required to use named literary theories.

This study explores how teachers worked out the implications of the Syllabus for classroom practice, particularly in light of the Rationale's concessions to literary and cultural theories. It covers the period before and after the Clarification, and considers how teachers worked through the contested question of what they were meant to be doing with conflicting literary theories.

Curriculum as a Site of Contestation

Definitions of contestation, curriculum, and literary theories are provided here, before the context is outlined for the development of literary theories. This is followed by a description of the English subject context, and the context of the Syllabus.

A site of contestation is a situation marked by ongoing disputation and controversy that resists resolution. Contestation has been used in political theory since the 1970s to describe one of the key dimensions of real-life democracy, namely individuals having freedom to formulate and communicate their preferences and have these preferences taken seriously by people and institutions with the authority to make decisions which affect them (Dahl, 1971).

Studies suggest that each of the following can be seen as sites of contestation:

- curriculum as a whole (Ball, 1982; Kennedy, 2005);

- English as a subject (Goodwyn, 2003; Marshall, 2000);

- literary theories themselves (Bonnycastle, 2002; Cuddon, 1998; Leitch et al., 2001); and

- this particular English Syllabus (O'Sullivan, 2005; Freesmith, 2006; Manuel & Brock, 2002).

Unresolvable contestation in the curriculum field may arise from the fact that it is embedded in human experience, for, as Giddens (1979) has noted, "The chronic contestation or disputation of concepts and theories in the social sciences is in some part due to the fact that these concepts and theories are caught up in what they are about, namely social life itself" (p. 89). Tension is created for teachers by curriculum being a site of contestation, or even a battleground, which is fundamentally influenced by its context. Kennedy observes that both within and outside schools there are groups with competing aims for curriculum:

> Progressivists want to retain the child-centred focus, neoconservatives would be happy to see the return of Latin and Greek, Reconstructionists want to ensure social reformation remains a goal of the curriculum and academic rationalists want to ensure that the academic disciplines have their role in the school curriculum. (2005, p. 2)

Writing from experience in international contexts, Kennedy warns that "the school curriculum will always be enmeshed in complexity and variation constructed by local circumstances and values and constantly defying simple interpretations" (p. 6). He adds that curriculum actors "will always seek to construct the curriculum in ways that complement their own values and priorities. This means that variation and complexity will always characterise the curriculum and should be part of our natural expectations about the curriculum" (p. 13). This research project examines the processes teachers use to interpret and enact a new Syllabus in a contested curriculum field in a way that is congruent with their values, priorities and educational beliefs, and with the perceived learning needs of the students they are teaching at the time.

While noting that every definition of curriculum "makes assumptions about the nature of reality, truth and knowledge, and also *conveys* views of reality, truth and knowledge in its practice" (Lovat & Smith, 1990, p. 7), for the purposes of this study curriculum is defined as a multi-dimensional process of educational planning and activity, undertaken by many participants and influenced by many variables as it proceeds through a number of dimensions. The dimensions of curriculum include the *written curriculum*, *teachers' intended curriculum*, the *enacted curriculum, students' experienced curriculum*, and the *assessed curriculum*. These dimensions are marked by complex interactions which can include contestation between curriculum dimensions, and between curriculum processes and teachers' knowledge, beliefs and experience. Teachers need to navigate a workable route among the multiple and sometimes competing demands of curriculum in all its dimensions. The phases of curriculum are briefly defined here, and described in more detail in Chapter 2.

The *written curriculum* is a plan for learning which includes goals or objectives, learning activities which may be sequenced or structured, and ways of evaluating the learning which occurs (Lovat & Smith, 1990).

Each teacher produces an *intended curriculum,* a draft outline of the scope and sequence of proposed learning activities which reflects their own interpretation of the mandated written curriculum. Teachers' intended curriculum is a plan for action, rather than the classroom action itself.

The *enacted curriculum* is all of the learning activities engaged by teachers and students as a syllabus is implemented. There is thus a distinction between a proposed plan and the transformation of that plan in the interpersonal realities of particular classrooms under the guidance of individual teachers who are responding to the learning needs of their students.

The *experienced curriculum* comprises what students learn and retain from what is taught. It will differ for individual students in the same class, taking part in the same learning experiences but gaining differing skills, knowledge or concepts.

The *assessed curriculum* is defined as the content, knowledge and skills on which students are assessed, evaluated or measured. This definition leaves room for recognition of the washback effect, by which assessment characteristics can have a cumulative effect on what teachers prioritise in the classroom, and also on how each teacher's intended syllabus is modified over time (Cheng, 1999; Pan, 2009).

This study primarily explores the Syllabus as an instance of *written curriculum*, a document whose purpose was to codify what the statutory authority, the NSW Board of Studies, intended to be implemented by teachers, and assessed by both teachers and external markers. The ongoing contestation surrounding how this Syllabus should be interpreted, enacted and assessed makes this subject one that may offer insights about curriculum development, teachers and curriculum change, teacher morale and self-efficacy beliefs, subject conceptions and teacher professional identity. To understand the disputation around this Syllabus, it is necessary to consider the contestation of literary theories with which it is connected (Manuel & Brock, 2003).

The Contestation of Literary Theories

A literary theory is a hypothesis about how textual meanings are constructed and shared by writers/composers and readers/responders (Cuddon, 1999). Literary theories offer different epistemological conjectures about the sources and stability of meanings (Bonnycastle, 2002). These theories may consider the role of such factors as power, race, culture, gender and politics in textual meaning (Butler, Guillory, & Thomas, 2000; Eagleton, 1994). They may also explore the effects of what texts do not mention

(Leitch et al., 2001). Literary theories can reflect many different assumptions about

truth, and about the purposes and possibilities of communication (Culler, 2000).

The last four decades have seen a very large number of literary theories jostling

for prominence, with none of them winning an uncontested place, or settling into a

stable form. This leaves teachers of senior English in a complex situation, uncertain

whether to teach many, several or no literary theories, to all, many or a few students,

whether to structure lessons around these theories or mention them in passing, or simply

respond to student questions on the subject as they arise. Chapter 3 provides a detailed

description of the way literary theories have been shaped through contestation. This

provides some historical context for the more recent literary-theoretical contestations

which may be having an impact on how senior English teachers approach interpretation

and implementation of the Syllabus.

The English Subject Context

The subject named English began in England more than a century ago in a

climate of controversy and challenge (Dixon, 1991; Peim, 2004; Sawyer, Watson, &

Gold, 1998). It was initiated in NSW schools in 1911 and at that time was structured

into two components, Literature and Language (O'Sullivan, 2005). In the United

Kingdom and in Australia, proponents of the new area of formal study, at both

secondary and tertiary levels, faced stiff opposition from classicists, historians and

philologists, and the ramifications of those essentially unresolved debates reverberate

today (Green & Beavis, 1996; Marshall, 2000; McGraw, 2010; Sawyer et al., 1998). As

Kermode describes it, English as a subject of study

> is unable to explain itself in ways immediately intelligible to the outsider, is
>
> notoriously riven with doubts and disagreements that prevent it from having a

shared sense of purpose, and may at intervals erupt into crises that attract the

wrong sort of publicity. (1986, p. 172)

In the last thirty years, continuing controversy about the nature and purposes of

English as a school subject appears to have variously affected views and practices

among teachers, curriculum developers, academics from the disciplines of English,

education and philosophy, school and university students, literary practitioners and the

community at large (Butler et al., 2000; Eagleton, 1994; Leitch et al., 2001; Manuel &

Brock, 2003; McGraw, 2005). Connections have been noted between contested literary

theories and disputes in English as a subject (Patai & Corral, 2005; Peim, 2004; Sawyer

et al., 1998). Some educational scholars credit particular literary theories with effecting

major curriculum change: Misson (1998) claims, for example, that "poststructuralism

has created a revolution in our way of thinking, and is somewhere behind most of the

major innovations and new insights we find occurring in English teaching today" (p.

152).

New challenges to any settled sense of the key purpose and significance of

English as a university discipline, and as a school subject, arose with the proliferation of

literary theories since the late 1960s (Green & Beavis, 1996; Marshall, 2000; Peim,

2004; Watson, 1981). The various theories and related curriculum changes received

attention from groups of scholars and educators who opposed each other's views with

adversarial rhetoric, often without stating their own underlying philosophical and

educational assumptions (Kitching, 2008). Many literary theories are incompatible with

each other in both epistemological presuppositions and educational practices. A

number contain apparently unresolvable internal contradictions, and some claim to

demolish or render unusable some or most prior theories and their related classroom

practices (Eagleton, 1983; Kitching, 2008). This has led to considerable discussion of the so-called "theory wars" and their connection in the field of education with what has been termed "the crisis in English" (Cuddon, 1998; Leitch et al., 2001; Patai & Corrall, 2005).

As literary theories are often philosophically irreconcilable, they lead in very different directions; their different aims result in different classroom practices. As Ball notes, English as a school subject has been and still is

> a contested area of curriculum knowledge involving endless disputes about its proper definition. At any one time, one of the competing definitions may appear to be predominant but the disputation is never satisfactorily resolved for all concerned. (1985, p. 78)

This unresolved disputation leaves senior English teachers with no consensus on whether or how to teach students about literary theories, or to what extent, or whether or how students are expected to demonstrate facility in applying these theories to texts in the context of high-stakes examinations, particularly for students expecting marks in the highest bands.

Given all of these interlocking areas of contestation—curriculum, literary theories, English as a subject, and the Syllabus—how do teachers navigate their way to interpret mandated syllabus documents in ways that fulfil their goals for student learning? As these contexts were explored in interviews with teachers, in person, by phone and through an online questionnaire, the following research question emerged:

How do teachers respond to difficulties in enacting a contested innovation in a new English senior syllabus?

Approach to the Study

This research used a qualitative framework to explore how teachers respond to difficulties in enacting a contested innovation in a new English senior syllabus. Data was collected in teachers' own words to provide a thick description of teachers' individual experiences of the syllabus innovation. The participants were 50 teachers currently teaching the final two years of secondary school English at government and non-government schools in both metropolitan and non-metropolitan centres in New South Wales; they comprised 26 Heads of Faculty and 24 teachers of English. The data-gathering techniques were semi-structured interviews and an on-line survey. Phase 1 interviews were conducted with five volunteers from independent schools in the researcher's geographical locality. The 25 Phase 2 on-line survey participants were obtained through approaches to half of the secondary schools in New South Wales, with Heads of Faculty nominating participants. Phase 3 interviews were conducted by telephone or email with 20 self-selected participants from a wide range of regions in New South Wales.

Organisation of this thesis

This chapter has sketched the context for the study, and the key concerns it explores. The literature review in Chapter 2 outlines the dimensions of curriculum, and their interaction in practice. It is suggested that teachers' epistemological and pedagogical beliefs and knowledge have a pervasive influence on how they implement mandated written curriculum. This literature review deals with divergence among teachers' possible responses to curriculum change, and explores how highly contested curriculum changes affect the working lives of teachers as they seek to gauge and fulfil their professional responsibilities.

Chapter 3 provides a review of the literature on the emergence of diverse literary theories from the eighteenth century to the present, to provide the necessary literary-theoretical context for the study. Derivation and characteristics of literary theories are sketched from the relevant literature. Links and disjunctions are identified between those literary theories that have been prominent in recent decades. Some implications of these theories for senior English teaching are also outlined from curriculum literature related to the subject of English in senior secondary school.

Chapter 4 describes the research methods used in structuring the study, selecting participants, and developing the research instruments. It also outlines the strategies used for gathering, managing and analysing the data.

Chapter 5 reports the findings of the research project. Consideration is given in that chapter to how teachers' epistemological and pedagogical beliefs and knowledge affect their responses to innovations in the mandated curriculum, as played out in the intended, enacted, experienced and assessed curricula. Four categories of teacher response to the teaching of literary theories are used to provide a narrative framework for the results and discussion. Through extensive use of teacher self-reports, Chapter 5 illustrates how teachers seek to make curriculum decisions that are in line with their own worldviews, and congruent with their pedagogical practices. It is argued from the data that teachers evaluate the potential benefits and disadvantages of a new mandated curriculum through the lens of their existing beliefs about knowing, their teaching subject, student learning, and their own past experience of teaching and learning.

Chapter 6 examines the implications of the findings for understanding teachers' curriculum processes in situations of contested curriculum change, and provides recommendations for further research.

The appendices supplied include copies of research correspondence, questions used for the online-survey and interviews, and the fully referenced version of the glossary of literary theories. The on-line version of the survey can be accessed at http://borrodale.homedns.org/~irish/index.htm

Chapter 2

Literature Review: Curriculum

A curriculum reflects not only the nature of knowledge itself but also the nature

of the knower and the knowledge-getting process. (Bruner, 1966, p. 72)

Introduction: Defining Curriculum

Definitions of curriculum range from the relatively prescriptive – an agreed

body of knowledge and strategies for delivering it (Block, 1998) – to the school-centred

definition of Oliva (1997) as a "program for all the experiences that the learner

encounters under the direction of the school" (p. 4). The word *curriculum* is diversely

used in both education and in wider communities. It can mean centrally produced

specifications of what is to be taught in all schools in a particular jurisdiction, or

teacher-generated planning and delivery of courses of study, or the overall provision of

learning in schools, intended and unintended. A curriculum can be a plan for learning

which students undertake with the guidance of a school, as has been noted by Oliva

(1997) and Tanner and Tanner (1995). Some definitions of curriculum move beyond

the confines of school and schooling, referring to "experiential journeys that shape

perspectives, dispositions, skills, and knowledge by which we live" (Schubert, Lopez

Schubert, Thomas & Carroll, 2002, pp. 525–526). As Lovat and Smith (1990, p. 7)

point out, every definition of curriculum "makes assumptions about the nature of

reality, truth and knowledge, and also conveys views of reality, truth and knowledge in

its practice."

For the purposes of this study, curriculum is defined as a multi-dimensional

process of educational planning and activity, undertaken by many participants and

influenced by many variables as it proceeds through a number of dimensions. One of

the key roles of teachers is to navigate a workable route among the multiple and

sometimes competing demands of curriculum. Figure 1 below shows the dimensions of

curriculum, and how they interact with each other. It is a visual representation of the

variables that influence the enacted curriculum, and provides a conceptual framework

that may also be applicable to other subjects. The figure shows how the various

dimensions of curriculum implementation interact with each other in ways that affect

both teaching and learning. It also clarifies terms used in this study for aspects of the

curriculum implementation process, replacing the diversity of terms used in the relevant

literature. Figure 1 distinguishes the *official* dimensions of curriculum mandated by

educational authorities – curricular goals, written curriculum and assessed curriculum –

from the *operational* dimensions of curriculum played out by teachers and students –

the ways in which curricula are planned, enacted, experienced and learnt. This

distinction between official and operational dimensions of curriculum highlights the

different spheres of agency in which curriculum authorities and classroom teachers are

operating. The distinction is a reminder that teachers may need to deal with tensions

between these dimensions. Arrows signify directions of influence.
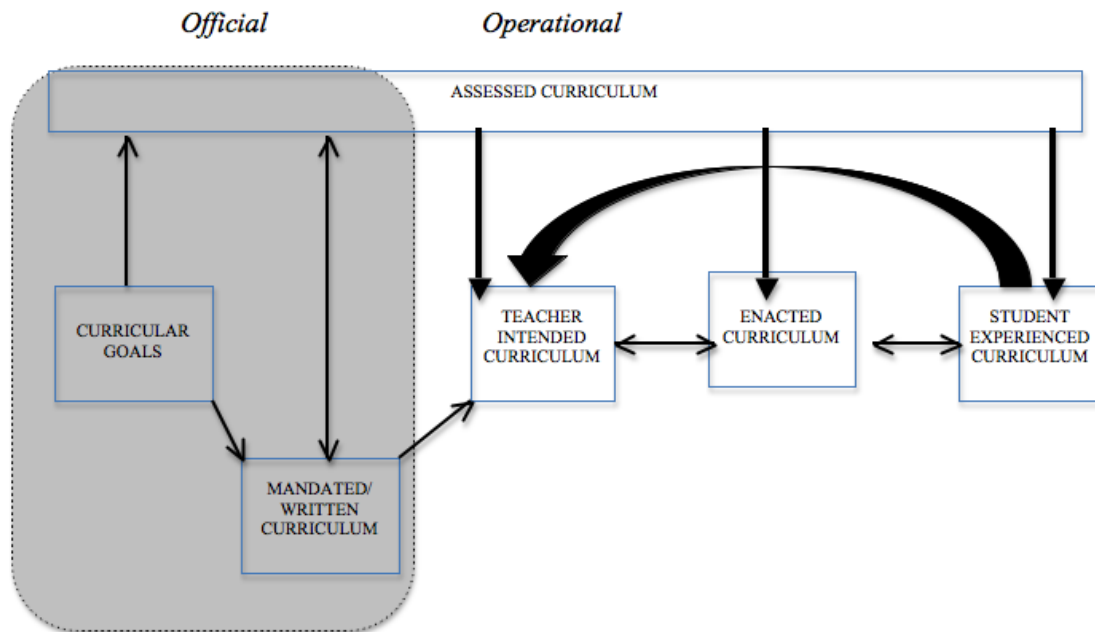
Figure 1. Outline of dimensions of curriculum implementation.

Adapted from Remillard and Heck (2010).

Dimensions of Curriculum

Various factors influence each of the dimensions of curriculum and may set up tensions for teachers. A brief summary follows of how the relevant literature characterises these components of curriculum development and implementation, and how the interaction of curriculum phases with teacher and student variables may lead to a level of contestation that complicates the task of curriculum implementation.

Written (mandated) curriculum.

The *written curriculum* is depicted by Cuban (1992) as the explicit curriculum set for study by regulatory bodies, and by Schubert (2008) as articulated goals for developing students' attitudes and capacities. The official curriculum documents, set texts and other support documents prescribed by statutory authorities are all part of the written curriculum.

Establishing a written curriculum for a region or nation has been noted by Reid (2005) to involve both political and educational contestation and negotiation. Reid's contention is that curriculum development needs to be based on principled answers to questions about what capabilities are needed for participants in a democracy to experience enriched lives; these questions and answers will be approached differently by different stakeholders. This means that, as Luke, Woods and Weir (2013) point out, "Curriculum settlements are by definition unstable, contingent and volatile" (p. 9). Dinan-Thompson (2003) similarly argues that the development of a written curriculum to apply across Australia involves contestation, negotiation and trade-offs between groups with competing interests, and is likely to result in a mixture of uneasy compromise and circumscribed consensus. Teachers are left to deal with the results as best they can, sometimes amid ongoing debate in the media and in professional associations. Dinan-Thompson, who assigns agency to all of the participants in the curriculum process, sees the teachers' role as the most significant because they contextualise the curriculum in the world of students.

Null curriculum and hidden curriculum.

Two other curriculum types which are frequently mentioned in theory but do not take a central place in this study are the null and the hidden curriculum. The *null curriculum* is described by Eisner (1994) as content, experiences and ideas omitted from or minimised in the curriculum, whether by accident, design, or the pressures of the crowded curriculum. Examples are explanations of religious ideas or practices, practice of traditional handcrafts, introduction to philosophical concepts, learning to drive, opportunities for older students to help younger students learn, and finding out about local oral history. Eisner concludes that these omissions can significantly shape the curriculum that is learned and taught. When curriculum is contested these omissions

may be significant to teachers. Some activities may be omitted from the written

curriculum but made available to interested students in clubs or co-curricular activities,

such as equestrian sports or learning a musical instrument.

Dewey (1935) uses the term *collateral learning* to signify that which is learnt

between the lines rather than overtly taught. The now more common term *hidden*

curriculum arose in Jackson's (1968) *Life in classrooms*, to cover learning which occurs

without seeming to be explicitly taught in class, and which may not be noticed

consciously by either teacher or students. Longstreet and Shane (1993) describe hidden

curriculum as the ideas and values communicated by the organisational structures of

schooling and the attitudes conveyed by teachers, whether intentionally or

unintentionally. Examples include students waiting quietly for their turn to have the

teacher's attention, taking a similar time as others to finish work, changing subjects or

rooms according to the clock or bell, and not going into the staffroom. Hidden

curriculum may include departmental resourcing levels, which convey the impression

that some subjects are more important than others. Similarly, some types of

achievement (such as sporting success) may receive more public commendation in a

school than achievements in academic subjects, cultural expression, extracurricular

projects or community service.

Intended curriculum.

The *intended curriculum* consists of the plans teachers make about how they will

translate the written curriculum into learning experiences. These plans are both mental

and documented. Marzano (2003) argues that it is important to distinguish between

written curriculum mandates and the intended curriculum each teacher produces. The

purposes of these are seen by Marzano to be distinct: the written curriculum's purpose

is to lead and direct teachers, while the intended curriculum helps teachers make

meanings from the written curriculum which are closely linked with their images and experiences from classroom practice. Eichler (2010) argues that giving due weight to the distinction between the externally produced *written curriculum* and the teacher's internal plan of their *intended curriculum* accurately reflects the pivotal role of teachers as mediators, translators and transformers of the written curriculum.

Because of time pressures, a large part of teachers' planning of an intended curriculum consists of selection, and judgement regarding what will and will not be included in their enacted curriculum, as Smith and Lovat (1990) point out. This professional decision-making is based on the individual's worldview, a complex interweaving of assumptions, conscious beliefs, habits and values (Oliva, 1997). Cuban (1992) argues that teachers' intended curriculum will inevitably differ from the written curriculum in many ways because their beliefs, values and experience lead them to modify or transform both content and pedagogy. Cuban does not judge this as a failing on the part of teachers, but rather as an inevitable result of individuals' diverse beliefs, priorities and interests.

Enacted curriculum.

The *enacted curriculum* is that which teachers use in daily classroom practice. It may differ from the mandated curriculum for a range of reasons, as Kubitskey and Fishman (2006) note. One reason for discrepancies between written curriculum and enacted curriculum is that teachers have the task of making written curriculum goals into lesson plans, which they then translate into dynamic learning experiences, responding minute by minute to the needs and understandings of their students. Eisner (2005) describes this as a complex and dynamic art involving considerable improvisation as a lesson unfolds, needing a fine balance of established habits and inventiveness in the face of the unpredictable.

Schubert (2008) indicates that teachers' diverse beliefs and assumptions are a major cause of disparities between the written curriculum and the enacted curriculum. He links these disparities with varied conceptions of a teaching subject, the unique circumstances of each community, and practical issues such as the availability of resources. He also observes the tendency for written curricula to be streamlined for ease of use in teachers' practical contexts, rather than used in their original, often more complex forms.

Experienced curriculum.

The *experienced curriculum* comprises the content and concepts that individual students grasp from what is taught. Cuban (1992) argues that there is a significant gap between the enacted curriculum and the learned or experienced curriculum. This may be a result of students' developmental stages, mother tongue, state of health, levels of concentration and responses to distractions in the environment, and of the availability of previous learning that connects with the new concepts (Glatthorn, 1999). It can also be a result of the pedagogical strategies and activities a teacher uses to convey content and concepts, which may suit some students' learning styles more than others'.

The experienced curriculum is shaped by the ways that teachers engage both their personal and professional identities when mediating curriculum to students. A close congruence between the taught and the experienced curriculum depends on what Shulman terms teachers' "practical pedagogical knowledge" (1987, p. 5): the knowledge of how to teach something in ways that facilitate learning. Teachers' "professional knowledge landscapes" are described by Clandinin and Connelly (1996) as "complex, narrative, historical, interwoven and constantly changing" (p. 30), made up of many layers of meaning which encompass professional, personal, educational and environmental elements. As the work of Ben-Peretz (1990) points out, what students

learn depends on what teachers do and how they do it, based on their knowledge of how classrooms work and how particular students engage with lessons of various types: by definition teachers "know their learners, classrooms and school milieu in a way that central curriculum developers can never know" (p. 11). This means that while teachers cannot determine what students take away from the experienced curriculum, they are in a position to shape what is likely to be learnt, through their enacted curriculum.

Assessed curriculum.

The *assessed curriculum* signifies the various means used to measure student attainment and performance. It takes two main forms: school-based and external assessment.

School-based assessment.

School based assessment is generally developed by teachers to fulfil one or more functions. Diagnostic assessment is used to identify deficits in student knowledge or skills. Formative assessment is used to support the design of further learning. Summative assessment is intended to measure a student's overall learning and achievement during a teaching cycle (Boud & Falchikov, 2006; William & Black, 1996). Over time, these forms of school-based assessment shape the operational dimensions of curriculum, as more effective assessment practices are consolidated and less effective ones changed. This is another way that teachers work towards congruence between the components of curriculum (Barnes, Clarke & Stephens, 2000).

External assessment.

Formal external assessments such as examinations (which may include performances and bodies of work) provide a summative assessment vehicle that embodies an interpretation of the requirements of the written curriculum. Luke (2011) suggests that the authority of high-stakes external assessments can over-ride the

authority of a written curriculum, because results are publicised and used to compare performances of individuals and schools. On the other hand, it is possible for patterns in external assessment results to provide feedback to the relevant authorities on how a syllabus works in practice. Such feedback has the potential to contribute towards change. At a school level, external assessments provide feedback which may influence the operational phases of curriculum, illustrating the complex interactions between the various dimensions of curriculum, whether official or operational.

Another type of external, standardised assessment is large-scale regional or international testing which is not linked to a specific curriculum. This is intended to provide a snapshot of student knowledge and skills, used for purposes of regional comparison. A significant lapse of time between testing and receiving results tends to minimise the diagnostic value of such testing, as feedback to teachers' intended and enacted curricula generally needs to be timely, although they can influence future iterations of mandated curriculum and can also influence teachers' intended and enacted curricula. This is because students' achievements in standardised tests affect the reputations of education authorities, schools, and teachers, as results and comparisons are published and much discussed (Luke, 2011).

Gipps (1994) points out the potential for the assessed curriculum to distort the enacted and experienced curricula, and the need to ensure that the types of assessment chosen facilitate the learning they purport to measure if they are to provide useful insight into students' learning. Pellegrino argues that the assessed curriculum can work against achievement, and generally does not reflect recent research on developing competence and adapting expertise to fit new contexts; instead, teachers come "under pressure to prepare students for high-stakes accountability tests … [and] often feel compelled to move back and forth between instruction and assessment" (2006, p. 2),

which leads to narrowing of curriculum and learning opportunities to fit the testing

regime. Luke (2011) notes that such high-stakes testing has a tendency to distort the

enacted and experienced curriculum over time, as the contents of past examinations and

sample answers lead teachers and students to focus on what has been highly rewarded

by markers in recent years. This has been termed *the washback effect* (Cheng, 1999;

Pan, 2009). As the different forms of curriculum interact with one another in complex

and sometimes unpredictable ways, this interaction affects the nature of teachers' work

in planning the intended curriculum, enacting it flexibly, and evaluating how effectively

it contributes to student learning.

The Implementation of Curriculum

The dimensions of curriculum implementation undergo changes as they interact.

The written curriculum is modified when teachers plan their intended curricula. This is

in turn transformed into enacted curriculum in the unpredictable dynamics of the

classroom. The experienced curriculum – what students learn and retain – differs for

each student. The assessed curriculum has the potential to influence all of these

curriculum dimensions.

Seeking curriculum congruence: teachers as interpreters of curriculum.

The search for congruence between the various components of curriculum can

be a major part of teachers' professional responsibilities. It involves interpreting the

written curriculum and related assessment requirements. Each teacher's interpretation

is strongly influenced by their knowledge and beliefs, subject conceptions, and

experience of teaching contexts, which in turn shape their intended and enacted

curricula, as Pajares (1992) demonstrates. Marzano (2003) describes teachers as

producing their own meaning out of the official dimensions of curriculum as they

transform it into classroom strategies and practices. Marzano acknowledges that there

can be friction and dissonance between written curriculum and the ways teachers perceive they need to plan their intended curriculum and perform their enacted curriculum, in response to their students' needs and interests. The key purpose of teachers' curriculum interpretation is to achieve a level of congruence that will make available to students what Ben-Peretz (1990) terms the *curriculum potential* within a syllabus document.

Researchers who work from the assumption that teachers interpret the written curriculum are described by Remillard (2005) as interpretivist, in that they use reader-response literary theory to characterise teachers and students as the meaning-makers in the curriculum process. This assumption is influenced by a key tenet of reader-response theory, which assigns more authority to the reader (or teacher in this case) than to the author/s of a text on the grounds that the meaning of a text is essentially produced by the reader interacting with it, rather than through the (unfathomable) intent of the author/s (Culler, 2000).

Ben-Peretz (1990) argues that every teacher has the task of interpreting the written curriculum. This interpretation occurs before and during the development of the teacher's intended curriculum. Re-interpretation is a necessary element of the teaching/learning cycle, occurring both as teachers enact curriculum and as they consider whether students' experienced curriculum is congruent with the assessed curriculum. Teachers also interpret the assessed curriculum, distilling what they perceive to be its key and subsidiary goals, and working out whether and how the other components of curriculum are congruent with it. Interpretation of the students' experienced curriculum also takes place, and individual teachers will interpret this differently, depending on their own and their students' capacities, knowledge and experience. When teachers evaluate the full cycle of curriculum after a teaching

sequence (unit/course/year), they may re-interpret the written curriculum and the assessed curriculum in planning for future enactments of the material.

The content of examinations and reports from external marking centres may also influence how teachers of senior school subjects interpret the written and assessed curricula over time, and has the potential to bring about changes in them, or in how the mandating authorities advise teachers to interpret and use them (Ben-Peretz, 1990). In all of these instances, interpretation may be undertaken both individually, and corporately in faculty groups or wider networks. Among the networks which Remillard (2005) sees as influencing how individual teachers, faculty groups and mandating authorities interpret and re-interpret written and assessed curricula are professional bodies such as subject associations, which may promulgate policies, position statements, and samples of work reflecting particular interpretations.

Interpreting assessment requirements.

Interpreting and appraising assessment requirements – and their implications for curriculum planning and enactment – fall within the professional responsibilities of teachers. In Figures 1 and 2, the assessed curriculum is shown to encompass external and teacher-generated assessments that are intended to reflect the content and skills included in the written curriculum.

The assessed curriculum interacts with the written curriculum to influence teachers' plans for the intended curriculum, and consequently affects the enacted and experienced curricula. Luke et al. (2013) underscore the influence of assessment upon other curriculum phases: "No matter how technically excellent, tests and examinations will tend to narrow … curriculum into what is describable within their testing format and technical parameters" (p. 27). An increased emphasis on accountability, Luke and colleagues argue, can unnecessarily limit the space for teachers' professional judgement

about how to achieve good educational outcomes for all students. Conversely, where

teachers are not held accountable for the taught curriculum, there may be uneven

coverage of course materials. English and Steffy (2001) state that deep curriculum

alignment allows all children to learn on an equal playing field by ensuring the material

that is tested is a subset of what has been taught; they also argue that this need not be

experienced by teachers as constraining, as they can allow children to explore areas of

learning beyond the tested material.

Translating mandates into intended curriculum.

As Figure 2 illustrates, teachers are professionally responsible for considering

the implications of the written and assessed curricula, as well as of relevant instructional

materials, when selecting content, concepts, strategies, activities and materials to use.

Teachers' intended curriculum takes both mental and written forms. Their mental

representations of intended curriculum are accessible to researchers through what they

say about their plans and programs. However, mental representations are fluid and

dynamic, and include both conscious and unconscious elements which may not be

evident to the teacher or the researcher in their self-reports. They include plans for

projected activities that will maximise the congruence between the mandated and

experienced curricula, bearing in mind students' prior learning and capacities as well as

their interests and levels of motivation.

The intended curriculum is codified into programs and lesson plans produced by

teachers either individually or in faculty groups. These may be submitted for

administrative approval in advance, or after being used to shape the enacted curriculum

with inclusions and exclusions noted, so that programs accurately represent the content

and approaches actually used. *Post facto* course programs may be seen as

representations of a hybrid intended/enacted curriculum, as teachers will necessarily

make professional judgements in the context of the classroom as learning activities

unfold. Remillard and Heck (2010) offer the analogy of the mandated curriculum as a

play script and the intended curriculum as how the director imagines particular scenes

being played out on stage.

From interpretation and intention to enacted curriculum.

When scholars such as Braun, Maguire and Ball (2010) use the term *enactment,*

they are signalling that they work from the assumption that educational mandates are

not simply implemented, but that various actors in the educational context translate and

interpret them in line with their own beliefs and the circumstances of the learners. In

the diagram of the dimensions of curriculum (Figure 1), the enacted curriculum is

intended to encompass all the ways that teachers and students interact in learning

activities, both individually and cumulatively. To use Remillard's theatrical metaphor,

the enacted curriculum is the play's performance, subject to all the unpredictability of

live theatre (Remillard, 2005). That this is theatre with a large element of improvisation

can be readily grasped when one thinks of the ways in which class discussion can

develop to follow up unexpected ramifications, connections to other areas of

knowledge, teachable moments, or students' difficulty in comprehending concepts.

Edwards (2001) suggests that pedagogical improvisation should be seen as a positive

vehicle for developing students' problem-solving capacities, rather than something that

interrupts the polished delivery of a fixed curriculum "script."

One of the factors that causes intended curriculum to differ from enacted

curriculum is teachers' exercise of professional judgement about what will work on the

day with a specific class. As Hargreaves (2003) notes, teachers make minute-by-minute

adjustments to their intended curriculum because they want the enacted curriculum to

provide the most effective learning environment for each student. To achieve

congruence among curriculum components, teachers have to be willing to alter each imagined lesson to suit the specific context as it unfolds. The tendency for authorities to show insufficient recognition of this facet of teachers' curriculum work, and the mature professional judgement it entails, is noted by Hargreaves (1996, 2002), whose work emphasises how much more teachers do than just implementing a curriculum mandated by others; while Bascia and Hargreaves (2000) argue that teachers should be considered agents who make a valued contribution to the curriculum change process.

Transforming the enacted into the experienced curriculum.

The components of curriculum shown in Figure 1 function cyclically. Through observation and assessment, teachers evaluate the extent and depth of each student's learning, and this is used to inform further curriculum planning, enactment and improvisation. As teachers build on their experience of teaching a particular mandated curriculum to succeeding student cohorts, they sharpen their professional judgement about what helps students learn effectively, both generally and in subject-specific contexts.

Extent of congruence among curriculum dimensions.

Given that curriculum includes several components, and prompts a diversity of teacher actions, it is worth considering how well these features cohere in practice, and where there may be friction or tensions between them. *Instructional program coherence* is the term used by Newmann, Smith, Allensworth and Bryk (2001) to describe the degree of alignment between different components of curriculum. Their research considers how congruence among curriculum goals, curriculum artefacts and classroom practices may contribute to student learning. Instructional program coherence as characterised by Newmann et al. (2001) requires a workplace climate that supports the implementation of the mandated curriculum, and relies on the provision of

adequate resources for its thorough implementation. McLaughlin and Talbert (2010) argue that working towards a good "fit" among curriculum initiatives involves two-way communication between all participants, including curriculum designers, administrators, professional associations, teachers, and examiners.

Teachers' responses to variations in curriculum congruence.

The search for congruence between different components of curriculum can strongly influence how teachers enact curriculum. Remillard's (2005) review of the relevant literature identifies a range of ways teachers may respond to a new written curriculum:

- following it with fidelity;

- drawing on it;

- participating with it; and

- subverting it.

Different scholarly stances towards how teachers generally use written curriculum imply different normative stances regarding how teachers *should* use them. These characterisations are considered briefly here, and linked with comparable stances in other studies where these provide illumination.

Following the written curriculum with fidelity.

When teachers try to enact precisely what they see as the requirements of a mandated curriculum, they are described as *following the curriculum with fidelity* (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Remillard, 2005). Remillard and Bryans' (2004) study of mathematics teachers found that inexperienced teachers reflected the curriculum materials with most fidelity in their classrooms, which may be a result of lack of confidence in their own ability to generate learning activities at that early-career stage.

While a high degree of curriculum congruence is an ideal for which curriculum developers strive, scholars such as Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) suggest it may be utopian and unattainable. Remillard (2005) argues that research which reflects the ideal of teachers following written curriculum with fidelity rests on an assumption that best curriculum practice results from congruence between curriculum writers' intentions as conveyed in syllabus documents, teacher thinking, and teachers' curriculum practice. However, as Snyder, Bolin and Zumwalt (1992) indicate, the fidelity stance gives little recognition to teachers' personal conceptions of pedagogy, of their subject disciplines, or of themselves as teachers. Nor does it take account of teachers' and students' varied beliefs, knowledge and experience. A fidelity stance does not account for conflicts, ambivalences or ambiguities within mandated syllabi, nor between different innovations, whether sequential or concurrent. It might be deduced that a fidelity stance works on an assumption of congruence between the dimensions of curriculum.

Drawing on the written curriculum.

In contrast to ideas of teachers following the written curriculum with strict fidelity, Remillard (2005) points out that the teacher's role is also conceptualised in some studies as *drawing on* the written curriculum. From this stance, the curriculum is understood as a collection of tools among a range of tools used by teachers in their work of designing an intended curriculum to fit their actual students. This is reminiscent of Stenhouse's (1975) definition of teachers' curriculum practice as "a way of translating any educational idea into a hypothesis testable in practice. It invites critical testing rather than acceptance" (p. 142). Stenhouse suggests that a new curriculum should be seen by the teacher not as "an unqualified recommendation but rather as a provisional speculation, claiming no more than to be worth putting to the test of practice," and notes that any curriculum innovation should be weighed up for intelligence rather than

correctness (p. 142). In a similar vein, Sosniak and Stodolsky's (1993) study found that

teachers did not see curriculum texts as *determining* their actions but as "props in the

service of managing larger agendas" (p. 271). Drawing on the written curriculum can

be seen as similar to what Hargreaves (1984) and Marzano (2003) describe as adapting

and adopting a syllabus in order to achieve greater congruence among curriculum

components.

When considering teachers drawing on the written curriculum, it is important to

bear in mind Chavez-Lopez's (2003) observation that teachers can actively use an

innovative curriculum without themselves being fully supportive of its epistemological

claims: this can mean that their classroom practice and attitudes may not change in

ways that fit the *underlying goals* of a new written curriculum, and may lead them to

draw on it in piecemeal or superficial ways (Marzano, 2003).

Participating with the written curriculum.

Another stance in the literature acknowledged by Remillard (2005) involves the

notion of teachers *participating with* the written curriculum. Participating with the

curriculum implies collaboration, reciprocity and possibly equivalence of authority

between external curriculum writers and teachers as designers of their own idiosyncratic

intended curriculum, modified in response to the fluidity of each classroom context to

become the teacher's unique enacted curricula. The main thrust of Remillard's (2005)

work on teachers participating with the curriculum is that teacher practice and written

curriculum materials are engaged in dynamic interaction and collaboration in which

both are transformed. Fullan (2001) uses the term *mutual adaptation* to indicate that

both the written curriculum and the teacher's customary practices are modified in order

to enhance the experienced curriculum for students. Further to this, Sherin and Drake's

(2009) study sheds light on how individual teachers develop characteristic ways of

using the written curriculum, which they enact in each situation of innovation through reading, evaluating and adapting mandated documents. Remillard (2005) argues that researchers who conceive teachers as participating with written curriculum are working from assumptions derived from sociocultural theory, as they focus on studying the two-way relationship between teachers and designated curriculum.

Resisting and subverting the written curriculum.

In situations where fidelity to written curriculum is assumed by policy-makers, Hargreaves (1996) notes that teachers may use considerable ingenuity to resist and subvert the written curriculum. Edwards (2005) argues that subversion is most likely where the curriculum standards are perceived to lack congruence with teachers' professional judgements about student maturation or desired educational outcomes. This highlights the priority teachers place on their contextualised experience in gauging students' learning needs.

Studies by Remillard (2005) and Sarason (1982) make the claim that educational reforms promoted in the 1950s and 1960s in the USA failed primarily because reformers did not recognise "the power of teachers to misinterpret, subvert, or even ignore unfamiliar curricula" (Remillard, 2005, p. 212).

The Search for congruence.

Teachers focus considerable effort on their search for congruence between written, intended, enacted, experienced and assessed curricula, as this is important for both student achievement and teacher professional satisfaction (Madda, Halverson & Gomez, 2007). Lack of congruence among curriculum components may produce tension and stress for teachers trying to determine and fulfil their professional responsibilities.

This study considers how teachers deal with what they perceive to be varying degrees of congruence among curriculum components, and between the official components of curriculum and their own beliefs and pedagogical content knowledge, particularly in situations of significant curriculum change. The complexity of the interactions between the different aspects of curriculum leads to a consideration of how diverse variables may influence its shape.

Variables Influencing Curriculum Implementation

The previous section reviews relevant literature on how curriculum implementation proceeds through different dimensions, and how teachers respond to varying degrees of congruence between these phases. This section shifts our attention to some of the many variables influencing one or more of the dimensions of curriculum implementation. The diagram of dimensions of curriculum implementation (Figure 1) is amplified to show examples of variables which can affect how curriculum is written, intended, enacted, experienced and assessed (Figure 2).

The colours used in Figure 2 emphasise the interactions between variables and curriculum phases. *Official* dimensions of curriculum are shown in blue. This research proposes that teachers' epistemological and pedagogical beliefs and knowledge function as a lens through which curriculum ideas are considered; the oval representing teacher beliefs and knowledge is yellow. As *operational* curriculum is influenced both by mandated curriculum and by teacher beliefs and knowledge, the *intended, enacted* and *experienced* curricula are shown in green (a mix of yellow and blue). The assessed curriculum contains both official elements such as external examinations and operational elements such as formative evaluation within the classroom. To reflect this, Figure 2 depicts the assessed curriculum as blue in the official zone, shifting gradually to green in the operational zone. The yellow oval representing teacher beliefs and

knowledge overlaps an oval representing key student characteristics that affect what and

how they learn. The student variables oval has not been coloured, as this study is

primarily focused on the effects of teacher beliefs and knowledge on curriculum

implementation. The influence of student variables on the unfolding of curriculum is a

rich field for further research.
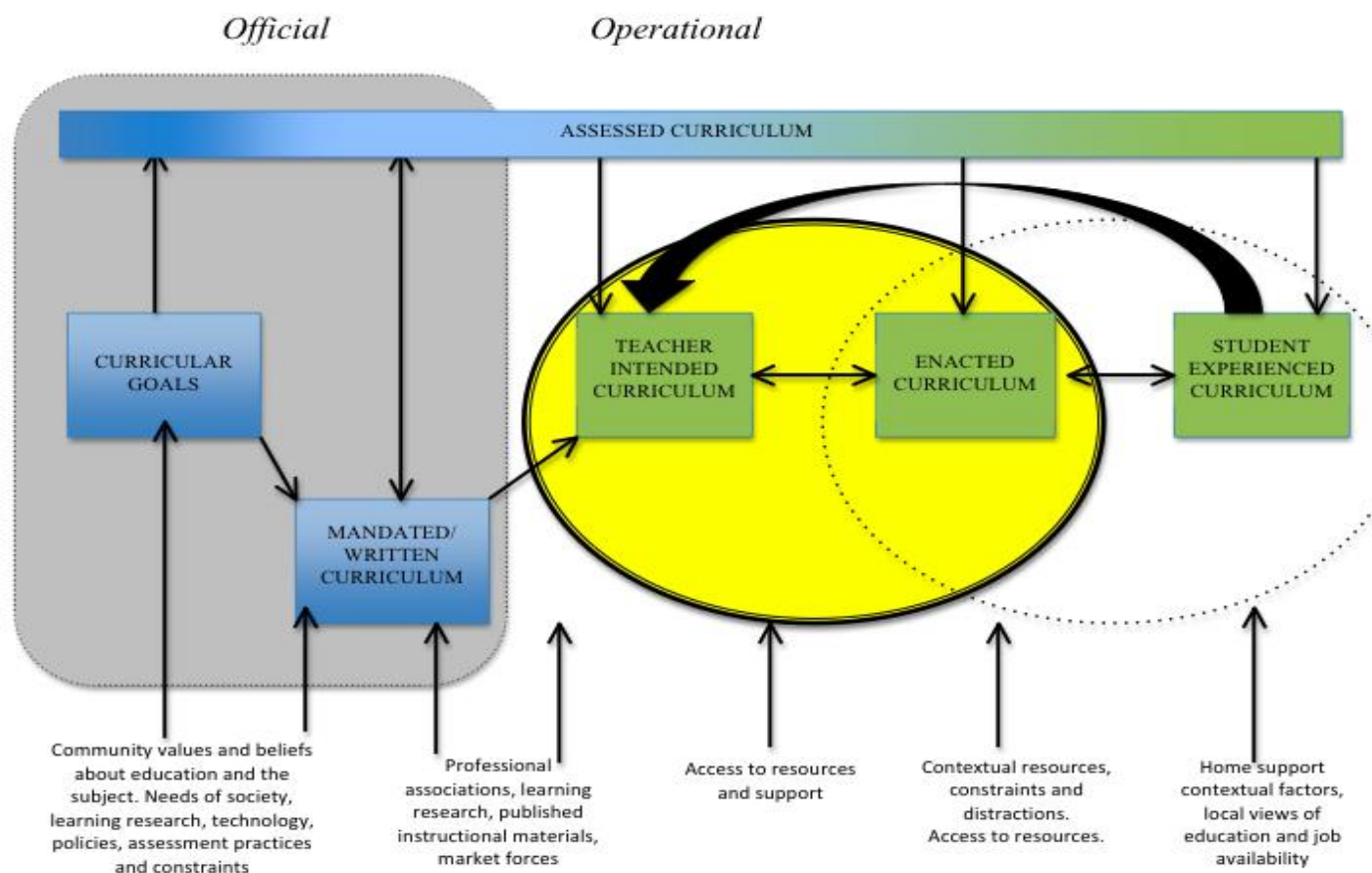
Figure 2. Variables influencing curriculum implementation.

Adapted from Remillard and Heck, *Influences on the enacted curriculum* (2010). Retrieved from

http://mathcurriculumcenter.org/PDFS/RemillardHeck.pdf. Copyright 2010 by the Center for the Study of Mathematics Curriculum.

Variables Influencing Official Dimensions of Curriculum

The official components of curriculum, including goals, written curriculum and assessed curriculum, are shown in Figure 2 to be affected by numerous contextual variables including the perceived needs of society, advances in understanding of learning gained from research and practice, technological developments, protocols and policies, existing assessment practices and constraints upon them, and the community's values and beliefs concerning both education in general and the specific subject being taught (Remillard & Heck, 2010).

Teacher variables influencing the intended curriculum.

Among the internal variables influencing the intended curriculum are teachers' beliefs, knowledge and practices – including their knowledge of the students they teach and of their local school and community context (Remillard & Heck, 2010). While these factors are intertwined, it may be helpful initially to consider teacher beliefs and following that, teachers' knowledge and practices.

Teacher beliefs.

Beliefs have been seen to play a central role in teachers' curriculum decision-making (Ertmer, 2005; Olafson & Schraw, 2006; Pajares, 1992). Beliefs have been defined as "mental constructs that represent the codification of people's experience and understandings" (Shoenfeld, 1998, p. 19) into propositions (statements which can be either true or false) which direct and motivate "voluntary behaviour" (Dretske, 1995, p. 82). This definition is adopted for the current study because it covers the scope of beliefs involved in teachers' curriculum use, and leaves room for both individual and collegially-held beliefs.

As units of cognition, beliefs combine to form knowledge including hypotheses and faith claims, as well as opinions and statements based on empirical evidence (Leder,

Pehkonen & Torner, 2002). Nespor's (1987) research contributes to the understanding

of beliefs as episodic and personalised in nature, and shaped by both emotional and

cognitive factors.

Olson (2002) states that, despite a considerable body of research highlighting the

importance of beliefs in shaping practice, teacher beliefs "are often cited in models for

change as superficial, if not borderline delusional, and, consequently, as elements to be

managed" (p. 130). This occurs despite findings that beliefs can be conceptually

coherent and highly functional in practice (Olson, 2002; Pajares, 1992; Yero, 2002).

Each individual's specific beliefs combine to form a general theory or belief

system, in the form of a micro-philosophy of knowledge. This may include

commitments to consciously or unconsciously held abstract ideas (Handal &

Herrington, 2003). Smith and Lovat (1990) suggest that this belief system determines

"almost everything one thinks about the business of teaching, the place of the school in

society, most desired methods of teaching/learning and, finally, who should control

curriculum and how it should be constructed" (p. 71).

Dirkx, Amey and Haston (1999) point out that teachers with considerable

experience "bring to a process of curricular development well-established systems of

beliefs about what is most worth knowing and how it should be taught" (p. 2). In a

similar vein, Cuban (1993) observes that even when teachers are using the same

resources in the same schools, there are substantial differences in the teaching and

learning that occurs; he attributes this variation to "the differences in teachers' personal

traits, from their beliefs about how [their subject] ought to be taught, from their attitudes

towards students, from their teaching skills, from their knowledge of subject matter, and

from their experiences" (n. p.). This highlights the influential role of beliefs, values and

attitudes in shaping teachers' curriculum implementation.

Beliefs and belief systems play a range of roles in cognition. These include defining tasks and the best mental strategies to apply to them, and assisting in recall and organisation of memories, particularly when processing complex and poorly structured problems, as Nespor (1987) indicates. Belief systems help people understand and adapt to circumstances in everyday life, and guide decision-making and behaviour (Pajares, 1992). Nespor defines two important concepts in studying belief systems. The first is "nonconsensuality," which is "a feature of belief systems rather than individual beliefs … Simply put, 'nonconsensuality' refers to the fact that belief systems consist of propositions, concepts, arguments or whatever that are recognised – by those who hold them or by outsiders – as being in dispute or as being in principle disputable" (1987, pp. 16–17). The second is "unboundedness," which signifies the ways in which "people read belief-based meanings into situations where other people would not see the relevance of the beliefs," such as interpreting all events and practices by means of a single theoretical system (p. 8). This connects with Schoenfeld's (1998) observation that "in all fields of endeavour, our conscious or unconscious biases shape what we notice and what we choose to do," just as medical practitioners make decisions by "ruling diagnostic possibilities in or out of contention" (p. 34).

Pajares' pioneering work on how beliefs affect teachers' practice has an enduring influence on research in this field, as can be seen in the continuing high rate of citations for works such as Pajares' (1992) article on the implications of teacher beliefs for educational research. One major contribution Pajares made was to review earlier research in order to crystallise some key principles about the nature and function of beliefs. These principles are salient when considering teachers' responses to curriculum change, particularly where aspects of these changes are subject to ongoing contestation. Among the significant concepts which Pajares (1992) identifies as emerging from the

research is that "Beliefs are formed early and tend to self-perpetuate, persevering even against contradictions caused by reason, time, schooling and experience" (p. 324). The earlier a belief is established, the less likely it is to be changed. In the case of beliefs about teaching, for example, these are largely established before pre-service teacher education begins. In considering belief change, Pajares also observes that because of their "very nature and origin, some beliefs are more incontrovertible than others" (p. 325).

The types of beliefs and belief systems which the research literature highlights as important influences on teachers' decision-making, and which are therefore pertinent to this study, are epistemological beliefs; beliefs about the nature of the teaching subject (which are here termed subject conceptions); and pedagogical beliefs. The literature on each of these types of belief is reviewed briefly here.

Epistemological beliefs.

Epistemological beliefs are beliefs about the nature of knowledge and the process of knowing (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997). Elements often included in studies of personal epistemology include beliefs about:

- the definition of knowledge;

- how knowledge is constructed;

- how knowledge is evaluated;

- how knowledge is personal and relational;

- where knowledge resides; and

- how knowing occurs (Hofer, 2001, p. 355).

Research on personal epistemology shows it to involve cognition, beliefs, affect (emotions), and motivation (Hofer, 2002b). While there is considerable research on the ways in which *students'* personal epistemologies can be part of their learning processes,

the focus of the present study is how *teachers'* personal epistemologies, values, attitudes and knowledge shape their response to curriculum innovations, with particular reference to the case of literary theories influencing Australian senior secondary English: thus, teachers are positioned in this study as *learners* also, particularly in the face of curriculum changes which reflect the influence of diverse epistemologies.

Epistemological perspectives influence teaching and learning in several ways. Kardash and Howell (2000) highlight the influence of these perspectives on the individual's cognitive development. Schommer (1994) indicates that personal epistemologies have the potential to influence the choice of teaching and learning strategies. Schommer (1998) notes that "how individuals face difficult tasks, react to controversial issues, and comprehend complex concepts hinges on epistemological beliefs" (p. 558). The pervasive influence of epistemological beliefs on thinking and behaviour means that further research in this area may be vital to the development of epistemically sound education that fosters self-knowledge, as Schommer (1998) argues.

Hofer (2001) outlines three main approaches to epistemological beliefs. The first approach conceptualises epistemological beliefs as a series of maturational stages, although it is by no means certain that adulthood will bring with it a critical and reflective personal epistemological stance (Hofer, 2001; King & Kitchener, 1994). The second approach is to see personal epistemology as "a system of more-or-less independent beliefs" (Hofer, 2001, p. 355). Thus Schommer (1994) proposes that, rather than being a series of developmental stages, personal epistemology is made up of five relatively independent dimensions: structure, certainty, source of knowledge, control of knowledge acquisition, and speed of knowledge acquisition. The third approach is to see an individual's personal epistemology as an *epistemological theory of knowledge and thinking* with many closely-related dimensions, rather than as "discrete,

unrelated bits of knowledge" (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997, p. 118). Hofer (2001) suggests

that this third approach "retains the explicit multidimensionality of epistemological

beliefs but implies more integration among an individual's perspectives" (p. 361). This

conceptualisation of personal epistemology as a complex epistemological theory with

interwoven dimensions is the one which most strongly informs this research.

Pajares (1992) summarises a number of fundamental assumptions in the

literature about the way beliefs interact within a belief system: "Beliefs are prioritised

according to their connections or relationships to other beliefs or other cognitive and

affective structures. Apparent inconsistencies may be explained by exploring the

functional connections and centrality of the beliefs" (p. 325). Distinctions between

peripheral and core beliefs have been made about teachers' epistemologies: the central

beliefs are core beliefs about knowing, closely connected to other beliefs; the peripheral

beliefs are about learning and teaching, and are seen to be "derived from these core

beliefs and … more easily reflected upon and changed" (Brownlee, Boulton-Lewis &

Purdie, 2002, p. 1). Pajares (1992) also observes in the literature the notion that some

beliefs may play a more central role than others in an individual's belief system: these

central beliefs are also called attitudes and values, and may be held with varying levels

of reflection or self-knowledge. Beliefs and knowledge are described in the literature as

being closely intertwined, and Pajares points out that because beliefs have emotional,

evaluative and experiential components, they transform all other inputs. This study

postulates that personal epistemology (including pedagogical beliefs and knowledge)

functions as a lens through which everything else is perceived. Consequently in Figure

2 the blue phases of official curriculum, when interpreted through the yellow lens of

teacher personal epistemology and pedagogical knowledge, are transformed into the

green intended and enacted curriculum. Furthermore, while not the subject of this

study, the notion that student beliefs and knowledge may similarly affect the perception

of all other influences on the students' experienced curriculum may be a fruitful subject

for further research.

Subject conceptions: beliefs about the subject.

Hargreaves (2003) suggests that as society moves away from consensus about

epistemological beliefs and presuppositions, the erosion of moral and scientific

certainties challenges many teachers' beliefs about the *purposes* of teaching: "If the

knowledge base of teaching has no scientific foundations, educators ask 'on what

grounds can our justifications for practice be based?'" (p. 4). Similarly, where subject

conceptions are challenged or questioned by a new mandated curriculum, teachers may

be concerned about whether this is likely to entail significant shifts in their

epistemological and pedagogical beliefs, as Kelchtermans (2005) indicates. Schmidt

and Datnow (2005) note that significant curriculum change requires that teachers have a

safe space to experiment and take risks, and opportunities to offer feedback on proposed

changes.

Teachers' epistemological beliefs connect with what they understand as the

evidentiary warrants of their teaching subject. The work of Peters (1985) highlights

how different academic disciplines and subjects rely on different evidentiary warrants

which place high value on particular ways of knowing, forms of evidence, and ways of

supporting a line of argument. Where there are contrasting subject conceptions among

teachers of a particular subject, it is possible that this may be connected with the

influence of evidentiary warrants from other disciplines or subjects. In the case of

English as an academic discipline and a school subject, there is evidence that diverse

subject conceptions are influenced by literary theories, which are conjectures about

meaning, textual evidence, and the nature of communication (Misson, 1998). It has

been argued that literary theories arise from the influence on English of other disciplines, particularly linguistics, sociology, philosophy, creative arts, and political science (Cuddon, 1998; Culler, 2000; Eagleton, 1994). It is important to note that these disciplines rely on different warrants for knowledge and therefore lead in divergent directions in both their foundational ideas and their teaching practices. Disparate epistemological assumptions underpin the complex conjectural clusters known as literary theories, which is one reason for the continuing dissent and rivalry between literary–theoretical schools (Eagleton, 1994, 2003; Patai & Corral, 2005). Divergence between a teacher's epistemological beliefs and those that underpin specific literary theories might be expected to affect how the theories shape teachers' curriculum implementation.

Contestation over curriculum change may be linked with diversity in teachers' beliefs about the nature and purpose of their subject, as Carroll's (2007) study indicates. As Patrick (1990) and Marshall (2000) note, teachers' professional work is foundationally directed by their personal conceptions of their roles and of their subject. In the case of English, these conceptions need to be seen within the contested history of the subject in the century since its inception (Marshall, 2000; O'Sullivan, 2005).

Subject identity has both personal and collegial dimensions. Teachers distil personal conceptions of the subject's central values and enduring characteristics, how it can motivate, enrich and challenge, what it is ultimately *for*, and how it is best taught. This process is vividly illustrated by the studies of Marshall (2000) and Carroll (2007) in English and History respectively. Personal subject conceptions are shaped by the individual's experience, schooling, knowledge, beliefs, pedagogical outlook, values and attitudes, as demonstrated by Hargreaves' (1994) work on the close connections teachers perceive between subject conceptions and personal identity.

Teachers' collegially-held conceptions of their subject concern its goals, rationales, history, social functions and procedures, bearing in mind that there may be several main schools of thought about these within one subject (Goodson, 1995). Lankshear and McLaren (1993) describe the gradual codification of subjects and disciplines as a game in which some of the rules are established, and some can be altered, by influential interest groups or institutions. These alterations may emerge through contestation, or ongoing conflict and rivalry for the supremacy of particular value sets. Contestation among opposing ideas can alter a subject's boundaries and give precedence to different features (Sawyer et al., 1998). Lankshear and McLaren (1993) suggest three hypotheses for how collegial subject conceptions develop. One is that rather than being monoliths, subjects are "shifting amalgamations of subgroups and traditions" (p. 2). The second hypothesis is that those establishing a subject tradition shift gradually from pedagogical and practical goals towards justifying their subject's intellectual credentials as an academic discipline. Lankshear and McLaren's third hypothesis is that much of the debate around subject identity can be seen as arising from rivalry with other subjects over status, territory, and a fair share of limited resources. Goodson (1995) similarly depicts the boundaries between subjects as fault-lines along which there is ongoing political manoeuvring for power and prestige. Subject conceptions shifting and being contested may lead to uncertainty among teachers about their professional responsibilities, particularly in times of curriculum change (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2003).

In discussing school subjects, and the cultures connected with them, it is important to recognise that academic disciplines and school subjects are "discrete entities, their differences defined by audience, outlook, subject matter and methodology. The first is concerned with the production of knowledge, the second with the production

of learning and its relevance to [childhood and] adolescence" (Young, 1998, p. 9).

Other scholars have noted that the terms *academic discipline* and *school subject* may

not have stable meanings in any case (Harris, 2005; Goodson, Anstead & Mangan,

1998).

Subject sub-cultures have been termed "territorial and sometimes divisive"

(Harris, 2005, p. 9). Their characterisation as monoliths is challenged by Ball and

Lacey (1995) who see them rather as "contextual realisations" formed by teachers

constructing their own picture of their subject determined by the values they hold, their

knowledge of the field, and their particular context (p. 95). Whichever way subject

culture is viewed, it is hard to disagree with the proposition that "epistemological and

pedagogical orientations have implications for the ways in which school subjects are

perceived and indeed the status that is attributed to them" (Harris, 2005, p. 54).

Teachers' subject conceptions are often developed further through interaction

with colleagues in their subject department. The subject department or faculty team

helps define "who teachers are, what they do, where and with whom they work, and

how that work is perceived by others" (Siskin & Little, 1995, p. 1). Subject

departments are zones where teachers communally establish and firm up "the distinctive

agreements on perspectives, rules and norms which make up subject cultures and

communities" (Siskin, 1994, p. 81). In the case of English, one might also include the

distinctive disagreements on these perspectives. Rather than taking advice from outside

the subject department, educators rely on "enduring assumptions, seen as embedded in

the disciplines, and educational beliefs to which the teachers have been socialised"

within their faculties (Hativa & Goodyear, 2001, p. 6). Shulman (1999) notes that

through enculturation into the faculty team, teachers' grasp of their subject may go well

beyond its content to encompass understanding of its epistemological underpinnings

and structure, and awareness of areas of contestation. This study explores whether the subject department or faculty team functions as a sounding board for teachers who are seeking congruence between a contested mandated syllabus on one hand, and personal and collegial epistemological beliefs and subject conceptions on the other.

Pedagogical beliefs.

As noted above, curriculum change may challenge teachers' core epistemological beliefs about *knowing* (which are deeply connected with other beliefs), and their epistemological beliefs about *the nature of their subject*. Curriculum change may also challenge more peripheral beliefs *about learning and teaching*. Brownlee et al. (2002) suggest that because teachers' peripheral beliefs about learning and teaching are explicitly formulated rather than assumed, they may be more open to change than their epistemological beliefs.

Pedagogical approaches to a new and contested official syllabus are shaped by teachers' philosophical beliefs about how the subject should be learned by students, as noted in Patrick's (1990) study of History in the UK. Patrick observes teachers actively shaping curriculum to fit these beliefs, and selecting features from the new syllabus depending on their congruence with the teachers' existing pedagogical beliefs. Building on this, in a study of NSW History teachers, Carroll (2007) explores why these beliefs are "critical to teachers' practice and responsiveness to change" and notes that teachers "appeared to embrace or respect aspects of the new curriculum according to its congruence with their philosophies" (p. 16). Carroll suggests that the degree of match between the written curriculum and teachers' pedagogical beliefs was the strongest determinant of how teachers responded to the contestation around the 2001 HSC History curriculum.

Teacher knowledge.

Teachers' knowledge is closely related to their beliefs. The work of Shulman (1986; 1987; 1999) has contributed significantly to the development of the notion that teaching is a profession because it relies on specialised technical knowledge of how learners come to comprehend concepts and procedures deeply, and use that knowledge appropriately in practice. This implies that teachers need knowledge which goes beyond their own deep understanding of something, so that they are able to communicate that to others in meaningful ways, including being able to tackle student misconceptions.

Teacher knowledge has been conceptualised by Shulman (1987) as having both general and subject-specific characteristics. *General pedagogical knowledge* includes knowledge of pedagogical principles, strategies and organisational schemes, macro-level and micro-level knowledge of how education works in practice, and knowledge of the philosophical grounding of various purposes of education. *Content knowledge* includes knowledge of the content of a subject, including the principles and concepts around which it is organised. *Curricular knowledge* is characterised by Shulman (1986) as a deep knowledge of the variety of resources pertinent to a subject, how to determine their appropriateness for particular learners, and the most effective ways to represent and structure subject content, concepts and skills. As Remillard and Heck (2010) note, the availability of such resources will vary in different contexts, and may have a significant impact on the intended, enacted and experienced curricula.

Pedagogical content knowledge is a term Shulman (1986) coined to mean teachers' particular forms of professional understanding, blending content and pedagogy and including knowing "the most useful ways of representing and formulating the subject that make it comprehensible to others" as well as "the

conceptions and preconceptions that students of different ages and background bring

with them to the learning of those most frequently taught topics and lessons" (p. 7).

Ball, Thames and Phelps (2008) argue that while Shulman's idea of pedagogical content

knowledge has been frequently referenced in the literature, it needs further theorising

and testing if it is to inform teacher education in ways that will enhance student

learning. Insufficient attention by curriculum designers to the practical pedagogical

knowledge of experienced teachers may lead these teachers to modify, resist or subvert

curriculum innovations, as Hargreaves and Goodson observe (2003).

Student and environmental variables influencing enacted curriculum.

The beliefs, knowledge and practices of teachers, students and parents have the

potential to shape the enacted curriculum. Variables arising from differences in

students' characteristics and environments are addressed only briefly here as they do not

form the main focus of this study. Differential levels of student ability, concentration or

motivation may lead teachers to improvise while enacting curriculum (Remillard &

Heck, 2010). Human factors may cause a change of plan; for example, individual

written work may be set in place of small group debates when tiredness affects

tolerance for high noise levels, or teachers may restructure material if a significant

number of students do not master a key procedure on which further learning depends.

As Marzano (2003) points out, unexpected interruptions to school routines can consume

a significant proportion of the time set aside for teaching, leading to teachers

improvising changes as they enact curriculum.

Variables influencing students' experienced curriculum.

Some variables influencing students' experienced curriculum may be outside the

teacher's control. They may include such factors as the students' identity, attitudes,

motivation, prior knowledge, home support and confidence (Remillard & Heck, 2010).

The curriculum as experienced by students may also be affected by practical matters such as health, tiredness and distractibility, or emotional, psychological and psychiatric conditions. These variables influence students' experienced curriculum, and by influencing their behaviour, lead to teachers changing their enacted curriculum to improve student motivation (Marzano, 2003). This is another example of how the phases of curriculum interact, and how this interaction is viewed by teachers through the lens of their personal epistemology and their pedagogical beliefs and knowledge.

Effects of the Variables on Curriculum Alignment and Congruence

Fullan (1993) has noted that each of the variables influencing the components of curriculum has the potential to make teachers' professional curriculum responsibilities complex and changeable, challenging, and hard to determine. For example, where divergent subject conceptions exist, as Chapter 1 suggests they do in English, the written curriculum, the assessed curriculum and teachers' intended and enacted curricula may reflect differing and even incompatible understandings of the subject's main goals. The next section considers how teachers' professional curriculum responsibilities are affected by the elements of curriculum change and its contestation.

Teachers' responses to contested curriculum change.

Contemporary teachers work in a rapidly changing educational environment. Substantial changes in written curriculum, as Hargreaves (2003) notes, mean that teachers need to interpret and make sense of the new requirements and the changes of classroom practice they entail. Handal and Herrington's (2003) research shows that the time and energy needed to respond to curriculum change can take a considerable toll on teachers' professional and personal lives. This confirms Hargreaves and Fink's (2006) observation that "change in education is easy to propose, hard to implement, and extraordinarily difficult to sustain" (p. 1).

Where several innovations occur at once, Hargreaves (2003) reports that teachers can feel overwhelmed and lose confidence in their ability to understand and meet the new requirements. In addition, a new written curriculum may lack congruence with the way the assessed curriculum works in practice. Pajares (2002) points out that aspects of curriculum may lack congruence with teachers' pedagogical and epistemological beliefs. While some beliefs about teaching and learning are open to change, Brownlee et al. (2002) suggest that teachers' core epistemological beliefs rest on assumptions which are highly resistant to change. Consequently, where proposed changes in a mandated curriculum pose a challenge to these teacher beliefs, there is little likelihood that teachers will enact them thoroughly.

Where teachers see a syllabus innovation as a threat to their epistemological beliefs and existing cognitive structures, this may cause what Eysenck et al. (2007) term *attentional narrowing*, an inordinate focus on the perceived threat and an inability to disengage from mentally processing it. Teachers' work depends on the ability to choose what to focus on at any given moment, and to share attention between several stimuli of equal importance. Derakshan and Eysenck (2009) show that these two aspects of *attentional control* are negatively affected by prolonged anxiety. Threat perception may also arouse anxiety that impairs *inhibition*, the ability to resist interference from irrelevant stimuli. This makes it difficult to select relevant cues and integrate new information with existing understandings, which are crucial in responding to a challenging syllabus innovation.

The types of responses teachers may make to the implementation of curriculum change range across a broad spectrum. Some teachers may thoroughly adopt the proposed change, in line with the *fidelity* model of curriculum implementation. Griffey and Housner (1991) report that inexperienced teachers are more likely to implement a

new syllabus with fidelity, whereas experienced teachers engage in far more

questioning of curriculum materials in advance of planning their intended curriculum.

Other teachers may adapt both the curriculum initiative and their usual practices, in line

with Remillard's (2005) notion of *drawing on* the curriculum. Teachers working from

an enactment paradigm who see their professional role as *participating with* the

curriculum may decide it is necessary to substantially reshape or transform the

innovation or policy to make it work in the classroom context.

Where teachers perceive a proposed curriculum change to lack congruence with

their own beliefs and their practical pedagogical knowledge, they may actively *resist*

and subvert the change. Resistance and subversion may be practised in several ways.

One of these, noted by Edwards (2005), is for teachers to act "in ways which give an

appearance of conformity, rather than the fact of conformity to mandated reforms" (p.

67). Such a strategy can appear to comply with policy while subtly altering it so that

little change is needed in classroom practice. The research of Ball and Bowe (1992)

and Hargreaves (2003) indicates that in some situations teachers expend considerable

energy resisting and subverting proposed curriculum changes. Edwards (2005) claims

that the main motivations for this are that the changes are seen as not important or

useful to students on one hand, and not practically workable in the classroom on the

other.

Hargreaves (1994) characterises teachers as professionals desiring *both* change

and conservation. Experienced teachers develop a repertoire of effective classroom

materials and practices which they seek to continue, because of their congruence with

their beliefs and knowledge and their demonstrable benefit to student learning.

Teachers may also trial new materials and strategies, which may be subsequently

conserved, changed or discarded, depending on their effects on student learning, resource availability, and degree of "fit" in the local context.

Teachers' curriculum decision-making.

Edwards (2005) points out that research has identified a tendency for policy-makers to take little account of local contexts, which "are not so much a sieve through which reforms are passed but rather a series of lenses which shape [teachers'] views of governments' mandates and intentions" (p. 69). The metaphor of lenses underscores how much transformation can occur during curriculum interpretation and use. Local contexts and student needs may well shed light on teacher responses to curriculum change, for as Martin (2008) observes, "It may not always be possible to both follow administrative mandates about instruction and meet student needs, and teachers may have to make a compromise between these two objectives" (p. 1). Marsh (1998) similarly notes that teachers must "establish priorities rather than doing all the things that are pressed upon them" (p. 156). Thus, a significant part of teachers' professional responsibilities may be selecting from a new curriculum what fits with their beliefs and their subject knowledge, and what is feasible in their local contexts given the available time and resources.

Bernstein (2000) depicts curriculum being contextualised as it is passed along a chain of participants. Each individual in this chain works in their "discursive gap" to interpret and enact the curriculum in unique ways. Scholars variously refer to discursive gaps as spaces of leverage, spaces of change, and "zones of enactment" (Spillane, 1998; 1999). Spillane (1998) offers this definition of the zone of enactment as the place where policy meets practice:

The zone of enactment is the "space" in which teachers apprehend reform and work out its implications for their practice. Some teachers have a very narrow zone of enactment limited to their own individual classrooms and their personal experience and training. Others have zones that include professional colleagues, experts, professional organisations, and others. (p. 27)

Change-readiness.

Some characteristics of teachers' enactment zones may correlate with their readiness to change the core of their curriculum practice. Spillane (1999, p. 171) suggests that change-ready teachers have enactment zones which extend beyond their classrooms to include colleagues and people deemed "expert" in the area of reform. Such enactment zones offer access to curriculum materials that can be used to deepen learning of the ideas behind the reform initiative.

Where a curriculum innovation requires substantial re-thinking of existing beliefs and pre-suppositions, Pintrich, Marx and Boyle (1993) state, there are four preconditions for any conceptual change to be established and maintained. If even *one* of these preconditions is not met, then the innovation is unlikely to be thoroughly implemented or sustained over time. The four preconditions cover the following areas:

- existing beliefs must be seen to be unsatisfactory in one or more respects;

- the new beliefs need to be plausible and intelligible to the participants;

- there must be opportunity for experimentation with the new beliefs;

- the new beliefs must be resilient in the face of challenges to their credibility, and support further learning (Pintrich et al., 1993).

The present research explores teacher perceptions of how well these preconditions were met in the case of the roll-out of the NSW English Stage 6 Syllabus

of 1999, which may have challenged the personal epistemologies and pedagogical

practices of English teachers.

Curriculum contestation.

The contestation of curriculum change may increase tensions between teachers'

"survival norms" – what they consider manageable in practice – and their "craft norms"

– what they aim to achieve as professional educators (Olson, 2002, p. 130). As Luke

(2011) indicates, one of the reasons for this tension is that curriculum change involves

contestation and negotiation between participants with differing underlying educational

assumptions. For example, contestation may exist between an essentialist paradigm,

with its emphasis on preserving what is seen as essential in a subject, and constructivist

notions of curriculum as fluid, emerging incrementally from the interests of both

teachers and students (Kennedy, 2005). Teachers working from an essentialist

paradigm may resist curriculum change which they believe undervalues key elements of

the subject, while teachers who prioritise constructivism may resist or subvert

curriculum changes that they believe allow little room for creative pedagogical

responses to their students' educational needs and interests.

Curriculum designers and bureaucrats, teachers and students, parents and the

wider community may work from different curriculum assumptions. Divergence in

assumptions tends to produce divergence in curriculum interpretation and practice

(Brady & Kennedy, 2010). Divergence in curriculum assumptions, interpretations and

practices is linked to ongoing curriculum contestation, in which dynamic equilibrium

among opposing views continues to be elusive (Dinan-Thompson, 2003; Edlin, 2002;

Luke, 2011).

Professional dilemmas.

Contested curriculum changes can lead to teacher professional dilemmas in which diverse value sets compete for dominance. Value sets are communally held groups of beliefs and attitudes which cluster together into epistemological theories influencing both thinking and behaviour. Yero (2002) claims that one of the reasons for professional dilemmas occurring is that instigators of innovations tend to focus on particular components of the teaching and learning task and "fail to perceive how much their proposed change influences other parts of the educational system" (p. 34). Teachers face the dilemma of trying to include many initiatives and take into account rigorous standards and benchmarks, at the same time as leading students into authentic and contextualised learning. Yero (2002) states that teachers "create compromises to bring contradictory parts of their reality into some semblance of order that is the most consistent with their values and sense of well-being, and with which they can live" (p. 34). This observation may encapsulate how teachers deal with curriculum contestation.

Curriculum contestation may arise when different value sets co-exist and compete for dominance. Williams (1980) proposes that when a value set is new on the horizon, and participants are weighing up whether they see it as potentially valuable for practice, it has *emergent* status. As it is broadly adopted, it may over time become the *dominant* value set in a field of human interaction. A long-dominant value set may become *residualised* when it is rarely referenced or foregrounded, even though it may still exert a degree of influence over thinking and action; however, it is possible for such a residualised value set to increase in status for some reason, as Williams (1980) points out.

Where teachers perceive there is competition for dominance between divergent value sets in a written curriculum, Hargreaves (2003) argues that this may complicate

their implementation of curriculum changes, particularly where there is ongoing

contestation about both the proposed changes and the primary purposes of the teaching

subject. This can have implications for teachers' professional identity (Goodson, 1995;

Hargreaves, 2003; O'Sullivan, 2005). It could be argued that contestation, about the

nature of English as an academic discipline and as a school subject, and among diverse

literary theories, is connected with the competing claims of different value sets and

might be expected to have an impact on teachers' interpretations of the NSW English

Stage 6 Syllabus (1999). Competing value sets may make it harder for teachers to

weigh up how a particular curriculum innovation will be of benefit to students, as noted

by Berlak and Berlak (1981). Competing value sets may give rise to differing answers

to dilemmas such as whether knowledge is "given or problematical" and how to manage

the "pull between assessment imperatives and curricular intent" (Briant & Doherty,

2012, p. 63).

Black and Atkin (1996) indicate that although teachers' professional dilemmas

in interpreting a contested educational reform should be considered valuable evidence

as to the innovation's likely value in practice, this evidence is often not given due

weight. The quality and success of reforms or innovations depend "on what can be

learned from the systematic examination by all of the experiences of teachers – on the

negative feedback needed, so that the emperor does not show up without clothes"

(Olson, 2002, p. 136). Teachers' positive and negative views of curriculum proposals

can play a role in ongoing curriculum development and evaluation processes.

Competing value sets in written curriculum can lead to ambiguity and confusion.

Rubin (1994) argues that any written curriculum contains ambiguities because it is "a

compromise between disparate expectations, competing demands, contradictory

conceptions of weakness, and discrepant solutions" (p. 28). Rubin argues that this leads

to mandated curricula characteristically being "hybrids" which take up the middle ground as they balance competing expectations from teachers' internal and external contexts. The reasons for taking such a mid-course can be described negatively or positively. There may be negative implications in Nunnery's (1998) observations about the gaps between design and implementation of written curriculum: "Local adaptation often results in watering the reform down to preserve the status quo, as local actors negotiate to maintain predictability by preserving current roles" (p. 288). In contrast, Gardner and Williamson (2005) could be read as commending teachers when they state that the "futility of legislating for uniformity must yield to the inevitability of localisation in which 'hybridised' change results from collaborative efforts of teachers" (p. 85) who use their awareness of student needs to transform the curriculum. Teacher insights will thus shed considerable light on how curriculum contestation works, and how it reflects the influence of teachers' beliefs and knowledge about epistemology and pedagogy. After all, it is the teachers who "have to make sense and create coherence out of the contradictory demands of different stake-holders for what are often, in the end, controversial intended outcomes of reform" (Olson, 2002, p. 130).

Hargreaves (1996) points out the absence of teachers' voices from much of the writing about their work, except where they are "used as mere echoes for preferred and presumed theories of educational researchers" (p. 4). To counter this, he challenges researchers to recognise that the voices of teachers "have their own validity and assertiveness which can and should lead to questioning, modification, and abandonment of these theories wherever it is warranted" (p. 4). Furthermore, teachers' voices should be recognised as identifying key problems and surprises inherent within contested curriculum proposals. The present study aims to hear the voices of teachers dealing with the philosophical and practical implications of contested changes in the senior

English curriculum, changes which arise from literary theories that are subject to

frequent debate and alteration.

Conclusion

The cyclical process of curriculum implementation has been shown in this

chapter to be made up of interacting components influenced by a diversity of teacher,

student and community variables. Teachers have been described as seeking congruence

between the curriculum components and their own epistemological and pedagogical

beliefs and knowledge. When this congruence is not achieved, teachers may enact what

they believe the mandated curriculum requires, or they may contest those aspects of the

curriculum which conflict with their own epistemological theories and therefore present

professional dilemmas.

The literature reviewed suggests that attention should be given to increasing our

understanding of teachers' attempts to reach congruence between the components of

curriculum and their own beliefs and knowledge. This research proposes that

epistemological and pedagogical beliefs and knowledge function as the lens through

which teachers perceive and transform all other influences in the curriculum

implementation process.

The context of a new English Syllabus for senior students in NSW provides an

opportunity to consider whether and how teachers use the lens of their own

epistemological and pedagogical beliefs and knowledge to interpret and transform a

written curriculum into their own intended and enacted curricula, during a period of

contestation about the influence of diverse literary theories in English as a subject.

Chapter 3's review of some key literature on the development and interactions of some

of the most significant literary theories provides the background for teachers' views on

the implications of these theories for English teaching at senior secondary level.

Chapter 3
Review of Literature: Literary Theories and Contestation

Introduction

In order to explore contestation concerning literary theories in senior English, it is necessary to investigate the underlying roots of these theories, and how the ongoing contestation between them has shaped conceptions of English both as a university discipline and as a school subject. For this reason, this chapter gives an overview of the movements in English literature which contribute over time to changes in assumptions concerning the production, criticism and teaching of literary texts.

It should not be assumed that movements in literary history function in clear-cut compartments. In each period writers, composers and critics value and preserve some inherited characteristics while reacting against others (Holloway, 1990; Patai & Corral, 2005). Sometimes what is explicitly valued by critics and educators is different from what prominent artists of the period produce (Daiches, 1968). In any one period, while particular literary "fashions" develop, a diversity of authors may lead to a diversity of styles, themes and treatments, even where writers consciously function as a group (Graff, 1979). Literary historians attempt to map the emerging trends in fiction, drama, poetry and expository prose and innovative texts in a particular period, recognising considerable diversity and contestation between opposing trends. This mapping can indicate which factors were enduring and which were evanescent, being rapidly exhausted of their potential, or discarded because of changes in philosophy or social

circumstances. Changes may also occur due to altered commercial realities for publishers.

While most descriptions of periods in literary history show a tendency to focus on those factors that are novel, surprising, revolutionary or eccentric, for the literary historian one of the important features of each period is what is *not* discarded, as Perkins (1992) indicates. How each era employs its literary inheritance often coincides with some of the substantial and enduring works of art being produced at that time.

Cycles in literary history often emerge. What is only briefly popular at a given time can be revived later as "new." Versions of a trend can appear, disappear and reappear, sometimes over considerable periods of time (Daiches, 1968). Conscious revivals are perhaps less common than pendulum swings against and towards particular values, as extreme examples proliferate at either end of a continuum, and then are less sharply demarcated with each succeeding swing. This can also work in reverse, where a new idea is tried at first tentatively and then with greater confidence as the reading public becomes used to it (Leitch et al., 2001). Paradoxically, what one generation regards as a breath-taking break from tradition can be regarded by the next generation as a humdrum exemplar of the literary tradition which they have received (Bonnycastle, 2002). This connects with Williams' (1980) notion of competing values sets being first emergent, then dominant, and finally residual.

A survey of literary history needs to keep in mind how particular literary and educational values were regarded by contemporaries, and by succeeding generations, as well as how they are evaluated in our own period (Guillory, 1993). This gives a rounded picture of the ebb and flow of influences as one stands at the tide-line of one's own period, reflecting on the contestation among contemporary literary values and practices. There is a tendency in current criticism for only the present generation's views to be

considered, as if this is a full picture. However, if an evaluation of succeeding periods'

reception of literary developments is not undertaken, it is easy to be blind to the hidden

assumptions of one's own period. This may lead to discarding what has gone before:

even among postmodernists this can arise from a latent modernist paradigm of history

as progress, of later ideas being by definition superior (what C. S. Lewis called "the

chronological fallacy"). Not all the critical texts cited in this study are of recent

publication; this is in a deliberate attempt to map the changing evaluations of what has

gone before. It also helps to highlight how influential ideology can be in influencing

habits of thought. Wherever possible, a diversity of views is presented, with no

assumption that a recent study must be closer to an authentic or definitive evaluation of

a period than were contemporary or near-contemporary responses to a work of

literature, a literary school of thought or a loosely aligned group. Where differing

paradigms reveal contrasting aspects of a writer's or group's literary work, this is also

noted.

 Ground-breaking ideas can have both intended and unintended consequences;

this is also true of the influences which function in literature, with some unintended

consequences developing in intriguing ways over the decades following their first

appearance. It is not uncommon for a paradigm or movement to sow the logical seeds

of its own demise, bringing about a return to the very ideals against which it was

intentionally reacting. Graff (1977) comments that often a particular paradigm "is

bound to backfire and reinforce the powers it aims to subvert" (p. 248). This is

significant in a period in which several of the predominant literary paradigms have been

seen as leading inevitably to impasse or self-defeat (Graff, 1977).

 The degree of dominance held by a specific paradigm at a particular time in

history is also of interest. In some eras, one paradigm is overwhelmingly dominant,

while in other periods various paradigms coexist as an array of choices, or particular

trends dominate among certain social groups but are rarely adopted outside those

groups, whether they be determined by geography, gender, class, educational level, or

by connection with other fields such as fine arts, psychology, linguistics, sociology or

philosophy (Daiches, 1968).

Some dominant literary paradigms are exploded, others fade away gradually or

change in significance by reconnection with some other factor. Some paradigms are

declared dead only to be revived to have a substantial and enduring influence. Current

fashions in literary theory are as open to contestation and change over time as were their

predecessors. This has implications for classroom practice, especially where theory

may drive syllabus design or teacher practice.

This chapter provides thumbnail sketches of the trends in literary theory and

composition over a substantial stretch of recent history, to illustrate how past and

present literary trends have emerged and shaped each other, with specific emphases and

literary values moving into and out of the foreground in succeeding periods, both

responding to and prompting change. Some interaction between literary, general artistic

and educational theories is also briefly outlined in this chapter, partly as a way of

defining the terms of this investigation.

Where in history to begin is a vexed question. The further back one goes, the

more cycles of recurrence seem to emerge. For the sake of brevity these thumbnail

sketches begin with the Augustan era, with some reference back to classical Greek and

medieval European paradigms and practices, especially where these re-emerge in later

periods. Some sections of text are preceded by an epigrammatic statement which

captures key elements of a literary movement.

Historical Overview

> **Augustan era: neoclassicism.**

> [As] the most obvious phrases, and those which are used in ordinary
>
> conversation, become too familiar to the ear and contract a kind of meanness by
>
> passing through the mouths of the vulgar, a poet should take particular care to
>
> guard himself against idiomatic ways of speaking.

> —Addison, 1712

In the Augustan era in the early eighteenth century, the predominant literary theory was neoclassicism. Reacting against what were seen as recent excesses, it sought to replace the commonplace with a heightened sense of taste and refinement. Neoclassical literature was written for the educated and probably aristocratic reader who upheld existing standards of good taste. It deplored idiomatic speech and vulgarity, valuing a literary language of elegance and polish. It was expected that reading this literature would educate the middle classes in good taste and refinement, increasing decorum and good sense. This was seen to be conducive to social harmony and progress towards Enlightenment ideals.

Neoclassicists did not value extremes in current fashion or ideas, but proposed a *via media* or *golden mean*, a somewhat idealised view of a society which diligently preserves past values and achieves a sense of proportion in everything. This theory saw literary criticism being seen as communal and agreed, an objective and even-handed valuing of works of literature in which precision, fluency and wit could be clearly observed.

The Augustan neoclassicists engaged in considerable contestation in the pages of periodicals, seeing this as sharpening society's sense of what was right and proper. The

wits of the day, including Dryden, Swift, Defoe and Pope, saw satire as an effective way

to challenge folly and poor thinking, including that of an institutional nature. These

writers saw their work as a civilising influence, shaping political and philosophical

ideals that their society could agree to work towards. Change was ideally seen to be

gradual, logical and based upon reasoned discussion of philosophical concepts in the

community of the educated. Many of these authors used fictionalised literary

approaches to instigate a wider community discussion of social problems, in a witty and

humorous form which offered imaginative distance and had the persuasive power of

narrative. Swift, for example, used *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) to ridicule and also to

critically evaluate many aspects of politics and governance.

The characteristic features of Augustan neoclassical literature were encouraged

in students: meticulous care in construction, highly controlled expression and great

attention to accuracy and good taste. Literary conventions were to be followed, lending

dignity and authority to both author and work. Students were trained to emulate the

style of the period rather than to break new ground in form or language. Imagination

was valued in the form of witty treatment of highly intellectual ideas, rather than in

breaking with conventions. These literary values can be seen to influence classroom

practices in the twenty-first century where students write or compose "in the style of

X," emulating characteristics of admired authors or modelling the conventions and

techniques of a particular movement or period. It could be argued that when teachers

encourage students to study literature in order to find enlightenment, and to write well,

they are building on an Augustan inheritance.

While the Augustan age may be out of vogue as an area of study in English

classrooms today, its literary values can still be influential. In recent years highly-

wrought ironic debate by authors of considerable erudition, such as David Williamson

(*Dead White Males,* 1995) has been followed with interest by many senior English

teachers; their levels of complexity and dramatic irony reward close study. Similarly,

current students may observe the levels of irony in Lawson and Paterson's *Bulletin*

debate of 1892–1893 on the relative merits of city and country, written with some of the

dryness and bite of the Augustan era.

In the middle of the eighteenth century theories about literary value began to

shift. There was a move towards seeing art as being not just for edification but also for

pleasure. There arose a sense of imminent change, of the impossibility of being static in

the face of exploration and scientific discovery; this was evident in some freeing up in

poetic styles. Rousseau posited that the prized ideal of "civilisation" brought with it

unbearable restrictions on human freedom; these should be thrown off. In literature this

began to be embodied in a fascination with primitivism and oddness. This period of

transition led to some questioning within education of morally appropriate boundaries

of study for young people.

The influence of Hegel.

The philosopher G.W.F. Hegel (1770–1831) continues to have a pervasive

influence in philosophy and literary theory. Hegel saw history as the progression from

tyrannical despots to city states which regulated their citizens, through to the

Reformation when individual consciousness became paramount. Hegel proposed that

community could be established on a shared rational basis, which would therefore

express the rational will of each person in it. Duty and self-interest would then coincide

(Honderich, 1995, p. 341). This was a shift from Emmanuel Kant's view that duty and

self-interest would be perpetually in conflict.

Hegel had an optimistic view of humanity's ability to live in harmony, where a

community's rules were based on reason. The traditional form of argument before

Hegel had been the Aristotelian syllogism, a pair of propositions on the model "if this ...

then that." Instead Hegel developed dialectical logic, which begins from a position and

then finds that position to contain the seeds of its own refutation or antithesis, usually in

the form of a paradox or internal contradiction. These two would be synthesised by a

process called *aufgehoben,* "overcoming." Hegel's dialectical logic markedly

influenced Romanticism and Marxist literary theory, as well as more recent literary

theories (Honderich, 1995; Leitch, 2001). Hegel's notion of human history progressing

to a new freedom for individuals, based on rationality, was fruitful for Romantic poets.

Hegel saw all previous philosophies as one-sided but his own as universal,

subsuming all previous systems and making sense of them on its own terms: all

philosophies culminated in his, which completed and refined them. This totalising

impulse is evident in the work of poets of the romantic period, who may well have seen

themselves as embodying Hegel's philosophy in their work (Leitch, 2001); it can also

be detected in the assumptions of more recent theorists, as Patai and Corral (2005) point

out. Hegel's *master-slave dialectic* also influenced the romantic poets' concern with

authority and freedom, and raised the notion that "at their extreme points opposites veer

into one another" (Honderich, 1995, p. 343). The thematic concerns of the romantic

poets with contestation (or complex co-existence) of opposites owes much to Hegel

(Cazamian, 1927/1954) and in turn contributes to the genesis of binary oppositions

theory in postmodernism. Leitch et al. (2001) claim that any current criticism "that

stresses the historical and social context of utterances or intertextual connections is

Hegelian to some degree" (pp. 626–7).

Romanticism.

"The rules had vanished. It was no longer the poet's job to satisfy expectation; it

was the reader's business to strive to comprehend the workings of the poetic mind."

—Fraser, 1964, p. 359

"Humble and rustic life was generally chosen because, in that condition, the essential passions of the heart ... are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language."

—Wordsworth, 1880, p. 447

After Augustanism, a transitional phase led into the romantic period, which saw significant shifts in attitudes towards the text, the author as artist, and the social responsibilities of the writer. The poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge signalled a movement away from rules and conventions in literary practice, towards a focus on individualism and imaginative truth. Wordsworth and Coleridge explicitly rejected the notion of satisfying readers' expectations, putting forward instead the view that the calling of poets is to express their own emotional states. This foregrounded the psychological and subjective, emphasising authentic freshness of feeling and originality in reaction against the Augustan focus on rationality and self-control. The influence of this shift in theoretical orientation of literary values can be seen to be still influential in English classrooms, when students are asked to write about their own psychological and emotional states in ways not explicitly bound by rules and conventions, but in which the imaginative and personal are highly valued.

Literature moved from being primarily about urbane aristocratic life to emphasising the ordinary everyday activities of humble country people. It also moved away from "civilisation" towards the "primitive," including Gothic themes and medieval influences. At the same time, the poet was placed on a pedestal, as a prophet showing new ways to truth through solitary experiences of nature. Shelley proposed that poetry could restore value and meaning to life, bringing harmony by reconciling opposites. The romantics thus sought to replace the philosophical rationalism and

decorum of the neoclassicists with a deification of the imagination, with the poet as imagination's prophet.

It seems likely that the dethronement of Augustan ideals in the romantics' literary practice affected the presentation of literature to school students in the nineteenth century, even if only in questioning inherited certainties. In the late twentieth century some of the romantic focus on the lone creative individual still emerged through work written by and for adolescents, in which they alone are able to save the world, such as John Marsden's (1994) *Tomorrow when the war began* series, Victor Kelleher's (1988) *Taronga* or Caroline MacDonald's (1988) *The lake at the end of the world*. The post-nuclear-holocaust dystopian fantasy genre owes much to the romantic conception of the youthful inspired individual as both alien and saviour. This genre has been represented on senior English lists for at least a decade.

How might the romantic ideal still be influential in English teaching today? Glorification of the individual imagination might be seen to influence the emergence of senior secondary courses in creative writing, which can be completed in addition to more rationalist-influenced courses in which essay-writing occupies a favoured position. It is also arguably present where there is a great deal of student choice in texts and types of assessment. The romantic ideal is influential upon pedagogical theories such as Growth Through English (after John Dixon's 1962 publication of that name), also known as the growth model of English teaching.

Victorian responses to romantic ideals

The history of Victorian criticism, as a consolidation of and partly as a reaction against the romantic revolution, is the history of various attempts to restore external standards, to find generally acceptable ways of judging particular

works, without reverting to the rigidity and pedantry of the eighteenth century.

The natural tendency, in an age which was both full of doubt and anxious to

believe, was to seek these external standards in moral and religious principles ...

But a latent fear that social change and new scientific knowledge might prove all

moral and religious principles to be illusory ... led ... to a strained and excessive

emphasis.

—Fraser, 1964, pp. 359-360

Literature and criticism during the Victorian era displayed a fundamental anxiety

that principles might be illusory, that subjective "truth" might be founded on nothing

and eventually be seen as arbitrary. There is evidence of a quest for meaning, against

an undercurrent of suspicion that there is none. The Victorians valued theme over form

and ideas over poetic techniques, in reaction against eighteenth century preciosity.

Partly because of suspicions about the moral character of some of the romantics, partly

in response to other social changes such as the rise of evangelical Christianity,

edification and aesthetic delight were seen as competing goals for literary culture.

Matthew Arnold (1822–1888) contributed significantly to the approaches to

literature in Victorian Britain and the colonies. He saw literature as having the potential

to sustain high culture, and believed the "philistine" middle class should study great

works "to improve its response to literature (and culture)" (Benet, 1965, p. 52). Arnold

challenged British dependence on "Hebraism"—uprightness of conscience and

conduct—and proposed a shift to the balance and spontaneity of "Hellenism."

The romantic idea of the poet as an alienated outcast was being replaced by a

view of the poet as belonging to society and offering it criticism and encouragement

from within. Literature was seen as inspiring social cohesion and harmony rather than

expressing the outsider's personal emotions. Art was seen to contribute to and reflect the new scientific spirit, and often tackled current topics.

Realism and naturalism.

In contrast to romanticism, nineteenth-century realism valued lucidity and objectivity rather than the personal or the aesthetic. This realism in literary culture was strongly influenced by the growth of secularism, and moved away from evaluation of characters on absolutist moral grounds towards the examination of psychological motivations as influences upon actions.

Distilling and intensifying some of the features of realism, naturalism investigated in literary forms the principles of scientific determinism, of humans being compelled to certain acts and beliefs by their biological and social circumstances. Naturalism depicted life as an animalistic struggle against overpowering forces, structures and drives. It focused largely on the lives of individuals in grinding poverty, often in overcrowded cities, and fed into *fin de siecle* decadence which saw civilisation as decaying rather than developing and focused on narcissism, decay, disorder and the cult of the erotic. Both senior English syllabi and Children's Book Council of Australia award lists include a number of works of a type called "gritty realism", which show evidence of the ongoing influence of realist and naturalist literary theories as embodied by Balzac and George Moore (Ireland, 1995;1996).

Symbolism.

[Symbolists] believed poetry should evoke and suggest, raising itself above the

level of objective description ... they sought poetic techniques which would

make possible the re-creation of human consciousness. The symbol and the

metaphor ... were highly personal, and their use resulted in obscure, esoteric

verse. At its finest, however, symbolist poetry achieved a richness of meaning, and created an awareness of the mystery of human existence.

—Symonds and Jones, 1964

Symbolism, which thrived from 1870 to 1900 and strongly influenced the twentieth century, can be seen as another form of contestation against a scientific and industrial age. It reacted against the French realist novelists who were seen as coldly impersonal in their naturalism. Instead, symbolists depicted subtly shifting states of emotion, reverie and mood, seeking to evoke and suggest in the manner of Impressionist painters rather than objectively describe. They revelled in folklore, mysticism and the exotic, and placed a high value on aesthetic concerns, particularly aiming for poetic musicality.

Symbolists reacted against rigidity in thematic and stylistic treatment, preferring to evoke human consciousness by means of clusters and patterns of images building up to a cumulative effect. The Australian novelist Patrick White was influenced by symbolism, and for some decades senior English students have been asked to reflect upon the shifting and elusive meanings of White's works. This may be partly because, compared with brief lyric poems, there is so much that can be speculatively written about White's densely symbolic novels. Classroom activities which focus on the shifting moods of a literary work rather than technique or themes reflect a symbolist influence.

Formalism.

Contesting the principles of romanticism and symbolism, the literary theory and practice known as formalism took a practical scientific approach to the text as a material object. Formalists discarded the romantic notion of art as the expression of the artist's

thoughts and feelings, and of the poet as a prophetic influence. They did not seek psychological or sociological content in literature, nor the embodiment of eternal truth; but assigned primary value to literary structure and form. They did this by seeing literature as an organisation of language, and by approaching it as linguists rather than as literary critics.

The formalist critic Boris Eichenbaum described the contestation between Formalists and Symbolists in these terms: "We entered the fight against the Symbolists in order to wrest poetics from their hands—to free it from its ties with their subjective philosophical and aesthetic theories and to direct it toward the scientific investigation of facts. We were raised on their works, and we saw their errors with the utmost clarity" (Eichenbaum, 1926/2001, p. 1065). Formalists disapproved of Symbolists blending literature with other disciplines. They sought to establish literary science as a distinct discipline, freed from the assumptions and methodology of other disciplines. Jakobson spelt out the rationale for this:

> The object of the science of literature is not literature but literariness—that is, that which makes a given work a work of literature ... The literary historians ... used everything—anthropology, psychology, politics, philosophy. Instead of a science of literature, they created a conglomeration of homespun disciplines. They seemed to have forgotten that their essays strayed into related disciplines—the history of philosophy, the history of culture, of psychology, etc.—and that these could rightly use literary masterpieces only as defective, secondary documents. (Jakobson, 1921, in Leitch et al., 2001, p. 1259)

The conglomeration of disciplines which Jakobson describes may be seen as a forerunner of the approaches which developed later into Cultural Studies and Critical

Literacy. The question of whether the eclectic interdisciplinary philosophical

foundations of these approaches reduce literary texts to merely secondary documents

proved to be very much a live question in publications about the English subject/s

during the period of this research (Edmundson, 2004; Manuel & Brock, 2003; Patai &

Corral, 2005).

In examining the connections between formalism and other theoretical

movements, Walhout and Ryken (1991, p. 190) propose that formalism contains

"timeless principles" and can be viewed as "part of a two-hundred-year-long attempt to

assert the limitations of scientific and cognitive knowledge," and to demonstrate that

literary and artistic endeavours open up complementary and equally important forms of

knowledge.

Archetypal criticism.

While formalist and archetypal criticism developed largely independently, some

key principles connect them. As Walhout and Ryken (1991) indicate, the two

approaches tend "to view literature as a more or less self-contained imaginative world,

instead of relating it to extra-literary contexts" (p. 9), with the key feature of archetypal

criticism being "its organizing and integrating ability" (p. 12). Archetypal criticism,

popular from the 1960s to the 1980s, identifies plot motifs, character types and images

which recur in literature across cultures, such as the walled garden, the rose, the lost

child, the woman enclosed in a high tower, the journey through the wilderness, or the

quest for the holy grail. Archetypal literary critics claim that identification of

archetypal motifs in texts can "yield meaningful insights into the universal human

condition and patterns of human behaviour and psychology that resonate with

readers/viewers over time" (Brock, 2009, p. 26).

Proponents of other literary theories mine these archetypes in support of their own theories, which assign specific causes to recurring human experiences and perceptions; thus in considering the archetype of the woman trapped in the tower (a development of the medieval concept of the "inclusa"), Marxist and sociocultural critical theorists might focus on materialist social structures forcing enclosure, while feminist literary critics might focus on the limitations which masculinist expectations place on women's autonomy.

Modernism.

The ultimate futility of art was implicit in the very terms with which the romantics, and subsequently the modernists, attempted to deify art as a substitute for religion. The concept of an autonomous creative imagination, which fabricated the forms of order, meaning and integration which men no longer believed could be found in nature, implicitly concedes that art is pure fiction, without any corresponding object in the real world. For this reason, the doctrine of the creative imagination contained within itself the premises of its refutation.

—Graff, 1977, p. 222

Arising in the late 19th century, the Modernist impulse proved influential for much of the twentieth, particularly in the period of disillusionment and sense of loss following the First World War. Modernism rejected positivism and expressed concern about current social abuses. In this period, so devastated by war, there was a decreasing faith in previously accepted ways of seeing the world, and a sense of hollowness and desolation when observing social disorder, wondering if the search for remedies was futile.

Modernists combine the esoteric and the strange, mixing disillusion and delight in a stream of consciousness, valuing surface impressions rather than representational art. Like symbolists, modernists argue against the idea that literature should be easy to follow for the ordinary reader, or depend on a tidy logical exposition. Instead, modernist work is often disjointed and episodic, juxtaposing rather than ordering ideas and aiming for radically non-logical effects. Modernist poetry is complex, highly intellectual, compressed, full of ironies at several interacting levels; it revels in unresolvable paradox and virtuosity. Reacting against the idea that conventions of literary or aesthetic criticism should restrict their composition, modernists self-consciously twisted traditional literary forms. They did not allow social respectability to restrict their choice of subject or its treatment, and their blunt use of vernacular sought to challenge and critique polite culture. Modernism saw itself as a movement of the cosmopolitan urban intelligentsia rather than the middle-class suburban or rural bourgeoisie with a concern for respectability.

Modernism brings a shift away from the romantic expression of individual emotion that placed the aesthetic above the cognitive, towards a dominantly "code-breaking" approach to the understanding of poetry. One of the consequences of the increasing cognitive challenge in modernist poetry is the heightening of interest in types of ambiguity, particularly for the New Critics.

The Cambridge School, Leavis, and *Scrutiny*.

In the twentieth century a school of criticism grew up around F. R. Leavis, editor of the Cambridge-based journal *Scrutiny*. Sometimes referred to as the Cambridge School (particularly in contrast with the London School of literary and educational theorists) these academics, critics and educators reacted against the customary study of literature in its historical context, which tended to focus on the author's life and other

social influences of the period. The Cambridge School developed a view of how

literary texts should be taught in secondary schools, flowing from their view of

literature and culture as forces for social cohesion and the preservation of the cultural

heritage.

The Cambridge School was influenced by the educational theories of Matthew

Arnold, who saw literature as to some extent replacing the moral force of traditional

religious belief, and transcending divisions in society. As Strickland (1990) points out,

this Arnoldian view of the ennobling power of literature to cement society, "thus

forestalling political revolution" (p. 176), also informed the 1921 Newbolt Committee

Report, *The Teaching of English*, which proposed that English had the power to "form a

new element of national unity, linking together the mental life of all classes by

experiences which hitherto have been the privileges of a limited section" (Newbolt,

1921, in Strickland, 1990, p. 177).

Industrialisation led to a rise in literacy linked with the rise of newspapers and

magazines. The explosion of what came to be known as the mass media led to

educators reflecting on the power of newspapers to influence popular taste and

community perceptions. The counterbalance to the mass media, as envisaged by Leavis

and his colleagues at *Scrutiny*, took two main forms: the study of exemplary literary

texts, and the identification of manipulative strategies used by advertisers and

newspaper magnates. Richards' *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924) linked critical

standards to moral and ethical health: "The critic ... is as much concerned with the

health of the mind as the doctor with the health of the body ... Bad taste and crude

responses are not mere flaws in an otherwise admirable person. They are actually a root

evil from which other defects follow" (p. 62).

Leavis and Denys Thompson's book *Culture and Environment* (1933) broke new ground by outlining an English syllabus which included study of news media and advertisements. The purpose of this was to help students resist conditioning. Leavis "saw the good or great work of literature as the manifestation of something both psychologically and ethically valuable" (Strickland, 1990, p. 178). Leavisian influence can still be seen in classrooms where advertising and other forms of mass media persuasion are analysed in order to help students resist being manipulated.

Leavis also added to the classics the enduring works of vernacular literature, seeing literary heritage as something that should belong to and be taught to people of all backgrounds. This grew out of his view of literature as an influence for good in society, especially in light of widespread anxiety about rapid social change. The Cambridge School emphasised a canon of literature which had been highly valued over time, whose authors might arguably be seen as agents of social stability and who were advocates for natural and universal beliefs and values.

The Cambridge Critics valued thematic structures and verbal nuances, and reacted against the mediocrity of much mass-produced fiction, damning it with faint praise as "middle-brow". This implied superiority on the part of the Cambridge Critics, which led to their being received with suspicion in some political and educational circles, notably those of the London School in English education, which was beginning to focus on the language and writing of the working classes as something of value in itself that had been neglected. Much of the disparity of outlook in English teaching arises from the divergence of the Cambridge and London Schools as to whether what was called "The Great Tradition" should be preserved and taught to all or replaced by far more diverse texts to reflect more of working class experience. This hinged on contested notions of what constitutes value in a text.

The Cambridge School was seen by its critics as doctrinaire in its views on literary excellence, while the London School was characterised by its critics as discounting all notions of literary excellence. Features of the two schools were frequently exaggerated by their critics, so some examination of primary sources is necessary as a counterbalance. Each group of critics also foresaw some of the unintended consequences of the other group's approaches, which may be fruitfully evaluated for this study. As each group's theories were taken up or contested by subsequent theorists, they have been influential and in turn have been affected by many other diverse interdisciplinary theories of culture and education. Untangling the resulting threads may be impossible, but this study attempts to outline them and highlight some of the interrelationships, particularly as they affect the teaching of senior English.

In attempting to give an even-handed view of the work of Leavis, Strickland (1990) observes that "Leavis's well-known insistence on judging every piece of writing by the highest possible standards turns out on examination to be a matter of judging a writer on his [or her] own terms and by his [or her] own standards. It amounts to a refusal to misrepresent" (p. 179). This contrasts with the erosion of the authors' authority in some prominent later theories.

As most of the contributors to *Scrutiny* were colleagues or students of Leavis and his wife Q. D. Leavis, there was a similarity of outlook which some claimed was a form of orthodoxy. Ousby (1996) depicts *Scrutiny* as playing a less problematic role in the literary contestation of the time: "Importantly, in the 1930s it offered a middle ground between Marxism and the right wing literary politics of T. S. Eliot. *Scrutiny* questioned current reputations as well as proposing its own view of literary and cultural history" (p. 840). Strickland (1990) comments that

A Marxist might note approvingly ... that for Leavis the work of literature is

never merely an individual creation, as the romantic tradition has assumed, but

the expression of the life of a community and an exemplification of what it

values and believes. (p. 183)

New Criticism

The school of literature and literary criticism known as New Criticism flourished

from the 1920s. New Criticism has formalist leanings: the text is seen as an

autonomous object worthy of close attention, universal in its transcendence of

geography and history. Meaning is seen to lie in "words on the page" rather than in

biographical information about the author, or sociocultural information about context.

New Critics closely analyse individual texts in a manner analogous to scientific analysis

of phenomena. They place great value on the importance of the multiple facets of

meaning in metaphorical language. Their method is not particularly effective with lyric

poetry, yielding more information when applied to complex allusive poetry. The

accessibility of such poetry to the methods of the New Critics leads to considerable

emphasis on the unpacking of ambiguities as if they were codes to be cracked to allow

meaning to spill out.

New Criticism rejects romantic subjectivity, with its focus on emotion, in favour

of aesthetic detachment and empiricism, seeking coherence and integration through the

resolution of ambiguity. As Brooks (1947) acknowledges, this approach has led New

Critics to be accused of cutting poems loose from their authors and contexts in a way

that renders literature "bloodless" and neglects their original and subsequent audiences.

Contestation Among Recent Key Theories

Marxist critical theory.

Although Karl Marx did not develop a literary theory, the principles of Marxist social theory have been applied by others to become what is sometimes called Critical Theory, influential in disciplines such as education, cultural studies and English. It begins from the Marxist premise that capitalism is

> not a neutral economic system founded on timeless laws of supply and demand, but a highly exploitative system, characterized by contradictions that would eventually undermine and destroy it. A new era of socialism—the dictatorship of the proletariat—would be ushered in, followed by communism—a stateless, egalitarian, and co-operative society, founded on the principle of providing for everyone according to their needs, not their wealth. (Cannon, 2009, p. 624)

Marxist critics saw aesthetic values as less important than the social and ethical aspects of literature. In the early years after the Russian Revolution, Soviet cultural theory required literature to be proletarian in nature, realist in approach, and able to advance the communist cause. Socialist realism was seen as the only authentic literature of the revolution. Trotsky pointed out in *Literature and the Revolution* (1924) that there was a risk of cultural sterility arising from this, in that a writer's politics would be no guarantee of literary quality (Murfin & Ray, 1998).

As disillusionment grew with the USSR in the 1930s, and with the rise of Nazism, some critics observed the "breakdown of the predictive dimension of Marxist historical theory" and the increasing anger of former Marxists "as time revealed that the remedy was, as much as anything, like another disease" so that a "double-bind impasse lies behind much of the writing of the post-war years" (Kumar, 1990, p. 70).

Paradoxically this was not matched by a decrease in the perceived authority of Marxist cultural criticism, which has been influential in the development of many other theories, particularly feminism, New Historicism, and postmodernism (including deconstruction).

The goals of early Marxist literary theorists were that literature should be progressive, realistic and accessible to ordinary people. One of the anomalies raised by Marxist proletarian literature was that it had a strong tendency to resolve its protagonists' difficulties through "release from, or evasion of, working-class life" (Holloway, 1990, p. 106). One consequence of this was that during the 1950s and 60s dramatists and novelists aiming at socialist realism "found fully adequate affirmations of life difficult, and ... looked about for palliating, limited solutions instead" (p. 106).

Early Marxists saw modernism as self-engrossed, incoherent and fragmented. Georg Lukacs protested against modernism for its pessimistic and introverted character, even where modernist writers were aiming at social criticism of modernity. Later Marxist critics, such as the Frankfurt School, however, were to recognise much of modernism as a valuable critique of modern urban capitalism. Benjamin saw potential in mass culture and the mass media to "eliminate the ritual and bourgeois elitism of art and literature and give it a kind of political freedom" (Cuddon, 1998, p. 493). He saw mechanical reproduction as changing society's idea of what constitutes art, and also allowing the working poor to easily own works of art, rather than leaving art as the province of the wealthy.

Marxist theory after Bakhtin saw discourse as a site of contestation between authority and freedom (Walhout & Ryken, 1991) and all literature as expressing ideology of some sort.

How might Marxist critical theory influence classroom practice? Marxist Critical Theory "seek[s] to de-privilege the canon, showing how classical literature

holds implied ideological messages; to recover or discover unheralded pieces of writing that come from the lower classes" (May, 1995, p. 201). The place of the canon has been hotly disputed—and its very existence challenged—by Critical Theorists in educational jurisdictions in each Australian state. Critical Theorists have campaigned for increased inclusion of contemporary and minority writers, including working class writers. They favour curricula which explicitly challenge perceived ideological assumptions in texts that may be regarded by the literary establishment as 'classics.'

The adoption by Marxist Critical Theorists of the (often capitalised) term 'Critical Theory' raises an intriguing question. Is all Critical Theory Marxist in presuppositions, and if so why has the term Marxist been elided? A further complication is that the capitalised form 'Theory' in the literature can signify either Critical Theory or any recent literary theory.

Cultural studies and critical literacy.

Marxist criticism led to the establishment of the new interdisciplinary field of Cultural Studies, which takes its name from the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies founded by Richard Hoggart. It defined culture as anything produced by society: any cultural product could appear on the curriculum as a text for study. Williams in his 1958 book *Culture and Society* galvanised critical attention on what came to be termed the Culture and Society debate. This debate considered the effects of industrialisation, the division of labour and the emerging mass society with its own popular culture. The debate ranged over whether a unified society was to be established by looking backward to a harmonious, highly ordered, caretaker model of culture, in which the great cultural products of the past would be preserved for future generations (Leavis's cultural heritage model of English), or by looking forward to a socialist utopia which would bring about a levelling of value hierarchies.

Williams defined 'culture' anthropologically as

> a particular way of life which expresses certain meanings and values not only in
>
> art and learning, but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour. The analysis of
>
> culture, from such a definition, is the clarification of the meanings and values
>
> explicit and implicit in a particular way of life. (1965, p. 4)

Williams' book title, *The Long Revolution* (1965), echoes its rootedness in Marxist theory. It is interesting that recent Marxist critics, who have been engaged in a long-running and vociferous debate with postmodernists about the implications of their respective philosophical presuppositions, criticise the identity politics of postmodernist theory of the 'gaps' as fragmenting those very groups who could together make this revolution possible: "For if we are to threaten capital[ism] we need to build an alliance of all who have any interest in its overthrow" (Cole, Hill, Kelly, & Rikowski, 1999, p. 4).

Peel (1998) in an article evaluating Cultural Studies from a proponent's perspective, shows ambivalence about the effectiveness of its approach, and the possible gap between theory and practice. He proposes that Cultural Studies is "likely to improve standards because it is based on those things which students like" (p. 81), but admits there is concern among educators and theorists over its relativism and its failure to include aesthetic considerations. Peel notes claims that Cultural Studies is laden with theory and is elitist, and admits that it presents some almost unanswerable difficulties. He asks, "Does Cultural Studies encourage debate or is it doctrinaire and inflexible? Is it an intellectual straightjacket?" (p. 82). Peel sees Cultural Studies as having the potential to empower students if it is implemented effectively, but also to be "superficial

and unchallenging" (1998, p. 80). He does, however, question whether Cultural Studies

belongs within the school subject English.

Semiotics and Structuralism.

In literary criticism theorists now rejected mere interpretation as a fruitless

endeavour subject to all the vagaries of ad hoc, intuitive response. Only by

examining the structural features of texts—poetic devices, narrative functions,

techniques of linguistic "defamiliarization"—could criticism place itself on a

firm (inductive and adequately theorized) methodological footing

—Honderich, 1995, p. 855.

Structuralism produced euphoria in some critics and thinkers because it seemed

to represent a great improvement on previous methods in criticism. It seemed to

have a potential for certainty—it seemed as though when you had determined

the structure of a work of literature, you would have it firmly and permanently in

your grasp, and you could show that structure to other people with confidence in

its objectivity. In structuralism, literary criticism and science seemed to be

coming together.

—Bonnycastle, 2002, p. 111.

In a similar way to modernism emerging as a reflection of disillusionment after

Word War I, the Second World War was followed by a literary and cultural reaction,

but of a contrasting type. Many were seeking "systems of thought that emphasized

comprehensibility and significance, rather than absurdity and meaninglessness" (Murfin

& Ray, 1998, p. 379). The theories of human society known as semiotics and

structuralism rose to prominence during this period, affecting numerous disciplines and provoking considerable reaction and contestation.

Semiotics is the study of sign systems and the ways they convey meaning. It emerged from the linguistic theories of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), but its application goes far beyond language. Semiotics functions in two main fields: "literary semiotics construes its primary object of analysis to be literature as a system, while social (or cultural) semiotics explores culture as a set of interlocking systems and sub-systems" (Leitch et al., 2001, p. 20).

Structuralism is an application of semiotic theory, linking the structures of language to literary forms but also to other aspects of culture, such as fashion and institutions. According to the structuralist explanatory model, texts of all kinds are constructed according to codes and conventions. People responding to texts (who could no longer be called readers as the texts were so diverse), were said to "naturalise" the texts to fit the cultural assumptions of their own time and place. Signs are defined by this school of thought as anything that communicates information by a network of agreed codes and conventions. Signs—including words—are believed to have meaning only in relation to other signs. Semioticians separate the "signifier"—the written mark or spoken sound, from the "signified"—the concept which is represented.

Popular through the 1960s and into the 1970s, structuralism had most influence in linguistics and literary theory, and in anthropology (Honderich, 1995). It applies Saussure's idea of binary oppositions from linguistics to a range of human sign-systems. Roland Barthes posits that in a literary text, opposite terms modulate until they reconcile, or are reconciled by a third term which functions as an intermediary. These binary oppositions were viewed as stable and systematic (an idea which was to be challenged at its roots by Derrida and the poststructuralists). Barthes distanced himself

from and later abandoned a structuralist position, and significantly contributed to the

shaping of post-structuralist theory.

Structuralists declared the meaning of human communication to be arbitrary.

They saw no inherent reason why red should signify danger or a handshake should be

used as a welcome. What gave these signs their meaning was seen to be a system of

agreed codes and conventions. Meaning was therefore seen as possible to determine—

"determinable"—and also fixed and correct—"determinative." For this reason,

structuralists proposed that systematic, quasi-scientific analysis of the structures of a

text would reveal its meaning, in the same way that grammar revealed the meaning of a

sentence. A subset of this theory made structural parallels between literature, ideas and

social groups ("genetic structuralism") which were to appear in later theories.

Structuralism was also influential in psychoanalytical theory.

Structuralism is a text-centred approach, which does not see biographical or

historical context as crucial to meaning. Structuralist criticism examines rhetorical,

metaphorical and linguistic features of text, seeing them as the structural axis around

which a text is constructed and as the source of literary unity (Honderich, 1995). It

rejects the idea that the author's unique mind is central to the creation of a text's

meaning, holding literature to be a product of society's complex codes and conventions.

It also challenges the notion that literature represents reality: "structuralists spurn any

notion of an inherent reality since they believe that all signification is arbitrary" (Murfin

& Ray, 1998, p. 382).

Structuralists saw their theories as rendering obsolete the traditional practices of

literary interpretation, of making them not just contestable but utterly untenable and

without foundation (Honderich, 1995). Ironically—or perhaps predictably—this was to

happen in turn to the structuralists, when the poststructuralists declared that meaning

was neither determinable nor determinative, and that they considered it neither 'natural'

nor appropriate to conceptualise in terms of pairs of opposites. This had the potential to

cause disequilibrium among educators as to what kinds of literary activities should be

modelled and taught in secondary schools, and led to the perhaps unresolvable

separation of paradigms, depending on the educators' theoretical foundations. Where

this was taken up later by the poststructuralists, it led to the crossroads of the Dartmouth

Conference of 1966, in which the London School generally took on the implications of

structuralism and the emerging poststructuralism, in contrast to the heritage model built

on the Cambridge School which rejected the theoretical foundations of structuralist

theory (Sawyer et al., 1998).

Post-Structuralism

"[W]ords subvert their own meanings, and every text, ultimately, betrays itself,

parodies itself, collapses on itself."

—Sartwell, 2004

Sorting out what poststructuralism is can be a complicated exercise, as

"poststructuralism is no single thing, but rather a loose constellation of ideas and

theories out of which multifarious versions of the phenomenon can be constituted"

(Misson, 1998, p. 45). Arising in the late 1960s, post-structuralism works out the

implications and weaknesses of structuralism. It reacts against the structuralist impulse

to perceive stable patterns, such as seeing binary oppositions as stable or centred. In

this respect it reflects the influence of Hegel, but rejects his philosophical universalism.

Hegel proposed that the end purpose of history would be stable perfection, but this is an

aspect of his philosophy discarded by many of the critics influenced by him, particularly

poststructuralists such as Foucault and Kristeva (Leitch et al., 2001, pp. 626–30).

Poststructuralism posits that there are many possible meanings but no closure, so that indeterminacy is pervasive and language is seen as inherently inadequate. The multiple possible meanings cause a fluidity described as "overspill." All discourse is seen as open to interrogation, but not to the resolution of a definitive reading. Hepburn has argued that following from the structuralists' position that all utterances acquire meaning through comparison with other utterances, the post-structuralists have been

> exploiting the implications they (rightly or—more probably—wrongly) see in this, for a more radically sceptical view of language in general and at all levels (literary, critical, historical). They stress the irreducible elusiveness and the instabilities in meanings, the illusions generated by metaphorical and other figurative strategies. (1990, p. 507)

Poststructuralism sees the individual not as the source of meaning but as "a site where different codes or ideologies operate," a view which "can slide into a kind of determinism, and a denial of the freedom of the individual to make decisions, take action and have feelings," according to Bonnycastle (2002, p. 19).

One of the main strategies employed by poststructuralist literary critics is deconstruction. It has been described as "a method of reading and theory of language that seeks to subvert, dismantle, and destroy any notion that a text or signifying system has any boundaries, margins, coherence, unity, determinate meaning, truth or identity" (Henderson & Brown, 1997, n.p.). As a consequence, deconstructionists declare theory to be an "aporia": an alternation of meanings which can never be resolved (Culler, 1976). The purpose of deconstruction is to illuminate the contradictory meanings within texts and systems, particularly where some opposition of terms privileges one

over the other, and to show that such a hierarchy can be inverted to give priority to the other term.

Where New Critics saw harmony, equilibrium despite paradox, and unity in great works of literature, deconstructionist critics looked for the tension, ambiguity or contradiction inherent in a work which would cause it to unravel. Deconstructionist techniques are "fundamentally at variance with, contradictory to, and subversive of, what may be (or may have been) seen by criticism as a single, stable 'meaning'" (Cuddon, 1998, p. 210). One of the implications of accepting this view is that

> any form of traditional literary criticism which employs the practical tools of comparison and analysis patiently and attentively to elucidate meaning is seen as a self-defeating practice since the rhetoric of both the literary text under analysis and literary criticism is inherently unstable. (Cuddon, 1998, p. 211)

The ramifications of this outlook on the classroom practices of English teachers who may (or may be required to) adopt it are very significant. If the theory is accurate, most of what English teachers do in class is self-defeating. If the theory is not accurate, English teachers might resist practising deconstruction, as they see it would undermine their existing classroom program. Even determining whether the theory is in essence well-founded is fraught with difficulty if meaning is as inherently unstable as its proponents claim. An analogy might be serving on a jury in a case where the witnesses cannot be depended upon to be consistent with themselves, let alone each other.

The postmodernist era.

Contemporary literature has come to register the dissolution of the ideas often evoked to justify its existence: the cultural, moral, psychological premises that

for many people still define the essence of literature as a humanistic enterprise.
Literature is now in the process of telling us how little it means.

—Poirier, in Graff, 1977, p. 219

Postmodernism resists definition. A blanket term for a cluster of attitudes and practices, rather than a coherent theory, the postmodernist label is used in several different ways: to refer to post-World War II anti-realist and non-traditional art, hyper-modernist art, or a broader cultural condition which has "an all-embracing effect on life, culture, ideology and art" (Goring, Hawthorn, & Mitchell, 2001, p. 270).

In general terms, postmodernism can be seen as both a development of and a reaction against modernism. Postmodernism challenges any perceived ordering of experience for artistic purposes, as this is seen as arbitrary (Ford, 1990). It reacts against the idea of absolute truth or authority, and revels in intricacy, in pyrotechnics, games, parody, artifice and pastiche. Postmodern writers are particularly intrigued by interference with patterns, with distortions of ordered sequences such as chronologies or linear narratives. They play games with the fictionality of fiction, deliberately blurring boundaries between research and invention.

Two modes of postmodernism have been postulated by Lather (in Cole et al., 1999, p. 4): a "postmodernism of reaction ... concerned with the collapse of meaning, with nihilism and with cynicism," in which "the conception of the individual is of a fractured schizoid consumer" who is involved in "games of despair"; and a "postmodernism of resistance" which she sees as "participatory, dialogic, encompassing pluralistic structures of authority," "nondualistic" and "antihierarchical" and which she sees as peopled by ex-socialists.

Feminist literary theory.

Feminist literary theory is closely connected to structuralist, poststructuralist, psychoanalytical, linguistic and Marxist literary theories. Feminist criticism is distinguished by principles rather than techniques. Feminist critics "believe that women have been unjustly marginalised and victimised by the structures of society; that this situation needs to be remedied, and that one way to do so is through literary criticism" (Gallagher, 1991, p. 232). Among other, feminist literary criticism takes several forms: the study of representations of women in classic works; highlighting the value of works written by women; challenging and subverting the "powerful opposition between the masculine and feminine" (Bonnycastle, 2002, p. 194); and categorising certain approaches to text as characteristically masculine or feminine. For example,

> Criticism centred on individual works of literature is ... dominantly masculine, especially when the work is seen as a complex mechanism that requires analysis ... Reader-centred criticism involves more feminine qualities—a dispersal of authority, a plurality of "valid" meanings for a work, and a concern with community rather than authority" (Bonnycastle, 2002, p. 192).

Some feminist critics claim that approaches which focus on an author's meaning are masculinist because they establish a hierarchy of "legitimate" authority. Cixous proposes a category termed "écriture feminine," which Leitch et al. describe as "opposed to patriarchal discourse with its rigid grammar, boundaries, and categories; tapping into the imaginary, it gives voice to the unconscious, the body, the non-subjective, and polymorphous drives" (Leitch et al., 2001 p. 16). Feminist theory, like poststructuralism, criticises the marginalisation of "the Other," whether women, non-Western races, or disadvantaged people.

Queer theory.

Queer theory's political aim "is to demonstrate that gender and sexual categories are not given realities but are 'regulatory fictions', products of discourse" (Goring et al., 2001, p. 197). Plays upon the similarities between "queer" and "query" have led to the coinage "queer(y)ing," which "suggests that a queer reading of a literary work can serve to raise questions about conventional reading, and about conventions in general" (Goring et al., 2001, p. 198). Queer theory "is interested in any and all acts, images, and ideas that 'trouble', violate, cross, mix, or otherwise confound established boundaries between male and female, normal and abnormal, self and other," with a broader goal of "a general troubling, an attempted unfixing, of the links between acts, categories, representations, desires, and identities" (Leitch et al., 2001, p. 2487). One example of how this might affect interpretations of literary text is the idea that characters who dress as the opposite sex "implicitly suggest that gender is a kind of persistent impersonation that passes as the real" (Leitch et al., 2001, p. 2489).

Reader-response criticism.

What a poem means is the outcome of a dialogue between the words on the page and the person who happens to be reading it; that is to say, its meaning varies from person to person.

—Auden, in Stephens, Watson, & Parker, 2003, p. 4.

Reader-response criticism emphasises the contribution of readers to the meaning of a text. Following Rudolf Iser, it posits that every text contains "gaps" which readers fill in from their experience of the world and their knowledge of cultural conventions. One question which arises in reader-response criticism is whether the text directs or causes readers to respond in certain ways or whether readers impose their ideas on the text, resulting in irreducible subjectivity.

Reader-response criticism can be classified under three main categories: psychological, social and intersubjective (Vander Weele, 1991). The first of these takes as the goal of literary study increasing knowledge of the self, and focuses on the reader's motivation in reading as a type of wish-fulfilment, taking into account "defences, expectations, fantasies and transformations" (Vander Weele, 1991, p. 131).

The social form of reader-response criticism proposes that social conventions shape interpretation of literary works. Rather than accepting complete relativism, where each individual's impressions of a work constitutes its meaning for that person, these critics see the social groups to which a person belongs as shaping interpretation. These "interpretive communities", to use Fish's (1972) term, engage shared conventions and strategies when exploring text, and their members voluntarily agree to abide by the rules of that community, rather as hockey players agree to abide by the rules of hockey rather than cricket. Fish contrasts *rhetorical* works, which reinforce the reader's opinions, and *dialectical* works, which challenge readers to construct truth from its contradictory components.

Fish (1972) raises the possibility that a reader might see an early part of a work differently once a later part had been encountered. This suggests that each reader has a fluid and dynamic, rather than static, response to a specific text. The concept of an informed "intended reader," familiar with literary devices, characteristics of diverse discourses and genres and idiomatic language, was explored by Fish and other theorists, who engaged in controversy over the role of ideology in making such a reader "informed."

The intersubjective branch of reader-response criticism focuses on "neither the unique individual nor the shared conventions but the negotiations between the two" (Vander Weele, 1991, p. 173). It is interested in the interrelationships between the

reader, the text and the broader social reality, including historical reality. One branch of reader-response theory, known as reception theory, emphasises what can be learnt from how a text was first received, and how this reception changes over time and in different contexts (Jauss, 1970/2001).

Theoretical shifts and contestation.

Contemporary literature has come to register the dissolution of the ideas often evoked to justify its existence: the cultural, moral, psychological premises that for many people still define the essence of literature as a humanistic enterprise. Literature is now in the process of telling us how little it means.

—Poirier, 1977 in Graff, 1979, p. 219

The historical overview of literary theories in this section illustrates how central contestation has been to their development and dissemination. Literary theories have been formed, re-formed and transformed through intense contestation about presuppositions, definitions, axioms, value claims and counter-claims. Contestation has occurred about the terms and the conduct of debates between rival theories. The notions of usefulness and practical application of literary theories (taken individually or collectively) have been strenuously contested. Contestation has also focused on the age-applicability for students of specific theories or a multiplicity of theories.

Each of these movements defined itself in terms of its difference from the other, during a period of intense social upheaval. Each of these proponent groups wrote substantial works challenging the faulty presuppositions of the others, and answering the criticisms levelled against themselves. As a consequence, many of the extant works on these subjects from the period contemporaneous with the original controversies argue backwards and forwards about the weakest and most vulnerable points of the

theories they oppose, rather than outlining the salient features of their own unfolding theories. Thus the contemporary inquirer into these theories may have to move beyond the earliest primary sources with their claims of how a theory was *intended* to function, and seek later works evaluating how those theories may be seen to have acted and interacted over the space of several decades.

One of the difficulties of dealing with the implications of teaching emerging literary theories is that the promulgation of these theories often commits a logical fallacy: instead of proposing a hypothesis which can be tested, the principles of a theory are stated as if they were self-evident factual claims which are not open to challenge (Kitching, 2008; Patai, 2008). Paradoxically this has even been the practice for some theorists who claim that nothing at all can be self-evident. Little room is left for evaluation of whether their assumptions and presuppositions stand up to the light of other theory, or fit with teachers' existing classroom practice.

For example, the truth of Barthes' claim of the death of the author is assumed in a handbook for senior secondary students:

> it would be ridiculous to assume that ... "authors" can control the meanings
>
> derived from the text ... Traditionally, in the days of the Renaissance ... the
>
> author was seen to be ultimately in control ... While some remnants of this
>
> theory remain today, the idea that the author is solely responsible for creating the
>
> meaning of a text has long been abandoned. (Robinson & Robinson, 2003, p. 7)

A number of critics have nevertheless pointed out areas in which they see the assumptions of a theory or cluster of theories to be so poorly grounded as to call into question their theoretical and educational implications. Such critics can sound initially like lone voices battling ineffectually against the dominant orthodoxy of their time and

place. Their protests can, however, prompt a process of re-evaluation of the "givens" of a literary theory by identifying some complexity for which it has no adequate explanation. This mirrors the scientific practice of testing hypotheses and recognising them as possible explanations, to be explored and tested, rather than as axioms.

Ironically, some of the critics announcing the demise of particular literary theories are themselves initiators and proponents of these very theories, including Roland Barthes (structuralism) and Stanley Fish (reader-response criticism). After decades of tertiary teaching in literature and literary theory, during which he shaped a highly developed theoretical position (sometimes referred to as the "school of Fish"), Fish has in recent years argued the logical impossibility of his stance. To quote from an official transcript of an interview:

> (1) if by theory you mean the attaining of a perspective unattached to any local or partisan concerns, but providing a vantage point from which local and partisan concerns can be clarified and ordered, the theory quest will always fail because no such perspective is or could be available;
>
> (2) the unavailability of the supra-contextual is in no way disabling because in its absence you will not be adrift and groundless; rather you will be grounded in and by the same everyday practices—complete with authoritative exemplars, understood goals, canons of evidence, shared histories—that gave you a habitation before you began your fruitless quest for a theory; and
>
> (3) nothing follows from (1) and (2) goes nowhere; if grand theories provide no guidance (because they are so general as to be empty), the realisation that grand theorists provide no guidance doesn't provide any guidance either. End of story, end of theory as an interesting topic. (Fish, 2000, n.p.)

Similarly, Kristeva's (1980) comments on semiotics might be applied by analogy to a range of other theories: "Semiotics cannot develop except as a critique of semiotics ... an investigation which discovers nothing at the end of its quest but its own ideological moves, so as to take cognisance of them, to deny them, and to start out again" (pp. 30–1).

Graff (1977) describes swings or trends in literary theory and connected English teaching practice as movements backwards and forwards between tradition and innovation, registering a conflict between those two impulses: to preserve and to break new ground. A poststructuralist might criticise Graff for expressing this in terms of a reductionist "binary opposition," but as a hypothesis of how trends in literary theory and English teaching change over time, it is worth investigation. Graff takes an eclectic and evaluative approach to theories as they arise, rather than adopting a particular theory as his chosen outlook and defending it against all attacks. He proposes that teaching the conflicts between the theories is a more fruitful way to help university students understand those successive waves of theory which have implications for the teaching of English. He outlines some of the areas in which successive theories can have more in common than they claim to have, indicating that while postmodernism's conventions "systematically invert the respect for artistic truth and significance which had characterised modernism," nevertheless on close examination, the weight that modernism placed on meanings in literature and "postmodernism's repudiation of these meanings prove to be highly ambivalent attitudes—much closer to each other than might at first appear" (p. 220). He argues that even apparently disparate theories were interconnected, noting that "Postmodernist anti-art was inherent in the logic of the modernist aesthetic, which in turn derived from the romantic attempts to substitute art for religion," and indicating that "the terms in which the religious function of art was

defined actually foreshadowed the twentieth-century reduction of art to triviality and marginality" (p. 221). The dependence of literary theories on previous theories which they claim to repudiate or replace further complicates the task of teachers seeking to interpret literary-theoretical influences on a mandated English syllabus.

Approaches to Literary Theories in Australian Schools

The diversity and instability of literary theories make it difficult to get an overall grasp of their influence on English teaching. For this reason, the theories are often grouped in clusters which interact to shape particular aspects of English teaching, whether these be text selection, curriculum development, pedagogical approaches, examination questions, or the purposes of the subject English, as seen by teachers or students. By clustering these multitudinous theories, educators can more readily formulate ideas about their potential classroom effects. The clusters can be conceptualised in a range of ways; among them are the Luke model included in Queensland syllabus documents, which clusters literary theories and approaches to the subject English by noting the respective values placed on text, reader, author, and world context (Queensland Studies Authority, 2003, p. 9). This model recognises that the difference between approaches is often reflected in a re-ordering of the priority given to each of these four factors, although they may all be present to some degree.

Board of Studies' Four Perspectives

Another model which gathers literary theories and approaches to teaching English in manageable clusters is what I will term the Four Perspectives document on the NSW Board of Studies web site (Hardage, 1998). This was tabled in 1998 at a Stage 6 English Forum held to brief and consult with teachers of HSC English, in a time of syllabus re-shaping. The document is still on the official website, although in an archives section, and teachers interviewed for this research typically thought these four

approaches still accurately represented the overall thrust of the senior English syllabus in NSW.

The four perspectives described in the paper represent four divergent emphases which arise from diverse views of the primary purposes of the subject English; their inheritance from various literary theories is outlined briefly in that document. From each of these perspectives, the paramount purpose of English is:

- Teaching methods of literary appreciation, cultivating taste, and giving access to literary exemplars as samples of the literary history of a culture (**cultural heritage**);

- Encouraging personal growth, written reflection on students' own lives and contexts, and the flourishing of creativity (**personal growth**);

- Teaching students to critically question sources of information, to critique the power structures embedded in literary and everyday texts, with the aim of influencing changes in power structures and social attitudes (**critical literacy/cultural analysis**);

- Teaching clear and accurate expression in all modes (writing, speaking, listening), grammatical knowledge and skills, and effective communication of ideas (**literacy development**).

Individuals prioritise these functions of English very differently, according to their experience, views of cultural heritage, philosophical and social views and attitudes, and how they see these perspectives serving students' learning needs and interests.

Cultural heritage.

The cultural heritage perspective "aims to promote transmission of the knowledge that has shaped the established view of high culture in the community ...

[and] ascribes high value to texts currently considered the literature of the Western

canon" (BOS, 2006). Characterised by detailed analysis of often complex texts, with a

focus on literary devices, elements of style, paradox, irony and rhetorical features, the

cultural heritage perspective seeks to connect students with the artistry of previous

literary periods through texts which have had enduring prominence, and values the

meanings communicated by the authors of such works. This model has strong links with

Leavisian, practical criticism and New Criticism which Hardage (1998) points out are

developments of formalism and inherit much from neoclassicism.

A cultural heritage approach may also be seen as connected to the romantic

period, which took pride in craftsmanship and artistry. The value this perspective

places on reworking available forms, showing technical artistry and sophistication, and

exploring relationships between literary and structural devices could be seen as echoing

both neoclassical and formalist theoretical stances. Because the cultural heritage

approach involves sustained analysis of highly intellectual and complex texts, it

encourages an interest in virtuosity and the interplay of ironies, which may be seen as

sharing common ground with both modernists and New Critics.

Personal growth.

The second perspective, sometimes called the growth model of English, (Dixon,

1991) provided the philosophic basis of the Year 7–10 English syllabus in the 1980s

and 1990s (BOS, 2008). The growth perspective originally emphasised working class

students writing authentically about the life of the urban poor (Dixon, 1991). This

perspective may be seen to resonate with romanticism in its elevation of individual

imagination, its focus on the psychological and subjective aspects of a personal state of

consciousness, and its view of the expression of original, fresh and authentic feeling as

a source of value and meaning in life (Hardage, 1998). It shares several characteristics

with romantic literary theory: a reaction against rules and conventions in literary

practice; a disapproval of the elevation of rational thought over emotional expression;

and a rejection of the idea that literature is about people in polite and refined social

circumstances.

Fraser's observation about romanticist literary theory fits fairly well with the

growth perspective's emphasis on unfettered student creative expression: "The rules

had vanished. It was no longer the poet's job to satisfy [the reader's] expectations; it

was the reader's business to strive to comprehend the workings of the poetic mind"

(1964, p. 350). Similarly, Daiches' remarks about romanticist theory could apply in

classrooms where the growth perspective is being emphasised: "poetry has for its major

function the expression of the poet's emotion and ... the relation of the poem to the poet

is more significant than the relation to its audience" (1968, p. 856).

These observations relate particularly to the growth model's perspective on the

student as producer of texts. When one comes to the student as responder to texts, there

would appear to be some connection between the growth model and the claims of

reader-response theory, particularly in its view of the reader as an active responder,

resulting in the acceptance of radical pluralism and the rejection of notions of

objectivity in literary criticism. The growth perspective resonates with the

psychological branch of reader-response criticism in its assumption that the goal of

literary study is "the reader's self-knowledge" (Vander Weele, 1991, p. 136), and it

therefore focuses on reader motivation in terms of "defenses, expectations, fantasies and

transformations" (Vander Weele, 1991, p. 132).

The growth model may also have links with archetypal criticism, which sees the

same deep issues and motifs arising in texts from all cultures, and values those patterns

of recurring ideas above any notions of literariness (Ryken, 1991). The growth

perspective may also be seen to develop out of reaction against any theories which see some texts as displaying qualities of excellence that other texts do not show to the same degree.

Critical literacy/cultural analysis.

The third perspective, the cultural analysis approach now often identified with the term critical literacy, appears to arise from a cluster of recent theories which share a tendency to challenge traditional authorities: these include Marxist critical theory, structuralism, poststructuralism, postmodernism (including deconstruction), cultural studies, postcolonial theory and New Historicism. Where the critical literacy perspective focuses on challenging received ideas about gender, it has resonances with feminist and gender criticism, and with queer theory. A fascination with power relationships links the critical literacy/cultural analysis perspective to all of these as well as to New Historicism's inquiry about the context of a text's production, use and prestige, and its approach to viewing cultural artefacts not as objects but as active participants in social oppression.

The cultural analysis approach has underlying sympathies with the poststructuralist idea of multiple meanings without closure, a sceptical view of literary, critical and historical language and the impossibility of any discourse or interpretation having objectivity (Derrida, 1967/2001; Misson, 1998).

Literacy development.

The fourth perspective may be seen to have links with the neoclassical emphasis on precision, directness and correct use of forms, but it may also arise from pragmatic concerns about comprehensibility and readiness for employment, rather than from particular literary theories. Where this perspective has led to working towards accuracy through decontextualised drills, it has been challenged at its roots by poststructuralist

theories about instability of meaning, and by Marxist critical theory's view of

correctness being a construct of the group in power, as reflected in the expression "the

Queen's English" which can be variously described as punctiliously correct according

to rules of lexicography and grammar or as reflecting the language of the aristocracy in

Britain. The Four Perspectives document notes that literacy development approaches

are "similar to cultural analysis in their social purpose" and aim to teach students

knowledge about language by means of "functional and genre-based approaches which

concentrate on the ways in which textual structures create meaning."

The process of outlining how these Four Perspectives might reflect particular

literary theories highlights some interesting queries about what might be expected of

teachers with regard to these perspectives and literary theories.

Conclusion

Diverse and rapidly changing literary theories have offered strong challenges to

ideas which might be seen as foundational to the study of literature at both school and

university levels. These ideas include what constitutes a text, the notion of

interpretation being contested and unstable or even untenable, the possibility of

construction and deconstruction of meanings, the concepts of literature and literariness,

literary canons and conventions, and privileged and marginalised voices, and the

relative authority of the author and the reader.

This study considers the case of teachers encountering the NSW English Stage 6

Syllabus that represented a significant shift in focus from its predecessor, particularly in

its—largely implicit—recognition of these challenges from many divergent literary

theories. What effects did these challenges from recent literary theories have on

teachers seeking to interpret the NSW Board of Studies' expectations of how senior

English is to be understood and enacted in classrooms, as represented in the 1999

Syllabus, which is after all a text, and may arguably therefore be seen as itself

vulnerable to these same challenges regarding the (im)possibility of interpreting

meaning in text?

Chapter 4

Research Method and Design

Introduction

This chapter outlines the research paradigm and theoretical frameworks under which this research has been conducted, and describes the procedures used. It also identifies the limitations of the research, and makes some suggestions regarding its transferability to other contexts.

The research question for this study was as follows:

How do teachers respond to difficulties in enacting a contested innovation in a new English senior syllabus?

The key concern of this research was to explore teachers' perceptions of the role, significance and effects of the use of literary theories in the New South Wales senior English classroom. The study focused on links between teachers' perceptions of English as a subject, their views of the NSW English Stage 6 Syllabus (1999), and their beliefs and practices regarding literary theory during a time in which there was arguably a significant change in emphasis in the Syllabus.

The length of the data collection period (2004–2010) allowed participants to reflect on their practices before, during, and after a period in which many senior English teachers had expressed uncertainty about their subject—its extent, purposes, and practices. Many teachers subsequently expressed relief at the publication of Board of Studies documents which had to some extent clarified these expectations, particularly concerning whether treatment of specific named literary theories was a requirement of the Syllabus. The researcher aimed to hear the voices of teachers on an issue which had

been the focus of much discussion in the profession, in professional publications, and in

the media (Manuel et al., 2009; McGraw, 2005; Sawyer et al., 1998).

The research project had three phases. Phase 1 involved in-depth semi-

structured interviews, Phase 2 took the form of an on-line opinionnaire, and Phase 3

was made up of interviews conducted by telephone and email. All three phases

involved teachers of senior secondary English in New South Wales.

Research Paradigm and Theoretical Frameworks

This study recognises that a researcher's theoretical lens influences the choice of

research methods, as individuals tend to select from the range of methodological options

those which are philosophically consistent with their ontological and epistemological

presuppositions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Practical considerations also lead to

pragmatic adoption of methods and strategies of inquiry that promise informative

results.

The analysis and underlying assumptions of this study draw on what Doyle

(1993) has called teachers' *curriculum processes*, those processes through which

teachers *interpret*, *enact* and *evaluate* curriculum in all its dimensions. From this

perspective, teachers are seen as interpreting the "meanings and intents" of curriculum

documents (Remillard & Bryans, 2004, p. 6) rather than taking them as self-evident

instructions to be obeyed. Individual interpretations of syllabus expectations provide a

rationale for each teacher's intended curriculum and shape the enacted curriculum,

which is understood as jointly constructed by teachers and students in their classroom

interactions. Teachers also engage in ongoing interpretation of students' speech and

behaviour, during and after a teaching sequence. Internal and external assessments are

also interpreted and evaluated by teachers, as a way of understanding and fine-tuning

the alignment of curriculum dimensions.

A curriculum processes framework recognises that teachers' curriculum actions are influenced by internal factors such as beliefs, values, emotions, interests and motivation. It also assumes that teachers' actions and attitudes are influenced by external contextual factors emanating from the school and from the wider community. A logical corollary of a curriculum processes framework is that diversity of curriculum practice is seen as both inevitable and valuable (Brady & Kennedy, 2010).

Qualitative Methodology

This study employs a largely qualitative methodology, because this provides "sensitivity to meaning and to context, local groundedness, the in-depth study of smaller samples, and greater methodological flexibility which enhances the ability to study process and change" (Punch, 2009, p. 290). It also reflects the discipline of education being part of the human sciences rather than the so-called "hard sciences."

A qualitative approach is well suited to a study that explores how research participants understand their own behaviour, and how they interpret particular situations and events (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). As this research aimed to investigate teachers' views of an aspect of their professional responsibilities as curriculum interpreters, enactors and evaluators, qualitative research provided an appropriate lens for inquiry (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Qualitative research can utilise different methodologies (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Punch, 2009), allowing a flexible and pragmatic approach to the phenomenon being studied. It is compatible with a range of epistemological theories (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Robson, 2002), which reinforces the appropriateness of qualitative methods for research in which epistemological theories seemed likely to be key factors underlying participants' curriculum actions and attitudes, as well as influencing the explanations that can be drawn from analysis of the data.

This study's interpretivist paradigm is compatible with a critical realist epistemology in that interpretations of reality are not taken for granted, but are understood to reflect the theoretical assumptions of both the participants and the researcher (Robson, 2002). An interpretivist paradigm fits well with a study of the meanings people bring to contexts and behaviour, which shape (and are shaped by) their worldviews (O'Donogue, 2007). The interpretivist paradigm assumes there will not be a single meaning attached to a complex social phenomenon such as curriculum change. The meanings multiple assigned to the role of literary theories in a new English syllabus could be expected to vary because of differences in teachers' perspectives and contexts. Consequently, rather than having a pre-structured research design with variables specified early, this study used general guiding questions and a relatively loose design in order to explore the field and allow the focus in the research question, and patterns in the data, to emerge gradually. This process suggested the most appropriate categories for data analysis.

Conceptual frameworks for this study were not pre-specified, but emerged from the Phase 1 interviews with senior English teachers. Their developing perspectives of the degree and type of influence of literary theories in Year 12 classrooms strongly guided the development of the questions for the Phase 2 online survey, the shape of the final research question, and the categories into which data could be gathered and analysed. As Grbich (2007) has noted, analysis of preliminary data can help to fill the gaps and provide a larger picture of the area under research, which helps identify emerging themes that may need to be targeted in further data collection.

Evaluation of the data patterns emerging from Phase 2 was instrumental in shaping the areas of further inquiry for interviews by phone or email in Phase 3. By this stage in the research, some patterns of similarity and contrast were emerging from the

data which could be tested in later phases of data collection, as described by Miles and Huberman (1994).

By the final phase of data collection (2010), the NSW English Stage 6 Syllabus (1999) had been in place for a decade, and teachers had established beliefs and knowledge about the practical classroom effects of particular emphases or inclusions with regard to literary theory. Many of the Phase 3 participants reflected on their initial expectations concerning literary theories, their hesitant or eager classroom experiments, the consequences for student learning and assessment, and the practices they consolidated, qualified or discarded as a result of this experience. They evaluated the longer-term effects of proliferating literary theories on the nature of their discipline, approaches to text, and the options they saw as open to them in the future. In this way, the study tapped into teachers' longer-term views of their subject identity, their role as professionals selecting the materials and approaches they perceive as most beneficial to students, and their picture of how much "room to move" is offered by syllabus parameters. Because teachers had raised issues concerning the influence of professional associations and influential publishers in determining what interpretive "slants" came to be seen as acceptable, questions about whose opinions were taken into account were included in Phase 3 interviews.

Quantitative Elements

While this study mainly used qualitative approaches, quantitative investigation was used at the beginning of the Phase 2 online survey to provide a basis for further inquiry. It took the form of statements to which respondents indicated their level of agreement on a Likert-type scale. Closed questions of this type allow increased standardisation in measurement, as Robson (2002) points out, while allowing participants to select an answer that conveyed their attitudes fairly accurately. From

this quantitative section of the survey, results for each individual case were visible at a

glance. In addition, disparities could be seen between *opinions* about the importance of

literary theories and the influence of those theories on *shaping personal practice*. This

helped to provide a deeper understanding of the complexity of the phenomena, and

suggested fruitful lines of inquiry for Phase 3. The table of attitudes towards literary

theories produced from their answers to these questions was then amplified by teachers'

descriptions of their attitudes and practices in the rest of the survey. This combination

of qualitative and quantitative strategies provided a rich pool of data which could be

cross-checked for interesting patterns and anomalies.

Some of the qualitative data was tabulated in ways that supported analysis of a

more quantitative type. These included tables of the numbers of teachers highlighting

specific theories that they taught or that they found epistemologically problematic, and

graphic representations of theories teachers specified as influencing the curriculum,

compared with theories which teachers indicated they identified with themselves. This

method supported the predominantly qualitative approach by providing "snapshots" of

data that could guide further analysis and help manage the volume of information. It

was also intended to minimise the potential complication of the varied terminologies

used for different literary theories by different individuals, which can make it difficult

to compare like with like.

The Interior Lens

The teachers in this study demonstrated that they evaluate the epistemological

theories known as literary and cultural theories through the lens of their own

epistemological theories (composed of beliefs about knowing along with beliefs and

knowledge about teaching). They were also simultaneously dealing with substantial

and contested curriculum change in a subject with a long history of contestation about

both purposes and practices.

This research has not included classroom observations or interviews with

students, relying instead on teachers' self-reports about the effects of these theories on

their classroom practice, although the researcher is well aware of studies indicating gaps

between teacher claims about personal practice and the observability of those claims

and their impact in the classroom (Cuban, 2001). As Schoenfeld (1998, p.33) has

noted, in regard to the limits inherent in using teachers' beliefs as research evidence,

> Critics ... may argue that the "interior lens" which only accounts for the
>
> teacher's perspective of context (constraints, supports, etc.) but not for "the real
>
> thing," must perforce be inadequate. Perhaps so, —but again, the teacher's view
>
> of context (including the teacher's sense of what materials might or might not be
>
> accessible, and what the 'abilities' of the students might be) is surely a
>
> significant factor in shaping what happens in the classroom.

Teacher beliefs and knowledge (both epistemological and pedagogical), and

their self-talk about classroom practice, remain potent influences upon that practice

(Smith & Lovat, 1995), acting as a worldview lens or epistemological theory through

which each teacher interprets all new knowledge and experience. The strongly

individualised nature of teachers' curriculum interpretation makes reliance on the

interior lens appropriate and fruitful for this study.

Weighing up Interviews and Surveys as Methods

Asking teachers for their perceptions of the influence of literary theories on their

teaching formed the basis of all three phases of this research, whether in an interview—

face-to-face or by telephone—or through either an on-line questionnaire or an email

discussion. Like all methodologies, interview methodology has both benefits and

disadvantages. The benefits of a personal one-to-one interview include the opportunity

to give long reflective answers in which they mull over underlying philosophical issues,

weighing up both sides of a question. An unhurried reflective interview leaves room for

participants to illustrate how their attitudes have arisen from their own experience.

Where a question leads to interesting responses, these can be followed up by the

researcher, to see where they lead. They may provide illuminating insights, including

specific classroom applications of literary theories. It is also possible for the

interviewer to influence the responses by following one particular line of impromptu

questioning rather than another, as an interview tends to be more conversational and

less investigative than an on-line survey.

The disadvantages of the face-to-face interview method include travelling time

and cost, the difficulties of scheduling an interview time suitable for busy teachers, and

the very considerable time taken to transcribe interviews. Interview responses tend to

be verbal in character: that is, to be non-syntactical, ungrammatical, allusive, and

tangential rather than linear. This may make them a poor source of quotable material

for a research write-up, as they abound in half-sentences and utterances that start in one

direction, only to become anecdotes which end up some distance from the original field

of questioning. Interview responses also typically lack succinctness and precision, use

colloquial language and tend to the particular rather than the general. Because of the

conversational nature of a semi-structured interview, participants are not always asked

identical questions. This has the potential to complicate the mapping of responses.

These factors all contributed to Phase 2 taking the form of a web-based

opinionnaire, which allowed teachers to answer the questions in writing over a longer

period of time, and also to review and edit their answers in the light of questions asked

later in the document. This provided an opportunity for participants to consider whether

their answers, taken as a whole, accurately reflected their considered view of the

influence of literary theories in their own teaching practice, bearing in mind both

content and pedagogical processes. It also meant teachers could be reported entirely in

their own words, rather than through the filter of the researcher's perceptions as

transcribed from the recordings (this can be an problem when there are even minor

issues of audibility).

Phase 3 returned to personal interviews by phone where possible, partly because

the more personal contact led to a much higher rate of completion than a request to

complete an impersonal on-line survey. It seemed that once potential participants had

spoken to the researcher, they felt more of a responsibility to take part within a short

period of time, which was emphasised by the fixing of appointments, rather than an

email languishing on a "to do" list until it dropped off the screen and was forgotten.

Challenges for the Inquiry—and Some Solutions

Theory proliferation and nomenclature.

Some challenges stood between the researcher and the exploration of this area of

inquiry. The first challenge was the extraordinary number of literary theories

implicated—along with complex alliances being made and dissolved between

theoretical schools, unresolvable paradoxes and refutations within schools, the waxing

and waning of influence of particular schools, and the often obscure language in which

theories have been conveyed by key proponents. The second challenge arose from the

first. Given the myriad theories and their complicated inter-relationships, how might

teachers' views on this vast and complex subject be elicited and mapped?

Glossary of literary theories.

One strategy for dealing with the methodological challenges was to crystallise twenty of the most influential literary theories of the last century or so into a succinct Glossary of literary theories, which highlighted salient distinguishing features and used the most common name for the theoretical school while signalling alternative names, to minimise confusion of terminology. Producing this Glossary involved a laborious reading of a diverse range of primary and secondary sources, and several stages of distillation. A fuller explanatory version of this distillation process is found in Chapter 3, which maps developments in a range of key theories and outlines some of the important interactions between theories that might be seen to influence the shape of senior English curricula over time.

The Glossary, while lengthy, is too brief to list key theorists, but instead identifies major goals of each school of thought and observable characteristics of that school's practice. It also highlights significant issues or ideas against which that school is reacting, which affect both the philosophy and the practice of the theory in a way which could have substantial classroom implications. Another version was produced which gave detailed references from primary and secondary sources for the derivation of each of the characteristics assigned to each theory, and for the classroom examples where appropriate. This was requested by the NSW Department of Education's State Education Research Approval Process, in order to verify the claims made when designing the data collection instrument. The expanded Glossary with citations appears as Appendix A. An independent expert reviewer confirmed that it was accurate, informative and appropriate for the purposes of this research.

Scope of the Glossary.

Literary theories covered in the Glossary included neoclassicism and romanticism (as the nineteenth-century backdrop to the twentieth), realism (also known as expressive realism and later morphing into Marxist or soviet realism), naturalism, symbolism, biographical criticism, psychoanalytical and psychological criticism, formalism, modernism, structuralism, New Criticism (including practical criticism), Marxist Critical Theory, cultural studies, poststructuralism, postmodernism (including deconstruction), feminist literary theory, queer theory, reader-response theory and reception theory. Other theories not distilled in the Glossary but listed for possible consideration by survey respondents included hermeneutics, semiotics, phenomenology, New Historicism and cultural materialism, narratology, post-colonial criticism, and the anti-theoretical and post-theoretical schools of thought, as represented by Knapp and Benn Michaels (2001) and the later work of Fish (2001). Teachers who believed their conception of English or classroom practice to be influenced by literary theories not included in this by no means exhaustive list were invited to specify and discuss them.

Eliciting ideas about literary theories from teachers.

The next methodological challenge was to identify strategies which would encourage teachers to articulate clear, frank responses to such an abstract phenomenon as the influence of complex and shifting literary theories on a school subject, particularly given the diverse and contested conceptualisations of that subject.

Different ways of referring to the field of literary theory also produced methodological quandaries. Literary theories are variously characterised as individual entities, as theoretical clusters, and as theory without capitalisation (functioning as a collective noun for all literary and cultural theories) and as Theory capitalised to cover what Cunningham (2003) lists as "Structuralism and Feminism and Marxism and

Reader-response and Psychoanalysis and Deconstruction and Poststructuralism and

Postmodernism and New Historicism and Postcolonialism" (p. 27). Capitalised Theory

can be seen as an abbreviation of Critical Theory, an over-arching term used for the

theories listed by Cunningham. "Critical literacy" is a term used in Australia to signify

a pedagogy which reflects the insights and critiques of the theories Cunningham lists,

but the term is used in other countries with different meanings.

The methodological strategy adopted for research in this definitionally-

challenged situation was to work primarily with literary theories as discrete entities,

while noting the existence and make-up of several key clusters. This strategy aimed at

eliciting from teachers their attitudes and practices regarding specific individual

theories, to allow distinctions to be made between them. This also provided scope for

mapping clusters and patterns, and left room for teachers to group theories in

idiosyncratic ways, rather than as defined by the researcher.

While teachers' attitudes towards literary theories were of interest in themselves,

this research also sought to elicit how their attitudes affected classroom practice. The

strategy adopted for this purpose was asking teachers to describe their practices, and

also their perceptions of students' responses to those practices. For the final phase of

data collection, teachers were asked to narrate a particular lesson in which they had

explicitly taught named literary theories, in order to provide concrete examples of

literary theories at use in the enacted curriculum.

Organisation of the Study

Research imperatives and practical considerations interacted in this study to

produce a three-phase program of data collection and analysis. Phase 1 took the form of

semi-structured interviews with five teachers in independent schools in the researcher's

geographical vicinity, to test proposed lines of inquiry. These were followed by

approaches to a large number of English teachers in schools of all types for the Phase 2

online survey, resulting in 25 completed surveys. Phase 3 of data collection comprised

in-depth semi-structured interviews with 20 teachers. Each of these three phases is

presented below.

Phase 1: the pilot study.

In undertaking a pilot project involving teacher interviews, the goal was to have

teachers reflect on their views about the influence of literary theories on their own

practice, and to see how that connected with the presence of literary–theoretical

approaches in the English Syllabus for Year 12. One of the issues for exploration was

how teachers worked towards student learning where multiple and mutually

contradictory literary theories were evident. Another was how teachers dealt with

literary theories whose premises or conclusions they found unconvincing or

problematic.

Care was taken to make questions as open as possible, so that teachers with a

great diversity of views would feel they had permission to air them without prejudice,

and to consider the theory–praxis connection in their own case. The pilot project

provided an opportunity to test the survey instrument and to trial semi-structured

interview approaches to see if teachers in an interview setting were willing and able to

provide substantive reflection on the subject in question. It seemed likely that teachers

would raise additional ideas that could be explored in a large-scale web-based version

of the survey.

Phase 1 Sample

The Phase 1 sample consisted of face-to-face interviews with five teachers who

had experience teaching English to Year 12 students. All were from rural or regional

schools. Three had more than 20 years' teaching experience, one had a decade of

teaching experience and one had been teaching less than five years. All five received

their training in Australia. Four were from independent schools and one had recently

retired from a government school. Two of these teachers were Heads of Faculty. One

agreed to be interviewed himself, but did not agree to his staff taking part in interviews.

One teacher interviewed for Phase 1 became a Head of Faculty before completing the

Phase 2 on-line survey, and was the only participant involved in all three phases of the

research. One interview was conducted with two colleagues jointly, and the remaining

teachers were interviewed individually.

To achieve an opportunity sample for this pilot project, principals in all of the

secondary schools in three geographically close NSW regional centres were contacted

by mail. The letter asked principals to give permission for their Heads of English and

two other teachers to take part in one or more of the following: individual interviews, a

written survey, and follow-up communications (such as email discussions). The non-

government school principals gave permission, and five teachers from three schools

took part in interviews.

The three government school principals approached did not give permission, and

indicated that even for a pilot study it would be necessary to have completed the full

ethics approval process of the Strategic Research division of the Department of

Education in New South Wales, which requires that research instruments are fully

detailed and all proposed questions supplied. The ethics clearance process for

substantial research in government schools was commenced. As this clearance process

took 14 months, the researcher limited the sample for the pilot phase of this project to

the teachers who had been permitted to respond.

The Phase 1 interviews took place in early 2006, so these teachers had been

through four examination cycles with the Syllabus, which was examined for the first

time in 2001. It was therefore reasonable to expect them to have passed the period of

initial adjustment, and to be consolidating their approaches to implementing it in class.

The research instrument: Phase 1 exploratory interviews

The semi-structured Phase 1 interview questions took the form of an

"opinionnaire." Attempts were made to allow for the limiting factors of opinionnaires,

notably that respondents might "conceal their attitudes and express socially acceptable

opinions" (Best & Kahn 1998, p. 314). The pilot project information sent to principals

and teachers indicated that a full diversity of views on this subject was welcome and

that it was important that teachers did not exclude themselves from the research process

because the topic was not of particular interest to them, or was an area into which they

had not previously put much concentrated thought. Views of the full spectrum of Year

12 English teachers were being sought.

Topics covered in the interviews included investigating which literary theories

teachers deemed to "underpin" the syllabus, how central these were to their own

conceptions of English, whether they saw themselves to have freedom to investigate

texts in line with any paradigms they chose, whether they could teach literature without

reference to any specific literary theories, if and how they mediated literary theories for

students, and how students dealt with literary theories.

Phase 1 interviews took 60–90 minutes and were tape-recorded and transcribed

in full. Each teacher had been provided with survey questions several weeks in

advance, to give them some idea of the scope of the research and to help them to order

their thoughts before the interview. While some respondents did not complete all the

questions in the written survey, it appeared to have signalled for them the topics which

would be under discussion, so they had made notes of their considered position and

brought them to interview as aides-memoire. All the participants were reflective and candid.

Methodological and strategic issues arising from Phase 1.

One of the purposes of the Phase 1 pilot study was to test the proposed research instrument so as to shed light on the best strategies to use for the phases that followed, as well as to signal questions, approaches or strategies which did not prove fruitful in practice or had unintended outcomes. As a consequence of the issues arising from the Phase 1 interviews, some fine-tuning of the research instrument was carried out to allow room for the exploration of emerging themes, bearing in mind the planned shift from personal interviews to a web-based questionnaire. In interviews, some of the broader questions from the Phase 1 interviews were followed up in discussions that led to other avenues of inquiry, and these were borne in mind when shaping strategies and questions for Phases 2 and 3. Interview transcripts from Phase 1 were reviewed in order to evaluate the fruitfulness of particular lines of questioning, to ascertain whether any needed to be dropped or altered.

The methodological implications which emerged from Phase 1 related to:

- order of questions;

- content of questions;

- revision and verification of the Glossary of literary theories;

- how to best survey a significant number of teachers; and

- keeping the questions sufficiently open to allow room for diversity of responses.

Each of these is now considered briefly.

Order of questions.

From the first two interviews, which began by asking teachers about their own views on literary theories, with somewhat stilted answers ensuing, it was found that survey questions worked better if they began at the syllabus level and then "zoomed in" on the teachers' own personal commitment to literary theories. This gave participants time to be comfortable with the interviewer before sharing views about their personal beliefs and practices, so this pattern was adopted from the third interview in Phase 1.

Nature of questions.

Some teachers interviewed in Phase 1 raised additional questions and topics which could be added to the survey. All five teachers wished to explore the way that "Areas of Study" in the syllabus privileged a conception of English strongly influenced by Cultural Studies, which constrained other approaches. Four of the five teachers raised the idea of differential valuation of *appreciation* and *critique* of texts being a key distinction between particular theories, which warranted further exploration. Three teachers wished to raise the problem of successive layers of complexity in syllabus requirements, into which literary theories entered as a further complicating factor.

When a full draft of the survey had been produced, it was sent for testing and comment to three academics in the field of English education and two Heads of English (all from New South Wales). One Head of English suggested the length of the survey might result in teacher fatigue and consequent non-completion. The two final questions on the survey had asked teachers to indicate which theories most influenced each of four key approaches to text (from the NSW Board of Studies HSC English website). Feedback from two trial participants resulted in these two final questions being removed as being mundane and "perhaps irritating;" this shortened the survey.

Glossary revision and verification.

The Glossary dealt with twenty theories, so was unwieldy when printed. For online use each theory was made available on request, in a box alongside the survey questions.

Classroom examples of literary theories in use were supplied for each entry in the Glossary, to assist teachers who preferred to reason from the classroom practice back to its theoretical basis. An external reviewer of the research instrument suggested around three classroom examples as a useful minimum, as fewer than that might be "a little restrictive for teacher interpretation of the application of the theory in everyday practice."

This Glossary was included with the ethics application to the Strategic Research division of the Department of Education in New South Wales (SERAP). A request was received from SERAP for the sources of each item in the Glossary so they could be independently verified. This annotated version can be found at Appendix A. The version used for the online survey was less detailed to make it more accessible. It can be found on the web at http://borrodale.homedns.org/~irish/index.htm

The Glossary was reviewed and sharpened after input from four English academics and two heads of English.

Increasing the number of participants.

In designing Phases 2 and 3, a key goal was to achieve a substantial number of responses. The length of time taken to transcribe the Phase 1 pilot interviews led to Phase 2 taking the form of a web-based opinionnaire, with teachers typing in their own responses. This method allowed teachers reflection time, and the opportunity to add answers to a draft on different occasions.

The survey would be followed up with some interviews with key respondents with a variety of views in Phase 3. Given the researcher's relative geographical isolation, such interviews were done by telephone or as web discussions.

Openness of questions to a diversity of responses.

A major goal of the survey questions was to elicit the full diversity of teachers' views. It was essential that teachers with all types of views felt that their opinions were valued and treated as objectively as possible, so questions which could be seen as leading needed to be avoided. More than one teacher indicated after interviews that it was a refreshing change to be able to speak their mind unreservedly on a topic connected with their professional beliefs and practices, as usually they are speaking to representatives of institutions or stakeholder groups and have to be very conscious of inspectorial mind-sets and public relations concerns. One very experienced teacher stated that this type of less guarded interview gave teachers an opportunity to outline what they see as the unintended consequences of various literary theories for both teachers and students.

The challenge was to maintain this degree of openness to the diverse views of teacher participants even while moving to a less personal on-line opinionnaire. Sample questions for an electronic survey were tabled as part of a pilot project report given at Macquarie University in November 2007, and a number of academics with expertise in research design suggested minor changes with the aim of making the questions as neutral and open-ended as possible, and avoiding sentence constructions with negative or passive forms. Opportunities were added for participants to add something not explicitly covered by the questions.

Selection of research strategy.

An on-line survey was selected as an achievable method of approaching a large number of participants. It was anticipated that having to produce a written response would encourage teachers towards clarity and crystallisation of ideas, while the infinitely expandable computer-generated space under each question would accommodate long responses where these were offered. The on-line survey was constructed to permit teachers to view all questions before answering any, if they so desired. This allowed for more considered views, which could be expanded in a connected way as the logically linked questions unfolded.

One limitation in the design of the research instrument was that it was difficult for participants to view a saved response after it was submitted; to do this, they needed to email the researcher and ask for a copy to be sent to them to keep (which two participants did). It would seem helpful for future surveys to allow a simple save and print option for participants, particularly if any follow-up interviews are to be undertaken.

Revision of the research instrument: from interview to on-line survey.

Design considerations.

The pilot project had been conducted using a paper survey as advance warning of questions to be asked, followed by face-to-face interviews with individuals. Some alterations to questions and approaches were needed in order to convert the survey to a web-based opinionnaire. The most obvious change was that the Glossary of literary theories moved from being numerous printed sheets for cross-referencing with questions, to being a series of topics in a menu bar. This meant that teachers only looked at one theory at a time, and saw only the information they chose to call up for clarification. This streamlined the process for those who felt well-informed about

particular theories. It also made the Glossary less visually overpowering, which it was hoped would allay teacher concerns about the demands of the survey.

Technical considerations.

Technical challenges in converting hard copy to a functioning on-line survey included finding people with time available and with experience in web surveys from the users' perspective, the technical skill to convert a paper survey into a web-based format, and willingness to assist the researcher with complications and possibilities as they arose (a university engineering student proved to be ideal; and being the researcher's son made him inexpensive); selecting an appropriate web server, maintaining the survey on the web despite blackouts; getting the survey to report the data reliably and collect back-ups in another location in case of system failure; and establishing a mechanism which would map the responses to quantitative questions as well as collate quantitative data into a form which would aid comparison of answers on each question.

Design requirements included establishing a home page

- which clearly demonstrated the purposes of the research;
- which included all of the information required by ethics committees without overwhelming readers; and
- on which links and procedures were self-evident and worked smoothly.

One of the benefits of an electronic layout is that it permits long responses to any question which teachers might find especially interesting, without (as in paper surveys) offering large spaces that may daunt a prospective respondent. Whether this benefit encouraged teachers to complete the survey and lessened the effect of survey fatigue remains an open question.

Components of the Phase 2 on-line survey.

Part 1 of the survey consisted of the self-identification of teachers, including where they trained and the duration of that training, which English subjects they currently teach, under which jurisdiction, and whether they are classroom teachers or heads of faculty.

Part 2 consisted of seven quantitative propositions with a Likert-type scale for indicating degrees of agreement or disagreement. The purpose of this was to allow cumulative mapping of all respondents' Part 2 answers as a group. Each individual's responses would be mapped separately also, to show internal connections between each teacher's responses to particular propositions, and how these linked with their answers to the later, more reflective questions. This combination of group and individual mapping suggested broad trends and exceptions to those trends. When checked against the longer answers, reasons for idiosyncratic combinations of answers emerged.

The quantitative questions were placed before the open-ended questions in Part 3, because "tick the box" questions are seen as less time-consuming. It was thought that the Part 2 questions might "warm up" participants to agreeing to complete the more reflective, perhaps more demanding, questions which followed. As indicated above, only one returned survey showed evidence that the respondent completed Parts 1 and 2 but not Part 3. The relatively low response rate could, however, indicate that when teachers looked through the survey and saw that most of it was reflective and required written answers rather than ticking boxes, a number may have not completed or submitted the survey at all.

Phase 2 Sample

The Phase 2 sample consisted of 25 completed web surveys. Of the 25 participants who provided answers to all of the questions in the on-line survey, 13 were

heads of faculty (55%). The average term of tertiary education of survey respondents was 4.48 years. Ninety-two per cent received their training in Australia; the other two teachers trained in the United Kingdom.

The total number of schools from which completed surveys were received was 18. One third of respondents were currently teaching in government schools, and two thirds in non-government schools. Sixty-four per cent were from schools in metropolitan areas, and 36% were from non-metropolitan areas (whereas the Phase 1 interviews had all been conducted with teachers in non-metropolitan areas). For Phase 2, the total number of research requests sent to schools was 296. From the 84 requests sent to non-government schools, 16 completed surveys were received (19% return rate). From the 212 sent to government schools, only nine completed surveys were returned (4.2% return rate). In addition two incomplete surveys were received.

The Phase 2 participant sample was selected by approaching every second secondary school in NSW (from the government and independent sectors) and every second secondary school from Parramatta, Sydney, Wollongong, and Broken Bay Catholic dioceses. Emails were sent to principals asking them to grant permission for their Head of English and two other Year 12 English teachers to undertake the online survey. Three principals (1%) responded with a message to the researcher that permission was *not* granted, with reasons given such as outstanding research involvements, or staff members' existing workloads. Sending a survey by email to principals, asking if they will forward it to the Head of English for distribution to relevant teaching staff, is certainly cost-effective, but the researcher cannot know how far along the chain of communication the research request actually travels. The response rate increased by 30% when reminders were sent by post.

While the pilot project participants were not included in the mapping of survey responses as they participated in interviews rather than the electronic survey, where they gave answers which illuminated the questions addressed by electronic survey respondents, their answers have been considered in the discussion.

Exceptional cases.

Of the 27 electronic survey responses received, two had to be treated differently from the others. One anonymously completed only the comments box, describing his or her experience of examining senior English. As he or she did not respond to the survey questions apart from providing this comment, this person cannot be taken into account in mapping of responses, but his or her comments were added to other respondents' answers to question L (i) which dealt with the impact of literary theory on students' grasp of ideas for assessment purposes.

One person responded only to questions in Part 2 of the survey (quantitative questions using a Likert-type scale) and provided no response to the more open-ended, reflective questions which made up Part 3. This Part 2-only respondent gave the same answer to each of the quantitative questions, even when this involved self-contradiction, so this has been taken as a "donkey vote" by an unwilling participant (whose head of faculty also participated and may perhaps have seemed to require this participation by a colleague). This reduced the number of mappable electronic survey responses to all questions to 25 teachers.

Quality of responses.

In response to the qualitative questions in the survey (Part 3), these 25 faculty heads, examiners and classroom teachers produced answers which were ruminative, insightful, blunt, judicious, philosophical and practical, clearly taking into account competing views and practices, and reflecting on their students' needs in Year 12

English. Many indicated that their substantial number of years of classroom experience informed their views about literary theories observed over time, rather than merely holding current views.

Phase 3: data collection and analysis.

After the completion of Phase 2 of the study—the on-line survey—some initial analysis of the data was carried out to find out where there were gaps, and how they might be filled in Phase 3. One omission detected was that, although teachers had been asked the length and location of their training, they had been asked neither the length of time they had been teaching nor when they had begun teaching Year 12 English specifically. It seemed advisable to find out whether the teachers had taught the previous curriculum, or just the so-called "new" Syllabus. As this major changes introduced in the Syllabus was seen by many respondents as a turning point in the teaching of senior English, and as the research sought teacher reflections on the shift towards a greater role for literary theories in the curriculum, finding out the year of respondents' commencing Year 12 English teaching was added to the Phase 3 data collection process.

Selection of interviews as Phase 3 data-collection strategy.

The final phase of the research took the form of interviews with 20 Year 12 English teachers from NSW. They were asked about their perceptions of the influence of literary theories on the current Year 12 English syllabus, the types of applications they believed were expected, assumed or required, and the degree to which they believed explicit teaching of literary theories was necessary or productive. To help teachers move beyond generalisations, they were asked to give examples of recent lessons that showed their approach to the use of literary theories in senior English classes. Respondents were also asked to look beneath both the syllabus and their own

conceptions of English as a subject, to explore whether and which literary theories may

have been influential in shaping the Syllabus documents and their own views of the

purposes of English.

One theme which had emerged from the Phase 2 data was teachers' perceptions

of a mismatch between the literary theories that they saw underlying the Year 12

English syllabus and those they themselves held, practised or considered useful for

student learning. This was followed up in Phase 3, with parallel questions about

teachers' views of the conceptual rationale for the Syllabus expectations concerning

literary theories, and their own conceptual rationale for this aspect of their classroom

habits. Interviewees were also asked if there were any specific literary theories with

which they were not "in tune," and were asked for their views about the use of literary

theories in the proposals for Australian Curriculum English.

One of the issues raised by respondents to the Phase 2 on-line survey was the

proliferation and rate of change in literary theories. The emotive language used by the

respondents suggested that the confusion and anxiety they reported as a by-product of

the number and instability of literary theories might be challenging their self-efficacy as

teachers. Consequently the Phase 3 interviews included questions exploring subject

identity and teacher self-efficacy, bearing in mind Bandura's research (1986; 1997) on

the links between teacher beliefs, self-efficacy, and persistence in difficult

circumstances, and recent research on the links between subject identity and teacher

professional identity (O'Sullivan, 2007; Patrick, 2000). The questions used for the

Phase 3 interviews are included in Appendix E.

Sample for Phase 3 interviews.

Phase 3 of the study comprised interviews with 20 teachers currently teaching

Year 12 English in NSW schools. An opportunity sample was used for this part of the

research, achieved by the following method. Year 12 English teachers who had

completed the Phase 2 online survey were invited to take part in interviews, and around

one third did so (N=11). They were encouraged to invite colleagues from English

teachers' professional networks to take part, and suggested participants were followed

up by the researcher, resulting in seven interviews. To achieve a reasonable mix of

metropolitan and rural participants, eight school principals in rural New South Wales

were approached by phone to request the participation of their teachers of senior

English. From these schools two teachers took part (25%), illustrating the improved

response rates which can result from telephone contact as opposed to email contact. All

the principals approached by phone gave permission for teacher participation.

       Of the 20 participants in Phase 3 interviews, 11 (55%) were Heads of Faculty

(HOF). Five were from government schools and 15 from independent or Catholic

systemic schools. Eleven interviews were with teachers in metropolitan areas, and the

remaining nine with rural or regional teachers. Almost a third each of the teachers

interviewed began teaching Year 12 English in the 1980s, the 1990s, and the first

decade of the new millennium, with the remaining three having commenced before

1980. This indicates a range of levels of experience. Twelve respondents were female

and eight were male. Seventy per cent of the teachers had taught the previous English

syllabus.

Ethical Considerations

       This study was granted formal approval to proceed by the Ethics Review

Committee (Human Research) at Macquarie University. The study proceeded with the

approval of the State Education Research Approval Process (SERAP) conducted by the

Student Engagement and Program Evaluation Bureau of the NSW Department of

Education and Training. Permission was also granted by the Catholic Education Offices,

Parramatta, Sydney and Wollongong, and the Catholic Schools Office, Diocese of

Broken Bay. In independent schools, permission was sought directly from principals.

Ethical practices in this study included using pseudonyms for participants and

providing them with transcripts of their interviews for the sake of accuracy; not

identifying any individual schools; allowing participants or participating schools to

withdraw at any time; and submitting letters to principals and teachers, the opinionnaire

questions, and the Glossary of literary theories to both ethics committees.

Letters of Consent

Letters to principals (Appendix C) and participants (Appendix D) outlined the

nature of the study, the requirements involved in taking part, and the ways in which data

would be used. Principals and participants were advised that withdrawal from the

process was possible at any stage without any reason being required. Principals were

provided with a statement of consent for their staff to take part in the research. The

letters also indicated that no individual or school would be identified in reports of the

research.

Confidentiality

The interview and survey data were kept confidential, with participants' names

replaced on transcripts by code numbers which reflected order of interviews and survey

submissions. The researcher kept a separate listing of participants' names, demographic

information, and the names and location of their schools.

Protocols

Kvale (1996) observes that participants in a research study often value having

their views heard, but they are also putting themselves out to assist the researcher, and

this should be acknowledged. Letters of thanks were sent to all research participants,

expressing gratitude at their willingness to take part in the study by reflecting on their

own attitudes and practices in the interviews or surveys. Each interviewee was also sent

a copy of the transcript of their interview, to check for accuracy.

Management of Data

Data for this study were managed in two main ways. Face-to-face and telephone

interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed on a word processor. Answers to the

online survey were generated as electronic transcripts by the participants. Each

contact's transcript was stored individually, but to enable cross-case analysis, additional

files were produced to show all participants' answers to each individual question.

Data Storage

Raw data, electronic copies and hard copies of the data were kept in a secure

place. Audio-tapes of interviews were clearly labelled and securely stored after

transcription by the researcher.

Contact Summary Sheets

Contact summary sheets were made for each participant. These highlighted the

key points raised in the interview or survey, and were attached to each participant's

interview or survey response. Direct quotations were coded with descriptive labels and

colours according to their content. These contact summary sheets reduced the data for

each contact, and highlighted patterns similarities and differences, facilitating cross-case

analyses.

Memos

Memos were added to these materials to signal the researcher's reflections and

comments, including "hunches" about collecting further material on particular themes in

later phases of the study.

Data Analysis

Each individual participant was taken as a unit of analysis. Each teacher's answers to the interview or survey questions, and their reflective amplification of those answers, were taken to be part of a complex whole. Cross-case analysis was facilitated by reformatting a second copy of the collected data. collating in one file all answers to a particular question.

The guiding frameworks for analysing the data collected for the three phases of this study were those of Miles and Huberman (1994). Data was reduced and displayed as matrices, charts and diagrams, to compress and graphically lay out patterns, and to help the researcher investigate clusters, contrasts and interacting networks of data for their explanatory power. These data reduction and display procedures led to some preliminary conclusions being tentatively drawn; verification of these conclusions was sought as data was reduced further and displayed in forms which illustrated the analysis reaching higher conceptual levels. Every attempt was made to be open to unexpected or surprising patterns and themes emerging from the teachers' self-reports, rather than the researcher seeking confirmation of a pre-ordained hypothesis. In each successive phase of the study research participants opened up further lines of inquiry. Informants also offered *explanations* of how and why certain actions and attitudes have become relatively common among English teachers.

To give an example of the use of colour-coding, any reservations or concerns teachers expressed about the teaching of literary theories were coded in blue. Prevalence of blue coding in a single case indicated that the teacher had a cluster of negative associations with teaching literary theories. Prevalence of blue coding in a cross-case data set indicated that many teachers' concerns about literary theories were linked with some aspect of that particular question (such as student confidence in

interpreting texts). This helped the researcher to identify the specific factors or effects

that teachers were seeing as problems.

      Each literary theory was coded with a different colour, so that clusters of colours

provided a visual representation of the emphasis each participant placed on specific

theories. Colour-coding of each theory was also applied to the collated answers of each

question. The frequency with which a colour appeared on a page indicated the degree

of focus on a particular theory but did not indicate whether it was described negatively

or positively, so crosses were added in the left-hand margins of transcripts and ticks in

right-hand margins, to provide an indication of the emotional content of the reference

which could be taken in at a glance.

      Placing mentions of specific theories into matrices provided a clear visual

representation of the number of teachers who identified one, several or many theories as

influencing (a) the Syllabus, (b) their personal epistemology, and (c) their classroom

practice. Responses for (a) and (b) were combined in one matrix, which provided a

clear picture of non-alignment of the perceived theoretical bases of the Syllabus with

the respondents' personal epistemologies. This provided an avenue for further analysis.

      As the research was exploring how teachers worked out whether and how they

were expected to teach their students to apply named literary theories to texts,

participants were asked to specify their sources of information about the theoretical

bases of the Syllabus. Displaying the resulting data in a table reduced it to a page that

showed at a glance which sources of information teachers perceived as authoritative on

the subject of Syllabus expectations and requirements. The table also displayed how

many teachers identified each source as authoritative, and how many teachers relied on

multiple sources of authority which they checked against each other. This informed

further investigation of the forms of input that were seen as authoritative, including the

Syllabus and Support Documents, markers' reports, professional development from various sources, faculty consultation, and subject associations.

The researcher was able to move back and forth between the responses of individual teachers and the matrices summarising the views of clusters of teachers. Where a teacher appeared as an outlier in a matrix, returning to the individual survey or interview transcript provided descriptions of phenomena that could lead to explanations of how or why something had occurred.

The analytic moves used in data analysis can be briefly summarised as follows. The initial interview transcripts and surveys were marked up with descriptive codes signalling themes and issues emerging from the material, some of them coded with colours to enable clusters to be seen at a glance.

In order to step back from the data and see interconnections with more clarity, and to "systematically assemble a coherent understanding" of the data (Punch, 2009, p. 347), the researcher used tactics for meaning generation developed by Miles and Huberman (1994, pp. 245–262). This involved review of all data, working both within and across cases, seeking connections between the groups of coded ideas, observing similarities and inconsistencies, exceptions, surprises, sequences, clusters and relationships, in order to produce some higher order generalisations.

One strategy used in analysing the research data was looking for factors underlying the processes being explored. So, for example, finding out what year respondents began teaching Year 12 allowed for an explanation of the notion that a teacher's number of years of experience might be a factor affecting their response to the idea of teaching literary theories. Looking for factors that could lie beneath such a phenomenon provided a possible explanation: that being a university student during what has been called "the moment of high theory" provided a familiarity with literary

theories that could be linked with their acceptance as teaching tools. This led to

consideration of a related factor: how postgraduate studies in a field involving literary

theory affected teachers' orientation towards teaching literary theory to senior

secondary students.

As patterns began to emerge from the data, outliers and atypical cases were

investigated to see if conjectures could be made about their likely significance. These

were checked against data from all three phases, and where possible against the relevant

literature. Where these investigations led to surprises they were investigated further, to

see if they shed light on the rationales offered by informants, or on the higher order

conceptual constructs which were gradually taking shape.

Testing or Confirming Findings

A range of strategies was used for testing or confirming findings. Data was

checked for representativeness, ensuring a range of ages, length of senior teaching

experience, range of city and rural/regional contexts, a mix of government and

independent school teachers, and representation of both genders among respondents.

There was some checking of researcher effect: both the effect of the researcher on the

case, and the effect of the case on the researcher (Robson, 2002, p. 311). This was

mostly checked through the use of research mentors, and through two workshop

presentations to colleagues and academics, seeking their feedback. Another tactic used

was weighting the evidence to see which aspects seemed most likely to be influential or

to lead to hypotheses which could be verified through further consideration of the data.

Evidence against developing hypotheses was given due weight, and allowed to

add to the complexity of responses being distilled. As surmises, hunches, possible

explanations and potential theories began to develop, they were subjected to "if–then

tests" (Robson, 2002, p. 484) to test causal links. Attempts were made to investigate

whether yet undetected factors, common to each of the cases being considered, were causing or contributing to the effect.

As findings firmed up, they were tested against each of the data sets, to reveal disconfirming evidence. Colleagues were asked to help generate alternative explanations to help the researcher follow up other lines of inference. Research informants were given a chance to offer feedback on the explanations being developed, to see if they saw them as justifiable and fair reflections of situations as they had experienced them (Robson, 2002, p. 485).

Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of this study is the relatively small number of teachers who took part. However, the 50 participants are drawn from government and non-government schools, from cities, regional towns and more remote centres. They represent a fairly even spread of ages, and both sexes are well represented. These factors make the sample reasonably representative of NSW teachers of Year 12 English. The size of the sample allowed detailed analysis of individual responses, which provided the rich data needed for a study dealing with teachers' personal epistemologies.

This study relied primarily on teacher self-report, and no classroom observations were conducted. To counter the lack of observations, participants were asked to describe classroom activities which they had used to teach literary theories. This provided data about how their enacted curriculum was influenced by their teaching of literary theories.

The study had two sources of information about how students coped with applying literary theories to texts. The first was teachers' views of how students experienced the teaching of literary theories, and is of course at one remove from a

personal account. The second was provided by reviewing reports from markers each year from 2001 to 2010, for English Standard, Advanced and Extensions Courses. These evaluated the quality and type of students' examination writing, judged from first-hand marking experience and presumably developed in consultation with a group of markers. The markers reported how student examination responses used or referenced particular literary theories, and whether this use was effective. There was a strong correlation between the observations of participating teachers and markers, which supports the notion that they are reliable sources of information on how students handled literary theories. *Reports from the Marking Centre* provided external validation of the teachers' self-reports. They also arguably influenced the subsequent actions and attitudes of teachers.

The study focused on English Standard, Advanced and Extension, as these were the courses in which the controversy over literary theories was most marked. It is unclear to what extent the findings of this study would apply to English Fundamentals and English as a Second Language.

This study does focus on a particular phase of curriculum history, and it may not be possible to extrapolate all aspects of it to other periods or places.

Summary

This chapter has presented the methodological approach used for this study, and has discussed the methods of gathering, displaying and analysing the data. This study, framed within a critical realist view of teachers' curriculum processes, explores how teachers interpreted their professional responsibilities when interpreting a new senior English syllabus in which the role of literary theories was contested and uncertain. The goal of this research has been to explore the complex and variable responses of teachers to the challenge of the new Syllabus, responses which are shaped both by teachers'

personal epistemologies and by their previous experience of teaching. It uncovers the

unique meanings individuals assigned to a shared experience of Syllabus interpretation

and enactment. The experience of these teachers in a specific instance of syllabus

implementation amid contestation and uncertainty may be used to shape or extend other

studies of teachers' curriculum processes in different settings of change and

contestation. It may also contribute to studies of the ways teachers' personal

epistemologies influence their interpretation of written and assessed curriculum.

Chapter 5 presents the findings on how teachers responded to difficulties in

enacting a contested innovation in a new English senior syllabus; the difficulties

experienced in determining the status of the teaching of literary theories in the Syllabus

are seen to have epistemological and pedagogical features. Chapter 5 also highlights

how teachers consulted various authorities about the role of literary theories in the

Syllabus, and experimented with the contested literary theories as part of making

decisions about what role these theories would have in their ongoing classroom practice.

Chapter 5

Conflicting Literary Theories as Epistemological and Pedagogical Challenges

Introduction

The implementation of the 1999 NSW English Stage 6 Syllabus provides an interesting case of teachers' responses to a mandated written curriculum which was strongly contested. The contestation centred around different perceptions about the nature and the appropriateness of the literary-theoretical bases of the Syllabus, and how these might shape the enacted, experienced and assessed curriculum. Collecting data in 2006, 2007–2008, and 2010 provided an opportunity to observe whether and how teachers' responses changed over time.

Contestation about the influence of literary theories on the Syllabus may be seen as nested within three other sites of contestation:

- contestation about curriculum as a whole;
- contestation about English as a school subject; and
- contestation about literary theories themselves.

The literature review established that there is ongoing contestation between and within diverse branches of literary theory. Different literary theories either assume or articulate radically divergent answers to key epistemological questions, and it is logically implausible that all of these theories could be held by an individual at any one time. When teaching a subject like English that is perceived to be influenced by such theories, teachers need to make judgements about which—if any—they regard as defensible, and aligned with their own epistemological beliefs; what they determine can

be expected to have major implications for pedagogical planning and practice. Even if

they consider no current literary theories to be epistemologically plausible, this will

affect both their intended and their enacted curriculum.

Teachers' personal epistemologies are comprised of beliefs and pedagogical

knowledge, which interact in complex ways to shape practice. Personal epistemologies

include both cognitive and affective elements, which can be closely connected but may

be internally contradictory. The findings of this study reveal teachers perceiving

contested curriculum innovations through the lens of their personal epistemology. The

data illustrates how teachers translate official dimensions of curriculum into their

enacted curriculum in order to align them with their personal epistemology.

Teachers' Responses to Three Persistent Difficulties

The three main themes emerging from the research data involve teachers'

responses to three persistent difficulties. The first concerns what teachers do when

there is a lack of alignment between their personal epistemologies and their perceptions

of the literary-theoretical bases of the Syllabus. The second concerns what they do

when they are uncertain about the requirements and expectations of the written and

assessed curriculum concerning the teaching of literary theories, and unsure whether

they understand these theories. The third concerns what they do when their experience

of teaching literary theories to students is problematic. These three themes involve all

of the dimensions of curriculum shown in Figure 2 (Chapter 2), and address key aspects

of the professional practice of teachers as they operationalise mandated curriculum.

The first two difficulties are outlined in the next section of this chapter. A picture of the

third persistent difficulty is built cumulatively from the illustrative quotations from

participating teachers, later in the chapter.

Teachers' responses to the three difficulties indicated their attitudes and practices regarding literary theories. The teachers were categorised according to whether they maximised, experimented with, minimised or resisted the redevelopment of the subject by means of an increased focus on literary theory. The reasons teachers gave for their various stances towards the teaching of theory were primarily epistemological and pedagogical: that is, their attitudes about teaching theories connected with how particular ones aligned with their own beliefs about knowledge and knowing, and how the teaching of those theories was seen to affect the students' experienced curriculum. Misalignment between personal epistemologies and individuals' interpretations of the literary-theoretical bases of the Syllabus correlated with teachers minimising or subverting the teaching of diverse theories. Negative effects of teaching different literary theories, described by more than two thirds of participants, related primarily to students' confidence in studying English, and their grasp of ideas that could be important for assessment purposes.

Teachers' epistemological rationales for their stances on teaching literary theories are dealt with first, because personal epistemology functions as a lens through which everything else is perceived, including pedagogical experience and observations of how students have experienced teachers' enacted curriculum.

Conflict Between Personal Epistemologies and Perceptions of Theoretical Bases of the Syllabus

The first of the three persistent difficulties that teachers faced was a misalignment between their epistemological beliefs and their perceptions of the mandated written curriculum. More than three-quarters of the English teachers surveyed and interviewed for this study identified a lack of alignment between what they perceived the Syllabus to expect from them with regard to literary theories, on the

one hand, and their personal epistemology and pedagogical beliefs, on the other. A low degree of alignment between these was observed in all three data-collection phases.

Conflict between literary theories and epistemological beliefs were described by all five of the teachers interviewed for Phase 1. These teachers perceived the orientation of the Syllabus to be strongly influenced by theories that conflicted with their personal epistemologies. All five felt that literary theory was given far more emphasis than had been the case in the previous syllabus, and indicated that theories were less central to their own thinking about teaching senior English than they appeared to be in the Syllabus. This made it difficult for them to support it wholeheartedly.

The five teachers interviewed for Phase 1 all observed disparities between the diverse perspectives on texts, meaning and interpretation they saw as implicit in the Syllabus on the one hand, and their own beliefs about the nature of knowledge and knowing on the other. They saw this as a lack of alignment between syllabus and self. For example, after noting the influence of literary theories on the angle or direction of the Syllabus, one teacher from a rural independent school remarked,

> I struggle with the idea of teaching literary theories. While I find the theories interesting I am often at odds with them (especially postmodernism) and feel that they disrupt students' experience of literature.

This teacher acknowledged a degree of interest in literary theories, but noted some disjunction between her epistemology and the worldviews embedded in some theories. Epistemological reservations, described as being "at odds" with some literary theories, and pedagogical concerns about the negative and even disruptive impact on students of a focus on theories, made their teaching a "struggle" for this teacher.

An experienced teacher made the following statement of her personal epistemology: "Postmodernism is a problem. 'Perspective' is all very well except when reality strikes you, as in a WW II bunker! I prefer realism." This teacher argued that theories such as postmodernism are artificial constructs which do not stand up to the test of real life, particularly in times of crisis. She linked this to her view of the role of literary theory in the Syllabus: "The senior English course with its texts and theories just doesn't seem to *gel* ... literary theory can take on a life of its own and the students need it like a hole in the head." She also argued that the juxtaposition of texts and theories leads to awkward co-existence rather than to complementarity. She saw a potential for literary theory to dominate the subject, and used a vivid simile to convey her view that this was not a benefit to students.

Three of these interviewees saw teachers and students as experiencing similar conflicts between their fundamental beliefs and those of the theories underpinning senior English. This presented professional dilemmas about the wisdom of students or teachers critiquing literary theories. This rural teacher stated the situation strongly:

> Kids rail against what they see as nonsense. But for exam purposes they have to do postmodernism. I try to take on board students who disagree with the Syllabus on literary theory, but as a teacher you face a disturbing paradox that you have to do it this way for an exam even if you vehemently disagree with the theory in it.

This respondent felt that teachers "have to" teach students to apply postmodernist theory in a certain way for the high-stakes examination, even if neither teachers nor students endorsed that theoretical position. The teacher did not indicate the source of her sense of obligation to "do postmodernism." She came from a relatively

remote area and made no reference to receiving any professional development on the Syllabus. Her emotionally charged follow-up to the above statement was that teaching literary theories seen as "nonsense" is "seriously disturbing for an educator" and has led her to consider leaving the teaching profession. HSC examinations do not test only students: they are a key professional accountability measure; and this may have contributed to this teacher's sense of anxiety about what she feels teachers and students have to do.

Having tabled her reservations about postmodernism, this teacher described its effects on students as "fragmentary and overwhelming" as well as "unsettling," due to its lack of concreteness. She noted that student reactions have made her "very cautious about practising postmodernism" and then reiterated her sense of obligation: "the Syllabus says it must be done." It should be noted that this participant was interviewed before the release of the Clarification in late 2007, which stated that that the teaching of named literary theories was *not* a requirement. The issuing of the Clarification suggests that the NSW Board of Studies recognised that many teachers were under the impression that teaching diverse literary theories was a Syllabus expectation. The accuracy of teachers' impressions of Syllabus expectations may be open to debate and interpretation (a process which will itself be influenced by the literary-theoretical stance of the interpreter) but it is *teachers' perceptions of the Syllabus* that influence their curriculum enactment.

To explore the reports of epistemological misalignment which emerged from the Phase 1 interviews, the Phase 2 online survey asked teachers to select from a list those literary theories they saw as underpinning the Syllabus, and to specify which literary theories they personally held. The divergence between these two lists of literary theories can be seen in Figure 3.
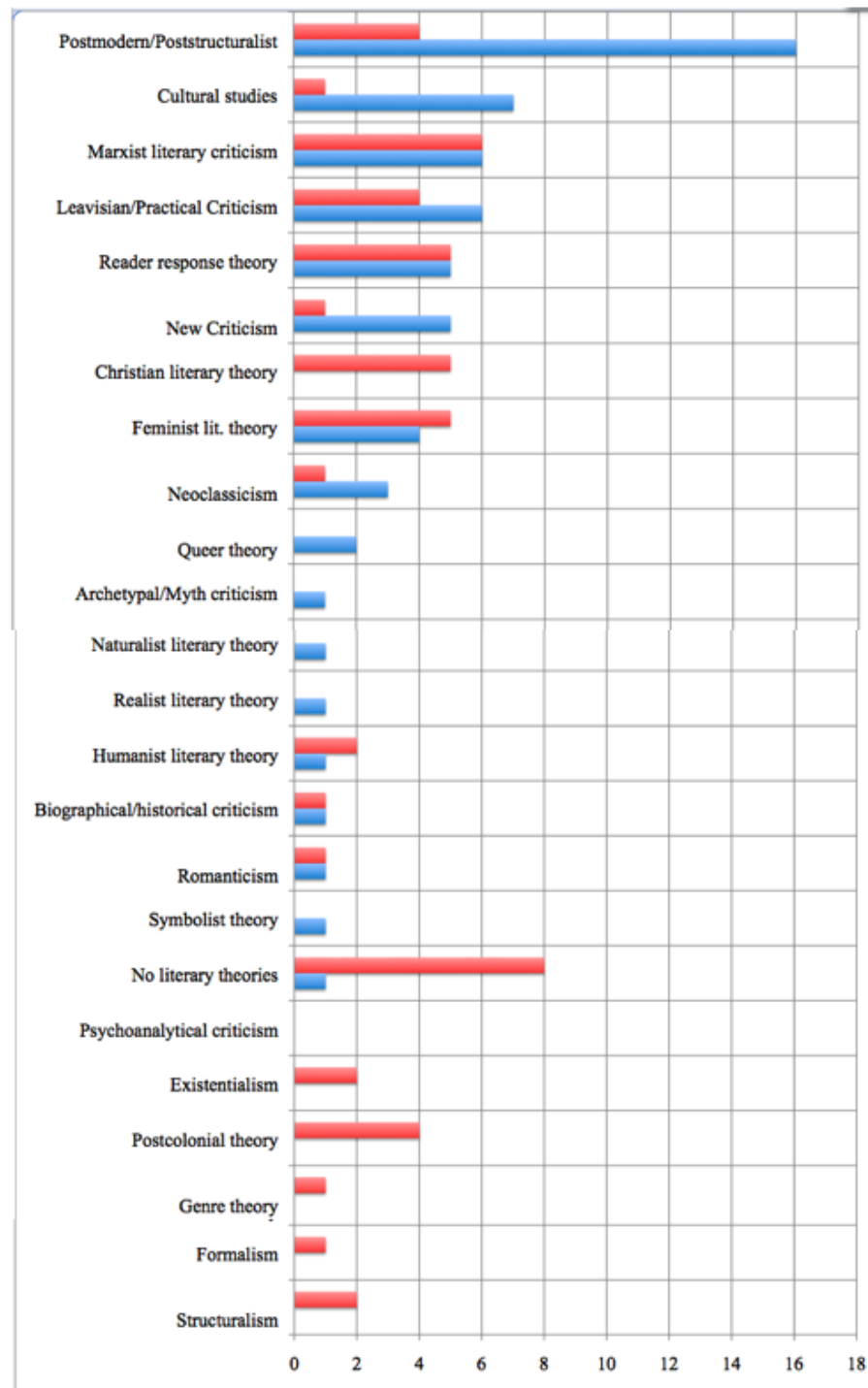
Figure 3 Comparison of perceptions of theoretical base of syllabus (blue) and literary theories held by teachers (red).

N=25.

Eighty-four per cent of the teachers surveyed in Phase 2 reported that the Syllabus was based on literary theories that did not fit their own epistemologies. This lack of correspondence between what teachers saw as the theoretical bases of the written curriculum and the theories they themselves held was highlighted by 21 of the 25 participants. The lack of epistemological "fit" fuelled many of the concerns raised in response to other questions in the survey. These teachers questioned both the epistemological foundations of the literary theories and the pedagogical implications of teaching them to students, and expressed uncertainty about the degree to which the Syllabus required, expected or assumed the theories would be reflected in classroom practice and in students' examination responses.

Four teachers reported a close correspondence between the literary theories they felt underpinned the mandated curriculum and those they held themselves; but offered contrasting perceptions of the written curriculum: two identified "all theories"; one experienced city teacher answered "Leavisian and biographical criticism"; one saw only postmodernism as central both to the Syllabus and to herself. This divergence of views suggests that where it was unclear what the theoretical bases of the Syllabus might encompass, these teachers focused on the literary-theoretical aspects that fitted their own epistemology.

The significance of the divergence between the written curriculum and their own beliefs perceived by a clear majority of participating teachers is worthy of further investigation. Respondents' perceptions of the literary theories on which the Syllabus is based are considered below in more detail, followed by a summary of the literary theories they saw themselves as holding.

Literary Theories Teachers Perceived as Influencing the Syllabus

Survey participants compared their own epistemological and pedagogical assumptions with those they perceived as being explicitly or implicitly present in the mandated written curriculum. Their reflections provide insights into the ways in which teacher beliefs and knowledge affect how they translate mandated written curriculum into their intended and enacted curriculum. The epistemological assumptions of the Syllabus being largely implicit made teachers' task of translation more difficult. As Manuel and Brock (2003) point out, in an article published just before this research commenced, in the "eclectic amalgam" of theoretical foundations of the Syllabus (p. 25), "the influence of post-modern theory is clearly discernible among a range of other theoretical positions" (p. 24). The inclusion of many, diverse theoretical positions in the Syllabus makes this a rich field for study, as literary theories essentially offer rival epistemological hypotheses about knowledge, meaning, the idea of veracity, and the authority and even the existence of textual evidence. Many are logically incompatible, and therefore difficult to combine in a single personal epistemology. How an individual accounts for these hypotheses can be expected to influence their attitudes and practices.

Table 1

Phase 2 Teachers' Perceptions of the Influence of Literary Theories in the NSW English Stage 6 Syllabus.

Literary Theory	Number
Postmodernism/Poststructuralism	13
Cultural Studies	7
Marxist literary theory	6
Leavisian/Practical criticism	6
Reader response theory	5
New criticism	5
Feminist literary theory	4
Neoclassicism	3

Note. N=25

Table 1 shows that a wide range of contrasting literary theories was perceived by teachers to underpin the Syllabus. The diversity of answers suggests that either all of the theories mentioned were in fact influential or that the teachers were uncertain of the theoretical underpinnings of the Syllabus. Given that identifying the literary-theoretical roots of the Syllabus was a highly contested issue, this may not be surprising.

The Phase 2 online survey provided participants with a Glossary of literary theories, which outlined key characteristics of 19 theories and related classroom activities. Participants in Phase Three were advised of this on-line Glossary before their interviews, and several of them had clearly consulted it. This may have reinforced for them the notion of multiple literary theories being influential, and may have refreshed their memories about theories that otherwise might not have been recalled at this time. The primary purpose of providing a Glossary was to streamline discussion of literary theories that have several names or sub-branches (such as Soviet socialist realism, the Frankfurt School, structuralist Marxism and neo-Marxism, or feminist literary criticism,

littérature feminine and gynocriticism). It was also intended to avoid confusion between literary theories and literacy theories, which had already been experienced during the ethics review process.

The importance of the Glossary was underlined when one Phase 2 teacher used it to facilitate precision in her reflections on the effects of literary theories, noting that she saw herself as holding "Post Colonial, Cultural, Marxism and Feminism" but offering her view that literary theories "are not really suitable for students in Standard English." A year later, when she was involved in an interview by email for Phase Three, the same teacher stated, "I was lost with what you meant by literary theories, considering we have never used this concept at school and I have not heard anyone else use it at any other school we have conferenced with." She added, "Not too sure what you mean by literary theories: I am assuming the Board of Studies outcomes?" This teacher makes the suggestion in her Phase 3 on-line interview that "at this point it would have been good if you had provided a brief definition of what you mean by 'literary theories'. If you mean resources/strategies, then I develop most of them myself." Near the end of her interview, when asked "Do you explicitly teach your Year 12 English classes about named literary theories?" she shows signs of remembering what these are when she asks, "Do you mean styles of reading e.g. Marxist, feminist etc. As I am only teaching Standard classes this year, no theories have been taught. In the past, a Marxist, colonsist [sic] and feminist perspective have been the main focus." By 'colonsist' this teacher presumably means post-colonialist rather than colonialist. This odd omission of the all-important prefix, given that the central aim of post-colonialist theorising is to counter or critique colonialist assumptions, suggests that the teacher is experiencing on-going confusion about the content of this theory. This teacher was from a metropolitan

independent school, and so a lack of geographical access to professional development or reading should not have been a major problem for her.

The Dominance of Postmodernism/Poststructuralism

The postmodernist/ poststructuralist theoretical cluster was the stance most often perceived by NSW teachers to underpin the Syllabus; its pervasive influence was emphasised by 13 of the 25 teachers completing the survey. Postmodernism/ poststructuralism was seen by more than half of the survey participants as shaping the requirements of senior English. The diversity of responses supports Manuel and Brock's (2003) observation that postmodernism and many other literary theories influence the Syllabus, whether or not they are explicitly labelled as such in Syllabus documents. Of the 13 teachers who saw postmodernism/poststructuralism as underpinning the Syllabus, six described postmodernist theory as "dominant" or "overwhelming," or as "an all-encompassing position." As noted in Chapter Three, the postmodernist/poststructuralist theoretical cluster takes a radically sceptical view of meaning, or "the collapse of meaning" (Lather, 1999, in Cole, Hill & Kelly, p. 4). This makes it logically difficult to hold in tandem with theories based on different views of the possibility of creating or interpreting meaning in texts, and could partly explain teachers' descriptions of postmodernism as dominating or overwhelming the Syllabus and the subject.

Contrasting perceptions about the theoretical foundations of the new Syllabus may be a reflection of its eclectic incorporation of approaches drawn from divergent literary theories, or an indication of a lack of theoretical clarity underpinning the Syllabus, or both. Five of the 25 teachers completing the Phase 2 survey indicated their belief that *all of the listed theories* underpinned the Syllabus, while one indicated that *no literary theories* underpinned it. Such contrasts suggest that teachers found its

theoretical bases to be unclear. This leads logically to the difficulties teachers said they faced in determining what role literary theories should play in Syllabus implementation. It could also reflect disparities in teacher knowledge of literary theories, or in familiarity with teaching them. Lack of professional support during early Syllabus implementation may also have been a factor. Dissimilarity of teacher perceptions about literary-theoretical assumptions in the written and assessed curriculum suggested further avenues of enquiry for Phase 3.

Teachers' Reports of Their Own Epistemological Theories

The English teachers surveyed saw the Syllabus as encompassing a shift in value sets from the previous syllabus. It is instructive to compare the literary theories the teachers perceived in the Syllabus with these same teachers' own beliefs and knowledge regarding literary theories, taken both as epistemological value sets and as educational tools. Literary theories with which teachers identified personally can be seen to vary considerably in nature and in number.

The eclectic collection of literary theories which Phase 2 teachers reported to form part of their personal epistemologies are shown in Table 2. They are also represented by the red portions in Figure 3 above.

Table 2

Literary Theories Held Personally by Phase 2 Teachers.

Personally held literary theories	Number
Christian literary theory	5
Feminist literary theory	5
Marxist literary theory	5
Reader response theory	5
Leavisian/Practical criticism	4
Postcolonial theory	4
Postmodernist/Poststructuralist theory	4
Biographical criticism	2
Existentialist literary theory	2
Humanist theory	2
Structuralist theory	2
Cultural studies	1
Formalism	1
Modernism	1
Neoclassicism	1
No literary theories	8

Note. N=25

Most striking about Table 2 is that more teachers (8 of 25) claimed to personally identify with *no literary theories* than with *any* of the named literary theories. That 32% of teachers surveyed should have wished to distance themselves from claiming any literary theory as part of their personal epistemologies is of particular interest, given that all but one of the participants reported seeing diverse theories as shaping the theoretical bases of the Syllabus. This could be interpreted as a protest vote against the influence these teachers perceive literary theories to have on the angle or direction of the Syllabus, and certainly suggests the likelihood of conflict between the different stances on literary theories in senior English.

Marxist critical theory, feminist literary theory, reader response theory and Christian literary theory were the theories nominated most frequently as the literary theories the respondents held themselves (five of the 25); however, even the theories most commonly nominated as personally held were mentioned by only 20% of the teachers. This leaves more than three-quarters not holding those particular literary theories, reinforcing the sense of teachers' personal epistemologies being very diverse.

While 13 of the 25 teachers surveyed saw postmodernism/poststructuralism influencing the Syllabus, only four (16%) claimed to personally hold a postmodernist/ poststructuralist position. This striking lack of concordance signals the contested nature of English as a subject, and of the Syllabus as a document, and highlights the absence of a coherent core set of theoretical perspectives shared by all English teachers. Reasons for the divergence emerge in both interviews and survey responses.

Postcolonial theory and Leavisian/practical criticism were held personally by 16% of Phase 2 participants. Structuralism, biographical criticism, existentialism and humanism were each held by two respondents. Cultural studies, modernism, neoclassicism, formalism and new criticism were each held by one participant. Once again, the most striking feature of this list is its multiplicity. Although 28% of teachers perceived that cultural studies was influential in the Syllabus, only one (4%) indicated that cultural studies was a theory they personally held. Criticism of the Syllabus as being structured along cultural studies lines in Areas of Study was prevalent in Phases One and Two but mentioned less often by Phase Three interviewees. This could indicate teachers had become accustomed to this structure by 2010, and its origins in cultural studies were no longer in the forefront of teachers' thinking about the Syllabus.

Despite this multiplicity of teacher epistemologies in regard to literary theories, some clustering of personally held theories did emerge from the responses. Four of the

five teachers reporting themselves as personally holding Marxist literary theory also

identified with at least three of the following: feminist, postmodernist/poststructuralist,

postcolonial, cultural studies and existentialist theories. This cluster of theories has

strong links with what is called "critical literacy" in Australia (although a somewhat

different meaning is attached to this term in the United States, as Mellor and Paterson

[2004] have noted).

Lack of alignment between personal epistemologies and the literary theory bases

teachers perceived to be implicit in the Syllabus was followed up in Phase Three

interviews. The teachers were asked to nominate literary theories they were not "in tune

with" themselves: that is, which did not fit their own epistemological beliefs. Their

responses are represented in Figure 4.
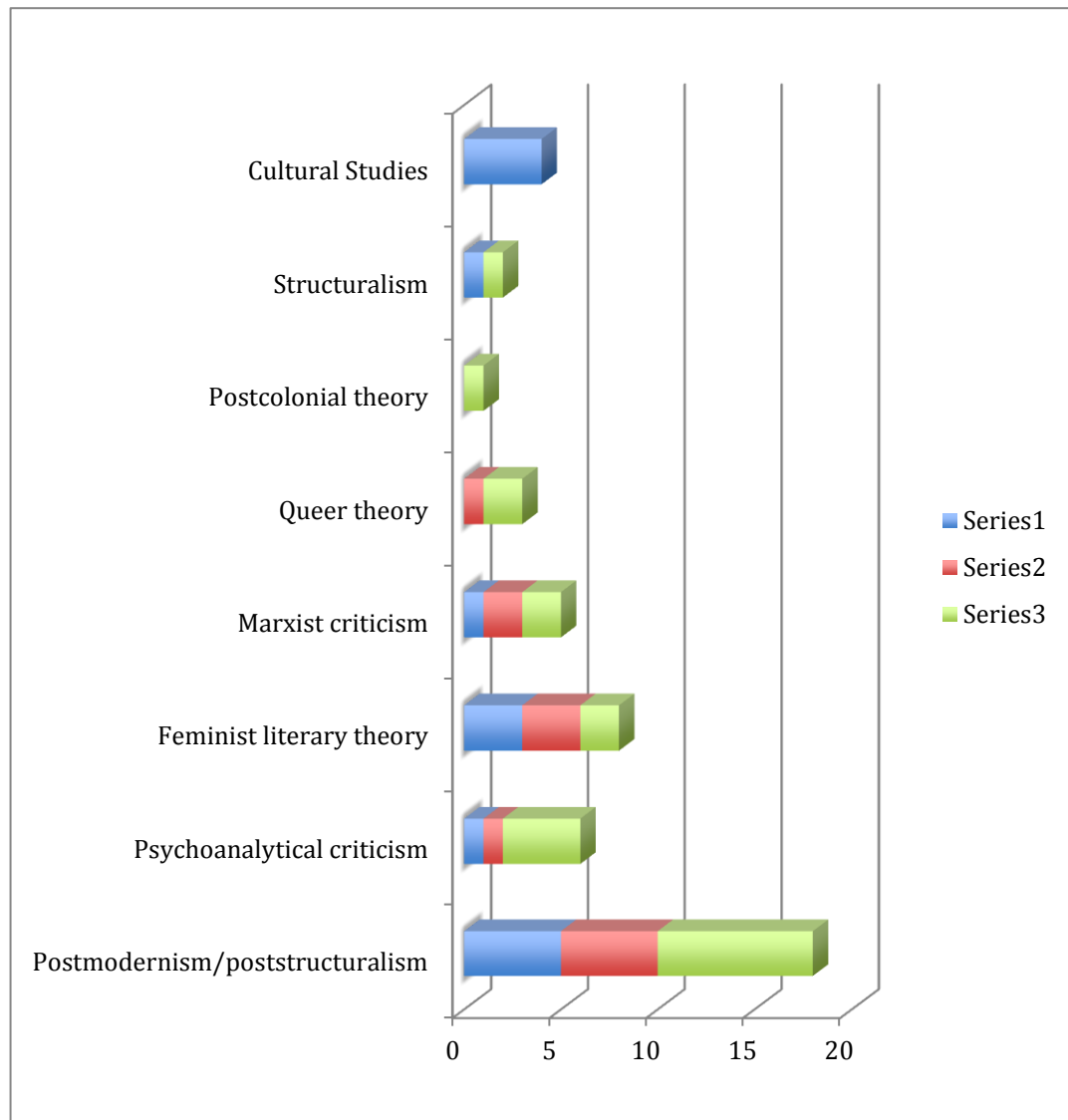
Figure 4 Literary theories that teachers identified as not being aligned with their own epistemological beliefs.

Note. Blue: Phase 1 (2006, N=6). Red: Phase 2 (2007-8, N=25). Green: Phase 3 (2010, N=20).

The poststructuralist/postmodernist cluster was nominated by the largest number of Phase Three teachers as not in tune with their own epistemology (8 of the 20 teachers interviewed, or 40%). This confirmed the finding from Phases One and Two that the theoretical cluster teachers most commonly identified as epistemologically problematic

was poststructuralism/postmodernism. Over all three phases of the research, of all the theories mentioned by the respondents, the postmodernist/poststructuralist cluster was reported most often as not congruent with their personal epistemologies (69% of participants) but as underpinning the Syllabus (72%). When epistemological objections to a literary theory were offered, they generally related to postmodernism or poststructuralism, out of the 19 theories treated in the Glossary. The existence of an elective called Postmodernism may have influenced focus on this literary cluster. In addition, poststructuralism/ postmodernism cannot easily be added to other theories, as it claims to dissolve or debunk previous theories rather than to refine them. If teachers already gave some credence to a collection of literary theories, then learning more about poststructuralism/postmodernism could present a professional dilemma: one could carry on holding an eclectic theoretical mix, or one could abandon the existing set of theories in favour of poststructuralist/postmodernist theory. Teachers were officially advised in 2011 that the elective was being discontinued.

Given that the primary sources of poststructuralist/postmodernist theory were generally written in languages other than English, and in complex and somewhat abstruse language, exploring their implications is difficult. Only two respondents out of 50 said they had read the original literary theorists. The remainder relied on secondary sources, glossaries and dictionaries of literary-theoretical terms, to glean enough information to understand the concepts and strategies involved. It is possible that some Higher School Certificate examiners may also have been relying on these glossaries rather than on primary texts, as the following statement was issued in notes from the marking centres (Board of Studies, 2007) "While experimentation is to be encouraged, students should be aware that postmodern or absurdist scripts must be carefully constructed to ensure the intention is clear" (p. 15). Given that postmodernism

challenges both the notion of a clear meaning ever being possible and the idea that an author's intention may be (a) interpreted with any certainty or (b) assigned any relevance, this instruction could be seen as asking the impossible of Year 12 students writing postmodern texts.

A rationale for not personally holding postmodernism/ poststructuralism was provided by several teachers. A city independent teacher offered this evaluation: "Poststructuralism is an economy that eats itself—it is ultimately self-destructing, an animal that eats its young." A rural independent Head of Faculty described his epistemological objections to postmodernism: "the idea that there is no truth is self-defeating: it defeats the truth it is supposed to be conveying." This teacher had engaged in sustained study of literary theories, amassed a substantial personal library on the subject, and had taught the Postmodernism elective before deciding that this inherent self-contradiction in logic made it unproductive to teach to secondary students.

Characteristics that may have contributed to postmodernism being resisted most by participants in this study include its claims about the collapse of meaning (Graff, 1979), its rejection of the notions of truth and authority (Perkins, 1992), its reliance on a "self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-undermining statement" (Hutcheon, 1989, p. 1), its "nihilistic pragmatism" (Rice & Waugh, 1999, p. 344), and its rejection of grand narratives (Lyotard, 1984). In admitting that she largely avoided such radical challenges to notions of meaning, one independent city teacher offered a pedagogical rationale, which she saw as based on her personal epistemology: "I do feel that if we take cultural assumptions for granted it is in deference to our students' age and a desire not to totally undermine their sense of stable values by which to live and make meaning."

Five teachers reported that Christian literary theory played a role in their personal epistemologies, although Christian literary theory was not listed in the Glossary, and no participants described it as underpinning the Syllabus. This reinforces the idea that the personal epistemologies of teachers largely determine their stances towards teaching particular theories, and which ones they focus on.

One city independent Head of Faculty expressed a view of the interaction between the theoretical bases of the Syllabus and his personal epistemology. In considering the theoretical bases of the Syllabus, he reflected that "The postmodern framework that encourages multiple readings of texts is crucial as is the position of the reader as part of the way meaning is constructed e.g. reader-response." This statement foregrounds teaching students to move beyond seeing texts as having a single "intended" meaning, and allows room for students to be participants in meaning-making. Interestingly this same teacher remarked, "I hate deconstructionism, poststructuralism and anything that the French philosophers of the 60s came up with!" so his observation that a postmodernist frame is "crucial" to the Syllabus does not mean that it aligns with his personal epistemology. In contrast to the postmodern framing he saw in the Syllabus, this respondent indicated a personal commitment to a "Christian reading," adding the proviso, "But you have to be sufficiently broad as to explore a whole range of other potential ways in which texts can be read, whether you see yourself 'holding' to them or not." This teacher described testing out certain theories with students, and added "Often I play Devil's advocate to tease out different ways in which a text can be read." Thus, in enacting curriculum he is willing to teach literary theories which may not be aligned with his personal epistemology. This contrasts with the city independent teacher who said of teaching literary theories, "I have been a reluctant English teacher in this respect, having to do something I didn't believe in,"

and who advocated teaching literary theories at university level rather than in secondary school.

Teachers in denominational schools raised the idea that when working in schools with religious foundations a lack of epistemological alignment between these foundations and some of the key tenets of particular literary theories could exacerbate professional tensions surrounding the teaching of literary theories. A rural independent Head of Faculty remarked, "I think there is a difficult line which exists between some of the literary theory and the ethos in a religious school." A city independent school teacher noted that it was hard to line up the theoretical bases of the new Syllabus with her "existing (Jesuit) pedagogy," and that this had delayed her adjustment to the Syllabus.

Where the respondents distinguished between their own position and the theories that they taught, they provided a rationale indicating how their epistemological and pedagogical beliefs interacted to affect their practice:

> Personally I read texts through a Humanist lens. Professionally, I have VERY strong beliefs in NOT espousing one particular "ism." That's so narrow and self-defeating. I want to inject my students with my passion for literature. That's what will sustain them in life, not some mindless adherence to a philosophical literary theory.

This teacher's conceptions of English as a subject emerge clearly, as does her sense of providing sustenance for students through modelling her appreciation of literature. The quotation sets up a conflict between two philosophies of teaching English, one that emphasises love of literature and another that interrogates texts. The teacher indicates where her own commitments lie, and reinforces this with positive

language and concepts; she uses capital letters and the pejorative "mindless" to
underscore the strength of her disagreement with teachers promoting a particular theory.

Uncertainty About Expectations

Having briefly outlined teachers' responses to the first persistent difficulty,
namely the poor alignment between their personal epistemologies and their perceptions
of the literary-theoretical bases of the Syllabus, we move now to teachers' responses to
the second persistent difficulty, which was uncertainty concerning the literary-
theoretical expectations embedded in the mandated curriculum. HSC English teachers
expressed uncertainty about whether and how the Syllabus was influenced by literary
theories, and how this should affect their classroom practice. From the time of Syllabus
publication in 1999 until the publication in late 2007 of the Clarification from the NSW
Board of Studies, the research participants repeatedly expressed uncertainty about
whether their professional responsibilities included teaching Year 12 English students to
recognise and apply diverse literary theories. Even after the Clarification, many of the
teachers in this study still expressed uncertainty as to what applications of literary
theory would be deemed appropriate by markers of the high-stakes external HSC
examinations. One Independent school Faculty Head offered an overview of the way
the Board of Studies' expectations were communicated, interpreted and clarified:

> [The] NSW Syllabus was confused about its own requirements. Early
>
> examinations and examiners' notes seemed to imply that students (and hence
>
> teachers) were required to be familiar with a range of recognised and labelled
>
> theories, particularly political theories of Marxism and Feminism, but also
>
> Psychoanalytic and other theories. In reality most teachers had a smattering of
>
> Marxist-Feminist awareness from their days at uni but were forced to rely on

simplistic guides for other readings. After the backlash, the Board of Studies

went into re-assurance mode that recognised critical theories were not the major

underpinning of the Syllabus or Module B, but rather they may lead students to

recognise other ways in which texts may be read and broaden their own

readings.

This teacher indicated that his observations were informed by his participation in

several English teachers' professional networks, facilitated by his metropolitan location.

He saw the assessed curriculum as influential in driving teacher expectations about use

of literary theories, through examination questions and reports from the marking

centres. His use of "smatterings" and "simplistic" suggests teacher knowledge of

diverse literary theories was not always substantial. The period of contestation about

the teaching of literary theories is captured in the emotive term "backlash." His careful

wording suggests that literary theories were "not the major underpinning of the

Syllabus" in the first place, but that this may have been unclear to teachers.

This teacher goes on to comment somewhat ruefully on the after-effects of this

process of detecting and clearing up ambiguity of expectations:

We have now gone to the other extreme in Module B whereby any student who

refs to recognised theories is automatically viewed with suspicion that they

may be merely uncritically regurgitating others' theories with minimal

engagement with the detail of the text.

Negatively-loaded words such as "extreme," "suspicion" and "uncritically

regurgitating" underline the strength of feeling involved in contestation over the use of

literary theories in senior English. Underlying both of his comments is the sense that

the issue was handled poorly both by curriculum authorities and by teachers.

Teachers described themselves as submitting to perceived official expectations,

despite their uncertainty. One independent school teacher saw this as a professional

responsibility:

> There has been some confusion in teachers' minds about the degree to which
>
> explicit teaching of various theoretical approaches should happen (King Lear
>
> being the most contentious example of this). I, and many other teachers, made a
>
> reluctant effort to comply with what we thought was the expectation behind the
>
> Syllabus. However, more recently, there has been a shift towards valuing the
>
> informed personal response of students.

She notes teacher uncertainty about whether teaching about literary theories should be

seen as normative—something that "should happen." Her final remark, recognising a

shift in expectations, is made without negatively loaded terminology, suggesting her

acceptance of such a shift. She indicates elsewhere that her view of requirements had

been altered by in-service days and conferences to which she had ready access, as she

worked in a metropolitan area.

Ambiguity of expectations concerning the teaching of literary theories was

summarised by a rural Faculty Head, who noted that the emphasis on teaching literary

theories is

> Less now than in the past. There was a miscommunication regarding Module B
>
> which meant that teachers felt that it was meant to deal more with literary
>
> theories than with the students' interpretations of them. It then became clear that

there was more leniency than that, and that more weight should be put back on

the students' own interpretations.

Tone and language use are unemotional. The difficulty is summarised and the

Clarification stated without mention of serious contestation, suspicion or anxiety. It is

interesting that this teacher elsewhere notes that rather than explicitly programming to

teach literary theories, he "tend[s] to respond to students' particular queries." The

rationale he provides for this approach is succinct: "Teachers have to use their

professional judgement about everything—including literary theories."

Another teacher saw the *practical application* of literary-theoretical approaches

to texts as key to the Board of Studies' expectations of teachers in this area:

> I think they want us to be cognisant of several different approaches but just in
>
> the way they might be applied to texts, rather than the theoretical understanding
>
> of what they are ... so I would call it "pop theory" ... I have met very few
>
> teachers who have a thorough understanding of the theories themselves, but
>
> most teachers do have a good working knowledge of pragmatic ways of
>
> connecting them with texts.

This participant is observing teachers' tendency to be pragmatic about Syllabus

innovation and official expectations; he is also recognising that teachers may not have a

strong grounding in a large number of literary theories, which may lead them to make

functional use of only a few. This suggests a context in which teachers may use

practical strategies derived from literary theories without being deeply aware of or

necessarily in agreement with their founding tenets; which further suggests that literary

theories could be used superficially—by teachers or by students.

While several of the teachers described an increase in students explicitly utilising literary theories followed by a noticeable decline, other Phase Three interviewees described ongoing expectations concerning literary theories, such as a city government school teacher who noted that

> Literary theory is an assumed knowledge for teachers of Advanced and Extension courses. Teachers are expected to guide Year 11 and 12 Advanced students in the application of literary theories to their critical responses.

Similarly, a city government school teacher observed that "there is still an expectation that students will be exposed to literary theory in certain modules;" although she does not state the source of this expectation, which might be the Board of Studies, the English Teachers' Association, or the English faculty in her school.

Some changes in respondents' stance towards literary theories coincided with the timing of the Clarification that explicit treatment of literary theories was not a requirement for Stage 6 English. The first change was that interviews conducted after 2007 elicited responses revealing less distress in tone and word choice, more matter-of-fact language, and fewer references to views of themselves as English teachers being under threat. Compared to Phase 1 and 2 participants, Phase 3 teachers tended to indicate that the degree of importance of literary theories in their own classroom practice was "not all that important" or "fairly unimportant" without any expressions of emotion. The idea of putting literary theories in their place, somewhere down the list of priorities, was pragmatically stated, with one teacher providing a scoring system: "As a mark out of 10, I would give it a 2." Another described literary theory as "one of the things I juggle." The change in language from the focus on contestation and anxiety in Phases 1 and 2 is evident in the Phase 3 responses.

There is also evidence in Phase 3 interviews, conducted after publication of the Clarification, of teachers seeing the influence of literary theories as moulding the teacher's outlook rather than directly shaping classroom content. One city Head of Faculty stated, "literary theory is important for my own conceptual paradigms but students' understanding of it is being rewarded less in the HSC so my explicit focus on it in class has been reduced." This teacher is linking evaluation of the assessed curriculum to changes in his own enacted curriculum. In a similar vein, one independent school teacher distinguished theoretical concepts from theoretical content: "I would say I am always teaching from a perspective that has theoretical roots ... [but] I would actually teach about literary theories for a tiny proportion ... of the time."

The level of reflectiveness of Phase 3 respondents considering the influences of a literary theory on their own thinking and classroom practice can be seen in the statement from a rural Faculty Head:

> there is a lot of implicit material, even for someone who has little idea about literary theories. It can perhaps be related to someone who has "no religion" yet acts out of a belief system nonetheless. I try to keep aware of changes in perspectives and consider how my own implicit "theories" impact on my teaching. Explicitly I don't think theories have a great role in my teaching.

This teacher moves from the implicit nature of literary-theoretical influences, to teachers' personal epistemologies, to the effect of theory fluctuation and the need to be self-aware, and finally makes a statement minimising the impact of literary theory on her own pedagogy. She also acknowledges the difficulties of evaluating influences that function "between the lines," as it were.

The Role of the Postmodernism Elective

It is possible that the presence in the new Syllabus of an elective called

Postmodernism reinforced teachers' perceptions that coverage of recent literary theories

such as postmodernism was to be understood as a professional responsibility. The fact

that the elective was nested in an Area of Study called "Texts and Ways of Thinking"

could imply that postmodernism was a way of thinking which students could observe

critically rather than an epistemology which they were intended to adopt.

Teachers may have connected the advent of the Postmodernism elective with

statements in the Syllabus Rationale for English Extension which describe this course as

providing students with the opportunity

> to theorise about the processes of responding to and composing texts. Through
>
> extended engagement in investigation and composition, students explore
>
> multiple meanings and relative values of texts. They explore a range of
>
> conceptual frameworks for the reading and composition of texts and examine a
>
> range of reading practices to develop awareness of the assumptions that guide
>
> interpretation and evaluation. (Board of Studies, 1999, p. 84)

This could be interpreted as alluding to diverse literary and cultural theories as

frameworks, each with their own assumptions, that lead to particular "readings" of texts.

Teachers who saw this statement as an oblique way of describing students learning to

use diverse literary theories may have had this view reinforced by the some of the

Outcomes prescribed in the Syllabus:

Students will learn how different texts are valued by ...

2.3 speculating about different ways in which texts might be valued

2.4 generalising about the nature of the process of valuing texts. (Board of

Studies, 1999, p. 91)

Literary theories have been characterised as speculations about ways of valuing and

interpreting texts (Malpas & Wake, 2006; Murfin & Ray, 1998). Exploring the

speculative nature of literary theories, Culler (2000) describes the impulse behind

literary theories as one of pushing ideas about meaning and value in texts to see how far

they can go. As teachers followed up the idea of students speculating about valuation of

texts, they may have also taken direction from the Extension 1 Course Requirements

referring to students exploring "the effects of particular paradigms for a range of

audiences" in Module B: "Texts and Ways of Thinking." This could be inferred to

include the paradigms of conflicting literary theories. Similarly, the references to

"sociolinguistic, historical or stylistic perspective[s]" and such "notions and processes

as ... subversion and appropriation" (Board of Studies, 1999a, p. 90) may have been

interpreted as reflecting official expectations that teachers would alert students to

sociolinguistic literary and cultural theories and teach them those subversive textual

strategies characteristically associated with postmodernism.

The findings of this research demonstrate that many senior English teachers

experienced anxiety and confusion from Syllabus inception in 2001, as they sought to

determine whether teaching literary theories was among their professional

responsibilities. The combination of the wording of the Syllabus, recommended

professional readings, professional development, and the presence of an elective on

postmodernism, along with a focus on literary theories in publications released by peak

professional bodies, appear to have had the cumulative effect of raising teachers'

concern over the teaching of literary theories in Year 12 English.

Decisions Affecting Curriculum Enactment

How literary theories were intended to affect practice under the new Syllabus was a question that proved to be subject to individual interpretation. Faced with a Syllabus which appeared to be influenced by numerous theories, the participating teachers described a range of persistent difficulties, which have been summarised in the following three key questions:

- Do I have to teach this?

- Does it fit my epistemological beliefs?

- Is it helpful to students in practice?

Uncertainty about whether the teaching of literary theories was a requirement or expectation of the mandated written and assessed curriculum was seen by participating teachers as delaying the answering of the other questions, and extending the period of contestation concerning the role of literary theories in senior school English.

From the data collected for this study from six teacher interviews in 2006 (Phase 1), the survey completed by 25 teachers in 2007–2008 (Phase 2) and interviews with 20 teachers in 2010 (Phase 3), it emerges clearly that teachers experienced widespread and ongoing difficulty in answering these three key questions. Some patterns emerge from the divergent answers. Teachers who felt they did not understand the literary theories they were expected to teach expressed anxiety and resentment. Teachers who felt literary theories were not, on balance, helpful to student learning, raised objections to their being "expected or assumed" to be part of their teaching responsibilities. Teachers who perceived a lack of alignment between the literary-theoretical bases of the Syllabus and their personal epistemologies indicated this raised professional dilemmas, which they approached in diverse ways.

Answering the three key questions about the Syllabus innovation involved teachers in a complex web of curriculum actions and evaluation. These are represented in Figure 5.
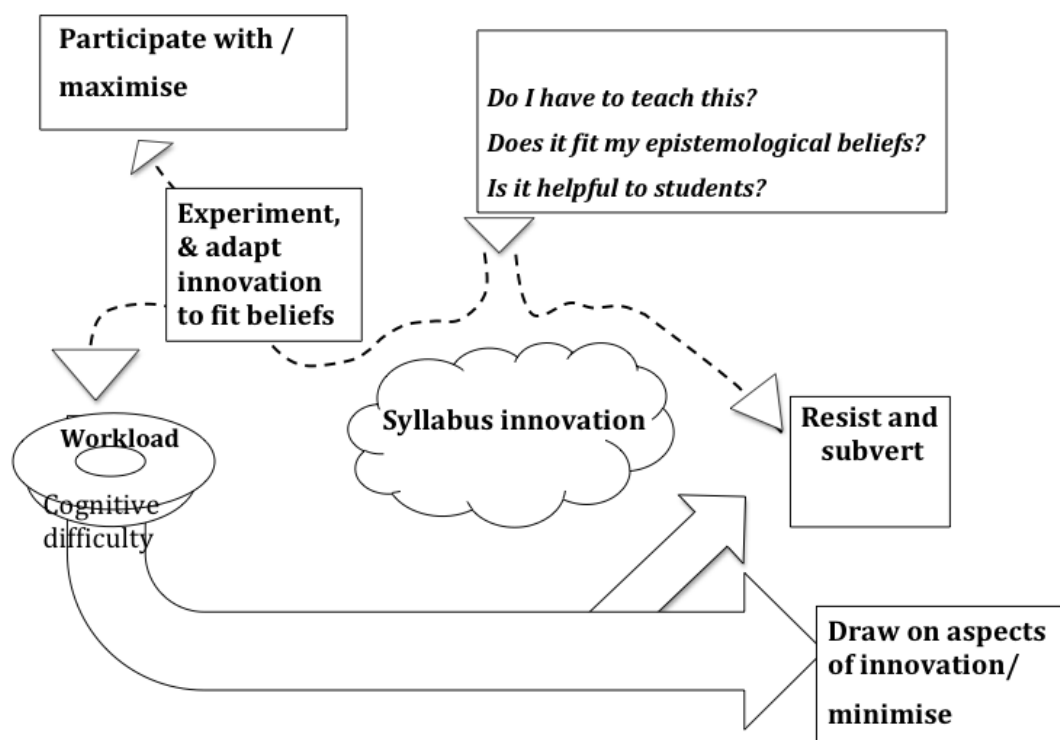
Figure 5 Range of teacher responses to syllabus innovation.

The Syllabus innovation (emphasis on teaching literary theories) is shown near the centre of Figure 5. It presents the teachers with three key questions to consider as they seek to interpret and enact the Syllabus. Teachers give different answers to these three key questions, and the contestation which emerges from this is illustrated in the way teachers take varied routes towards curriculum action and end up treating literary theories in divergent ways.

Teachers giving affirmative answers to the three key questions were positive about reshaping subject English to maximise the positive impacts of teaching diverse

literary theories. Conversely, teachers giving negative answers to several of these key

questions minimised their use of the literary theories. Teachers who gave firmly

negative answers to the three key questions actively resisted or subverted the teaching

of contested literary theories to their Year 12 students.

What the majority of teachers interviewed and surveyed for this study reported,

however, was *uncertainty* about how they would respond to the three key questions with

regard to teaching a range of literary theories. This led them to experiment over time

with various theories, in order to determine whether the benefits outweighed the

disadvantages. When invited to reflect on the epistemological and pedagogical

implications of teaching diverse and rapidly changing literary theories, the participants

offered perceptive and nuanced observations on the effects of teaching literary theories,

which illuminate the evaluative processes teachers use when faced with curriculum

contestation.

"Do I have to teach this?"

The first question teachers asked themselves, when faced with perceptions of the

Syllabus emphasising literary theories, was "Do I have to do this? Determining whether

they were expected to teach diverse literary theories turned out to be a complex and

multi-faceted task.

All five teachers interviewed for Phase 1 in 2006 indicated that they were having

difficulty interpreting the Syllabus in regard to the degree of emphasis that was

expected on literary theories. This was the case even for those who had attended the

Stage 6 English Forum in 1998, which was intended to prepare them for the new

Syllabus. At the time of interview, these teachers had been working under the Syllabus

for five years, so the ongoing uncertainty about expectations cannot simply be regarded

as the customary initial adjustment to a new written curriculum. These Phase 1 teachers

raised questions about whether they needed to be well-versed in a range of theories, whether they needed to explicitly teach literary theories and if so, which ones were most suitable, and whether they needed to train students to apply literary theories in external examinations.

Working out their professional responsibilities concerning literary theory proved difficult for almost all those surveyed in 2007 and 2008. The on-line survey solicited English teachers' views on the role literary theories played in Year 12 English teaching. It also sought to get beyond teachers' *views* about the teaching of literary theory, to explore how they *interpreted* and *enacted* the expectations they perceived to be explicitly or implicitly present in the official dimensions of curriculum, including the new mandated Syllabus and Support Documents (Board of Studies, 1999a) and the assessed curriculum in the form of examination questions, marking practices and reports from the marking centres. The survey also invited teachers to evaluate how they saw the teaching of literary theories affecting students' experienced curriculum. These factors, all part of teachers' considered responses to a new and challenging syllabus, provide a window into the way teachers decided how to respond to a written curriculum designed by others.

Perceived obligation.

A top-down view of curriculum design and promulgation was widespread among the research respondents. They generally conceptualised curriculum design as something outside their control, an official prescription with which they needed to comply. As one rural independent Head of Faculty remarked, "You have to toe the line! If the Board of Studies is calling for Cultural Studies practice, then you need to explore the topic in that way in order not to disadvantage students." The use of "have to" and "need to" underlines this teacher's sense of obligation to follow the (perceived)

requirements of the written curriculum. A city government school Head of Faculty

conveyed this more bluntly: "I teach what I am told." Even when teachers indicated

that their personal epistemologies were not in line with some of the theoretical premises

of the Syllabus, they described themselves as having to "present what the Syllabus

requires," to "teach it anyway—it's my job," noting about their motivation: "I may not

be enthusiastic but I do it."

That an obligation to explicitly use literary theories could fall upon students as

well as teachers is suggested in the statement by a rural independent school teacher

concerning literary theories that are not aligned with teachers' or students' personal

epistemologies: "I teach according to the Syllabus to prepare my students as thoroughly

as possible for the exam. After that ... they can make their own decisions." This could

imply that the teacher encourages students to "toe the line" by using certain literary

theories for examination purposes. A teacher from a metropolitan government school,

however, conceptualised the obligation to treat literary theories as falling on her as a

teacher but *not* on her students, when she noted that even where there was misalignment

with her personal epistemology "I would still research and prepare even if I didn't agree

with the theoretical premise. I am not here to impose my views rather to help the

students to find theirs." This statement of pedagogical philosophy prioritises student

exploration of contrasting ideas above the need for teachers to stay in their

epistemological comfort zones.

Teachers described finding ways of accommodating a perceived obligation to

teach literary theories without being circumscribed by them. One regional independent

school Head of Faculty indicated the accommodation she had achieved in practice,

teaching in a denominational school context:

You teach the Syllabus but make sure the students are aware that there are other

options. The Syllabus must be covered but you can always give the students

more information in addition to that. It is about providing them with

opportunities to see beyond boundaries.

Another teacher from an independent city school established by a different

denomination expressed similar views, about accommodating what is expected but

adding to it in a way which allows for other ideas: "I present what the Syllabus requires

and make known that there are a variety of views. It is not my place to push my

personal theory." One teacher who perceived the teaching of literary theories in Year

12 as a Board of Studies expectation illustrated how she avoided making this an

imposition on students' personal epistemologies: "I present the theories and we study

the ideas with the students. The students are encouraged to develop their own

perspectives on these and incorporate them into their work." This inner-city

government school teacher's remarks show that she aimed to make space for individuals

to respond differently to the literary theories that she taught as a perceived professional

duty. Other teachers indicated they fulfilled their perceived professional obligations by

both teaching diverse literary theories and critiquing their epistemological bases: "I

teach what is necessary to maximise student results but I use classroom discussion to

generate constructive criticism of various approaches." This statement shows how a

teacher may work to balance assessment pressures with the need to give students space

to test and contest rival literary theories.

To what extent did research participants perceive that teaching literary theories

was one of their professional responsibilities under the new Syllabus of 1999? Of the

25 teachers completing the Phase 2 survey, 10 indicated that they perceived the teaching

of literary theories to be a Syllabus expectation. A city government school teacher described her sense of professional obligation in this way:

> Year 12 is preparing for the HSC and as such [students taking] any unit that requires a firm understanding of the theories and manipulation of them must study and know how to incorporate them when necessary into assessment tasks if they are to succeed.

The language use here carries a note of bureaucratic requirement rather than personal interest: "requires ... must ... incorporate ... necessary." Similarly a teacher from an elite city independent school stated her sense of obligation to teach with the assessed curriculum firmly in mind: "I do what the Syllabus requires as I am preparing students for a very high-stakes examination." She did, however, indicate that her enacted curriculum was not limited to an uncritical treatment of literary theories or textual approaches: "From time to time I may indicate to students that the imposition of a concept such as 'Journeys' on a range of texts can be a limiting factor in the appreciation of the range of meanings in the texts." She appears here to be critiquing Cultural Studies approaches in order to make room for other approaches, rather than criticising literary theories in general.

Knowing that their students faced high-stakes examinations at the conclusion of Year 12 made teachers anxious to know whether it was necessary to approach texts by means of contrasting literary theories. The challenges of preparation for external examinations were highlighted by eight of the 10 Phase 2 teachers who saw the teaching of literary theories as a Board of Studies expectation under the new Syllabus. This was still an issue on which English teachers had different views in 2010. All Phase 3 interviews were conducted after the Board of Studies (2007) had clarified that students

were not required to explicitly use named literary theories. However, 11 of the 20

teachers interviewed perceived that they were nevertheless expected to teach students to

explicitly use literary theories. This was stated by teachers such as the city independent

Head of Faculty who declared, "It is a requirement for examination responses" (later

adding, "It should *not* be a requirement for examination responses"). Other teachers,

notwithstanding the Board of Studies clarifying that explicit treatment of literary

theories was *not* a requirement, believed that expectations about the teaching of literary

theories were still evident in the Syllabus. In this vein, a rural independent Faculty

Head noted the Syllabus contained "outcomes which expect teachers to help their

students become familiar with [literary theories]" and "electives which assume some

expertise" with them.

The question of obligation.

Several teachers made statements which appeared to be about the teaching of

literary theories *not* being a professional obligation, but which they immediately

qualified significantly. For example, the statement "I would not feel obliged to explain

all these theories to students" might suggest the teacher does not see teaching literary

theories as an obligation, until the qualification is added: "Only the theories relevant to

a text or its context would be introduced." Similarly, a statement that "To my

knowledge there are no literary theories explicitly present in the HSC ... Syllabus" could

be read as a declaration that teaching literary theories is not an obligation, but this city

independent school teacher then observes that "terms like a text's 'reception in a range

of contexts' are intentionally broad so as to encompass the widest of readings." This

shows that the teacher is not interpreting the inexplicitness of the Syllabus with regard

to literary theories as an indication that teachers may ignore them. The qualifying

remarks in both cases reveal an implicit acceptance of the responsibility of teaching at

least some literary theory. This suggests that ongoing contestation over the role of literary theory in senior English has led to teachers "hedging their bets" or equivocating about the degree of obligation they perceive themselves as working under. This is supported by some of their reports of covering literary theories "in case" they are required.

Uncertainty about expectations concerning literary theories.

Eighty-eight per cent of the research participants said they had experienced uncertainty about whether they were expected to teach students to use diverse literary theories. All five Phase 1 participants and 15 of the 25 Phase 2 participants indicated that they continued to be *uncertain* as to whether the teaching of literary theories should be seen as an integral part of their professional responsibilities.

The approach generally taken by teachers who were uncertain of Syllabus requirements concerning literary theory was to teach a minimalist "dose" of theory, bearing in mind that an external examination question might render such preparation necessary. One rural independent Faculty Head explained that despite being uncertain about the degree to which she should emphasise literary theory, she provided her students with what she saw as a precautionary minimalist dose:

> I have worked out a simplified version [of three literary theories] and say to the students "Concentrate on these three theories" because we have a major essay that forces them to do that so I know that when they get to the exam they will be prepared. But it's still hard going.

Despite her view that the Syllabus is unclear as to the intended role of literary theories, this teacher has organised an internal assessment task that will make students deal explicitly with theories. Her purpose in doing this is to give students practice in

something she suspects they *may have to do* in the external examination. Her use of the

phrase "it's still hard going" links cognitive difficulty and student motivation. The fact

that she designs an assessment task which "forces" students to deal with diverse literary

theories suggests that she sees this as something students would not choose to do

without a degree of compulsion.

One rural independent Head of Faculty admitted that his uncertainty over the

role of literary theories in senior English had led him towards curriculum practices and

attitudes which reflect a somewhat resigned cynicism: "I do what I have to for my kids

to get through that 40 minute response. Am I interested in the theory other than that?

No I am not ... I think that very quickly all the teachers ... learn to play the game."

Despite a lack of interest, this teacher grudgingly taught a bare minimum of literary

theory in case students needed it for examination purposes.

In addition to reporting uncertainty about whether they were expected to teach

literary theories, teachers characterised the Board of Studies' expectations about such

teaching as fluctuating. Sixteen of the 20 teachers interviewed for Phase 3 characterised

their understandings of the theoretical bases of the Syllabus as having changed over

time. Twelve held the view that the perspective of the Board of Studies had changed,

while the remainder believed that it was teachers' views of the Board's perspective that

had changed, the Board itself. The notion of a shift in stance on the teaching of literary

theories is explored in more detail at the end of this chapter, after teachers' curriculum

decisions and actions have been considered.

Sources of information.

Where respondents were uncertain whether the Board of Studies expected them

to teach literary theories, they sought further information from documentary sources and

professional networks. The teachers participating in this research demonstrated that

they approached the Syllabus documents, past papers, and notes from the marking

centres as *texts* which needed to be *interpreted* before they could be *enacted*.

Interpretations of the Syllabus text varied substantially according to each teacher's

prevailing literary theories and textual strategies, and this had implications for how they

enacted the mandated curriculum. In crystallising their interpretations of the mandated

curriculum, teachers consulted those institutions, groups and individuals that they saw

as authoritative. To investigate how teachers approached these sources of information

and authority, Phase 3 interviews asked participants to specify their sources of

information about literary theories and whose views they took into account when

deciding what role literary theories would have in their classroom practice.

When asked to specify where they obtained information about literary theories,

teachers responded as summarised in Table 3.

Table 3

Sources of Teachers' Information About Literary Theories.

Sources of information on literary theories	Number
Unspecified general reading	12
Reading books and articles on *teaching* literary theories	8
Glossaries and brief summaries of literary theories	6
Internet searches	6
In-services or professional development days	5
Formal university study of literary theories	4
Information from the NSW Board of Studies	3
Primary sources written by literary theorists themselves	2
Information from the NSW English Teachers' Association	2

Note. Phase 3: N=20

The last two sources of information in Table 4, the scholars with whom literary

theories originate and the peak body for teachers of the subject, might have been

expected to be relatively influential, but were listed by only 10% of respondents. One

rural independent Head of Faculty provided a rationale for highlighting literary theorists

as reliable sources of information about "their" theories:

> Books! I have a reasonable library at home and books by the theorists
>
> themselves are indispensable. I find the internet is a good resource for people's
>
> *opinions* about literary theories, but that's all it is, unless you come across an
>
> occasionally good podcast or lecturers' notes on a particular theory.

It is interesting that the source this teacher regarded as "indispensable" appeared

to have been dispensed with by all but one other teacher interviewed for Phase 3.

Books and articles about *teaching* literary theories were relied on by 40% of teachers

interviewed, which suggests these teachers' interests lay in the pedagogical implications

of theories rather than the theories themselves. Glossaries of literary-theoretical terms

and skeleton outlines of theories were key sources of information for 30% of Phase 3

participants.

Regionally through the NSW ETA, and nationally through the Australian

Association for the Teaching of English (AATE), the peak bodies for English teachers

gave considerable attention to professional development and publications on literary

theories in English classrooms during the period of this research. Despite this, a

remarkably low number of teachers reported finding the NSW English Teachers'

Association a helpful source of information on literary theories in senior English (2 out

of 20 Phase 3 participants). This might indicate that the literary-theoretical articles

published by these associations emphasised theories or approaches which were not in

line with teachers' epistemological beliefs; or that teachers found the pedagogical

suggestions in the articles difficult to align with existing practice. For example, more

than half the research participants expressed a view that teaching literary theories was

not appropriate in Standard classes because students in these classes rarely had the level

of thinking skills required to process the abstract concepts required for understanding.

The Phase 3 interviews probed further to clarify whose views the teachers took

into account concerning the teaching of literary theories to senior school English

students. This was intended to move teachers on from considering where they found

out what they knew about literary theories, to indicating whose views were *authoritative*

in their decisions about what (if anything) they would teach about literary theories, and

how they would be used in classroom practice. Responses to this question about whose

views were taken into account are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4

Whose Views of the Syllabus Innovation Phase 3 Teachers Took into Account.

Whose views of the Syllabus innovation were taken into account?	Number
NSW Board of Studies	13
Faculty colleagues	10
Own views	8
Students	7
Examiners	4
Parents and wider school community	3
NSW English Teachers' Association	2

Note. N=20

Board of Studies as primary reference point.

Thirteen of the 20 Phase 3 interviewees specified that the Board of Studies was

their most authoritative reference point regarding use of literary theories in the Year 12

classroom, making remarks such as the following from a very experienced rural Faculty

Head: "I will assess all views but principally take advice from Board of Studies

statements and ... reports from the marking centres. These are authoritative and reliable, and address student needs at the HSC level in NSW."

The centrality of Board of Studies Marking Guides was highlighted by a city independent school teacher: "We live by the rubrics, so as a faculty we just look for things which fulfil the rubrics." While the word "just" implies straightforward reliance one source of authority, "we" indicates that the teacher is also engaged in faculty-wide planning and discussion of factors such as the role of literary theories in senior English in her particular school. In that situation, the faculty group might be regarded as another authority teachers consult in deciding whether or how to use literary theories.

The breadth of consultation in which teachers engage, even in isolated rural areas, is illustrated by this government central school Head of Faculty:

Realistically, you try to get into the head of the Board of Studies, consult your own colleagues, and use your own insights. I also respond to students—where they have some background in theory, you can let them take whatever they want from it, and interpret and test the theory in action.

It may be inferred from this that the task of interpreting Board of Studies expectations concerning literary theories required teachers to bring their own and their faculty colleagues' professional judgement to bear on the range of ways this aspect of the Syllabus could be embodied in their enacted curriculum. This suggests that diverse Syllabus interpretations are possible, depending on the interpreter's assumptions about the nature of the subject and how it is best taught.

One of the key sources of authority and insight into whether and how literary theories should be taught by Year 12 teachers was the assessed curriculum, including examination questions, examination markers' reports (published annually as *Notes from*

the Marking Centre), and feedback from colleagues with relevant marking experience. Respondents who been external HSC examination markers rated this highly as an experience which crystallised their views on how the role of literary theories in the Syllabus should be interpreted. However, gleaning perspectives on the teaching of literary theories from the assessed curriculum did not necessarily mean that teachers reached a position of certainty about whether teaching literary theories was a requirement, nor that they felt well-equipped to teach them effectively.

Teachers trying to determine whether they needed to teach the use of literary theories noted that students' treatment of these theories was mentioned every year in the *Notes from the Marking Centre*. The format of these summaries from marking centres generally highlighted how each factor was treated in stronger and weaker student responses. This provided teachers with blunt summaries of how students dealt either very well or very badly with literary theories. So for example, in 2004, the *Notes from the Marking Centre* observed of students in the Advanced course: "While more effective responses reflected an understanding of the prescribed text through critical evaluation, some less successful candidates relied upon a narrow focus on critical readings which prevented them from engaging with the text and the question" (p. 26). This highlights the potential for a focus on literary theories to impair the examination performance of weaker students. The document goes on to make what appears to be a statement of policy concerning appropriate ways of treating literary theories: "There was evident merit in evaluating critical readings in a discerning manner, responding to the set text and to those readings from a personal perspective." Positively loaded terms such as "evident merit" and "discerning" would support the notion that students are to be encouraged to use literary theories as long as they do so in an integrated fashion. However, the document goes on to observe the misuse of literary theories by many

students: "Many of the weaker candidates relied upon or provided a list of critical views and/or theories where the candidate had not engaged personally in an evaluation of these responses" (p. 26). This is followed by the admission that "It was readily evident that some candidates did not grasp the intent of the critical reading they had made reference to" (p. 26).

For teachers whose students were struggling to use literary theories in an integrated way, these markers' reports identified a problem but may have left them still uncertain how to push students beyond "a superficial grasp of theories or readings" (p. 27). A study of the *Notes from the Marking Centre* reveals that from 2001 until 2010 (the end of data collection for this research) very similar observations were made about stronger and weaker responses respectively, which demonstrates that moving students beyond a surface use of theories towards a more nuanced and integrated use was an ongoing professional difficulty for teachers.

Teachers noted that when the new Syllabus was first instituted they had felt very uncertain about expectations without any past papers and reports from the marking centre to guide their practice. This left them without two of the key benchmarks they used to evaluate how well their enacted curriculum was meeting students' learning needs. When teaching a new elective which represented a major shift in texts and approaches, such as the Postmodernism elective in Extension 1, teachers had to use their own judgement as to what was expected, and then observe the first round of examination questions and the responses from the examiners. The first two publications of examiners' reports on the Postmodernism elective provide a sharp contrast with each other, and may have left teachers uncertain how to ensure their students did well in this elective. I have provided substantial quotations from 2001 and 2002, to allow the

reader to better gauge the tone and nature of the markers' evaluations of the first two cohorts of students taking the Postmodernism elective.

A strongly positive tone is evident in the first year of *Notes from the Marking Centre* (2001) on the Postmodernism unit: in fact, the tone and word choice are so positive that the paragraph appears to have the rhetorical purpose of persuading students or teachers to take this elective:

> Question 6 was done extremely well on the whole and appears to have been, for the candidates, the question that best allowed them to show what they could do. We had persuasive responses that also captured the spirit of adventure of the movement in a number of ways—sometimes by creating a presentation in the postmodern genre as part of the presentation. The Williamson text was rarely considered but in some cases its ambivalent status as a postmodern text was the basis of high A level responses. Candidates seemed to appreciate the chance to explain postmodernism to an audience of their peers and had clearly enjoyed the elective. It provided them with an opportunity, under exam conditions, to elucidate how their studies had changed their way of thinking about the text. (p. 11)

The language is emotive and celebratory, celebrating student enjoyment and adventure and the paragraph avoids any mention of student difficulties. It could be inferred from the last sentence that the intent of the Postmodernism unit was to change students' ways of thinking.

A stark contrast is seen in markers' comments in the following year (2002). While there was a marked increase in student numbers taking the Postmodernism elective (659 to the previous year's 338), which may have affected the nature of the

cohort, the change in tone is striking, as is the increased focus on students who did not

cope well with literary theory:

> Markers noted that many of the weaker responses ... tended to rely heavily on
>
> quoting critics and regurgitating some sort of treatise on the theory of
>
> postmodernism without making any attempt to adapt their knowledge to the
>
> specifics of the question ... The better responses showed a complex and
>
> sophisticated understanding of postmodernism and were able to provide a strong
>
> personal response that reflected their engagement with the course and their study
>
> of postmodernism. The weakest responses indicated that these candidates were
>
> struggling with the very basic concepts underpinning postmodernist theory and
>
> were confused and inarticulate in their response to it. (p. 16)

While dealing with both exemplary and poorer responses, these comments largely focus

on the difficulties encountered by weaker students. A teacher looking to this report for

guidance on how to prepare the next cohort of students can get a clearer picture of what

is expected, but not necessarily of what pedagogical adjustments would help students

reach the level of sophistication being commended. The report moves on to evaluate

students' creative responses to Module B: "Texts and Ways of Thinking," which it finds

even more problematic:

> In contrast to the 2001 candidature, a number of poorer responses this year were
>
> produced by candidates who had studied the Postmodernism elective. Some of
>
> these had interpreted the paradigm to mean "anything goes" and the result was
>
> an often disastrous pastiche of intrusive authors, gender changing, shrieking
>
> abuse, self-reflexivity, grand and minor narratives, multiple endings and a truly

remarkable series of visitations by celebrated representatives of popular culture.

(*Notes from the Marking Centre*, 2002, p. 14)

Replacing the celebratory tone of the 2001 document is a barely-concealed

exasperation with the way students have embodied their views of postmodernism. The

listed features being disparaged are all characteristic of postmodernist texts, but have

been combined by students in ways which examiners have found superficial and

unconvincing. While acknowledging the difficulty of producing a postmodern creative

piece in an examination, the markers offer advice to future students (and their teachers):

"Any text, postmodern or otherwise, needs to have enough coherence to be followed by

a well-intentioned reader familiar with the genre." The list of elements students

included in their pastiches was largely quoted again in the 2003 *Notes,* indicating that

despite the strongly worded criticism from 2002 being available to their teachers,

students examined in 2003 still found it difficult to learn to apply postmodernist literary

techniques with enough coherence to avoid a repetition of this criticism from examiners.

Teachers seeking to ascertain whether teaching literary theories was part of their

professional responsibilities had an indicator which was much simpler to evaluate than

the full Syllabus document, as stronger and weaker treatments of literary theories have

been described in each annual edition of the *Notes from the Marking Centre* since the

Syllabus was first examined in 2001.

Other views teachers took into account.

The other views teachers considered when determining how their enacted

curriculum would tackle literary theories are shown in Table 4 above. Faculty

colleagues came a close second to the Board of Studies as reference groups for teachers

deliberating over their classroom approaches to teaching literary theories. As noted

above, teachers highlighted trusting their own professional judgement about what would

benefit students, built up over years of experience in enacting curriculum jointly with

students. Teachers characterised their hard-won professional judgement as a central

part of their identities, both personal and professional. They described their

professional decision-making largely in domain-specific terms, as based on their beliefs

about *teaching English*, rather than just on teaching in general. Personal subject

conceptualisations were highlighted by respondents as central to their curriculum

processes, forged as they were in the furnace of contestation around subject English.

In a subject which has experienced sustained contestation, it might be expected

that the subject peak body could play a pivotal role in helping to crystallise a coherent

core of shared theoretical perspectives at work in the subject. The findings of this

research question such an expectation being realised in practice.

Only the same two teachers who highlighted the NSW English Teachers'

Association (ETA) as a source of their knowledge about the content of literary theories

indicated that they took the ETA into account in determining whether and how they

were expected to focus on literary theories in senior English. This is a low rate of

recommendation for the state's peak body for English teachers, a body which has

published a substantial number of articles about literary theories in English classrooms

in its flagship publication *mETAphor*. It is notable that two of the Heads of Faculty

interviewed volunteered that they had reservations about taking into account the ETA

and the national Australian Association for the Teaching of English (AATE) when

making decisions about what they would do with literary theory in their senior

classrooms. One metropolitan independent school teacher stated, "when I use their

[ETA and AATE] resources ... I can feel rather arrogantly that I understand this better

than the authors do—and I can see through a lot of what they write." By contrast, one

of the teachers who indicated she took ETA views into account was very positive about

the association's input into her decision-making about literary theories: "Apart from

colleagues teaching senior English, our main source of reference is the information we

receive from HSC study lectures and workshops, especially those run by the ETA, and

ETA publications." This government school teacher did not train in the English subject

area, and lives in a relatively remote rural area. She described the benefits teachers in

distant geographical situations may gain from subject association functions, for which

they may have to travel several hundred kilometres; she made three positive mentions of

the ETA during her interview.

When considering whose views teachers take into account in determining what

responsibilities they have to teach literary theories, one rural independent Head of

Faculty described the sifting process in this way:

> You have to read some articles and take some notice of what some organisations
> and a great range of people have written and thought, before you make your own
> judgement of the way forward. I take into account what I read from those bodies
> [the AATE and the ETA] but I don't take them as gospel but as a reference.

Like many of the research participants, this teacher foregrounds the role of teachers'

professional judgement in weighing up a wide variety of potentially authoritative views.

The investigation process he describes sounds time-consuming and reasonably

thorough. Whatever authorities are taken into account, he sees that the final

professional judgement concerning literary theories is in the hands of the individual

teacher, who is the one who knows the students concerned. This was a predominant

orientation in the responses of teachers to both survey and interview questions.

"Does it fit my epistemological beliefs?"

A crucial question for teachers considering their professional responsibilities vis-à-vis literary theories was whether the theories aligned with their own beliefs or worldview. As participating teachers described their approaches to determining whether they saw the teaching of particular literary theories as in line with their personal epistemologies, they placed most emphasis on postmodernism/ poststructuralism as a problematic theoretical cluster. This may have been in response to the presence of the Postmodernism elective in the Extension course, or may have reflected a reaction against poststructuralism/postmodernism because of its potential to radically destabilise other stances towards knowledge and knowing. On the other hand, terms such as "postmodernism" and "Theory" have come to stand for loose groupings of theories (Leitch et al., 2001; Patai and Corral, 2005; Schad, 2003). In this way poststructuralism comes to stand for all anti-foundationalist theories, and Theory with a capital T comes to stand for Critical Theory, which is itself shorthand for a cluster of theories. Schad (2003) makes the observation that "'Theory', of course, is a notoriously loose term, covering as it does a multitude of critical and intellectual sins most of which have been committed in the name of 'poststructuralism' which is itself a loose term" (p. ix). Schad uses religious language ironically, to tease out the implications of the hackneyed term "covering a multitude of sins." Similarly, Butler et al. question what is meant by 'Theory':

> "Theory" more often than not appears to mean "poststructuralism," but it is
>
> unclear why (a) the history of literary theory should be collapsed into the
>
> synecdoche of poststructuralism and (b) whether poststructuralism, in its varied
>
> forms, can be referred to meaningfully as a unitary phenomenon (2000, p. viii).

Although they query the practice of letting poststructuralism stand for the vagaries of literary theory (in the same way that "the Crown" may be used to signify the institution of the monarchy), they nevertheless observe that it is common in literary and cultural studies for the term to be used to refer to those literary theories which began to challenge existing literary-theoretical practices from the late 1960s. That teachers in this study should also use poststructuralism and postmodernism as blanket terms is, therefore, unsurprising, although it adds to conceptual difficulties. These relate to the blurring of meanings between poststructuralism (as theory) and postmodernism (as the period when the theory is influential), and the intersecting of these definitional territories with the terms Critical Theory (as a cluster of theories) and critical literacy (as pedagogy foregrounding that cluster of theories). The definitional ambiguities add many layers of linguistic and conceptual difficulty to the task of interpreting the roles of literary theories in secondary schooling.

English teachers taking part in this research specified that some of the features of what they termed poststructuralism/postmodernism did not align well with their personal epistemologies, nor with their pedagogical approaches. A rural independent school teacher, for example, tabled her epistemological and pedagogical reservations, which may be seen to arise from the same philosophical roots:

> Postmodernism and poststructuralism ... are often in opposition to my own worldview. I also struggle with the faddish structural techniques associated with these theories.

Another teacher, while noting some attraction to the cognitive puzzles of postmodernism, rejected it on the grounds of personal epistemology, including religious commitment, and the principle of avoiding fallacious argument in logic:

> I find postmodernism interesting but my faith means that I am diametrically
> opposed to its teaching about truth and also find it ironic that a theory which
> disregards the idea of absolutes is itself proclaiming an absolute.

In contrast to this, for some teachers who stated they held a strong faith, the challenges to meaning implicit in poststructuralism/postmodernism were the very reason they *were* teaching students about this theoretical cluster, but "as a construct, not as truth": as a way to prepare students for encountering poststructuralism/postmodernism in their tertiary education: "I want to broaden students' understanding of how different people view texts, and I want them to be prepared for university" (city independent Phase 3). This same independent city Faculty Head highlighted her interest in having students alerted to the epistemological implications of varied perspectives:

> They need to think about how they read a text and how their writing shows their
> ideas/beliefs. The students are better off talking about these ideas in a Christian
> context instead of coming up against them after school and having no idea how
> to react.

This teacher is giving an affirmative answer to the last of the three key questions, "Is it helpful to students?" as she is conceptualising her classroom as a safe place to explore the challenges of poststructuralism/postmodernism, with teacher assistance.

Literary theory proliferation was seen by one teacher as making a space for Christian literary theory among a diverse array of possible readings:

> I am interested in the way that Christians don't seem to see their Christian
> perspectives as a "reading" of text. I would think that Christians are REALLY
> into providing a Critical view of text. The issue seems to be that we like our

readings ... we just don't like the idea that what we are doing might be a critical

reading. And we certainly don't like the idea of postmodernists challenging our

assumptions. (City independent Head of Faculty)

His statement signals the anomalies that he perceives between the ways in which

teachers characterise their epistemological beliefs, and their practice. The teacher

begins by speaking of Christians in the third person ("their Christian perspectives") and

then shifts to the first person to include himself ("we don't like the idea ..."). This

suggests a similarity of faith positions but a different view of their implications for the

teaching of literary theories, from the one he describes at the start of the quotation. The

contrasting approaches described by these four research participants, who all teach at

schools with a Protestant Christian ethos, illustrate the complexity of teacher responses

to the epistemological questions raised by literary theories, and their implications for

pedagogy.

"Is it helpful to students in practice?"

The pedagogical implications of the Syllabus innovation were also crucial to

teachers' curriculum decision-making. Questions about the pedagogical implications of

a focus on literary theories elicited long and reflective answers from the vast majority of

participants, showing how they weighed up many factors in developing and refining

their enacted curriculum. In addition to the epistemological factors which have been

described above, and the challenge of determining whether teaching literary theories

was a Syllabus requirement or expectation, teachers gave careful consideration to the

links between the high levels of cognitive difficulty and abstractness of literary theories

on one hand, and student motivation and confidence on the other. This was the case for

almost all the respondents, whether they saw the teaching of literary theories as largely

beneficial to students, largely disadvantageous, or somewhere between the two.

The language of obligation and the language of motivation were combined in

one city independent school teacher's positively-loaded evaluation of the pedagogical

effects of literary theories, which he said "force students to consider alternative ways of

reading texts and analysing meaning" at the same time that they "encourage students to

critique dominant readings and reflect on the cultures that create and respond in specific

ways to literature." This teacher also acknowledged specific difficulties that students

confronted when trying to assimilate different reading positions.

Devaluing personal responses.

Concerns about students who were taught literary theories consequently

undervaluing their own ideas were raised by 80% of the participants. The teachers

differed in the extent to which they believed this problem could be rectified, but even

keen proponents of teaching literary theories generally echoed these concerns in some

form. The problem was described vividly by a city independent Faculty Head: "Some

students become fixated on the theory and parrot the thoughts of a critic rather than

describing their own response to a text." Similarly, a government school Head of

Faculty described student responses to literary theories: "They do not think for

themselves if one advocates particular theories. They think the 'theories' are more

important than the text. They do not develop their own personal response." One

government school Faculty Head felt that students had a poor understanding of what

literary theories are for, instead thinking "they are like a checklist or something they

have to acknowledge and use in order to get a good mark."

Notes from the Marking Centres for 2006 confirmed a tendency of students to

rely on the views of theorists in place of engaging directly with texts:

Candidates need to be alert to the inappropriateness of accessing barely understood critical theory in their assessment of the prescribed text. Too many candidates continued to use critical readings about the text as a substitute for the study of their text. In many scripts, the "readings" remained a barrier placed between the candidate and the text ... these responses relied on, or provided a regurgitation of, various critical theories or "readings" with little sense of an evaluation or of personal engagement with these "readings." (Board of Studies, 2006, p. 23)

Cognitive difficulty.

One teacher identified the cause of this problem as students' poor understanding of the theories, noting that "using literary theories detracts from students' own capacity to evaluate: they imperfectly understand these things and then they try to write about something they don't particularly know about." Tellingly, this rural independent school teacher does not just say that students' practices with literary theory are poor, but sees a focus on literary theories as decreasing their *capacity* to engage at a high level with the texts by using their own thinking rather than that of critics.

As far as cognitive difficulty was concerned, once again postmodernism was identified by teachers as problematic for students, as one city independent school teacher noted: "Postmodernism would have to be the hardest of all the theories for the students to grasp." Other teachers saw a range of literary theories as impairing student confidence in approaching texts: "I feel that some of the theories can cause the majority of students concern as they can be difficult to understand and grasp."

Motivational difficulty.

Cognitive and motivational challenges connected with literary theories were described as problematic for teachers as well as pupils. In describing the challenges, a city government school Faculty Head contrasted the onerous task of teaching literary theories with the literature study that he clearly preferred:

> I believe that the introduction of literary theories has created enormous stresses on students and teachers. We teach what we have to to the students and try to help them pass the exams. On the way we try to forget the theories for a while and actually get down to the literature and hope they will learn to love that and value it. No HSC student is sufficiently sophisticated to truly understand the theories that academics foist on us.

It seems this teacher lays the blame on academics for students and teachers having to bear a burden of literary theory which is beyond the comprehension of students, and which competes with other priorities for classroom time.

Literary Theories Explicitly Taught

In light of these pedagogical challenges surrounding the teaching of literary theories, and the subsequent issuing of the Clarification that theories were not a requirement, this research sought to determine how teachers shaped their enacted curriculum with respect to literary theories. The Phase 3 interview asked teachers if they were specifically teaching literary theories in Year 12, and if so, which ones. Eight of the 20 teachers reported teaching no literary theories, which indicates that at least that number of teachers did not see that explicitly teaching diverse theories was a Syllabus expectation or requirement.

Twice as many teachers (eight) selected "no theories" as those who named any other single theory. The theories named by the largest number of teachers—Feminist and Marxist— were only taught by one-fifth of the teachers interviewed in Phase 3.

Table 5

Literary Theories Taught by Phase 3 Teachers.

Literary theories I teach in Year 12	Number
No literary theories	8
Feminist literary theory	4
Marxist literary theory	4
Postcolonial theory	3
Postmodernist/Poststructuralist theory	3
Christian literary theory	2
Existentialist literary theory	2
Psychoanalytical theory	2
Modernism	1
Romanticism	1
Structuralist theory	1

Note. N=20

One city independent school teacher (with a doctorate in English and tertiary teaching experience) conveyed her pedagogical rule of thumb about which literary theories she teaches, and why she avoids some other theories: "I consider the most applicable and accessible theory in terms of the students' experience of the world. Some theories require the students to have a background in history or sociology." Several teachers singled out Marxist critical theory as demanding background knowledge which students lacked, because of their limited life experience.

There were instances of respondents making statements of policy about the subject English which did not fit their own reported practice. One example was the

young rural independent school teacher who stated, "I believe if a teacher does not teach to include various theories, they do not give students a thorough overview of the subject"; but she then indicated that she did not teach literary theory to any of her current (Standard) students, because of its cognitive complexity. The transcript of her interview shows no evidence of her being conscious of this contradiction between intent and enactment.

English as a Building

Teachers confronting Syllabus innovation have been seen to work hard at interpreting the demands of the official curriculum, asking themselves the three key questions,

- Do I have to teach this?

- Does it fit my epistemological beliefs?

- Is it helpful to students in practice?

Because teachers' responses to these questions have complex consequences in their enacted curriculum, a visual representation is provided in Figure 6 to illustrate how the research participants saw themselves as interpreting and responding to the emphasis on diverse literary theories which they perceived to exist in the Syllabus. An analogy is developed which conceptualises the school subject English as a building with four different groups involved in its use: Confirmed Redesigners (who maximise the potential they see in literary theories), Experimental Renovators (who investigate how literary theories might work in the classroom), Minimalists (who teach literary theories as little as possible) and Preservationists (who resist and subvert the influence of diverse literary theories). How teachers interpreted and responded to the contested innovation of increased emphasis on literary theories leads them to be identified with particular groups in Figure 6.
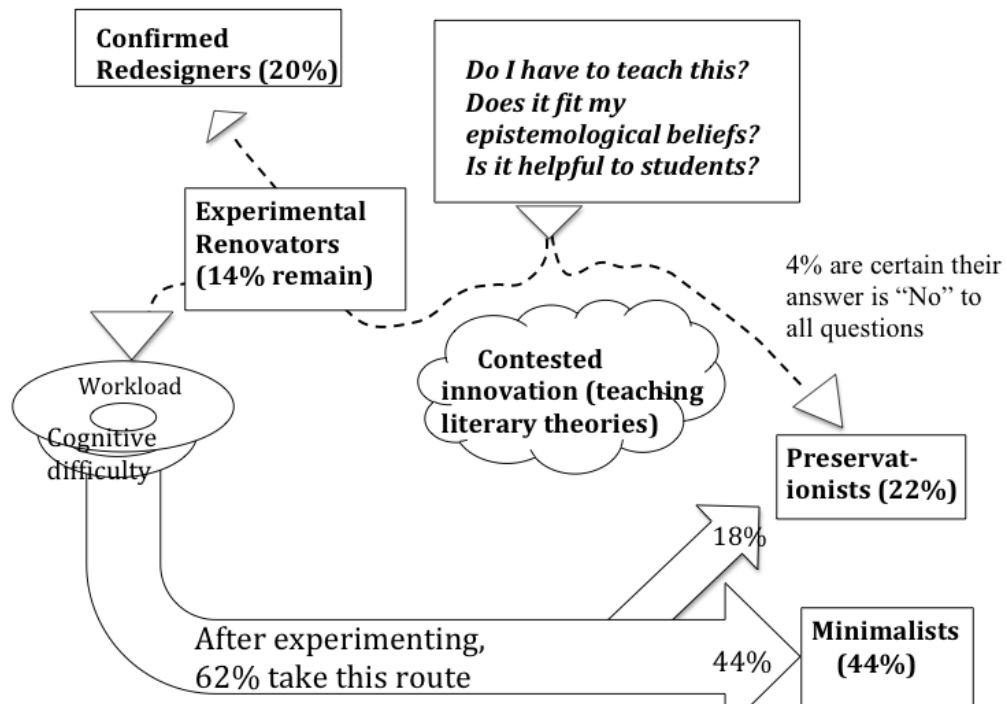
Figure 6 Typology of teacher responses to perceived expectations about the teaching of diverse literary theories.
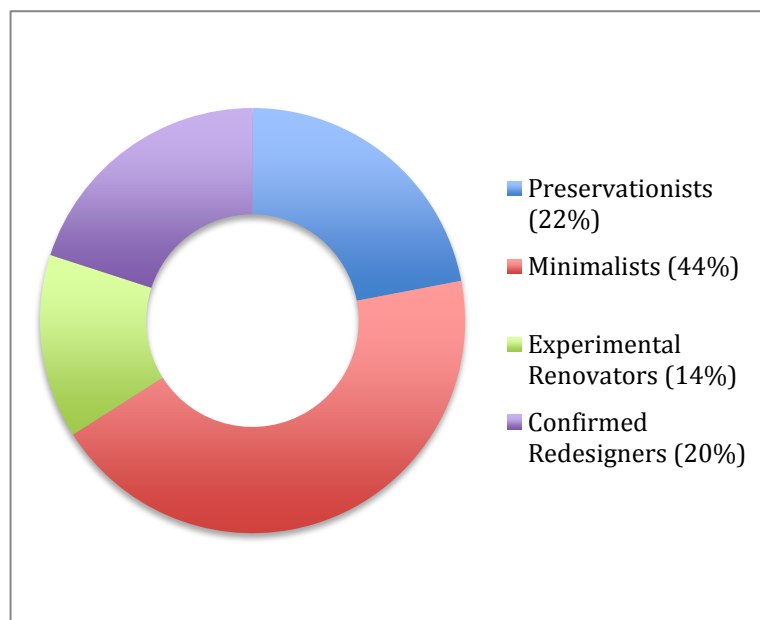
Figure 7 Proportions of all research participants by typology category.

The following section describes these four characterisations of participating teachers. Confirmed Redesigners are largely positive about the impact of literary theories in shaping senior English, whereas Experimental Renovators are undecided. Minimalists and Preservationists do not see the teaching of diverse literary theories as generally beneficial to students. The proportions of research participants in each category can be seen in Figure 7. Blue and red sections of the graph represent less positive attitudes towards the teaching of literary theories; green represents an exploratory or undecided stance, while purple represents teachers with a positive view of the effects of teaching literary theories.

Confirmed redesigners

(20% over all phases)

(Phase 1: 0%; Phase 2: 16%; Phase 3: 30%)

The first group, the Confirmed Redesigners, saw the new designs and alterations already in progress as desirable in theory, feasible in practice, and largely positive in results. They saw the benefits of redesign as largely self-evident. Confirmed Redesigners were matter-of-fact about the inclusion of literary theories and could not see what others were worried about. So, for example, one Confirmed Redesigner, a former academic now teaching in a city independent school, commented that literary theories are

> fundamental to my own academic work and I think basic to the way literature is studied in the late 20th century and the 21st century. I am a bit mystified by the way theory is treated, to be honest ... I don't see "literary theory" as some kind of mysterious talisman ... These are just ways to approach texts. You use them

where they are valuable to illuminate ideas and help students understand their

world. They are not weird and mysterious.

By using the words "fundamental" and "basic" this teacher highlighted the central

importance of literary theories in her conception of subject English. Rather than

describing literary theories in terms of epistemological beliefs, she characterised them

pragmatically as tools that are used where appropriate to extend students' perspectives.

This teacher also indicated that she found it difficult to understand the perspectives of

teachers who saw literary theories as problematic.

For Confirmed Redesigners, an increased emphasis on contrasting literary

theories was in line with their personal epistemology, their view of the subject, and their

views about how best to teach it. This meant they taught literary theories with

enthusiasm. One quotation may serve to illustrate the attitude of the Confirmed Re-

designers, as it highlights how different applications of literary theories may serve

different groups of students:

Literary theories are useful and relevant in "readings" of texts, so they are

relevant in Critical Study. They can be relevant in Standard English in ... putting

texts and characters in their historical context, including belief systems. They

are a helpful tool, but it is only for Advanced and Ex[tension] 1 and 2, are they a

significant part of the program. Generally readings have value because they can

introduce students to higher-level thinking and reveal possible layers of meaning

in a text. They free a student by conveying the possibility that everyone can

have a reading, as long as the text's integrity is respected.

This city independent school teacher emphasises the practical applications of literary theories for more able students, helping them grasp cognitively challenging ideas by exploring various interpretations, in order to develop their own. Her proviso that the integrity of the text should be valued could be seen as placing some restrictions on the free play of poststructuralist theorising.

Confirmed Redesigners saw building students' awareness of diverse literary theories as part of their professional responsibilities, and part of their English subject conceptualisation. When asked what literary theories he saw himself as holding, one regional government school Head of Faculty offered the following description:

> I think critical literacy is an essential part of English education. I guess this presupposes seeing Marxist, postmodern, post-structuralist and postcolonial views as important because it suggests texts can be read in ways other than the intended reading, but this is not to say the intended reading is not engaged with or valued.

This Confirmed Redesigner sees "critical literacy" as resting on four literary theories. He identifies the value of such theories as opening up alternate interpretations of texts. He then pre-empts a common criticism that using these theories implies not giving a fair hearing to "the intended reading." Interestingly, by using the singular form, he implies that a text has one "intended reading," whereas other respondents saw intended readings as inevitably multiple, or as inadmissible in principle, in line with Wimsatt and Beardsley's (1954) discussion of the intentional fallacy. For Wimsatt and Beardsley, a text is "detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his intention to intend about it or control it" (p. 2). Barthes (1992) goes further, to declare the death of the author, a phrase which rhetorically captures his claim that it is impossible for the

reader to detect any intentions of authors in "their" texts. These are ideas Confirmed Redesigners see as productive to explore with their students.

Eight of the ten Confirmed Redesigners were Heads of Faculty. It could be argued that as they needed to offer leadership to staff, Faculty Heads may have felt an obligation to thoroughly investigate the potential of literary theories, and that as a result they moved out of the undecided stance of Experimental Renovators to become either Confirmed Redesigners or Minimalists.

Confirmed Redesigners were twice as likely to be teaching in city schools than in rural or regional schools. This could reflect the geographical accessibility of professional development on the new Syllabus, and of universities, as 70% of Confirmed Redesigners indicated they had gained their knowledge of literary theories through recent or further university studies. This may suggest that for these teachers there was a less pronounced demarcation between English as a university discipline and English as a secondary school subject. Three of the ten Confirmed Redesigners had taught English in universities as well as in secondary schools. Their period of tertiary teaching coincided with a period in which literary theories were particularly influential (Cunningham, 2003; Eagleton, 1994, 2003).

Experimental renovators

(14% of all participants fell into in this category)

(Phase 1: 0%; Phase 2: 24%; Phase 3: 5%)

Teachers in the second category are described as Experimental Renovators. It should be noted that 96% per cent of research participants *passed through* this category, and only 14% could be characterised as maintaining the stance. For the overwhelming majority of participants, this experimental stage was followed by a shift into one of the other groups.

Teachers who experienced an Experimental Renovator period were initially unsure of their answers to at least one of the three key questions. In this position of uncertainty, they resolved to experiment with the contested innovation, so as to be able to assess its risks and benefits, and its "fit" with their personal epistemologies. The self-reports of these participants show them moving through a stage of experimenting with the teaching of literary theories, uncertain of the extent to which this was expected, before ending up with views and practices that more closely fitted a different group in this typology. When this experimentation and assessment were largely positive, they moved into the Confirmed Redesigners group, which finally accounted for 20% of participants. Where the experimentation and risk analysis confirmed largely negative answers to the three key questions, the teachers shifted towards minimising literary theories in their teaching. Seven teachers (14%) remained Experimental Renovators throughout the period of the study, still unsure of their answers to some of the key questions even after the Clarification.

Minimalists

(44% of all participants)

(Phase 1: 40%; Phase 2: 48%; Phase 3: 45%)

After a period of experimentation with literary theories, teachers moved into the Minimalist category if they decided that their answer to several of the three key questions was "probably not." Minimalists largely avoided literary theories, which they saw as epistemologically or pedagogically problematic for them and for their students. One rural government school teacher's observation could perhaps apply to both students and teachers: "there is a danger that when too much importance is put on literary theories individual thought is stifled." Minimalists made very circumscribed use of the

few theories they saw as most plausible and least likely to undermine their conception

of the subject English.

An example of the Minimalist stance towards the teaching of contested literary

theories is the statement by a rural independent school teacher, which bears the

hallmarks of personal epistemology, without being couched in the language of belief:

> I dislike interpreting "classic" texts by inserting a perspective that may not have
> been intended at the time. I will mention to students that the theory exists, but
> try to spend as little time as possible dealing with many of the prevailing
> theories. (Phase 2)

Minimalists sometimes used literary theory terms to provide a semblance of

theory use without changing their practice: one even termed this "doing pretend critical

literacy" while another reported mentioning "the latest uni buzz theories" in writing up

his intended curriculum programs. It is possible to detect resentment in the sense of

obligation to make even minimal use of literary theories, in this statement from a

metropolitan government school teacher:

> Students find the theory too difficult and it destroys the whole point of high
> school studies. Theory is for those who fully understand literature, which HSC
> students do not as yet, and is much more appropriate to uni study. Until
> academics are forced to teach HSC English in a variety of classrooms across the
> state they will never be able to come to terms with the inherent difficulties they
> have foisted upon us.

The use of phrases such as "too difficult" and "foisted" underlines her strong objection

to the teaching of some complex literary theories. Emotionally-laden overstatement

may be seen in the observation that difficult literary theory "destroys the whole point of high school studies": "the whole point" carries a sense of an essence or central purpose of such studies, which is being seriously damaged. One might read this statement as referring to "high school [English] studies," although a case could be made for a literary theory such as poststructuralism having implications for how students approach texts of all kinds in all subjects, given what participants described as its "all-encompassing" character. The last sentence of this quotation does narrow the focus to HSC English, which supports the inference that the teacher is primarily speaking of the English subject.

This quotation also distinguishes between English as a university discipline and English as a school subject. The teacher sees the study of diverse literary theories as belonging more properly to the university discipline. She also lays blame on academics for literary theories being emphasised in senior secondary English, and claims that such academics fail to understand the developmental stages and literary backgrounds of senior secondary students. The use of "foisted" and "forced" reinforces the view that academics involved in Syllabus design have placed inappropriate literary-theoretical burdens from the university discipline of English onto teachers and students of English as a school subject.

Students' lack of developmental readiness for the abstractness, complexity and conflicting perspectives seen in literary theories was emphasised by a clear majority of teachers who had reservations about explicitly teaching literary theories. A survey participant from a city government school offered a pedagogical rationale for taking a Minimalist stance towards the teaching of literary theories:

I believe that HSC students are not sophisticated enough in their understanding of literature to embark on detailed studies of literary theory. They are only just beginning to cope with the study of literature; your average student is only confused by theory.

Preservationists

(22% of all participants)

(Phase 1: 60%; Phases 2 & 3 both 20%)

Preservationists saw at least two of the three key questions as needing to be answered in the negative. Two teachers (4% of participants) were certain of this without experimenting with diverse literary theories. Those teachers who ended up (or began) by taking a Preservationist stance were not prepared to accept the proposed redesign of English that they perceived to be the implication of a focus on contested literary theories in Stage 6 English. To continue the building metaphor, these teachers saw a focus on literary theories in senior English to undermine the load-bearing walls of the subject edifice, risking serious erosion of the structure. Preservationists pointed to the proliferation, alteration, and self-contradiction of literary theories as confirmation of their evaluation of these theories as too unstable to be productively taught to students preparing for external examinations.

Preservationist resistance to the teaching of literary theories is exemplified by the following statements: "I do not agree with students being expected to understand and apply literary theories;" "I do not think literary theories should be expected in an examination response;" and "I'd like to see literary theories confined to university English courses." Statements of this type were prominent in the responses of both Preservationists and Minimalists. The difference between the two groups is that

Preservationists avoided teaching students to apply literary theories, whereas Minimalists chose a small number of theories to outline for students in very simplified form, as a gesture of compliance with a perceived official expectation.

It is clear that for some Preservationists, aside from the non-alignment of theories with their own epistemologies, their rationale for not teaching students to use contrasting literary theories is primarily pedagogical and reflects their observations from practice, confirmed by assessment feedback, that students do not effectively grasp the abstract conceptualisations involved. This was captured by an independent regional teacher: "My opinion is that using literary theories detracts from the students' own capacity to evaluate: they imperfectly understand these things and then they try to write about [them]." One Preservationist rural Head of Faculty went so far as to say he would actively discourage the introduction of some literary theories, because of their complexity and the background knowledge they require: "if they [students] want to introduce a Marxist perspective I would advise them not to, simply because they do not properly understand it." This teacher had considerable understanding of Marxist literary-theoretical perspectives herself, so lack of teacher knowledge was not the issue here.

Teachers in the Preservationist group tended to see the competing branches of some recent literary theories as deliberately destabilising each other, making the field of literary theory too complex for the teachers themselves to fathom, let alone the students. Among the groups described as competing were feminist literary theorists and "Feminazis;" "vulgar Marxists" and "neo-marxists"; and also "poststructuralists and "post-poststructuralists."

Some Preservationists offered a rationale for not explicitly teaching literary theories, which indicated some elements of their epistemological outlook and personal preferences:

The text should come first—that's what was emphasised in my university degree: that's what I became passionate about teaching, not some silly label or theory that "needs" to be explored. (rural independent Faculty Head; Phase 3)

This teacher identifies his undergraduate experience of focusing on literary texts as the source of his enthusiasm for teaching English. His language conveys a view of literary theories having little relevance or value, and this is reinforced with what are sometimes called "scare quotes" around the word "needs," to question the sense of necessity or centrality of literary theories.

Mobility Among the Categories

Participating teachers described how they evaluated and experimented with the teaching of literary theories as they sought to clarify whether this was expected of them, whether they could comprehend the theories well enough to teach them clearly, how the various literary theories connected with their personal epistemologies, and whether these experiments with literary theories brought pedagogical benefits.

Where a period of experimenting with the teaching of diverse literary theories and analysing their risks and benefits led to negative answers to several of the three key questions, teachers took the route depicted as a funnel in Figure 3, decreasing their focus on theory (62% of participants). The figure shows that 44% of all participants reported moving to a Minimalist practice, while after some experimentation with teaching literary theories 18% of participants moved to a practice of resisting and

subverting literary theories, taking on a Preservationist stance (joining the 4% who had not experimented with literary theories).

In addition to teachers crystallising their responses to the three key questions, other factors contributing to this shift in attitudes about the teaching of literary theories are shown in the mouth of the funnel in Figure 6. These contributory factors include heavy workloads and the cognitive difficulty of many literary theories (for both students and teachers).

The Clarification, which stated that explicit use of literary theories was not a requirement, was a catalyst for this movement away from experimentation and risk assessment towards minimising or resisting the teaching of diverse literary theories. Once it was made clear that teachers were free to avoid emphasising diverse literary theories, 62% of participating teachers moved away from experimenting with them. The three reasons most commonly given were the tendency for students to devalue their own view of texts if taught the views of theorists, the treatment of literary theories being rewarded poorly by external markers, and the sheer workload of becoming familiar with multiple theories.

Teachers who shifted away from being Experimental Renovators generally offered a rationale connected with workload, change of requirements, and lack of benefit for students. A city independent school teacher who acted as an Experimental Renovator during Phase 2 noted, "The introduction of the concepts of literary theory and how they can be applied does help students see that in forming their own readings they need to consider the integrity of the text." By Phase 3, this same teacher was admitting, "To tell you the truth, you do a minimal amount of those readings: you do what you have to ... It is just too much to do all these things with literary theory," thus stating a view that places her among the Minimalists. She confirmed this by

commenting that "In the Year 12 English national curriculum there should be less depending on literary theory and more choice about the students that do it." The expression "less depending on literary theory" suggests this teacher thinks the Syllabus is influenced too much by literary theories. The need she sees for more freedom of choice about who studies literary theories connects with other comments she made about differential student abilities and interests.

One city independent school teacher explained how she initially experimented with several literary theories but moved to a Minimalist stance in response to the Clarification and to examiners' reports:

> I used to [teach] much more with many theories (Feminist, Postmodern, Postcolonial etc.) but I've pulled back a little from that now... [Literary theory] is important for my own conceptual paradigms but students' understanding of it is being rewarded less in the HSC so my explicit focus has also reduced.

This comment about the main role of literary theories being to make teachers aware of their own conceptual paradigms was echoed by other Phase 3 participants in response to the Clarification. The quotation also emphasises how the assessed curriculum drives classroom practice, and how closely teachers observe examination questions and examiners' reports when reviewing their intended curriculum for the next cohort.

Teachers who adopted a Minimalist approach to teaching literary theories saw examiners' reports of how students dealt with particular examination questions as confirming the accuracy of the reservations they had developed through their experimentation and risk assessment. They particularly emphasised their reservation that students taught multiple literary theories had difficulty understanding them due to their abstractness and complexity, and that parroting ill-digested statements from

various literary theories resulted. One rural independent school teacher quoted from *Notes from the Marking Centre* to support this view: "Critical theory often seems misunderstood or was applied inaccurately or inappropriately. This is particularly so in the case of feminism and postmodernism. Claims were made but not substantiated" (NSW Board of Studies, 2007, p. 12).

Differences Between Rural/Regional and Metropolitan Teachers

Rural and regional teachers fell predominantly into the two categories which limited or resisted the teaching of literary theories, with 84% of them being Preservationists or Minimalists (compared with 48% of metropolitan teachers).
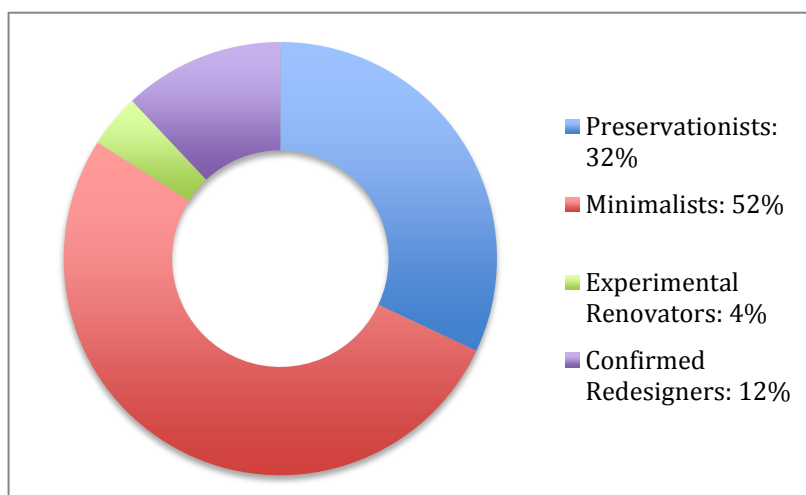
Figure 8 Distribution of rural/regional teachers across typology categories.
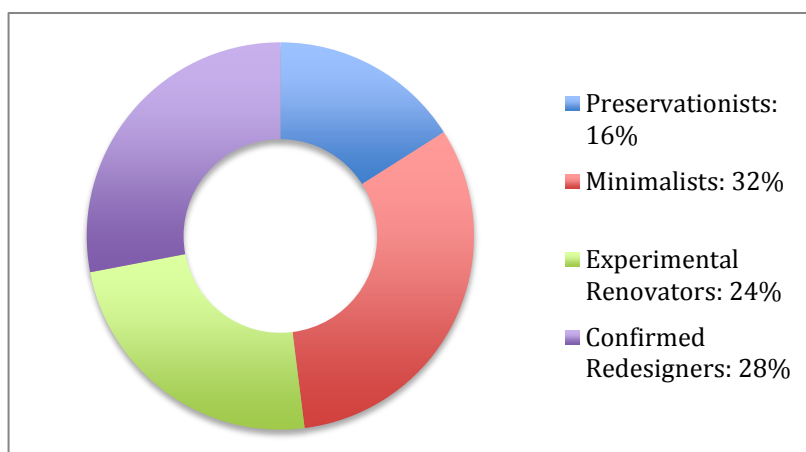
Figure 9 Distribution of metropolitan teachers across typology categories.

City teachers were more than twice as likely to be Confirmed Redesigners than their counterparts in rural and regional schools, and six times as likely to sustain the practices of Experimental Renovators. Taken together, the two categories reflecting a relatively positive stance to the teaching of literary theories, shown in the diagrams as green (Experimental Renovators) and purple (Confirmed Redesigners), account for 52% of metropolitan teachers but only 16% of teachers from rural and regional schools. This could reflect differences in ease of access to the professional development offered during Syllabus rollout, and to networks of other teachers.

Differences Between Government and Independent School Teachers

While not as marked as the contrast between city and rural/regional teachers, there were differences in the distribution of government and independent school teachers across the typology categories, as can be seen from comparing Figures 10 and 11.
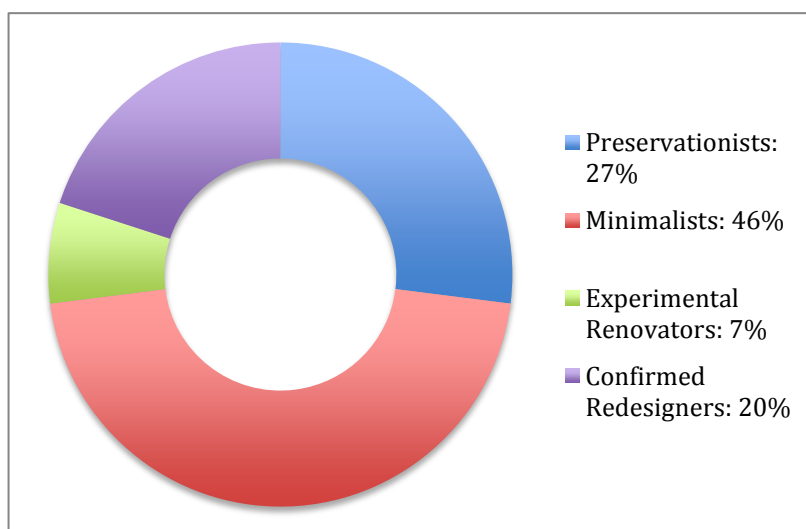
Figure 10 Distribution of government school teachers across typology categories.
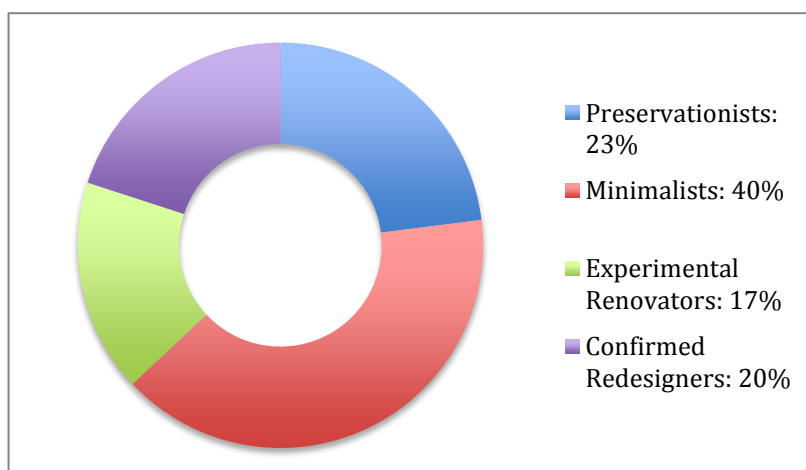
Figure 11 Distribution of independent school teachers across typology categories.

Figure 10 shows a strikingly large proportion of government school teachers in the categories which minimised and resisted literary theories (73% being Preservationists or Minimalists). Sixty-three per cent of independent school teachers took Preservationist and Minimalist stances. This difference can largely be accounted for by the smaller proportion of government school teachers who remained in the Experimental Renovators category. Government school teachers more commonly cited their "clientele" as the reason they did not view the teaching of literary theories positively. They also made more observations than independent school teachers about the limitations of Standard students in dealing with the abstractness and cognitive complexity of conflicting literary theories.

The only category receiving an equal distribution of government and independent school teachers was Confirmed Redesigners (20%).

Summary

Senior English teachers in New South Wales faced considerable difficulty in interpreting the expectations of the 1999 English Stage 6 Syllabus, when considering the teaching of diverse literary theories. These teachers weighed up the risks and benefits of teaching students about literary theories, and teaching students to use these

theories. They evaluated the degree of alignment between the theories they perceived to underpin the Syllabus, and between those theories and their own epistemological beliefs. As they planned their intended curriculum, teachers also tried to pre-empt possible negative consequences of teaching literary theories.

As the curriculum was enacted by teachers and experienced by students, particular approaches to literary theories were reconsidered due to their pedagogical effects. Examination questions and reports from examiners also helped crystallise teachers' views about the pedagogical impact of different approaches to teaching diverse literary theories. All of these factors were taken into account as teachers engaged in further planning and enacting of curriculum, fuelled by their professional judgement, which had been honed during this period of controversy, clarification and curriculum settlement.

Chapter 6

Conclusions and Recommendations

Overview

Substantial curriculum change can have a deep and sometimes paradoxical impact on teachers' work because the development of written curriculum involves a complex array of intentions, proposals, concessions and compromises. A mandated curriculum does not embody a single idea or purpose: it is a complex amalgam of ideas and strategies, reflecting the variety of epistemological and pedagogical assumptions of the participants in its production. Brady and Kennedy (2010) indicate that this should be accepted as a logical consequence of pluralist democracy, as should the diversity of curriculum implementations by different teachers in their particular contexts.

New South Wales English teachers implementing the English Stage 6 Syllabus of 1999 reported facing intractable dilemmas which were at once interpretive, epistemological and pedagogical. They found these dilemmas difficult to resolve in the context of a notoriously hard-to-define school subject which has always had a somewhat problematic relationship with the distinct but related university discipline of English.

The contested innovation investigated in this research involved contrasting views of the significance of literary theories in senior English. Interpretations of Syllabus documents ranged from seeing them as requiring a strong focus on literary theories producing multiple readings, to seeing them as vague and imprecise about what students should do with literary theories. Academic and mass media publications indicated that the Syllabus constituted a substantial shift towards cultural studies

practice, in which texts are interpreted through the prism of specific literary theories (Manuel & Brock, 2003; McGraw, 2005). Contestation over the nature and degree of the influence of literary theories implied or stated by the Syllabus was lengthy and vociferous. This study has explored teachers' responses to the difficulties they faced in enacting an innovation which was so persistently contested.

In this context, teachers had the task of designing an intended curriculum that would accurately reflect the theoretical bases of the Syllabus, could be enacted engagingly, and would result in student learning and motivation. The findings of this research show that teachers viewed this task through the lens of their epistemological worldviews, pedagogical beliefs, and experiences of working with students. This led to experimenting with literary theories in order to gauge their implications for pedagogy. Where there was doubt about the theoretical bases of Syllabus documents, teachers relied heavily on faculty colleagues and on the assessed curriculum to confirm or refine their interpretation of their professional responsibilities in teaching Stage 6 English.

The Research Question

The research question for this study was

How do teachers respond to difficulties in enacting a contested innovation in a new English senior syllabus?

The three key findings of the study concern

- The difficulties experienced when teachers are uncertain about curriculum expectations;

- A lack of alignment between teachers' personal epistemology and curriculum; and

- The pedagogical implications of a contested innovation.

Each of these findings emerges from teachers' descriptions of the epistemological and practical difficulties experienced when dealing with a contested innovation. After a brief consideration of teachers' approaches to the potential costs of educational innovations for professional practice, this chapter considers the research findings in these three areas, and their implications for the understanding of teachers' curriculum processes.

Counting the Cost of Educational Innovation

Hargreaves (2003) has noted that the multiplicity of complex innovations in education has considerable impact on teachers' working lives, taking a toll on their energies and coping skills and leaving them little time to reflect. He argues that more recognition should be given to teachers' voices in curriculum change processes, something which this research aims to achieve. Hargreaves (2003) sees research that hears teachers' voices as taking part in "the battle for teacher professionalism as the exercise of wise discretionary judgement in situations that teachers understand best" (p. 6). This chapter explores how teachers sought to make such discretionary judgements as they faced difficulties in enacting a contested innovation in a new syllabus.

As teachers confront an educational innovation, they engage in a process which might be termed *counting the cost*. In counting the cost, teachers weigh up whether something which they value highly will be displaced by an innovation whose value is not yet clear. In the case of literary theories influencing senior English, teachers considered, for example, whether aesthetic, imaginative and affective aspects of the subject would be largely displaced by the politics of cultural critique, an issue also raised by the work of Misson and Morgan (2006). Teachers persistently highlighted the risk that cultural *critique* would be achieved at the expense of aesthetic and imaginative

appreciation, endangering the delight and pleasure of engagement with literature, as Locke (2009) observes.

This sense that an educational innovation may entail the loss of something valued is connected with teachers' experience of the crowded curriculum: of having too much to do in too little time. In the finite amount of time available in the classroom, the addition of a complex innovation almost inevitably means something else has to give way. Past experiences of unsuccessful curriculum change fuel teacher scepticism about whether a curriculum innovation will bring lasting educational benefits.

To project likely gains and losses from a particular innovation, after determining whether an innovation is a requirement or is optional, teachers subject it to epistemological and pedagogical tests. The epistemological test boils down to whether the innovation can be aligned with teacher beliefs. The pedagogical test is often expressed by teachers in the phrase, "but will it work with students?"

This research shows that determining the official status of an innovation, probing the innovation as a cluster of ideas, and experimenting with it as a collection of strategies are crucial features of teachers' curriculum processes, confirming the work of Remillard (2005). For individuals this determining, probing and experimenting confirm whether they will support or resist an innovation. At a communal level, the results determine whether or not the innovation is bedded down as part of the curriculum settlement for the subject, or remains a minority interest to be superseded by the next wave of innovation. This is what makes teachers' experimentation with proposed innovation crucial to the success (or failure) of an innovation in the longer term. If proposed syllabus innovations are seen as hypotheses to be tested by teachers, then positive and negative feedback from teachers must be seen as important aspects of the process of confirming or disconfirming these hypotheses.

Three Key Findings

1. Uncertainty about expectations.

The findings of this study show that where the status of an innovation is hard to determine and widely contested, the resulting uncertainty leads to teachers experiencing anxiety and frustration. A curriculum innovation that is also cognitively complex and epistemologically hard to pin down tends to impair teachers' sense of self-efficacy for the task of enacting the innovation. The combination of high anxiety and cognitive complexity intensifies the psychological and professional challenges of enacting a curriculum innovation because, as Eysenck et al. (2007) have demonstrated, high levels of anxiety correlate with impaired cognitive performance, particularly in terms of higher-order thinking.

NSW senior English teachers experienced several years of uncertainty about what they were required or expected to do with literary theories in the light of the Syllabus. This led to feelings of anxiety and frustration, and a sense of inadequacy in the face of an ambiguous and hotly contested curriculum innovation. Teachers criticised the English Syllabus and Support Documents (1999) for vagueness and ambiguity concerning the teaching of literary theories. There was an irony that literary theories about the elusiveness of meaning were exemplified by the language of the Syllabus suggesting or hinting at their strategic importance, rather than stating what teachers and students were expected to *do* with these theories.

Teachers saw the Syllabus as representing so many different literary theories and conceptions of the subject that it lacked coherence. They spoke of the Syllabus being "confused about its own expectations" and "divided against itself." This produced frustration when working to interpret it and enact it as learning activities. These findings show that teachers' uncertainty about the theoretical basis or "slant" of the

Syllabus arose from its linguistic imprecision and vagueness, and also from its inclusion

of principles from many literary theories without recognition of their epistemological

roots or the unresolvable conflicts between them. The teachers saw the Syllabus as

using theoretical premises without naming literary theories, leaving educators guessing

whether these theories had mandated status.

Professional development at the time of Syllabus inception was presumably

intended to clarify the direction and application of the Syllabus, but teachers reported

further confusion from it. They perceived that conflicting literary theories implicitly

influenced the Syllabus, but neither the Syllabus nor the professional development

clarified how such theories should be applied. Several Phase 3 participants wondered

with hindsight whether this professional development was intended to clarify teachers'

own literary-theoretical assumptions rather than to direct their choices of content and

strategies. As it was, teachers reported no lessening of uncertainty from their

involvement in initial professional development, and this contributed to further anxiety

about unclear expectations.

Anxiety.

This study found that teachers experience anxiety about syllabus innovations

that challenge both their epistemological beliefs and their existing cognitive structures.

Derakshan and Eysenck's work (2009) suggests that anxiety can compete in the brain

with the mental activities required to process challenging ideas. Teachers'

preoccupation with the perceived epistemological threat posed by an innovation impairs

their ability to focus concurrently on other equally important tasks, an ability which is

central to classroom work. Prolonged anxiety about a syllabus innovation perceived as

threatening leads to teachers having difficulty disengaging from mentally processing

this threat. Derakshan and Eysenck find that such anxiety also impairs inhibition,

leaving teachers struggling to identify and select relevant cues and integrate new ideas with existing understandings.

Uncertainty about official expectations leads to heightened anxiety about the impact of curriculum changes on the subject knowledge base. It also makes teachers anxious about the relevance of resources that they have already painstakingly prepared. Eysenck et al. (2007) suggest that negative emotional response to these impacts further impairs teachers' ability to make fine-grained judgements about a proposed curriculum change. They may ultimately come to question their capability to deal with the innovation on top of all of their other professional responsibilities, as noted by Hargreaves (1994).

The findings of this research demonstrate that teachers experienced ongoing anxiety about teaching students to apply literary theories to texts, and questioned their ability to do this well. Where examiners confirmed that literary theories were being used ineffectively by students, this reinforced both teachers' reservations about the innovation's appropriateness and their sense that they were ill-equipped to teach it. In the case of NSW senior English, teachers saw themselves as poorly prepared "practically, theoretically, and philosophically" (Manuel & Brock, 2003, p. 23) to teach literary theories, and this led them to experience anxiety about their ability to interpret and enact the challenges of the new Syllabus.

The challenges of some recent literary theories to key constructs which might be seen as the building blocks of subject English compounded the difficulties, producing further anxiety about cognitive overload and associated workload stresses. In particular, the potential for recent literary theories to destabilise notions of determinable meaning made it difficult for English teachers to weigh up the claims and counter-claims of various theories to achieve the clarity needed if they were to teach them to students.

This produced a situation where not even the standards for testing the credibility of claims could be agreed upon. Trying to deal with multiple layers of disputed literary-theoretical concepts unsettled teachers' already diverse English subject conceptualisations, further intensifying their anxiety about the contested role of these theories in the Syllabus.

The nesting of contestation over English as a school subject within contestation over literary theories within contestation over curriculum itself compounded the difficulties of teachers as they sought to interpret the Syllabus, enact it, and evaluate its effects on students. These three areas of contestation interacted in complex ways within the profession and in the news media, placing the work of teachers in the public spotlight, as McGraw (2005) points out. The polarisation of views on whether students were to learn to apply literary theories played out in national newspapers, contributing to teacher uncertainty about what was expected of them. This case has implications for other syllabus innovations that rest on contestation among epistemological assumptions that may be impossible to resolve. Feedback from teachers on the feasibility of including diverse ideological assumptions in a syllabus may be vital in determining whether contested proposed curriculum innovations will enhance learning in practice, and how this may be achieved. Not listening to teachers' evaluations of the risks and benefits of an innovation makes it more likely that an innovation will be short-lived because it has been only superficially adopted. The money, time and emotional effort involved in implementing curriculum change, and the extraordinary diversity of possibilities for change, make it very important to avoid ill-advised or abortive curriculum initiatives.

Teaching is a stressful and demanding occupation, and teachers invest considerable emotional energy in developing their professional identities. Marshall

(2000) and O'Sullivan (2008a; 2008b) argue that teachers of English make strong connections between their professional identities as English teachers and their personal identities. English teachers characterise their subject as having an orienting function for students' unfolding sense of themselves, and this heightens their sense of the subject's significance. A new English Syllabus may therefore be seen by teachers as unsettling existing attitudes and practices which teachers see as important for students' learning experiences, not just in English but in all subjects. This would go some way to explaining the degree of anxiety teachers reported about their perceptions that the Syllabus was influenced by unstable and contradictory literary theories that could pose a threat to personal epistemology. The findings of this study are important in that they illuminate the experience of teachers who perceive a new syllabus to be de-stabilising existing beliefs and practices in ways that they believe will not be beneficial to students. This study also demonstrates how strongly teachers' beliefs about epistemology and pedagogy affect how they interpret a challenging syllabus.

Voices of authority.

Uncertainty about the expectations embodied in a mandated written curriculum leads to the question of whose voice has authority for teachers as they interpret and enact a syllabus. Teachers taking part in this study highlighted the NSW Board of Studies as the chief authority on how the senior English Syllabus should be interpreted. However, the statutory authority of the Board of Studies rests in the development of syllabuses and support documents and the production of examinations and examination reports; the role of advising teachers about how to teach a syllabus is not part of their remit. This falls under the jurisdiction of the NSW Department of Education and Communities (previously the Department of Education and Training, and the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs). In non-government schools

some responsibility for teacher professional development is taken by bodies such as the Association of Independent Schools and Catholic Education Offices. For the roll-out of the new Syllabus, the Department of Education (to use a convenient abbreviation) used a train-the-trainer model of teacher preparation for Syllabus induction, through Local Interest Groups (LIGs). It is noteworthy that only two of the 50 research participants made any mention of this LIG induction as they described how they worked through their uncertainty about understanding, interpreting and enacting the new senior English Syllabus.

The findings of this study show that participants' uncertainty about senior English Syllabus expectations was not resolved by the Board of Studies Stage 6 English Forum, nor by using LIGs as a 'train the trainer' form of professional development, nor by events and publications emanating from the English Teachers' Association or the Association of Independent Schools (for example). Both teacher uncertainty about official expectations regarding literary theories and poor student use of theories in examinations were persistently observed, reinforcing the sense that further direction was needed from the Board of Studies regarding the role of literary theories in the teaching of senior English. These two factors prompted the Board to clarify expectations in the *Support Document* for *Module B: Critical study of texts* in September 2007.

The assessed curriculum as authority over interpretation.

The assessed curriculum emerges from this study as very influential upon the attitudes and practices of HSC English teachers. Given the difficulty of interpreting Syllabus expectations, teachers chose to see examination questions and markers' comments as a vital indicator of what sorts of treatments of literary theories were seen as hampering or enhancing the students' examination responses.

As most of the markers' comments are provided as evaluations of either stronger or weaker answers, teachers developed little sense of the middle groups of students utilising literary theories in particular ways. It could be argued that this contributed to teachers' sense that literary theories were best left to the most capable students. This meant in practice that most of the teachers who were Minimisers of literary theory indicated they generally just answered student-initiated queries about literary theories, rather than programming to teach these theories. Markers' descriptions of weaker student treatment of literary theories acted primarily as a deterrent against emphasizing literary theories. On the other hand, markers' evaluations of the most capable students' approaches to literary theories allowed teachers to think that very able students might be rewarded for explicitly treating complex literary theories. These two tendencies may have reinforced the polarisation of teachers' views about the risks and benefits of focusing on literary theories in senior English.

It is significant that although respondents complained strongly about external examinations driving learning to an inordinate degree, they actively contributed to this process through their focus on *Reports from the Marking Centre* and by preparing students specifically for predicted examination questions, a practice about which examiners persistently complained in their turn. This suggests that, against their better judgement, teachers get caught in a cycle of tailoring teaching strategies to fit prevailing assessment regimes, which reinforces the negative impacts of the assessed curriculum. Thus, high-stakes examinations contribute over time to the dominance of the assessed curriculum over mandated, intended, enacted and experienced curricula. This dominance of assessment leads teachers to sideline their own professional judgement for the sake of high examination scores. The resulting substantial shift of authority over time from the mandated curriculum to the assessed curriculum complicates teachers'

work of interpreting and implementing syllabus innovations. It could be argued that

this is an example of poor curriculum alignment hampering teacher professionalism, by

producing a *curriculum system* that works against best-practice *curriculum processes*.

Whatever their views on the teaching of literary theories, teachers were almost

of one voice in judging high stakes examinations to be a largely unsuitable way of

assessing students' application of literary theories to texts. The examiners' reports may

support this view, judging by the persistence of marker complaint about how poorly

students handled literary theories. The conjectural nature of many recent literary

theories was cited by participants as a key reason for seeing examinations as

inappropriate vehicles for students' theorising. The very limited time available to

generate an examination response means that students do not have the opportunity to

fully explore the "what if" implications of such theories. Where a literary theory

challenges the validity of logical argumentation, it is difficult to measure a student's

grasp of it by means of the logical argumentation expected in an examination essay.

Conjectural theories in any school subject may not be well-suited to assessment

through timed examinations. Across the full range of subjects, more appropriate means

of evaluating student work on conjectural theories could include project work,

experimental investigations, or journals completed over a period of time. In History,

this might involve comparing divergent eye-witness reports of the same events, and

comparing various evidentiary warrants for knowledge used by historians. In English,

examples of this type of work include re-writings of well-known works prompted by

postmodernist outlooks, or multimedia presentations which challenge genre boundaries.

This may make the Extension 2 Major Work a better platform for student exploration of

conflicting literary theories than other components of the English Advanced course, or

the English Standard course. The 3.2% of English students who complete English

Extension 2 are characterised by respondents as more able than the overall cohort to deal with the complex abstractions of contradictory literary theories. This concession regarding levels of student readiness for conceptual thinking about literary theories was noted even by teachers who fitted the Confirmed Redesigners category.

Uncertainty about the *status* of teaching literary theories (as a requirement, an expectation or an option) compounded the difficulties of interpreting and enacting a syllabus innovation which involved fluidity and indeterminacy of meanings, and a range of competing epistemologies. External examination responses do not lend themselves to an exploration of fluidity and indeterminacy, as they rely on students producing succinct and logical pieces of writing which answer a specific question. As the work of Luke et al. (2013) demonstrates, using external examinations as the principal measure of student achievement tends to re-shape all other dimensions of curriculum to fit what can be measured by such examinations, leading to a narrowing of curriculum offerings.

2. Lack of alignment: teachers' personal epistemology and curriculum.

This research demonstrates that because teachers interpret syllabus innovations through the lens of their personal epistemologies, innovations involving complex and conflicting philosophical concepts produce strong emotional responses and dramatically increase workloads. Teachers' beliefs and priorities inevitably lead to different ways of making meaning from a mandated curriculum, and diverse approaches to enacting curriculum. An epistemologically complex curriculum innovation demands from teachers considerable mental, ethical and emotional effort as they evaluate it on several levels, probing beneath statements of intent in the written curriculum documents to uncover underlying principles. Where these are not stated unequivocally, teachers must deduce them before or while enacting them.

With a syllabus innovation such as the teaching of conflicting literary theories, the task of interpreting the epistemological principles behind the innovation is a philosophically challenging one. This study found that many teachers resented the time and mental effort it took. This effort was particularly resented where teachers felt the evidentiary warrants for a theory – the logical justifications for its primary claims – were unconvincing. Their professionalism was further taxed by students similarly challenging these evidentiary warrants. On the other hand, teachers very well versed in the implications of theory used these challenges from students as an opportunity to unpack anomalies, while others merely shared their exasperation with the students.

Teachers try to identify the epistemological principles which underpin a syllabus innovation and test them for their fit with their own personal epistemologies, those belief systems through which experience is encountered and interpreted. Where the principles underpinning an innovation largely match those of a teacher's personal worldview, the innovation is likely to be tested in practice, with a view to its adoption either alongside or in place of other approaches, or its rejection or minimal use if practice shows it to be unworkable in some respects.

What the case of literary theories in senior English has shown is that where a syllabus innovation is epistemologically complex, teachers characteristically find that parts of it cannot be assimilated into their existing epistemological beliefs. Consequently, teachers select some aspects of the innovation to add to their professional repertoire while resisting or minimising others. This study shows that a lack of epistemological alignment leads teachers to enact only circumscribed portions of an innovation without adopting or subscribing to its overall rationale. In Remillard and Heck's (2010) terms, these teachers *draw on* a written curriculum, selectively enacting those features they see as justifiable through the lens of their own worldview. The

downside of this selective enactment is teacher anxiety about whether students'

examination results may be affected if they do not foreground the contested innovation,

particularly where external examinations have compulsory questions, rather than a

range from which students may choose.

The findings of this research reveal that where an innovation rests on multiple

and conflicting answers to key epistemological questions about the grounds for

knowing, and the nature and sources of knowledge, this sets up tensions in teachers'

work which resist resolution and affect morale. Unresolvable epistemological

challenges that became the foundation for professional and public contestation about the

Syllabus innovation intensified teachers' anxiety about their professional dilemmas in

interpreting the Syllabus, linguistically, cognitively and epistemologically. Teachers

could experience this situation of unresolvable challenges as detrimental to their sense

of self-efficacy concerning their key professional responsibility: to enhance student

learning.

This research shows that teachers who experienced a marked epistemological

misalignment between an innovation and their own worldview responded by

minimising, resisting or subverting the innovation in order to preserve their personal

epistemologies and subject conceptions. This raises several difficult ethical questions:

on whose authority are the epistemological and theoretical bases of written curriculum

to be determined? Where teachers do not subscribe to the epistemological principles

underpinning an educational innovation, on what grounds might they be expected to

adopt it? As Raths (2001) has indicated, it is not clear what ethical concerns should

come into play when considering attempts to change teachers' epistemological beliefs.

Contestation over epistemologies.

The perception that the theoretical bases of a syllabus rest on conflicting theories produces conceptual cross-currents that are hard to assimilate into teachers' existing personal epistemologies. Assumptions about such central constructs as texts, authors, authority, intention and meaning are interpreted in diverse ways by competing literary theories. This leads to the use of what are colourfully called "scare quotes" around these concepts, to signal the erosion of room to use them unselfconsciously.

Where the conflicting theoretical bases of a syllabus are drawn from other disciplines and rest on diverse evidentiary warrants, this further complicates teachers' work of syllabus interpretation and enactment. As different theories challenge different assumptions or "naturalisations," a large number of key concepts in the teaching subject can end up being destabilised. Consequently, teachers lose the sense of having their feet on something solid and familiar that can be used as a basis for student learning. This may intensify workload stresses for teachers.

Effect of the Postmodernism elective.

The findings of this study suggest that once non-realist literary theory was fore-grounded by the inclusion of a Postmodernism elective, NSW senior English teachers appeared to see the multifaceted and iconoclastic claims of these theories as unsettling their own interpretation of the Syllabus as a text, and even of English as a school subject. This impaired their confidence in their ability to enact the Syllabus in ways that would serve students. English teachers might be seen as professional textual interpreters, but here they were being faced with literary theories which claimed to demolish or refute the way they thought about, and taught about, texts.

This led to apparently insoluble questions about whether the Postmodernism elective should be "read" from a postmodernist perspective, and whether students

should write in a postmodernist way for examinations. It was not clear how a postmodernist treatment of the Postmodernism elective would fit the marking criteria. The *Reports from the Marking Centre* demonstrate that this was a "live" issue, and that there were students who extrapolated postmodernist strategies from the Postmodernism elective to their examination answers for other parts of the course, in ways the examiners deemed problematic. This suggests that students adopted what they saw as postmodernist concepts or strategies, rather than becoming resistant readers of the very notion of resistant reading. It appears that the nesting of the Postmodernism elective in a module entitled "Texts and ways of thinking" was not universally understood as allowing students to take a certain critical distance when dealing with postmodernist theory.

One implication of this research is that if curriculum authorities want teachers and students to understand they have freedom to critique a perspective being studied, this needs to be spelled out unambiguously in syllabus documents rather than "taken as read." This may be particularly important where assessment tasks are to be externally marked. In complex cases such as this one, it would seem wise for syllabus documents to explicitly state that there is room for teachers to enact their own epistemology within the syllabus.

Subject conceptualisations and professional identity.

Teachers may perceive a contested innovation as disturbing primary categories in their subject. This can cause them to doubt that they have the knowledge and skills needed to teach it. Marshall (2000) observes that teachers articulate their goals and purposes for teaching English in ways that show the subject holds moral and ethical imperatives for them, which are strongly connected with their personal epistemologies. The findings of this research show that teachers who see a contested innovation as

destabilising or undervaluing their views of the purpose and value of their teaching

subject experience anxiety, distress and frustration, and an intensification of their

workload. This is a result of teachers' discipline-specific epistemological beliefs

providing much of the motivation needed to work through professional difficulties

(Hofer, 2002).

A syllabus innovation built on a range of contested and cognitively-demanding

theories has the potential to substantially re-shape the teaching subject, and this may

cause teachers to feel that their hard-won content knowledge is being devalued

(Shulman, 1986). This content knowledge includes not just the material included in the

subject, but also the principles around which it is organised. New theories that

challenge those principles impact on teachers' subject conceptions. As O'Sullivan

(2007) and Marshall (2000) have shown, English teachers' subject conceptualisations

are profoundly linked to their personal and professional identities. This means that a

perceived threat to their subject conceptualisations is experienced as a threat to

cherished aspects of their identity, their sense of who they are and why they are English

teachers. This connects at a deep level with their interpretations of experience through

the lens of their epistemological beliefs.

Teachers' coping strategies.

Where teachers perceive a lack of alignment between their personal

epistemology and the innovative mandated curriculum, they adopt a range of strategies

to cope with the disequilibrium this produces. In the case of NSW senior English, these

strategies included:

- teaching students about the lack of epistemological alignment;

- selecting literary theories most closely aligned with their own epistemology;

- teaching literary theories taxonomically, reduced to information about movements, rather than as rival epistemologies; and

- using the uncertain status of literary theories in the curriculum as grounds for largely avoiding them.

A lack of alignment between teachers' personal epistemologies and the perceived theoretical bases of the written curriculum is not something that is resolved by looking to authorities outside the official curriculum authorities. Groups such as subject associations and school sector professional development providers do not have authority over the theoretical bases of the mandated written curriculum, nor over teachers' personal epistemologies. This means that the professional development provided by such bodies is unlikely to bring resolution of the quandaries faced by teachers who feel that the written curriculum has theoretical bases which are hard to align with their own epistemological beliefs.

Teachers in this study resolved this difficulty largely by teaching the Syllabus in a way which aligned with their own epistemologies, and by adding a superimposed layer of literary theories at strategic points, with the metaphor of *adding layer upon layer* being frequently used.

Apart from the Confirmed Redesigners (20% of participants), the teachers participating in this study did not approach literary theories as a range of different epistemological lenses through which texts – and indeed English as a subject – could be approached. Rather, in order to preserve their personal epistemologies, and their key priorities in the subject, the majority of teachers quarantined the literary theories into a separate layer of content which they applied intermittently. By doing this, they kept the theories confined to a small portion of their enacted curriculum but saw themselves as

fulfilling perceived official expectations about teaching theory, to the smallest extent they could justify.

This research shows that innovations which challenge teachers' strongly-held beliefs are received with anxiety and other negative emotions, in line with the work of Hargreaves (2003). Uncertainty about the status of an innovation in a new mandated syllabus intensifies the negative emotional responses of teachers responsible for enacting it. In turn, the anxiety thus produced may impair the cognitive processing efficiency that Eysenck et al. (2007) describe as necessary for handling complex concepts. Where such innovations are aligned with neither teachers' epistemological beliefs nor their existing cognitive structures, their negative emotional responses tend to result in a return to "safer, more established positions" (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997, p. 122), rather than an adoption of the larger challenges which a particular change entails.

This study suggests that where curriculum authorities wish to promote a substantial change in teachers' theoretical outlooks, they need to demonstrate the benefits of such shifts for student learning. Such demonstrations need to be practical, feasible and unambiguous. Teachers need room to test the implications of shifts of theoretical outlook, to determine whether they can be aligned with their personal epistemologies and pedagogical beliefs. Curriculum authorities should anticipate that such alignment will vary from one teacher to another. It may be necessary to state explicitly that teachers are allowed room to exercise professional judgment about which theoretical outlooks can be productively used with their particular students. This has the potential to decrease teacher anxiety about contested syllabus innovations.

3. Pedagogical problems in practice.

Given the context in which teachers saw a syllabus innovation as both poorly aligned with their personal epistemologies and not conveyed clearly in the mandated

curriculum documents, this section considers the findings of this research about

pedagogical problems teachers experienced as they implemented the teaching of literary

theories. These included

- increased student workload in learning an array of conflicting and changeable

  theories;

- cognitive difficulty of conceptually abstract theories being an obstacle to

  student understanding and examination readiness;

- challenges from students over the epistemological bases and logical

  soundness of some theories; and

- decreased student confidence in responding personally to texts.

These implications received confirmation both from teacher observation of students'

experienced curriculum and from external examiners' reports.

The teachers reported facing ongoing professional challenges as they sought to

resolve tensions between two goals: helping students develop their own personal

responses to texts, and schooling students to understand a range of critical readings

grounded in speculative literary theories. Teachers reiterated the risk of students relying

on views of literary-theoretical "experts" and writing about literary theories with little

understanding of the principles involved, or of workable applications. This was seen to

pose a threat to achieving excellent scores in the Higher School Certificate

examinations. Perceived threats to examination performance had profound effects on

teachers' ongoing evaluation of their intended and enacted curriculum, and attracted

sustained media controversy.

Teachers' concerns about pedagogical implications.

One key implication arising from this research is that if a substantial proportion

of teachers see a contested innovation as a great deal of extra work without a strong

likelihood of benefit for students, this should make policy-makers wary of endorsing it

for inclusion in a new syllabus. The onus should be on curriculum writers to

demonstrate the benefits of an innovation before teachers are expected to enact it.

Teacher concerns about negative pedagogical implications of a proposed innovation

should be taken very seriously by curriculum writers and policy-makers. They reflect

teachers' sense of their duty of care to students, which leads them to avoid introducing

material and approaches which they think will impair learning and achievement. As

Olson (2002) has pointed out, there is a tendency for proponents of a curriculum

innovation to seek only positive feedback from practitioners when the innovation is

being tried out, whereas negative feedback is of more strategic benefit in ensuring that

the innovation caters effectively for student needs and is worth the effort of

implementation.

This study suggests that delay in responding to negative teacher feedback on

curriculum innovations leads to students having prolonged exposure to innovations

which are later deemed unjustified on pedagogical grounds. Such delay in recognising

teachers' pedagogical concerns adds an unnecessary load of anxiety and stress to

teachers' already challenging work. It also increases teachers' suspicion that

curriculum writers are out of touch with the daily realities of classroom teaching. It

follows that this suspicion will influence the way teachers react to subsequent

innovations, particularly where pedagogical benefits cannot be clearly demonstrated.

Tuning in to teachers' negative responses to proposed innovations could avoid wasted

spending on educational fads.

Pedagogical responses to the multiplicity of literary theories.

One response of teachers to the multiplicity of literary theories was to reduce a

particular theory to several key propositions, and model for students what effect these

propositions might have on textual interpretation. Once students had grasped how these propositions could be applied in practice, some key ideas from a contrasting theory could be introduced.

Another response to the diversity of literary theories was to experiment to see what would happen when a small amount of theory was introduced to particular topic. For example, several participants talked about teaching fairy stories or folk tales in Year 10 and modelling how they might be approached through the principles of varied literary theories. Confirmed Redesigners saw this as altering students' perspectives, giving them a sense of how a literary theory can completely change the "message" or meaning of a fairy story or folk tale. Teachers who were not Confirmed Redesigners tended to describe this as an obligation they got out of the way as efficiently as possible.

A third response was pragmatism.   Recognising that they could not easily acquire all the knowledge and understanding needed to teach literary theories well, teachers looked for manageable ways of including theories to some extent. The most common method was to produce or find a simplified version of a theory and use it in a circumscribed way.

Low interest in literary theories – teachers and students.

The findings of this study indicate a low level of interest in literary theories among the participating teachers. As Olsen and Kirtman (2002) point out, where an educational innovation connects with teacher interests, teachers show more eagerness to implement it, and more persistence through difficult stages. "Individuals' mediating responses" to a curriculum innovation (Olsen & Kirtman, 2002, p. 302) show their varying levels of reflection, optimism, confidence, energy and understanding.

Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) state that for an educational innovation to change teachers' practice, both individuals and groups need to "find meaning concerning what

should change as well as *how* to go about it" (p. xi). They term this the *meaning hypothesis*. It could be argued that a shared meaning hypothesis was lacking regarding the teaching of literary theories in the Syllabus. Teachers had difficulty making meaning from it because they saw it as based on many epistemologically incompatible literary theories, and were unsure how to go about enacting these for students.

As teachers worked to find meaning in the Syllabus which could shape their intended curriculum, they evaluated the epistemological rationales for at least some of the influential literary theories and tested these against their personal epistemologies, finding a considerable range in degrees of alignment. Teachers questioned whether they were obliged to teach literary theories based on epistemological assumptions they did not hold themselves. The fact that the Syllabus alluded to key principles from literary theories, but did not clarify whether these were mandated or optional, left teachers in uncertainty over whether and how to teach these principles and the theories from which they are drawn.

A related explanation for teachers not enthusiastically taking up an educational innovation is that the teachers see themselves as lacking the pedagogical versatility to teach it well (Olsen & Kirtman, 2002). A lack of background knowledge, or deep understanding of an epistemologically-complex innovation, may also contribute to teachers being reluctant to adopt an innovation.

Implications

Teachers' responses to the three difficulties.

This study has implications for curriculum processes theory as it illuminates a situation in which ongoing teacher scepticism about the value of a syllabus innovation led to official clarification of the nature and scope of the innovation. It highlights how teachers evaluate the epistemic, evidentiary, and pedagogical warrants for a curriculum

innovation as they plan their intended curriculum and evaluate both their enacted curriculum and the students' experienced curriculum. It sheds light on the way epistemic and evidentiary warrants and the pedagogical potential of an innovation are evaluated and contested, within the local faculty team and in wider formal and informal networks.

This study also recognises that the pedagogical implications of a syllabus innovation may be different in the various curriculum phases, in different school communities and with diverse students, and this will affect how teachers respond to an innovation. This means that trials of proposed syllabus innovations need to include schools with a range of geographic and demographic profiles from each school sector. The findings show that the value assigned to a syllabus innovation can vary markedly between city and rural school teachers. Rather than simply characterising rural and regional teachers as slow to adopt an innovation, policy-makers and curriculum designers would be wise to investigate what factors contribute to teacher scepticism about its projected benefits. These could include distance to professional development sessions outlining ways of using the innovation, a recognition of its poor alignment with local community values and aspirations, and cynicism about the tendency for educational ideas to be imported from dissimilar contexts and found to fit less well in rural schools than in city schools in affluent suburbs where parents have higher than average levels of education.

Tensions between the views of the curriculum innovation held by individual teachers, professional networks and influential publications and organisations may result in public contestation of the value of a curriculum innovation. The purpose of such contestation is to determine whether the educational value of the innovation warrants the work involved in implementing it. The venues for this contestation may

include the faculty group in the local school, curriculum implementation events run by curriculum authorities or interest groups, professional publications, and the mass media. The contestation process may identify the likely benefits and disadvantages of the curriculum innovation, both for student learning and for teacher professional practice. Individuals evaluate these factors through their own worldview, and institutions evaluate them through the lenses of their agreed policies.

Key influences in this process of evaluation and contestation are the subject conceptions held by individuals and by organisations. Subject conceptions encompass a subject's distinctive epistemic assumptions (how something can be known), evidentiary warrants (how ideas are tested for plausibility and reliability), and pedagogical beliefs and knowledge (how this subject can be effectively taught and learned). Unless teachers are convinced that a curriculum innovation is justified on all three grounds (epistemic, evidentiary and pedagogical), they are likely to minimise or avoid implementing the innovation in the classroom. They do this on the basis of their worldview, their experience of how the intended and enacted curricula work, and their perceptions of student-experienced curriculum over time. These perceptions are strongly influenced by the assessed curriculum, its content and procedures, and the marks students attain.

The teachers' rule of thumb is doing "what works." By this, teachers mean they do what contributes to an environment conducive to learning, where students make progress and produce assessment results that can be respected in the community. Where the epistemological, evidentiary and pedagogical justifications for a curriculum initiative are widely seen as insufficient, contestation may continue until it brings about a re-evaluation of the innovation. This may lead to the innovation being substantially modified, de-emphasised or abandoned.

Teachers with experience of innovations being promoted, tried and abandoned tend to develop a scepticism towards proposed curriculum innovations. This scepticism may be adopted to buffer students from trends which are unlikely to last, or to save teachers from extra work which may prove unnecessary if the innovation does not last. An attitude of sceptical detachment from a curriculum innovation may also come into play when teachers perceive that an innovation does not leave room for their own epistemic and pedagogical beliefs and knowledge to shape their teaching.

Contestation against a syllabus innovation may be communicated explicitly through reports from marking centres, articles in educational publications, and features or letters in the mass media. Such contestation can also be directly communicated to the curriculum authorities, by individuals or by interest groups and professional peak bodies.

Contestation against and resistance to an innovation can also be conveyed implicitly, by the texts, modules or approaches chosen by teachers. Where teachers largely select options in which the innovation can be minimised or avoided, this in itself provides feedback to curriculum authorities about teachers' perceptions of the innovation's value, and the risks entailed in trying it out. Sustained explicit and implicit contestation over an innovation may indicate that teachers characterise the innovation as poorly justified in epistemology, evidentiary warrants, or pedagogical practice. Where an innovation is seen as insufficiently justified in all three respects, this reinforces teachers' resolve to minimise its impact on their students. If contestation continues to revolve around these factors, teachers tend to retreat from seeking external advice and rely more on their own professional judgement, in answering the three key questions:

Do I have to teach this?

Does it fit my epistemological beliefs?

Is it helpful to students in practice?

One reason teachers came to rely on their own professional judgement was that this was the one area in which they had some control, in a context of anxiety-producing uncertainty.

In the case being studied, the New South Wales Board of Studies recognised that the ongoing difficulties teachers were having in answering these three questions needed to be resolved. It was clear that teachers' epistemological beliefs were diverse and not under the control of curriculum authorities. There was also evidence of persistent doubt about the innovation's value to students, in the minds of both teachers and examiners. The curriculum authorities recognised that by decisively answering the first question in the negative, they could decrease the pressure on teachers who had negative or ambivalent responses to the second and third questions.

By officially stating that explicit treatment of literary theories was not required, and that it should not be used as a substitute for personal engagement with the text, the Board of Studies (2007) helped to establish a workable curriculum settlement. Teachers who wished to teach the use of specific literary theories could still do so, as long as this did not obstruct students' personal engagement with texts. Teachers who were sceptical of the wisdom of a focus on literary theories were also enabled to act on their professional judgement, without students' examination marks being placed at risk.

This curriculum settlement was reached late in the eighth year of the Syllabus, through the publication of an unambiguous statement in a Support Document (Board of Studies, 2007). This resulted in a substantial decrease of teacher anxiety surrounding Syllabus expectations about teaching literary theories. The toll of this long period of uncertainty and contestation on teachers' emotional resilience is hard to measure, but the data demonstrates that teachers experienced confusion and anxiety about this issue

to an extent that intensified their work-related stress. This suggests that an early clarification of teachers' room to move in interpreting a syllabus innovation could prevent considerable workload stress and anxiety, potentially improving morale and productivity.

Teacher resistance to an innovation should be seen as an indicator not merely of unwillingness to change, but also of its implications for the types of student they are teaching. In other words, the best judges of the likely benefits and shortcomings of a syllabus innovation may be the educators who are being asked to use it. Both positive and negative reactions of teachers to a proposed innovation are crucial in gauging whether a substantial change in written curriculum is likely be sustained past a trial period. However, continuing contestation about the merits of an educational innovation may indicate that divergent perspectives are unlikely to be reconciled even in the longer term. Supporting the co-existence of varied approaches may be one way of recognising several schools of thought on a specific innovation.

As Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) have pointed out, waves of curriculum change which do not become embedded in educational practice contribute to teachers' sense of being asked to do more than they can manage, by people who do not inhabit classrooms. Deep recognition of the professional capital of teachers should decrease the number of curriculum initiatives which are announced with a flourish before being replaced by the next round of impractical and short-lived initiatives. A sense that their feedback on proposed initiatives has helped to avoid those least likely to benefit students, builds teacher morale by avoiding the waste of time and energy on short-lived fads. Indeed, Hargreaves and Fullan argue that giving due recognition to the professional capital of teachers is vital to improving education on a broad scale.

Changes in the process of curriculum enactment.

This research has implications for curriculum theory as it illuminates teachers' curriculum processes in the context of ongoing educational contestation. It reveals that once teachers achieve what they see as a workable interpretation of a syllabus innovation from the standpoint of their own beliefs and experience, they put the syllabus documents to one side and use their own interpretation to guide curriculum enactment.

As teachers evaluate the effectiveness of the enacted curriculum for the students, they rely heavily on feedback from the assessed curriculum, particularly on examination questions and how students handled them, as indicated by markers' reports. Once into this enactment and evaluation phase, teachers rarely return to the original syllabus documents, relying instead on feedback from the assessed curriculum to confirm or reshape their professional practice. Teachers' reliance on the assessed curriculum to confirm their syllabus interpretations is intensified where students' further opportunities depend on high-stakes examinations, on which teachers' competence may also be judged. This may exacerbate the narrowing of enacted curriculum into types of learning that are most readily assessed through timed, written examinations. Luke argues that this leads to students not experiencing the rich breadth of learning experiences that would best prepare them for a rapidly changing world (2011).

In a contested curriculum, teachers move their focus away from the underlying theoretical bases of a syllabus towards a pragmatic focus on what works in practice. Teachers use the assessed curriculum to gauge this, along with their reflective observation of student engagement in learning in the classroom context. This means that if the theoretical bases of a syllabus do not seem to align with their subject conceptions, teachers increasingly focus on lining up their enacted curriculum with the

types of questions they predict will be in the next examination. Predicting assessment

questions leads to students preparing formulaic answers for specific questions, which

they memorise and try to link to the actual questions they face in the examination.

Memorisation of answers is discouraged in markers' reports, particularly where the

links between a prepared answer and the question being asked are forced and

unconvincing (see, for example, Board of Studies, 2006, p. 7). Notwithstanding this,

teachers who perceive a Syllabus to rest on a large number of conflicting and

irreconcilable literary theories may come to see the relative predictability of exam

questions as a simple guide to what is expected of students.

In cases of uncertainty about written curriculum expectations, the power of the

assessed curriculum increases as teachers use it to help crystallise their interpretation of

syllabus expectations. While in the initial stages of a new syllabus authority is vested in

the mandated written curriculum, over time the weight of authority moves to the

assessed curriculum. This can lead to the assessed curriculum distorting the enacted

and experienced curriculum, as Gipps (1994) and Luke (2011) have pointed out. It

means that those aspects of a subject which are most easily measured in external

examinations increasingly take centre stage in teachers' intended and enacted curricula,

so that the assessed curriculum becomes the de facto curriculum.

As a new syllabus is bedded down over several years, examiners' reports

increasingly take on the function of clarifying its expectations. Teachers may interpret

examiners' comments as crystallising or indeed as revising the intentions of syllabus

writers. As they appear annually, and are carefully considered as part of teachers' re-

evaluation of their intended curriculum, examiners' reports can take on an authoritative

role in teachers' thinking and planning. This research suggests that examiners' reports

may crystallise thinking about practical problems arising from a contested innovation,

because examiners evaluate the work of a large number of students in different school contexts. This can inform official statements about whether the innovation is optional or prescribed.

Examiners' observations on how an innovation is handled by students are seen by teachers as authoritative because they connect with the lived experience of teaching and learning. When curriculum authorities make further official statements based on examiners' reports, teachers see this as allowing the realities of enacted and experienced curricula to shape the mandated syllabus.

Conversely, where teachers perceive a shift in emphasis in examiners' reports from one year to the next, this may contribute to the sense that official curriculum expectations are unstable, with possible consequences for teacher anxiety levels and motivation. This suggests that curriculum authorities should carefully consider the cumulative messages teachers receive over time from examiners' reports, so that the parameters for teachers' syllabus interpretation are communicated with clarity. The new syllabus and its support documents, as well as sample assessment questions issued when a new syllabus is introduced, should make clear where teachers have room to exercise professional judgment about whether and how to enact a syllabus innovation. This may avoid long periods of uncertainty as to official expectations, such as those experienced by teachers taking part in this research, and minimise the anxiety this entailed.

Directions for Future Research

This study suggests several directions for future research. It would be valuable to see how different state jurisdictions approach the challenges to arts and humanities subjects presented by the proliferation of literary and cultural theories and their potential for shaping classroom practice. If teachers in other states experience less

uncertainty and anxiety about how literary and cultural theories impact on their teaching, research could be warranted into how these jurisdictions handle syllabus writing, dissemination, induction and evaluation.

Further research is also warranted on how curriculum authorities ascertain whether a syllabus is being misunderstood by teachers, or when it is ambiguous or contributes to poor student practices; this could indicate which methods of post-publication intervention are most effective in ameliorating such problems.

This investigation of the difficulties teachers experienced in interpreting syllabus expectations in the light of examination requirements, and in helping students to apply speculative theories in high stakes examinations, suggests that further work is warranted on whether external examinations are the most effective way to assess how well students have learned to use theories or other constructs which are conceptually abstract and highly contested. Such a study could explore if other forms of assessment might yield richer and more nuanced insight into student achievement.

Since its inception as a school subject, English has been understood in diverse ways. New ways of defining and thinking about texts have been augmented by a multiplicity of literary theories and educational approaches. Given that teachers interpret these challenges through the lens of their own epistemologies and pedagogical beliefs, it is unlikely that a single conceptualisation of the subject is achievable among English teachers. Consequently, writers of mandated curriculum for English will need to find ways to write syllabus documents that leave "wriggle room" for English teachers to use their professional judgement to help students learn. Further research is warranted into how recognition of the individual teacher's professional judgement in interpreting curriculum can be balanced with the unfolding of a cohesive national curriculum, which is intended to be equivalent across states without being entirely uniform or prescriptive.

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Appendix A
Glossary of Literary Theories

Classroom activities listed are just a few examples from a wide range of possibilities and may involve students as responders to and/or composers of texts. Study of texts which represent outworkings of each specific theory or approach could also apply in each case. Please note that theories marked with an asterisk are often grouped together under the umbrella term "Critical Theory." The term "critical literacy" is often used to signify pedagogy built on the assumptions of Critical Theory.

NEOCLASSICISM

Characteristics

- re-working of traditional forms and subjects with accuracy and technical skill (Murfin & Ray, 1998, p. 291; Young, 1759/2001, pp 140-3)

  * rules of composition and metre are meticulously followed (Fraser, 1964; Pope, 1711)

  * technical control of form and language (Pope, 1711)

  * grace and decorum in expression and urbanity in wit (Daiches, 1968, p. 858); (Fraser, 1964 p. 359)

Classroom example

- Students writing formally correct haiku or sonnets after studying some which are technically expert and graceful (lesson plans from school B in pilot program)

ROMANTICISM

Characteristics

- deification of the imagination, with the poet as imagination's prophet (Wordsworth, 1880) "under supernatural agency" (Coleridge, 1816, p. 517); "the poet is a 'seer'" (Graff, 1979. p. 221; Kermode, 1986, p. 5; Wordsworth, 1880, p. 447)

- humble and rustic country life as subject (Fraser, 1964, p. 359)

- expression of poet's emotional states (Daiches, 1968)

- glorifying the creative individual (Kermode, 1986, pp 1-29; Shelley, 1821, p. 291)

- the creative individual being alienated from society, yet able to save it (Graff, 1979, p. 225; Murfin & Ray, 1998; Wordsworth, 1880)

- not being bound by convention or rationality "diminished status of rational knowledge" (Daiches, 1968 p. 416; Kermode, 1986, p. 25)

- flexibility and increasing freedom of choice (Abrams, 1971, p. 460): "poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings"; Yeats on the poet's "free consciousness" (Padley, 2006, p. 857; R. Williams, 1988, p. 25)

Classroom examples

- study and writing of confessional poetry as embodiment of the individual psyche (classroom program of interviewed teacher 4)

- creative writing tasks with few constraints in content or techniques (classroom programs of interviewed teachers 2,3 & 4)

REALISM (OR EXPRESSIVE REALISM)

Characteristics

- work which is life-like, or true to life in a way which penetrates the surface and reveals underlying driving forces (Abrams, 1971, pp 140-3; R. Williams, 1988, pp 140-3; Zola, 1868/2004, pp 257-62)

- aims for lucidity and objectivity rather than rhetoric or personal viewpoints (Padley, 2006, p. 127; Zola, 1885/2005, p. 127)

- the unpacking of psychological motivations and sociopolitical factors which influence characters' actions (Dreiser, 1925/2005, p. 261)

Classroom examples

- students producing reports of jointly observed phenomena, attempting verisimilitude and clarity, and aiming for objectivity (e.g. newspaper reports) (programs of interviewed teachers 2 & 3)

- studying/writing character sketches showing effects of social circumstances interacting with psychological factors (Realism as "a conscious commitment to understanding and describing" "the movement of psychological or social or physical forces")(Holloway, 1978, p. 261)

NATURALISM

Characteristics

- the principles of scientific determinism, of humans being compelled to certain acts and beliefs by their biological and social circumstances (Abrams, 1971, p. 538; Butler, 1903/1964; Murfin & Ray, 1998, 288-9)

- depiction of life as an animalistic struggle against overpowering forces, structures and drives (Osborne, 1959); literature as quasi-medical "dissection" (Daiches, 1968)

- a focus on the lives of individuals in grinding poverty, often in overcrowded cities (Padley, 2006)

- civilization as decaying rather than developing "giving ample place to the sordid" (Malpas & Wake, 2006, p. 83)

- a focus on narcissism, disorder and the cult of the erotic (Ousby, 1996, p. 167) (fin de siecle) and p. 91 (the Decadence)

  Classroom examples

- studying/writing character sketches with a sense of inner compulsion of characters because of their social situation (White, 1957, p. 142); as seen in the evolutionary view of character in *The Way of All Flesh* (Daiches, 1968); (Cuddon, 1999, p. 1087)

- exploring texts about the urban poverty trap and its effect on victims and the social structures maintaining it (Cuddon, 1999, p. 244; Murfin & Ray, 1998, p. 100)

SYMBOLISM

  Characteristics

- shifting states of emotion, reverie, daydream and even delirium (Daiches, 1968, p. 1123; Ousby, 1996, p. 921; White, 1957)

- evocation of human consciousness, mood and sensations through patterns of images which build up to a cumulative effect ; Mallarme 1891, in (Cuddon, 1999, p. 886)

- using symbols with a private, idiosyncratic significance (Murfin & Ray, 1998, p. 473)

- aesthetic and musical features of composition (may have spiritual significance) (Cuddon, 1999, pp 886-7)

    Classroom example

    - students map the use of particular symbols throughout a densely symbolic text, to see if patterns emerge which have an impact on unfolding themes and to see if significance of a symbol alters in different parts of the work (study of WB Yeats in classroom program of interviewed teacher 1)

BIOGRAPHICAL CRITICISM

Characteristics

- insights to be gained from study of the author's life and times, and stated intentions (Woolf & Strachey, 1957)

- a focus on the effects of material and philosophical shifts during the author's life (Brooks, 1947; Lewis & Tillyard, 1939)

- using the insights of psychoanalysis to evaluate the possible effects of an author's life experiences on the presentation of family relationships and the expression or repression of desires (Thurley, 1976)

    Classroom examples

- students research the life and times of particular authors, linking biographical events to characteristics in the authors' works (classroom program from school B); (Brown, 1963; Thurley, 1976)

PSYCHOANALYTICAL CRITICISM*

Characteristics

- focus on the unconscious which may appear in puzzling or distorted dreamlike bursts, showing what has been repressed or censored by the conscious mind (Murfin & Ray, 1998, p. 377; R. Williams, 1988, pp 322; 246-8)

- exploring the multiple motivations affecting texts, seeing particular genres as defence mechanisms and the reader motivated by avoiding pain and pursuing pleasure (Cuddon, 1999, p. 877; Freud, 1900/2001, pp 919-29; Perkins, 1992, p. 33)

- literature as an illusion of escape from the divided self (Murfin & Ray, 1998, pp 378-9)

- patterns in literature of pairs of archetypes or universally recognised symbols stored in the collective unconscious, such as water and fire, journeys and enclosed gardens (Frye, 1951/2001, pp 1449-51; Leitch, 2001, p. 16)

Classroom examples

- students trace life experiences of particular authors/characters, to see whether experiences of childhood trauma are reflected in their literary depiction of characters' lives (author study on Harper Lee, school B program); (Brown, 1963); (Moon, 2001, p. 117) on life of Luke Skywalker

- mapping the use of archetypes such as journeys and enclosed gardens in novels and poetry, to see how they function as emblems of interior psychological states (classroom programs on 'The Inner Journey' school B); (Helleman & Parisi, 2006, pp 59-60; Partridge & Hughes, 1998, p. 169; Wilders, 1982)

FORMALISM

Characteristics

- a practical scientific approach to the text as a material object (Eagleton, 1994; Trotsky, 1924/2001, pp 1006-7)

- focusing on intrinsic features of texts (R. Williams, 1988, p. 138)

- what linguistic and rhetorical structures and features of genres contribute to the meanings produced by a text (Ousby, 1996, p. 340)

- aiming for technical artistry and sophistication

- exploring relationships between literary and structural devices (Cuddon, 1999, pp 327-8; Shklovsky, 1917/1992, pp 17-21)

Classroom examples

- exploring defamiliarisation—how reader alertness is heightened by depicting something ordinary in such a way that it seems strange; as modelled by Shklovsky (Rice & Waugh, 1999, pp 17-21)

- focus on word order, quirky, shifting narration, or an untruthful narrator (classroom program from school C on *The Great Gatsby*)

- exploring how writers reveal information gradually to control pace (interview with teacher 4)

MODERNISM

Characteristics

- work which is disjointed and episodic, juxtaposing rather than ordering ideas; "wavering episodic movement ... abrupt transitions" (Holloway, 1978, p. 89) "complex, allusive, using abrupt contrasts and shifting countersuggestions" (Daiches, 1968, p. 1124)

- an effect which can be "radically non-logical" (Eliot, 1919; Holloway, 1978, p. 73)

- complexity, compression, levels of interacting ironies, virtuosity (Henderson & Brown, 1997)

- unresolvable paradox, deliberate elusiveness and instability of meaning; aiming at "excellences higher than clarity at a first reading" (Hopkins, 1953, p. xxii)

- self-consciously twisting traditional literary forms and language (Cuddon, 1999, p. 516; Murfin & Ray, 1998, p. 268)

- practices technique of linguistic "defamiliarisation" (Honderich, 1995, p. 855)

- blunt use of the vernacular to critique polite culture (Holloway, 1978, p. 80)

- cognitive rather than aesthetic factors, contributing to a dominantly "code-breaking" approach to the understanding of poetry (Empson, 1977)

- stream of consciousness narrative technique (Woolf, 1938/1977)

Classroom examples

- placing realist and modernist texts side by side to see where modernism attempts to break away from realistic depiction (teacher interview 4) (Murfin & Ray, 1998, p. 269)

- attempting to follow the lines of thought in some unresolvable paradoxes in texts, to explore the notion of deliberate elusiveness (teacher interview 4)

- looking at use and purposes of slang in a text (classroom program, school B)

- observing or practising textual disruptions—half-finished scenes, blank pages, (Sterne, 1759/1967, pp 592-4) or extended dramatic irony, e.g. "the self-deceiving and paranoid monolinguist in Browning's *Soliloquy of the Spanish cloister*" (Abrams, 1971, p. 81)

- linguistic "defamiliarization"—activities which draw attention to the artifice of a text (Rice & Waugh, 1999, p. 17)

STRUCTURALISM*

Characteristics

- rhetorical, metaphorical and linguistic features of text as the structural axis around which a text is constructed and the source of literary unity (Culler, 1976, pp 189, 242; Honderich, 1995, p. 85)

- meaning is determinable and determinative (Cuddon, 1999, p. 692)

- systematic, quasi-scientific analysis of the structures of a text to reveal its meaning, as grammar reveals the meaning of a sentence (Culler, 1976, pp 97-101; Hepburn, 1990, pp 506-7)

- makes structural parallels between literature, ideas and social groups; Lucien Goldmann's "genetic structuralism" (Milner, 2003, p. 37; Wellek, 1949/1992, p. 64)

- abandonment of all previous methods of textual analysis, seen as obsolete and untenable in the face of structuralism (Honderich, 1995); and similarly as structuralism morphs into poststructuralism (Cuddon, 1999, p. 211)

Classroom examples

- searching in texts for the structural axis which may function as the key to their 'correct' interpretation (e.g. Beethoven's string quartets as a key to TS Eliot's *Four Quartets*); (Moon, 2001, pp 3-6) activities to map binary oppositions

- unpacking "codes" or conventions in a literary work which the reader conforms to perceptions shaped by culture (Moon, 2001; Wellek, 1949/1992, p. 61)

LEAVISIAN OR PRACTICAL CRITICISM

Characteristics

- substantial study of great works as counterbalance to expansion of mass media (Ousby, 1996, p. 541; Padley, 2006, pp 164-5; Sinaiko & Beck, 1998, p. 222)

- all students, no matter what their backgrounds, being taught major works from a canon of literature highly valued over time (F. Leavis & Thompson, 1933, p. 3; Strickland, 1990, pp 176-8)

- both the literary tradition and contemporary creative writing being seen as influential (F. Leavis, 1983, pp 166-70; Strickland, 1990, p. 183)

- literature and culture as forces for social cohesion and preservation of cultural heritage (Leitch, 2001) p. 1565; (Eagleton, 1994, pp 17-33)

- values works with moral and ethical substance, seriousness, social conscience, which explore the background reasons for life's most significant choices (Malpas & Wake, 2006p. 218-9; Sinaiko & Beck, 1998, p. 223)

- interpretation through close reading, not skewed by habits of expectation, and justifiable from the text (reading a text 'on its own merits'); "to say nothing that cannot be related immediately to judgements about producible texts" (F. Leavis, 1936/1994, p. 10; Malpas & Wake, 2006, p. 218; Strickland, 1990, p. 180)

- evaluation of literary quality and comparison of works' relative value as high-, middle- or low-brow (F. Leavis, 1948/1983, pp 1-39; Q. Leavis, 1932/1979, pp 20-30)

Classroom examples

- study of exemplary classic works, in order to reach a point of being able to evaluate their worth compared with many other works (interviews with teachers 1 and 4)

- focus on literary works from diverse periods which contain ethical and philosophical reflection on the individual's role in community

- study of advertisements and newspaper opinion pieces to see how techniques of persuasion are bring used to affect people's characteristics, attitudes and purchasing habits ("Mass Media" unit of classroom work , school B)

- study of contemporary creative writing as a continuation and adaptation of 'the great tradition' (interview with teacher 4)

NEW CRITICISM

Characteristics

- close 'scientific' evaluation and detailed textual analysis of individual texts, as autonomous entities worthy of close scrutiny (Brooks, 1947) in (Leitch, 2001, p. 1362)

- unpacking ambiguity, irony and paradox as codes to be cracked (Empson, 1977)

- balancing tensions and resolving ambiguities by symbol and metaphor, seeking coherence and integration (Leitch, 2001, p. 1351)

- formalist practice of close reading or practical criticism, firmly focused on how the text creates meaning (Ousby, 1996, p. 674)

- every technical, metaphorical and aesthetic feature has a function, rather than being merely decorative (Eagleton, 1994, pp 46-51)

- poems as 'concrete universals,' examples of something permanently true (Padley, 2006, pp 170-1)

- rescuing texts from tyranny of authorial intent and readers' emotional responses "Never trust the artist. Trust the tale." (DH Lawrence in (Leitch, 2001, p. 1373)

Classroom examples

- close textual analysis of complex works, painstakingly unpacking meaning from deliberate ambiguities (classroom programs school A)

- analysis of poems which seeks to evaluate the effects of each stylistic device (classroom programs school B)

- searching for universal themes in specific works

POSTSTRUCTURALISM*

Characteristics

- removes the authority of the author (Barthes, 1977, pp 114-8)

- idea that there are many possible meanings but no closure (Belsey, 2006, pp 43-4)

- indeterminacy, fluidity and inherent inadequacy of language (Misson, 2002, p. 146)

- all discourse being open to interrogation, but not to the resolution of a definitive reading (Derrida, 1967/2001; Murfin & Ray, 1998, p. 365)

- deconstruction of ideas in a text to subvert and destroy idea of clear meanings with coherence, truth or logical boundaries; "non-truth is the truth" (Cuddon, 1999, pp 210-11; Derrida, 1972/2001, p. 1875; Hepburn, 1990, p. 507)

- 'aporia' or meanings which can never be resolved (Misson, 2002, p. 147; Perkins, 1992, p. 8)

- illuminating the contradictory meanings within texts and systems (Belsey, 2006, p. 46)

- questioning binary oppositions such as male/female, logic/emotion, black/white, and challenging such hierarchical pairings (Cuddon, 1999; Gold, 2006, p. 323; Moon, 2001, p. 3)

- looking for the tension, ambiguity or contradiction inherent in a work which would cause it to unravel (Barthes, 1977, p. 117; Johnson, 2001)

    Classroom examples

- exploring what the text has suppressed in order to convey false picture of coherence or meaningfulness (Gold, 2006, p. 323; Watson, 2003)

- trying to expose the 'lines of construction' in texts, which shape the illusion of meaning, as Johnson does with the misreading of gaps in knowledge in *Billy Budd* (Johnson, 2001, p. 2329; Stephens *et al.*, 2003, pp 34-5)

- deconstructing the ideology underpinning texts (Moon, 2001, pp 110-1; Stephens et al., 2003)

MARXIST LITERARY THEORY*

Characteristics

- recognition of relationships between literary works and economic, class, social or ideological factors (Balibar & Macherey, 1978, pp 6-12)

- interpretation of literature as a representation of Marxist dialectical theory of the owners of production oppressing the workers (Guillory, 1993, p. 8; May, 1995, p. 201)

- literature as a critique of the existence of class structures and oppression of the many by the few (Goldmann, 1975)

- social context of art (rather than form, technique or aesthetic considerations) (Guillory, 1993, p. 7) p. 7

- socialist realism as tool for revolutionary social change (Cuddon, 1999, p. 492; Perkins, 1992, p. 2)

- challenging texts by pointing out what they fail to say, because of their ideological position (Peel, 1998)

- de-privileging of the 'canon' (May, 1995, p. 201)

- challenging any literary authority (Guillory, 1993)

- giving prominence to work by lower classes and minorities (Sawyer *et al.*, 1998)

  Classroom examples

- with reference to a particular text, students ask in what way those with less power are trying to gain more power, and what economic and ideological and class issues are at work (Misson, 2002, p. 149; Moon, 2001, p. 83) on the presentation of Mrs Darling in *Peter Pan;* (Helleman, 2006, pp 36-7) on Marxist reading of *King Lear*

- students are trained to ask how a text tries to maintain a social order which is oppressive to marginal groups and to idealise away any social conflicts and what class-ridden attitudes and behaviours does the text challenge or further solidify (Helleman & Parisi, 2006, p. 59; Stephens et al., 2003)

CULTURAL STUDIES*

  Characteristics

- "culture" as anything produced by society (R. Williams, 1988, pp 87-93)

- any cultural product from the long weekend to a rock concert program being seen as a text for study (R. Williams, 1988)

- analysis of cultural phenomena to clarify implicit meanings and characteristics

- "literature" not to be valued above popular culture or everyday artefacts (Perkins, 1992, p. 11; Stephens et al., 2003, p. 65)

- looking forward to a socialist utopia which would bring about a levelling of value hierarchies

  Classroom examples

- analysis of the long weekend as a social phenomenon which conveys attitudes and characteristics (school B program)

- analysis of rock concert program, fashion magazine or film poster as cultural artefact, exploring what it reveals about society's characteristics; (Thomson, 2002, p. 8) p. 8 (fast food advertising)

- rewriting well-known texts with changes in the balance of power (Gold, 2002, p. 199; Thomson, 2002, p. 7)

POSTMODERNISM*

Characteristics

- the collapse of meaning (rejection of the idea that there can be any absolute truth or authority) (Graff, 1979, p. 219; Perkins, 1992, p. 48)

- pluralistic structures of authority, giving all participants a voice (Leitch, 2001, p. 1611)

- intricacy, pyrotechnics, parody, artifice and pastiche (Cuddon, 1999, p. 690; Stephens et al., 2003, pp 48-9)

- interference with patterns and distortions of ordered sequence such as chronology or linear narrative (Lyotard, 1979/2001, p. 1613)

- experimentation with the fictionality of fiction, blurring boundaries between research and invention, between journalism and fiction (Acker, 1986)

- "self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-undermining statement" (Hutcheon, 1989, p. 1)

- "nihilistic pragmatism" (Rice & Waugh, 1999, p. 344)

- fluidity and plurality of meanings rather than dualistic pairing of opposites (seen to be artificial and distorting) (Cuddon, 1999, p. 82) on Derrida

- "rejects all grand Narratives" (Lyotard, 1984, p. 26)

- can be playful and humorous (Klages, 2007)

  Classroom examples

- focus on texts which collapse boundaries between high and popular culture, using pastiche, parody and self-consciously constructed narrative forms (Moon, 2001, pp 105-8)

- creative writing which aims to interact with readers in a teasing. ironic or abrasive manner, rather than seeing readers as collaborators (Helleman, 2006, pp 10-20)

- writing deliberately fragmented texts in which the unreal, the hyper-real and the surreal keep shifting (Mirzoeff, 1999, pp 223-5; Stephens et al., 2003, pp 32-3, 42-3) on post modern analysis of *The X-Files*

- rewriting famous texts with significant disruptions (Adams, 2002, pp 57-73; Gold, 2002, pp 198-200; Sawyer & Watson, 2006, pp 295-6)

FEMINIST LITERARY THEORY*

  Characteristics

- claim that society has marginalised and suppressed women, and that this is reflected in texts (Perkins, 1992, p. 10)

- subversion of the opposition of men and women (in literary works and criticism) (Cuddon, 1999, p. 316; Kristeva, 2001, pp 2169-79)

- study of how women are represented in literary works especially "classics" (Gallagher, 1991, pp 232-5; Murfin & Ray, 1998, p. 159)

- highlighting the value of works written by women (Gallagher, 1991, pp 235-8)

- the construction of new discourses to overturn women's exclusion from literature except as the object of men, e.g. la gynocritique (Cixous, 2001; Cole *et al.*, 1999; Showalter, 1992, p. 95)

- recognition that some types of literary criticism are "masculine" in nature, especially text-centred criticism which allows authors some authority and which depend on rules and structures (Bonnycastle, 2002, p. 192)

- the idea that feminine qualities such as plurality of meanings and focus on community are evident in some types of literary theory, such as reader-response theory (Bonnycastle, 2002, pp 192-3)

- "ecriture feminine" which opposes masculinist ideas of grammar and logical categories, and focuses on the unconscious, diversity of desires, the body, and the inclusion of "the Other" (Cuddon, 1999, p. 316; Leitch, 2001, p. 24)

  Classroom examples

- study of neglected women writers

- study or depiction of women characters as marginal or oppressed, and writing which aims to redress this imbalance or invert it (Helleman & Parisi, 2006, pp 56-61; Partridge & Hughes, 1998, p. 128)

- exploration of literary concepts which might allow more room for difference, such as open-ended plurality of readings (Stephens et al., 2003, pp 30-1)

- study of presentation of gender in texts and wider society (Gold, 2006, p. 322; Helleman, 2006, pp 38-41; Moon, 2001, pp 42-5)

QUEER THEORY*

  Characteristics

- literature which violates and troubles established boundaries between male and female (Acker, 1986)

- the idea that sexual categories are regulatory fictions constructed by society (Murfin & Ray, 1998, p. 386)

- refusal to link identity with gender as traditionally understood (Padley, 2006, pp 87-9)

- extrapolation of this to categories of normal/abnormal and self/other (Davis, 2001, pp 2400-21)

- the idea of "queer(y)ing—a reading of literary works which questions conventional readings and even the existence of conventions (Jankowski, 1998)

- implications such as: literary characters who dress as the opposite sex are portraying gender as an ongoing impersonation of something unreal (Jankowski, 1998)

Classroom examples

- studying works which radically challenge or explore the idea of gender identity (Herrett *et al.*, 2003, pp 160-71; Sedgewick, 1997; Stephens et al., 2003, pp 24-5)

- rewriting texts from gay or lesbian perspective (Sedgewick, 1997)

- reflection on the effects of cross-dressing in the plots of some renaissance plays, such as *Twelfth Night* (Murfin & Ray, 1998, p. 25)

READER-RESPONSE THEORY

Characteristics

- the idea that every text contains gaps which readers fill in from experience of the world and knowledge of literary and cultural conventions, which form 'horizons of expectations' (Iser, 2001, pp 1673-82; Jauss, 2001, pp 1550-63; Rice & Waugh, 1999, pp 75-6)

- openness of literary works to be experienced differently by each responder (Fish, 1972; Murfin & Ray, 1998, p. 391; Stephens et al., 2003, p. 4)

- interest in the question of whether the text directs or causes the reader to respond in certain ways or whether readers impose their ideas on the text, resulting in irreducible subjectivity (Henderson & Brown, 1997; Vander Weele, 1991, p. 137)

- focus on the potential that literary works have to increase the reader's self-knowledge and fulfil unconscious psychological needs (Holland, 1975, p. 342; Murfin & Ray, 1998, p. 394)

- the seeking of identity themes in literature (Vander Weele, 1991, p. 134-5)

- shared conventions in reading communities, like rules of specific sports (Fish, 1972; J. Williams, 2001)

- recognition of negotiations between the reader, the text, and social and historical reality (Cuddon, 1999, p. 733; Murfin & Ray, 1998, p. 392)

- emphasis on reception of texts by their original audience (Moon, 2001) Classroom examples

- focusing on students with different backgrounds making meaning from texts in diverse ways (Vander Weele, 1991, p. 134) (classroom procedures of David Bleich); (Moon, 2001, pp 122-8)

- wide diversity of texts being studied, including those which reflect working class experience (Sawyer *et al.*, 1998, pp 14-5)

- classroom exploration of the way different individuals fill in gaps in a text in varying ways (Moon, 2001, pp 52-4; Watson, 2003, pp 4-5; 10-1)

Appendix B
Phase 2 Research Instrument

RESEARCH SURVEY—HOW DO LITERARY THEORIES INFLUENCE THE TEACHING OF YEAR 12 ENGLISH?

I am undertaking doctoral research with the Australian Centre for Educational Studies at Macquarie University to explore if and how literary theories affect the teaching of Year 12 English. This research will examine what teachers make of literary theories, and what effects—if any—this has in their classrooms. **Teachers with experience of teaching Year 12 English** courses are warmly invited to help shape the directions of my research by completing this web survey. Your frank responses to the focus questions will contribute to this field of research.

What are the purposes behind undertaking a study of this kind? Recent newspaper articles have highlighted some of the concerns teachers have about literary theories affecting the teaching of senior English. Recent newspaper articles have highlighted some of the concerns teachers have about literary theories affecting the teaching of senior English. Other research reports teacher uncertainty regarding the influence of different literary theories which may be prominent briefly and are then replaced. I am interested to explore what you think about the influence of literary theories on the teaching of senior English.

As many theories have more than one name and because the boundaries between different theories can be quite blurred, I have provided a **Glossary** of key characteristics of some main theories and theoretical clusters. Please note, in each case, what is being

considered is the literary theory which arises from the broader social theory: i.e.

feminist literary theory, not feminism at large. You are welcome to comment on

theories which are not listed in the Glossary, or describe your own personal theory or

mix of theories.

Thank you for your willingness to take part in this survey,

Jill Ireland

Australian Centre for Educational Studies

Macquarie University

(02) 6492 0162

<english.research@netspeed.com.au>

INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

Please fill in your details if you consent to taking part in this on-line survey. Participation is entirely voluntary. Participants are guaranteed of their right to withdraw from participation at any time without having to give a reason and without adverse consequences. No teacher, school or school type will be identified in reports of this research. The researcher will not be interviewing any students. Research will only commence after ethics approval is finalised with both Macquarie University and the NSW DET. Participants are advised that there is a risk that information transmitted on-line may be viewed by a third party. Even where responses are made anonymously, the tracking of responses, although unlikely, is possible.

I agree to take part in this research.   Date:

Name:

Position held (e.g. Head of Faculty, classroom teacher):

Number of years of training:

Qualifications and where obtained:

Year 12 English subjects taught in last 5 years:

Name of School:

Email address:

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Ethics Review Committee (Human Research). If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Research Ethics Officer (telephone [02] 9850 7854, fax [02] 9850 8799, email: *ethics@.mq.edu.au*). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

RESEARCH SURVEY—HOW DO LITERARY THEORIES INFLUENCE THE TEACHING OF YEAR 12 ENGLISH?

YOUR VIEW OF LITERARY THEORY

Which of the following statements most closely resembles your overall stance on literary theories in senior English? Please indicate the strength of your agreement/disagreement with each of the statements.

- I do not consider literary theory relevant to my teaching of senior English;

- None of these theories captures what I do in the classroom;

- I eclectically use whatever components of literary theory (or resulting strategies) connect effectively with my programs;

- I teach/practise the literary theories I observe in the syllabus;

- I teach/practise some literary theories which are not explicitly prescribed by the syllabus;

- I practise some literary theories and reject others;

- I shape my classroom approach to reflect specific literary theories;

- I am more interested in my students' needs than in literary theory;

- Other individual responses not covered by the above. Please specify.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The English syllabus

A. What effects do you think literary theories have on the subject English?

B. What literary-theoretical base/s do you see as underpinning the senior English syllabus under which you work?

C. What are the sources of your knowledge about the theoretical base(s) of the HSC English syllabus?

Your theoretical position:

D. What literary theories do you see yourself as holding?

E. Do your classroom practices reflect your views on various literary theories? How?

F. How do you adapt your practice to reflect changes in prevailing literary theories?

Conflicts

G. What do you do if you are teaching from a syllabus but are not in agreement with

H. some or all of its theoretical premises?

I. Have you seen a range of literary theories and approaches come and go during your

time as a teacher?

J. What do you do if you believe that a syllabus still shows the influence of a theory

which may have been substantially discredited or even abandoned by its originator

and/or former key proponents?

K. What do you where you think a syllabus is strongly influenced by literary theories

which you do not hold or practise yourself?

L. Of the theories in the Glossary supplied are there any you would like to express a

view on, with regards to their impact on the teaching of Year 12 English? Or other

theories? Please be specific.

M. Implications for students

N. What do you observe as the effects of particular literary theories or clusters of

theories in Year 12 English on

a. students' grasp of ideas which may be important for assessment purposes

b. students' approaches to text

c. overall student confidence about studying English?

Perspectives on English

The NSW Board of Studies website outlines four perspectives from which the English syllabus has arisen. These are summarized below, and explained at the URL <http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/archives/forum_hscenglish98/perspectives_eng.html>

The article in which these approaches are outlined makes no assumptions about the relative weightings of these four approaches, and recognizes there is some overlap between them. (Feel free to indicate different percentages for General/Advanced/Extension if desired, and to add any explanatory comments.)

O. If you had autonomy in this area, roughly what percentage of your Year 12 class time would reflect each of these approaches?

P. Working under the existing syllabus, roughly what percentage of your Year 12 class time does currently reflect each of these approaches?

FOUR PERSPECTIVES ON ENGLISH

The cultural heritage approach

emphasises the transmission of culturally significant texts, values and ideas.

The personal growth approach

emphasises the value of language and literature in enriching students' lives.

The cultural analysis approaches

emphasise that language and texts embody cultural and political assumptions such as those of gender, or class, which need to be read as part of meaning-making and are all culturally constructed.

The literacy approach

emphasises the development of literacy skills.

http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/archives/forum_hscenglish98/perspectives_eng.html Accessed 15.03.2007

Appendix C
Principal's Letter

HOW DO LITERARY THEORIES INFLUENCE THE TEACHING OF

YEAR 12 ENGLISH?

Dear Principal,

I am undertaking doctoral research with the Australian Centre for Educational

Studies at Macquarie University in order to explore if and how literary theories affect

the teaching of Year 12 English. The research is being carried out under the supervision

of Professor George Cooney (02 9850 8666, george.cooney@mq.edu.au) and Dr Sue

Duchesne. This research will examine the impact that literary theories in the senior

English curriculum have on teachers' views of their subject, their classroom practice

and their morale, and to explore how this may influence their perceptions of student

confidence and understanding of classroom material and approaches.

The research has been prompted by current controversies about the teaching of

English in the final two years of school. Recent newspaper articles have highlighted

some of the concerns teachers have about literary theories affecting the teaching of

senior English and some other research confirms that many teachers feel threatened by the current use of literary theories which may be replaced at some point in the future.

The research encompasses a large scale survey of 50% of secondary schools in New South Wales and a smaller number of schools from the other states, augmented by a small number of telephone interviews. Within each school chosen in the survey the Head Teacher of English and two other English teachers who are currently teaching, or have taught, Year 12 English will be invited to complete an online questionnaire (http://borrodale.homedns.org/~irish/index.htm). This questionnaire, which comprises responses to a series of statements and open-ended questions, should take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

I am inviting your school to participate in the study.

If you agree to your school participating in the study I would like you to forward the attached information letter to your Head Teacher of English and two other English teachers. Their participation, and that of your school, is entirely voluntary and you and they can withdraw your/their consent at any time without having to give a reason and without adverse consequences.

Feedback from this research questionnaire will be available as a website summary at the same web address which was used to access the survey.

As participants will be responding to an online survey they will not be identified unless they agree to being interviewed at some future time. The confidentiality of respondents and of the school is thus guaranteed in the reporting of the results of the research. For this purpose less than 10% of respondents are likely to be invited to take part in a telephone interview lasting about 20 minutes. While the researcher will know the identity and school of the small number of teachers interviewed, no individual or school will be identified in reports of this research.

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Ethics Review Committee (Human Research). If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Research Ethics Officer (telephone 02 9850 7854, fax 02 9850 8799, ethics@mq.edu.au). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

The research has been approved by the New South Wales Department of Education and Training and the Catholic Education Offices of the dioceses of Sydney, Parramatta, Broken Bay and Wollongong and a copy of the relevant approval is attached.

I hope that you will allow your school to participate in what is an interesting and important piece of research which will inform the teaching of Year 12 English and subsequent curriculum development.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter. If you have any questions please contact me or my supervisor.

Jill Ireland

Australian Centre for Educational Studies

Macquarie University

(02) 6492 0162

english.research@netspeed.com.au

I have read the information letter and agree to my school participating in the research study, ***How Do Literary Theories Influence The Teaching Of Year 12***

English?. I know that my participation is entirely voluntary and I can withdraw my

consent at any time without having to give a reason and without adverse consequences.

Name:

School:

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie

University Ethics Review Committee (Human Research). If you have any complaints

or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may

contact the Committee through the Research Ethics Officer (telephone 02 9850 7854,

fax 02 9850 8799, *ethics@mq.edu.au*). Any complaint you make will be treated in

confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Appendix D
Information Letter for Participating Teachers

HOW DO LITERARY THEORIES INFLUENCE THE TEACHING OF YEAR 12 ENGLISH?

I am undertaking doctoral research with the Australian Centre for Educational Studies at Macquarie University in order to explore if and how literary theories affect the teaching of Year 12 English. The research is being carried out under the supervision of Professor George Cooney (02 9850 8666, george.cooney@mq.edu.au) and Dr Sue Duchesne. This research will examine the impact that literary theories in the senior English curriculum have on your views of your subject, your classroom practice and your morale, and to explore how this may influence your perceptions of student confidence and understanding of classroom material and approaches.

The research encompasses a large scale survey of 50% of secondary schools in New South Wales and a smaller number of schools from the other states, augmented by a small number of telephone interviews. Within each school chosen in the survey **the Head Teacher of English and two other English teachers** who are currently teaching, or have taught, Year 12 English are invited to complete an online questionnaire (http://borrodale.homedns.org/~irish/index.htm). This questionnaire, which comprises

responses to a series of statements and open-ended questions about literary theories and

how they affect your teaching, should take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

I am inviting you to participate in the study. If you agree to participate in the

study I would like you complete the online questionnaire. <u>If you are not going to</u>

<u>complete the survey, it would be very helpful for my research if you would use the web-</u>

<u>site comments box to make a brief comment</u> on your view of how literary theory

influences the teaching of Year 12 English. I would grateful if surveys and comments

could be returned to me by **December 16^h 2008** if at all possible. Late surveys and

comments will also be gratefully accepted.

You **do not** have to give your name and contact details unless you are willing to

be interviewed at a subsequent time in order to explore some of the issues raised in the

survey responses in greater depth. Less than 10% of respondents are likely to be invited

to take part in a telephone interview lasting about 20 minutes. While the researcher will

know the identity and school of the small number of teachers interviewed, no individual

or school will be identified in reports of this research. Your participation is entirely

voluntary and you can withdraw your consent at any time without having to give a

reason and without adverse consequences. Feedback from this research questionnaire

will be available as a website summary at the same web address which was used to

access the survey.

As you will be responding to an online survey you will not be identified unless

you agree to being interviewed at some future time. The confidentiality of your

responses is thus guaranteed in the reporting of the results of the research.

There are no right or wrong answers to the questions in the survey. I am seeking

your opinions and rely on your honesty. As many literary theories have more than one

name and because the boundaries between different theories can be blurred, I have

provided a Glossary of the key characteristics of the main theories and theoretical

clusters. You are welcome to comment on theories which are not listed in the Glossary,

or describe your own personal theory or mix of theories. In answering these questions,

please focus on how these theories affect your teaching practice.

The NSW Board of Studies has outlined four perspectives on English which

underpin the Stage 6 English syllabus. These are summarised in the survey to help you

address the questions.

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie

University Ethics Review Committee (Human Research). If you have any complaints

or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may

contact the Committee through the Research Ethics Officer (telephone 02 9850 7854,

fax 02 9850 8799, ethics@mq.edu.au). Any complaint you make will be treated in

confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

The research has been approved by the New South Wales Department of

Education and Training and the Catholic Education Offices of the dioceses of Sydney,

Parramatta, Broken Bay and Wollongong.

I hope that you will participate in what is an interesting and important piece of

research which will inform the teaching of Year 12 English and subsequent curriculum

development.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter. If you have any questions

please contact me or my supervisor.

Jill Ireland

Australian Centre for Educational Studies

Macquarie University

(02) 6492 0162

english.research@netspeed.com.au

Appendix E
Phase 3 Interview Questions

TEACHERS' EXPECTATIONS, ASSUMPTIONS & VALUES

1. How much coverage of literary theories do you think is assumed, expected or required in the teaching of NSW HSC English?

2. What sorts of applications of literary theories do you think the syllabus includes, assumes or requires?

3. Has the "new" 2001 NSW HSC English syllabus brought about any change in your views or practices concerning the role of literary theories in your Year 12 classroom?

4. Have any more recent BOS documents affected your views or classroom practices with regard to literary theories?

e.g. Support documents, reports from marking centres

5. Where do you obtain your information about literary theories?

6. Where and how do you find the most useful ideas for practical classroom implementation of literary theories?

7. Whose views do you take into account when you are deciding what (if anything) you will do with literary theories in Year 12 English?

8. Any other comments about how you make decisions about the use of literary theories in your Year 12 English classes?

9. What are your views about the use of literary theories in English in the national curriculum?

ANY CLASSROOM APPLICATIONS OF THEORY?

10. Can you describe a recent lesson where you used one or more literary theories? Which ones? Why these? How did you use them?

11. Do you also use literary theories in any other ways, in your teaching or in your own studies? Which ones? How do you use them? Why or why not?

12. Do you explicitly teach your Year 12 English classes about named literary theories? Which ones and how do you teach them? Why or why not?

13. Do you teach your students how to use different literary theories in approaching texts?

Which ones, and how do you teach their use?

14. Describe the **<u>degree</u>** of importance of literary theories for your classroom practice:

SUBJECT IDENTITY AND SELF-EFFICACY

15. What is your conception of Year 12 English as a subject, of its main purposes?

16. How important are literary theories to this view?

17. Are there any specific literary theories that you think have influenced this view?

18. Are there any literary theories you are not "in tune" with? Which ones?

19. Literary theories are numerous, can conflict with each other, and can change rapidly. How does this affect you as a Year 12 English teacher?

Appendix F

Approval to Conduct Research in Schools

**STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND
PROGRAM EVALUATION BUREAU**

NEW SOUTH WALES
DEPARTMENT
OF EDUCATION
AND TRAINING

Mrs Jillian Ireland
94 Mountview Close
BEGA NSW 2550

Dear Mrs Ireland   SERAP Number **2006140**

I refer to your application to conduct a research project in New South Wales government schools entitled *What influence do literary theories have on the teaching of Year 12 English?*. I am pleased to inform you that your application has been approved. You may now contact the Principals of the nominated schools to seek their participation.

This approval will remain valid until 1/08/2011.

No researchers or research assistants have been screened to interact with or observe children for the purposes of this research. You should include a copy of this letter with the documents you send to schools.

I draw your attention to the following requirements for all researchers in New South Wales government schools:

- School Principals have the right to withdraw the school from the study at any time. The approval of the Principal for the specific method of gathering information for the school must also be sought.
- The privacy of the school and the students is to be protected.
- The participation of teachers and students must be voluntary and must be at the school's convenience.
- Any proposal to publish the outcomes of the study should be discussed with the Research Approvals Officer before publication proceeds.

When your study is completed please forward your report marked to Manager, Schooling Research, Department of Education and Training, Locked Bag 53, Darlinghurst, NSW 2010.

Yours sincerely

Dr Robert Stevens
Manager Schooling Research
Student Engagement and Program Evaluation
a August 2010

Student Engagement and Program Evaluation Bureau
NSW Department of Education and Training
Level 3, 1 Oxford Street, Darlinghurst NSW 2010 – Locked Bag 53, Darlinghurst NSW 1300

Telephone: 02 9244 5619– Fax: 02 9266 8233 – Email: serap@det.nsw.edu.au

Appendix G

Ethics Approval for Research

MACQUARIE
UNIVERSITY ~ SYDNEY

Mrs Jill Ireland
PO Box 269
Bega NSW 2550

4 July 2007

Dear Mrs Ireland

FINAL APPROVAL LETTER

Title of Project: The influence of literacy theories on the teaching of year 12 English in New South Wales schools
Reference Number: HE22JUN2007-D05299

Thank you for your recent correspondence. Your responses have satisfactorily addressed the outstanding issues raised by the Committee. You may now proceed with your research. This approval is subject to the following condition:

1. Please forward copies of the approvals from the NSW Department of Education and Training and the Catholic Education Commission to the Committee when they become available.

Please note the following standard requirements of approval:

1.   Approval will be for a period of twelve months. At the end of this period, if the project has been completed, abandoned, discontinued or not commenced for any reason, you are required to submit a Final Report on the project. If you complete the work earlier than you had planned you must submit a Final Report as soon as the work is completed. The Final Report is available at http://www.ro.mq.edu.au/ethics/human/forms.

2. However, at the end of the 12 month period if the project is still current you should instead submit an application for renewal of the approval if the project has run for less than five (5) years. This form is available at http://www.ro.mq.edu.au/ethics/human/forms If the project has run for more than five (5) years you cannot renew approval for the project. You will need to complete and submit a Final Report (see Point 1 above) and submit a new application for the project. (The five year limit on renewal of approvals allows the Committee to fully re-review research in an environment where legislation, guidelines and requirements are continually changing, for example, new child protection and privacy laws).

3.   Please remember the Committee must be notified of any alteration to the project.

4.   You must notify the Committee immediately in the event of any adverse effects on participants or of any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

5. At all times you are responsible for the ethical conduct of your research in accordance with the guidelines established by the University (http://www.ro.mq.edu.au/ethics/human).

6. If you will be applying for or have applied for internal or external funding for the above project it is your responsibility to provide Macquarie University's Grants Officer with a copy of this letter as soon as possible. The Grants Officer will not inform external funding agencies that you have final approval for your project and funds will not be released until the Grants Officer has received a copy of this final approval letter.

CRO File: 07/714   ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE (HUMAN RESEARCH)   Portrait (85%
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY (E11A)
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Yours sincerely

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