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Teachers' perceptions of the influence of assessment on the teaching of Year 9 English

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Acknowledgement

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ABSTRACT

In 2014 the implementation of the new NSW English K-10 syllabus for the Australian Curriculum is underway. A new curriculum can be used as a vehicle for educational change and reform (Fehring & Nyland, 2012). However, studies of the implementation of syllabus change in Australia demonstrate this is not always achieved successfully or fully (Watson, 1978; Albright & Knezevic, 2013). Assessment is an important component of the work of teachers and a measurement of the extent to which students are achieving the curriculum's outcomes and the inclusion of students assessing their own learning is an innovative element. This invites investigation into how teachers perceive assessment influences their classroom practices. How can teachers enable students to "let learn" (Heidegger, 1968, p. 15) given the pressures of assessment and the implementation of a new English syllabus?

This small case study offers a snapshot of the early implementation of the new NSW English K-10 syllabus in Year 9 while highlighting the local context, the role of assessment and individual teachers' perceptions of the phenomena of curriculum change. The participants are drawn from one English faculty employed in a single sex school in the Sydney metropolitan area. An online survey and one-to-one interviews are undertaken. Thematic analysis of data from an interpretivist paradigm identifies the emergent issues. Teachers' perceptions of various forms of assessment and the role these play in the classroom can impact on the way in which a curriculum is delivered. Classroom and assessment practices may influence whether teachers feel empowered to reconceptualise the ways a curriculum and its potential assessment can be used to provide them with a greater sense of professional autonomy.

CHAPTER I   INTRODUCTION

1.1. Overview

An important focus for school-based education is to improve student learning and assessment is one method used by teachers to achieve this. Improvement in student learning is governed by the ways we assess the extent to which students have achieved the learning outcomes of a particular course of study. These outcomes are governed by the curriculum presented through the form of a state syllabus in a content area and its specific requirements for the ways that students can be assessed. Therefore, there is an inextricable relationship between teaching, learning, and assessment, and the nature of this relationship in practice is worth investigating.

Assessment can be used to guide the direction teaching and learning will take. Assessment can be used to reflect on the extent to which teaching has enabled students to learn and assessment can be used to evaluate the extent to which students have achieved the learning outcomes. In addition, assessment can be used as a form of accountability, by using standardised tests to measure the extent to which students are meeting benchmarks.

The new NSW English K-10 syllabus for the Australian Curriculum (Board of Studies, NSW, 2012) is being implemented in 2014 and replaces the English Years 7-10 syllabus (Board of Studies, NSW, 2003). This new syllabus includes the agreed Australian

Curriculum content and the content that outlines the learning for English from Kindergarten to Year 10 and is explained in Stage Statements. The syllabus also includes assessment and reporting information. The syllabus is structured around objectives and outcomes and is organized in stages from Early Stage 1 to Stage 5. The syllabus aims to address the diverse needs of all students and the outcomes cover the essential knowledge, understanding, skills, values and beliefs required of students to succeed in school and beyond. The document provides for teachers to deliver the syllabus from different theoretical perspectives and models for teaching English. (Board of Studies NSW, 2012, p.13)

1.2 The Aims and Objectives of this Study

The aims of this study were to establish teachers' perceptions of the influence of assessment in their teaching of Year 9 English. The impact of these different types of assessment provoked interest in the implementation of the new NSW English K-10 syllabus for the Australian curriculum (Board of Studies NSW, 2012) and the inclusion of three distinct types of assessment: assessment for, as and of learning included in this document (Keeves, 1988).

There are many assessment strategies available to teachers as part of their everyday practice and an effective use of a range of assessment practices can ensure students are provided with accurate information to both guide and judge their learning. The new NSW English K-10 syllabus includes three specific types of assessment. When used together in a recursive cycle of teaching and learning, these three forms of assessment can be used to elicit improvement in student learning.

As well as the central focus on assessment, the objective of this study is to investigate the opinions of teachers about implementing a new English syllabus. This is particularly significant because for the first time the NSW English K-10 syllabus (Board of Studies, 2012) is based on the Australian Curriculum: English which framed the subject into three distinct strands: language, literature and literacy. Much critical evaluation has been written on this aspect of the Australian curriculum: English, focusing on the need to ensure there is integration as opposed to fragmentation between the three. Sawyer (2010) is concerned about the possibility for fragmentation in practice and the need for English teachers to be actively informed about developments in subject English. Macken-Horarik (2011) stresses the importance of a "meta-model" of English and is concerned about the homogeneity that comes with a National Curriculum.

Additionally, some critical evaluations of the new syllabus have focused on the influence of a neo-liberal discourse of transparency and accountability through the measurement of literacy via standardised testing. This is seen to place limitations on the delivery of a subject that is distinguished by the complexity and plurality of the models of English currently available to teachers (Ditchburn, 2012; Fehring and Nyland, 2012). These critical evaluations of the syllabus are important considerations because the new English curriculum is being implemented in 2014.

1.2.1. A case study approach

This research presents the perceptions of one English faculty from a single sex comprehensive metropolitan high school in Sydney, New South Wales, about the influence of assessment on the teaching of Year 9 English. The intention of this small case study is to provide a snapshot of the influences of different forms of assessment on the teaching of

Year 9 English. These will include the three types of assessment outlined in the new NSW English K-10 syllabus (Board of Studies, NSW, 2012) and standardised testing known as the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy or NAPLAN.

According to Fehring and Nyland (2012, p.7), a new curriculum can be used "as a vehicle for educational change and reform". The extent to which a syllabus is adopted by practicing teachers has been the focus of previous studies, for example see Watson (1978) and Albright and Knezevic (2013). In this research, assessment is identified as the chief area of investigation for teacher interest. Formative assessment was included in the previous English Years 7-10 syllabus (Board of Studies, 2003) and the term was coined by Scriven (1967 cited in Perry, 2013, p. 95), followed by Sadler (1989) who refined the definition and included students as part of this evaluative process (Perry, 2013, p. 95). The inclusion of students assessing their own learning is one addition to assessment in the new NSW English K-10 syllabus for the Australian Curriculum: English (Board of Studies NSW, p.104)

1.2.2. Assessment in the new NSW English K-10 syllabus

The descriptions of the three types of assessment outlined in the new NSW English K-10 syllabus for the Australian Curriculum provides a range of ways teachers can evaluate students' learning gains. The distinctions are important to outline at this point because they establish the diversity of purposes for assessment. It is timely to ask teachers what their current perceptions of the influence of assessment are and the ways they see the roles of and relationships between these three distinct types of assessment in their classes.

1. Assessment for learning is:

- enables teachers to use information about students' knowledge, understanding and skills to inform their teaching.

- Teachers provide feedback to students about their learning and how to improve. (Board of Studies NSW, 2012, p.104)

Assessment for learning is considered to be formative because it enables teachers to establish where students are at in their learning at any time. This allows teachers to modify the pedagogical choices they make to ensure the needs of the students are being met. This also allows teachers to use a recursive cycle of teaching, learning and assessment to evaluate the extent to which the expectations of the curriculum are being reached in their classrooms.

2. Assessment as learning is:

- involves students in the learning process where they monitor their own progress, ask questions and practice skills.

- Students use self-assessment and teacher feedback to reflect on their learning, consolidate their understanding and work towards learning goals. (Board of Studies NSW, 2012, p.104).

Assessment as learning includes students into the process of evaluating their skills, knowledge and understanding. Setting goals and developing a stronger sense of their own learning journey reflects new theories of learning and potentially addresses a growing concern regarding student engagement, particularly in the middle years of schooling (Tadich, Deed, Campbell and Prain, 2007). Sawyer (2000, p.36), in a report for the Board of Studies, noted that if students are provided with the opportunity to "negotiate aspects of the curriculum", it will not only "create self-direction in early adolescent learners, but can

also play a key role in developing school cultures that produce lifelong learners and "knowledge workers"". Learning is shaped by the context in which it occurs and learners must acquire adaptive expertise by developing flexible and creative skills so that they can face the challenges of the 21st century (Dumant, Istance, Benavides, 2012). The implications of learning how to monitor and reflect on their learning therefore has much broader implications for life long learning.

3. Assessment of learning is:

- assists teachers to use evidence of student learning to assess student achievement against learning goals and standards. (Board of Studies NSW, p.104)

Assessment of learning maintains the importance of measuring students learning gains and coupled with the previous two forms of assessment places its importance in context and reduces the focus on summative assessment as the only way teachers can monitor students progress.

The inclusion of three distinct yet complementary forms of assessment in the new NSW English K-10 syllabus reflect the 2008 Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians. Successful learners are defined in the Declaration as being able to "develop their capacity to learn and play an active role in their own learning" (p. 8-9). Assessment as learning is one feature of the new English syllabus that directly addresses this goal. Additionally, the Declaration goes on to include a commitment to action, specifically, enhancing middle years development and promoting world-class curriculum and assessment.

1.2.3. Standardised External Assessment Measures

Standardised tests have the potential to direct what types of learning and teaching are occurring in schools. A national standardised test known as the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy or NAPLAN was introduced in 2008 in Australia and is held for students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 in May every year and since 2010 the results are published on a website known as the MySchool website. The purpose of the test is to "provide education authorities, schools, parents and the local community with quality data" (Senate Report, 2014, p.8).

A final report by the Education and Employment References Committee on the "Effectiveness of the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy" was delivered in March of 2014. The report's terms of reference included whether the test was achieving its stated outcomes which are to "identify students at an early age who were not meeting minimum standards in literacy and numeracy" (p.6); "the unintended consequences of the tests"; "its impact on teaching and student learning and publication of results on the MySchool website" and "potential improvements to the test and international best practice" (p.1).

The report found that the tests lacked diagnostic effectiveness due in part to the four-month turnaround between students sitting the tests and the publication of results. It was also found that teachers required more support in how to evaluate the data. The report recommends changes to the way NAPLAN tests are conducted and results disseminated to ensure the stated objectives are realised. The report also includes a number of unintended consequences of the test that challenge the stated objective. These include the creation of a preparation industry; narrowing of the curriculum and teaching to the test, with the resultant misconception that NAPLAN is a "high stakes test" (p. 13). The report

demonstrates the potentially harmful influence of external assessment measures on the teaching and learning practices in schools in Australia.

If the forms of assessment included in the new NSW English K-10 syllabus (Board of Studies, 2012) are to be used cohesively by teachers and students they must form part of the conceptual framework around the delivery of the curriculum. If they are used in isolation or if the assessment literacy of teachers and students does not include a clear understanding of the purposes and relationships between these three types of assessment it is possible that the improvement in student learning may not be achieved. In addition, external assessment measures such as standardised tests have the potential to influence and narrow the delivery of curriculum.

CHAPTER II   LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview

This chapter examines the nature of assessment, the challenge of defining subject English and the extent to which the new NSW English K-10 English syllabus (NSW Board of Studies, 2012) encompasses a broad yet inclusive curriculum. This review of existing literature and research will lay the foundation for this investigation. The starting point will be assessment, followed by subject English, and conclude with a consideration of both curriculum and syllabus.

2.2 Developments in assessment practice.

In this section the developments in assessment and in particular, of formative assessment practices, and the extent to which this type of assessment can be incorporated into teaching practice will be reviewed from the literature, both internationally and nationally. Assessment is an evaluative process of teaching and learning. When assessment, teaching and learning occur in a cyclical and recursive way, the literature suggests, they offer the potential to improve student learning and teaching practice because they require reflection about what is happening and why it is occurring in the classroom. This suggests assessment is a process of constant revision rather than a measure of achievement.

2.2.1. Defining formative assessment.

Assessment can be divided into two distinct areas: formative assessment and summative assessment. The two occur at different times in the teaching and learning cycle. Formative assessment occurs early and is used to formulate future directions for teaching practice and learning goals and it can be referred to as assessment for learning and assessment as learning. Summative assessment occurs at the end of a teaching and learning program of study as a summation of student learning and can be referred to as assessment of learning. These different types of assessment are included in the new NSW English K-10 syllabus (NSW Board of Studies, 2012) and the extent to which they can become part of an integrated approach to teaching and learning is worth investigating because the literature suggests the ways students are assessed will affect their learning (Wiliam, 2011).

One definition from the literature that provides a broad view of assessment describes assessment as a "process of gathering accurate and reliable information on the knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs of learners" (Berry and Adamson, 2001, p. v). Missing from the definition is the complexity of assessing these four separate aspects of learning. Assessing the knowledge and skills of learners may well require different types of assessment than that used to assess their attitudes and beliefs. This immediately suggests that there needs to be a range of possibilities for the ways that the judgment of a student's learning is arrived at. Formative assessment attempts to combine assessment practices that can establish an integrated approach aligning teaching practice with learning goals (OECD, 2013) in a recursive process rather than appearing as a summative product. The focus of this review will be on the literature about formative assessment practices.

2.2.2. Testing and early models of formative assessment

Formative assessment and its purposes have developed over time and are considered to be a more effective means of gathering information about learning than those offered by the older "psychometric model of assessment"(Gipps, 1994, p.30) because formative assessment practices are designed to be responsive to the needs of students or their future capabilities rather than a summative measure of their current abilities (Gipps, 1994). Scriven (1967) is credited in the literature with the first conceptualization of assessment as a formative process, by coining the term 'formative' (Perry, 2013, p.95) when describing the evaluation of educational programs. This was perceived as being the "successive adaptations of a new programme" in an educational setting (Allal and Lopez, 2005, p.2). Thus the use of the term formative indicates a need for reflection about teaching practice based on making a judgement about the previous experience of practice. Bloom is credited with expanding the concept by including the word 'assessment' (Perry, 2013, p.95) as part of educational evaluation. From these beginnings, formative assessment is now used rather than evaluation when referring to "student learning in the classroom" (Allal and Lopez, 2005, p.2) and the term has gained clarity in its functions and processes (Taras and Davis, 2012).

Sadler (1989) expanded upon this notion of formative assessment of a programme of study by including the qualitative appraisal of student outcomes by using more than one type of criteria. These innovations included the use of feedback, exemplars and the importance for students to understand the criteria by which they were being judged. In addition, Sadler included students in this process by providing them with aspirational but achievable goals. Sadler's intention with these strategies was to free the students from their reliance on the teacher and be able to objectively evaluate their work. These early models see "students' learning potential" as the focus rather than the alternative psychometric model of normative grading with its focus on "social comparison and competition between students

which accompanies it" (Gipps, 1994, p.39). It is Sadler's conceptualization of formative assessment that will be used to guide the review of the literature because it includes both teachers and students in a recursive process.

2.2.3. Formative assessment and testing

Gipps (1994, p.27) provides a contextual frame for the emergence of formative assessment practices arguing that adaptable and flexible learners are required today. This is coupled with research supporting the findings that higher order critical thinking is not dependent upon firstly acquiring basic skills. This is in response to the unique challenges of modern industrialised societies. She cites Vygotsky's learning theory as the place to begin "conceptualizing models of assessment" in order to address emerging research on the needs and abilities of learners in the classroom. This constructivist approach to classroom practice is also reiterated in the literature on formative assessment. In addition, Gipps recognises the importance of the metacognitive processes of learners as part of assessment practices, reiterating Sadler's (1989) need for the inclusion of students in any formative assessment model.

Gipps' (1994, p.35) contribution to the literature on formative assessment introduces the relationship between the purposes of assessment and their relationship with teaching and learning. She found that testing such as high stakes testing as opposed to assessment, impacts upon teaching and curriculum. The real consequences of this testing, Gipps argues, is contained within the "symbolic value" of the test itself and what results is a drill and skill preparatory "defacto" curriculum. This is a significant finding because the delivery of the new NSW English K-10 syllabus (Board of Studies, 2012) with its inclusion of formative assessment is being implemented at a time when standardised testing has been in place nationally since 2008 via NAPLAN.

Gipps suggests the agency of teachers and students within a testing culture are more limited than the agency afforded to both and central to formative assessment practices. The challenge, as Gipps sees it, is how to provide authentic formative assessment when it must exist alongside high stake testing, as a valid and reliable source of information about student learning. Black and Wiliam (1998) extend the argument by Gipps (1994) about testing by addressing the limited value of a test if the information from the test is not used to give feedback about learning and is used for summative purposes only. This reiterates the argument that if students are only able to passively receive information about their current abilities then they are not given recourse to actively pursue future capabilities. This introduces the relationship between assessment, teaching and learning as being a cyclical process. By extension, the ways teachers perceive how students learn will directly influence the way they assess them.

Black and Wiliam's (1998, p.10) seminal review of the literature of formative assessment offers a detailed discussion on some specific examples of formative assessment practices. The key words in their definition of formative assessment are the "feedback" provided to "modify" both the teaching and learning activities occurring in a classroom. The uses of feedback are central to their concept of formative assessment and they reiterate Gipps' (1994, p.124) assertion of the importance of a "constructivist" classroom for formative assessment to occur, as again students must be involved in self-assessment.

The feedback provided therefore needs to be informative, guiding students towards improvement in their abilities and differentiated, by targeting individual student need. In this version of feedback, students are not "passive recipients" (Black and Wiliam, 1998, p.21) of the information but rather must be motivated to improve their learning. Motivation

is a complex concept and Black and Wiliam (1998) discuss this within the context of mastery and performance orientation and suggest motivation is linked with students' perceptions about their ability to succeed. In this review of the literature, the concept of motivation or student engagement is viewed through the theme of agency and efficacy of both teachers and students (Marks, 2000).

Hargreaves (2005) addresses the relationship between the ways teachers perceive the role of assessment and the ways this links to theories of learning by surveying 83 teachers and head teachers in England. She found six specific definitions from their responses with "two distinct meanings for assessment…extrapolated: assessment as measurement, and assessment as inquiry" (p.218). The majority of the responses saw assessment for learning from a measurement perspective and Hargreaves linked this to behaviourist theories of learning and contextually to the adoption of a National Curriculum in the UK in 1988. She argues that a national curriculum involves "conformity and standardization" (p.223). This view of formative assessment consequently limits the opportunity to perceive alternative possibilities for formative assessment, particularly assessment as inquiry modeled on constructivist theories of learning. Hargreaves (2005) acknowledges the significance of the influence of government and policy on conceptualisations of assessment and learning in practice.

The literature reviewed thus far has presented formative assessment as the ongoing, reflective modification of practice by teachers, the inclusion of students in assessing their own learning by articulating goals and the importance of feedback in providing future directions within a constructivist classroom. Allal and Lopez (2005) in a report, published by the OECD about the French language literature on formative assessment, acknowledge the importance of a constructivist classroom and of the teacher in establishing formative

assessment practices. They also make a specific distinction between formative assessment, as stemming from the influence of Bloom (1968) who saw formative assessment as the "remediation of learning difficulties"(Allal and Lopez, 2005, p.6) and with Cardinet (1977) who sees formative assessment as the "regulation of learning" (Allal and Lopex, 2005, p.6) focusing on differentiation of instruction. This conceptualization of formative assessment reflects a constructivist rather than behaviourist model echoing Hargreaves' (2005) finding that particular theories of learning influence the perceptions about the role of assessment. These studies call for a need to link theories of learning more clearly to practice as the teacher directly influences assessment practices and they argue for more controlled experimental research on formative assessment.

The definitions provided in the new NSW English K-10 syllabus (Board of Studies, 2012) would be an appropriate place to start conceptualising the role of formative assessment into teaching practice in an English classroom. Drawing upon the review of literature, the challenge would appear to be in creating a classroom that enables teachers and students to engage in consistent reflection on their own practices in cyclical or recursive ways using formative assessment measures and the shared goal of improving learning.

2.2.4. Challenges to the integration of formative assessment into practice.

Three specific challenges facing the implementation of authentic formative assessment in the classroom are competing theories of learning, high stakes testing, and national curriculum. The need for more empirical evidence about the ways formative assessment can be integrated into practice is reiterated by both, Torrance (2006) and Wiliam (2011). It was noted by Wiliam (2011, p.13) that the "impact of assessment practices was to limit, even reduce, student learning". It would seem that some of the types of assessment

practices in use are impeding the learning of students, despite evidence to suggest there are specific assessment strategies available to improve student learning. This is worth further investigation.

Wiliam (2011, p.6) also discusses the nature and role of feedback with evidence from other studies used to suggest feedback reports are most effective when they are "focused on the details of the focal task and when they involve goal-setting". This again reiterates the active role students must play in any formative assessment strategy in that they need to actively shape their learning goals. Wiliam also argues the problem with implementing effective formative assessment stems from a lack of consensus when defining its nature and uses, and also in finding ways to provide the most effective form of feedback.

Additionally, teacher assessment literacy is cited by both Price (2010) in her review of Stobart's work (2008) and by Willis, Adie and Klenowski (2013) as another area that requires further consideration. Willis, Adie and Klenowski (2013, p.242) define teacher assessment literacy as "social practice that involves teachers articulating and negotiating classroom and cultural knowledges with one another and with learners…" Price (2010) argues in order for formative assessment to achieve its aim of "integrating assessment within the learning and teaching process so as to support the learner" (p.336) then both teachers and students need to ensure they have sound "assessment literacy" (p.337). According to Willis, Adie and Klenowski (2013), teacher assessment literacy must be connected with the teacher's theories of learning in order to develop a shared understanding of the role of assessment in classroom practice for enhancing students' learning.

Hume and Coll (2009) present their findings from two case studies into "student-experienced curriculum" in New Zealand. The study examined inquiry based learning of science and explored its ability to contribute to scientific literacy goals as part of the national educational and curriculum reforms in New Zealand. Two large secondary schools, similar in demographics regarding numbers of students and ethnicity, were the basis of their investigation. Using an interpretivist-based methodology with qualitative research methods of unobtrusive observation, semi-structured interviews and document analysis, two teachers and 4-5 Year 11 students participated in the study. The results indicated students' attitudes towards formative assessment were "ambivalent" (p.280) and they were unable to successfully evaluate their learning. Other findings suggested the students were more concerned about finding the right answer to the task than with the process of learning. The teachers were concerned about the time constraints associated with the completion of a unit and were unable to adapt programs to meet the "students' emerging learning needs" (p.284).

The results of this case study offer insight because the formative assessment practice used was directly linked to a summative assessment task and this reflects Hargreaves' (2005) finding that assessment is perceived as a measurement of student learning rather than as an inquiry into the needs of the students.

An Australian study in Queensland conducted by Willis (2011) explores the "shift from a measurement to a learning focus" (399) by drawing on a 2008 PhD research inquiry into middle school classrooms in Queensland. The study "sought to explore the ways teachers can help learners find affiliation with their expectations and negotiate an identity of a learner in the classroom culture through AfL" (p.403). The findings from this study suggest "autonomy was defined differently by each teacher and reflected the teachers'

preferences for learning" (p.405). Additionally, the extent to which the students accepted the teacher's goals was perceived as the extent to which they embraced assessment for learning practices. It appears the researchers used participation as a measure of student engagement. There was limited evidence of the students gaining more autonomy as a consequence of their participation. Rather it appeared that they met the expectations of the teacher's beliefs of a fully participating student. This highlights the argument that teachers need to articulate a clear assessment literacy to ensure there is a shared understanding between the teachers and students regarding the relationship between teaching, learning and assessment in the conduct of classroom activities.

Taras and Davies (2012) examined the role of the learner in assessment and were motivated by the limited amount of theory linked to practice that exists in the literature. They acknowledge that the views "about assessment, learning and teaching have changed radically in the past 50 years" (p.51) and that one of the most challenging aspects is to create environments and practices where learners can take an active role. These researchers distributed a questionnaire to 50 lecturers in health and life sciences in a Science faculty at an English University in 2010. The results of the questionnaire found the participants lacked a clear understanding about the role and purpose of assessment. They suggest, "there is a real danger in compartmentalization of the various facets that together make up the broad topic that is assessment" (p.59). This finding confirms both the importance and the challenges of integrating assessment effectively into classroom practice, and like Hargreaves (2005), it demonstrates the need for teachers to be able to link their assessment practices with learning goals thereby improving their own assessment literacy (Willis, Adie and Klenowski, 2013).

2.2.5. Conclusions on assessment

Formative assessment is predicated on the belief that teaching, learning and assessment are integrated into everyday classroom practice in order to guide and improve student learning. The challenge is to ensure teachers and students have the necessary assessment literacy to enable such practices.

2.3 Subject English and the new NSW English K-10 Syllabus.

In this section of the review, the role and definitions of subject English beginning with Dixon's seminal work (1967) will be discussed. The developments in curriculum and syllabus in English in Australia with a particular focus on the literature about the implementation of the national curriculum and the impact of standardised testing on the delivery of the new NSW English K-10 syllabus (Board of Studies, 2012) will also be discussed.

2.3.1. Defining subject English

According to Watson (1994), the 1966 Dartmouth seminar produced one of the most influential books on subject English, John Dixon's *Growth through English* and the Personal Growth model which emerged from this conference has had an impact on the NSW English syllabus since 1971 (Sawyer, 2008). This model of English focuses on the experiences of discovery, creativity and activity and is strongly framed around a student-centered curriculum where the processes of learning are paramount and flexibility in the delivery of subject English in the classroom is required (Dixon, 1967).

Since the creation of this seminal work on subject English more 'models' of subject English have been introduced, two examples include critical literacy and notions of discourse (Sawyer, 2008). However, the real challenge for teachers of subject English, according to the literature is twofold. Firstly, it is not simply picking and choosing which model suits best, but rather the ability to integrate these into a "meta-model" of English (Sawyer and McFarlane, 2000; Macken-Horarik, 2011) and secondly, the importance for teachers of subject English to be well versed in the developments and philosophies underpinning these models (Dixon, 1967; Peel and Hargreaves, 1995). This is especially necessary in the current climate of a more hegemonic vision of English influencing the delivery of the subject via a National Curriculum and national standardised testing (Ditchburn, 2012; Cumming, Kimber and Wyatt-Smith, 2012; Fehring and Nyland, 2012).

2.3.2. Implementation of English syllabus in Australia

Subject English cannot be easily defined, it is not simply about facts to be learned, memorised and retrieved, it is more than just skill development and content knowledge (Peel & Hargreaves, 1995; Peel et al 2000; Sawyer, 2008; Macken-Horarik, 2011; Moni, 2012; Dixon, 2012). Patterson suggests the difficulty in defining subject English is because from "its emergence, it has represented a curriculum territory that is not solely, or even importantly, linked to a knowledge content…[and] does not readily lend itself to 'testing' (Peel, Patterson and Gerlach, 2000 p. 238). Additionally, from its earliest beginnings in Australia as a secondary subject, "it was (and is) a subject where students learn to relate to themselves, to others and to the world in particular ways. Literature just happens to have become the 'tool' for that learning" (Peel, Patterson and Gerlach, 2000, p. 237). Watson (1994, p.38) provides an in-depth analysis of the progression of English as a secondary school subject and notes the importance of the works of Holbrook (1961); Marshall (1963);

Whitehead (1966) and Dixon (1968). This period is credited with establishing a 'new' English defined as "consisting primarily of experience and involvement…based upon the centrality of the child's experience"(p. 39).

Watson (1994, p.41) conducted a study in 1978 on the implementation process of the 1971 syllabus and found "that there had been but a partial implementation of it in most schools" attributing this to criticism of declining standards of literacy and a rise in support for a 'back-to-basics' model. Sawyer (2008, p.332) cites a research study of highly successful (in terms of academic outcomes) English faculties during the transition from the 1987 syllabus to the 2002 syllabus and found that, "curriculum was the result of shared and deliberate intellectual work, and the testing ground of its success was the extent to which it met the needs of students as well as addressing the external compulsions of syllabus change and innovation". Demonstrably absent from this is the influence of external testing and public perception.

A recent study by Albright and Knezevic (2013, p.112) investigates the way the new national English and Mathematics curricula have been interpreted and enacted by systems and schools. Their investigation considers whether the diversity in the needs of students and individual school contexts are challenged by the "economically-driven curriculum". The results of their online survey suggest that teachers use the syllabus document often and suggest the importance the syllabus has in their teaching practice.

Albright and Knezevic (2013, p.119) make the observation that "the survey items and assessment by teachers across the data highlights the (increasing) role standardised testing plays in mediating teachers' work". Teachers consistently identified assessment as an issue not specifically addressed in the survey but it was described as "front and centre" of

teachers' thinking about the new curriculum and making "explicit" connections between "the activities and assessments" being taught. The implication here is that teachers are seeking more support about the nature and types of assessment required in their delivery of the new curriculum materials.

This study suggests there is the potential for teachers to embrace change and to use the new curriculum implementation as an opportunity to improve their practice through pedagogical rather than content driven reform. The way they perceive the role of formative assessment is therefore worth further investigation.

2.3.3. Competing discourses in subject English

The literature on subject English is framed by two distinct discourses. Firstly, the discourse favoured in much of the literature argues for the complexity and plurality of subject English with a focus on the development of the whole child in the spirit of Dewey, Vygotsky and Dixon (Dixon, 1967; Peel, Patterson and Gerlach, 2000; Marshall, 2000; Dixon, 2012; Moni, 2012). This frame is threatened by another discourse driven by measureable improvement in literacy through the use of standardised tests such as NAPLAN.

The creation of a national curriculum and the introduction of national standardised testing in literacy in Australia since 2008 has been the subject of much discussion in the literature (see for example, Cumming, Kimber and Wyatt-Smith, 2011; Ditchburn, 2012; Fehring and Nyland, 2012; Thompson, 2013). Peel, Patterson and Gerlach (2000, p.239) provide the most succinct argument about these debates by explaining that, "one of the fears of

English teachers is that a state or national testing agenda will begin to drive curriculum and syllabus development, thus jeopardizing the freedom of individual teachers to tailor their programmes to the needs of their students". This fear has direct links back to some of the issues surrounding the implementation of authentic formative assessment, such as teacher and student efficacy when selecting learning goals. Additionally, the importance and place of feedback in the teaching and learning cycle discussed earlier.

Cumming, Kimber and Wyatt-Smith (2011, p.47) cite a 2006 study they conducted about the impact of testing on the delivery of curriculum and found that "teachers' judgments reflected the narrow focus of the test measuring national literacy benchmark performance". They argue that English and literacy are interrelated concepts and are much broader than just the print based texts used in tests like NAPLAN. They found the teachers were limited in their perspectives about what they saw as literacy, limiting further their agency to explore broader conceptualisations of literacy that include multimodal, digital, visual and listening texts. The researchers also found this version of literacy directly influenced the teachers' assessment practices.

The need for a meta-model of subject English is argued for by Cumming, Kimber and Wyatt-Smith (2012, p.10) who suggest that because standardised tests such as NAPLAN are only capable of measuring print-based literacy skills, they ignore the "multiplicity of ways currently open for composition and communication in today's world". They argue that the new literacies required include multimodal, digital, visual and listening texts are best assessed by an "explicit understanding of what constitutes development and how development is manifested in students' work, behavior and metacognitive reflection" (p.13) rather than using a test.

Cumming, Kimber and Wyatt-Smith (2011, p.48) cite their own 2006 study which found the teachers who participated in the study rarely commented on literacy skills beyond reading and writing and perceived student progress not as a recursive cycle but "along a continuum of progression". The consequences, they argue, of standardised tests are that they do not keep pace with the requirements of the modern world, echoing Gipps' (1994) discussion on the need for assessment practices to reflect current learning needs.

It becomes all the more necessary to support teachers' knowledge and understanding of the three strands of language, literature and literacy in the new NSW English K-10 syllabus (Sawyer, 2008; Macken-Horarik, 2011; Derewianka, 2012; Dixon, 2012)) and their plurality and complexity. This will better inform the pedagogical and assessment choices implemented in practice used to improve student learning in all areas of subject English encompassed by the new NSW English K-10 syllabus (Board of Studies, 2012).

2.3.4. National Curriculum and the new NSW English 7-10 syllabus in practice

In their discussions about literacy and assessment, Fehring and Nyland (2012, p.7) consider "the concept of curriculum as a vehicle for educational change and reform". This suggests the opportunity for teachers to see the implementation of a new syllabus as a time for reflection and critical consideration about their current practice. It is also the time to improve their knowledge and understanding of developments in their subject and about learning. The debates in the literature about the ways literacy can be assessed have been discussed above. Further discussion is required regarding the relationship between how an English curriculum is viewed in the literature and the ways it can be delivered in practice.

Dixon (1967, p.75) discusses syllabus and curriculum in the spirit of Dewey (1902, p.75) by emphasizing that these are more than a "guide". He states a syllabus and curriculum should not just be "the body of knowledge" but also the "process" by which this is organized. This theme of process continues in the literature (see for example, Cumming, Kimber and Wyatt-Smith, 2012). The epistemological (Macken-Horarik, 2011, p.199) perception of curriculum and syllabus as a process of learning (Sawyer, 2008) and the perception of formative assessment as a process of evaluating understanding cannot go unnoticed with their common connection to constructivist theories of learning, because they both provide a window into the ways the subject of English can be practiced in both a cyclical and recursive way.

The most recent debates in the literature are about the structuring of the Australian Curriculum: English into three strands. Sawyer and McFarlane (2000, p.4) argue for an approach to English that enables teachers to adopt various models of English available as "an appropriate approach to curriculum design". The information about what to teach contained in the new NSW English K-10 syllabus for Australian Curriculum: English (Board of studies, 2012) covered in the literature is the creation of three strands: language, literacy and literature. The main thrust of the debate is centred on this structuring and the degree to which these strands can be integrated and localized in classroom practice (Sawyer, 2010; Macken-Horarik, 2011; Derewianka, 2012; Dixon, 2012).

Sawyer (2010) identifies the most salient feature of the debate about the three-strand structure for this investigation and its relationship to assessment by citing Garth Boomer's (1996) concern about the possibilities for the curriculum to become fragmented and consequently assessed in fragmented ways. This has the potential to reduce the opportunity for students to experience more depth and complexity in their understanding. This concern

anticipates the findings of Cumming, Kimber and Wyatt-Smith's (2006, p.47) investigation where teachers' judgments about literacy were as narrow as the national tests used to measure benchmark performance. The influence of national standardised testing may affect the extent to which the new NSW English K-10 syllabus is delivered. Additionally, Sawyer (2010) goes on to stress the need for English teachers to be well informed on developments in their subject. This theme of professional development, in the form of a strong knowledge base in the history and developments in subject English and theories of learning is a consistent feature of the literature (Dixon, 1967; Sawyer, 2010).

Another feature of the discussion about a national curriculum focuses on the notion of homogeneity. According to Macken-Horarik (2011) a national curriculum could limit the diversity of the models of English utilisied and may potentially remove the agency of both the teacher and student in the quest for greater accountability and equity. Ditchburn (2012) goes further and suggests that because the Australian Curriculum: English is "disconnected from local realities" (p.259) and attempts to provide a "one-size fits all approach"(p.259) where the opportunity to provide diversity in instruction centred on the child's individual needs (Fehring and Nyland, 2012) is under threat from a neo-liberal discourse driven by competition and efficiency (Ditchburn, 2012, p.262).

The main themes in the literature about subject English focus on the discovery of meaning through activity with a range of models available for the practitioner to integrate into the classroom. The debates about the inclusion of three integrated strands of Language, Literature and Literacy into the new NSW English K-10 syllabus (Board of Studies, 2012) along with additions to assessment are worth further investigation from the perspective of those implementing it.

2.4 Curriculum as a contextual framework

In this section the broader framework of curriculum design will be discussed. Dewey (1902) and the challenges inherent in bringing the child and the curriculum together will be discussed and the relevance of his philosophy to today will be reviewed.

2.4.1. John Dewey and contemporary curriculum.

This investigation is framed by the implementation of the new NSW English K-10 syllabus for the Australia Curriculum (Board of Studies, 2012). For the first time in Australia's history, a national curriculum, in the form of separate state syllabus will be implemented. The idea of a national curriculum in Australia has been around since the 1960's, however, it was not until the 1990's that a concerted effort by federal governments to create a National Curriculum began in earnest. Snyder (2008, p.186) contextualises the historical progression of this debate citing central control of curriculum as the driving force behind curriculum reform as well as consistency across the states, efficiency through the sharing of resources and promoting unity of identity.

The implementation of a national curriculum offers the opportunity to reconsider the role curriculum plays in modern education. John Dewey (1902) was one of the first theorists to recognize the essential conflict facing educators. Dewey explores the challenges faced by teachers who are to provide meaningful learning experiences to the child derived from the curriculum in his essay, 'The Child and the Curriculum' (1902).

Dewey (1902, p.3) identifies the essential dilemma facing teachers whose daily challenge is to bring together the "unity" of the child's life with the "specializations and divisions of the curriculum". Phillips (1998, p.404) argues that these "dualism of curriculum", can be used by different groups for different purposes creating opposing viewpoints about the relationship between the child and the curriculum. This dualism of curriculum can be seen in the two discourses discussed about subject English - a meta-model versus basic literacy skills and the challenges teachers face in maintaining a student-centred curriculum. Phillips (1998, p.408) suggests the need is for a "reconceptualising" of the relationship between teaching, learning and assessment when these dualisms become fixed.

Dixon's (1967) Personal Growth Model of English offers an example of such a reconceptualising of curriculum moving from a conceptualisation of English as content to one of English as activity. This model of English offered a new way of seeing subject English and influenced the writing of the 1971 NSW English syllabus suggesting a willingness by the writers to implement change and reform (Fehring and Nyland, 2012). However, the findings by Watson (1994) suggest this is not always realised in practice, citing the dualisms still present in the discourses of subject English as one reason why this syllabus was not fully adopted in practice.

Dewey (1902, p.7) sees learning as a process that is fluid and continuously changing and adapting. Dewey's discussion on the complex relationship between the curriculum, teacher and child therefore remains relevant today and provides educators with a theoretical framework for the role curriculum plays in the learning of a child and one way they can approach the implementation of a new syllabus.

Samuel and Suh (2012, p.380) present an argument in support of Dewey's philosophy as a response to the increase in high stakes testing brought about through the "No Child Left Behind" policy in the United States of America. They argue that Dewey's relevance stems from his insistence on teaching the whole child, not just developing their ability to perform well on tests. Samuels and Suh (2012, p.375) argue that student teachers need to apply Dewey's thinking to their own teaching because, "To be an effective teacher, an educator has to be aware of where the student is in her or his development stage". They go on to identify how the needs of students in the 21st century have changed, citing Cookson (2009) who argues what students need to develop today are, "critical reflection, empirical reasoning, collective intelligence and metacognition". These arguments reflect the literature reviewed on both assessment (Gipps, 1994) and subject English (Sawyer, 2008; 2010).

The value of Dewey's words is that they still command relevance today and reflect the aims of formative assessment (Gipps, 1994; Torrance, 2006, Price, 2010; Samuel & Suh, 2012). Education is a complex and multifaceted exercise achieved, not in isolation, but in collaborative settings where students must work with their teacher in a communal environment to achieve standards and outcomes determined by other stakeholders for whom the results of learning hold value. Teachers must therefore be supported when implementing syllabus if dualisms exist in order for them to reconceptualise the way they practice.

2.5 Conclusion

Rather than seeing educational gains for students, in terms of data and measurement, more appropriate descriptors might be interpretation and appraisal, by focusing on the transition and growth of students. Dewey (1902, p.7) cautions against using gains as the endpoint of

the learning journey and he suggests that the process is as valuable as the product. In fact, of more use for the teacher is the "actual steps" taken by students along the way as it is these which can provide the most useful information to then assist them to reconstruct the learning opportunities for their students so as to ensure the product being measured is one that reflects real learning gains.

The complexity and plurality of the subject of English and the various ways in which it seems it can be interpreted by scholars and by teachers makes it more difficult to adopt one approach to assessment or to implement widespread change. To include a new view of assessment in a new syllabus creates additional complexities for teachers at a time of change. This small project investigates the ways English teachers of Year 9 students perceive their classroom practices and the approaches they take to facilitating the learning outcomes of their classes while managing a range of other contextual pressures.

CHAPTER III.   METHODOLOGY

3.1 Overview

This chapter presents the method that was used to conduct the research. This investigation used an online survey and one-to-one interviews with five teachers from the one English faculty to explore their perceptions about the influence of assessment on their teaching of Year 9 English. The context for this study is one English faculty at a time of syllabus change which includes new forms of assessment enabling students to take part in the assessment of their learning called 'assessment as learning'. In addition, Year 9 students must sit a standardised test in May known as the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy or NAPLAN. The results of these tests are also published on a website, known as the MySchool website, www.myschool.edu.au. Programs of study in 2014 for Year 9 are to be based on the new NSW English K-10 syllabus (Board of Studies, 2012) with appropriate assessment procedures. The purpose of this research was to give voice to the views of practitioners who were dealing with change and the external pressures of standardised testing.

3.1.1. Research Question:

The research question for this study: What are teachers' perceptions of the influence of assessment on the teaching of Year 9 English?

This research was designed to examine what teachers thought about the new English syllabus and its accompanying assessment requirements, particularly regarding assessment for and as learning. The purpose was to give voice to the views of participants who were dealing with syllabus changes as well as with the pressures of external assessment measures such as standardised testing. The way teachers perceive the role of assessment influences their pedagogical choices and the research suggests this reflects underlying theories of learning.

3.2 Development of the Research Method

3.2.1. Qualitative research paradigm

In order to answer the research question, this study was developed predominantly around a qualitative paradigm within an interpretivist model as the research sought to understand the experience of the participants within a specific context with theory emerging as the data are interpreted.

Educational research is conducted for the purposes of "explaining and predicting phenomena…those that impact upon teaching and learning and the operation of schools" (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005, p.1). The impact of any phenomena upon the teaching and learning within schools requires researchers to investigate the perceptions of individuals, what Krathwohl (1993) explains as, "research that describes phenomena in words instead of numbers" (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005, p.13). The qualitative methods used for this research study provided one way to explain and predict individual teachers perceptions of a phenomena (assessment) that impacts upon their teaching and learning by using their own words to investigate if any qualitative patterns and themes emerge.

The fundamental concern in this research project was to identify the participants' feelings and attitudes towards a significant change (new syllabus) to their practice at the time this change was being implemented. One of the main tasks of qualitative research "is to explicate the ways people in particular settings come to understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day-today situations (Miles & Hubermann, 11994, p.7). The small sample size and the subjective potential of the responses meant that interpretation focuses on the experience of these individuals.

According to Miles and Huberman (1994, p.1), qualitative research methods "are a source of well-grounded, rich descriptions and explanations of processes in identifiable local contexts". The qualitative data from this research provided information and explanation about the issues faced by the participants in one specific context, one faculty of English teachers who are all teaching Year 9 English. The findings from this investigation into assessment and curriculum implementation aims to illuminate areas required for further research.

3.2.2. Approach

This research was developed as a small case study involving one English faculty, specifically targeting teachers of Year 9 English who are responsible for implementing the new NSW English K-10 syllabus for the Australian Curriculum: English. The participants were invited to complete an online survey of 30 minutes duration asking them both closed and open-ended questions. They were then interviewed for 20 minutes with questions developed from responses to the survey. Questions were designed to elicit participants' perceptions of the influence of assessment on their teaching practice with Year 9 English

and the ways they are implementing the new curriculum and assessment for, as, and of learning methods. The participants were given one week to complete the online survey and submit their response; they were then contacted to arrange a one-to-one interview in person during a free period at their school.

3.3. Research Design

3.3.1. The Sample and the Participants

The teachers of Year 9 English from one English faculty in a suburban Sydney school volunteered to be part of this investigation. Five people participated in this survey, four were female and one was male. Non-gender specific pseudonyms were used. These include:

- Drew who has been teaching for 8 years.

- Taylor, who has been teaching for 20 years and holds the position of Assistant to the Year 9 Leader of Learning.

- Ashley, who has been teaching for 30 years in schools prior to that Ashley was teaching in business. Ashley was the Coordinator of English at the time of the study.

- Alex who has been teaching for 30 years.

- Sam who has been teaching for 3 years.

- Two of the participants hold a Diploma of Education, two hold a Bachelor of Education and one holds a Bachelor of Teaching. All five participants hold a Bachelor of Arts.

The school was established in the mid 1970's and it is located in a low to middle class area in the greater west of Sydney. It is a comprehensive single sex Catholic girls school with approximately 1000 students. There is a mix of socio-economic background and though it serves a predominantly white, anglo-celtic community, there is a multicultural mix of Asian, African and Mediterranean students. The school serves a wide catchment area with many students travelling to the school from surrounding suburbs. Last year the school introduced the completion of the Progressive Achievement Test in Reading or PAT-R developed and distributed by the Australian Council for Educational Research or ACER. This is a system wide initiative and the test is completed by all students in Year 1 through to Year 10 in all schools in the local diocese and the results are collated and accessed via a website.

Bell states, "The number of subjects in your investigation will necessarily depend on the amount of time you have" (1993, p.82). The sample was taken from the researcher's school using teachers of Year 9 English due in part to the limited size of the research project and the completion time of this study. Teachers of Year 9 English were invited to participate in the study, and 5 agreed. While the sample size could be seen as a limitation of the research and Wiersma and Jurs (2005, p.163) argue the population to be sampled "must be selected so that valid inferences can be made to the population and to any subpopulations", the data produced by this survey still have implications for the specific school under investigation and can be used as a snapshot of the ways one faculty has approached change and reform within a local context.

3.3.2. Survey

An online survey was created for the first stage in the research in order to gauge the participants' perceptions of the influence of assessment on their teaching practice as well as their attitudes towards the new NSW English K-10 syllabus (Board of Studies, 2012) and NAPLAN. Researchers use surveys to gather information about participants' thoughts, feelings, beliefs and perceptions (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005). As Jones states (1999, p.321), "the purpose of them [surveys] is almost always to find out what is going on out there, what people are thinking or doing, and perhaps how things are changing". The survey was selected here as a suitable instrument as it can provide a way of "getting a picture of the current state of a group" (Jones, 1999, p.321).

The survey also included two questions created by Dulfer, Polesel and Rice, (2012) "The Experience of Education: The impacts of high stakes testing on school students and their families. An Educator's Perspective." Their investigation was designed to gather educators' views about the NAPLAN tests. Their survey was completed by 8553 respondents and the respondents came from every state and territory in Australia. These questions were included because this previous research could "account conceptually for the phenomenon under investigation…it is this conceptual framework [influence of assessment] that serves to focus and restrict the collection of data (Keeves, 1988, p. 515). This investigation aims to investigate the role of both internal and external assessment procedures within classroom practice and this previous survey established the influence of external assessment measures like NAPLAN on teaching practice.

The decision to narrow the focus of the survey to assessment and to Year 9 English teachers was taken because this Year was targeted as one of the first groups to experience the new NSW English K-10 syllabus while also completing NAPLAN. Given, the time

frame for this research project was limited, the sample and focus also needed to be manageable.

The survey was used to establish a preliminary understanding of teachers' perceptions of assessment and the new NSW English K-10 syllabus at a time when this process was underway. It aimed to gauge their understanding and attitudes to the three specific types of assessment and NAPLAN. The information obtained from the survey was used to inform the next stage of the research, the interviews.

3.3.3. *Construction of the Survey Questionnaire*

The survey questionnaire was constructed using the format provided by Johnson and Christensen (2008) with both closed and open questions used. It was a self-administered survey using Google forms to create an online questionnaire. After viewing other online survey design instruments, Google forms were chosen because they are easy to develop and to use, you can add as many questions as you need with no cost involved. Responses are automatically sent to a spreadsheet and the quantitative data are summarized into pie charts, bar graphs and percentages. After the consent forms were distributed to the English staff via the Head of the Department to avoid any conflict of interest, as the researcher is also a member of the faculty, the online questionnaire was emailed to all participants. Participants were given one week to complete the survey and submit their responses. The response rate to the survey was 83% with data received from 5 teachers out of a total of 6 invited participants.

The survey was structured into four parts:

- Part A 'Teaching English': included questions about the participants' experience as an English teacher. Jones (1999) recommends, "For self-administered questionnaires, it often helps to lead off with the most interesting, non-threatening questions to get people to start answering questions" (p.324). Therefore, the questions included in this section were about how many classes the respondents teach, the average number of students in each class, the number of free periods, the amount of marking they do and where they mark to gauge an understanding of their current workload and teaching commitments.

- Part B 'Year 9 English': the questions were specific to the teaching of Year 9 English and included their priorities for their class, the new NSW English K-10 syllabus and any skills specifically targeted in the area of literacy and how those skills were being targeted. These questions were designed to establish the way the respondents interpreted the new NSW English K-10 syllabus document as well as to provide information about the specific local context of the teaching of Year 9 English at the school.

- Part C 'Assessment': required respondents to explain what types of assessment for, as, and of learning they conducted in their classes, and their views about the external assessment measure of NAPLAN. The three types of assessment outlined in the syllabus document were separated into three separate questions. The questions included the definition provided by the NSW English K-10 syllabus. Two specific questions about what respondents believe to be the purpose of NAPLAN and the extent to which the respondents agree to some researchers claims that NAPLAN has a negative impact on curriculum, were taken from another survey instrument to provide valuable comparable data with the original survey by Dulfer, Polesel and Rice, (2012) "The Experience of Education: The impacts of high stakes testing on school students and their families: An Educator's perspective".

The decision to use these questions included the advice of Litwin, that "a reliable survey instrument is consistent; a valid one is correct" (cited in Fink, 2010, p.157). It was considered useful to compare the results from this earlier survey with the current teachers' perceptions within a specific local context at a time when their workload was increasing and additional assessment practices were being introduced. These already tested questions might also assist in enhancing the reliability and validity of the information gathered during this research project and could be linked to the findings of previous research (Slavin, 1992). These two questions were closed and used a Likert scale which are "typically used to measure opinions and attitudes (Neiderhauser & Mattheus, 2010, p.352). A number of further open questions were created regarding NAPLAN testing about the respondents' views on its timing and the way they use the results in their teaching practice.

- Part D 'Demographic': was included because " it identifies the individual in terms of classifying variables for analysis" (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005, p.164). It was designed to provide information about a respondent's age, gender, qualifications, years teaching and any other roles or responsibilities held by them at their school. This was placed at the end of the survey based on advice from the literature for questionnaire design (Johnson & Christensen 2008; Neiderhauser & Mattheus, 2010; Jones, 1999). An opportunity was provided at the end for respondents to add any other information they felt was relevant.

The questions were guided by the research question and the literature reviewed (Bell, 1999; Neiderhauser & Mattheus, 2010; Fink, 2010). The purpose of this survey was to gain

a snapshot of a Year 9 English teachers' working life, the sorts of constraints on their teaching and preparation time and their feelings, thoughts and beliefs about the subject of English, and more specifically, the role of different types of assessment and its influence on their teaching practice. This was regarded as a necessary part of the first stage of the research to gauge the teachers' perceptions on the influence of assessment when teaching Year 9 English at a time when a new syllabus is being implemented and the extent to which teachers feel enabled to adapt and change practice accordingly.

3.3.4. The Pilot of the Survey

The survey was piloted with three people who were invited to participate and offer feedback. The pilot respondents completed the survey and provided an evaluation according to the following questions adapted from Johnson and Christensen (2008, p. 190):

1. What was your overall impression of the survey?
2. How long did it take answer the questions?
3. Did you find any of the questions confusing or threatening?
4. Have I left anything important out?
5. The overall appearance and clarity of the presentation
6. Was there enough space to write your answer?
7. Were there too many questions or not enough on the page?

The pilot confirmed it was an appropriate tool to use. The layout and presentation were agreeable as well as the balance between open and closed questions. A number of the questions regarding the nature of the syllabus document were seen as challenging as the respondents felt unfamiliar with it as well as the distinctions between the three types of

assessment. This confirmed the importance of including the syllabus definitions of the three types of assessment to assist the respondents in providing responses. The length of time to answer the survey required some adjustment, as it took much longer than estimated to complete. This was achieved by either eliminating or collapsing some of the questions after discussion with the chief investigator. Some were changed from open to closed questions and others required more or less space for responses. Numbers were added to all the questions to aid in the analysis of the results.

3.3.5. Implementation of the Survey

Ethics approval was sought and granted from the Ethics Committee at Macquarie University. Following ethics approval an application to conduct research at a Catholic school was completed and approval was granted. The school Principal was then emailed and a hard copy posted with a letter outlining the nature of the study and who would be invited to participate from the staff with a copy of the approval letter from the systemic head of research for the diocese.

The Principal gave consent and directed the researcher to the English Coordinator. Both the English Coordinator and Assistant English Coordinator were contacted via email with a copy of the consent form. The consent forms were delivered to the individual teachers of Year 9 English via their pigeon holes at the school, no contact was made with the participants by the researcher at this stage, except with the English Coordinator, who was requested as the contact by the Ethics Committee, to avoid any potential conflict of interest or possible coercion. After consent forms were received, the survey was emailed to participants for completion within one week. The results were automatically sent to a spreadsheet and five consent forms and five responses to the survey were collected. The

design of the online survey received a comment from one respondent who noted the need for a 'save' mechanism to allow them to complete the survey over time rather than in one sitting and thereby allowing them to increase the detail of their response.

3.3.6. Interpreting the survey data

The survey results were automatically sent to a spreadsheet within "Googleforms". This spreadsheet included a timestamp recording the submission date and time. Each question was individually collated according to the response. A summary of all responses for each question was possible by clicking on the dropdown 'Responses' and selecting 'response summary'.

Each open-ended response was coded for repetition of words or phrases, for example, "results" and each close-ended response was converted to a column graph using Excel. Additionally, individual column graphs were created for each of the close-ended questions adapted from the Whitlam Institute survey and two more bar graphs were created placing these responses in order of most agreement to least agreement.

After reading the summary of responses for the open-ended questions for Part B "Year 9 English", categories were determined for each question according to the nature of the response. These questions with their categories are listed below:

Question 1. Teaching priorities:
Improve skills/develop, strategy/focus, understanding, cognition/critical, and personal engagement

Question 2. Priorities of Year 9 program for new syllabus:

English as content/passive, English as activity/active, English as assessment

Question 3. Identify changes to Year 9 based on new syllabus:

Content, assessment, student-centered

Question 4. Literacy skills targeted in Year 9:

Reading, grammar, punctuation, spelling, writing

Question 5. Why have these skills been chosen:

Results, understanding, policy

Question 6. How are they being addressed:

Teacher led strategy, student led strategy.

The responses provided for Questions 1-4 of Part C "Assessment" were coded according to the six definitions identified by Hargreaves (2005) from her survey of 83 teachers about their "conceptions of assessment for learning" (p.213). These definitions were chosen as categories because they described what emerged from the survey data which asked teachers to write down what 'assessment for learning' meant to them. These six definitions (Hargreaves, 2005) are listed below:

1. Monitoring students' performance against targets/objectives
2. Using assessment to inform next steps in teaching and learning
3. Teachers giving feedback for improvement

4. Teachers learning about children's learning/emphasis on processes rather than observable performance
5. Children taking some control of their own learning and assessment
6. Turning assessment into a learning event/as inquiry

There were two assumptions made prior to the conduct of the survey: that the demands for summative and external assessment narrow curriculum and prevent teachers from developing broader assessment practices in the spirit of the new syllabus and quantitative measures of student performance influence the types of assessment valued in schools. Based on the data from the survey, it appeared that many of the respondents viewed assessment in similar ways. The results from the survey then provided information that was used to create the semi-structured interview questions. A discussion of the findings from the survey, with relevant tables is included in Chapter IV Results.

3.3.7. The Participants for Interviews

This was a small case study of one faculty about teachers' perceptions of the influence of assessment on their teaching of Year 9 English. It was therefore deemed necessary to interview the participants once the data from the survey were collected and analysed. The interview explored in further detail following some areas of investigation from the survey data. The intention of the interview was to enable the participants to expand the descriptive detail of their own experiences and context, building on their survey responses.

Participants were asked to describe the way they selected teaching strategies for Year 9, their opinions on assessment, their attitude towards the new English syllabus and they were provided with an opportunity to describe why they felt English was an important subject to learn.

A semi-structured interview schedule with open-ended questions was used. As Slavin (1992, p.87) states, "In an interview, respondents can be asked to clarify or expand their responses making the data from an interview potentially richer and more complete than that which can be obtained from a questionnaire". This can take the researcher into a deeper appreciation of the lived experiences of the participant, "to see the content and pattern of daily experience" (McCracken, 1988, p.9). Additionally, through this method of inquiry, when a participant is able to describe in their own words their lived experience, the "meaning they make of that experience" (Seidman, I. 1998, p.3) can be explored in greater detail.

An interview guide was used with open-ended questions that had emerged as a result of the analysis of the survey data. The same questions were posed to all five participants because the investigation was focused on a specific subject with the intention "that basically the same information is obtained from a number of people by covering the same material" (Patton, 1990, p.283). The first question was designed to investigate a teacher's pedagogy and the relationship between practice and theory, activity and content knowledge. This question was to enable the participants to explain in greater detail the ways they work with their Year 9 English class. The second question was focused on their views about assessment and the relationship between teaching, learning and assessment. The third question asked participants about their opinions of the new NSW English K-10 syllabus. This question was designed to inquire about both the participants' knowledge of, and their views regarding the changes this syllabus contained. This was considered an important aspect of the interview because this new syllabus was being implemented at the time the interviews were being conducted and the teachers could provide first hand accounts of this process.

The fourth question inquired of the participants' theory of learning and their philosophy of subject English as these underpin the choices they make when selecting their teaching strategies. Finally, the participants were asked at the end of the interview if there was anything else they would like to share.

3.3.8. Selection of Participant for Interview

The same five participants participated in the interviews, Drew, Ashley, Same, Alex and Taylor. These teachers were all teaching Year 9 English in the same school at the time the interviews were conducted. This produced a substantial amount of qualitative data and considering the relatively small sample size it provided for a richer level of analysis.

The participants were contacted when the researcher travelled to the site to collect the consent forms. A time was arranged at mutual convenience for an interview. The researcher contacted the teachers and arranged a convenient time for an interview early in Term Three, conducted at the school. A prompt sheet was developed after analysis of the survey data and in consultation with the Chief Investigator to ensure the data from the interviews would extend the initial data collection. The prompt sheet included the four key areas and probes to elucidate responses and is included as Appendix E. A practice interview was conducted with the Chief Investigator to assist the researcher's preparation.

3.4 Data-Gathering Techniques

3.4.1. Interview Schedule

The interview began by explaining to the participants the researcher was interested in their opinions about assessment and the new English syllabus. The first question asked the participants to describe the kind of teaching strategies they like to use with their Year 9 English class. This question provided the participants with some context and entry into the interview. The additional questions were then explored when appropriate. The interviews were audio taped and were about 20 minutes in duration. The audio file and transcript of the interview were provided to the participants to ensure "truth value" (Appleton, 1995, p.995) and for their checking. These were returned without change.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical protocols were in place for this study. Approval to conduct research with human subjects was obtained through the Ethics Review Committee at Macquarie University. This approval letter is included in Appendix A. Permission to conduct research in a Catholic school was also granted through the Catholic Education Office, Parramatta. Additionally, the Principal of the site was contacted directly and permission was received to invite teachers of Year 9 English to participate. This letter is included as Appendix B. The Head of English was contacted through email with a copy of the participant consent form requesting permission to deliver participant consent forms to all teachers of Year 9 English.

Written information outlining the purpose of the research and the data to be collected was included in the participant consent form. This is included as Appendix C. It was made clear in this form that confidentiality and anonymity would be ensured to all who agreed to participate, pseudonyms would be used and that participants were free to withdraw from

the study at any time and without consequence. The consent form was signed by all five of the participants and the researcher and a scanned copy was provided to each participant.

3.6 Data Management

The data collected from the survey and interview were processed before analysis in the following way:

1. Two folders were created. One for the survey and one for the interviews. All data pertaining to each was kept in these electronic folders, password protected.

2. The survey was created in "Goggle Drive" and the data was sent to a spreadsheet within "Googledocs", a summary of all responses for each question of the survey could be accessed through this spreadsheet. Additionally, the researcher created a word document of this summary for all open-ended questions and imported bar graphs from Mircosoft Excel for all closed questions. This document was printed and the researcher read through the responses several times underlining and noting in the margins repeated words and phrases. This document was kept in a secure folder along with the signed copies of consent forms.

3. A contact summary sheet (Miles & Hubermann, 1994, p.53) was kept in the folder for the survey.

4. Additionally, the open-ended survey questions were coded according to repeated themes that emerged from responses and individual tables were created placing

quotations from the survey responses into the appropriate column of the table. For the open-ended questions on assessment the researcher used the definitions of assessment for learning by Hargreaves (2005) as the codes.

5. The interview audiotapes were uploaded to the Interview folder and each labeled with the date and initial of the respondent and the researcher transcribed the tapes. The tapes were transcribed using pen and paper, then played back to ensure accuracy. The researcher then typed each as a separate word document and these were saved in the Interview folder. While this was time consuming it allowed the first time researcher the opportunity to consider emergent themes and immerse herself in the data.

6. The transcripts were printed and with a highlighter the responses to each question were interrogated for key words, phrases and sentences. When all transcripts were completed the researcher wrote out each question at the top of a page in the same notebook used to write out the first transcription. Under each question, the researcher wrote the highlighted material for each participant, labeled 1 through to 5. When completed the researcher again with a highlighter looked for key words and quotations.

7. A word document was created and under each question the key words and responses for each participant were typed. This enabled the researcher to reduce the data and identify significant patterns to emerge (Patton, 1990, p.371).

3.7 Data Analysis

The analysis of the interview data followed the three stages described by Miles and Hubermann (1984) as data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing (Appleton, 1995, p. 994-995) with the intention of identifying "significant patterns and construct a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal" (Patton, 1990, p.372). McCracken writes, "The object of analysis is to determine the categories, relationships, and assumptions that informs the respondent's view of the world in general and the topic in particular" (1998, p.42). This qualitative method of inquiry is regarded as a descriptive means of conveying the perceived experiences of the subjects in their own words (McCracken, 1988; Patton, 1990; Slavin, 1992; Appleton, 1995; Seidman, 1998; Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) with the intention "to fairly represent the data and communicate what the data reveal given the purpose of the study" (Patton, 1990, 372).

3.7.1. Grounded Theory

The approach used for analysis was grounded theory. When a qualitative researcher is planning to develop a theory about the subject of their study, the direction taken will come as a consequence of the data collected and emerge as this data is analysed and examined for meaning, grounding the theory within the research conducted (Slavin, 1992, p.67). Theory will be grounded in the data collected and the emergent patterns uncovered. This method is appropriate for this investigation as qualitative research uses inductive analysis building grounded theory "from many disparate pieces of collected evidence that are interconnected" (Slavin, 1992, p.67). The survey data provided initial patterns that were elaborated on via the interviews with the same participants. Once the data have been collected from both collection methods the patterns were used to draw inferences (Miles and Hubermann, 1994) thus "rendering a conceptual understanding

of them" (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003, p.311). Grounded theory emerged about the influence of assessment on the teaching of Year 9 English through the patterns and repetitions of words from the responses provided to the survey and in the interviews.

3.8 Stages of Analysis

3.8.1. Transcription

The first stage of the analysis was to transcribe the interview tapes. The researcher transcribed the tapes using pen and paper first to ensure accuracy. These were then typed and saved to the same folder storing the audio. Where possible, gestures were included and emotional reactions such as laughter, sighing and any specific reference to another participant, school or colleague were removed and replaced by a generic descriptor such as "Principal" "previous school" or "colleague" to ensure anonymity.

Each participant was provided with a pseudonym for the interview data to ensure anonymity and these were Drew, Ashley, Alex, Sam and Taylor, as they do not immediately suggest gender because only one participant was male. Given, the small size of the sample it would be preferable not to use names at all. However, reporting the findings was difficult to follow without the use of names to distinguish between respondents. No names are attached to the survey data and all respondents are referred to as participants for the reporting of this data.

3.8.2. Thematic analysis

The transcripts were divided into the responses provided by all participants for each question separately and the researcher looked for patterns by highlighting repeated words and phrases. These were cross-referenced with the data collected from the survey and broader patterns were grouped according to perceptions linked with assessment, learning and teaching English in Year 9 and the new English syllabus.

A contact summary sheet was completed (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 53) and this data was compared and contrasted with the data gathered from the online survey. Through this process, three conceptualisations emerged, then three overall patterns grouping around, perceptions about teaching Year 9 English; perceptions about classroom assessment and external assessment measures such as NAPLAN and perceptions about a new English K-10 syllabus and implications for practice. These sheets were used as signposts to discuss the findings in Chapter IV: Results.

CHAPTER VI.   RESULTS

4.1.   Overview

The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of the influence of assessment on the teaching of year 9 English at a time when a new NSW English K-10 syllabus is being implemented.

Assessment is an important component of the work of teachers and a measurement of the extent to which students are achieving a curriculum's outcomes. The inclusion of additional formative assessment known as assessment as learning whereby students are assessing their own learning is a new feature of assessment in the new NSW English K-10 syllabus. It is therefore appropriate to investigate teachers' perceptions about assessment and the extent to which teachers are incorporating such assessment procedures into their practices.

Year 9 English is one of four separate Year groups targeted by the National Assessment program-Literacy and Numeracy or NAPLAN, a standardised test with results published on a National website. It is therefore appropriate to investigate the extent to which teachers are influenced by this form of assessment, and whether the impacts of this test influence the ways a curriculum is delivered locally.

Additionally, specific to this study, all students in Year 1 through to Year 10 in the schools within this educational system must complete the Progressive Achievement Test in Reading or PAT-R created and distributed by the Australian Council for Education Research or ACER. This initiative was introduced into this region last year and will run for the next three years. The results are collated centrally and the data are reproduced in nominal formats that include charts, tables and statistics. This information is password protected.

The report of this study's results are presented in three areas. The five teachers from the one English faculty provided similar responses for the teaching priorities, literacy skills targeted and the reasons for the targeting of literacy skills in Year 9 and these support findings in the literature that suggest standardised testing is impacting the delivery of curriculum.

The participants reveal a superficial knowledge of the new NSW English K-10 Syllabus and their views of the changes being implemented are limited to content in the form of text selections and again this has an impact upon their delivery of curriculum at a local level.

Finally, the five teachers in this sample shared similar views about the role of assessment of learning but differed in their understandings of assessment for and assessment as learning. This echoes the literature about the need for improvement in teachers' assessment literacy if different forms of assessment are to co-exist in a recursive teaching, learning and assessment cycle so as to inform and modify teaching practice to cater to the needs of all students effectively.

4.2.   Teachers' perceptions about teaching Year 9 English

Part B of the online survey questions focused on identifying the nature of the participants'
teaching priorities and programming for Year 9 English and any changes being made as a
result of the new syllabus. They were also asked specifically about any literacy skills being
targeted, the reason for the choice and the ways in which these are addressed in their
classrooms.

The one-to-one interview questions were developed as a result of the initial findings from
the online survey. The final question asked the respondents why they felt English is an
important subject to learn. The intention of this question was to gauge the participants'
perceptions of learning and their models of English currently in use. The first question
asked participants what kinds of teaching strategies they like to use with their Year 9 class.
The intention was to find out about the preferred pedagogy and teaching styles of the
respondents.

4.2.1. Teaching priorities for Year 9 English.

The first item in Part B of the online survey asked participants what are your teaching
priorities for your Year 9 class for 2014? The data suggested five separate priorities,
ranging from a very specific instructional priority such as "To improve skills and to help
them understand the purpose of feedback" from one participant to broader priorities such
as "To develop new programs that address the new NSW English K-10 syllabus for the
Australian curriculum" by another participant. A pattern emerged that revealed the
repetition of specific terms and these three terms were repeated at least once in every
response. These terms were, "skill", "improve" and "develop". For example: "Improving

reading and language skills", "improve their literacy skills", "develop new programs" and "building on the skills developed as per stage outcomes."

Firstly the noun "skill" was used seven separate times and was used by all five participants. This suggests a focus on ability and proficiency gained through training. "Skills" was used in relation to "reading", "writing", "comprehension", "language" and "literacy". This suggests the teaching priorities for this sample aim to build what are considered to be broad descriptors and don't provide a lot of detail or specific information. They are quite essential basic skills in literacy.

The verb "improve/improving" was used six times; in five cases in relation to a skill and this was consistent in all five participants' responses. This word suggests working to create better quality or develop a standard. "Improve" was used when referring to "reading and language skills", "literacy skills" "comprehension skills", and "literacy." The use of these groupings suggests the teaching priorities for this sample aim at monitoring the students' progress in basic literacy skills along a continuum in the form of competence in either: reading, language use or writing.

The repeated use of these terms when describing the teaching priorities for Year 9 English suggests the teachers here perceive the improvement of skills in literacy as important for Year 9 English. It suggests the teachers view the teaching priorities of English in traditional ways focusing on improving students' literacy skills in reading, writing and language. Taken together, these suggest attention to broad competencies and print based textual studies.

In a similar pattern, the verb 'develop' was used three times by two participants. The use of this word suggests the two participants perceive their teaching priority is gained through a gradual process of a deeper level of understanding of concepts rather than as the proficiency or quality in student literacy as is suggested in the use of "skills" and "improve". However, on all three occasions the word was used to refer either to the acquisition of a skill, or the improvement in students' ability. For example, "building on the skills developed as per stage outcomes" and improvement such as, "Develop students' ability to think critically" and "to develop their ability to compose." While the latter two examples suggest a move away from skill and literacy, the use of the word "ability" does suggest the intention to improve students' capability.

The repetition of "skill" and "improve" in each response suggests the teaching priorities of these five teachers are similar and they share a common purpose in teaching English in Year 9. This purpose appears to be based around a traditional view of English teaching as measureable improvement in literacy skills with particular emphasis on reading, writing and language. These are predominantly print based and suggest the teachers' perceptions about their students' ability requires them to be focusing on the specific targeting of basic literacy skills.

4.2.2. Literacy skills being targeted in Year 9 English

When asked <u>what literacy skills are being targeted in Year 9 English in 2014</u> all five participants identified "reading." Additional information provided in the responses for this item about what type of reading included, "inferring meaning from text", "explicit teaching of skills in investigation", "comprehension", "for meaning" and "developing Literature Circles". These suggest that reading is perceived as the process of comprehending texts to

construct meaning. The inclusion of literature circles indicates there is an effort to use student-centred strategies to assist the development of this literacy skill.

Literature Circles is a print based collaborative reading strategy. Students form into groups based on the selection of a novel. The groups can vary in number and they take turns completing a range of roles with directives that include "summarizer", "connector", "illustrator" and "director".

The next item in the survey asked why have these skills been selected. Four participants identified "results" derived specifically from "NAPLAN." This indicates that external standardised testing is influencing their teaching priorities, and these priorities are for the improvement in basic skills and more specifically, reading.

There were two additional reasons given by two participants who nominated NAPLAN results as the rationale for targeting reading. These were "a lot of students don't even read for pleasure so we are trying to change that mindset" and "it became apparent that many students did not read, either for pleasure or in regards to classwork." The inclusion of "reading for pleasure" indicates there are additional intentions for targeting reading in Year 9 English that go beyond basic literacy and constructing meaning. This is reflective of the new NSW English K-10 Syllabus Rationale that seeks to "develop a love of literature and learning" (p.13)

Only one participant differed in the reason given explaining, "This is the school goal." Indicating additional external influences generated by the school executive plays a role in the selection of the teaching priorities for Year 9. This forms part of the wider context against which the teachers must make their decisions.

These findings suggest the targeted literacy skill of reading is based on numerical results based on benchmarks derived from an external standardised test and this has specifically influenced the teaching priorities for Year 9 English and for the whole school. This explains the importance for this sample of the improvement in students' literacy skill as it has been part of the leadership directive for their programming in 2014.

Participants were asked to explain how they were addressing this skill in their classrooms. Four respondents indicated they were using 'Literature Circles.' This is a collaborative reading strategy similar to a book club but with greater structure, expectations and specific roles allocated to all members of the group. Students read novels selected by the group based on their personal interest and reading level. Additional references were made to "wide reading" and "guided reading." One respondent provided the following reason for these strategies, "The objective is not simply that the students are reading more but are given strategies to comprehend what they're reading and for what purpose." This supports the two reasons provided for why this skill is being targeted. Literature Circles is a print based strategy and enables students to select the novel and share their reading within a group of students who share their interest and level of reading ability.

Literature Circles are a collaborative reading strategy where the focus is on student engagement through careful selection and reading of novels within a small group. The strategy would appear to be appropriate for the targeted literacy skill of reading. However, the purpose and structure of Literature Circles and wide reading do not extend the range of texts students are reading because it is exclusively print based. This has the potential to narrow the variety of reading opportunities available to these students.

During the interviews "Asian" texts were specifically identified by four participants as one of the main changes they recognized in the new NSW English K-10 syllabus. Ashley suggested the novels being read as part of Literature circles were chosen for their strong link to Asia and Asian themes. This will be discussed in greater detail later. However, it reveals a limitation being placed on student agency in the selection of reading material for this strategy. The stated aims of a learning cycle are therefore, diminished by the teacher's intervention and direction.

Additionally, two respondents included 'writing' as part of the ways they are addressing the targeted literacy skill in their class. This was in response to the texts they are reading. For example, "[writing] usually in response to texts, in every lesson" and "they are writing down their responses to reading which I check." One respondent to the survey described a specific writing strategy, "the 8 Word Synthesis strategy: students read a piece of text and then decide on eight key words. These words are put on the board, discussed and eight words are decided on as a class. Finally, the students write their own paragraph using the words." The five teachers identified similar reasons for why the skill is being targeted and similar strategies are being used to target this skill in Year 9 English. This exposes a strong print based reading strategy. The use of novels excludes multimodal, digital, visual and listening texts, limiting the types of reading material being utilized in Year 9. Additionally, this indicates there is a lack of teacher agency within the faculty in identifying the literacy skills targets and the pedagogical choices made to address them in their classes.

4.2.3. Why English is an important subject for students to learn.

The emphasis on a skills based approach in the Year 9 classroom was also found in the interviews. When asked about why they believed English was an important subject for

students to learn, four of the participants directly identified "skills" as important. For example, Taylor commented "because its [English] skills based…and they're skills that apply to life", Ashley stated, "so that junior focus of getting all those skills right", Alex commented, "apart from the skills…reading, writing, spelling" and Drew who said "you can't be good at anything else unless you have skills in English." These comments indicate the participants perceive skills as important features of subject English and reflect their prioritizing of improving skills in literacy in their teaching. It also suggests why a basic literacy skills model of English is dominant in Year 9 rather than more complex models of English and other learning goals such as knowledge, understanding, beliefs and attitudes.

4.2.4. The teaching strategies used in Year 9 English.

The first question participants were asked in interview was to explain what types of teaching strategies they like to use with their Year 9 English class. Two purposes emerged, firstly, the intention to engage students in the activities and secondly prepare their students for impending summative assessment tasks. This develops the information on reading and what was identified as the purpose for teaching identified as being the improvement of skills in reading.

For example, Taylor discussed one specific strategy as she is reading a text out loud to the class involving a questioning technique modeling metacognitive processes such as "I'm thinking right now what does that word mean?" This strategy was part of a school wide initiative devised and coordinated at the system level called the EM4 Project and targeted improvement in student outcomes. Taylor explained the strategy was used in relation to reading and writing and she was modeling the strategy with the class. Taylor was also able to explain a reason for the strategy "you're not always conscious of your thinking…kids

aren't anyway." This strategy is being used to develop the students' ability to think critically about their reading and writing rather than only the teaching priorities that were identified as improving literacy skills. This also suggests a possible lack of cohesion between the teaching priorities identified for Year 9 and the teaching strategies being employed. There appears to be the need for a clearer link established to increase the effectiveness of approaches.

Alex's initial comment to the question was that the class responds well to group activities and she provided an example that involved the annotation of a poem. Her emphasis was on students discovering the poem's meaning for themselves and building confidence in their ability to explain what it means. This strategy is being used to develop the students' ability to think critically about their reading and writing rather than only the teaching priorities identified as improving basic literacy skills. However, there is still a focus on literacy skills related to reading and comprehending meaning in print texts.

Two participants discussed the challenges they faced when teaching basic literacy skills by considering their use of a textbook. Alex, in referring to the challenges of the first unit of work developed for the new syllabus, made the comment "using a textbook in class is never going to be fun and just, yeah it just takes away the enjoyment of the unit…we haven't since gone back to Jacplus unfortunately because it's time consuming." Jacplus is an online textbook purchased as part of a larger package of online textbooks for a number of KLA's when the school required all students in Years 7, 8 and 9 to purchased ipads for the 2014 school year. The electronic textbook targets basic literacy skills. This exposes the challenges of integrating simplified units of work compartmentalised in textbooks that lack broader contextual links to the teachers' purpose and the learning needs of the students. Ashley commented, "we were also stymied terribly [during the first unit] by the Jacplus

that was a mistake, none of us ever teach by textbooks and I've already said to [the current Principal] just toss it out [remove the Jacplus from the online textbook package]" and this suggests the imposition of an external influence upon the teaching priorities of the faculty.

4.3 Teachers' perceptions about classroom assessment and external assessment measures.

Part C of the online survey questions focused on establishing the participants' knowledge and understanding of the different types of assessment included in the new NSW English K-10 syllabus: assessment for, as and of learning. This was followed by a series of questions about NAPLAN testing. During the interview one question asked participants what their views were about the role of assessment in their teaching of Year 9 English.

4.3.1. Teachers' perceptions about classroom assessment.

Three separate items were included in the survey to establish the teachers' perceptions about the three types of classroom assessment included in the new NSW English K-10 syllabus that is, assessment for, as and of learning. Patterns emerged through the repetition of terms to describe the ways they use different types of assessment. The two patterns to emerge were firstly, the similarity in understanding provided in the responses for one type of assessment and secondly, their statements showing the lack of cohesion between the purposes of the three types of assessment.

The pattern in the participants' responses to the types of assessment for learning they use in their Year 9 class revealed the repetition of one term. The most frequently used term was "Feedback" and this was identified by four participants in the following ways,

"written responses to their reading", "verbally and in written form as feedback", "peer feedback" and "descriptive feedback". This suggests the four respondents perceive formative assessment as information about the students' work provided by the teacher and received by the student passively rather than a recursive process of modification to practice in response to knowledge gained about the students' needs. Feedback should also act as a guide for students and be used actively to improve future work.

Feedback is an important strategy of formative assessment practice and the inclusion by four respondents suggests some understanding of what assessment for learning includes. However, no mention was made by any of the respondents regarding whether there was any modification to their practice as a consequence of the feedback provided which is a significant aspect of formative assessment practice.

Three specific references to the modification of practice emerged from the interview data. Two participants commented on some modification to their Literature Circles as a consequence of this strategy being perceived as not working effectively. In Ashley's case it was due to her formation of groups, "I said, O.K here's the group, come here. I want you to do this book. Alright. So and I won't do that every time, I'll go back to choice next time. Because what I've found they were doing was, they were sticking with their friends and then some of them would not be reading the books that they really wanted to read." This reveals her modification was a reaction to student choosing groups based on friendship rather than text and despite the comment that students were not reading the books they wanted, Ashley appears to have made the selection of the book instead of "their friends" and selected the group members as well.

Alex also modified the way Literature Circles was being run as a consequence of interruptions and student absence. She said, " And by the time we got back to it, you know, some kids had flown ahead and others were still, you know, on chapter two and I eventually pulled the plugged on it and just went down to the library got a new book and said, O.K. we're starting afresh…and it's worked really well." Her modification was a reaction to logistical issues rather than student needs. Again, this practice is not in the spirit of Literature Circles where the students ability to choose is regarded as essential in maintaining engagement and assisting students to move beyond their current reading levels.

Taylor also identified a change to her practice. However, in this example, the modification was implemented at the beginning of the unit of work and is a new initiative. Her modification is intended to assist students to recognize the way they are thinking. Taylor commented, "but I'm doing it more and more and they're telling me, and we do it informally as well as really structured and they're telling me that its helping (whispers) I don't know if it's true. But they're saying that it's helping them to be conscious of what they're reading and writing." This suggests despite Taylor's reservations about the initiative, she is willing to persevere as a consequence of the students' feedback and this suggests a reciprocal relationship is present. Whereby the teacher is responsive to the needs of the students and students feel able to comment on the teachers practice.

Participants' responses about the types of assessment as learning they use in their Year 9 class were categorized into three distinct types. Firstly, two participants described it as preparation for formal assessment tasks. Secondly, two participants described it as part of normal teaching practice, and thirdly one participant described it as strategies to promote student engagement.

Two participants perceived assessment as learning as a preparation for, or reflection on, summative assessment tasks. For example, "for students to seek teacher feedback on their written responses prior to submitting or completing assessments." This suggests assessment as learning is perceived as the students' initiative rather than as a recursive process. Another participant who commented students, "reflect on their achievement, strengths and weaknesses once assessment tasks are returned." This suggests these participants perceive assessment as learning as either preparation for or reflection by students about their performance on summative assessment tasks. This is a narrow view for the possibilities of assessment as learning and does not provide students with the opportunity to implement the discoveries they make about their progress because the task and unit are complete. If students were provided with opportunities to reflect on their progress throughout the unit, it would enable them to reflect on their learning more broadly with greater possibilities for application in practice and in anticipation of future assessment tasks.

Two participants perceived assessment as learning to be part of routine teaching practice with a focus on the teacher monitoring of student engagement. For example, "they have to show me the written work they have completed. I also listen to what each group is discussing and monitor what they are doing, trying to keep them on track" another indicated "written and oral feedback…informal class tasks" were used. In both examples, the teacher is monitoring the students, rather than the students monitoring their own progress frames the uses for assessment as learning. Assessment as learning is perceived as the completion of classwork and is more in line with summative assessment principles.

One participant for the survey viewed assessment as learning to be using metacognitive strategies to engage students in their own learning. For example, "Use of learning journals…Knows/needs to know, stop and think strategies to get students to consider how their learning is going at any particular time. Setting goals that they feel they can work to and achieve (period, week, term). Developing their own success criteria for tasks." These strategies most closely align with assessment as learning as evidenced in the definition provided in the syllabus. This suggests that this participant perceives assessment as learning as an inquiry or ongoing process of self-reflection by students about their learning. This challenges the dominant discourse of literacy skills and reading for Year 9 established and reflects broader learning goals with the intention of developing students understanding and agency.

Assessment as learning is one important innovation in the new NSW English K-10 syllabus, and the three separate types of response to assessment as learning (as preparation for formal tasks, routine teaching practice, and strategies to promote student engagement) presented here suggest some lack of cohesion in the interpretation of this type of assessment and this suggests that the teachers need to improve their own knowledge and understanding of assessment. In other words their assessment literacy could be enhanced through greater exploration of the term and a shared understanding of it as used in a classroom.

Participants' responses about the types of assessment of learning they use with their Year 9 class were significantly similar in the ways these were described. Four participants referred to an official assessment task that was completed by the whole Year 9 group. For example, two participants' referred to an, "across the form task", one participant referred to an "official task" and three participants referred to a "formal task". The use of "formal"

"form" and "official" reveals the participants perceive this type of assessment as something legitimate and a shared understanding is clear from the uniformity of the responses provided. The teaching and learning would appear to be linear rather than recursive in direction and broader applications for formative and summative assessment is required. In addition, there is no mention of differentiation for this task and a reductive teaching, learning and assessment process is evident where the students complete the same task under the same conditions with the same criteria.

Additionally, the use of the term "task" suggests that assessment of learning is considered as the completion of a product that will be used to encapsulate student learning. This is supported by the comment from Ashley during the interview, "I try to constantly point out to them what they've done all term and they've done much more learning and much more assessment than that little 50 minute bit." This suggests her dissatisfaction with assessment of learning. However, seemingly superficial knowledge about innovations in assessment present in the new syllabus could suggest why more integrated approaches to assessment are not currently practiced.

Another survey participant referred to the summative assessment task created for the first unit of study in Year 9 as a, "Take home assessment task. [In 2014 it] included a feature article to assess persuasive writing skills." This links to the perception that assessment of learning has legitimacy because it is perceived as an official assessment task, completed by the whole year group and in a similar way reflects the standardising present in tests like NAPLAN and PAT-R. There is no mention of any other type of assessment being used officially to report student learning such as qualitative measures or processes or differentiated tasks to cater to individual student needs.

The uniformity of the responses provided about assessment of learning also suggests the unambiguous nature of the participants' perception of this type of assessment and that it is seen as a measurement of performance and it is official because all students complete the same task. Unlike the variety of responses detected about the previous types of assessment, assessment for learning and assessment as learning, the perceptions of assessment of learning presented here exposes an underlying belief that student learning is about achieving course outcomes. The similarity of the responses also indicates the teachers are more familiar with this type of assessment and that this 'summative' model is what is used and valued by the group.

4.3.2. Teachers' perceptions of the role of assessment in Year 9.

Participants were asked in both instruments about their views on the role of assessment in Year 9. Two views emerged from the data; the first and dominant view indicated the participants perceived the role of assessment as a form of measuring student progress. The second view indicated two participants perceived an additional role of assessment as an ongoing investigation into student learning. These two views support the findings of Hargreaves (2005, p.213) who found six definitions of assessment for learning which she divided into two distinct meanings: assessment as measurement and assessment as inquiry by surveying 83 teachers about their "conceptions of assessment for learning".

The first view provided in the survey responses was to see the role of assessment as information related to students level of progression. Four of the five responses included the term "skills" and two responses included "strengths and weakness" and two responses referred to "monitoring" or "gauging student progress". In addition, two descriptions included, "information about student achievement" by one participant and "to generate

marks and therefore grades for reports" by one participant. These responses suggest the role of assessment is perceived as a form of data collection that is used to measure student learning.

However, two participants included in their responses to the survey question an additional view about the role of assessment indicating it also had an investigative role about student learning. One participant commented, "develop meta-cognitive skills and knowledge so that students are learning how to learn…and allow for a greater degree of differentiation" and the other participant commented, "it is an ongoing process which I try to use to help them to identify strengths and weaknesses in their skills". The use of words "process" and "develop…knowledge" suggests that at least two participants have a broader conceptualisation for the role of assessment that includes the students co-constructing learning in a recursive way.

The same question was asked during the interviews. The dominant view for the role of assessment as information related to the students' level of progression was provided by Ashley during her interview. She referred to "marks" twelve times in her response to the question and commented that, "once they start getting good marks in their assessment tasks they start moving ahead faster…that gives them encouragement." She endorses the dominant view of assessment presented in the findings as the summation of student learning derived from an official task completed by all students.

However, both Taylor and Alex expressed dissatisfaction with the dominant view of assessment stemming from a belief it was a distraction and disconnected from classroom work. Taylor commented, "cause we don't have a choice, as an administrative thing…to put a number or a letter on a page that parents understand…it's associated with a grade."

Alex commented, "the assessment task is issued…you've only got two or three lessons so its like how do I do this…its gotta be taught, you've got to teach them how to write…there's no opportunity for assessment for learning". This comment also suggests a disconnection between the summative task and the learning activities preceding it and a culture of teaching to the test.

Taylor, Alex and Sam explained what they felt the role of assessment should be in their Year 9 classes during their interview. These reflected the second view provided in the survey data that assessment should have an investigative role. Taylor observed, "looking at little things to do to get a little bit better, that's what I think it should be." This suggests her view of the role of assessment as being an indicator about small gains in students' understanding and ability. Sam reflected it was, "sort of garnering how much students know…deciding, well, where can I then take my planning from there." Alex thought, "it should be assessment for learning…that's a challenge…I need to set for myself is, is doing more peer editing and finding the time to get around to them individually…kind of informal assessment I, I tend not to do as much of in Year 9." Alex felt she did more formative assessment with her senior classes. These three responses suggest a view of the role of assessment as being about planning next steps for the teacher but also suggests assessment has an ongoing recursive role.

The results from the survey and interview suggest there are varied perceptions amongst the participants in their views about the role of assessment and in the types of assessment for, and as learning they are using in their Year 9 class. However, there is similarity in the types of assessment of learning being used in their Year 9 classes. This suggests from this sample that there is not a particularly close relationship between their formative and summative assessment practices nor does there seem to be any consistent student

involvement in assessment. Additionally, there appears to be a lack of clarity about the specific purposes for the different types of assessment, as have been presented in the syllabus and thus, the relationship between these in classroom practice.

4.3.3. Teachers' perceptions about external measures like NAPLAN.

The survey asked participants about their view of NAPLAN testing in schools. Four responses expressed negative views that were characterized by quite emotive language. For example, "highlights skills out of context…I can't see how this is helpful", "misused by Principals and the public to assess the worth of a school", "an unnecessary stress for students", "too many hours are spent pouring over data that is…not that accurate" and "has been used (or abused) for political purposes." These views reveal four participants view NAPLAN as unreliable but influential in the community. These comments about NAPLAN are significant because NAPLAN was nominated by all of the participants as the reason for the targeted literacy skill of reading in Year 9. It is therefore appropriate to consider why this sample has selected a literacy skill derived from a test they generally regard as unreliable and is seen as a form of accountability.

The survey included two Likert Scale questions taken from the Whitlam Institute "The Experience of Education: The impacts of high stakes testing on school students and their families. An Educator's perspective." (2012). The first asked participants about what they believed to be the purpose of NAPLAN with six separate items and the second asked participants to respond to: some researchers claim that NAPLAN has a negative impact on curriculum in school. To what extent do you agree with the following statements with seven separate items. The results from this survey have been converted into two Tables ranking the responses from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Table 1: Perceived purposes of NAPLAN for this sample
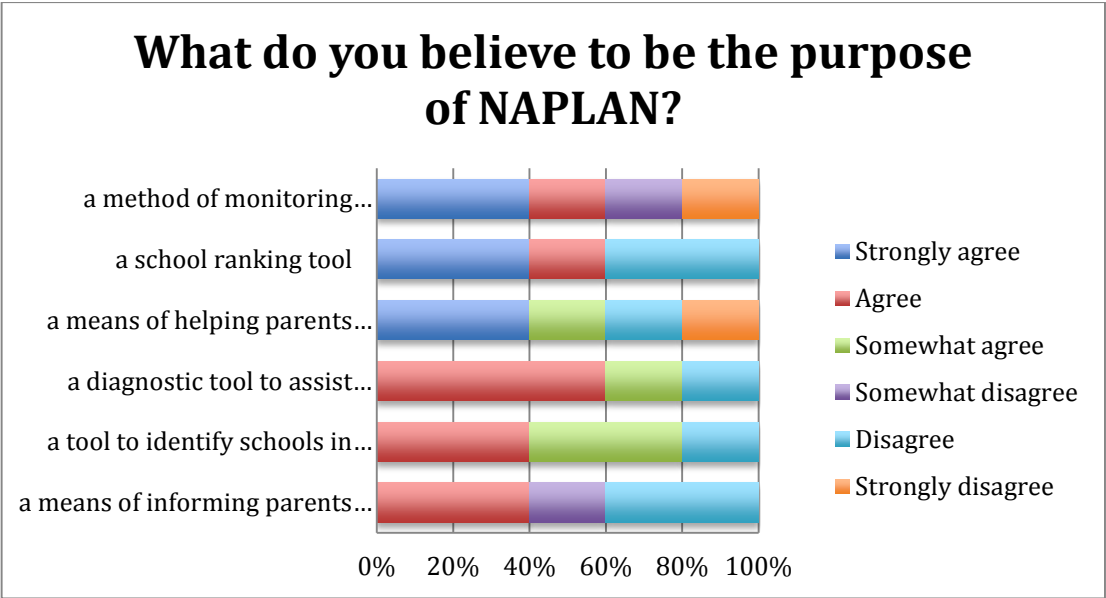
There is a strong similarity between the results from this survey of five teachers and the data from the Whitlam Institue with a sample of 8353. What differs is the highest ranked response. Here, the five teachers strongly agreed that the purpose of NAPLAN was a method of monitoring school performance. This reflects their immediate context and the ways in which this external assessment measure is interpreted within the school. NAPLAN was identified by all five participants as the reason for targeting reading in Year 9 and it therefore influences their classroom practices and thus, their views about their accountability. In the Whitlam Institue survey, 'a school ranking tool' was the most strongly agreed to statement and this offers a broader perspective. However, the differences are slight and could be attributed to the change from the word "policing" which was felt to be too subjective to the word "monitoring" for this sample. It suggests that the teachers in this study may not see the value of NAPLAN as a diagnostic tool, rather it

implies they consider the tests to be invasive and unreliable. This further implies that the value placed on the work of teachers is connected to the measureable performances by students on standardised tests.

Table 2: Impact on Curriculum areas for this sample

The following table, Table 2 shows the results from the second Likert Scale question from the Whitlam Institute about the claims by some researchers that NAPLAN has a negative impact on curiculum.
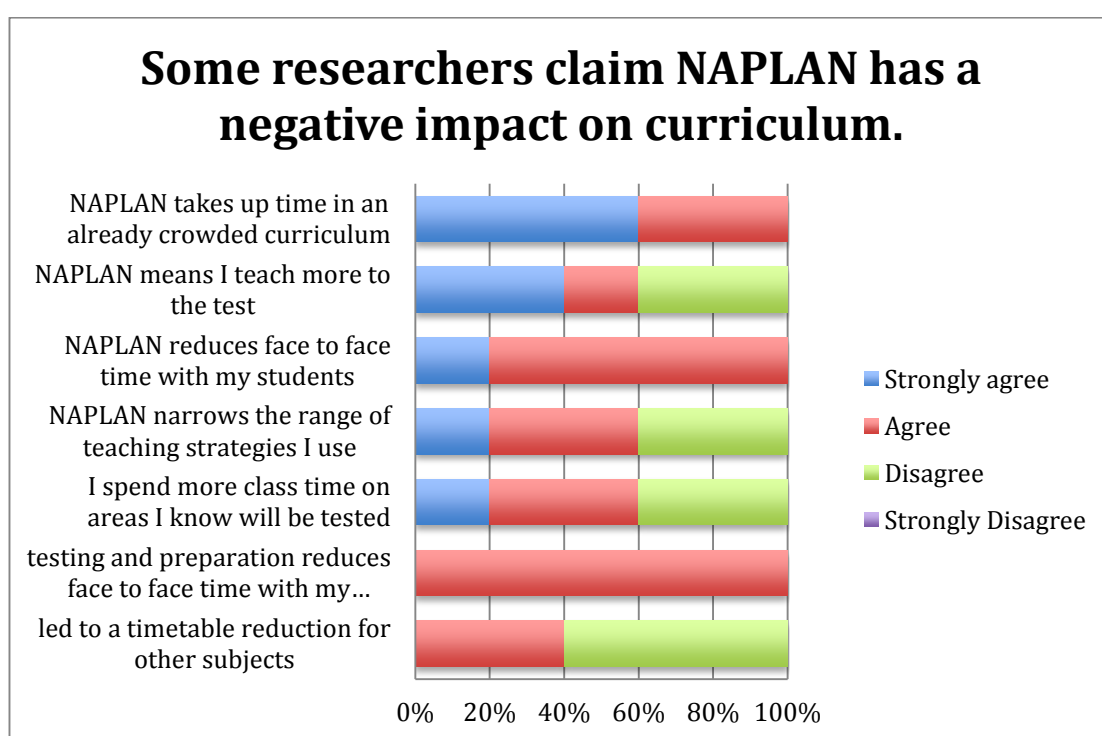
The results from the second question about the impact on curriculum areas differ from the Whitlam Institue survey results and could reflect the local context of the survey data in this investigation. However, for both surveys the most strongly agreed to descriptor was the same, 'NAPLAN takes up time in an already crowded curriculum'. In addition, there is consistency between the two data sets where NAPLAN is prioritised because of the

perceived external pressures, the publication of results and their feelings about accountability.

However, while the second most strongly agreed to option in the Whitlam Institute survey was 'NAPLAN has reduced the importance of other curriculum areas', significantly this was seen as the least impact of the test for this investigation and this finding reflects the importance of considering local contexts and the impact of standardised testing on the local delivery of curriculum. The negative impact of NAPLAN testing for this sample of 5 appears to be felt most significanlty in terms of their teaching strategies, the external pressures derived from the publication of results and their feelings about accountability. In other words, their professional integrity, identity and sense of self-efficacy are being influenced by the presence of this test.

A number of open questions were included that asked participants about their views on NAPLAN. The 5 participants' opinion on the publication of NAPLAN results were similar. Only four provided a comment and all expressed negative views. For example, the publication of NAPLAN results "can easily be used to pigeonhole schools", "people are using it only to determine the merits/demerits of a school", "the information gathered is limited and is misleading for parents and the wider community" and "I think labelling schools based on one set of results is unfair." These comments suggest the participants' view that the publication of results is perceived as detrimental because the information provided can be misrepresented especially given the public and accessible nature of reporting. However, despite the repeated belief by three participants that these results are unreliable they were identified by all five participants as the source of the targeted literacy strategy.

When they were asked <u>in what ways they use the data provided on the MySchool website</u>, three participants commented that "I don't". One of these participants also added, "the data published is used by the school and assists in determining faculty and College goals." This comment supports the earlier finding that there are external factors influencing curriculum directions in this sample rather than the teachers tasked with delivering the curriculum. This exposes some lack of agency and shared ownership by the participants in selecting the teaching priorities and literacy skills targets in Year 9.

4.4. Teachers' perceptions about a new English syllabus and implications for practice.

Questions in the survey and interview were developed to investigate the participants' views about the new NSW English K-10 syllabus and the implications of the changes in this curriculum document has on their teaching practice. This also provided an opportunity to investigate the pedagogies favoured by the participants and the importance they place upon the subject of English.

4.4.1. The prioirites for a Year 9 program based on the new NSW English K-10 syllabus.

The participants were asked in the survey as to <u>what they see as priorities of a Year 9 English program based on the new NSW English K-10 syllabus.</u> Four out of five responded to this question. These priorities ranged from a continuation of the previous emergent themes related to skills, "improve students' skills" by one respondent to changes in assessment by another, and two more detailed responses that both identified "respond to and compose a variety of texts and contexts" and both included reference to student engagement. For example, one participant said students "actively engaged in learning" and the other commented, "personal engagement with text". The sorts of responses suggest at

this early stage of implementation, the participants here have a limited knowledge of the syllabus. This indicates more time is required in organising the way the curriculum will be delivered and more time needed to familarlise themselves with the new material. Their current knowledge suggests this sample sees the priorities of a Year 9 English program to be based on content in the form of text choices and student engagment.

In the survey the participants were then asked to <u>identify any changes to Year 9 English made this year based on the new syllabus.</u> Three patterns emerged in the responses. The first pattern was the use of the term "focus" and this was used on five occasions by three respondents. The use of this word suggests a need for a point of reference to anchor the programs being delivered. Two respondents used the term when referring to "Asian culture", and the term was used by the same respondent to refer to "cross-curricular" and "text choices" and another respondent for "assessment as learning". Additionally, four respondents referred to "Asian culture" specifically and of these, two also included references to indigenous and environmental perspectives at the same time. Finally, two respondents identified "assessment", one referred to "assessment as learning" and one referred to "assessment for learning". This suggests the participants perceive the changes in the syllabus as content in the form of Asian, indigenous and environmental contexts and formative assessment.

Due to the limited nature of these responses provided in the survey, a question was asked during the interviews about <u>what they thought of the new syllabus and what changes they noticed.</u> The adoption of "Asian" texts were referred to again by four of the participants during the interviews and it was established that the first program taught in Year 9 included a range of novels with a contextual link to Asia. For example, Ashley commented when explaining the teaching strategy of Literature Circles, that the students were able to

choose texts with an Asian theme, "cause I've got a lot of Asian books for Year 9, when I say Asian books, set within an Asian theme and some of them are fabulous like the kid version of *Mao's Last Dancer* is fabulous…And um, *Revolution is not a Dinner Party*. Fantastic book about Mao's rule and cultural revolution through a kids eyes really beautifully written a couple of the girls have loved um you know *Chinese Cinderella*, there's two more in that series. I bought one of them…the girls that have read that loved it…" This suggests the identification of an "Asian focus" in previous items is perceived as content and text selection.

This reflects the findings in the survey where the use of the word focus suggested the need to find a point of reference to anchor the programs being delivered. It appears this anchor has become novels with an Asian theme. This has the potential to limit the range of strategies and activities available to students in their studies of Year 9 English with a new English syllabus. In addition, only the first program taught was specifically written for the new syllabus and no other program was available for analysis for this study.

The implications of this perception upon practice are suggested in Alex's comment, "we also spoke about the fact that the kids have proabably picked up on the fact that a lot of the books that we have for literature circles actually have an Asian flavour to them and they have asked the question, 'Are we only reading books about Asia for the whole year or are we going to have access to other texts?' and I think that's something that we need to consider as well…Yeah, cause I think it's a pretty narrow focus." This suggests that another feature of the syllabus identified, student engagement, may require more consideration when texts are being selected for programs.

There were four other aspects of the new NSW English K-10 syllabus referred to by the participants. These included the observation by three that the outcomes could be "mapped" or "tracked" across the Stages and all three felt that was a postitive change. This was understood to be the continuation of an outcome across the stages as a progression in understanding, ability and skill and was identified by the change of verbs within the outcomes, this was pointed out either at a professional development day or by a colleague. However, this could reflect the participants interest in measureing student progress. Two participants identified that there were "less outcomes" and two participants identified "assessment for learning". These observations suggest the teachers in this sample have identified some changes in the new NSW K-10 English syllabus. However, these are generally limited to content and again, repeat the comments provided in the survey. This is interesting given two months passed between the completion of the survey and the interviews, in that time there had been a professional development day on the new English syllabus.

One explanantion for the apparent superficial knowledge of the new English K-10 syllabus might be provided by two separate comments during the interviews. Alex and Drew specifically discussed a professional development day allocated for the faculty to work on programs and assessment for the new syllabus. Alex observed, "I haven't spent as much time on it as I would've like to have but we did have some time at the end of last term [Term Two] for our staff development day…we spent some time looking at um perhaps the advantages, you know what works, what's what's good about it and perhaps what we perceive as being the challenges of it and that was quite a useful process." This suggests time has not been prioritized within the faculty to interrogate the syllabus in greater detail. This is despite the identification by at least two participants that their understanding of the syllabus needs to be improved.

Drew's remarks on the professional development day are rather hesitant and unfocused, she states "And it was a planning day for something, a unit or an assessment task…we ended up with, I guess, conversation, I mean valid conversation because we went through what are the new changes, what are the different um, you know, the organization of the key competencies are different, the jargon's a little bit different, the cross-curricular is, you know, the focus is some are some are new, so it was really good to hear all that. But we didn't end up with a product…we all weren't there and we didn't end up with a product." Her uncertainty and lack of clarity reveal her vague knowledge and the departments lack of organisation regarding the unpacking and programming for the new English syllabus.

This suggests the need by some participants for greater cohesion in the programming and implies not enough time is being spent on the implementation of programs. It was also established that two programs have been written but only one has been taught. This suggests the implications for practice are that the faculty are adapting existing programs. This may limit the opportunities for reform.

These two comments reflect a lack of agency within the faculty for the individual teachers to take charge and to work to familarlise themselves with the new English syllabus. Together they express the need for a planned approach when organising the delivery of curriculum. It also reveals a lack of cohesion and shared understanding of the ways they will approach the delivery of the new NSW English K-10 syllabus. This was further demonstrated in the absence of a program that could be given for analysis for this study.

4.5. Conclusion

The results of this study found that teachers of Year 9 English from one English faculty had similar teaching priorities related to the improvement of skills. They shared the same literacy skills target of reading and four identified results derived from NAPLAN as the reason. They were using a print based strategy called Literature Circles to target this skill. They had a superifical understanding of the new NSW English K-10 syllabus. Their understanding about assessment for learning and assessment of learning were similar. In addition, Ashley and Alex both referred to their senior classes on several oocasions to elucidate what strategies they use and why English is an important subject to learn. There were significant differences in the way the participants described the types of assessment as learning being used in their Year 9 class. Taken together these results suggest a traditional literacy skills based curriculum is being delivered in Year 9 English driven by the influence of standardised testing and where assessment is regarded as the measurement of student progress.

CHAPTER V.   DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION and RECOMMENTATIONS

5.1. Overview

The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of the influence of assessment on their teaching of Year 9 English. A new NSW English K-10 syllabus for the Australian curriculum is being implemented in schools in 2014 in Years 7 and 9 and includes three specific types of assessment. Years 7 and 9 also sit a standardised test in May known as the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy or NAPLAN with results published on a national website.

Teachers of Year 9 English in New South Wales are currently implementing a new syllabus which includes formative assessment called assessment for, and as learning. Assessment for learning requires teachers to establish procedures to identify students' learning needs and as a consequence, to modify their teaching practice. Assessment as learning is an innovation in the new NSW English K-10 syllabus and requires students to be involved in their own learning by enabling them to be part of the process of identifying their own needs and developing their own criteria for success. The overall purpose of formative assessment is to free the student from their reliance on the teacher and become better at objectively evaluating their own work. This has broader implications including improved self-efficacy and student engagement (Marks, 2000) with the potential of creating life-long learners.

This study investigated the perceptions of Year 9 English teachers about the different types of assessment at the point when new assessment procedures are being introduced into their classroom practices. At the same time, national standardised testing has been in place since 2008 with concern growing, since its introduction, about its influence on curriculum and on students' learning.

One sample faculty of Year 9 English teachers revealed differing perceptions about what assessment for, and assessment as learning are but the results showed similar perceptions about assessment of learning. They had similar negative opinions about the role and influence of NAPLAN on their teaching. The five teachers who participated in this investigation also lacked a cohesive and detailed understanding of the new NSW English K-10 syllabus. According to Watson (1994) previous investigations into syllabus implementation have found that the influence of external pressures to deliver improvement in basic literacy skills have seen only a partial implementation of the syllabus. However, when curriculum delivery involved meeting the needs of the students through "shared and deliberate intellectual work" (Sawyer, 2008, p.332) the implementation of a new syllabus had greater success.

The implications from this study's findings can be found in three distinct areas. These include a strong focus on basic literacy skills based on print texts as being the dominant discourse of subject English in Year 9 for this sample. The importance of professional learning and support when implementing a major curriculum change is highlighted here and also, there is a need to address the development of formative assessment procedures in teaching practice.

5.2. Discussion

This study aimed to investigate teachers' perceptions about the influence of assessment on Year 9 English. The findings reveal that standardised testing and summative assessment rather than learning are driving the taught curriculum and this is compounded when teachers have a superficial understanding of a new syllabus that is then exacerbated by an indistinct theory of learning coupled with an ill-defined philosophy of their subject.

This is manifested in the lack of agency demonstrated by both the teachers and their students as a consequence of a reductive view taken by the participants about NAPLAN, assessment, and curriculum. This narrow view reduces the possibilities available to teachers when designing programs of work based on the new NSW English K-10 syllabus, and consequently limits the learning opportunities provided for their students. In this case study, the Year 9 English classroom became a place of skills and a focus on measureable improvement in reading print based texts that were identified as predominantly "Asian" novels as part of Literature Circles. This suggests there is a singular rather than a "meta-model" (Macken-Horarik, 2011) of English in operation. The consequences of this model are a reduction in the flexibility of the pedagogical choices of individual teachers limiting their professional agency, and thus, reducing the opportunities to address the diverse learning needs of their students.

The Rationale of the new NSW English K-10 syllabus "is founded on the belief that language learning is recursive and develops through ever-widening contexts [and]…enables teachers to draw on the methods of different theoretical perspectives and models for teaching English to assist their students to achieve the syllabus outcomes at the highest levels" (2012, p.13). It is therefore important to consider the real impact of a

reductive view when it is influenced by external assessment measures such as NAPLAN because this view limits not just the agency of the teachers to deliver the curriculum, but also the associated agency of the students in terms of their role in their own learning journeys. The literature on assessment, subject English and curriculum perceive learning as a "process" (Dewey, 1902; Dixon, 1967; Price, 2010) that centres on the needs of the students rather than on a measurement of an individual student's performance on a standardised test.

If teachers are feeling pressured by, and accountable for external tests such as NAPLAN, inevitably, the time required to plan and to develop deeper conceptualised understanding of a new syllabus are reduced. What results then is a narrow curriculum limiting the flexibility, diversity and richness of subject English by the teachers who are required to deliver this new NSW English K-10 syllabus.

5.2.1. Discourse of Traditional English and basic literacy skills

The findings of this study suggest there is a dominant view of subject English operating in this Year 9 sample as being about traditional literacy skills of reading, writing and grammar. This is reflected in the repetition of terms in both the survey and interview data. This reveals a discourse where "skills" and "literacy" and "official" assessment in the form of internal summative assessment tasks and external standardised testing typified as "marks", "results" and "reports" are regarded as legitimate measures of student learning and consequently, are being used to identify and to establish the teaching priorities and the specific literacy skills to be targeted.

From a broad sociolinguistic perspective, the influence of a dominant discourse of basic literacy skills is evident in the teaching priorities provided by this sample where, as Morgan (1997, p.2) points out "the ways of talking characteristic of a social or cultural group have a bearing on more than just the language dimensions of people's lives" and people's thinking, actions, attitudes and identity are shaped by their shared discourse". The findings here, with the repetition of terms, suggests there is a shared and dominant discourse where Year 9 English is perceived as being about the improvement of students' literacy skills by targeting reading and this construct is derived from the results of NAPLAN. The introduction of an additional standardised test known as PAT-R supports the finding in that this emerges from a broader systemic discourse where measureable improvement in basic literacy skills are being targeted across schools in the diocese.

The homogeneity of the responses provided by these teachers about their teaching priorities of targetting literacy skills, their use of summative assessment, the influence of NAPLAN, and the introduction of PAT-R suggest the negative impact of standardised testing on classroom practice. This is at the expense of a "meta-model of English that gives unity to the complex practices of the discipline" (Macken-Horarik, 2011, p.199). The dominant paradigm of subject English in this sample is developed around basic literacy skills with a focus on measureable results.

The relationship between teaching, learning and assessment identified in the literature suggests the teaching strategies employed need to be clearly linked to student learning goals based on selected syllabus outcomes and these should be assessed in a recursive cycle which involves a relationship between the teacher and student. This requires that the role and pedagogy of the teacher must be part of a reflective, shared faculty process with ongoing professional learning focusing on developing an understanding of the new

syllabus, and on engaging with emerging theories of learning and formative assessment. The influence of standardised tests on the pedagogical choices being made by teachers in this sample has the potential to interfer with a broader conceptualisation of teaching, learning and assessment as a cyclical, co-constructed process.

5.2.2. Policy change and Professional Development

As Willis, Adie and Klenowski (2013, p.246) observe, "policy change requires teachers to develop new repertoires which significantly impacts on the work of teachers". In this instance, the policy changes include the creation of a "student-centred curriculum that involves the creation as well as critical interpretation of texts, as part of both learning and assessment" (Dixon, 2012, p.21) From this sample, the inclusion of "Asian" texts was seen by the teachers as innovative and in keeping with significant changes made in the new English syllabus. However, this is a relatively superficial change in content and thus was made by including new texts in their classroom practice. It appears to be motivated by the need for new material rather than as an opportunity to implement reform at a deeper level.

Four distinct styles of teaching English could be characterised from the data emerging from the one-to-one interviews, and all participants were reasonably confident in expressing the particular ways they teach subject English in Year 9. Drew and Alex appeared to be nurturers and they spoke about their classes in a caring and supportive way and both saw reinforcing student gains in learning as important. Taylor spoke about being on the side of the students, was open to using new strategies and expressed a strongly partisan, almost conspiratorial position, particularly when speaking about official assessment tasks. There was a strong desire revealed to downplay the importance of marks in testing and to not view this measurement as the total picture of a student's learning.

Ashley expressed traditional conventional views about her teaching where marks, repetitive practice mostly of written work, and numerous drafts towards a final task figured prominently in her comments. With a more expansive view, Sam spoke about supporting student diversity and arranged various activities according to student need thereby facilitating a broader range of student learning.

However, a clear dichotomy emerged between their teaching priorities, literacy skills targets, and their assessment practices. This was reinforced by a discourse consistent with the notion that in this context, subject English in Year 9 is about improving students' literacy skills driven by external standardised testing. This appears to be in competition with a broader personal conceptualisation of subject English as expressed in the way they spoke about their own practices and it can be seen in their emotive responses to the impact of NAPLAN testing on their classrooms. The result is that generally the respondents felt disempowered by the way summative assessment influenced their practice.

However, none of the participants made an explicit connection between teaching, learning and assessment. There was no explicit connection made between a teaching strategy used and the reason for using it or their intended learning goal in selecting this approach. Many used an example to illustrate what they meant and two used specific senior classes rather than Year 9 to answer the question. This suggests a broader conceptualisation of practice is required, making links between theories of learning with explicit pedagogical choices and closely related assessment procedures. In looking towards the Senior English syllabus included are a range of texts and contexts. It is linked to a clear long term goal based on conceptual electives that require students to gain knowledge and understanding and to be able to transfer these into new and challenging arguments. These Senior Stage 6 syllabus requirements have implications for what is studied in Stage 5 English. The confidence

these teachers expressed when describing their senior English classes may need to be reflected on when considering ways to approach the new English K-10 syllabus.

Student learning goals need to be underpinned by a clear theory of learning which should then support the formative assessment procedures used to establish the students' current skills, knowledge and understanding that should then support the selection of strategies and pedagogy for the teachers. In addition, students should be actively encouraged and enabled to participate in their own learning and there is evidence in this sample to support that greater student engagement is required. It was not clearly stated whether the literacy skill of "reading" was endorsed by the students as a specific goal they also recognised as worth achieving. The inclusion of students as part of the assessment process introduces the possibility of improved engagement and self-efficacy (Marks, 2000). If students are not involved in making decisions about their own learning they may feel disconnected from the learning goals being selected for them and in fact, may not achieve the kinds of learning experiences and outcomes that are desirable.

These findings suggest a narrow curriculum is being delivered. Thus, the scope of English in Year 9 is being restricted. One reason could be found in the teachers' views about the perceived influence of published test results on the wider community as is evidenced in their responses provided to the survey items on NAPLAN. This is then exacerbated by the additional findings of a rather superfical understanding of the changes to the range of assessment forms within the new NSW English K-10 syllabus. They would benefit from a broader understanding of the nature and uses of assessment practices within their classrooms. This would allow these teachers to "teach to the construct or broader domain, rather than the assessment task" (Gipps, 1994, p.22). This would be included in a similar

way as evidenced in the examples they provided when discussing senior English teaching strategies.

5.2.3. Assessment for, as and of learning in teaching practice

The main tensions to emerge from the data of this investigation, were about the teachers' perceptions of formative and summative assessment practices as separate and distinct from one another rather than as a cohesive and recursive process of teaching and learning. The relationship between their teaching strategies and student learning and assessment measures were also problematic and confused in terms of their overall purposes. These two tensions are intricately related and suggest the importance of both ongoing professional support and of time for reflection that are required when implementing a new syllabus and also when reforming assessment practice.

One area that invites the possiblity for the greatest reform is the area of assessment, namely, assessment as learning whereby students are assessing their own learning. The new NSW English K-10 syllabus enables teachers to see an integrated and informed role for assessment in their practice using three types of assessment. Hargreaves (2005) from a survey of 83 teachers regarding their conceptions of formative assessment extrapolated two distinct conceptions of assessment and learning: assessment as measurement, and assessment as inquiry and learning as obtaining objectives and learning as constructing or co-constructing knowledge. In both conceptions, assessment as inquiry is the most desirable because it invites students into the process and affords them a new level of agency in their own learning journeys. The findings from this study here suggest the teachers would prefer a conception of assessment from this perspective but in fact that they perceive the conception of assessment from the former perspective as being the most

legitimate. Again, reconceptualising the way assessment is used to evaluate students'

learning is required in order to enhance the processes occurring within the classroom.

Reflecting on current practices and their relationship to theories of learning may offer an

opportunity to consider the limitations of current practices.

In addition, the variety of assessment for learning strategies being used by these teachers

suggests further professional development in this aspect of their practice is required. Allal

and Lopez (2005) argue the role of the teacher is pivotal when it comes to the practice of

formative assessment as the most effective modification to practice is established prior to

instruction or what they term "proactive" rather than as a consequence of practice or what

they term "reactive". In two examples from this sample, examples of modification to

practice were provided during the interviews, but in both instances they would be

considered reactive. In one example, a proactive modification to practice was evident but

the teacher did not clearly articulate the broader learning goals behind the change.

External standardised testing appears to be driving curriculum and influencing the

teachers' perceptions about the role of assessment. In addition, the way teachers use their

planning time and their engagement strategies in the middle years of schooling are of

specific contextual importance for this investigation. Alex, Ashley, Sam and Drew all

commented that students were often out of class for a range of extra curricular activities

and that absenteeism was also significant. Taylor was asked directly about this issue and

acknowledged it was a problem but felt there was little she could do about it. While this

issue does not directly relate to this investigation, the broader implications regarding

student engagement, the delivery of curriculum, and the meeting of mandated hours of

study are worth noting.

5.3. Implications from this sample

It would appear from this small case study that the teachers' perceptions of the influence of assessment in the teaching of Year 9 English reflect the literature that suggests implementing authentic formative assessment practices are restricted by the presence of high stakes standardised testing.

There was evidence to support the conclusion that respondents had a clearer understanding of assessment of learning rather than assessment as learning. However, it is recommended that respondents consider some of the ways they might need to proactively modify their teaching practice. This also reflects their comments where they feel they are burdened with the task of satisfying the external demands of standardised testing despite their personal reservations regarding its effectiveness to reliably diagnose student learning.

Teachers do need to improve their assessment literacy by investigating and experimenting with formative assessment tasks. Additionally, for this specific case, respondents should delegate time to interrogate the new syllabus more thoroughly, plan their approaches to working with a new curriculum, and consider investigating the latest theories of learning and also review contemporary models of subject English. An exploration of each of these areas would enhance the professional learning of the teachers involved and also open up greater opportunities to create their own agency and that of their students.

While the Board of Studies advises that established programs may be adapted to meet the needs of the new syllabus, it would be worthwhile for this faculty to develop some new programs of study. This would present them with an opportunity to grapple with their own

understanding of the ways teaching, learning and assessment are inextricably connected within the specific context of English curriculum.

In pedagogical terms, Literature Circles offers a strongly socio-constrcutivist model of reading and the respondents spoke positively about its success when it was given the apprropriate time. It suggests one specific area that could offer opportunities for them to implement authentic formative assessment strategies. The comments by respondents also suggested there appeared to be greater student engagement when the explicit connections between teaching and learning were explained to the students. There is more scope to enrich the work already being done in Literature Circles by ensuring greater student agency in the selection of groups and novels, additionally, this structure may be used to include a greater variety of types of texts such as multimodal, digital, visual and aural texts.

5.4. Directions for future research

This project raises a number of avenues for future research investigations. One area that can be investigated further is the extent to which teachers perceive assessment as measurement. In this investigation, the five teachers acknowledged the salient view that assessment was for "official" purposes to record student progress. Is this phenomenon limited to this faculty or does it have broader acceptance within the school context and the system? When asked why reading was the target for literacy, one participant commented that it was a school goal. This suggests a paradigm of assessment as measurement is in place across the school and that this goal may not necessarily be a shared one. The introduction of the PAT-R online testing for Year 1 through to Year 10 across this school's regional system suggests a paradigm that values external testing measures that are then

used to influence the delivery of both the school and classroom based curriculum. This is contrary to current theories of learning that focus on the co-construction of knowledge and understanding where assessment is used to inquire into future directions (Hargreaves, 2005).

In addition, more empirical evidence is required for the ways teachers and students can develop reciprocal assessment practices that will respond to the learning needs of all students. There was a preference for perceiving assessment as inquiry by two participants who expressed dissatisfaction with the dominant view of assessment as a measure of student progress and who felt that more formative assessment was needed in their teaching of Year 9 English. Two more participants directly addressed the way summative assessment removed their agency in the classroom. What has not been investigated is the extent to which students feel they have agency in the direction that the teaching and their learning is taking under this current paradigm of assessment.

The consequences of a narrow use for assessment appear to be a reduction in the potential reliability and accuracy of the information gathered because it does not consider learning to be an ongoing process of reflection and modification (Berry and Adamson, 2001). It would seem that external assessment measures influence and drive the internal assessment forms and the classroom practices of teachers of Year 9 English. When assessment is perceived as measurement the information gathered about student learning favours the students' knowledge and skills, rather than addressing the broader aspects of their learning such as their attitudes and beliefs. To fully engage with an innovative and exciting new syllabus for subject English, students need a greater range of learning activities, more diverse assessment forms, and increased opportunities for their active participation.

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Appendix A: Ethics Approval Letter

21 May 2014

Dr Kerry-Ann O'Sullivan
Department of Education
Faculty of Human Sciences
Macquarie University
NSW 2109

Dear Dr O'Sullivan

Re: Teachers' perceptions of the influence of assessment requirements on the teaching of Year 9 English (Ref: 5201400478)

Thank you for your recent correspondence. Your response was reviewed by the Executive of the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) (Human Sciences and Humanities).

This research meets the requirements set out in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (2007) and your application has been approved.

Details of this approval are as follows:

Reference No: 5201400478

Approval Date: 21 May 2014

This letter constitutes ethical approval only.

The following documentation have been reviewed and approved by the HREC (Human Sciences and Humanities):

Documents reviewed	Version no.	Date
Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Application	2.3	Jul 2013
Correspondence from Mrs Portelli addressing the HREC's feedback		15 May 2014
Permission to Conduct Research Letter		
Participant Information & Consent Form (PICF)	2	15 May 2014
Survey Questions		
One-to-One Interview Schedule		
Application to Conduct Research in Catholic Systemic Schools in the Diocese of Parramatta		

Please ensure that all documentation has a version number and date in future correspondence with the Committee.

Standard Conditions of Approval:

1. Continuing compliance with the requirements of the *National Statement,* which is available at the following website:

http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/book/national-statement-ethical-conduct-human-research

2. Approval is for five (5) years, subject to the submission of annual reports. Please submit your reports on the anniversary of the approval of this protocol.

3. All adverse events must be reported to the HREC within 72 hours.

4. Proposed changes to the protocol must be submitted to the Committee for approval before implementation.

It is the responsibility of the Chief investigator to retain a copy of all documentation related to this project and to forward a copy of this approval letter to all personnel listed on the project.

Please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Secretariat should you have any questions regarding your ethics application.

The HREC (Human Sciences and Humanities) wishes you every success in your research.

Yours sincerely

Dr Karolyn White
Director, Research Ethics & Integrity
Chair, Human Research Ethics Committee (Human Sciences and Humanities)

This HREC is constituted and operates in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) (the National Statement) and the CPMP/ICH Note for Guidance on Good Clinical Practice.

Appendix B: Letter to Principal

RE: Permission to Conduct Research

Research Project title: Teachers' perceptions of the influence of assessment on the teaching of Year 9 English

Dear_____,

I am writing to request permission to conduct research at _____with participants taken from the English Department, who are currently teaching Year 9. My name is Leanne Portelli and I am undertaking the Master of Research degree at Macquarie University in the Faculty of Human Sciences, School of Education. The nature of my research is to conduct a case study using an online survey and one 50-minute interview during Term 2 and 3 this year.

The purpose of this research is to gauge the perceptions of the new NSW English K-10 syllabus by the teachers in one English faculty in light of existing and additional assessment requirements. The following question will be guiding the research project, "What are teachers' perceptions of the influence of assessment requirements on the teaching of Year 9 English?"

For research purposes, access is required to conduct the completion of an online survey by the participants. I also request one teaching program with associated assessment. I will email all teachers of Year 9 English at the school outlining the research and inviting participation requesting their consent to complete the survey. Teachers will be advised that they need to reply by return email with a signed consent form if they agree to participate in the survey. A further consent form for their participation in a 50-minute interview will follow once they have consented to and completed the survey. I will email a copy of the survey to each participant and I will travel to the school to conduct the interviews at a time convenient to the teachers. Pseudonyms will be used and the school will not be identified in any way.

I have followed the procedures for conducting research in Catholic systemic schools in the Diocese of Parramatta by completing and submitting the application form required. I have sought and received Ethics approval from Macquarie University. My Supervisor is Dr Kerry-Ann O'Sullivan who can be contacted on 9850 8702 or via email kerryann.osullivan@mq.edu.au for further information. As a member of the English faculty, currently on leave to undertake this research I hope to use the findings to enable me to support the ongoing implementation process of curriculum upon my return to full-time work at the college. I look forward to hearing from you regarding my request.

Yours Sincerely,

Leanne Portelli

Appendix C: Participant Consent Form

School of Education
Faculty of Human Sciences
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY   NSW   2109

Phone: +61 (02) 9850 8702
Fax: +61 (02) 9850 8674
Email: kerryann.osullivan@ mq.edu.au
Dr Kerry-Ann O'Sullivan

Participant Information and Consent Form

<u>What are teachers' perceptions of the influence of assessment requirements on the teaching of Year 9 English?</u>

You are invited to participate in a case study regarding the implementation of the new NSW English K-10 syllabus for Year 9. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete a 30-minute online survey and a 50-minute interview during Terms 2 and 3 of 2014. The purpose of this research is to gauge the perceptions of the new NSW English K-10 syllabus by the teachers in one English Faculty in light of existing and additional assessment requirements.

The study is being conducted by Mrs Leanne Portelli to meet the requirements of the Master of Research degree under the supervision of Dr Kerry-Ann O'Sullivan, 9850 8702, kerryannosullivan@mq.edu.au, Senior Lecturer, of the School of Education, Faculty of Human Sciences.

Any information or personal details gathered in the course of the study are confidential, except as required by law and pseudonyms will be used. No individual will be identified in any publication of the results mitigating any potential risks or discomforts perceived by the participants in agreeing to partake in this research. A summary of the results of the findings will be made available to you.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary: you are not obliged to participate and if you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without having to give a reason and without consequence.

The survey seeks to identify your perceptions of the local demands you face as a teacher implementing the new NSW English K-10 syllabus. The follow-up interview will be based on the survey findings and provide an opportunity for further exploration of the local issues identified. The interviews will be audio recorded, transcribed and sent to you for verification.

The contemporary educational landscape in Australia is rapidly changing and this can be seen in the context of an individual school. There are many external pressures constantly added to the complex nature of education at a local level. As NAPLAN results become

linked with policy decisions, pressure for improving scores impact on teachers, their practices and the prescribed curriculum. As a result, some changes have already been enacted to the MySchool website. Given the many changes facing teachers, there is evidence their work is intensifying.

This research will contribute a small case study of individual English teachers' perceptions about key educational matters, specifically the implementation of curriculum and assessment that are currently being enacted in policy. The implementation of a new English K-10 syllabus in NSW has implications for all schools and for the wider community in relation to the uses and direction of educational assessment. In anticipation of your participation in a short online survey and follow-up interview, I thank you for your support of this research project and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours Sincerely,

Leanne Portelli
leanne.portelli@students.mq.edu.au

I,_____have read *(or, where appropriate, have had read to me)* and understand the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research, knowing that I can withdraw from further participation in the research at any time without consequence. I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

Participant's Name:_____
  (Block letters)

Participant's Signature: _____Date:_____

Investigator's Name:_____
  (Block letters)

Investigator's Signature: _____ ___Date:_____

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Director, Research Ethics (telephone (02) 9850 7854; email ethics@mq.edu.au). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

(INVESTIGATOR'S [OR PARTICIPANT'S] COPY)

Appendix D: Online Survey Questions

Online Survey Questions

Teachers' perceptions of the influence of assessment on the teaching of Year 9 English.

Part A – Teaching

1. How many classes do you teach this year?
2. What is the average number of students in your class?
3. How many classes do you teach in one timetable cycle?
4. How many free periods do you have in one timetable cycle?
5. On average, approximately how many hours of marking would you do per week?
6. Where would you do most of your marking?
   - home
   - school
   - combination of home and school
   - other
7. On average how many emails would you receive per week?
   - students
   - parents
   - staff
   - other
8. How would you categorise the nature of emails from students?
   - homework submission
   - catch-up on work missed in class
   - work for marking/feedback e.g. draft responses
   - general interest on class work
   - other
9. Do you have a strategy to manage student emails?
10. On average, how long would it take you to answer student emails per week?
    - 15 minutes
    - 30 minutes
    - 1 hour

- 2 hours
- 2 hours+

Part B – Year 9 English

1. What are your teaching priorities for your Year 9 class for 2014?
2. What do you see as the priorities of a Year 9 English program based on the new NSW English K-10 syllabus for the Australian curriculum?
3. Can you identify any changes to Year 9 English this year based on the new syllabus for the Australian curriculum?
4. What literacy skills are being targeted in Year 9 English this year by the faculty?
5. Why have these skills been selected?
6. How are you addressing this skill in your class?

Part C – Assessment

1. What types of assessment for learning do you do with your Year 9 English class?
2. What types of assessment as learning do you do with your Year 9 English class?
3. What types of assessment of learning do you do with your Year 9 English class?
4. What is the role of assessment in your Year 9 English class?
5. What is your view of NAPLAN testing in schools?

The next 2 questions have been adapted from the Whitlam Institute "The Experience of Education: The impact of high stakes testing on school students and their families. An Educator's perspective." (2012)

6. What do you believe to be the purpose of NAPLAN?

	strongly agree	agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	disagree	Strongly disagree
A diagnostic tool to assist teachers						
A tool to identify schools in need of support						
A method of						

monitoring school performance						
A school ranking tool						
A means of informing parents of student progress						
A means of helping parents choose schools						

7. Some researchers claim that NAPLAN has a negative impact on curriculum in schools. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	agree	disagree	Strongly disagree
NAPLAN's literacy and numeracy focus has led to timetable reduction for other subjects				
NAPLAN testing and preparation reduced face to face time with my students				
NAPLAN has reduced the importance of other curriculum areas				
NAPLAN means I teach more to the test				
NAPLAN narrows the range of teaching strategies I use				
NAPLAN preparation takes up time in an already crowded curriculum				
I spend more class time on areas I know will be tested in NAPLAN				

8. Do you access the ACARA website for information on NAPLAN?

  - regularly
  - occasionally
  - never

9. What are your views on the publication of NAPLAN results on the MySchool website?

10. What do you think of the timing of the NAPLAN tests in Term 2?

11. In what ways do you use the data provided on the MySchool website?

12. Did you prepare any or all of your students for the last NAPLAN tests?

13. Across the 14 teaching weeks prior to NAPLAN, how often do you practice NAPLAN tests/questions with your Year 9 class?

14. How has NAPLAN testing influenced your new syllabus programming for Year 9?

15. How has the NAPLAN tests influenced your assessment practices?

Part D – Demographic Information

1. Gender
   - male
   - female

2. Age
   - 25-35
   - 36-45
   - 46-55
   - 56-65

3. What are your academic qualifications?

4. For how many years have you been teaching?

5. Are there any other roles or responsibilities you hold at your school?

6. Is there anything else you would like to add?

END OF SURVEY

Appendix E: Semi Structured Interview Questions

Area 1:
Focus of investigation: teacher's pedagogy

What kind of teaching strategies do you like to use with Year 9?

Prompt: Can you give me any examples?
Probe: the relationship between practice and theory, activity and content knowledge. How are students involved in the teaching, learning and assessment cycle? How would you describe your ideal English lesson?

Area 2:
Focus of investigation: assessment – concept and theory. Type of and role of assessment.

What are your views about the role of assessment in your teaching?

Prompt: Can you give me any examples?
Probe: the relationship between teaching practice, assessment and learning. Look for evidence of assessment for, as and of learning. What relationship is there between what you teach and how you teach it? How often and when do they modify their practice?

Area 3:
Focus of investigation: new NSW syllabus and nature of student learning

What do you think of the new NSW syllabus? What changes do you see/notice?

Probe: the role of curriculum in their practice, its influence and place in their daily lives, what is their knowledge of the syllabus and whether they see the new syllabus as an opportunity for reformation in subject English.

Area 4:
Focus of investigation: theory of learning and philosophy of subject.

Why do you think English is an important subject for students to learn? What do you think they learn?

Probe: what perspectives of learning can be identified, such as socio-constructivist theories of learning. Can any 'models' be identified here? Personal Growth or Literacy orientation (basic skills).

Is there anything else you would like to share?