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Resonant continuities: The influence of the Newbolt Report on the formation of English curriculum in New South Wales, Australia

“Retrieving intellectual history is not an antiquarian pursuit. Anyone wanting to be a well informed professional needs to understand certain continuities that link English curriculum discourses and practices with previous discourses and practices” (Reid 2003, 100).

Introduction

When *The Teaching of English in England* (Departmental Committee, Board of Education 1921, also cited as the Newbolt Report) was published in 1921, the subject known as English had already been installed as the “hub of the curriculum” (Crane and Walker 1957, 62) in schools in New South Wales (NSW), Australia. In 1905, for example, the “radical reforms” (Green and Reid 2012, 363) to state-based primary education in NSW saw the release of the first *Courses of Instruction for Primary Schools* (NSW Department of Public Instruction 1905) that established English as the “basis of the curriculum” (iv). Six years later, the *Courses of Study for High Schools* (NSW Department of Public Instruction 1911) followed suit by positioning English at the compulsory core of the secondary school curriculum. In both the primary and secondary school courses, English carried the weight of curricular responsibility for advancing the self-formation, socialisation and nation-building project of education that was well underway in NSW in the first decade of the twentieth century (Green and Cormack 2008).

At the heart of the newly-envisioned school subject was a fervent belief in the “moral, spiritual and intellectual value of reading literature” (NSW Department of Public Instruction 1911, 18) – a belief that is clearly expressed in the opening statement of the secondary English syllabus:

[t]he special educating power of Literature lies in its effect in developing the mind, filling it with high ideals and in its influence on refining and ennobling character, and as Literature cannot exercise this power unless works are understood and enjoyed by the pupils, it follows that the true end and aim of the teacher must be to rouse interest and create enjoyment in the books read (18).

Even this short excerpt is inscribed with certain “epistemic assumptions” (Reid 1996, 32) about the student, the teacher, and the superior civilising and character-building utility of literature and literary study that would come to figure so prominently in the Newbolt Report. The philosophical, ideological and discursive correspondences between the Newbolt Report and a range of other key education reports, policies, documents, Acts and syllabuses in Australia and Britain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have been recognised in the scholarship in the field (see Author 2012; Ball, 1985; Ball, Kenny and Gardner 1990; Barcan 1988; Brock 1984a, 1984b; Campbell and Sherington 2013; Cole 1935; Cormack 2008; Crane and Walker 1957; Goodson and Medway 1990; Green and Beavis 1996; Hughes and Brock 2008; Hunter 1987; Peel, Gerlach and Patterson 2000; Reid 1996, 2002, 2004; Sawyer 2002, 2009b).

These historical accounts underline the highly complex dynamics of the spread of an amalgam of ideas, values, and beliefs that took hold in Australia, Europe, the United Kingdom, and North America under the banner of the Progressive education and the New Education movements. It was during this period in NSW that a confluence of local, national and international forces gathered pace to usher in “a new literature, a new art, a new Commonwealth, a new Education” (Crane and Walker 1957, 8). It was a “new Education” with English as the “keystone” (Newbolt 1921, 5) of the curriculum that laid the disciplinary groundwork for English in NSW for a century to follow (Authors 2017; Hughes and Brock 2008; Sawyer 2009a).

The rich and complex historiography of the rise of English in schools in Australia and Britain has been constructed through nuanced and detailed narratives of the subject’s provenance, formation, contestation and reformation, and the factors that have shaped its enduring status in the primary and secondary school curriculum (see Ball 1985, 1982; Ball, Kenny and Gardner 1990; Brock 1984a, 1984b, 1996; Cole 1935; Homer 1973; Mathieson 1975; Peel, Gerlach and Patterson 2000; Reid 1996, 2002; Selleck 1968; Shayer 1972). Within the broader scholarly and discursive landscape, the Newbolt Report looms large in the histories of the development of English in schools in NSW during the twentieth century (see Brock 1984a, 1984b; Doecke 2017; Green and Beavis 1996; Homer 1973; Meadmore 2003; Sawyer, 2009b).

These narratives, like those of English in other Australian jurisdictions and countries, draw attention to the distinctive and at times competing streams of influence; watershed moments; and instrumental figures in the sweep of the subject’s history. They also enact an intellectual and imaginative quest for “certain continuities that link English curriculum discourses with previous discourses” (Reid 2003, 100). The quest for continuities in the current context of

intensified education reform, instability, and change is especially crucial because, as Doecke (2018) observes, when “[c]onfronted by a neoliberal culture that is characterised by a loss of historical memory, we need to posit a history in which we might locate our ongoing practice as English teachers” (236). There is an imperative here for deliberately raising this kind of historical consciousness as source of collective disciplinary wisdom and agency necessary for pushing back against the waves of governmental intervention in policy, curriculum and teachers’ work (see Day 2012).

In this paper, we are interested in contributing to the project of “retrieving intellectual history” (Reid 2003, 100) by situating *The Teaching of English in England* (1921) retrospectively in the historical arc of secondary English in NSW. Rather than considering the legacy of Newbolt to post-1921 versions of secondary English in NSW, we aim to cast light on the ways in which the conceptualisation of literature and literary study encoded in the inaugural NSW secondary school English syllabus of 1911 can be seen to anticipate the conceptualisation so passionately enunciated in the Newbolt Report of 1921.

Self-evidently, the two products of history (Ball and Goodson 1984) that constitute the focus of the paper emerged during different timeframes, from out of different cultural milieu, and were written in genres shaped by and intended for particular audiences and purposes. One is a commissioned national report with a marked ideological and political as well as an educational agenda. The impact of this report has extended well beyond the geographical and temporal context within which it was produced. The other is a pre-active (Goodson 1988) curriculum document designed for implementation by teachers in classrooms in a single state in Australia. No such claim for trans-national influence can be made for the 1911 secondary English syllabus, despite its pivotal role in history of English curriculum in NSW.

We propose, however, that the philosophical and ideological resonances between the 1911 English syllabus and the Newbolt Report attest to the extraordinary trans-cultural traction and ascendancy of the New Education movement in the formation of secondary English during the early decades of the twentieth century in Australia and Britain. Both documents sit within an emergent discursive space concerned with establishing English as the “incontrovertible” (Newbolt 1921, 14) epicentre of the school curriculum. Although a decade separates their publication, the Newbolt Report can be understood in the chronology of English in NSW as a powerful voice in the ongoing narrative of the subject. It served to both vindicate and lend additional authority to the ideas and values embedded in the 1911 English syllabus that were in turn carried forward in successive iterations of secondary English in NSW.

As a means of framing the discussion, we begin by sketching the context for the release of the first *Courses of Study for High Schools* (NSW Department of Public Instruction 1911). Since the context that generated the Newbolt Report has been extensively chronicled we do not intend reprising that existing scholarship, except where it explicitly relates to points of argument. The major focus of the paper is a comparative analysis of the 1911 secondary English syllabus and the sections of the Newbolt Report directly pertaining to literature and literary study. We conclude with a consideration of the extent to which the ideas, values, beliefs, and “subject paradigm” (Ball and Lacey 1995) espoused in both documents have proven remarkably durable in the “visible and submerged” (Beavis 2010, 288) discourses and the practices of English in education in NSW from the early twentieth century to the presentⁱ.

The reorganisation of secondary schooling in NSW

In response to a sustained period of intense educational debates in NSW (and internationally) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Brock 1984a, 1984b; Connell 1980; Crane and Walker 1957) the NSW Government appointed G. H. Knibbs and J. W. Turner in 1902 to conduct a *Commission on Primary, Secondary, Technical, and Other Branches of Education*. The findings of the second of the two Commission Reports (Knibbs-Turner Report) published in 1904 concluded that the secondary education system in NSW lacked the “scope and depth of secondary education in some European countries” and little of the “spontaneity and interest of American secondary education” (Knibbs-Turner Report, 52-53, as quoted in Wyndham 1957, 15).

The changes taking place in NSW during this period mirrored equivalent and “rapid advances in the field of secondary education throughout the whole western world” (Crane and Walker 1957, 96). An increasing pre-occupation with “the very foundations of the national life and economy” (Fitzharding 1947, 65) translated into the systemic reorganisation of secondary schooling in NSW, culminating in the release of the *Courses of Study for High Schools* (NSW Department of Public Instruction, 1911). While the Knibbs-Turner Commission was limited in its scope to matters relating to the administration of education, the ensuing reforms of 1911 established structures, systems, policy and curriculum that have since been identified as foundational in the subsequent shaping of secondary education in NSW (Brock 1984a; Crane and Walker 1957; Hughes and Brock 2008; Wyndham 1957).

Installing a New Education in NSW: the aim of secondary school education

Patterson (2000) has suggested that “rather than seeing Newbolt as inventing and giving voice to personalist English, it is possible to think that Newbolt was reiterating and setting forth the ideas and practices that had been circulating in England, Australia and the United States” (268). In NSW, these “ideas and practices” were keenly embraced and translated by the then Director of Education, Peter Board. Board’s role in championing and carrying forward the spirit and vision of a “new Education” and the innovations occurring in Britain and elsewhere at the time cannot be over-estimated (Connell 1980; Crane and Walker 1957; Green and Reid; Homer 1973; Selleck 1968; Shayer 1972; Wyndham 1957). Board’s fierce determination to establish a centralised system of comprehensive, free, and secular primary and secondary education in NSW was fuelled, in large part, by his “conversion” (Crane and Walker 1957, 45) to the New Education during his extensive study tours of England, Scotland, Europe, the United States and Canada between 1903 and 1911 (Crane and Walker 1957).

Whilst abroad, he witnessed first-hand the revolutionary “ideas and practices” (Crane and Walker 1957, 45) emerging in schools in those countries. Such was the impact of these experiences on Board’s thinking that by 1904 he “had become an ardent disciple of the new faith” (45). His official reports and public addresses during the early 1900s reveal the growing philosophical and practical commitment to the New Education (see Cole 1935). The currents of educational theories, models and pedagogies advocated by, for instance, Pestalozzi, Herbart, Froebel, Dewey, de Garmo, S. S. Laurie, Haywood, Adams, the McMurray brothers, and F. W. Parker were unambiguously instantiated in the 1905 *Courses of Instruction for Primary Schools* (NSW Department of Public Instruction) and later in the 1911 *Courses of Study for High Schools* (NSW Department of Public Instruction).

In the Introduction to the *Courses of Study for High Schools* that Board himself wrote and signed, he announced that “the aim of secondary education should be to combine the liberal elements of a curriculum with such studies as will furnish the student with a body of knowledge, habits of thought and trend of interests that have a distinctly practical outcome” (NSW Department of Public Instruction 1911, iv).

The key elements of the aim chime with the Newbolt Report’s centrepiece argument for the “value of a liberal education” that must have a “practical bearing on life” (1921, 3). For Newbolt, a liberal education was to proceed “not by the presentation of lifeless facts, but by teaching the student to follow the different lines on which life may be explored and proficiency in living may be obtained” (1921, 8). Like the 1911 *Courses of Study for High Schools*, the Report was

responding to the accepted imperative for education to be “perfected by being ... refounded as a universal, reasonable and liberal process of development” (1921, 14) requiring “the training of the will (morals) ... of the intellect (science) and ... of the emotions (expression or creative art)” (1921, 9).

This same consciousness of the need for all facets of education to be at the service of developing every student’s self-activity, interest, freedom of thought and feeling, identity, and citizenship is similarly knitted through the 1911 Introduction. For instance, the syllabus directs that “whatever may be the path to which the teacher has directed the pupil, the pupil himself^{fi} has travelled it and made all its features his own” (1911, 7, 8): the transition to high school “is marked by the call for more self-reliant effort on the part of the pupil, and with each succeeding year of the higher course, the character of the school should be such as to demand from him a steadily increasing degree of self-dependence” (1911, 5).

In the same vein, the Newbolt Report asserts that “[a]mong the best things which education can give are certainly freedom and independence of thought, a wide outlook on life, and a strong sense of the difference between convention and reality” (1921, 17). In noticeably consonant language and intent, the Report also maintains that “we hold that no student of English will have completed his exploration, or gained all its advantages, until he has ascended the stream of literature and discovered these perennial sources for himself” (1921, 18).

Envisioning secondary school education as a site for citizen-formation and nation-building

These discourses of child-centred education evident in Board’s 1911 Introduction, other writing and public addresses, and in the Newbolt Report reveal a shared conviction about the urgency for a radically re-oriented model of education. For Board, as for Newbolt, a liberal education for all promised a singular pathway to forging a unified democracy. It was imagined as a “powerful agency for social stability ... necessary for the safety and stability of the social order” (Crane and Walker 1957, 100-101). The 1911 Introduction stresses the role of the high school in creating the “well-educated citizen” through both the study of certain subjects as “common ground” and the kind of “fellowship” – what Newbolt terms a “community of interest” (Newbolt 1921, 8) – engendered through the school’s social, cultural and intellectual sway:

[t]he school time table will, therefore, provide an allotment of time for the games, clubs and other similar activities of the school. Out of

these will grow the self-government by the pupils of some of their school concerns, the cultivation of social obligations, training in organisation and opportunities for leadership (1911, 8).

This fundamental belief, encoded in familiar tropes of citizenship, nation-building, social unification and “corporate life” (Newbolt 1921, 8) is of course pervasive throughout the Newbolt Report. Adopting the rhetoric of universal ‘entitlement’ and ‘emancipation’, the General Introduction to the Report invokes the paternalistic ideal of cultivating a certain kind of individual by “conferring upon” them an “experience in human relations” (8). The sustained encounter with literature – as the “most direct and lasting communication of experience” – is regarded not only as the “channel” for illuminating “the dull and superficial sight of the multitudes” (1921, 17): through its “unifying tendency” (21) it also promises ultimately to create a common “bond of union between classes” (22). This dual purpose of educating the individual citizen for the grander cause of nation-building is clearly laid out in quasi-religious cadences in the early stages of the Report:

The judgments and experience laid before us ... support us in our belief that an education of this [liberal] kind is the greatest benefit which could be conferred upon any citizen of a great state, and that the common right to it, the common discipline and enjoyment of it, the common possession of the tastes and associations connected with it, would form a new element of national unity, linking together the mental life of all classes by experiences which have hitherto been the privilege of a limited section ... to initiate all English children into such a fellowship, to set the feet of all upon that road of endless and unlimited advance (15) (Emphases added).

What is clear in these excerpts is a congruence in the epistemological beliefs about the socially-mediated nature of a liberal education anchored in the relational experiences of the individual in the community, the home, the playground, the classroom and through the sustained communion with the great “rivers” (1921, 13) of literature.

In the 1911 *Courses of Study for High Schools*, as in the Newbolt Report, this foundational philosophy is evident not only in the rationales for a liberal education highlighted thus far. It is also apparent in Board’s structural, curricular and policy reforms that were modelled on those being implemented in Britain during the early twentieth century (see Connell 1980). A striking number of these reforms have since become normative in NSW, including but not limited to: the

compulsory status of English from primary through to senior secondary school; a conceptualisation of literature as the sovereign instrument for self-formation; and mandated types of texts and quantities of texts for study (fiction, poetry and drama, including Shakespearean drama). In order to further demonstrate the correlations between the 1911 English syllabus and the Newbolt Report, we turn now to a closer analysis of the ways in which the conceptualisation of literature and literary study in the former can be seen as anticipating that set forth in *The Teaching of English in England* (1921).

Subject English and literature as the vehicle for realising the aim of secondary education

The Newbolt Report argues for the replacement of the then dominant Classical model of education with a far more 'practical' model of altruistic, child-centred liberal education to be realised through the student's experience and study of English literature and language. "In English literature", it asserts, "we have a means of education not less valuable than the Classics and decidedly more suited to the necessities of a general or national education" (1921, 15). Debates about the perceived (in)adequacy of the prevailing Classical model of secondary education in NSW had been played out in the decade preceding the release of the 1911 *Courses of Study for High Schools*. Board's writing, public addresses and advocacy of the New Education in the period leading up to the re-organisation of secondary schooling were widely embraced (see Crane and Walker 1957) and were therefore transparent in the structure and content of the 1911 curriculum. The 1911 Introduction states, for example – and without a hint of defensiveness – that English is one of the core subjects

having no immediate bearing on vocational ends, but designed to provide for the common needs and the common training for well educated citizenship ... it is especially in the use of the mother tongue and the study of its literature that the High School will exercise its highest influence upon the general training of pupils (NSW Department of Public Instruction 1911, 5, 18).

In almost identical discourse to that apparent in this passage, the Newbolt Report claims that English is "not merely one occasion for the inculcation of knowledge, it is an initiation into the corporate life of man ... it is not merely the medium of our thought, it is the very stuff and process of it" (60). Indeed, literature and literary study is described in the Report in discourse analogous to that associated with the religious experience of mystical transubstantiation: "Literature is alive ... it is the sublimation of human thought, passion, feeling, that it is concerned

with issues which are of universal interest, that in short it is flesh and blood and not stucco ornamentation" (266). Conceptualised in this way, "literature is not just a subject for academic study, but one of the chief temples of the human spirit, in which all should worship" (1921, 259).

Although the evangelical timbre of this and other sections of the Report may be jarring for a twenty-first century reader, it nonetheless conveys the utter certitude of the Report's argument for English literature and literary study as "a possession and a source of delight, a personal intimacy and the gaining of personal experience, an end in itself and, at the same time, an equipment for the understanding of life" (1921, 19). Invoking the same reverence for the utility of literature – in albeit more measured tones – the 1911 English syllabus proposes that the "works in the Literature Course have been chosen not merely for their value as a means of information, but as a source of higher pleasures, as a means of knowing life, and for their ethical or their literary value" (NSW Department of Public Instruction 1911, 5, 18).

Once again, powerful continuities can be discerned in the "epistemic assumptions" (Reid 1996, 32) and the forthright advocacy of principles associated with the New Education articulated in both documents. Not only is English conceptualised as the curricular path to "salvation" (1921, 166): it is cast as the antidote to the perceived deficiencies in Classical education and as an essentialising, transcendent medium for delivering a re-imagined 'golden age' of social cohesion through an educated, morally robust citizenry. As the Report declares, literature (of a certain kind) is "an embodiment of the best thoughts of the best minds" inviting the individual into "a fellowship which 'binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time'" (1921, 253). These are indeed lofty sentiments, oft-repeated throughout the Report, intended to persuade the reader of the "incontrovertible primary fact" (1921, 14) that English and English alone, stands as the "only possible basis for a national education" (1921, 14).

On this point, a critical dimension of both the 1911 English syllabus and the Newbolt Report is the ideologically driven mission to reclaim literature and literary study from the hitherto overly "bookish", "too remote from life" (Newbolt 1921, 165), elitist, and subject-centred nature of the curriculum. The Report frequently draws distinctions between "book learning and true education" (1921, 17), and between the "practical and the pedantic" (16) treatment of literature. Based on Wordsworth's view of education (and its deficiencies), the Report insists that literary study and language development occur through the "transmission, not of book learning, but of the influence of personality and the experience of human life" (16). It follows, according to the

Report, “that literature, not being a knowledge subject, cannot and should not be taught. It is to be communicated to the students in such a way that they will experience it rightly, that right experience being the sole aim of literary work” (1921, 150).

Similarly, the 1911 syllabus warns that if a “book is merely to supply the pupil with something which he has to learn in order that he may afterwards reproduce it, the book will hinder rather than help the pupil’s real education” (1911, 7). The belief that ‘book’ must be at the service of enriching and expanding the student’s *experience* is yet another reflection of the progressive ideas and values imprinted in both the 1911 English syllabus and the Report that have endured in the discourses of English in NSW to the present.

Literature as cultural capital

A feature of the 1911 syllabus was a prescribed reading list for each year of secondary school. These lists were almost exclusively constituted by works of English literature that were at the time “regarded as amongst the finest in the language” (Cox 1991, 4). What has come to be known as the Cultural Heritage (Arnoldian) model of English (4) figures prominently the 1911 English syllabus and remains influential in contemporary versions of the subject in NSW, most conspicuously at senior secondary level where traditional British canonical texts continue to be prescribed for study.

The text list of 1911, for example, included works by writers such as Chaucer, Shakespeare (*Julius Caesar, As You Like It, The Tempest, Merchant of Venice, Midsummer Night’s Dream, Macbeth, Coriolanus, A Winter’s Tale*), Dickens, Holmes, Ruskin, Carlyle, Austen, Elliot, Gaskell, Alcott, Emerson, Addison, Burke, Kingsley, Stevenson, Bacon, Gibbon, Milton, Lamb, Coleridge, Shelley, Byron, Wordsworth, Kipling, Longfellow, Scott, Tennyson, Arnold, and Lowell (8-12). The works of many of these writers have continued to appear on reading lists for the past 108 yearsⁱⁱⁱ, despite the profound changes in the contexts of schooling and the significant shifts in definitions of literature and literary study. The historical consistency in the orientation of the lists to a Cultural Heritage conceptualisation of literature exposes the extent to which the subject has resisted these contextual influences. It also exposes the enduring ideological bias that only a certain kind of literature, representing a certain set of hegemonic assumptions is fit for what the early twentieth century saw as the “refining and ennobling” (1911, 18) function of literary study in English.

The concern in both documents with the “practical” treatment of literature is the recommended shift in emphasis from the study of language as a body of knowledge and “rules” (1921, 281) to be transmitted to the study of literature as “the most direct and lasting communication of experience” (1921, 253). The 1911 English syllabus, for example, directs teachers “to develop an intelligent interest in the mother tongue and not to acquaint pupils with a body of details” (1911, 21). This directive aligns with the Newbolt Report’s argument that “formal grammar and philology should be recognised as scientific studies, and kept apart (so far as that is possible) from the lessons in which English is treated as an art, a means of creative expression, a record of human experience” (1921, 11).

It is unsurprising then, that in both documents the teacher is charged with the primary responsibility for fostering a personalist, inquiry-based and problem-solving approach to teaching. The 1911 Introduction advises that this goal can be achieved by the teacher selecting

the material that will prove to be of the greatest use to the particular pupils whom the teacher has before him, what will best give them a knowledge of the most influential thoughts of men, what will best stimulate their own thought, what knowledge will best serve the practical purposes of the type of career they are likely to follow, and what will most help them to grasp the essential elements of the problems which will be presented to them as members of the community (1911, 7) (Emphasis added).

In tones more elevated and impassioned, the Newbolt Report positions the teacher as the living conduit who “must himself be full of life and passion, and must be able to convince his students of this” through teaching not “knowledge or even ‘appreciation’, but creation” (1921, 277). Both documents share a pre-occupation with the pedagogical treatment of literature and foreground the decisive role of the teacher in translating into practice the philosophical and ideological tenets of the new “subject paradigm” (Ball and Lacey 1995). The Newbolt Report’s title – *The Teaching of English in England* – signals this pre-occupation. The 1911 *Courses of Study for High Schools* contains extensive ‘Notes and Suggestions’ on matters of pedagogy – which are far more lengthy than the actual syllabus content – explicitly addressed to teachers. If English was to be “the true starting-point and foundation from which all the rest must spring” (1921, 14) then it must be the teacher as the prime agent who would bring the vision to life.

Addressing the pedagogical treatment of literature

The 1911 English syllabus stresses a pedagogy for developing the student's "self-dependence", "art of independent study", "taste" and "conduct and character" (1911, 6). The student is viewed as "an investigator, an experimenter" (v) whose learning must be personally relevant, experiential and active. "At no time", cautions the 1911 syllabus, "should notes be dictated to the pupil" (v) or text-books be substituted for practical teaching activities. This same principle is endorsed through the Newbolt Report's insistence that "students are not to be passive recipients, but active participators; they must be fired to do things" (1921, 277). Approaches to teaching encouraging this kind of student-centred pedagogy clearly anticipate later twentieth century discourses and models, notably those associated with the New English that came to the fore in English education in Australia and elsewhere during the late 1970s and early 1980s (see Sawyer 2009a, 2009b).

When it comes to the detail about the treatment of literature in the classroom, the parallels in ideas, values, beliefs and discourses in the two documents are compelling. In broad-brush terms the Report argues that

we must treat literature, not as language merely, not as an ingenious set of symbols, a superficial and superfluous kind of decoration, or a graceful set of traditional gestures, but as the self-expression of great natures, the record and rekindling of spiritual experiences, and in daily life for everyone of us the means by which we may, if we will, realise our own impressions and communicate them to our fellows (1921, 21).

The approach recommended here intimates a preference for the tenets of Expressive and Affective Literary Criticism; that is, the worth of a text is valued on the basis of the feelings or emotions it provokes in the reader, with the subjectivity of the individual reader considered central to the reading experience. In this sense, the pedagogy also implies an emergent version of Reader-response theory that understands the 'transaction' between the reader and the text as the over-riding source of meaning (Rosenblatt, 1978). With echoes of Newbolt, Rosenblatt urges teachers to "reject the routine treatment of literature as a body of knowledge and conceive of it rather as a series of possible *experiences*" (42) (Emphasis added). The treatment of literature as experience is promulgated in the sections of the 1911 syllabus and the Newbolt Report devoted to the teaching of the major genres of literature: poetry, fiction and drama. Both

documents not only stake out the curricular territory for English in schools; they also articulate the necessary pedagogical approach in classrooms.

Teaching poetry

Poetry, valued as the consummate literary art form, occupies a pre-eminent place in the pantheon of works for study in English. The advice in the 1911 syllabus on the teaching of poetry emphasises the need to engage with this art form in ways that privilege the aesthetic, affective and individual responses of the student:

In this the appeal is specially to the emotions. As the study of poetry scarcely comes within the sphere of the exact intellectual activities, it does not lend itself to treatment by any prescribed method. Even the explaining of poetry has its difficulties and dangers for both teacher and pupil; often the mere understanding of a passage is so closely connected with emotional experience that in attempting an explanation its delicate beauty is lost. Something should be left to the pupil's feeling and imagination (1911, 19) (Emphasis added).

There is a high degree of symmetry between these sentiments and those articulated in the Newbolt Report. The latter asserts, for instance, that students should be “able to read poetry so as to reveal its beauty and to awaken poetic emotion” (1921, 81) since “it does undoubtedly tend to form the soul and character ... and it inspires the emotion so helpful in making principles operative” (1921, 49). The Report also warns of the dangers of unsuitable pedagogy or a “prescribed method”: “[a]ll delight in poetry may be easily killed by ill-judged selection of pieces, undue insistence on perfect memorising, destructive explanations, and ill-concealed indifference, or even distaste” (1921, 87). These insights are arguably just as salient in contemporary contexts in which poetry is still too often treated as a quarry for techniques, conventions and language devices at the expense of students’ engagement with a poem’s ideas and affective impact. What is interesting to note here is the attention to subjective experience, imagination and emotions as fundamental to the student’s capacity for “making principles operative” in life; reason and scientific analysis alone are insufficient for addressing and solving human dilemmas.

Teaching fiction

The recommended approaches to teaching fiction are likewise concerned with what Rosenblatt (1978) would later describe as reading in the “aesthetic mode” whereby “the reader’s attention is centred directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text” (25). The 1911 syllabus gestures towards this pedagogical principle thus:

In good fiction the story is the embodiment of the author’s view of some phase of human life, given not in abstract terms, but as a concrete vision. Therefore, though methods must necessarily be varied with regard to class, book, the story should be treated as a story, and efforts made to bring out its real and living interest. (1911, 18) (Emphasis added).

Interestingly, the syllabus also recommends that “the pupils should first read the books out of class, unaided by the teacher” to allow for “their own impressions” to be formed. The novel “might then be discussed in class in more or less detail” (1911, 18). Taking the same view, the Newbolt Report advises that “it will be of great use and will save much time if students are required to read and consider their [novel] at home” (1921, 138). In class, reading “aloud with comment and discussion may be varied by silent reading” and “students should be required to reproduce orally or in writing the substance of what they have read” (1921, 138).

From the vantage point of the twenty-first century, the notion of reading the book ‘out of class’ may appear to run counter to contemporary understandings of effective reading pedagogy. However, this recommendation in both documents is arguably consistent with their translation of progressive philosophies of student-centred learning. In this instance, to initially read the book “unaided by the teacher” suggests that the student’s direct experience is understood to be critical in the pedagogical cycle.

It is important to note that both documents consistently promote the need to integrate oral reading and discussion arising from the student’s interest when studying literature. The Report leaves no doubt about the crucial role of talk and self-expression in learning: “Oral work is, we are convinced, the foundation upon which proficiency in the writing of English must be based; more than that, it is a condition of the successful teaching of all that is worth being taught” (1921, 71). Oracy in the classroom is regarded as a means of both “enlarging (pupils’) vocabulary” (1921, 76) and negating the possibility of “children remaining more or less passive

while the teacher retails by word of mouth information which they could more profitably obtain themselves from books” (71).

In the 1911 English syllabus, oral work is seen as the cornerstone in language development and all literary study with the clear directive that “formal instruction in the theory of expression will scarcely be needed” (1911, 18, 19). In both documents, the emphasis on oral language development signals a strong philosophical orientation traceable back to the Romantics (see Author 2012; Mathieson 1975) and anticipates the central role of student talk in post-Dartmouth^{iv}, New English conceptualisations of learning (see Sawyer 2009a, 2009b, 2002). In the Newbolt Report and the 1911 English syllabus, student talk is seen to be especially vital in the teaching of drama, where oral work is extended to performance and dramatic readings of key scenes from the play as a strategy for making meaning.

Teaching drama

The Newbolt Report maintains that “since dramatic representation is at once the most alluring and intense form of literary experience for young adolescents, we hope and expect that it will play a very important part” (1921, 150) in developing “self-expression” and “personality” (1921, 160). The 1911 syllabus provides quite extensive commentary on the teaching of drama – and Shakespearean drama – that explicitly endorses embodied learning through performance-based, active treatment of a play (1911, 19). It is worth pointing out that although the 1911 syllabus preceded the innovative work of Caldwell Cook (*The Play Way* 1917), his ideas exerted significant influence on pedagogy in NSW English classrooms in the 1920s and beyond (see Watson, 2003). His creative, embodied approach to drama is endorsed in the Newbolt Report. The high status accorded to the study of plays in the discourse of both documents also chimes with what are recognisably post-1960s perspectives on the affordances of drama as a genre and as a medium for learning (see Heathcote 1989; Moffett 1994).

Enduring influences of the 1911 English Syllabus and the Newbolt Report

The 1911 *Courses of Study for High School* and the secondary English syllabus within it, remained relatively unaltered through 15 subsequent editions for 35 years. In 1945, a revised curriculum including a revised English syllabus was released (NSW Department of Education). It represented a departure from the “subject paradigm” (Ball and Lacey 1985) in its heavy emphasis on language skills (Brock 1984a, 1984b). This syllabus had a comparatively short life-span. Less than a decade later, in 1953, a reformed secondary curriculum was developed (NSW

Department of Education). Appearing more than 30 years after the publication of *The Teaching of English in England*, the 1953 English syllabus is widely recognised as the syllabus that enshrined the Newbolt conceptualisation of English in NSW (Brock 1984a, 1984b, 1996).

The syllabus was written by the NSW English Teachers Group, established in the 1940s by a number of prominent figures in the field in NSW. Crucially, “several in the group had taught in Britain under the influence of the Newbolt Report” (Brock 1984a, 54). What is striking is the extent to which the discourses, ideologies and “epistemic assumptions” (Reid 1996, 32) of both the 1911 syllabus and the Newbolt Report are explicitly appropriated. It opens thus:

The intention of this syllabus is to give pupils an experience of their language as a means of transmitting thought. Thought – its expression and its comprehension – is, therefore, the foundation of the syllabus (NSW Department of Education 1953, 13)
(Emphasis added).

In its conceptualisation of English as a subject cohering around the assumed indivisible relationship between language and thought, the syllabus takes up the central premise articulated in the Newbolt Report:

We have looked upon it almost as convertible with thought, of which we have called it the very stuff and process. We have treated it as a subject, but at the same time a method, the principal method whereby education may achieve its ultimate aim of giving a wide outlook on life.

... We wish to see English constantly overflowing its own compartment, and penetrating into all the rest (Newbolt 1921, 56, 63).

The “continuities of influence” (Reid 2003, 100) are immediately apparent, lending weight to Seddon’s (2001) point that “curriculum carries representations and cultural resources across generations” (310). For secondary English curriculum in NSW, the “representations and cultural resources” associated with literature and literary study in the 1911 syllabus and the Newbolt Report find their apotheosis in the 1953 syllabus. This syllabus further embeds a set of “disciplinary norms” (Reid 2002, 21) that have remained largely uncontested in successive

syllabus documents, including those in the twenty-first century. These enduring “disciplinary norms” encompass but are not limited to:

- literary study as the mandatory core of the syllabus;
- the privileging of poetry, fiction and drama;
- the rhetoric of child-centred approaches to teaching and learning;
- an emphasis on student’s language development through the use of language in context and the engagement with literature;
- the dominance of the Cultural Heritage model in the senior secondary syllabus;
- an aim and purpose that includes discourses about the moral, spiritual, intellectual, physical and ethical formation of the student; and
- the need for the teacher to ensure student enjoyment, pleasure and aesthetic experience (New South Wales Education Standards Authority, NESA 2017).

Concluding remarks

Reid (2004) observed that “(o)urs is a forgetful era, often oblivious to ways in which past cultural practices have shaped the foundations of much that we think and do” (ix). Similarly, Morgan (1997) speaks of a “formidable ignorance” of the “weave of ideology in the discourse” (231) of historical English curriculum and policy documents. The historical analysis offered here has concentrated on foregrounding the “weave of ideology” in the discourses of two historical documents of significance to the heredity of secondary English in NSW. That such commonality in the discourses of the two documents is discernible, however, does not presume that disjunctions or discontinuities are not also potentially instructive in more fully understanding the historical narrative of the subject^v. What we have proposed in this paper is that the resonances between the 1911 NSW English syllabus and the Newbolt Report reveal the transformative influence of the New Education philosophies, ideologies and discourses on educational thinking and reforms during the early twentieth century in Australia and Britain that have since endured in syllabus versions of secondary English in NSW.

While recognising that the documents we have explored are a pre-active curriculum (Goodson 1988) and a commissioned report, in their conceptualisation of literature and literary study they can be situated in a broader historical, epistemological and pedagogical arc spanning more than a century. In their historical account of the major reforms in education in NSW, Hughes and Brock (2008) argue that “the philosophies underpinning earlier successful reforms can often become implicitly embedded within the subsequent educational thinking that produces later

reforms” (5). As a consequence, “later educators may fail to appreciate or fail to be even aware of the originality – or even, perhaps, of the radical character – of the ideas that inspired previous reforms” (5). Our intention in this paper has been to make explicit and substantiate a hitherto less well recognised example of historical continuities in the narrative of English in schools and thereby enlarge our understandings of “the foundations of much that we think and do” (Reid 2004, ix).

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ⁱ It is beyond the scope of the paper to consider matters related to the 'enacted' curriculum (Goodson, 1988): that is, how the rhetoric of syllabus documents, reports and policies may be translated in practice or the effect of external examinations and prescribed reading lists on the pedagogy in English classrooms. For coverage of these aspects of the history of secondary English in NSW see Authors 2017.

ⁱⁱ Since curriculum documents published prior to the later decades of the twentieth century contain what contemporary readers may consider to be gendered language, all quotations from primary sources in this paper that refer to "him/he" and "man" will be taken to include "her/she" and "woman", respectively, in order to avoid frequently disrupting quotations with [sic].

ⁱⁱⁱ Texts and authors still prescribed on 21st century prescribed texts lists include: *Julius Caesar*, *As You Like It*, *The Tempest*, *Merchant of Venice*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *A Winter's Tale*, Dickens, Austen, Elliot, Gaskell, Coleridge, Shelley, Byron, Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Lowell.

^{iv} 'Post-Dartmouth' refers to the period following the 1966 Dartmouth Seminar. The influence of the ideas promulgated at this Seminar have been well documented in the literature on the history of English in education in NSW. See for example, Brock 1996; Dixon 1975; and Sawyer 2002, 2009b.

^v For a detailed coverage of the key moments of English curriculum reform, contestation and discontinuities, see Brock 1996 and Hughes and Brock 2008.