

The subject of English: Constructing a new child in the discourses of 'New Education' in the early twentieth century

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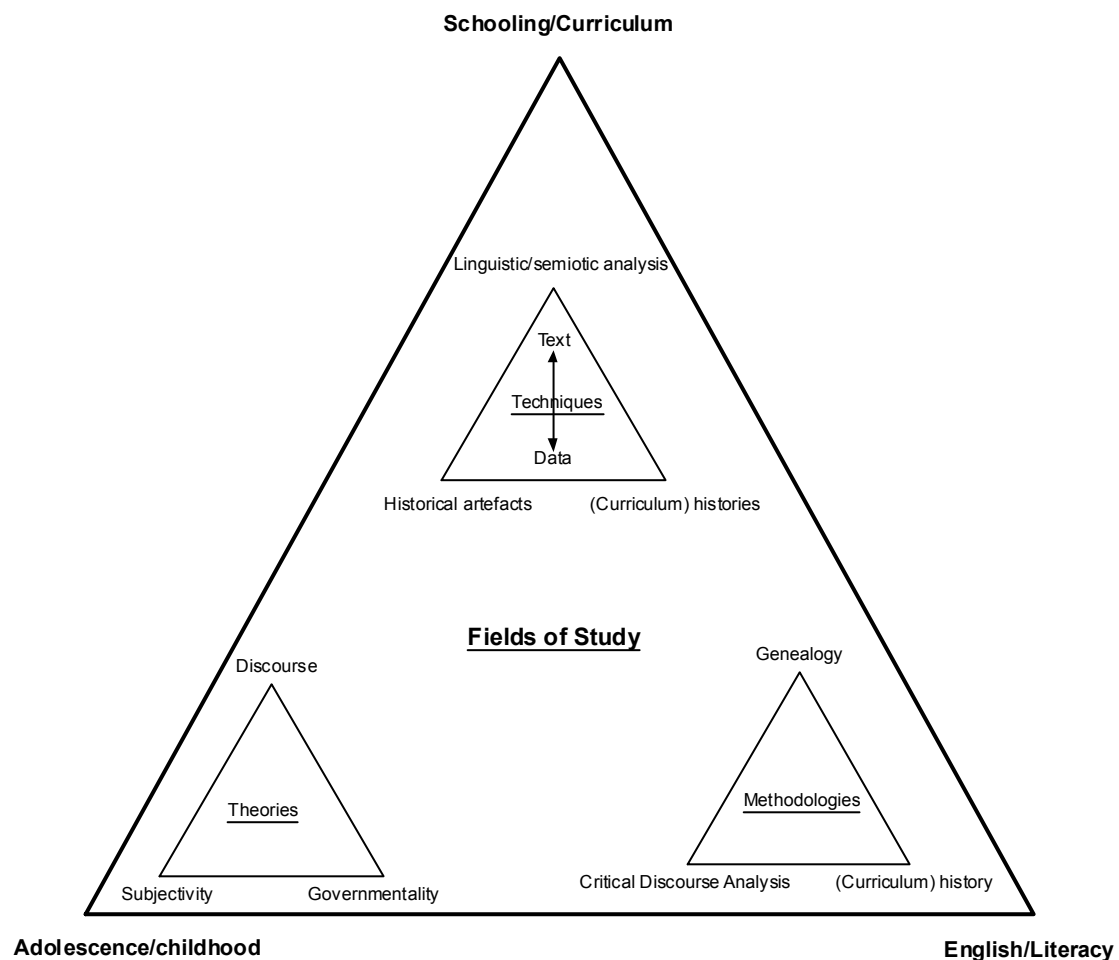
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Given the methodological focus of this symposium, I propose to begin with an overview of where critical discourse analysis (CDA) fits within my historical curriculum inquiry. That is to say I am addressing the question of the kind of contribution that CDA might make to a genealogy that begins with a problem in the present and traces its various forms and its emergence historically.

The problematisation that I am researching is the tying together of adolescence and literacy, in the present day discourses of education and youth welfare, as a site of anxiety and as a focus for governmental programs of rescue and repair centred around schooling. My historical focus is on the first decades of the twentieth century in South Australia when the first public post-primary (elementary) schools were established for adolescents and when issues of a proper curriculum for them were being debated – school subject English being a central element of this debate. This is a period, I argue, when the problematisation of adolescence and literacy in relation to schooling emerged in a form that can be related to the present. I am conducting a detailed analysis of how this happened in one local site – the Education Department of South Australia which had at that time been established for a quarter of a century as responsible for public schooling and the curriculum for the whole state.

Figure 1 outlines the theoretical, methodological and research techniques I am using in this study and illustrates their relation to each other and the place of critical discourse analysis.

Figure 1: Overview of the study



English/literacy, curriculum/schooling and adolescence/ childhood are the key points of the problematisation – they are the fields of study. In one sense I am using ‘field’ in its common sense notion of an area of study – a site of research, theory and practice. In another sense I am using field in the Bourdieuan (1990; 1996) sense as a, “network of objective relations (of domination or subordination, of complementarity or antagonism, etc.) between positions” (Bourdieu, 1996, p.231). In this latter sense I can consider these to be bounded and subject to their own logic and ways of operating

where participants are engaged in a game built around ‘oppositions’ – orthodoxies and heresies – that drive debates within, and changes to, the field.

Each of these broad fields of study I have placed as pairs of related, overlapping, and co-constitutive fields and positions which represent particularly important dynamics for the problematisation that is the starting point for my study.

There is the dynamic of schooling-curriculum where schooling provides the enclosure which has historically constituted the child/adolescent. It operates as a space where children/adolescents have been gathered together and thus made available for study/examination (Rose, 1999). Working within and across this space, the curriculum has operated as a kind of ‘map’ of the *content* – what is to be learned – and of the *learner* as Hamilton points out:

Between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the conception of a curriculum as a map, a journey and a destination remained unchanged, even if the maps, journeys and destinations had been revised. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, however, a major transformation occurred. Curricula remained map-related, but they began to be planned on the basis of a map of the learner rather than upon a map of knowledge. By 1902, when John Dewey commented on this transition in *The child and the Curriculum...* it was a relatively mature notion. (Hamilton, 1990, p.39)

In this way, the fields of adolescence/childhood are related to schooling/ curriculum, because, in their modern form, adolescence/childhood have been largely constituted within the operations of schooling/curriculum. Adolescence itself is something that is defined as an adjacent field to childhood – a not-quite-a-child – and as a transition into adulthood. Both adolescence and childhood are constituted within developmental discourses that have arisen from the scientific gaze of movements such as ‘child-study’ in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century – a period when public schools were established for the adolescent and curricula developed for them.

The fields of English/literacy are centrally related to the purposes of public schooling. There is an interesting dynamic between these two labels in a curriculum sense. The English subjects (reading, writing, grammar, composition, spelling etc.) formed the core of the traditional primary (elementary) school curriculum and has been a subject that has carried a particular role in the moral training of the student as citizen-in-the-making (Doyle, 1989; Green & Beavis, 1996; Hunter, 1987; King, 1982; Peel, Patterson, & Gerlach, 2000). As Green (1998) has pointed out, English has always contained its own set of dynamic (op)positions between grammar and literature with the former carrying much in relation to the proper disciplining of young people as workers – something that relates to the ‘grammar’ of schooling itself. There are strong echoes of this dynamic at work in the field of literacy especially as it has been foregrounded as a key site for the training of the student as a potential citizen and worker. Thus literacy can be seen as something constituted in relation to the English subjects and in relation to the proper child/adolescent subject of schooling.

Methodologically, this study is primarily a Foucauldian genealogy working with the major theoretical constructs of discourse, subjectivity and governmentality – due to the focus on methodology, these constructs are not discussed in any detail in this paper. Genealogy is supplemented by curriculum historical approaches¹ and critical discourse analysis (CDA). Using these methodologies my technique has been to treat as data, historical artifacts such as curriculum texts, and histories themselves. These materials operate as both texts and as data in this study.

One of the major challenges of conducting a genealogy is to ‘read’ historical material in ways that lead the researcher away from the narrative impulse of traditional historical work that tells the story of how things came to be. In contrast, the starting point for genealogies is that the present is not seen as an inevitable outcome of the past, nor its seamless continuity – indeed, the past is the ‘other’ of the present

1 Curriculum history offers my study a wealth of categories and strategies for analysing curriculum artefacts and considering their relation to English and to schooling more generally. These will not be discussed in detail here as they are not the focus of this paper – see Franklin (Cormack & Green, 2000; 1999) for a useful summary of the current state of this approach.

and, being 'other,' the past can be used to bring into relief the contingency and the constructedness of the present. Further, an important feature of genealogical work (and one of the ways in which it echoed and built upon Foucault's archaeological studies) is its refusal of the unity of subjects (eg child, citizen), institutions (eg school, hospital), and ideas (eg democracy, sanity) across time, noting that, being constituted within discourses, they are the *effects* of particular (historical) practices.

One has to dispense with the constituent subject, to get rid of the subject itself, that's to say, to arrive at an analysis which can account for the constitution of the subject within a historical framework. And this is what I would call genealogy, that is, a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects etc., without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its empty sameness throughout the course of history (Foucault, 1980, p.117).

This is a radically different kind of history – a history of the present (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1986, p.119); or a 'critical and effective history' (Dean, 1994) – which requires reading practices that are disruptive and which resist the modernist search for fundamental truths.

For the genealogist there are no fixed essences, no underlying laws, no metaphysical finalities. Genealogy seeks out discontinuities where others found continuous development. It finds recurrences and play where others found progress and seriousness. (Foucault, 1986, p.106)

It is from a need to deploy such disruptive and resistant reading practices that I came to CDA. I use the term 'reading practices' advisedly here, as the main historical data to which I have access is textual, thus analysis is primarily an act of reading. CDA provides reading practices compatible with the critical nature of genealogies (Visker, 1995). Foucault put together critical analysis and genealogy as two sides of the same discourse analytic coin. In 'The Order of Discourse' (Foucault, 1981) he describes discourse as something that involves processes of both exclusion (restricting who can talk, what they can say, the things it is possible to say etc) and production (constituting desire, providing choices). Examination of the exclusionary practices he called 'critical' analysis, while the study of productive practices he called 'genealogical' analysis (p.49). Foucault built genealogies upon his earlier archaeological work and supplemented the critical reading of discourses with an examination of the practices that have served to constitute the human subject.

Three features of CDA are important to my genealogical work:

1. the strategies it provides for close linguistic analysis that promote a 'denaturalised' reading of texts and highlights their role as discursive practice. This is a reading which is different from the preferred reading structured by the author(s) of the text. Patterson (1997) highlights this feature when she labels CDA as 'a condition of doubt', where the taken for granted is interrupted and questioned. This reading against the grain is useful in the genealogical requirement to question and unpick those constituent assumptions of discourse, those categories that they take for granted or which are "so fundamental that they remained unvoiced and unthought." (Young, 1981)
2. the emphasis of CDA on intertextuality as a way of understanding how texts are read and produced and linked to the social conditions of their use. CDA is alert to these relationships between and within texts in order to track the different viewpoints and meanings being employed. For Fairclough (1992), this involves tracking relations between texts in 'horizontal' and 'vertical' planes:

On the one hand there are 'horizontal' intertextual relations of a 'dialogical' sort ... between a text and those which precede and follow it in a chain of texts ... On the other hand, there are 'vertical' intertextual relations between a text and other texts which constitute its more or less immediate or distant contexts: texts it is historically linked with in various time-scales and along various parameters, including texts which are more or less contemporary with it. (Fairclough, 1992, p.103)

3. the emphasis on going beyond texts, to consider how texts may be used in peoples' material lives to shape subjectivity – these are, especially, the productive and constitutive elements of discourse.

CDA attends to the embodied aspects of discourse. Researchers such as Kamler (1997) have shown how, in educational institutions, textual practices are central to the shaping of student (and teacher) bodies to produce a habituated way of being and seeing the world.

The remainder of the paper is an examination of one aspect of my study which illustrates elements of the use of these three features of CDA. I focus here on the formation of the late/post primary student subject² in and through subject English. The first aspect of this work has been the close reading of curriculum texts to think about the mundane and everyday *practices* that were employed to constitute student subjectivities and the discourses which informed these practices.

I examine English as a site of such practices in schools and as a form of human technology which seeks to shape young people into particular ways of being. In this way, my analytic perspective is built upon poststructuralist theories of the subject and subjectivity. I am not taking as my starting point a liberal-humanist view of young people as unitary subjects. I am not trying to say what it was ‘really’ like for them, nor am I assuming that there are essential or foundational features of the child that lie behind or beyond the discourses of curriculum and schooling waiting to be identified. So I am not seeking a child that English and the curriculum repressed or ignored or brought into the light of reason, rather I am seeking to track the historical construction of a child subject (Poster, 1997) or, rather, the construction of a transitional subject which was not quite a child, nor an adult – the adolescent – not the usual subject of public schooling at that time. Following Weedon (1987), I see subjectivity as formed within and in response to discourses and institutional practices. I ask “What are the objectives of all this work upon the human being, what subject form do they seek to produce: what are the images or exemplars of ideal persons promoted or assumed by these practices?” (Rose, 1996, p.310)

Data used

I have chosen the first decade of the twentieth century as the period in which to focus this inquiry because this is the time in which English was first formed as a subject³ and therefore a place where a process of curriculum ‘fabrication’ of the subject might be visible. I use the English curriculum as a site for considering the play of discursive and non-discursive practices in shaping the student subject. I view the curriculum as a text as well as a process and a practice. I treat curriculum texts in the way that Ball (1994, p.16) sees policy texts - as “not necessarily clear or closed or complete.” Indeed I see them as sites of tension where competing discourses may clash and as fields of play where multiple discourses may co-exist, overlap or even be unaware of each other’s existence.

To consider this multiplicity of discourses I have used the *Education Gazette* (hereafter the *Gazette*), published by the Education Department of South Australia as the key data source for this study, alongside the more ‘official’ statements of policy such as the education regulations and courses of instruction. The *Gazette* was produced monthly and forwarded to every teacher in the state. As well as being the official means of communicating administrative and curriculum requirements to a far-flung teaching force, it provided a forum for teacher ‘improvement’ and acted as a record of key events. It contained, among other things, extracts from conference speeches, announcements of regulations, articles, extracts from inspectors’ reports, tips and hints for teachers, official statistics and lists, curriculum guides, and reports of teacher association meetings. The *Gazette* was a multi-vocal text, where official pronouncements were placed alongside commentaries, complaints and entreaties to teachers, notices about events and all the other texts necessary to run a widely dispersed education

² Students were required to be in school until the age of 13 – this was raised to 14 in 1916 – thus in considering the ‘older child/adolescent’ I have focussed on the curriculum of the later years of the primary (elementary) school and that of any post-primary schools established at that time. In this paper the ‘older’ child is the student in the late-primary or post-primary school – around 11-14 years of age.

³ The 1907 Course of Instruction of the Education Department of South Australia was the first to group formerly separate subjects of reading, spelling, grammar, language, poetry etc under the heading of ‘English’ (Cormack, 2001) although the term ‘English’ had been used as far back as 1885 as an over-arching label for ‘composition’ and ‘grammar’. Thus in SA government schools, English was a *primary* (elementary) school subject before it was a *secondary* (high) school subject, an issue that has not been fully explored in curriculum histories of the subject (for comment on this see Patterson, A ‘English in Australia: Its emergence and transformations’ in Peel et al., 2000, p.291).

system. While the 'official' voice was dominant, the *Gazette* was far from univocal as different discourses competed to speak the truth about teaching and curriculum. Also detectable in this text were the echoes of practice (exemplary and problematic, everyday and special), and alternative ways of seeing the world of curriculum and teaching. The *Gazette* seemed an ideal site for the application of critical discourse analysis that was alert to the possibilities of multiplicity of discourses and flows of power from 'below' as well as from 'above.'

The curriculum materials and the *Gazette* for this period were read to consider the key practices being deployed to constitute young people as *subjects of English* in the *English subjects*. My analytic process was to read thoroughly the curriculum statements and the *Gazette* for the period of the first decade – with excursions into the periods preceding and following this decade. I noted instances where the (older) child was talked about or made a subject or object of curriculum or school practice with a focus on the English subjects. I paid particular attention to those places where the child or a practice attracted a surfeit of words. This is what Fairclough (1992, p.193) calls 'overwording' which is a sign of 'intense preoccupation' with an idea or object – for example, places where a problem was being addressed, or where the writer was clearly making an attempt to persuade the teacher reader. I also attended to the mundane duties, the ideas that seemed to go without saying, and the terms that served to monotonously mark accepted practices and ideas throughout the period.

The child subject as an object of pedagogical knowledge and practice in subject English

The practices most often mentioned in the various texts that made up the curriculum and the *Gazette* – such as the inspectors' reports, articles, speeches – were related to reading (both oral and silent), writing and speaking. Over the first decade it was reading (as both school subject and as practice) that stood out as central to how students were to be in school. I have identified a range of reading, writing and speaking practices that, in combination, constituted possible subject positions for the older child in school. The first five relate to reading practices, while the last two relate to writing and speaking practices. They are:

- Reading the body – the examination of reading (aloud)
- Reading the world through English eyes – accessing the 'storehouse' of great thoughts
- Touching the soul – accessing an emulable self
- 'Establishing the reading habit' – reading as exercise and recreation
- Regulating the self – exercising the freedom 'to do as one ought'
- Writing as drill – 'the closest attention to every minute detail'
- Speaking as the mark of learning – eliminating the 'Australian twang'

Not all the practices noted were within the official boundaries of the English subjects for, as was often noted in the texts examined, the 'mother tongue' was used in all subjects and could be deployed as part of pedagogical practice across the school day.

These practices did not offer a coherent or singular subject position to the older child – indeed a variety of positions seemed on offer. Informed by different discourses, these practices sometimes seemed placed awkwardly in relation to each other in the curriculum as if each was unaware of the existence of others. I'm very aware that my 'reading' of these practices is produced out of my experience of late twentieth century theories and pedagogies and that their incompatibilities and intersections are available only as a product of this analysis. However, one can only wonder at how teachers and students might have managed their competing demands, or resolved their different challenges, assuming they tried to take up aspects of the positions made available.

A significant driver of this overlap and contradiction of discourses and practices at this time was a reform movement known as the 'New Education.' The 'New Education' was a set of ideas – a kind of loose 'program' of reform – that was invoked by particular inspectors and leaders in the education department as the inspiration for reshaping curriculum and pedagogy in public schools and, as part of this process, forming a new kind of student subject/citizen-in-the-making. In the Australian education context of the early twentieth century the New Education has been characterised as having "no set pattern" (Turney, 1983, p.1). In the hands of these inspectors and leaders in the South Australian context, it was cast as a reform movement which emphasised student activity, a move against drill and 'cram', and featured an appeal to nature – both as a focus for curriculum through 'nature study' and as

a basis for seeing the child as ‘naturally’ inquisitive and ready to learn as this extract from the Assistant Inspector-General’s report of 1905 exemplifies:

I have noted with pleasure in several schools a marked tendency to let the pupils take a more active part in what are generally spoken of now as the “intelligence lessons,” in geography and history has this been especially the case. There is really less talk on the part of the teacher and more work on the part of the pupil. The method which used to treat the pupil as an empty vessel to be filled in the shortest and easiest way possible is fast being superseded in our better schools by the method which treats each child as an ever living being - soul, if you like, - endowed with powers to observe, receive, and assimilate. This method has of late been much spoken of as the New Education, but really there is little that is new in it at all. It is rather that we are at last awakening from a long horrid nightmare of cram, falsely-named instruction, and returning again to dear old mother Nature’s ways. (Assistant Inspector-General’s Report (Whitham) 1905, p.75)

For teachers faced with 60-70 students, it must have been hard to imagine what this product of the New Education might look or behave like – this amalgam of Rousseauian naturalness, Herbartian attentiveness and Hall’s scientifically knowable child (Baker, 2001). Indeed, working as they were from imported texts and occasionally in touch with university scholars and educational leaders from other states, the South Australian inspectors and others who promoted such reforms were clearly feeling their way themselves, adapting this new child of European and American ideals to the realities of a struggling and isolated state in Australia. This child/student subject was also new in the sense that it was also staying on at school longer and in some senses no longer a child. The inspectors’ and educational leaders’ writing and speeches reflect this uncertainty, representing the school system, teaching, the curriculum and the students as a kind of work in progress – or as things in the process of ‘awakening’ as Inspector Whitham put it in the above quotation. The consistent use of the present progressive tense noted in the *Gazette* and shown in many of the examples used below, marked schools, students and teachers as never quite there, as always on the way, as leaving some things behind and coming to a better place, but never quite arriving. Thus one of the discursive effects of the New Education as revealed in the *Gazette*, was to mark the student (and the teacher) as particularly malleable subject positions that were never fully formed.

For the purposes of this paper, I propose to focus on the first two of the practices listed above in order to illustrate some of the discourses that were at work in the curriculum and to consider aspects of the ideal student positions on offer.

Reading the body – the examination of reading (aloud)

One of the ritualistic parts of the inspectors’ reports that were reprinted in extracts in the *Gazette* each year was the comment on reading.

Reading.- Improvement is still to be desired. More fluency and a better grouping of words, coupled with voice inflection, are needed to produce the desired effect. (Smyth *Gazette* 1900 p.47)

No other aspect of the curriculum attracted such consistently troubled commentary in report after report, year in year out. In the early years of the department it was common practice in curriculum statements to simply list the reading book from which the exam would be taken at each year level. There was no specification of the way in which that text was to be read – but inspectors more than made up for this omission in their reports. Possibly this only seems an omission from a present perspective where ‘oral’ reading has to be marked and silent reading is the unmarked norm – presumably in the 1870s it went without saying that this was reading of the text out loud to the teacher. In the 1879 course, eight words were placed before the statement of the text to be read, presumably to clarify for teachers *how* the text was to be read aloud.

To read with ease and expression from the Fifth Royal Reader or equivalent, or a passage from a newspaper (Program of Inspector’s Examination 1879, emphasis added)

The ritualistic complaints about the quality of reading – it constantly was needing improvement, ‘appearing to improve,’ ‘not well taught,’ subject to ‘faults’ etc – highlighted it as a key site for the inspector when examining students (as they did until the middle of the 1900s when the head teacher took over) or inspecting the quality of the teaching. In 1902 (*Gazette*, p.124), responding to the fact that the Inspector would no longer conduct the exams on all children in all schools, in which reading was a central subject, Inspector Whillas noted that he would, “judge the success of the instruction by noticing the conduct of the children during the ordinary lessons, whether the attention is keen or languid, whether the children are careful and industrious or idle and slovenly.” This comment alerted me to review the comments on reading aloud to see how much they attended to the students’ bodies. This analysis demonstrated that reading was a production of the student body – where strict attention was paid to how students held their body and to what they did with their bodies in producing a reading.

When examining reading an inspector notes how the child stands, his manner of holding the reading-book, and the distance of the book from the eyes. (McBride 1908, p.270)

Inspector McBride’s comment shows how the position of the body in relation to the text was monitored. This was seen to be a crucial aspect of reading as well as the appropriate pronunciation and articulation of words. This issue brought about a minute consideration of the use of the mouth and tongue, and attention to breathing even to the extent of having “mouth drill,” or “dumb-bell exercises for the mouth.” (Martin, *Gazette* 1901, p.85)

Reading aloud had not been well taught. It was characterized by slovenliness, faulty phrasing, and poor expression. It did not strike the teachers that voice-training was necessary. I suggested that breathing exercises, practice in vowel sounds, exercises in words beginning with *h* and *wh*, and in such expressions as *when he had*, and *he six stones*, &c., should be given daily before reading lessons. Where the teacher paid strict attention to voice-production the results were remarkably good. (McBride, *Gazette* 1908, p.271)

Experience shows that the majority of teachers altogether underestimate the value of making every child thoroughly conversant with the sound of every consonant, vowel, diphthong, and combination. If this be done the power to read will come almost spontaneously. (Course of Instruction 1907, p.45)

Thus, the ‘power to read’ was the result of an appropriate bodily production of the text via stance, breathing, pausing and pronunciation. Pausing received much attention and students were to deliver the reading in a way that matched the author as if he spoke the words on the text. The use of the male form here is deliberate in order to highlight the way that authorship of reading material in general, and any authors cited, were almost always marked as masculine.

The emphasis on the appropriate delivery of the performance of reading led to some inspectors recommending a separation of the eyes from the book so that they could attend to the audience. That is, the child was, from time to time, to look away from the book in order to achieve an appropriate performance of the reading. The absent presence in all these words about oral reading was the *listener* who included the reader but also included the inspector, the teacher and an imagined appreciative audience. The point of reading was the reproduction of the words of the author in a way that embodied the message. The following extended quotation from Inspector Burgan shows the line of reasoning here, arguing that reading was about attending to ideas, not words,

... I must say that children generally look for words and not ideas, and their great desire is to utter these glibly and without due regard for their sense. Their eyes, too, all the time are on the book; whereas, to speak with ease and in a natural and effective way, they should be frequently raised, so that they could speak well above the book. They should get their thoughts from the book, but give themselves perfect freedom when uttering the same. I believe that adoption of this method would revolutionize the teaching of reading, and make it, in a short time, one of the best subjects taught in our schools. The process would at first be slow, but it would be sure and effective. I recommend all teachers to try it. The improvement in articulation, emphasis, and expression will soon convince them

that it is worth following, and that under it the difficulties connected with the teaching of reading would disappear as if touched by a magician's wand. No art, except perhaps music, is better calculated than that of reading to give pleasure to all, for everyone can appreciate great thoughts fitly expressed. Shakespeare's direction to the players, "to speak the speech trippingly on the tongue," applies aptly to reading. (Burgan, *Gazette* 1904, p.134)

Four years later, in 1908, Inspector Burgan built on this view, this time using the notion of children forming pictures, and pausing at each picture as they read. The term, however, that occurred more often than either reading 'ideas' or 'pictures' was that of grasping the 'thought' content of the text. Thus, verbal accuracy was not necessarily a key to a proper reading. As was stated in the 1907 Course of Instruction, "Reading is not a mere repetition of meaningless words. The matter of vital importance is that the child should grasp the thought involved in the words, and should cultivate in interest in so doing. Such reading, therefore, as betrays grasp of the content is more to be sought than mere verbal accuracy." (p.45)

In practical terms, the emphasis on (oral) reading as an embodied performance of the thoughts of the author must have been a difficult practice to employ in the classroom of the early 1900s. In large schools, classes of 70 or more were standard, and in small schools, four or five different classes of students had to be managed by one teacher simultaneously. In these circumstances providing the teacherly audience for the individual reader would have been an onerous task.

There are hints in the *Gazette* that reading was rarely conducted in this way as indicated by the repeated complaints of the inspectors in their reports. Also, occasionally inspectors noted some of these non-desired practices, if only to try to restrict their use. For example, Inspector Maughan (1902, p.160) commented on the practice of 'simultaneous reading' as possibly "necessary where classes are large, but, except with very skilful usage, it leads to dull monotony." Based on the evidence of the *Gazette*, 'simultaneous reading' was reading aloud conducted by the whole group/class in unison. This could be preceded by the teacher modelling the reading by 'patterning' or giving the students a sense of how to group words, pause etc. Inspector McBride defined the practice in the negative thus:

I cannot report that this subject has been well taught in all schools. The method used has been quite contrary to the right one. The wrong method has many adherents. Teachers read a passage from a book, explain it, give a pattern, allow loud simultaneous reading, stop children in the middle of a phrase to correct some slight error, and so on. Until they realize that comprehension of the matter is of *primary* importance, that phrasing with deliberation will lead to fluency and suitable expression – briefly, that the golden rule for reading aloud or silently is "Take your time," I do not think that this subject will be so much appreciated by children as it should be. (McBride, *Gazette* 1906, p.251)

It is likely that the oral performance of reading in the manner so sought after by the Inspectors was a focus in the examination of the older children, once students had mastered basic word recognition. For these students, to read successfully was to perform the reading as a spoken text in a manner that conveyed the 'thought content' to the examiner/listener – the meaning followed the appropriate oral production of the text, it did not precede it. There are indications that this bodily performance of reading was a mark of social location. It was as if the reader had to be someone who could comfortably converse with the author as an equal in taste and knowledge as is reflected in this comment by Inspector Burgan.

No doubt comprehension is the weak point in the reading; but the reproduction of the passage read ought to remedy this defect. To quote once more from Burrell - "The very best reading, like the very best acting, cannot be taught. It presupposes a love of the subject, a taste and a gift for it, a nice discrimination of lines and shades of the human voice, an appreciation of the fine in literature, and a certain amount of general knowledge. (Burgan, *Gazette* 1908, p.253)

The responsibility for the examination of pupils in the annual examination was passed from the inspectors to the head teacher in this decade. However, the inspectors continued to examine pupils for

the compulsory standard at the end of Class IV and the older Class V students. We can picture the pupil standing before the inspector being examined for their 'two marks' for reading. For the first mark, students had to be able to read/reproduce the text of the approved reader for their year, however, they only gained the second mark if they demonstrated "expression and comprehension" (Gazette 1907, p.45). In the quote above, Inspector Buran gives an indication of how this was done in the examination – it was a reading of the body, of the 'lines and shades' of voice, and of the 'taste and gift' for reading and general knowledge – markers of student class, rurality and gender.

It is clear from the curriculum materials and inspectors' reports that this practice of examination and the focus on the oral performance of the text remained important in the years following the first decade of the century. However, in 1917, the President of the South Australian Public School Teachers Union attacked this practice, especially in the higher grades. By this time, it appears, the practice and examination of oral reading could be relegated to the early years of school because of the new emphasis on *silent* reading. In 1917, to read in the manner so desired by the inspectors of a decade earlier could be dismissed as merely 'producing a nation of elocutionists,'

Just now, great stress is being laid on silent reading, and rightly so. But quite oblivious of the fact that nine hundred and ninety-nine out of every thousand of men and women derive their pleasure and solace and instruction from silent reading, the test remains the same - To read, with fair fluency and good expression, a certain number of lines from a prescribed book. This may be necessary in the lower grades, but unless the aim is to produce a nation of elocutionists, it surely might be dispensed with in the higher. Moreover, the test is not infallible. A boy may read fluently and with excellent expression, and have but a very hazy idea of the matter read; while another may stumble over his words, forget all about modulating his voice, and have an intelligent grasp of the subject matter. ... Let us have silent reading by all means, but let the test be *on* silent reading. ... The ultimate test of any method of teaching this subject must be, Does it engender in the scholar a love for reading? Judged by that test, our treatment of the subject has largely failed. (President's Address 1917, p.136)

This quote indicates that the view of reading as oral performance was to be contested after the first decade of the century – an interesting fate for a practice which was so much the focus for attention of inspectors and curriculum in the period I studied. If nothing else, this demonstrates the potential fragility of curriculum and pedagogical practices that educators may hold dear from time to time. I have argued in another place (Cormack, 2001) that the move to silent reading arose in part out of the different resources made available in the classroom that required a different shaping and examination of the student⁴. However, my focus here is to remain in the first decade of the twentieth century and to consider the second of practices listed above that were being made available by the curriculum of the period. This second practice was related to the first. The notion that reading provided access to the 'great thoughts' of men suggested that *what* students were to read was as important as how they were to read it. It is to this aspect of the reading curriculum that I now turn.

Reading the world through English eyes – the selection of literary texts for reading

The focus on the 'thought content' of the text being read and reproduced during oral reading was related to an understanding of the nature of the texts that should be read in the English curriculum. For if 'reading' was the act of being the oral conduit for the 'thoughts' of the author, then it followed that great care was needed in the selection of the authors and texts to be so performed. And who were to be these authors? These were the 'great men' who provided access to the heritage of ideas from the past. The following quote provides an idea of how these great men were to influence the reader. It is

⁴ That having been said, this is not to claim that some of the underlying features of distinction used in the examination of oral reading – the display of 'taste' for example – could not be maintained in other forms of the subject. Silent reading was a new technology that required new forms of assessment and, I argue, required/allowed new ways of measuring taste that could be deployed in ways similar to the assessment of oral reading discussed here. Teese (2000) has shown that the use of taste and the dispositions of the culturally advantaged as a way of defining the 'better students' remained central to the examination of senior secondary English right through the second half of the twentieth century.

extracted from an address entitled 'Education: A Practical Ideal' delivered at the Annual Prize Distribution at an English Grammar School – Dunstable – and reproduced in the *Gazette*.

A pure love of reading is one of the most precious gifts of true education. Through the companionship of books great men talk to us, pour their souls into ours, share with us their loftiest aspirations, their highest thoughts, their purest ideals. In the mirror of their minds we see and judge our own most truly. Books are the voices of the distant or the dead speaking in our ears, making us heirs of the life of past ages; they are the truest levellers, for they make no distinction between rich and poor, employer and employed. they give us however humble may be our lot, if we will but use them faithfully, the society of the best and the wisest of the human race. (Prothero, *Gazette* 1910, p.86)

It is the metaphor of literature (including poetry) as a 'store' or 'storehouse' of noble or great ideas that was commonly called up in discussions of what children were to read as in this example in Inspector Maughan's report for the 1901 school year.

"Reading maketh a full man," said Bacon. Because the noblest thoughts of great men are enshrined in their writings, and because, too, abundant stores of exact information are only to be acquired by the study of books, the subject of reading is of vast importance. (Maughan 1902, p.134)

What was this storehouse of ideas and information and what work was it to do? The question of what students were to read about was linked to conceptions of the kind of person the reader was to be and, especially, to appropriate sensibilities or to ways in which they were to 'read' the world. In one of the first entries of the 1900 *Gazette*, the Board of Inspectors (p.82) reflected at length on the problem facing a secular school system in working with all classes of children – not just those of the middle class. They quoted Matthew Arnold as rejecting the notion that mere *information* from science would be enough to ensure that the working classes rise beyond their "ignorance" and argued that the people must be "moralised ... through letters, poetry, and religion" if they were to have the appropriate dispositions towards that information and use it wisely. However, as the Board of Inspectors pointed out, a secular system had no recourse to religion. Instead, they said, the State must rely on "the refining culture which comes of reading and digesting the best thoughts of the best writers, past and present." Citing the 17th century pedagogue Comenius, they noted that the result of this refinement through reading was to train "men to all which is human."

In the same year, Inspector Neale, made a parallel comment about the teaching of poetry and went on to describe some of the practices that may accompany this training.

In the absence of formal religious teaching, the poetry lesson gives the best opportunity of touching the higher realms of the children's souls; but in most instances "poetry" means saying verses and explaining the unusual words. I should like to see the material setting of the poem, with its historical and geographical details, fully illustrated with pictures and maps, by which time the new words would have been talked into the children's vocabulary. Then, with this knowledge, and, if necessary, the key of the poem, the children should be led to feel the hidden meaning - the spiritual beauty, for which there is no adequate expression. Sometimes I see a class so taught; I wish it was an ordinary experience. (Neale, *Gazette* 1900 p.83)

For Neale, poetry becomes a portal, in the guiding hand of the teacher, to spiritual insight. Via concrete illustration with pictures and maps, the children *see* the world that is represented by the words of the poem. Through the 'key' provided by the teacher they can open their souls to its beauty⁵. Thus reading involved training in a particular aesthetic which was primarily built around visualisation (this may be related to the pausing at the 'pictures' required by Inspector Burgan in the previous section). Such training in the 'higher' realms of taste and judgement was one of the major reasons for the study of literature, but not the only one. In 1906 the *Gazette* reproduced from *The Australian Journal of*

⁵ There are obvious implications for the teacher in this – as a reader of literature and as someone who finds such hidden meanings – which are not the focus of this paper.

Education the text of an address given on “The teaching of literature in the kindergarten and lower forms of school” by Margaret Hodge to the Public School Teachers’ Association (Parramatta Branch). Literature had value in the primary school in five ways, she argued, as it was:

- valuable as information
- an interpreter of the world around us
- training for the mind/imagination
- training in taste and judgement
- a potent factor in moral development (summarised from Hodge, *Gazette* 1906, p.142)

Just as did the Board of Inspectors, Hodge linked the training of taste to moral development – one followed the other. Literature “widens and elevates our sympathies, ennobles our ideals; indeed, it forms the firmest foundations for the ethical training.” (Hodge, *Gazette* 1906, p.142)

It was an English moral sensibility and aesthetic sense that was being sought here, emphasising the *Englishness* of English as a subject – something that locates subject English as a colonial enterprise (Pennycook, 1998) in the context of Australian schooling. Literature, as I have said, was a training in seeing the (English) world. Inspector Whitham, for example argued that “if our history and topography were all forgotten almost all that is of value in them could be reproduced from the beautiful poems which are the rich inheritance of our English race.” (Whitham, *Gazette* 1907, p.206) There are occasional examples in the *Gazette* of a love for the English pastoral aesthetic. The most interesting of these was contained in an address by the director to the South Australian Public Teachers Union where he reported on his study tour to Europe and England with Tate, the then principal of the Teachers College in Victoria. In it he described England in rapturous terms:

While you were holding your meetings here last year I was away realizing the hope of a lifetime, visiting the “old grey mother of the northern sea,” seeing something of the spots made sacred by the memory of her mighty sons; lingering, for all to short a time, in places hallowed by many memories; rushing through country scenes so lovely that one longed to play the truant and loiter there; threading the mazy, winding ways of quaint old towns and great industrial cities ... (Director *Gazette* 1908, p.205)

The ‘mighty sons’ referred to by the Director, clearly included the writers and poets who had made England, in the minds of men such as the director, a “placid, pastoral paradise.”

Mr Tate and I were journeying from London to Aylesbury ... That day, the sun had decided not to hide himself in sulky gloom behind great murky banks of clouds, but shone out brightly, lighting up the “meadows trim with daisies pied,” showing the tender growth of oak, elm, beech and birch in all the glory of spring. Bucks – home of Hampden and Milton – that day was at its best: a placid, pastoral, paradise. (Director *Gazette* 1908, p.205)

This vision of beauty was that being sought in and through literature. It was, literally, a training in seeing the world through an English sensibility. For example in a speech by Melbourne University Professor Drummond, extracted in the 1910 *Gazette*, he urged the reading of English art critic Ruskin, who did so much to promote the work of English rural artist Turner (Landow, 2000). Ruskin is praised as someone who will:

... help a man to the use of his eyes. Anybody can be put up to this in a few minutes. Go out into the country on Saturday and stop at the first ploughed field. At first you will see nothing but an ugly ploughed mass. When you look again, it is a rich amber colour, with probably two feet of coloured air moving over it. the ploughed field is really a glowing mass of beautiful colour. When I was a little boy, I wondered why God made the world so dingy. I saw in Ruskin that the colours as they are in nature are most perfectly beautiful, and that by no possibility can they be changed to advantage. (Drummond, *Gazette* 1910, p.86)

The beautiful landscape of England, and its poets and writers were placed in contrast to the position of the ordinary Australian child and man. In this sense of location, literature was seen to provide a space

beyond the assumed squalid nature of everyday existence of the (rural, poor, working class) student of public schools or – perhaps as suggested by Drummond above – a way of *seeing* it differently. As such literature was meant to act as a kind of life-time prophylactic against the material world – “to raise us above pounds, shillings, and pence” as Inspector Whitham put it. (*Gazette* 1907, p.206)

[If] an appreciative taste for reading during respite from labour is created, the working man is put in possession of the most effective instrument for sweetening his life, and raising himself almost unconsciously to a higher level. ... if the working man is not to stagnate, and expose himself to the dangers that usually accompany stagnation in the moral as well as the material world, he must read, and read as regularly as he can. ... Reading is an educational, but still more a moral force. (Taken from a section entitled “Gleanings – Reading” in which an extract from “Memories Grae and Gay,” by John Kerr is given, *Gazette* 1907, p.168)

This excerpt from Kerr’s memoirs, reproduced in the *Gazette*, positioned literature as providing a higher place of respite and beauty. As Hodge said in the *Gazette* (1906, p.142), “what a debt of gratitude do we not owe to that study, which carries us so completely out of ourselves, which enables us, if only for a time, to cherish great and noble thoughts, to rid ourselves of the haunting spectres, the spot upon our sunshine, the shadow of ourselves.”

The classroom pedagogical practices that may have been associated with this reading of the world through English eyes were difficult to identify. As can be seen from the examples given, many of these comments seemed to be as much about adults’ (the inspectors’ and teachers’) lives and desires as about what children would do. Here literature was positioned as art and something that happened internally – in contrast to the bodily display of oral reading. One way the teacher or inspector would have had of knowing what the students were taking from the thoughts of great men would have been to question them on their reading and this practice certainly took place. There is some evidence, for example from this comment by Inspector West, that the bodily performance so valued in reading aloud was also valued in answering questions on the text.

In one of my schools there is a clear and distinct enunciation, good inflection and modulation, well-rounded sentences, and confidence, spontaneity (sic), and fulness in answers. The children stand erect, look the questioner squarely in the face, and are not ashamed or afraid to give expression to their thoughts. (West, *Gazette* 1910, p.15)

Beyond such questioning, in the *Gazette* most attention was focussed upon the reading material that was to be selected and made available to children. In his speech to the South Australian Public School Teachers Union in 1903, the Inspector-General talked about the need for schooling to go beyond its traditional focus on training the child’s intellect (the first five ‘windows to the soul’) to “open a sixth window in the souls of children” and engage in the moral development of the child. (*Gazette* 1903, p.102). For him the key subject available to teachers for this work was that of reading where “the optional reading book may be turned to good account.” (p.102) This optional book referred to the possibility of the teacher bringing additional texts into the curriculum to supplement the official reader for the year and to extend the amount of reading students did. He went on to identify three kinds of books which could be used for this purpose. First there were books ‘for information:’

We may call these the literature of knowledge. They differ in the actual value of the information they contain, and also in their style. Some of them are comparatively worthless and uninteresting to children. The typical boy wants books “with stuff in them,” as he calls it; and his idea of “stuff” rises as his reading advances. Of this kind of literature are historical stories, descriptions of the life and customs of other people, descriptions of other lands, stories about plants and animals that tell the truth, either in the form of fact or fiction. (Inspector-General *Gazette* 1903, p.102)

Second, there were books of ‘biography:’

[These] are valuable in part for knowledge and in part for inspiration, or for power to will and to do the great and noble thing. (Inspector-General *Gazette* 1903, p.102)

Third, there were books of ‘literature:’

[These] awaken ideals of heroism, of love, of beauty, of self-sacrifice, of returning good for evil, of honour, of honesty, of truthfulness and many other noble virtues. These are sometimes called the literature of power.” (Inspector-General *Gazette*, 1903, pp.102-103)

The use of books for such purposes related to the way in which the bible was used as a text of inspiration and for uplifting of the soul. The education department was born in a period of a bruising battles in South Australia about the use of the bible as reading materials in schools – a battle in which the secularists were successful. However, in this period, the first item in the course of instruction – a brief note that preceded the description of the ‘secular instruction’ – referred to bible reading and the fact that a teacher could read portions of the scriptures to pupils in the half hour before the official beginning of the school day at 9.30am. With the bible barred from use in the official curriculum, literature and poetry could be seen to carry the task of moralising students. As I have argued, however, this did not prevent it being put to use in the training of a particularly *English* moral subject.

This focus on the use of appropriate literature could also be seen as a response to the greater availability, through the expansion of cheap printing and publications methods in the late nineteenth century(White, 1981, p.88), of popular texts which appealed to an altogether different class than that of the director and inspectors.

I have a strong conviction that the “penny dreadfuls’ and some of even the higher-priced periodicals (containing little else than sensational and impossible adventures) which are issues weekly or monthly from the press, can scarcely fail to create an appetite for exciting and highly-spiced reading to which literature of a higher, more useful, and, except to a diseased taste, intrinsically more interesting kind will appeal in vain. The boy or girl who between the ages of sixteen and twenty has gone through a course of this sensational rubbish, will be with difficulty brought back to a state of mind which can enjoy the beauty, pathos, and truthfulness of such writers as Scott, Thackeray, and Dickens. The result must be a waste of valuable time and a debauching of literary taste. (Taken from a section entitled “Gleanings – Reading” in which an extract from “Memories Grae and Gay,” by John Kerr is given, *Gazette* 1907, p.168)

The availability of cheaper printing processes was to have its own effects on school reading. There was a move at this time to expand the materials available for reading beyond the one or two official primer texts supplied and used for the examination – the use of ‘optional reading books’ referred to by the director above – through the establishment of school libraries funded by parents. As books became cheaper, and as publishers produced materials for this market, the education department began to supply such texts.

One effect of this was increased attention given to silent reading in the curriculum and practices of English as the greater variety and number of texts could not be handled through traditional practices of reading aloud. The question became, how could the teacher know what the students were making of their reading – if it was silent and private. What moral lessons were being taken if the child could not be monitored as the reading took place? In addition, the greater publication of books meant that distinctly Australian texts were developed and distributed, along with American materials. Thus the particular Englishness of the subject position described here would be overlain or disrupted by other cultural sensibilities with consequent concerns about the effects of such changes.

The curriculum and educational leaders of the time were concerned about what students read because they saw the content of texts as a means of developing desired moral sensibilities, and particular (cultural) ways of seeing and reading the world. They brought to this work the kinds of literary sensibilities that were available to them from their own lives and which had served to distinguish them within the field of education. The concern with *what* students read intersected with *how* they read

(aloud) which was interpreted as an embodied demonstration of the ease and naturalness of a cultured person⁶.

Conclusion

This paper has reviewed only two of the practices listed earlier that were promoted for students through the English subjects in the curriculum of the early 1900s. Through the use of critical discourse analysis I have been able to utilise the curriculum and other texts as data. CDA has enabled me to denaturalise 'reading' to analyse it as a curriculum technology for shaping student subjectivity; as a set of dispositions which were the focus of examination; and as an indicator of the cultural and other resources brought to the curriculum by those who wrote it that can be linked to a colonial enterprise of Englishness in an Australian schooling landscape.

CDA has alerted me to the intertextual links between the reading curriculum and debates about the role of religion in public schooling – debates which saw English and, especially, the reading of literature and poetry, promoted as a potential site of moral training and pastoral care (Hunter, 1987; Patterson, 1999).

Finally, CDA has foregrounded in my analysis the ways in which reading operates on the body of the child (and the teacher) in school. This is a reminder that curriculum and schooling practices are productive of embodied practices – the taking of the eyes away from the book, the confident answering of the examiner, the act of listening appreciatively – that will be differentially available for take-up by students depending on their own histories and dispositions.

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⁶ Of course, this 'ease' would have been the outcome of a life's work for the educational leaders – a habitus which was the product of a social trajectory (Bourdieu, 1996) – and, it is assumed, a position not available to most students in public schools at that time.

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