



CS PROGRESS REPORT

The new Stage 6 English syllabus has been in operation in schools for a full term. English teachers have been applying the lessons learnt in the LIGs and translating their understandings of the syllabus into programs and units of work. How well the change is taking place depends on how well English faculties have prepared for the Preliminary course and how effectively schools have nurtured and supported effective professional working teams.

This article reflects on the changes that have taken place in senior English and details some of the places where teachers can go for support and advice.

The best-prepared racing car is unproven until the driver takes it to the grid, the flag is lowered and the race is under way. So also, a syllabus is unproven until it is handed over to the teachers, whose task it then is to get the best from it and prove its worth. To do this, teachers need to know its capabilities, understand what makes it work and devise ways of helping it realise its potential. English teachers are now at that most important and intriguing phase of initial implementation of the new Stage 6 English syllabus.

To torture the analogy just a little further, we have gone the first few laps and it might be time for a pit stop just to check that we are on the right track.

What is unassailably new about this syllabus?

Faced with change, some might be tempted to wish that it would go away. They might look for what hasn't changed and cling to that, repeating the self-reassuring mantra as they run off their seventies study guides: "There's nothing new in this syllabus, I've been doing it for years".

However, there is no comfort to be found in this syllabus for anyone tempted to take such a position. Teachers who are programming and teaching the Preliminary course have seen how dramatically the structure and focus of Stage 6 English have changed what happens in the classroom. The Board of Studies support document introducing the syllabus describes it as a "major reconceptualisation and expansion of

study" incorporating "new theoretical developments in the study of English while maintaining the literary orientation".

The new syllabus changes both the structure and content of senior English courses.

- The "Area of Study", the "module" and the "elective" have created a new format for the year's work that is both purposeful and visible.
- The content is now much more than a list of texts for study. This content includes specific skills, knowledge and understanding about the way language is structured and meaning shaped.
- In the area of study, students learn specifically about the ways in which meaning is shaped by the interaction of composer, responder, text and context. They learn the "how" and the "why" as well as the "what" of texts, and the process of making meaning is studied as well as the product of making meaning, that is, the meaning that comes from responding to and composing texts.
- There is greater diversity than ever before of texts for study, including both traditional literary texts and forms, and the more recent film, media and multimedia texts. In all cases, informed critical reading is central.
- The terminology in this syllabus is different, as the syllabus glossary demonstrates. The terms are not used gratuitously; their presence, as well as their meanings, signal the nature and extent of the changes: for example, "representation", "culture", "critical thinking", "creative thinking" and "perspective".
- There is a much stronger emphasis on seeing texts in relation to each other rather than only in isolation. Students now must be able to articulate more clearly how and why a concept is treated differently in different texts, what commonalities can be seen, and what cultural values are inherent in the different treatments.
- Composing and responding are given equal weight; no longer can we only pay lip service to imaginative writing in the senior school. Teaching students to write creatively within the context of the "how, why and what" is as rigorous a process as is teaching Shakespearean tragedy.
- The modes of reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing and representing are given a "more equal" weighting, especially as students explore and create media and multimedia texts.



But so much of this is new to me!

Much of the syllabus is new to most teachers. The extent of the newness varies from person to person.

Those who have chosen in recent years to learn more about cultural studies, linguistics, film studies, media studies or the impact of the new technologies on the English language are embracing these aspects of the syllabus with confidence and enthusiasm.

Those who have continued to take a more traditional approach to English teaching can contribute their experience and special knowledge in the new context of the syllabus because breadth and balance are important.

Neither a preoccupation with the new nor a retreat into the past is the answer. All English teachers share the responsibility for collaborating in order to provide the best possible senior English courses for their school.

Where can I get help?

Locally

English faculties are finding that everyone has some special expertise to bring to their colleagues and everyone has something to learn from their colleagues as they shape the new courses. So, the place to look for help, in the first instance, is within one's own district, school and staffroom. The Department's implementation processes support schools in creating and fostering professional learning teams. Schools which have taken up this approach, and which already work within a strong culture of in-school professional development, are finding that, while they are very busy indeed, they are also working in a purposeful and productive way.

Support materials abound and are constantly being developed. When schools and faculties have set up their learning teams they are able to make best use of these materials, choosing what they decide is of most help to them at different phases of the implementation.

Board of Studies

The Board of Studies has produced English materials, which are available in hard copy and on the Internet at <http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au>

These documents include the following:

- *Stage 6 Syllabus English: Preliminary and HSC Courses*

- *Prescriptions: Area of Study, Electives, Texts* (Higher School Certificate 2001 and 2002)
- *Examination, Assessment and Reporting Supplement: Standard and Advanced*
- *Examination, Assessment and Reporting Supplement: ESL*
- 2001 HSC Specimen Paper: English (Standard and Advanced)
- 2001 HSC Specimen Paper: English (ESL)

Support documents currently available include:

- *The New Higher School Certificate: Assessment*
- *English Stage 6: Internal Assessment*
- *Area of Study: Common Content: English (Standard and Advanced)*
- *Studying in English: English as a Second Language (ESL): Module B (Texts and Society)*
- *Annotations of Texts Prescribed for the First Time for the Higher School Certificate*
- *Fundamentals of English: Stage 6*
- *Annotated Professional Readings*
- *Credit Transfer for TAFE/National Communications Skills Modules*
- *Answers to Frequently Asked Questions.*

Department of Education and Training

The Department of Education and Training has an ongoing program of support.

Local Interest Groups (LIGs)

The LIG courses have created forums in which teachers meet to work through the syllabus structure, philosophy and implementation, learn, share understandings and establish networks for ongoing team support. It is the purpose of the LIGs to help teachers develop critical understandings of the rationale and theory bases and to learn how to adapt their programs to address the new courses.

The support materials supplied at the LIGs model units of work and explain new concepts.

Curriculum Support (English)

The Department continues to support implementation through the HSC supplement of this newsletter. So far the newsletter has published the following articles:

- The theory bases of Stage 6 English (1999, No. 3)
- Responding to film (1999, No. 3)
- The area of study (1999, No. 3)
- Assessment and reporting (1999, No. 3)
- Visual texts in newspapers (1999, No. 4)
- Implementing film, television and multimedia in English (1999, No. 4)



Swimming not drowning in technology (2000, No. 1)

Teaching ESL students in the new Stage 6 English courses (2000, No. 1).

Human resource support

Help is available through districts, which can arrange visits by Curriculum personnel to groups of schools. Contact your District Office for details. Also, assistance in implementing the ESL course is available from Judith Mee, Project Officer, Stage 6 English ESL support. Judith's contact numbers are 9244 5352 or 9624 9156.

Web site

<http://www.newhsc.schools.nsw.edu.au>

This particularly valuable web site is the professional development site dedicated to supporting teachers of the new HSC. It is cross-sectoral, the combined effort of the Board of Studies, the Department of Education and Training, the Catholic Education Commission and the Association of Independent Schools (AIS). This site allows you to link with all of these organisations and gain access to the support they are offering. In addition to the resources listed above from the Board of Studies and the Department of Education and Training, you can download sample English programs and units of work produced by the AIS.

This site is still in development, so you should visit it regularly and also take the opportunity to join in. Teachers can take part in discussions, and schools are providing accounts of how they are approaching the challenges of implementation.

Professional associations

The NSW English Teachers Association (ETA) and the Association for Teaching English to Students of other Languages (ATESOL) have been holding workshops on the new courses; for example, ATESOL has a workshop planned for August to help teachers of the new ESL course.

Information about upcoming ETA activities and resources is available from Patrick Hickey at the Professional Teachers Council NSW on 9564 3322.

Information about upcoming ATESOL activities and resources is available from Judith Mee on either 9244 5352 or 9624 9156.

Readings

Annotated Professional Readings (Board of Studies web site)

Moon, Brian. *Literary terms, a practical glossary*, Chalkface Press

Pope, Rob. *English studies book*, available through St Clair Press

Sawyer, Watson and Gold (eds). *Re-viewing English*, St Clair Press

Stephens and Watson. *From picture book to literary theory*, St Clair Press

Thomson J (ed). *Reconstructing literature teaching*, AATE, 1992

Bonnycastle, S. *In search of authority*, available from St Clair Press

More information about these books is available from St Clair Press on (tel) 9818 1942 or (fax) 9418 1923.

CD-ROMs

NSW Professional Development Consortium (1999): *New technologies, new literacies ...working with information* (This should be in all schools.)

Materials from the Curriculum Corporation (Victoria) are helpful; for example, *Teaching and viewing visual text* for moving images and *The big picture* for still images.

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