

Putting Our Past to Work...

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Putting Our Past to Work...

Turning to history - the history of the subject and the profession - is quite a recent phenomenon in English teaching. This may be because all too many English teachers and educators feel older themselves, passing inexorably into what can seem all too often an almost archival existence¹. It may be, as some argue, that English had its heyday some time ago now, in the seventies and early eighties - before Literacy reared its ugly head, before Governments started to actively intervene and interfere in 'our' business. Importantly this was before budgetary constraints came into play, and then the wine soured and the roses wilted... Maybe this turn to history registers a new maturity in the field - admittedly one born of crisis and change - a new willingness to ask self-critical questions of the place of English and the English subjects in what has been called the modernist project of state-sponsored public-popular schooling. Certainly the story of English in Australia needs broadening, and complicating, and part of that means taking a properly informed historical perspective.

Hence our own recent and growing interest in curriculum history, with specific reference to literacy and English (eg Green and Beavis [eds], 1996). Terri Seddon has noted the paucity of Australian curriculum history more generally. This means that Australian curriculum workers, including English teachers, characteristically "do not know their own past, neither the curricular past, nor the history of their own profession". Moreover:

The preoccupation with the present which arises because history is neglected, means that the relationship between past, present and future is taken-for-granted. The links between past, present and future remain unexplored and the processes by which change occurs over time are insufficiently analysed (Seddon, 1989: 1).

This 'amnesia' often causes us to forget that 'English' is not a timeless category - that, indeed, it has a quite delimited history, and needs to be understood as a profoundly historical phenomenon, and also an historical construction.

It is a commonplace to argue that, as a distinctive school-subject in its own right, English has been in existence for little more than a century (Ball, 1985; Nelms, 1994). While some writers point to a much more extensive and complicated history (Hunter, 1988a, 1988b; see also Goodson and Marsh, 1996), it seems important to bear in mind that what is known today as 'English' may not be the same thing as in previous times. Furthermore, there is a tendency to think of English as more or less exclusively a secondary-school category, and as a postwar phenomenon (World War 2, that is). Yet clearly there was something understood as English teaching, and sometimes even named as such, *before* 1945. It is salutary to be reminded that it is only in the 1950s that comprehensive secondary schooling became the norm in public education, following developments such as the Wyndham Report in NSW. Before then, the primary school was the centrepiece of

¹ Average age of teachers in NSW - 47...

public education, and - as we shall go on to indicate - English figured significantly as *its* centrepiece.

It is interesting to reflect on our own histories, and our careers. All three of us have been involved since the seventies in teaching - particularly English teaching and literacy education. We are all now teacher-educators, with specific interest in language and literacy education. Looking back on our own training, it is striking how little history figured. Subsequently, as new teachers in those heady times, if anything we felt like we were at the beginning of a new history, a new age, and in the vanguard of nothing less than a 'revolution'. There was Before, and there was After - and thank God we were associated with the latter! In his characteristically flamboyant way, Garth Boomer (1977) described this era as 'The Great Adventure (1968-1972)', which modulated into 'The Making of the Maps (1972-1976)'. Incidentally, this echoes other such accounts of marked and even decisive change in Australian education at this time: Bill Connell's (1993) 'Education Explosion' from the 60s, and Peter Musgrave's (1988) view of the 70s as a new phase in curriculum inquiry and curriculum work. In their avowedly 'personal' and 'partial' account of English teaching in Australia since 1945, Diana Davis and Ken Watson deliberately concentrate on the then twenty or so years since 1965, seeing in this period 'major shifts' in the field. (Interestingly, the 1945-1960 period is dealt with rather abruptly, in a two-page Overview, which may indeed be how it was, but smacks all the same of caricature - was that *all* it was?) Theirs is a story of the rise and rise of the 'New English', although at the end of it there are storm clouds looming...

What about our own initial training? Two of us did the DipEd in the seventies, in Queensland and WA respectively, and one a DipT (Primary) in South Australia. In retrospect, these were the halcyon days, and already there were in circulation the exciting new rhetorics of language and learning, small group work, negotiated curriculum, personal response, and the like. As new teachers, we breathed all this in, along with left wing ideologies of social justice and equality. A recent overview of post-Dartmouth developments in English teaching includes accounts of 'seminal books' and the major figures of influence (Holbrook, Dixon, Moffett, Barnes, Britton, Rosen...). The set text for English Method at the University of Queensland in 1974 was Frank Whitehead's *The Disappearing Dais*, published in 1971. It is notable that this rarely appears any more in histories of the field. Why? Of course part of the answer lies in the publication, four years later, of James Britton's *Language and Learning*, which quickly became a canonic text, and deservedly so. But it would be useful to re-read both these texts now, thirty years on, from our vantage-point in the opening days of a new century.

As Goodson points out, the history of school-subjects involves struggle over not simply ideas but also identities, status and careers. This is surely pertinent to English teaching. Who were the winners, and who the losers? In the case of Whitehead and Britton, one explanation is that they were identified respectively with different sides of the 'literature-language' debate. Whitehead, we might then note, lines up readily with positions and polemics such as those associated with David Allen's (1980) *How Much Growth?* (and perhaps, more recently, Peter Adams [1998]) but certainly not with later 'language'-oriented developments such as those associated with Michael Halliday and the so-called

Sydney School. (What about Britton in this latter regard?) But the argument over whether English teaching is 'literature-based' or 'language-based' is still raging. In part it is an historical argument running back at least to the turn of the century in Australia - and its settlement will only come in the due course of history. Importantly that argument also involves theory and politics.

Back to Whitehead. His opening chapter ("The Groundwork of Principle") is striking. It begins "English is unique among school subjects..." - in itself, a worryingly familiar formulation. It then goes on to assert that "we can never reach a full understanding of what English teaching can and should be until we have grasped the peculiarly intimate relationship which exists between the individual human being and his [*sic*] mother-tongue". More particularly (and notwithstanding its unavoidable gender-blindness...):

We need to have brought to clear focus in our minds the way in which the child's acquisition of his native language is inseparably intertwined with his developing consciousness of the world in which he is growing up, with his control of his inner phantasies and the feelings they give rise to, and with his possession of the values by which he will live his life in the civilisation he forms part of (Whitehead, 1971: 11).

This sets the tone for the chapter, and for the book as a whole. This is indeed familiar territory, rhetorically and discursively, even now - despite over a decade of the circulation of 'posts'(-modern, -structural) in our popular-professional forums. The issue for us is: How is this to be read today? More to the point, are there historical traces to be found in the position being enunciated here? Significant echoes of past formulations and phrasings? And what might their familiarity mean as we struggle with reconstructing English today?

Clear parallels can be drawn, for instance, between Whitehead's exhortation for English teachers to know and understand 'the child', and the early twentieth-century attention to the results of psychological Child Study in formulating curriculum (see Reid, 1999). Later in the chapter, Whitehead refers explicitly to the notion of 'child study', building on from this ('the systematic study of children') to outline a 'developmentalist' narrative that is still deeply inscribed in the field - moreover, a 'science' of sorts ("the scientific study of child development for its own sake"). He arrives at what he describes as "five basic principles" informing his view of English: "the extent of individual differences, the importance of 'readiness', the principle of activity, the significance of play, and the principle of interest" (Whitehead, 1971: 21). There is much in this, we suggest, that can still be read in contemporary 'manifestos' such as *Re-Viewing English* (Watson, Sawyer and Gold eds], 1998). It also reads as perfectly appropriate advice for 'early years' literacy educators today. This raises the question of how much we are, in fact, 're-viewing' English today. Certainly, there is a need to maintain important and still useful traditions in English, but equally, perhaps, we should look carefully and critically at the value of simply maintaining what is familiar to us, perhaps under a slightly different

name, in the face of radically different times. An historical consciousness can help us to address such questions.

In recent pages of this journal, there has been an intriguing debate about the continuing value and relevance of Garth Boomer's work for English teaching today - bearing in mind that he died early in the 1990s (that is, late last century...). This has of course something of a personal *frisson* to it because all three of us continue to see find much of value and inspiration in that work. Indeed, such a case is made quite forcibly in introducing a recent collection of Boomer's papers on curriculum and teaching (Green [ed], 1999). What seems to be at issue here is a struggle over history: the recent history of the profession, the curious play of amnesia and nostalgia that marks many of our forums, and the history of English teaching more generally as a central feature of modern schooling. How does Boomer figure in all this, as perhaps our last great icon of English teaching, in something like its Golden Age? But such a debate also serves to raise the question of history itself, and the importance of history to issues of meaning, culture and identity. Brenton Doecke (1998: 4) names this neatly in pointing to the need for "a strong historical perspective" in shaping "our professional identity". He is right, of course - and as editor of *English in Australia*, he saw fit to republish recently one of Boomer's arguably most influential and inspiring essays (Boomer, 1998).

Perhaps predictably, one response was to challenge - with all due respect - the notion that this essay ('Mrs Bell') continues to speak as eloquently and powerfully as ever to today's teachers, especially those new to the profession, in today's increasingly complex conditions and circumstances (Howe, 1998). This can be read as, itself, a call to history - the insistent, urgent, necessarily *different* history of the present. Indeed, the Editorial endeavours to make this clear, in initiating such a discussion and a debate: "I am not interested in encouraging an uncritical celebration of Boomer's essay or his role in the history of English teaching in Australia" (Doecke, 1998: 4). Elsewhere in the volume, a former editor of the journal, Bill Corcoran, provides his own historical overview of "the significant debates which were to be central to the professional development of teachers for the next decade, in the pages of *English in Australia*, and in the nation's classrooms" (Corcoran, 1998: 105). He makes it clear that, in his view, Boomer's influence was considerable. Others took up the challenge, coming down on one side or the other (McClenaghan, 1988; Noden, 1998; Johnston and McCausland, 1999).

Given all this, it is surely not inappropriate to evoke Boomer's own sense of history - or perhaps his use of history. It needs to be said that, all throughout his career, he tended to go for grand gestures, and to work up and with models and metaphors. The often painstaking work of the historian (characterised by Foucault as 'grey' and 'meticulous') was not his style. He is perhaps best known for the memorable phrase, the dazzling, enduring image: the play of rhetoric. What are we to make of this, then? Among his unpublished papers, we find a relatively early text, written in 1979, with the title "Learning - 1902". There is a subtitle of sorts: "By James Sully, M.A. (1902) as 'told' to Garth Boomer". Sully's article "How the Child Becomes a Learner" was published in *The Education Gazette of South Australia* in 1902 (Nov 12, pp 144-148) - where it is

attributed as a paper read before the "College of Precepts". Boomer's paper is in fact an artful paraphrase of Sully's. It begins thus:

'To learn', he says, 'is to acquire by a process of conscious exertion'. It involves 'a process of intelligent reaching out towards and grasping some object'. It is a main object of his paper 'to bring out that when a child grasps a fact through another's information, he performs essentially the same piece of mental work as when he acquires knowledge independently'.

Boomer goes on to present an account of Sully's "'learner-before-teacher' theory" and his view of "the learning process", noting that while "each learner will develop an individual style ... 'the essential elements of the process appear to be the same'". In summary, that process consists of a movement "from challenge through clarifying what is known, to intense enquiry and reflection":

The learner must be in a state of tension' and 'anticipation', prepared to predict and willing to struggle in 'steady pertinacious study'.

Those who know Boomer's work will find clear echoes here of his argument and even his words in papers like "Struggling in English" (Boomer, 1988) and in his work on 'negotiating the curriculum' (Boomer [ed], 1982; Boomer et al [eds], 1992). The point is not so much to expose Boomer's 'borrowing' of Sully's ideas - after all, contemporary theory tells us that this is how we work all the time (ie intertextually, using the words of others, as Bakhtin would have it). Rather, this example illustrates that a great deal of what we all too often take-for-granted as a distinctive register of the so-called 'New English' itself has a history. In this case, it would be useful to see this deliberate conjunction of texts from 1902 and 1979 (and now 2000...) as a reminder of history's persistent presence in our thinking, our discourse. It is also worth remarking that five years after Sully's paper was published, 'English' was used for the first time in South Australia as a label in the primary school curriculum.

Here, it might be timely to refer explicitly to the New Education, an important educational movement of the latter part of the nineteenth century, which continued to be influential well into the twentieth century (Selleck, 1968; Turney, 1983). The New Education brought together aspects of Romanticism (the idea of the natural growth and 'flowering' of the child, the importance of beauty, and peaceful surroundings) and linked these with educational methods that became known as Progressivism. Thus the 'art' and 'science' of teaching and schooling was drawn into a sometimes uncomfortable synthesis with the programmes of people such as Pestalozzi, Froebel, Herbart, Montessori, G. Stanley Hall and (later) Dewey. This represented a growing groundswell of new thinking about education and children. It was child-centred, emphasised activity and experience, increasingly alert to the interests of the learner, and extremely conscious of the pedagogic value of carefully, lovingly constructed educational environments. The point to make is that, seventy years later, there was an almost uncanny echo of the New Education in the

New English. Yet the New Education as such had 'disappeared', even though much was made of the possibilities and opportunities associated with it in the early part of the twentieth century in Australia. And this was the very time of the emergence of English as a subject in the primary school. What happened to the New Education movement and why did so many echoes of it appear again in the seventies?

There is, of course, one explanation for the continuity between the early years of the twentieth century and the New English of the 1970s. This is that English has been, since its inception, the territory of discipline and governmentality, of bio-power, and the social regulation of norms and images, with the English teacher as the kindly moral supervisor of future citizens. This is an argument that Ian Hunter and his colleagues and students have made much of in recent years, not uncontroversially. However wary or sceptical we might be about some of the larger (and 'grand') claims of this work, it would be unwise to dismiss it out of hand. It is a *different* history - which raises the issue of competing or contending histories, of historical accounts that not only diverge in terms of detail and emphasis, but which offer different and differing views of the past. That account is now readily available elsewhere (eg Hunter, 1988, 1994), and moreover featured at the 1999 National Conference (Patterson, 1999). No doubt the arguments will continue, as they should. For the moment we want to conclude this section with the following passage, again taken from Whitehead's opening chapter:

The main business of the English teacher is not instruction in any direct sense, or even teaching in the sense that may be applicable in some other subjects. It is the provision of abundant opportunity for the child to use English under the conditions which will most conduce to improvement; opportunity, that is, to use his [*sic*] mother-tongue in each of its four modes (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and for all the varied purposes (practical, social, imaginative, creative) which make up its totality; opportunity moreover to use it under expert guidance and in situations which will develop ultimately his power to be self-critical about his own efforts (Whitehead, 1971: 16).

This is, again, very familiar - isn't it? We 'average' teachers recognise it - don't we? The issue is: How do we *historicise* such a statement? How do we read it *historically*, as something that has itself a history, and that nonetheless strikes a chord now, for better or for worse? For some no doubt this will ring discordantly, while for others it may speak eloquently to the future, or at least a preferred future. Our concern here is to pose it as a *question*, especially to ask how it is that English came to be associated with not so much with teaching or instruction, but rather the provision and 'facilitation' of opportunity. What might this mean today for the ways that English justifies its role in the curriculum or even its very existence as a subject?

A recent documentary history of literacy debates in Australia since 1945 indicates a long complex record of public struggles over literacy and schooling, particularly in the light of

new and changing formations in Australia culture and identity following World War 2 (Green, Hodgens and Luke, 1997). There are obvious implications in such an account for English teaching. For one thing, it's worth bearing in mind, once again, that it is only in the 1950s that secondary schooling became more systematically part of public education. This is significant because there is a tendency to think of English as a secondary-school phenomenon, along with school-subjects more generally. It was at this time, too, that views of what constituted and counted as English started to change, in accordance with changing social, cultural, economic, technological and geopolitical conditions and relations. 'English', so the story goes, became more 'inclusive', less 'elitist'. That story is usefully complicated and problematised, in itself (eg Dale 1997). Literacy began to emerge (under various aliases...) as an issue of explicit public, popular and professional concern, escalating from the mid-seventies on.

One of the documents picked up in the 'Debating Literacy in Australia' project was an essay from a South Australian school inspector, re-published in the *Victorian Educational Magazine* in 1949 from the *Journal of Inspectors of Schools in Australia*. Entitled "Formal Grammar - and Standards in English", it is usefully (re-)read in the light of the recent history of the Literacy and Standards debate, and also, of course, the so-called Grammar Wars (Kamler, 1994; Green and Hodgens, 1996). Clearly this was an 'item' even then:

A great deal has been said, sometimes even with a touch of acrimony, and in educational circles and the teachers' press much has been written, at times with more enthusiasm than good taste, about the vexed question of the teaching of formal grammar and its effects on language standards in our schools (McDonald, in Green, Hodgens and Luke, 1994).

McDonald goes on to offer an overview of recent developments in the field, "sensibly and scientifically", alert to "the influences that are at work - particularly those extra-school ones - to exploit them profitably when they can be helpful, and to present a strong resistance to them when they constitute a danger to the efficiency of the work we do in school". The post-Dartmouth echoes in much of what he says are unmistakable. As he puts it, emphatically: 'Children do far too little talking in school'. Furthermore:

More and more opportunity must be provided for talk in schools. Language must be learned in the natural way, by using it, just as we learn other things by doing. It is surely not too much to expect in these days of a wider and more interesting curriculum that these opportunities will be reasonably and frequently presented in an interesting way.

Later, he argues that more account needs to be taken of the influence of radio and film, of broadcasting more generally (television was, remember, some time off then - the Royal Commission on Television happening in 1953). One way of responding, he suggests, is to encourage more 'radio-activity' in schools - children speaking back, and speaking up.

He cites a claim that "70 per cent to 80 per cent of children are visiles, learning through the eye more effectively than through the other senses". Reading figures significantly, as might be expected, with "reading interests [being] a powerful factor in the development of the power of expression, either spoken or written". Get them reading early, and enjoying reading: "The good story and the good novel always had and always will have a great appeal for children". "Give children more books and the time to use them and to talk about them": That has a very contemporary ring to it - and yet it emanates from the Dark Ages of the 1940s! What are we to make of this? Is it a sign of a deep underground stream of the 'true' tradition of English teaching, running through much of the century, as has sometimes been suggested? Perhaps.

What do we make of other passages such as this, then, in the midst of this quite congenial emphasis on language activity and student experience?

We must make up for these intellectually and culturally under-privileged [children] what they lack at home, and by cultivating their interests and giving them a wider field of experience at first hand and through films, radio, drama, and books create for them an environment and a pool of experience that will enrich their language and impel them to express their thoughts in a clear and attractive manner.

These are the children of "the cultural sub-class", which interestingly enough he glosses as "not merely ... the poor class, except in an intellectual sense". Even so, it is clearly a register of *social class* discrimination, and its attendant cultural and educational politics. Is it good enough to say that 'we' are more sensitive to such things today, more reflexive and self-critical? How is it, in this text from over fifty years ago now, that such discourses co-existed? Or is it that this is a condition of all such texts? That is, that they be heteroglossic, unstable compounds of contradictory moments and elements, historical traces of the rise and fall of ideologies and investments, 'science' and 'myth'. How might such a text be used to problematise the often seamless production of the history of English teaching as a war between binary traditions, or even the slow swing of a pendulum? At the very least, such a text as this might be usefully drawn into teacher education and professional development, in order precisely to de-stabilise our contemporary certainties and our confident 'progressivism'.

Another figure in Australian educational history that English teachers today need to know about, in our view, is Peter Board. Board was a distinguished Director of Education in New South Wales in the early years of the twentieth century, and arguably the architect of the modern system of public education in Australia more broadly. Like Boomer, he represents the remarkable achievement of so-called 'administrative intellectuals' ('bureaucrats') in Australian education. Published in 1932, his "Curriculum Making" paper presents an eloquent account of the centrality of English in the school curriculum. Significantly this is with specific reference to the curriculum of the primary school. As he writes: "English is the corner-stone of the curriculum, because it is the subject the treatment of which in the school contributes the largest quota towards the ultimate

equipment of the pupil for life" (Board, 1932). What is particularly worthy of note here is his emphasis on what he called "personal culture", which elsewhere he links directly to "that insensible thing that you call influence, whether it is the influence of the teacher or the influence of the author" (Board, 1910). This is, of course, recognisably the territory of literary ideology. For Board (1932: 80), moreover, "the cultural is nationally utilitarian" - an essential part of the project and programme of nation-building.

'Personal culture' involves, on the one hand, a combination of "the mastery of ideas" and "a feeling for beauty of form, beauty of sound, and beauty of thought". On the other, it combines a sense of "the moral obligations inherent in social relationships" and "recognition of those standards and codes of conduct that make for pleasing behaviour" (Board, 1932: 8). The (re)production of 'personal culture' is therefore inextricable from the (re)production of 'national culture'. Significantly this is embodied in and transacted through the relationship between teacher and student, a "personal contact between the child and the teacher who is himself the possessor" of such qualities. What is perhaps difficult for us to grasp today is the intimate connection between the aesthetic and the normative - between the love of Literature and the needs of the State. Education is *for* the child, yes, but it is also *for* the nation; it is in the national interest, ultimately, that children become literate and educated, in the fullest sense. He made this point as early as 1905:

Among the agencies that co-operate in nation building, the primary school holds a high place, for while in the school each individual child is the immediate object of the teacher's care and study, it is the relation of the child to the community and the State that gives to the teacher's work its wide horizon and far-reaching influence (Board, 1905: 7).

Hence 'English' is to be seen directly in relation to moral training and character formation, as lessons in social subjectivity: the disciplined production of a national subject. Language, literacy and literature: these form the 'cornerstone' of state-sponsored public education, and are achieved by bringing together in a new synthesis Learning, Life and Love. Schooling is the means whereby "the child is provided with an equipment for life" (Board, 1932: 75), and English has a central role in this regard, as we have seen. But, just as importantly, it is thoroughly implicated in the tasks of government and citizenship. What might be the implications of such a view for rethinking 'Personal Growth', at the other end of the century? Indeed, what might define the 'personal' in these postmodern times?

We began by highlighting the turn to history in English teaching and literacy education, noting however that this raised many questions that needed to be explored. Among these was the question of history itself: What history? Whose history? What counts as history? We've been conscious throughout, too, of the need to be reflexive about our own histories, about our own positioning. Meaghan Morris (1998) has recently drawn attention to the *desire* for history in cultural studies. Paraphrasing her (and also Carolyn Steedman), a question to be asked here is 'Why does English teaching want history'? As

she notes, "wanting history is not a primal human desire. We have to be taught to want it, to learn that history is the name of something we lack" (Morris, 1998: 5). What *is* this 'lack', then, in the case of English teaching?

Partly this is an issue of developing a rich historical imagination, not simply as a matter of archival interest or a mark of responsible introspection, but rather, as a resource for praxis - in classroom practice as much as in teacher education. That is a complex business, of course, and something still to be adequately worked out. However it is not simply a matter of *memory* (or even of 'dangerous memory') - it is not enough, and not good enough, to work on remembering what happened then, whenever, and thus to re-call the past into the present. 'English in Australia' is not a simple story waiting to be told, in a manner faithful to its 'real' or 'true' traditions. It is not a story of 'progress', either, at least in any straightforward, simplistic sense - which by no means is to deny that things may well have changed decisively, and often for the better, in all sorts of ways. It seems to us that history will be most useful when it is used to problematise current categories and taken-for-granted ways of thinking and helps us to see that what has been made can be unmade or made again in different ways. In other words, history can be a means for the profession to rethink its present and claim a stake in its own future.

It is important to be properly mindful about this. For some, for instance, the last decade or so has been a time of great challenge and even disappointment for English teaching. The landscape seems to have changed, dramatically. This may be reason enough for clinging to a vision of another, different English teaching - something that was, and might well be again, but is not *now* (even waiting for the pendulum to swing back). Everything else is a deformation, a deviation. That especially holds for English teaching in its most recent 'governmental' manifestation. Perhaps this goes part of the way of explaining Doecke's (2000: 4) 'astonishment' that "we could let our environment rigidify in the way it has over the past decade, that we have allowed the values of a richly varied English curriculum and pedagogy to be displaced by the language of 'outcomes' and benchmarks". For some, this is not just a matter of 'outcomes' and 'benchmarks, however, but also of the triumph of 'literacy' over 'literature', and moreover the emergence and consolidation of 'critical literacy' (at least in its allegedly more 'doctrinaire' formulations), or even the new 'post-literacy' challenge of postmodern media culture. These are all profoundly historical judgements. What is needed, urgently, is a better sense of history, both substantively and in terms of a lived sense of being-in-the-world.

It is for such reasons that we have initiated a programme of research addressed to a curriculum history of English teaching, teacher education and public schooling in Australia, with particular reference to the first half of the twentieth century. This is, roughly, the period extending from Federation to World War 2. Two projects currently underway are, firstly, a study of English teaching in New South Wales, focussing in particular on the first ten years of Sydney Teachers College (1905-1915) and Armidale Teachers College (1928-1938), respectively; and secondly (and simultaneously), a study of official English curriculum formation in South Australia from the 1920s to the 1950s. What we hope to do is extend these projects into a larger comparative study of English in Australia, *pre-World War 2*, the design and planning of which is in fact already

underway. This period involved large-scale economic and social reformulations in Australia, and the emergence of a complex and distinctive national identity.

The 1930s in particular is likely to be a focus of concern: it was a time not only of world-wide economic depression and its associated hardship, but also of major developments in Australian curriculum, with comprehensive new syllabi for the primary school emerging in Western Australia and Victoria. Hence it is likely to constitute an illuminating case-study of English curriculum history in Australia - especially since it so clearly allows for an interrogation of the educational-institutional intersection of economic history and the history of ideas (Hamilton, 1990: 5), or the disjunction between what might be called the material conditions of educational practice and the rhetorics of curriculum revision. In this regard, there are important analogies and connections to be observed between the 'New Education' and the 'New English'. What are the historical lessons to be gained from thinking these two movements together? What is it in the former that can be traced emerging in the latter, and why did this happen when it did, decades later? What about English teaching now, at the outset of a new century?

Just as importantly, however, we want to draw attention to the business of 'doing history', of reckoning historical perspectives and problematisations into the work of English teaching, in schools and in teacher education. How to do this, and how to respond adequately to the question 'Why does history matter?', are among the challenges we look forward to over the next few years. One thing that is certainly clear is that it will be increasingly important to look beyond the secondary school, and also beyond the post-1945 period, in thinking about English teaching and the English subjects. We invite our colleagues in the field and the profession to join in the dialogue.

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