Worlds Apart: a comparative analysis of discourses of English in the curricula of England and Australia

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Abstract

A comparative analysis of English in the primary curricula of England and Australia reveals markedly different policy perspectives of the functions and purposes of language, literacy and literature in these two Anglophone countries. Whilst the Australian curriculum incorporates 'the basics' with broader sociolinguistic views of language in an attempt to construct breadth and balance, the English curriculum is predominantly a didactic adherence to 'the old basics'. Using discourse and content analysis, a systematic review of the two curricula is undertaken and evaluated by applying Cox's five models of English and Kalantzis et al.'s four paradigms of literacy. The results of this study have important implications for teachers, academics and policy-makers in all Anglophone countries, especially the two countries that are the focus of the study.

Introduction

English is a subject covering diverse content and purposes, making neat definitions problematic (Macken-Horarik 2014). The breadth and range of what might be included as English makes curriculum design equally problematic. Given that the curriculum is culturally situated, what might be appropriate in one jurisdiction need not necessarily apply in another. A comparative analysis of the primary English curriculum in England and Australia reveals contrasting views of both what is deemed to be valid subject knowledge and what future literate citizens in these respective nations require.

Since the late 1980s, both societies have increasingly sought systematic reform of education. Since its implementation in 1989 the National Curriculum in England has undergone several iterations, including modifications caused by the

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'National Literacy Strategy' (DfEE 1998) and the 'Primary National Strategy' (DfES 2006), causing Alexander (2008) to suggest that curriculum changes in England have been premised upon politically expedient perceptions of skills and standards with considerations of pedagogy absent from discussion. In Australia an attempt to introduce a National Curriculum in the late 1980s was blocked by several states. The federated Australian political system means implementation can only occur by agreement with each state. A second attempt, initiated in 2008, finally received approval for implementation in September 2015 (ACARA 2015), but only after a first iteration had undergone rigorous scrutiny by Donnelly and Wiltshire (2014). Incidentally, as part of their review, the two academics scrutinised the curricula of several other countries. It is pertinent to note their comments on English in the curriculum of England:

> *The emphasis is on teaching grammar, spelling and punctuation in primary schooling with spoken language integrated throughout the program of study. There is greater freedom for teachers in secondary schooling where pupils apply and expand knowledge gained in primary with greater demands in the range of reading and formal writing skills. There is also a strong phonics and phonemic awareness approach to the early years of literacy.*   Donnelly and Wiltshire 2014:39

The synopsis corroborates Alexander's criticism, suggesting England has adopted a reductionist model of English that barely extends beyond teaching decontextualised skills. Ball (2013:19) regards a curriculum of the present rigidly embedded in 'traditional subjects, canonical knowledge…a curriculum of facts, lists and eternal certainties' as 'cultural restorationism' and Kalantzis et al (2016: 3) suggest that the 'old basics' is suited to a society in which both learners and citizens behave unquestioningly towards 'received authority'.

By means of a comparative documentary analysis of primary English in England, as outlined in the national curriculum (Department for Education 2013) and Australia (ACARA 2015), this article explores the validity of the above critique alongside revelations about the teaching of English in these two English speaking nations on opposite sides of the world. A systematic interrogation of the content and discourse of the two curricula is presented, using Cox's (DES 1989) five models of English and Kalantzis et al.'s (2016) four paradigms of literacy. The ensuing discussion raises questions about the appropriateness of different models and paradigms for effective communication in a post-industrial world in which knowledge is increasingly transacted using multi-modal semiotic systems.

Models and Paradigms of English

Professor Brian Cox, who chaired the working party responsible for the first iteration of English in the National Curriculum of England and Wales

(Department of Education and Science and the Welsh Office (1989), also devised five models of English based on teachers' views of the subject. The five models are as follows:

> *Personal Growth* – *a focus on the child and the relationship between language and learning, as well as the role of literature to develop children's imaginative and aesthetic lives.*

> *Cross-curricular* – *a focus on the diverse language demands of subjects across the school curriculum. English is both a subject and a medium of instruction for other subjects. Without a command of subject specific language children's access to the curriculum is impaired.*

> *Adult needs* – *a focus on preparation of children for the language demands of adult life; including the workplace, in a fast changing world. In order to function effectively with daily demands, children need to have command of spoken language, as well as print and writing.*

> *Cultural Heritage* – *a focus on an appreciation of works of literature widely regarded as amongst the finest in the language.*

> *Cultural Analysis* – *a focus on developing critical understanding of the world and cultural environment in which children live, including knowledge about the processes by which meanings are conveyed and the ways in which print and other media carry values.*   (Department of Education and Science and the Welsh
> Office 1989: 60)

Increasingly, discourses of 'English' are framed as literacy. Lankshear and Knobel (2011: 4) suggest the following five reasons why the term has become privileged: a perceived 'crisis' in literacy in the 1970s coincided with associations between levels of literacy and a country's ability to make economic progress, known as human capital theory (Lankshear and Knobel 2011: 8); from 1980, achievement in literacy was used to measure institutional and political success in what Lanskshear and Knobel (2011: 9) refer to as the 'standards-testing-accountability-performance' model; these socio-political reasons were accompanied by two developments in the field of education itself; the first of these was Paulo Friere's radical education movement that inspired critical pedagogy and critical literacy (2011: 5); the second was sociocultural theory and its application to literacy development as social practice (2011:7). Kalantzis et al. (2016) identify four paradigms of literacy that have emerged from these historical developments. These are listed here.

Didactic literacy dates from the 16th Century and emphasises the teaching of: synthetic phonics; prescriptive grammar; comprehension skills; rules governing 'the correct way to write'; a literary canon and the naming of concepts;

Authentic literacy dates from 1900 and builds on the learners' existing knowledge, interests and experiences. Whole language, analytic phonics, process writing, student self-expression and enjoyment of reading are typical of this paradigm;

Functional literacy emerged in the mid-1970s and is concerned with the social purposes of texts and how they are differently structured (genres). The focus is on how meaning making is influenced by context and involves the deconstruction of texts to identify how language serves the text's intended purpose;

Critical literacy also emerged during the mid-1970s and involves critical interrogation of texts as socio-political constructs. The learner is positioned as an active meaning maker who engages with texts from a position of empowerment.

<div align="right">Kalantzis et al. 2016</div>

There are obvious connections between these last two paradigms and Lankshear and Knobel's discussion of socio-cultural theory and critical pedagogy.

Although Cox's models and Kalantzis et al.'s paradigms do not map identically, they share some commonalities. The personal growth model resonates with aspects of authentic literacy to the extent that both involve the interests of the child. The cross-curricular model requires an understanding of subject specific genre which is a feature of functional literacy in the Australian context. However, in the English context the term 'functional' may suggest 'basic literacy'. With an emphasis on reading the finest literature in the language, the cultural heritage model, in the English context, may resemble that aspect of the didactic model in which texts are privileged as the 'literary canon'. In the Australian context, however, the cultural heritage model may refer to cultural diversity. Finally, both the cultural analysis model and critical literacy involve an understanding of how language is value laden and can represent different standpoints.

The Cox Report provides a 'snapshot' of thinking about English at a particular historic point prior to the introduction of the English National Curriculum. It therefore stands as a reference point against which to judge subsequent curriculum changes and the paradigms posited by Kalantzis et al. represent an historical overview of developments in the teaching of English. Taken together, the models and paradigms provide a comprehensive analytical framework for a comparison of English in the national curricula of England and Australia.

Method of Analysis

Data visualisation as a means of documentary analysis is a method increasingly used in a number of disciplines (Cidell 2010). Wordles provide the researcher with a quick means of identifying key words in texts (Baralt et al. 2011) as a preliminary to fuller investigation of discourse (McNaught and Lam 2010). A Wordle creates a 'word cloud', which is produced by cutting and pasting text into a Web 2.0 tool. The frequency of word usage in the text is represented by the size of each word in the 'cloud'. The size of words and their juxtaposition in the word cloud demonstrates their relative importance in the text's overall discourse. This method was used to elicit dominant words in the two curricula. Prior to entering text into Wordle, language that was not content specific, such as in sub-headings, was deleted.

Representing lexical selections of text visually made it possible to construct a lexical hierarchy that could be used for the subsequent interrogation of semantic nuances around key words, as suggested by McNaught and Lam (2010). McNaught and Lam (2010: 630) add that dominant words in the 'word-cloud' may also reveal the standpoint of the text's author. This function of Wordles make the tool a useful means of critical, cultural and socio-political analysis.

Iliinsky and Steele (2011 cited in Riggs and Hu 2013: 522) argue that the human mind is equipped to quickly comprehend and analyse visual media when information is correctly presented. On this point, Ahearn (2014) sounds a note of caution about interpretations of visual representations in word clouds because several variables can be manipulated, including font style and colour, background, and directionality. Ahearn found that the juxtaposition of words can make some appear more prominent than words that occur more frequently in the text. For this reason a consistent approach was applied to all word clouds in this study, which are presented with words printed horizontally in black, Open Sans Bold font on a white background.

Cognisant of McNaught and Lam's (2010) implication that Wordle should be used as a first stage analytic tool, a second stage of analysis was implemented. A search was made using the find and search facility in Word of the 10 most frequently used words in each Word Cloud. This enabled the words to be interrogated in context. Significant statements containing these words were extracted and coded against the nine criteria derived from the five models and four paradigms. For example, the word 'word' appears in the top ten words in both Word Clouds. In the English curriculum it is the most frequently used word and in the Australian curriculum it is the fifth most commonly used word (see Table 2). However, when the word 'word' is considered in context, its use generally functions differently in the respective curricula. The following examples are typical of its use in the English curriculum:

> *Pupils should be taught to:*

● *Develop their understanding of the concepts set out in English Appendix 2 by:*
   ○ *Leaving spaces between words*
   ○ *Joining words and joining clauses by using and* (sic)

<div align="right">(Department for Education 2013: 15)</div>

The context in which the word appears suggests that the didactic criterion is the most appropriate category against which to code this instance because it conforms to instruction around the acquisition of skills in a prescriptive manner. Although there is evidence of similar use of the word in the Australian curriculum, there is also evidence of its use in a range of other contexts. For example, in terms of expressing and developing ideas there is reference to recognising:

> *… that texts are made up of words and groups of words that make meaning;*

and exploring:

> *… the different contribution of words and images to meaning in stories and information texts..*

> *This usage of the word in relation to textual semantics is closer to the criterion of functional literacy.*   (ACARA 2015)

At the final stage of analysis, the total number of statements extracted from each curriculum was calculated. A simple statistical analysis was then undertaken by dividing the total number of statements in each curriculum by the number of statements coded to each of the nine criteria. These were then represented as a percentage of the total number of statements in each curriculum.

Overview: structure of the two curricula

The two curricula differ significantly in their overall structure. Whereas the English version is sub-divided into three 'programmes of study' covering spoken language, reading, and writing, the Australian curriculum integrates three interrelated strands of: language, literature, and literacy. These strands are then expressed in terms of 'Level Descriptions' for each year group from Foundation Year (five year olds) upwards. The Australian curriculum also classifies language in terms of 'receptive modes' (listening, reading and viewing) and 'productive modes' (speaking, writing and creating). The term 'creating' in this context refers to composing multimodal, visual and digital texts. The use of sub-headings signposts what learners need to know about the nature of language, literacy and literature and functions as a refrain reminding teachers of

the uses, purposes, and structures of language. In contrast, the English curriculum has a single programme of study for spoken language for years 1 – 6 and then separate programmes of study covering reading and writing for each year group. The two modes of language are then sub-divided into word reading and comprehension, transcription (spelling and handwriting), composition, vocabulary, grammar and punctuation, respectively. There is a further demarcation in each of these sub-divisions between 'statutory requirements' and 'Notes and guidance' that are non-statutory. However, the language used is the same in both sub-divisions, giving the discourse of the entire document a mandatory tenor.

As shown in Table 1, whereas the structure of the English version dissects language into its constituent parts, itemising discrete skills to be taught, the Australian curriculum implies a broader conceptualisation of English. However, a more in depth analysis follows to investigate the extent to which this initial view is justified.

The most frequently used words in the two curricula

The most frequently used words in each document are shown in the word clouds below (Figure 1 and 2). By extrapolating the ten most frequently occurring words, as shown in Table 2, authorial standpoints (McNaught and Lam 2010:630) become clearer. The dominance of 'word' in the curriculum of England is bolstered by the appearance of 'vocabulary' and 'spelling'. Although the term also appears in the Australian top ten, it comes halfway down the list and is subordinate to 'text', a word that is absent from the subject in the curriculum

Table 1: *Comparison of sub-headings in the English and Australian curricula*

Sub-headings in the English Curriculum	Sub-headings in the Australian Curriculum
Spoken language Reading: Word reading Comprehension Writing Transcription – spelling; handwriting Composition Vocabulary Grammar Punctuation	• Language variation and change • Language for interaction • Text structure and organisation • Expressing and developing ideas • Phonics and word knowledge • Literature and context • Responding to literature • Examining literature • Creating literature • Texts in context • Interacting with others • Interpreting, analysing, evaluating • Creating texts

Figure 1: Word cloud of the English curriculum Y1-6 Table 1

Figure 2: Wordcloud of the Australian Curriculum F-6

Table 2: *The ten most frequently used words in each curriculum document*

English Curriculum	Australian Curriculum
words/word	texts/text
Pupils/pupils	understand
read/reading	language
writing	including
English	words
taught	different
vocabulary	literature
spelling	Students/student
books	knowledge
knowledge	ideas

of England. The implication one might draw from this cursory glance implies English is being viewed through opposite ends of a telescope. However, as McNaught and Lam (2010) caution, Wordle should only be used in the initial stage of analysis. In order to assess the full significance and potential inter-relationship of key terms in both curricula, a systematic analysis of the words in context follows.

Analysis of contextual use of dominant words: English curriculum

The focus on words is located in reading and writing and phonics. Although the type of phonics is not explicitly stated, it is clear synthetic phonics is not only the preferred method but is mandatory. By **statutory order** pupils must be taught to decode words by blending (synthesising) grapho-phonic correspondences (GPCs) and to spell words by segmenting GPCs. There is no reference to alternative methods of teaching reading and even phonically irregular words must be 'tackled' using synthetic phonics. Teachers are told pupils must be given books that '..*do not require strategies other than phonics',* implying acknowledgement of a wider repertoire of reading strategies whose use is denied to them.

The second most commonly used word, 'pupils', is succeeded by the modal verb 'should' 109 times. Given that the modal phrase 'pupils should' frequently occurs in the 'statutory requirements' section, the obligation seems imperative. Teachers are also statutorily instructed to teach children to: sit correctly at a table; hold a pencil correctly; learn poems by heart; develop stamina for writing; use diagonal and horizontal strokes to join letters and choose the '…writing implement that is best suited for a task'.

Spelling is referred to 38 times, with teachers instructed to correct misspellings and pupils required to spell correctly words and sentences dictated to them. However, morphological knowledge is encouraged as a means of spelling words with common affixes, and vocabulary extension is emphasised. The term 'vocabulary' is used 48 times. Teachers are reminded that reading increases pupils' vocabulary. Although five references are made to reading widely for enjoyment, gaining pleasure from reading and developing a love of literature, the weight of discourse falls to skilled word reading, phonics and phonically decodable books linked to pupils' skills. There are nine references to pupils' being expected to discuss what they read, taking turns to listen to one another courteously. No other means of responding to books is suggested except orally re-telling stories and reading and performing poetry and plays. Reading is also linked to grammar and proof-reading. Books are referred to 48 times, including non-fiction books five times. The dominant discourse around writing emphasises a command of vocabulary, grammar and linguistic conventions. Knowledge of grammatical terms is considered necessary in order to discuss writing. Handwriting features in equal measure to these other transcriptional features. Pupils should be taught how to plan, draft, revise and evaluate their writing and it is a statutory requirement that pupils compose

sentences orally before writing them. This appears to be a misconception of writing as speech written down. Writing for purpose and audience is mentioned only three times.

We are told: 'English has a pre-eminent place in education and in society' and that the '…overarching aim for English in the National Curriculum is to promote high standards of language and literacy'. The development of spoken language is discussed in the context of its importance for pupils' development across the whole curriculum. However, being '…taught to control speaking and writing consciously' including having command of the grammar of Standard English is referenced numerous times.

The context in which the word 'knowledge' appears corroborates much of what has been explored above, with the exception of reading as a means of pupils' developing 'knowledge of themselves and the world in which they live'. This is in addition to gaining 'knowledge across the curriculum'. These isolated references to wider aspects of reading are overshadowed by statements that reinforce a dominant discourse in relation to phonic, orthographic and grammatical knowledge.

The focus in this curriculum, then, is the statutory performance of pupils and teachers in relation to decoding, spelling, writing and understanding the meanings of words. In this curriculum view, semantics appear to be captive to the signifier-signified semiotic dyad and rarely move beyond meaning-making at the level of individual words.

The curriculum also emphasises the quality of product over the understanding of processes. The emphasis on books and in particular written text as the staple of literacy fails to recognise a multi-modal world that requires the simultaneous processing of various semiotic systems in order to fully comprehend texts. This omission signifies an outdated view of English and the denial of literacy in a post-modern world in which knowledge transaction through multimodal texts is a commodity of 'cognitive capitalism' (Peters 2012). Anstey and Bull (2010) identify up to five semiotic systems that operate in multimodal forms, including: linguistic, visual, auditory, gestural and spatial. However, only the linguistic system is recognised in this curriculum.

There is a concern that world-leading literacy experts in the UK are absent in this curriculum. For example, Gunther Kress, a founder of the New London Group, is world renowned for his work on multimodality and semantics, but his voice is not present in this curriculum. Absent too are other internationally renowned literacy experts. It should be a matter of concern that the UK government is not drawing on the knowledge of experts in the field in the shaping of its curriculum and that the current authors of the curriculum are anonymous.

The consequence of this failure to use expert advice appears to have led to a prescriptive, micro-managed pedagogy. As Michael Rosen asserts:

> *Instructing teachers how they 'should' do things deprives them and their students of the excitement of discovering things. In fact, if I had to invent a way in which I could put something into the school day to guarantee that it would be forgotten by the majority of children, this is how I would do it.*   (Rosen 2015)

Analysis of contextual use of dominant words: Australian curriculum

The dominant word in the Australian curriculum is 'text'. As in the English curriculum, reference is made to the use of 'decodable and predictable texts' but these references, shown in brackets, are outweighed by statements that emphasise: 'variety of texts for enjoyment' (9); 'a wide range of texts' (13); 'texts from different cultures', including: Asia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (9); 'multimodal texts (22) and digital texts (9). In addition, students are expected to create and experiment with a range of texts for different purposes and audiences (27), which is indicative of creativity. There are 29 references to students' responses to texts, which include discussion, evaluation and analysis. Analysis involves investigating textual composition (10); understanding how purpose shapes a text's structure (6) and intertextuality (6). This level of textual knowledge is absent from the curriculum in England.

The second most prolific word is 'understand'. Understanding includes knowledge that Australian Standard English is one of many social dialects. Alongside understanding words and how etymology and morphology aid spelling, there is space for wordplay and experimentation with sound devices and imagery in narratives, poetry, anthems and odes. Understanding grammatical devices is embedded in a recognition that meaning is 'enriched' by grammar. Grammar is associated with purpose and context for writing and the use of language to express feelings and opinions. Understanding also applies to how images and vocabulary combine to create different effects and extend meaning. The influence of social context on people's interactions also features in this curriculum. There is a need to understand phonics but not with the pre-occupation apparent in the English curriculum. The same applies to grammar. Syntactic knowledge is rarely regarded as an end in itself to be taught in discrete, decontextualized ways.

The third term, 'language', sits alongside literacy and literature as a central tenet of the Australian curriculum. Study involves not only a comparison of the features of language in different text types and its use in context but variation in language, including differences between spoken, written and other modes. Paralinguistic aspects are recognised as an integral semiotic to communicative competence. Language is viewed as a rhetorical device designed to shape readers' responses and to create aesthetic effect in literature. Reference is also made to understanding the difference between the language of feeling and the

language of fact. The relationship between linguistic features, individual words and imagery to represent ideas, characters and events reinforces the notion of text as a multimodal phenomenon.

The inclusiveness of the Australian curriculum is encapsulated in the fourth most frequently used word, 'including'. It posits a multi-strategic approach to word level work, including grapho-phonic knowledge, morphemic, etymological and contextual knowledge, similar to the now defunct Searchlight Model (Department for Education and Skills 2001: 4), which lost political favour in England following the Rose Report (2006). To fully appreciate the full semantic value of the word 'including', the following reference is indicative of its usage across the Australian curriculum:

> *Students engage with a variety of texts for enjoyment. They listen to, read, view and interpret spoken, written and multimodal texts in which the primary purpose is aesthetic, as well as texts designed to inform and persuade. These encompass traditional oral texts **including** Aboriginal stories, picture books, various types of print and digital texts, simple chapter books, rhyming verse, poetry, non-fiction, film, multimodal texts, dramatic performances and texts used by students as models for constructing their own work.*

Inclusion in the Australian context captures its rich oral tradition, as well as exposure to a wide range of semiotic systems that constitute what it means to be fully literate in the 21st Century.

Furthermore, scrutiny of the word 'literature' reinforces a commitment to inclusion of the diversity of texts from within Australia, as well as classic and contemporary world literature. Of equal importance is the exploration of texts from different historical, social and cultural contexts in relation to students' own experiences. Hence, 'text to life' and 'life to text' (Cochrane-Smith 1984) correspondences are integral to student engagement with reading. This recognition allows the positioning of readers as active participants in the processes of literacy rather than as passive recipients of prescriptive reading programmes. The words 'difference' and 'different' abound in the Australian curriculum. Examples of their usage include: the *different* contributions of words and images to texts; *different* systems of communication for *different* needs and purposes; words have *different* meanings in *different* contexts; and language varies according to the *different* roles of speakers and the context of use.

While the Australian curriculum refers to grapho-phonic knowledge as a means of blending and segmenting letters to read and spell words, this is often with reference to CVC and high frequency words. Visual memory, onset and rime, letter patterns, semantic, grammatical and contextual combine to provide a balanced holistic approach to the teaching of reading and spelling. The

relationship of words to texts as symbiotic entities in the construction of meaning is recognised. The use of multiple cues is considered to be essential knowledge necessary to become an effective reader.

The Australian curriculum conveys a view of language as a dynamic living entity, which is especially evident with reference to the eighth most frequently used word, 'students'. Students are creators of texts for a variety of purposes and audiences, as well as readers who are invited to respond to texts by relating them to their own lived experience. They are encouraged to collaborate when editing their own writing, which can include imaginative, informative and persuasive texts, as well as reports, performances, poetry and expositions. Students are encouraged to collaborate and identify how ideas relate to their own lives, as well as discuss the different viewpoints from which similar ideas can be expressed. The social aspect of language is complemented by investigation of how language features can be used to present and extend ideas.

Comparison of the two curricula in relation to models of English and paradigms of literacy

A comparison of the two curricula against the five models of English and four paradigms of literacy is represented below (Table 3). Some similarities are discernible. The two curricula are virtual mirror images of one another in terms of the attention they give to the Personal Growth and Cross Curricular models. Fifteen per cent of statements in both curricula advocate English for Personal Growth. Both curricula allocate only one per cent of statements in the subject to its importance as a cross curricular dimension. Although apparent commitment in the English curriculum is given to the relationship between language

Table 3: *Comparison of paradigms of English*
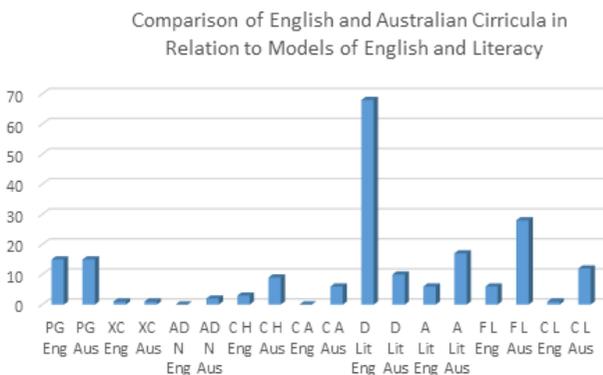
Key:
PG - Personal Growth; XC – Cross Curricula; AD – Adult Needs; CH – Cultural Heritage; CA – Cultural Analysis; D Lit – Didactic Literacy; A Lit – Authentic Literacy; F L – Functional Literacy; C L – Critical Literacy.

and learning as a means of developing personal growth, the attention given to word level study in the form of phonics and vocabulary and the seeming neglect of the connection between words, grammar and textual semantics makes it difficult to see how a focus on words alone can be effective as a means of scaffolding students' understanding of whole texts and hence contribute to their personal growth. In contrast, the Australian curriculum encourages an engagement with ideas and ways in which language is used to communicate, thoughts and feelings in different text types.

This finding is in contrast to that of Goodwyn (1992), who found that teachers had a preference for the Personal Growth model and that they also reported the cross curricular aspect featured strongly in practice. It seems the last three decades has seen a paradigm shift in the teaching of English.

Neither curriculum gives explicit attention to English for Adult Needs. The English curriculum includes one statement that refers to language development as a foundation for secondary education and beyond. This one statement accounts for less than 1% of the English text, whereas in the Australian curriculum language for adult needs is slightly higher, at 2% of the text. More generally, however, the Australian curriculum makes reference to the use of software, word processing, the construction of digital and multimodal texts; all of which are relevant to the knowledge economy and are, therefore, skills students need to acquire to function effectively in the adult world. Implicit to this aspect of the Australian curriculum is recognition that digital and multimodal texts are part of a growing repertoire of 'literacies'. Neither of the words 'digital' nor 'multimodal' appear in the English curriculum, which implies that for English students the acquisition of digital and multi modal literacies will be in spite of the English curriculum, not because of it.

Literature as a means of developing imagination and aesthetic responses is a stronger feature of the Australian curriculum than its English counterpart. The Australian curriculum makes continual reference to texts from different cultures and perspectives, especially the oral texts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander peoples, as well as literature from Asia, classic and contemporary world literature. In contrast, the English curriculum refers to '..a wide range of books being read..' but it is noteworthy that, whereas this curriculum is very detailed in the study of words, it is opaque with reference to literature beyond traditional narratives. It might be argued the phrase 'a wide range of books' gives teachers broad scope in their selection of reading material, but findings suggest that teachers tend to choose books they read themselves as children (Cremin et al. 2008), which implies that current students may receive a narrow diet of literature. The fact that traditional narratives are the only named genre in a highly prescriptive curriculum signals an imperative that may further constrain choice. In contrast, the Australian curriculum refers to literature from different cultures across time and geographic location. Although the Cultural Heritage model accounts for only 9% of statements in the Australian curriculum,

recognition is made of the nation's multicultural composition, as well as its positioning in Asia. In contrast, there is no mention of cross-cultural literature in the English version despite the multicultural composition of English society. Only 3% of the English curriculum includes statements related to the Cultural Heritage model, making it narrow in both scope and content.

Further interrogation of the two curricula against the remaining models and paradigms exposes even greater differences. The starkest difference is the disproportionate emphasis on Didactic Literacy in the English curriculum and the greater emphasis given to Authentic, Functional and Critical literacies in the Australian curriculum (see Table 3). Whilst 10% of statements in the Australian curriculum were classified as Didactic Literacy, the figure in the English curriculum was 68%, which means that over two thirds of the English curriculum for students aged between five and eleven focuses on a literacy diet consisting mainly of: synthetic phonics, prescriptive grammar, knowledge of grammatical terms and naming of concepts, comprehension, rules and correctness. This confirms Donnelly and Wiltshire's (2014) synopsis. The two curricula share lexical similarity in relation to the use of grapho-phonic correspondence to decode, by means of synthesis, which may reflect the worldwide movement to privilege the teaching of synthetic phonics.

Six per cent of statements in the English curriculum were classified as Authentic Literacy compared with 17% in the Australian curriculum. The latter encourages exploration of the relationship between texts and students' personal lives. Although students in England are encouraged to connect what they read or hear with their lives and to write narratives based on their own experiences, emphasis is given to existing word knowledge as basis for interpreting meanings of unfamiliar words.

Functional literacy accounts for five per cent of statements in the English curriculum, typified by requirements to 'write clearly, accurately and coherently, adapting . . . language and style in and for a range of contexts, purposes and audiences' and to 'read books that are structured in different ways. . . for a range of purposes'. Although recognition of register and genre may be implicit in these statements, they lack the nuances of the 28% of statements in the Australian curriculum which include capacity to investigate the language features and structures of similar texts and to understand how authors adapt text structures and play with language to create different effects.

In a comparative curricular study of the USA, England, Scotland and Australia, Papen (2016: 175) notes that only the latter two include any mention of Critical Literacy and that New Literacy Studies and Critical Literacy are strongly embedded in the Australian educational landscape. This is exemplified in curriculum statements that include: 'understanding that language in social context signals roles and relationships'; understanding the difference between the 'language of

feeling and the language of fact' and comparisons of how texts, 'including media texts, present information in different ways'. Identifying the point of view of the author and how language can be used for emphasis, as well as to represent people and places, are also included in the 12% of statements attributed to Critical Literacy.

As mentioned earlier, Australia has a federated system in which national policy is filtered by the states. It is not within the scope of this article to comment on each state's application of the National Curriculum. However, Papen (2016) has scrutinised the New South Wales (NSW) interpretation of the Australian curriculum for English, using Freebody and Luke's (1990) Four Resources Model. Broad similarities were found, including an integrated and balanced application of the four resources for reading in NSW.

Unlike the English version, the Australian English curriculum was drafted by an expert committee. This was chaired by Peter Freebody, who referred to studies restricted to letter and word focus as: '...conceptually trite'; '...limited in their theoretical scope...' and offering '... little for educators to work with...' (Freebody 2007: 45). We can speculate on what might be his conclusions about the literacy diet being offered to the children of the land where English originated.

Conclusion

This comparative analysis of primary English in England and Australia reveals how students are positioned differently as learners and future citizens by means of differing paradigms of English. Whereas the Australian curriculum refers to listening, reading and viewing, thereby including multimodal textuality alongside audio and written texts, the English curriculum adheres to a traditional conceptualisation of text as the written form. This signals a distinct difference between the preparation of Australian and English students for literacy in the 21st Century and is indicative of the extent to which the British government ignores its own literacy experts.

In contrast, the voices of Australian literacy and language experts can be heard in the folds of the text. Papen (2016) references Freebody and Luke (1990), but also evident are Halliday (1978) and the genre theorists, as well as advocates of New Literacy Studies to which Cope and Kalantzis were 'signatories'. The inclusion of these different paradigms makes policy for the teaching of English in Australia richer and conceptually more diverse than similar policy in England, which is dominated by a didactic approach, narrowly focused on reading, spelling and understanding the definition of words. Whereas the Australian curriculum views language as a living, vibrant entity that swims in social spaces, the English curriculum treats language as an inert, moribund specimen to be dissected, named and consumed. We do not have to speculate too long on which of these discourses is likely to create the more creative, adaptable

and critical users of language. This is not to negate the agency of literacy teachers in England and their ability to construct positive outcomes but, as Papen (2016: xii) states, teacher agency operates within national policy frameworks and highly prescriptive national curriculum discourses constrain individual freedom to act. For English students, then, it is a curriculum of 'the old basics' situated at the level of words and unquestioning acceptance of authority (Kalantzis et al. 2016); for Australian students it is an eclectic curriculum that attempts to balance and integrate the 'basics' with the purposes and functions of language as a social entity.

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