



Quality Teaching Program

Enhancing literacy in Stage 6 through Fundamentals of English

The Stage 6 English syllabus states on page 96 that:

The Fundamentals of English course addresses the literacy needs of students undertaking the course and assists students to use the English language effectively in their study and for vocational and other purposes.

There is widespread agreement among Standard English teachers at Oberon High School that Fundamentals of English provides students with valuable support in tackling the literacy demands of the Standard English course. It also provides them with opportunities to explore and develop their vocational literacy and oral language skills. The course also plays a vital role in meeting Key Competency 2:

The capacity to communicate effectively with others using the range of spoken, written, graphic and other non-verbal means of expression.

Oberon High School is a small rural school of approximately 256 students, with usually 35 to 45 students in each of the senior years. We have very few students from non-English speaking backgrounds, and the gender mix is approximately 60% males and 40% females. Most students in the Standard and Fundamentals of English courses intend seeking employment or attending TAFE when they complete their HSC.

At Oberon High School the new Stage 6 English syllabus presented the English staff with new challenges, one of which was how best to cater for those students in Standard English who needed support. The staff felt that the best way to do this was to introduce the Fundamentals of English course as a sixty-hour, one unit course in the Preliminary year.

Like most schools across the state, we had to address the difficulty of timetabling the course. We were aware of the problems of offering the course within the normal line structure, as this would require that the students select Fundamentals of English as either a one or two unit course on another line in the timetable and forgo

an elective as a result. We also knew that, if Fundamentals of English were to be placed within the normal line structure, the students who most needed the course would be the ones least likely to select it, and they would select another subject in that time slot.

Fortunately, the school has had a literacy period operating in Years 7 to 12, for twenty-six minutes, straight after recess, four days a week. The literacy period replaced the old *DEAR* period that many schools are familiar with, and has structured literacy activities for students of all abilities. The executive decided that the most logical way of integrating Fundamentals of English into the curriculum was to run it in the literacy period. This means that Fundamentals of English runs for the four terms of Year 11, as a one unit, sixty-hour course, and it also means that all Standard students are able to take Fundamentals of English. The students do not regard it as an extra unit because it simply replaces the literacy period that they would participate in anyway.

The Fundamentals of English course ran successfully at Oberon High School in 2000 and is operating again in 2001. All Standard students complete the course in Module A: *Approaches to the Area of Study in English*, Module B: *Oral Communication Skills*, and Module E: *Workplace Communications*. Modules B and E run for twelve weeks and Module A for the remaining time. The course starts in Term 1 of the Preliminary year and goes through until the end of Term 4. Not only does this enable us to complete the prescribed hours for each module, it also means that the students have the additional support provided by this course for their entire Preliminary course and for the first term of their HSC course.

Modules A and B were taught by members of the English staff in 2000 and the careers teacher was involved in Module E: *Workplace Communication*. We selected these modules for their relevance to our students and to the local community.

The staff felt that the *Oral Communication Skills* module was particularly useful in developing students' confidence and skills in oral communications, and would provide a sound basis for oral language development in the Standard course. Students' performance in oral assessment tasks in Standard English has borne out this belief. The program for *Oral Communication Skills* covers a range of formal and informal oral tasks such as phone conversations, interviews, meeting procedure, impromptu speeches, and formal speeches for a range of purposes and audiences.

The *Workplace Communication* module was designed to be very

"I feel a lot more confident now about speaking in front of a group. Most of it's been fun to do."

"The oral work in Fundamentals has sure helped me in my assessment tasks."

"I never did any of the speaking tasks in Years 9 and 10, I always made sure I was away. Now it doesn't worry me because we've all had to do it together."



practical in terms of developing workplace skills for the students in areas such as job applications, preparing resumes, interview preparation, and responding to and composing a variety of workplace texts and forms.

The *Approaches to Area of Study in English* module supported students in meeting the outcomes of the Standard course by engaging them in a variety of activities to specifically develop their language skills, study skills, and the knowledge and understanding required for the Area of Study.

In 2001 we are running the same modules, but the English staff are teaching all modules. This year we also have English Life Skills students integrated into the Fundamentals of English course, and this is proving very successful. Already we have made changes to the original program in terms of refining our teaching and learning strategies and resources, and we envisage further changes as the year progresses. The three English teachers share the responsibility for programming and resourcing the course. Team teaching takes place to access teacher expertise, and to enable close work with small groups and more individual support for students. This is often done on top of the teachers' allocated period load.

Assessment for the Fundamentals of English course at Oberon High comprises one assessment task per module and a final examination. The assessment task for *Oral Communication Skills* requires students to prepare a speech for a specified audience and purpose. The *Workplace Communication* task asks students to fill in an official accident report in response to a designated scenario. For *Approaches to Area of Study in English* the students prepare and present a representation of the concept of justice.

Through teaching the HSC Standard course, we have begun to see definite links with the work done in the Fundamentals of English course; for example, the *Workplace Communication* module in Fundamentals of English has built a solid foundation for Standard Module C: *Texts and Society*. We discovered that many of the text forms from the *Workplace and community texts* booklet had already been covered in *Workplace Communication*. This meant that the students already had a solid base for their approach to *Texts and Society*. *Oral Communication Skills* would be relevant for the Module A: *Dialogue* elective because of its focus on the language and forms of spoken language. Module A, of course, is vital in providing support for the Standard Area of Study.

The English staff at Oberon High School believe that the Fundamentals of English course provides necessary support for our Standard students so that they can better achieve the outcomes of the course.

There has been considerable interest in both how we have integrated Fundamentals of English into the senior curriculum, and the program that we have devised. For this reason we became interested in further developing the Fundamentals of English course through the Quality Teaching Program Project. The project involves an action research approach to evaluate the Fundamentals of English course presently running at Oberon High School and at St Stanislaus College, Bathurst, assisted by the staffs of both these schools and the Head Teacher of Bathurst High School, who is interested in exploring ways for this course to be successfully implemented in that school. As part of this process, we are examining a variety of ways in which Fundamentals of English can be incorporated into a timetable, and how students can be encouraged to take this "extra unit of English". Following the evaluation, a package will be produced containing suggestions on timetabling, as well as programming samples.

Fundamentals of English can be implemented as either a one unit or two unit course. It can be offered in either the Preliminary or HSC year, or across both. It may take some lateral thinking to incorporate it into the timetable or to sell it to students, but our experience shows that it is a worthwhile effort for both staff and students.

Sandra Chapman
Head Teacher, English
Oberon High School

HSC workshops

During Term 2 more than three thousand seven hundred teachers participated in one hundred and fifty workshops supporting the new HSC. The workshops focused on the curriculum areas of English, Science, HSIE, Creative Arts, PDHPE and TAS, as well as Assessment and Reporting. Mathematics workshops are being provided separately as part of the Quality Teacher Program, while Languages workshops have been conducted by the individual language consultants.

These workshops have supplemented the more than one thousand HSC implementation workshops that have been conducted across the state since 1999.

The Term 2 workshops had a strong pedagogical focus. They were designed to increase teachers' confidence by further developing their understandings of HSC standards, resources and assessment tasks. The flexible design of the workshops meant that presenters and participants were able to address local needs.

Workshop evaluations have been overwhelmingly positive with teachers expressing their appreciation for the discussions, advice and information about resources.



The English workshops

The English team of presenters: David Hargrave, Lyndall Hough, Gillian Lovell, Josh McGahen and Kerry Underhill, put high priority on the workshops' meeting the specific needs of the participants. To achieve this they used a flexible model of delivery and provided a wide range of resources.

At the workshops, English teachers shared their Stage 6 experiences, and their teaching and assessment programs. They were also able to network with their neighbouring colleagues. Some teachers travelled considerable distances to attend the workshops and, according to the evaluations, found that the workshops provided a much needed opportunity for them to brainstorm, problem-solve with colleagues, and to listen to how others have met the challenges of the new courses.

After an initial session, where aspects of the syllabus and its implementation were discussed, some workshop groups looked at ways of accessing the language of the outcomes, and suggested teaching strategies that they had used or would use to allow for a demonstration of the outcomes. Programming was also discussed, culminating in the sharing of a Standard course unit with an accompanying assessment task. Two work samples were used as the basis for a discussion about consistency in setting tasks and in using marking guidelines and procedures. Sometimes discussion led to a closer consideration of the module and elective, including implications for the Area of Study and other modules where students are required to go beyond their prescribed texts.

Teachers were able to share ideas, both formally and informally, about future teaching units, the selection of modules and electives, how to assess what has been taught so far and what to keep or change in their programming and teaching for next year's students.

Many teachers reported that their students enjoy the integration of technology into English. At the same



English workshops at Hornsby Girls High School

time, however, this raised some teachers' concerns about their own confidence and competence in using technology, as well as access issues. However, at most workshops people were able to share their uses of various types of technology, and what they and their students had done.

Many workshop participants also spoke enthusiastically about teaching film and other visual texts such as picture books, magazines and other media texts. The value of incorporating the study of popular texts, (what students at this age enjoy), and moving on to a wide range of other texts, including the more traditional texts, was discussed.

It appears from the comments of teachers at the workshops that students are feeling a sense of empowerment at being given responsibility for finding their own texts by looking at a wide range of texts including social, historical, workplace and community texts.

Each workshop provided opportunities for teachers to discuss the Specimen Papers: their intent, the range of



questions and, importantly, the necessity of familiarising students with the general layout of the papers and making sure that they address in their answers the assessment criteria at the beginning of the question. There was agreement that students need to be shown how to use the information in the questions to shape their answers, and so to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and understandings. Many teachers shared their concerns about the external examination, and what the first examination of the new HSC might look like.

Other commonly-held concerns included such practical issues as the workload on both teachers and students to ensure that, when students are new to the course (for various reasons), they are able to complete all text categories. Many teachers reported that it really helps to share writing and marking assessment tasks with faculty members and colleagues in other schools. Working in teams to make judgements, and keeping print, video and audio samples are seen as very good ways of informing teachers' judgements, increasing confidence and maintaining consistency.

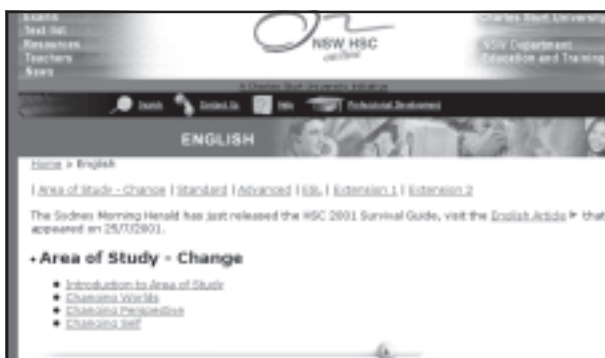
Written and verbal evaluations from the workshops indicate that many teachers feel that what they have already accomplished has been worth the additional effort and workload of introducing the new courses. This was particularly reassuring for teachers in non-metropolitan areas who sometimes feel isolated from others and are unaware that others share their concerns.

Evaluation comments included the following: *very good material, well presented, informative, good to hear what others are doing, we need more days like this, reassuring.*

Other support for the HSC includes:

Web sites

The new *NSW HSC Online* www.hsc.csu.edu.au was launched on Monday 2 April 2001. It provides twenty-three subject nodes, including English, with a variety of interactive elements for students. A further fourteen subjects will come online in 2001.



The Professional Support and Curriculum Directorate web site www.curriculumsupport.nsw.edu.au has links to resources for HSC subjects.

The www.newhsc.schools.nsw.edu.au professional development site is regularly updated with advice to teachers regarding professional development activities and resources.

The Board of Studies web site www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au is the source for all Board documents, including the Specimen Papers.

Print publications

The following publications can be downloaded from the professional development web site www.newhsc.schools.nsw.edu.au

CURRICULUM SUPPORT (HSC Supplements)

Assessment and Reporting bulletins

Enhancing Learning through the New HSC newsletters.

A CD-ROM has been sent to governments schools containing an archive of all **CURRICULUM SUPPORT** in the eight secondary KLAs as well as Vocational Education 7–12.

What I do

Distance Education and the new English Syllabus

When I was a head teacher in charge of an English department, I would occasionally come across wonderful materials which mysteriously appeared and which originated at *the Corro*. We teachers loved these materials. They met syllabus requirements, had teaching and learning activities, and were very thorough in their approach. *The Corro* turned out to be the old Correspondence School. I imagined vast dark rooms in which people sat in rows, writing this fabulous stuff for children who rode their fat little ponies down to the mail box at the end of the property to collect their lessons.

These days I'm a team leader of the Secondary English writing team which creates these wonderful materials in the revitalised, high-technology distance education arm of the Department of Education and Training. We are situated at Learning Materials Production which is within the Open Training Education Network (OTEN), a TAFE Institute at Strathfield.

Our finished materials are sent to teachers for use with school and TAFE students studying by distance education. There are seven Distance Education Centres



(DECs) as far away as Balranald and as close as Sydney. Not all students, I discovered, are riding ponies to collect their lessons. Some are in wheelchairs, some travelling around Australia by car or boat, or in ballet or sports training.

Distance materials are an excellent way of providing an education to students unable to access face-to-face schools. Teachers work in the distance centres and receive and send print and audio tapes out to their students. Some staff have a mix of face-to-face and distance teaching; others, like Dubbo, have all distance students. The students complete a week's work then send it back to their teacher for marking and comment. Once a term, students come into the centres for a whole day of face-to-face teaching or for work which requires, for example, oral, drama or film skills. Teachers and students also use telephone, fax and e-mail contact.

Writing materials for the new Stage 6 English syllabus

My main task has been to initiate, plan, organise, edit and produce Preliminary and HSC Standard and Advanced courses. This has been an interesting and difficult project.

In June 1999 I convened a conference with my team of 2.4 writers, two teachers from each Distance Education Centre and two TAFE distance teachers. After a great deal of discussion, planning and thinking, we came up with a Preliminary course acceptable to the Distance Education Centres, TAFE, and the writers.

We asked for *critical readers* or *buddies* to read each writer's material. We were, after all, writing at least six months ahead of schools, who were still working with the old syllabus, and we were launching into very new territory. Our one hundred and twenty indicative hours for each course comprised two common content pieces totalling twelve weeks or forty-eight hours (a week is equivalent to four student hours), and three Standard and three Advanced units of six weeks or twenty-four hours each.

Before each writer started, we had a major team brainstorm. Where and how to start? We knew we had to start with outcomes, and needed to *fit* the most suitable outcomes to each writer's project. We didn't want technology outcomes hanging off the end of a unit that didn't lend itself to technology! The writers set off into the uncharted territory carrying a set of outcomes, brainstorm notes, a topic, the Preliminary Draft syllabus and a set of apprehensions.

They researched, then began writing their first drafts. The critical buddies read the drafts, and I edited the units, making suggestions and corrections. We had

to have the first four units in the Distance Education Centres by January 2000. We managed that, then repeated the process three times, producing in all sixteen units of about two hundred pages each, in twenty-four months, for Preliminary and HSC English. Our lives became dominated by *computer head*, fatigue, writer's cramp, back ache, imaginative exhaustion, insecurity about what we were doing, and a myriad of questions about the process of creating the units and whether we were interpreting the syllabus correctly.

The audience

It's a challenge to write materials for an audience you don't see or know. Our audience is teachers and school and TAFE students who use the materials. We write in the second person, addressing the student as *you*, trying to anticipate any questions or needs the students might have, especially those students without an adult handy. We have to make materials and exercises accessible to the full range of student abilities. Tapes of poems, articles and plays help students who struggle with reading. Instructions have to be particularly clear. We work in a template, and use icons, clear instructional design, supporting graphics, and have all the benefits that up-to-date Macintoshes with IT support can provide.

Writers often include articles that students or teachers would not find easily. Sometimes it takes weeks for material to get out and back to the teacher, so it is important that the information is correct the first time it goes out.

The HSC learning materials

For the HSC Standard course we've produced units on Module A: *Experience Through Language*, Elective 3: *Image* (Multimedia: *When the Wind Blows*), Module B: *Close Study of a Text* (Drama: *The Shoe-Horn Sonata*), Module C: *Texts and Society* (Consumerism: Poetry of Bruce Dawe). I decided to break the Area of Study Common Content into two manageable parts: Section A, dealing with the concept of Change and the Board of Studies Booklet, *Changing*, and Section B, examining *Looking for Alibrandi* in particular and the HSC question from the Specimen Paper.

For the Advanced course we've completed Module A: *Comparative Study of Texts and Context* (Drama: *Hamlet* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*), Module B: *Critical Study of Texts* (Nonfiction, Media or Multimedia: Speeches) and Module C: *Representation and Text* (Poetry: *Birthdays Letters*).

All materials have to be cleared for copyright before they can be made available for sale to non-distance schools and individuals.



Ways people use the materials

Distance materials can also benefit non-distance students in a variety of situations. In some schools, students can't access a particular subject, but they can sometimes find the subject they need through distance education, for example single language subjects, or through Access clusters in smaller country schools unable to offer a full curriculum. The materials are also very useful in face-to-face classrooms for teachers because of the information in them, and for students who can work well by themselves. A teacher could use a whole set of materials by choosing the parts relevant to their face-to-face teaching. The excellent instructional design, the teaching and learning activities, the full range of exercises across language modes, and the extra information embedded in the materials make excellent resources for classroom use.

Technology and distance learning

Currently technologies such as phone, fax, teleconference, CD-ROM and e-mail are part of the continuum of distance learning. The Internet will provide wonderful opportunities for distance students. As effective learning tools are developed online, students will be able to access their lessons and download materials. Learning Materials Production will be part of this expansion into online flexible delivery of education. However, problems can still arise with this kind of delivery when many students are living in isolated regions without electricity, or in homes where technology is not admitted. It is thought that future delivery of materials will be through a mix of print, audio and online modes.

I suspect that these days distance students are more likely to be scanning the Net to pick up their mail than riding their ponies. As their isolation shrinks, the online horizon opens up.

Developing the Stage 6 materials has been a challenging and demanding process but I wouldn't have missed it for anything. I've become very familiar with the new Stage 6 English syllabus, have worked with a talented team of writers, and feel I've been involved in a worthwhile, creative and productive effort, getting our materials out to students studying in isolated or difficult circumstances.

If you are interested in a copy of our catalogue contact:

Direct Mail Sales
Open Training and Education Network
Locked Bag 2014
STRATHFIELD NSW 2135
or telephone 02 9715 8222.

Lyndall Hough
Team Leader, English
Learning Materials Production

HSC support

In Term 1, we published a synopsis of support available for Stage 6 English teachers. The article detailed what is available online with direct addresses to access the English materials. These resources include:

- professional development materials, HSC articles from **CURRICULUM SUPPORT for teaching in English 7–12**, units of work, and study guides on the *New HSC* web site
- resources on the Professional Support and Curriculum Directorate, OTEN–DE, ETA and Chalkface Press web sites
- syllabuses and support documents on the Board of Studies web site.

Resources added since Term 1

At the New HSC English Hot Spot http://www.newhsc.schools.nsw.edu.au/hotspot_eng.htm you will find recent HSC **CURRICULUM SUPPORT for teaching in English 7–12** articles including: *Studying film in the Stage 6 syllabus*, *Stage 6 English resources online*, and *Reviews of Internet sites: HSC texts* (No. 1, 2001), *HSC English Extension 2 at Hornsby Girls High School 2001*, *Talking about Stage 6 reporting* and *Stage 6 syllabus implementation* (No. 2, 2001), *Enhancing literacy in Stage 6 through Fundamentals of English* (No. 3, 2001) http://www.newhsc.schools.nsw.edu.au/hotspot_eng.htm



Latest information and links to Stage 6 resources, theatre productions, and HSC lectures are available at the Curriculum Support English web site

<http://www.curriculumsupport.nsw.edu.au/english/index.cfm?u=3&I=16>

