



are similarities and differences in the reporting requirements.

Continuity such as this is also of great help to parents and other readers of the reports. Once they master the necessary *report-decoding* and *report-interpreting* skills for Year 7, they can then confidently approach their children's reports throughout their high school years.

***What continuity is there in our school's reporting system across Stages 4, 5 and 6? What are the variables? What is the reason for these variables?***

### **Attractive, accessible reports**

A report is well received and responded to when it is well designed and well presented, user friendly and presenting a positive image of the school. The Stage 6 English course teaches students how meaning is conveyed through image. The same principles apply in school reports. Within the resources available in the school, it is possible to show in the report's format and presentation that a school is making a special effort to communicate with parents and community in a way that is both lively and professional.

At Chester Hill High, Stages 4 and 5 English assessment and evaluation sheets are colour coded, each year's sheets printed on a different coloured paper. These are filed in the classroom where they are always accessible to staff and students. The semester report, which evolves from these sheets, is sent home in a folder with the school's crest and name on the cover, and its mission statement, and explanation of grades inside. This system is currently being modified for Stage 6.

***What image does our school report project?***

The recently released *Assessment and Reporting Issues 7–12 Bulletin 6* provides an overview of the elements of effective reporting and includes various annotated sample reporting formats. The bulletin should prove a useful document for cross-KLA meetings when considering the issues involved in reporting.

## Stage 6 syllabus implementation

Gil Lovell has been at the centre of the implementation of the Stage 6 English syllabus through the LIG training and development days and as a support visitor to districts and schools, providing English teachers with advice and guidance. In this article, Gil responds to some of the questions most frequently asked of her during her travels. These questions relate particularly to "the four approaches" and to assessment.

Gil is at present coordinating school-based projects designed to support Stage 6 English and funded through the Quality Teacher Program (QTP). The projects will increase understanding about effective teaching and learning practice in English across Years 7–12, and the learning will be shared with all NSW schools through the English LIG training and development in 2002.

### **Changing**

*Dear, dear! how queer everything is to-day! And yesterday things went on just as usual. I wonder if I've been changed in the night! Let me think: was I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I'm not the same, the next question is, Who in the world am I? Ah, that's the great puzzle!*

*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland,*  
Lewis Carroll

I think that everyone teaching Stage 6 English feels a little like Alice at the moment. We seem to have plunged into change like Alice down the rabbit hole, and we are now confronted with a fascinating array of doors of all sizes and strange creatures and characters. Our previous existence seems a world away.

On the whole, teachers across the state are finding that teaching Stage 6 English is more interesting and more student-centred than with previous syllabuses. The range of texts and the inclusion of viewing and representing as language modes have opened English to those students who may have found previous syllabuses too narrowly focused on literary texts and writing. Some English faculties have found in their students a fund of valuable expertise about the Internet, multimedia texts and film.

The Extension course in the preliminary year, "Texts, culture and value", has stimulated teachers and students to devise units of work which are new and fresh, and which offer students much more scope for independent inquiry. These include units on the intertextual links between *Cinderella* and *Persuasion*, or *Little Red Riding Hood* and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, and contemporary film and representations of the city from Charles Baudelaire in the nineteenth century, through Edgar Allan Poe, Virginia Woolf and T. S. Eliot to films such as *Metropolis* and *City of Angels*. I am hoping that teachers are recording their programs and keeping careful notes on their class activities because the material they are producing should be published.

Teachers are also appreciating the opportunity for students to undertake four units of English in the HSC year; students have chosen from the full range of options and some fascinating Major Works are under



way. Management of the Major Work has been supported by the release of a support document, *Ideas and strategies for teachers and students*. This document answers many queries addressed to the DET and the BOS.

After an introductory preliminary year, teachers are now concerned *to get it right* for Year 12 students approaching the first HSC. There are some aspects of the syllabus still causing concern, mainly because we simply have not *been there* before. On the whole, the challenges focus on two main areas of complexity: critical theory and assessment.

## Critical theory

The developments in critical and literary theory mean that teaching and learning must broaden to include, explicitly, a range of approaches to texts. There are a number of accessible and readable texts on critical theory which make the syllabus philosophy accessible and teachers need to explore some of this material. The more traditional evaluation of the aesthetic or artistic appeal of texts, for example, is only one approach. Considering the social and political aspects of texts is important if students are to understand the *how* and *why* of composing, and the relationship of texts to their cultural context.

Teachers often ask how to teach using the *four approaches* referred to in the Board of Studies material prepared for the 1998 Stage 6 Forum, *Perspectives on English*, and referred to again in the preparation material for the development of the Stages 4 and 5 syllabus. The answer is not to think of these approaches as mutually exclusive, but to realise that sound teaching strategies have always included all of them.

Teachers have always valued literary texts, and have sought to encourage students to analyse them critically and constructively. They are also familiar with an approach to texts which focuses on the students' needs and interests and their personal response to what they read and view. Good English teaching also uses texts to expand students' involvement with, and understanding of the use of language. In recent years, there has been increasing emphasis on the development of knowledge about language, rather than just using it in a range of contexts. While a *cultural analysis* approach may appear new, I do not believe that, in the past, English teachers have divorced texts from their cultural and social context.

A unit of work integrates the four activities when it includes such activities as:

- close study of theme, characterisation, point of view, imagery and integrated structure or "unity"... (cultural heritage approach)

- composing from the point of view of a character in the text, imaginative recreation, composing a personal response to the text, representing aspects of the text—landscape or setting... (personal growth)
- examination of the cultural, historical and social world in which the text was composed, a focus on the constructedness of the character, asking questions about how cultural issues of race, gender, class or religion are produced in the text... (cultural analysis)
- close study of sentence structures and the structural features of the text, identifying word chains that build up a description or an idea, identifying elements of written, spoken and visual texts, composing a specific type of text for a specific audience and purpose... (literacy development)

It is hard to conceive of teaching and learning in English that would not involve these activities at some point.

### Useful readings

*English Stage 6 Annotated Professional Readings* (1999) published on The Board of Studies web site at [www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au](http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au)

Paul Hardage, *The theory bases of Stage 6 English*, in Curriculum Support for teaching in English 7–12, 1999, Vol. 4 No. 3. Department of Education and Training.

David Baxter and Liz Diprose, *Close study of text: some ideas on using the four approaches to English*. A teaching resource available from the English Teachers' Association of NSW. This publication discusses *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Antony and Cleopatra*.

Brian Moon. (1990) *Studying Literature*, Chalkface Press. Many other Chalkface publications provide excellent classroom activities for Stage 6.

Rob Pope. (1998) *The English Studies Book*, Routledge, an excellent and accessible reference book for teachers interested in exploring critical theory further.

## Assessment

Another challenge for Stage 6 English teachers is that of designing and marking assessment tasks. Including all language modes, (particularly speaking and viewing and representing) in the assessment structure can present teachers with some logistical challenges.

*Speaking is worth 15% of total assessment. It is not fair to assess that whole allocation in one task. How can we devise assessments that test "speaking" more than once, without using up too much time? How can assessing students' speaking tasks be fair if there isn't a panel of teachers?* These are typical questions.



Ideally, students should be offered the opportunity to speak in both formal and informal situations. Too often the *speaking assessment* is a formal address to the class or some other audience. However, speaking can be assessed in the course of class time if each student is asked to *teach* a five to ten minute segment of the lesson. This could be based on an issue pertinent to the elective, or a segment of a text, or a seminar topic. Students would need to know that this task would be assessed at some point during, say, a two week segment of the unit of work. Teachers would need to prepare carefully and write firm marking guidelines. In fact all teaching and learning using outcomes requires a good deal of collegial cooperation—coffee and cake!

Recently, Morisset High School devised and administered a very successful speaking task. Students in the Standard course classes, studying the elective *Telling stories*, were asked to choose a character from their prescribed text and prepare an oral presentation in which they told a story from that character's point of view. The outcomes addressed were 3, 7, 8 and 11. Students were assessed on the following criteria:

- reference to and perceptive use of the text
- ability to present a well-structured and interesting-story
- effective control of language
- ability to use speaking skills such as eye contact, voice control and humour to engage and involve the audience.

The English faculty needed to devise a way to assess one hundred and fifty students and maintain consistent marking standards across eight classes. The solution they came up with was to have a panel of four teachers assess one class, the *control* group, and then debrief and evaluate the marking guidelines. The teachers then had the confidence to work in pairs to assess the students in the other classes. A variety of student presentations were video-taped for use as work samples and for future evaluation.

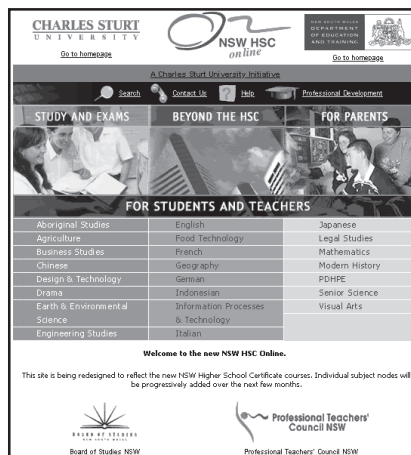
The teachers were very happy with the results of this process. They felt that the assessment task was fair and that they developed their expertise. Strategies such as this would also be invaluable for beginning teachers. I can also see that eventually teachers will be confident enough to assess students on their own.

Alice found her experience down the rabbit hole *wonderful*. She learned to fit through all manner of doors and to cope with the strange creatures and characters. Let's hope that, like *Alice in Wonderland*, teachers of English will keep exploring, taking risks and testing the possibilities of their new world.

Gil Lovell

## NSW HSC Online

On 2 April 2001, John Aquilina MP, the Minister for Education and Training launched the new *NSW HSC Online* web site <http://hsc.csu.edu.au> which has been designed to reflect the needs of candidates for the new Higher School Certificate.



The original *NSW HSC Online* was established in 1996 by the NSW Department of Education and Training in partnership with Charles Sturt University to provide support for HSC students. The site has increased significantly in size and usage over the intervening years with the site recording many thousands of visits daily, especially in the weeks leading up to the HSC examination periods.

Since the launch, the new *NSW HSC Online* has been averaging 32 000 hits daily and this of course will increase significantly in the lead up to examination periods.

The new *NSW HSC Online* has been two years in the planning and there are currently 23 subjects or nodes on the site with a further 15, including four VET, planned to go live during 2001.

The site provides valuable support providing relevant up-to-date information which takes advantage of the interactivity provided by the Internet.

Teachers and academics have developed a wealth of resources, all designed specifically for the HSC syllabuses, to complement the support and guidance teachers are providing to their students. These resources include activities involving sound files for language subjects, video interviews with artists and writers, virtual field trips, as well as study guides, commentaries, advice and links to relevant Internet resources.

Please encourage your colleagues and students to use the site. Contributions are always welcome. We welcome feedback and node coordinators can be contacted by e-mail via the individual nodes on the web site.