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Historic Australian Conceptualisations of English, Literacy and Multimodality in Policy and Curriculum and Conflicts with Educational Accountability

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Abstract: Attainment of functional English literacy skills by all students has been a focus of Australian national policy since the 1989 Hobart Declaration (MCEETYA, 1989). This focus underpins current educational accountability policy enacted through the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). The Adelaide and Melbourne Declarations (MCEETYA, 1999, 2008) maintained focus on English literacy skills but also identified ICT skills as essential for students for 21st century, suggesting teachers should make use of contemporary learning resources to engage students. Literacy, multimodality and ICT have been intertwined in various definitions of literacy and English in Australian policy and curriculum for some time. This article examines historical and current constructions of English, literacy, multimodality and ICT in policy and curriculum over the last two decades and in current educational accountability practices through NAPLAN. Research on Queensland teacher identification of English literacy skills is reported to show how national educational accountability that fails to reflect policy and curriculum focuses on multimodality may serve to narrow classroom English literacy.

Introduction: Australia's vision for a multimodal and technological future

A Google search on 'multimodality and literacy' on 31 August 2011, identified (about) 572,000 results, with many scholarly articles, including free access articles, and commentary. A further refinement 'and youtube' yielded (about) 116,000 results including student postings. Multimodality is not the future – it is the present.

The Australian Government has invested \$2.4 billion in the Digital Education Revolution to 'contribute sustainable and meaningful change to teaching and learning in Australian schools that will prepare students for further education, training and to live and work in a digital world' (DEEWR, 2011). This includes \$16m for professional development to assist teacher proficiency in using information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the classroom. Further funding is being provided to allow online access to the Australian curriculum and sharing of resources.

A shared vision for education by Australia's Ministers of Education as expressed in the Adelaide Declaration (MCEETYA, 1999) is for Australian students to be 'be confident, creative and productive users of new technologies, particularly information and communication technologies' (DEEWR, 2008, p. 4). Students should be engaged in 'challenging and stimulating learning activities' supported by ICT with teachers using 'contemporary learning resources and activities' to develop 'student centric programs of learning' (p. 4). The more recent Melbourne Declaration (MCEETYA, 2008) notes that while many teachers already

make use of ICTs, 'use of digital media ... [is] essential' for 21st century skills (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 5). The Melbourne Declaration, echoing the Adelaide declaration, wants young Australians to become successful learners who have 'essential skills in literacy and numeracy' and are 'creative and productive users of technology, especially ICT, as a foundation for success in all learning areas' (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 8).

Two General Capabilities in the new Australian Curriculum, linked to the Melbourne Declaration, are 'Literacy' and 'ICT competence' (ACARA, 2010). Literacy includes listening, reading and viewing, writing, speaking and creating print, visual and digital materials accurately and purposefully within and across all learning areas. ICT competence requires students' to use 'ICT effectively and appropriately when investigating, creating and communicating ideas and information at school, at home, at work and in their communities' (ACARA, 2010, p. 19). Australia's national policy and curriculum identify broad goals and expectations for 21st century learners that have evolved significantly over the last twenty years.

Literacy, English and multimodality in Australian policy and curriculum: A chronology

Over the last two decades, definitions of literacy and English curriculum in Australia have encompassed a range of skills and knowledges. While earlier constructions of literacy complexity used terms such as multiliteracies (Cazden et al., 1996), rapid growth of technology has led to emphasis on integration of literacy with technology and 'text' forms encountered in modern communication. Complexity is enhanced by the concept of multimodal literacy, recognising that in modern society communication usually involves more than one form. In the following discussion, we provide a chronology of the evolution of English – literacy in Australian policy and curriculum over this time. Our focus is to explore how conceptualisations have changed, or have not changed: the discussion shows that multimodality has been present for some time.

Appendix 1 traces the evolution of literacy definitions in Australian policy and curriculum, from the first MCEETYA collaboration, the Hobart Declaration of 1989 (MCEETYA, 1989), that created national focus on 'English literacy'. The goal was English literacy skills for all students, including 'listening, speaking, reading and writing' (MCEETYA, 1989, [6a]). As shown in Appendix 1, initial conceptualisation of national English and literacy was therefore a combined 'English

literacy' of four macroskills. 'Information processing and computing' skills were also identified as key educational aims (MCEETYA, 1989, [6d]).

Following the Hobart Declaration, MCEETYA and the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA) identified national literacy goals (MCEETYA, 1997a) and launched the National Literacy and Numeracy Plan (DEETYA, 1998), focused on intervention in early schooling through diagnosis and identification of students at risk, and state assessment procedures. Emphasis was on 'reading, writing and spelling' (MCEETYA, 1997a) with agreed national benchmarks on reading, writing and spelling to be developed to measure students' achievements (see DEETYA, 1998).

The 1999 Adelaide Declaration endorsed these goals,¹ with the specific goal that 'every child leaving the primary school should ... be able to read, write and spell and communicate at an appropriate level' (see DEETYA, 1998, p. 9). The Adelaide Declaration continued focus on fundamental reading, writing and spelling skills. Communication skills, possibly incorporating listening and speaking skills, were not defined.

At this time, a Commonwealth literacy policy, including the agreed National Literacy and Numeracy Plan, was produced following stakeholder consultations (DEETYA, 1998). Avoiding a singular definition of literacy, the policy highlighted the awareness of researchers and practitioners of the complexity of literacy and changing literacy demands and contexts. The national policy starting point was that '[e]ffective literacy is intrinsically purposeful, flexible and dynamic' involving 'integration of speaking, listening and critical thinking with reading and writing'. The policy noted cross-curriculum literacy demands and emphasised the additional literacy concepts, viewing and critical thinking. It emphasised the impact of 'electronic communication technologies' identified in the National Plan and new literacy demands they would bring. Even then, Commonwealth policy stated further investigation was warranted into the relationship between literacy and technology. Considering the technology use cited then – email, hypertext, internet – it is clear communication has moved exponentially into cyberspace.

In keeping with the National Plan and Adelaide Declaration, national literacy benchmark statements of minimum expectations for Years 3, 5 and 7 students were finally developed (Curriculum Corporation,

2000). The Year 3 literacy benchmarks (see Appendix 1) emphasised written texts in a focus on reading, writing and spelling, but including 'electronic media'.

Development of the national literacy benchmark descriptors involved iterative consultation with experts, including teachers.² Two features of early literacy benchmark drafts in 1997 were (i) inclusion of strategic skill descriptors such as capacity to predict text from context, and (ii) adequate (minimum), proficient and exceptional (high-achieving) level descriptors within a Year level. However, descriptors of strategies and reasoning were removed from the benchmark standards, despite being considered essential indicators by teachers and other consultants, due to difficulty assessing these skills by the simplified test format that had, by then, been identified as the process for accountability. Advanced level descriptors within a Year were not pursued due to lack of agreement among consultants as to whether advanced skill levels represented skills for a higher year level, or greater breadth and quality of skills within the Year. Final literacy benchmark standards were minimum expected English literacy skills assessable through simple standardised test formats such as multiple-choice items, or essays. The literacy skills eventually addressed were reading, writing and spelling. Draft benchmark descriptors for speaking, listening and viewing developed by June 1997 were not included in final versions.

Considerable valuable literacy research was conducted in Australia during the 1990s and 2000s. One specific addition to definitions of literacy brought new insights into conceptualisation of cross-curriculum literacies. Cumming and Wyatt-Smith used video technology to capture the lived literacy experiences of students of different achievement levels taking a range of subject in Years 11 and 12 in two Australian states (Cumming & Wyatt-Smith, 2001; Wyatt-Smith and Cumming, 2003). Literacy experts who analysed videotape and artefact data identified the breadth of literacy experiences of students as they switched not only from subject to subject but also from teacher to teacher and from administrative to curriculum focus. These students navigated 'curriculum literacies', conceptualised as much more than a singular literacy across the curriculum.

To assist the move towards a common national curriculum, Curriculum Corporation (CC) developed national Statements of Learning in English (2005) through collaboration with stakeholders (state and territory curriculum authorities) to identify essen-

tial elements common to existing curriculum. While not intended to be a replacement curriculum, these national Statements were intended to represent opportunities to learn that all Australian students should have. In contrast to the minimum literacy benchmark standards, the Statements were intended to be 'challenging but accessible' to inform the forthcoming national literacy assessment program (CC, 2005, p. 3). They were based on state and territory English curriculum aims that 'students develop ... capacity to critically interpret and construct spoken, written, visual and multimodal texts in a broad range of mediums' (CC, 2005, p. 2). They included reading and viewing, writing, and speaking and listening. Texts with which students might engage included traditional print and virtual sources such as CD-ROMS and websites. The 2005 Statements therefore not only reflect the original four macroskills mentioned in the Hobart Declaration for English literacy but also capture 'viewing' and engagement with electronic forms of communication and text – multimodality.

In 2008, the third and most recent statement of common national goals was released – the Melbourne Declaration (MCEETYA, 2008). Following similar principles to the Hobart and Adelaide declarations, it focuses on equity, outcomes for disadvantaged students, and essential educational outcomes for the 21st century. Literacy and knowledge of 'key disciplines' remain 'the cornerstone of schooling for young Australians' (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 5). The goal of a national curriculum was strengthened as well as national educational accountability assessments.

Literacy was not defined in the Declaration. However, it identifies 'use of digital media ... [as] essential' for 21st century skills (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 5) with successful learners having 'essential skills in literacy and numeracy', and with 'creative and productive' use of technology, especially ICT, a 'foundation for success in all learning areas' (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 8). The Melbourne Declaration therefore reinforces both the richer sense of literacy prevailing in earlier national policy and interrelationships between literacies and technology and different media forms of the current era.

The new Australian curriculum is framed by *The shape of the Australian curriculum 2.0* (ACARA, 2010). Endorsing the Melbourne Declaration, the Australian curriculum encompasses discipline studies including English, and General Capabilities including literacy. The General Capability literacy is 'defined' as follows:

Students become literate as they develop the skills to learn and communicate confidently at school and to become effective individuals, community members, workers and citizens. These skills include listening, reading and viewing, writing, speaking and creating print, visual and digital materials accurately and purposefully within and across all learning areas. (ACARA, 2010, p. 19).

Literacy is to be reinforced in other subject areas with the national curriculum prioritising English and literacy' (ACARA, 2010, p. 12). Version 2.0 of the shape paper emphasises ICT competence as a second general capability, attained through learning 'to use ICT effectively and appropriately when investigating, creating and communicating ideas and information at school, at home, at work and in their communities' (ACARA, 2010, p. 19). The framework for the Australian curriculum therefore includes English, literacy and ICT. While the document does not use the term 'multimodal', these three areas are identified as strongly interrelated. Visual and digital materials are included for literacy, while communicating ideas and information are included for ICT.

The final document now to inform teachers' work is the Australian Curriculum English (ACARA, 2011a). The final Foundation to Year 10 English curriculum was endorsed by the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) on 8 December 2010 for implementation across Australia by 2013 (MCEECDYA, 2010). Returning to the Hobart Declaration, English and literacy are evident in the three intertwining strands of the English curriculum: language, literature and literacy. Students are to 'learn to listen to, read, view, speak, write, create and reflect on increasingly complex and sophisticated spoken, written and multimodal texts across a growing range of contexts with accuracy, fluency and purpose' (ACARA, undated 1). In English curriculum, 'students learn to read, write, listen and speak accurately, flexibly and critically, and to view and create increasingly complex texts in a variety of contexts' (ACARA, 2011a, p. 10). Expectation that students engage with spoken, written and multimodal texts is present from Foundation Year level.

Further, the English curriculum provides definitions of key terms in definitions and expectations including 'listen', 'read', 'view', 'text' and 'multimodal text' (Appendix 1). Texts include 'written, spoken or multimodal and in print or digital/online forms'

while 'multimodal' refers to 'combination of two or more communication modes, for example print, image and spoken text as in film or computer presentations'. Presentation of Australian curriculum on the ACARA website is itself multimodal, involving written texts, hyperlinks and video explanations.

The Australian Curriculum English establishes English and literacy as interrelated and strongly based within modern communication and visual technologies and forms. It presents a curriculum that represents the cutting edge of considerations of the nature of English and literacy. The Generic Capability literacy, while having broader application, is strongly tied to and consistent with the English curriculum framework.

Teachers now have a rich framework to work with in terms of expectations for all students. Over the next few years, teachers will become familiar with these and manage curriculum change as they have done for the last twenty years. The evolution of thinking from the inclusion of viewing, of digital forms of text, of information and communication technology, can be traced through considerations of English and literacy from the Hobart Declaration of 1989. Multimodality is firmly established in the Australian national curriculum English. The expectation placed on Australian teachers is to ensure students have skills necessary for 21st century lifestyles and employment. Throughout policy and curriculum developments, literacy, English and English literacy have become interchangeable, although not identical.

However, inconsistency with official curriculum expectations, literacy statements in the national declarations on the goals of schooling, and the national Statements of Learning occurs with the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). ACARA identifies that curriculum continua are being prepared for publication for the General Capability of literacy across the curriculum with descriptions for Years 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10, including a conceptual framework, evidence base and references for literacy, showing development across bands of year levels. These are 'to guide the future development of the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)' (ACARA, undated 2). The critical question is how this next development will shape the work of teachers. We consider this next by considering the general impact of educational accountability testing accompanying the national declarations, policy and curriculum developments in classroom practice to date.

Realising national literacy goals: The development of educational accountability

Congruent with the national literacy focus developing from the Hobart Declaration was agreement for a National Report on Schooling marking the beginning of a process of national reporting to the Australian people, to provide an annual national snapshot of state and territory educational performance, predominantly literacy and numeracy. The move to educational accountability through standardised tests of literacy and numeracy commenced with the Hobart Declaration, and its identification of the four macroskills; listening, speaking, reading and writing. While a 1980 report indicated a national assessment program was not appropriate and that individual school should be the 'primary agent to conduct skills assessments' (Harrington & McDonald, 1999, p. 4), states and territories agreed to the National Report. Further national agreements, and persuasion using the 'power of the purse' through federal allocation of education budgets, have resulted in Australian national curriculum, the national testing program (www.nap.edu.au), and publication of all schools' performance.

As noted, literacy benchmarks for assessment and reporting of reading, writing and spelling produced by Curriculum Corporation were originally released in 2000 after considerable consultation and refinement. While benchmarks for listening and speaking were expected to be developed (see, for omission, MCEETYA, 1997b), these did not eventuate. The Adelaide Declaration of 1999 that identified literacy skills of reading, writing and spelling, and communication also did not elaborate on the last of these.

The national literacy benchmarks of minimum standards were the starting point for educational accountability and the National Report on Schooling (see, e.g., MCEETYA, 2000). Initially, states' student performances on benchmark standards were assessed through state-based testing of random samples of students across Australian schools, providing an overview of 'what our students are learning and where the greatest needs lie' (Campbell, 1996, 4290). This later changed to whole cohort testing, with parents provided with individual simplistic reports of their child's achievement.

Initial performance indicators were the percentage of students achieving the literacy benchmark standards with comparability of state-based test outcomes determined through consultation and statistical equat-

ing, despite the lack of a national curriculum. From 2008, state-based literacy tests against the benchmark standards were replaced by the national literacy tests in National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), reporting on literacy constructs of *reading*, *writing* and *language conventions* based on the national Statements of Learning for English (ACARA, 2011b; CC, 2005). Current reporting is not only the percentage of students achieving the minimum standards, but also student outcomes across six bands of performance for each year level, statistically linked to a literacy/English continuum from Year 3 to Year 9. As noted earlier, new continua are being identified from the Australian curriculum General Capability literacy with descriptions for Years 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10 expectations to inform future NAPLAN development (ACARA, undated 2). However, student participants in NAPLAN even for Year 3 will not have undertaken the full national curriculum for several years.

National reporting is now public through MySchool (www.myschool.edu.au) with publication of individual school NAPLAN outcomes and comparisons to 'like' or 'statistically similar' schools. NAPLAN and publication of school data have greatly increased the high-stakes nature of the literacy tests for schools and teachers. This in turn increases pressure on schools and teachers to improve performance, and consequently preparation by teachers to ensure student success. This will have impact on teachers' classroom practice.

Considerable gaps exist among conceptualisations of literacy and English literacy in curriculum, literacy policies, the national statements of learning, and the enacted focus on literacy – English literacy in the NAPLAN tests. Gaps also exist between NAPLAN literacy test content and valued outcomes identified in early consultations for the national literacy benchmarks.

All current test formats are written, and, apart from the writing section, predominantly multiple choice or simple response. For writing, students construct a conventional hand-written 'composition'. Clearly missing from NAPLAN are opportunities for students to demonstrate their literate capabilities in viewing, shaping, designing, listening, speaking, critical thinking (apart from inferential reading comprehension items), technology,³ digital and multimodality, with the exception of text with printed images as stimulus material. Taking account of these omissions, a critical question is sufficiency of the testing regime for monitoring the quality of education provision and outcomes for 21st century citizenry.

The impact of national accountability literacy tests on teachers and schools

Assessment is a critical component of the teaching and learning cycle. Considerable research identifies effective assessment practices, including current conceptualisations of assessment and learning (see, e.g., Assessment Reform Group, 2002; Black & Wiliam, 1998). Assessment can be seen as driving classroom instruction or leading it. Assessment-driven instruction can be both positive and negative. Use of assessment evidence to identify student needs and direct further teaching is positive. Assessment providing diagnostic information on student strengths and weaknesses is positive. However, assessment that serves to narrow curriculum and drive teaching and learning practice to focus on 'what is on the test', with excessive practice of standardised test formats and items, is negative.

Considerable international research demonstrates that negative effects can emerge from high-stakes external accountability testing that identifies individual school performance: schools resort to 'game-playing' to improve assessment outcomes, even removing students from testing (Heilig & Darling-Hammond, 2008); teachers engage in 'triaging' by concentrating on students near benchmarks to get them over the line, leaving behind students most at risk (Jennings & Dorn, 2008); teachers narrow curriculum by focusing on test content and test-taking practice, teaching transmissively, making little use of results to assist student learning (Harlen, 2005), and overpractising test-item types (Shepard, 2003). Further, borderline students are 'triaged' at the expense of others, particularly high-achieving students.

The current form of NAPLAN with items across a continuum of performance does address the last issue. Australian states and schools appear to set targets to improve student performance across levels (Chilcott, 2011). However, the downside to tests with items covering multiple levels is that fewer items can be used for diagnostic purposes for low-achieving students – those at-risk students who were the original focus of national policy.

Evidence that the high-stakes nature of NAPLAN tests and MySchool publications is having negative impact on Australian classrooms has emerged. Allegations and findings of cheating have been made. The negative impacts of accountability assessments identified in international research have been reported to an Australian government Senate enquiry (see, Cth Australia, 2010, pp. 43–45). As one Queensland submission stated:

The time spent on preparing students for this test, analysing results and setting narrow targets has become counter productive. That is to say, the time spent preparing and administering the NAPLAN has taken away valuable teaching and learning time that is better spent on supporting student learning. ... The high stakes nature of the NAPLAN has also served, in many schools, to narrow curriculum offerings. ... If the high stakes nature continues a narrowing of focus on literacy and numeracy outcomes from the NAPLAN will inevitably become the focus of many schools (NAPLAN Senate inquiry submission). (Cth Australia, 2010)

As a result, the Senate committee recommended 'ACARA [should] identify, analyse and report publicly on possible means of strengthening the relationship between NAPLAN tests and the wider curriculum' (Cth Australia, 2010, p. 45).

Impact of educational accountability on teacher constructions of English and literacy: One research example

Evidence that educational accountability affects teachers' ways of viewing English literacy emerged in a project Cumming and Wyatt-Smith conducted through funding provided by the Queensland Studies Authority in 2006, prior to the introduction of NAPLAN. At that time, Queensland's literacy policy, *Literate Futures* (Dept. Ed., 2000), encompassed national policy directions, describing a rich environment for literacy and multiliteracies. It included viewing, 'surfing', and 'real and virtual communities'. The starting definition was:

Literacy is the flexible and sustainable mastery of a repertoire of practices with the texts of traditional and new communications technologies via spoken language, print, and multimedia. (Dept. Ed., 2000, p. 9).

While the term 'multimodal' was not used, the connotations are present.

Our project examined interrelationships between teacher judgment of student performance and the then Queensland state literacy testing program. Overall, we found that teachers' judgments reflected the narrow focus of the tests measuring national literacy benchmark performance (Cumming, Wyatt-Smith, Elkins, & Neville, 2006). Also evident was how the focus of educational accountability tests, and high stakes attached to test outcomes, put at risk local and system efforts to broaden teachers' perspectives on English literacy, with tension between narrow technicist under-

standings of literacy education, and exploratory pedagogical approaches linking literacy and curriculum, and literacy and ICTs.

In our project, 56 teachers of students in Years 3 and 5 in schools across Queensland were interviewed and asked to describe literacy practices of students 'above', 'at' and 'below' expected levels (Cumming et al., 2006, p. 55). Comments were provided for 70 specific students and for Year level students in general. No formal definitions of literacy or numeracy were provided to teachers, nor were 'levels' defined. Thus comments and descriptors provided by teachers were both their constructions of literacy and their constructions of quality of performance.

Overall, teachers associated literacy with discipline subject 'English', focusing on reading (decoding and comprehension), and writing text, including operational or control aspects such as spelling and grammar. These also dominated teachers' own assessment practices. Cultural and critical dimensions of the 2005 Queensland English syllabus in place at that time were rarely mentioned, nor students as designers or innovators. No teacher mentioned ICTs or development of higher order thinking skills as literacy goals.

Descriptions of Year 3 students' literacy achievements *below* expected levels focused on reading decoding skills, with emphasis on reading aloud: 'inappropriate intonation', 'struggles to read words with more than three letters', 'does not apply decoding strategies', 'needs a lot of work on sight words and initial letters'. Teachers separated comprehension from decoding, indicating these students had 'difficulty with comprehension, find[ing] it hard to understand the questions and [form] inferences about texts'. For writing, teachers focused on simple sentence construction, with which most students had difficulty, spelling, and punctuation. Students had limited strategies, did not take risks and were slow and lacking in confidence. Teachers also referred to learning difficulties including poor memory. They did not comment on listening or viewing skills.

Year 3 students *at* level were described as being able to comprehend written texts, to do 'simple structured writing', with less focus on decoding skills. Motivation and attitude were seen as the barriers to higher performance: 'takes time to complete tasks', 'struggling to get through the class work', '(needs) motivation and a good environment'. However, some students were described as taking pride in their work and 'keen and interested'.

For Year 3 students *above* level, different descriptors were used. Some focus on reading aloud fluency occurred. Comments on reading comprehension included 'can do a re-tell' and 'make inferences'. Considerable focus was on writing text, including 'eloquent vocabulary', 'mature', 'volume and quality' and '[effective] sentence structures'. Student learning strategies were a focus with comments including 'far deeper level', 'more detailed', 'problem solver', 'only have to tell once'. Creativity was a focus also: 'quirky', 'excellent creative thinking', 'imagination', 'captures the reader's attention', 'insightful comments', 'flair', 'initiative'. Students were described as confident readers, loving books and focused. Comments on oral communication skills were made for 'above level' students.

Teachers made few comments on literacy skills other than reading and writing text, or on literacies across the curriculum. They did discuss contexts where children could demonstrate knowledge and strength, such as oral presentations and PowerPoint presentations, noting that these were not assessed by the state literacy tests. Teachers sited students along a continuum of progression, identifying areas where a child was improving. No comments were made about multimodal literacies, inclusion of technology either as part of literacy or as part of literacy assessments, or non-text based skills. Listening skills were not mentioned.

In the context of external accountability testing, comments by teachers showed attention to traditional and limited aspects of literacy, echoing literacies assessed by the external tests. This may have been influenced by the project's context, as teachers knew we were exploring congruence between their conceptualisations of students' achievement and external test outcomes. However, teachers' comments did extend beyond external test focuses. They showed the extent to which teachers still identified strategies of literacy learning as important, a focus of the original draft literacy benchmarks but not of the external tests. Teachers attended to attitude and engagement as critical factors in student literacy achievement. Their textual focus was the written word in standard contexts; their focus as teachers on literacy learning was much broader.

Conclusion

Our project findings demonstrated that increased high stakes for educational accountability testing may work against increasing teacher engagement with broader constructions of English/literacy and with multimodality and technology emphasised throughout national

declarations and definitions of literacy and English over the last twenty years.

This discussion shows that the educational accountability focus of NAPLAN has not kept pace with 21st century learning agendas and identified essential skills for 21st century learners in national policy and curriculum. Broadening literacy forms included in NAPLAN could be effective in broadening teachers' focus. Teachers already have pedagogical focuses that reflect a fuller curriculum.

The core questions for policy and practice become (i) how do we ensure that we maintain breadth of focus in English curriculum, multimodality and technology in classrooms in a high-stakes external educational accountability environment, and (ii) how can we develop a high-stakes external educational accountability system more aligned, as suggested by the Australian Senate report, with the breadth and richness of a 21st century curriculum. For classroom teachers, the practical question is how to integrate and sustain multimodality with subject English and English literacy for 21st century learning processes and outcomes in classroom assessment practices, in an environment where external accountability exerts such influence.

Notes

- 1 As this article focuses on English literacy, subsequent references to numeracy are not made. However, federal policy emphasises both as essential outcomes for students.
- 2 Cumming was a consultant to Curriculum Corporation for the literacy and numeracy benchmarks as well as assessment issues.
- 3 Information communication and technology (ICT) is the focus of an independent national test under the national assessment program. ICT skills are tested for random samples of students in Years 6 and 10 on a three-yearly cycle. ICT is not linked to NAPLAN literacy.

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Appendix I:

A chronology of literacy, English and multimodal emphasis in Australia since 1989

<p>Hobart Declaration (MCEETYA, 1989) [emphasis added]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreement to map appropriate knowledge and skills for 'English literacy' • 'to develop in students ... skills of <i>English literacy</i>, including skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing.' (Aim 6a) • 'to promote equality of education opportunities, and to provide for groups with special learning requirements.' (Aim 3)
<p>National literacy goal & subgoal (MCEETYA, 1997a) & National Literacy and Numeracy Plan (DEETYA, 1998) ['benchmarks']</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'comprehensive assessment of all students by teachers as early as possible in the first years of schooling ... to ensure that ... literacy needs of all students are adequately addressed and to intervene as early as possible to address the needs of those students identified as at risk of not making adequate progress towards the national ... literacy goals. ... use [of] rigorous State-based assessment procedures to assess students against the Year 3 benchmark for ... reading, writing and spelling for 1998 onwards.' (MCEETYA, 1997a) • goal: 'every child leaving primary school should be ... able to read, write, and spell at an appropriate level.' (MCEETYA, 1997a) • sub-goal: 'every child commencing school from 1998 will achieve a minimum acceptable literacy and numeracy standard within four years (recognising that a very small percentage of students suffer from severe educational disabilities).' (MCEETYA, 1997a) • development of agreed national benchmarks in literacy and numeracy, against which all students' achievement in these years can be measured. (DEETYA, 1998)

<p>National Literacy and Numeracy Plan: 'Literacy for All: The Challenge for Australian Schools' (C'th literacy policy) (DEETYA, 1998)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Effective literacy is intrinsically purposeful, flexible and dynamic and involves the integration of speaking, listening and critical thinking with reading and writing.' • 'This definition draws attention to the significance of effective literacy which requires the ability to read and use written information, to write appropriately, in a wide range of contexts, for many different purposes, and to communicate with a variety of audiences. Literacy is integrally related to learning in all areas of the curriculum, and enables all individuals to develop knowledge and understanding. Reading and writing, when integrated with speaking, listening, viewing and critical thinking, constitute valued aspects of literacy in modern life. This comprehensive view of literacy reflects current use of the term in the professional literature. ... 'literacy is more than just being able to read and write; it is the ability to comprehend, interpret, analyse, respond, and interact with the growing variety of complex sources of information' ... Purposeful, flexible and dynamic literacy developed in the early years of schooling provides the foundation for continued development throughout an individual's lifetime.' • '[T]he [National Literacy and Numeracy] Plan draws attention to the multiple uses of literacy and the changing nature of literate practices in modern society. New electronic communication technologies bring new literacy demands; the relationship between literacy and technology is an area for active professional investigation.' • 'New information technologies bring with them profound changes in the range and nature of texts, and to ways of accessing new information. Email, for example, creates a greater immediacy in written communication, reducing the temporal space so that often writing has some of the immediacy of speech. Hypertext allows readers to read text in non-linear ways, and to interact with texts. Students are using the Internet to communicate with learners around the globe, and to access information world-wide. Users of the new technology bring new literacy skills into play: composing texts appropriate for email communication and critically analysing information found through the Internet.'
<p>Adelaide Declaration (MCEETYA, 1999)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • every child will: • '[attain] high standards of knowledge, skills and understanding through a comprehensive and balanced curriculum in the compulsory subject area[s] ... English' (Goal 2.1) • '[attain] the skills of ... English literacy; such that every child leaving primary school should be ... able to read, write and spell and communicate at an appropriate level.' (Goal 2.2) • 'Schooling should be socially just so that ... learning outcomes of educationally disadvantaged students improve and, over time, match those of other students' (Goal 3.2)
<p>National literacy benchmarks (Curriculum Corporation, 2000)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literacy Benchmarks Years 3, 5 and 7 – minimum acceptable standards 'all but a few' students should attain by a respective Year level. Minimum benchmark statements for <i>writing</i>, <i>spelling</i> and <i>reading</i> were completed by December 1997. Benchmark statements for <i>speaking</i>, <i>listening</i> and <i>viewing</i> to be developed by 1998 (MCEETYA, 1997b). However, benchmark statements for listening and speaking were not finalised. • Year 3: Reading At benchmark standard, students read and understand a range of texts that are suitable for this year level. These texts appear in, for example, picture books, illustrated chapter books, junior reference material and the electronic media. Typically, texts that these students are able to read have predictable text and sentence structures. Words that may be unfamiliar are explained in the writing or through the illustrations. Typically, these texts use straightforward, everyday language. When students read and understand texts like these, they can: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify main purpose of text (e.g. say that purpose of a set of short simple instructions is to help you do something) • identify sequence of events in stories • find directly stated information in written text and/or illustrations • make links between ideas stated directly and close together in different parts of text (e.g. predict end of story; work out character's feelings from an illustration; make links between a diagram and its label) • work out meaning of some unfamiliar phrases and words. Writing At benchmark standard, students compose simple pieces of writing that make sense to the reader and show basic understanding of the writing task. The pieces of writing contain a few ideas related to task and topic. The ideas are usually briefly expressed. The pieces of writing show evidence of some organisation of subject matter (e.g. a simple beginning, middle and end in a story). However, they may also include irrelevant details, or ideas not well tied into the writing. (Elaboration of structure and content) Spelling At benchmark standard, students spell accurately: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • many frequently used and readily recognised words (e.g. come, going, like, saw, was, went, but, from, they, very, you) • other one- and two-syllable words: • most words of one syllable with common spelling patterns (e.g. <i>sharp</i>, <i>thick</i>, <i>star</i>, <i>crown</i>, <i>spoon</i>, <i>free</i>, <i>green</i>, <i>play</i>) • some words of two syllables with common spelling patterns (e.g. <i>sunny</i>, <i>playing</i>). While students are expected to spell accurately the words described above, they also attempt to spell a wider range of words. Errors made with these words should be close to the look and/or sound of the correct spelling (e.g. <i>gess</i> for <i>guess</i>, <i>jungil</i> for <i>jungle</i>, <i>redy</i> for <i>ready</i>). (Curriculum Corporation, 2000)

<p>Cumming and Wyatt-Smith (2001); Wyatt-Smith and Cumming (2003)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum literacies: ‘We use “curriculum” deliberately as a noun, rather than the adjectival “curricular”, in order to demonstrate that this conjunction represents the interface between a specific curriculum and its literacies, rather than literacies related to curriculum in a generic sense, or a single literacy that can be spread homogeneously across all curriculum.’ (Cumming & Wyatt-Smith, 2001, p. 10; Wyatt-Smith & Cumming, 2003, p. 50)
<p>National Statements of Learning (literacy) (Curriculum Corporation, 2005)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘[D]esigned to be challenging but accessible to students at years 3, 5, 7 and 9. They differ from the <i>Literacy Benchmarks</i> ... which represent minimum standards of achievement.’ (p. 3) • ‘The <i>Statements of Learning for English</i> have been written in the context of the following aims of English curriculums in Australia which seek that students develop ... the capacity to critically interpret and construct spoken, written, visual and multimodal texts in a broad range of mediums ...’ (p. 2). • Reading and Viewing: Students read and view simple texts that entertain, move, report, explain and give opinions. They read and view imaginative texts such as children’s stories, rhymed verses, fairytales and fables. They also read and view information texts such as reports, transactions and explanations. The texts they read and view contain ideas and information related to their real and imagined worlds, with illustrations that clarify meaning. The texts may be in illustrated books, school newsletters, local newspapers, children’s magazines, advertisements, films, and on television programs, CD-ROMs and websites. ... They ... understand that texts can be produced for different audiences and that the interests of the intended readers and viewers can be reflected in the text. • Writing ‘Students write texts on familiar topics for known readers to entertain, describe and express their opinions in print and electronic mediums.’ (pp. 5–6) • Speaking and listening standards have also been developed. These are not listed here as they are not included in NAPLAN.
<p>Melbourne Declaration (MCEETYA, 2008)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Literacy ... and knowledge of key disciplines remain the cornerstone of schooling for young Australians.’ (p. 5) • ‘the use of digital media ... [is] essential’ for 21st century skills (p. 5) • ‘successful learners’ ... ‘have the essential skills in literacy and numeracy and are creative and productive users of technology, especially ICT, as a foundation for success in all learning areas’ (p. 8) • ‘The [national] curriculum will include a strong focus on literacy ... skills’ (p. 13) • ‘Educational outcomes for Indigenous children ... are substantially behind those of other students in ... literacy ...’ (p. 15)
<p>Shape of the Australian Curriculum 2.0 – General Capabilities (ACARA, 2010)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Literacy [–] Students become literate as they develop the skills to learn and communicate confidently at school and to become effective individuals, community members, workers and citizens. listening, reading and viewing, writing, speaking and creating print, visual and digital materials accurately and purposefully within and across all learning areas’ • ‘literacy ... must be reinforced and strengthened through learning in other contexts including science, history, geography and technologies’ (ACARA, 2010, p. 12). The national curriculum will prioritise ‘English and literacy’ (p. 12). • ICT competence is attained through learning ‘to use ICT effectively and appropriately when investigating, creating and communicating ideas and information at school, at home, at work and in their communities’ (p. 19)
<p>Australian Curriculum English (ACARA, 2011a)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literacy includes students’ ‘application of ... English skills and knowledge to read, view, speak, listen to, write and create a growing repertoire of texts’ (Aims: http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/English/Aims) • ‘In English, students learn to read, write, listen and speak accurately, flexibly and critically, and to view and create increasingly complex texts in a variety of contexts. The general capability of Literacy is drawn from the content descriptions in the Language and Literacy strands of the English curriculum. The literacy knowledge and skills are developed and applied through all three strands: <i>Language, Literature and Literacy</i>.’ (General capabilities: http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/English/General-capabilities#Literacy) • ‘Interpreting and creating a range of types of texts with accuracy, fluency and purpose’, with sub-strands ‘Texts in context’, ‘Interacting with others’, ‘Interpreting, analysing and evaluating’ and ‘Creating texts’ (General capabilities) • ‘the ability to listen, read and view, write, speak and create print, visual and digital materials accurately and confidently to enable students to become effective individuals, workers and citizens’ (General capabilities).

<p>Australian English curriculum: Year 3 (ACARA, 2011a)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Year 3 Level Description: 'Students engage with a variety of texts for enjoyment. They listen to, read, view and interpret spoken, written and multimodal texts in which the primary purpose is to entertain, as well as texts designed to inform and persuade. ... texts describe complex sequences of events that extend over several pages ... [and] use complex language features, including varied sentence structures, some unfamiliar vocabulary, a significant number of high-frequency sight words and words that need to be decoded phonically, and a range of punctuation conventions, as well as illustrations and diagrams that both support and extend the printed texts. Students create a range of imaginative, informative and persuasive types of texts including narratives, procedures, performances, reports, reviews, poetry and expositions.' • ACARA English curriculum definitions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Listen</i>: 'the use of the sense of hearing as well as a range of active behaviours to comprehend information received through gesture, body language and other sensory systems' • <i>Read</i>: 'to process words, symbols or actions to derive and/or construct meaning. Reading includes interpreting, critically analysing and reflecting upon the meaning of a wide range of written and visual, print and non-print texts' • <i>View</i>: 'observe with purpose, understanding and critical awareness. Some students use oral, written or multimodal forms to respond to a range of text types. Other students participate in viewing activities by listening to an adult or peer describing the visual features of text, diagrams, pictures and multimedia' • <i>Text</i>: 'the means for communication. Their forms and conventions have developed to help us communicate effectively with a variety of audiences for a range of purposes. Texts can be written, spoken or multimodal and in print or digital/online forms. Multimodal texts combine language with other systems for communication, such as print text, visual images, soundtrack and spoken word as in film or computer presentation media' • <i>Multimodal text</i>: 'combination of two or more communication modes, for example print, image and spoken text as in film or computer presentations'
<p>Australian English curriculum Year 3 Expected achievement standard (ACARA, 2011) [revision of these Standards in late 2011 has not changed the overall focus of these statements]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • '... students listen to, read and view a range of spoken, written and multimodal texts, identifying their different purposes. They attend to others' views and respond appropriately. They use monitoring and self-correcting strategies to clarify meaning when reading, viewing and listening to an increasing range of types of texts. Students create a range of imaginative, informative and persuasive written, spoken and multimodal texts for familiar and unfamiliar audiences. They contribute actively to group discussions ... They communicate expressively and clearly about familiar ideas and information to known small audiences, in mostly informal situations. ... They create imaginative texts based on characters and situations encountered in their reading and viewing. ... They organise texts in paragraphs composed of logically grouped and sequenced sentences. Short sentences are meaningful and correctly structured, and some complex sentences are used appropriately. They choose vocabulary appropriate to the purpose and context of their writing. They use simple punctuation correctly, and use a variety of spelling strategies to spell high frequency words correctly.'
<p>NAPLAN tests 2009–2010</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing Prompt Single page sheet, 17 images including six photographs Topic: 'Today you are going to write a narrative (a story). The idea for your story is "What a mess!"' (ACARA, 2010, http://www.nap.edu.au/_Documents/NAPLAN%202010%20Test/Writing_Prompt.pdf) • Reading • Text: Reading Magazine 2009 – seven pages of print text (factual information, recipe, postcard, story, persuasive text, story, sequence) with pictorial support (ACARA, 2009, http://www.nap.edu.au/NAPLAN/The+tests/NAPLAN+2009+Tests/index.html) • Questions: 32 multiple choice questions (3 to 4 options) (shade the bubble); 2 sequence order questions; 1 multiple option question. • Language Conventions (40 minutes) Written language conventions: 25 single word spelling, 18 selection of appropriate word[s] to insert in text, 1 word meaning, 6 punctuation.
<p>ACARA General Capability literacy: literacy capabilities for end of Year 2, 4, 6, 8 & 10</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publications on 'conceptual statements and continua' are being developed for the general capabilities including 'the conceptual framework, evidence base and references for the capability', and 'a continuum of learning, showing development across bands of year levels' • For the generic capability literacy, development 'includes descriptions for the end of Years 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10 ... to guide the future development of the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN):' (ACARA, <i>The Australian Curriculum General Capabilities</i> <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/GeneralCapabilities> at 13 April 2011.)