

Essential Learning Prep to Year 10 English Curriculum Area

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Victorian Essential Learning Standards



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Section 1: What is English?

A perennial question in discussions about English as a school subject, discipline or key learning area has been ‘What is English?’ Over the past decade, English in Victoria has been based on the conceptualisation of the subject presented in *English Curriculum and Standards Framework I*, 1994 and the revised version *English Curriculum and Standards Framework II*, 2000 (*CSF II*). These documents provide insights into English in the current Victorian context.

The discipline of English has generated a vast body of professional literature, both Australian and international, and a review of this literature provides further answers to the question in a broad professional context.

This section of the discussion paper is therefore presented in three parts: an examination of the scope of English in *CSF II*, a review of the professional literature, and consideration of English as a school subject in light of recent research.

English in *CSF II*

CSF II presents a comprehensive account of English as a school subject, from Prep to Year 10. An examination of the *English CSF II* indicates that the framework includes a number of models and functions of English.

The ‘Rationale’ in *English CSF II* highlights the importance of English for ‘active and effective participation in Australian society’:

Active and effective participation in Australian society depends on the ability to speak, listen, read, view and write with confidence, purpose and enjoyment in a wide range of contexts.

This rationale refers to students thinking ‘critically about their world and the global community’, and states that ‘the knowledge and skills of English are essential to people who contribute to political, social, and cultural life and are active and informed citizens. Knowledge about language ‘assists students to achieve a better understanding of themselves, their culture and the contemporary world.’

The model of English with which Victorian teachers have worked over the past decade is broadly summarised in the *English CSF II* ‘Rationale’:

The study of English, and the broader concept of literacy, is about the appropriate and effective use of language, the use of language as a means of learning and the development of knowledge about language. Through language use, students convey and discover information, work through idea and express feelings. Students learn how language works and how to use it well... In English, students are actively involved in reading, viewing, writing, comparing and talking about texts. Students are encouraged to explore and engage with a range of literature, everyday and media texts from their own and different cultures, to take pleasure in using texts to explore ideas and to think critically about their world and the global community. (p. 5)

In this account, *language* and *texts* are the central and essential concepts. *Language* encompasses both the use of language and knowledge about language. *Texts* encompass a range of different kinds of texts from various cultures, and provide a springboard for critical thinking. This definition of the discipline of English provides a valid framework across the years of schooling, where development is about the increasing complexity of the use of language and the kinds of texts that are the focus of study. The ‘Rationale’ also highlights the modes of language – reading, viewing, writing, speaking and listening – that are the focus of learning in English P–10 classrooms.

While texts and language in all modes are central to English at all years of schooling, there are significant differences in emphasis and complexity at different phases of schooling. The *Victorian Curriculum Reform 2004 Consultation Paper* acknowledges the development of students’ learning needs and capacities across the phases of schooling, and indicate that this development must be considered in the development of a curriculum framework. For example, in Years P–4, *the curriculum focuses on developing the fundamental knowledge and skills in literacy and numeracy that underpin all future learning* (p. 10). In the middle years (Years 5–9) students’ *literacy and numeracy needs become more sophisticated and important concepts across the disciplines are progressively introduced* (p. 10).

Using the key concepts of language and texts, the ‘Rationale’ (p. 5) outlines a number of functions for the subject. These include English as:

- personal development: *Learning about texts and language is important to the personal and social development of the individual.*
- serving the purposes of educational and workplace literacy: *Students need to understand and control the English language to develop the confidence and competence to meet the demands of school, employment and further education.*
- creating a knowledgeable citizenry: *Knowledge about how language functions and how it both reflects and shapes social attitudes assists students to achieve a better understanding of themselves, their culture and their contemporary world.*
- creating a culturally and politically active citizenry: *The knowledge and skills of English are essential to people who contribute to political, social and cultural life and are active and informed citizens.*
- creating a critical citizenry: *Students are encouraged... to think critically about their world and the global community.*
- creating competent producers of texts: *They are then able to use the texts they read and listen to as resources in creating and constructing their own.*

It is interesting to note the extent to which these functions resonate with the purposes of education set out in the framework for curriculum and assessment in the *Victorian Curriculum Reform 2004 Consultation Paper* (2004). For example, the framework lists one of the purposes of education as being to equip students with the knowledge, skills and attributes ‘to be informed citizens who understand and contribute to civil and community relations at a local, national and global level’ (p. 5).

English CSF II, like *English CSF I* (1995), was developed from the *English Curriculum Statement and the English Curriculum Profile for Australian Schools* (1994). Like the statements and profiles developed through the national collaborative

curriculum initiatives that commenced in 1989, both *CSF I* and *CSF II* encompass a number of models of English curriculum. This is also the case with the English curriculum documents of other Australian states and territories, such as the Western Australian *English Student Outcome Statements*.

The English statement broadly describes English as ‘that area of the curriculum where students study and use English language and literature’ (1994). Table 1 lists the goals for English presented in *CSF II*. These goals closely align with those listed in the English statement. The goals from the WA *English Student Outcomes Statements* are also included in the table, as a further example of the take-up of the national collaborative work.

Table 1: Goals of English

<i>Statement on English for Australian Schools</i> (1994)	<i>English Curriculum and Standards Framework II</i> (2000)	<i>WA English Student Outcomes Statements</i> (1998)
1. The ability to speak, listen, read, view and write with purpose, effect and confidence in a wide range of contexts.	The ability to speak, listen, read, view and write <u>effectively</u> with confidence, purpose <u>and enjoyment</u> .	The ability to speak, listen, read, view and write with purpose, effect, understanding and critical awareness in a wide range of contexts.
2. A knowledge of the ways in which language varies according to context, purpose, audience and content, and the ability to apply this knowledge.	A knowledge of the ways in which language varies according to context, purpose, audience and content, and the capacity to apply this knowledge.	A knowledge of the ways in which language varies according to content, purpose, audience and context, and the ability to apply that knowledge.
3. A sound grasp of the linguistic structures and features of standard Australian English, and the capacity to apply these, especially in writing.	A <u>knowledge</u> of the linguistic <u>patterns used to construct different texts</u> , and the capacity to apply these, especially in writing.	A sound grasp of the conventions of Standard Australian English, and the capacity to apply these
4. A broad knowledge of a range of literature, including Australian literature, and a capacity to relate this literature to aspects of contemporary society and personal experience.	A broad knowledge of a range of <u>texts</u> and a capacity to apply this to aspects of contemporary society and personal experience.	A broad knowledge of a range of literature, including Australian literature, and a capacity to relate this literature to aspects of contemporary society and personal experience.
5. The capacity to discuss and analyse texts and language critically and with appreciation.	The capacity to discuss and analyse texts and language critically.	The capacity to discuss and analyse texts and language critically and with appreciation.
6. A knowledge of the ways in which textual interpretation and understanding may vary according to cultural, social	A knowledge of the ways in which textual interpretation and understanding may vary according to cultural, social and personal differences,	A knowledge of the ways in which textual interpretation and understanding may vary according to cultural, social and personal differences,

and personal differences, and the capacity to develop reasoned arguments about interpretation and meaning.	and the capacity to develop reasoned arguments about interpretation and meaning.	and the capacity to develop reasoned arguments about interpretation and meaning. An understanding of the role that language plays in the construction of gender, ethnicity and socio-economic class.
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The differences between the 1994 *Statement* and the 2000 *English CSF II* (underlined) are almost all refinements, rather than major shifts. However, the use of ‘texts’ rather than ‘literature’ does represent a significant difference, and a broader notion of the content of English. The omission of ‘a wide range of contexts’ from the first goal is of interest, although the phrase appears in the opening statement about English:

Active and effective participation in Australian society depends on the ability to speak, listen, read, view and write with confidence, purpose and enjoyment in a wide range of contexts. (CSF II, p. 5)

The omission of the reference to ‘standard Australian English’ in the third goal is another reasonably significant difference.

The *Statement* also addresses the issue of the relationship between English and literacy:

At the primary level, the classroom teacher has the opportunity to develop literacy skills across the curriculum. At the secondary level, reading and writing of the specialized language and texts in each area of learning must be taught by the subject teacher. Teachers of English, however, have a special responsibility since they focus on knowledge about language and how it works. They teach students to use, think about and analyse language and to develop strategies for composing, comprehending and responding to texts. (p. 4)

The conceptualisation of English in the *CSF II* around texts and language encompasses a number of theoretical perspectives, as did the 1994 national statement. Reflecting the differences referred to above, a brief overview of some of the major theoretical influences in the teaching of English and literacy in the early years and into the middle years is followed by a review of some perspectives from the professional literature focused on English in the secondary school. It is important to note that the influence of the perspectives in these reviews can be seen at all levels of schooling. There are however, perspectives that are of more relevance at the stage of acquiring foundational skills in reading and writing, and other perspectives that are of greater relevance as students move into the secondary years.

Literacy learning in English: Perspectives from research on literacy teaching and learning

The field of literacy teaching and learning is a widely researched field. In 1997 The US National Reading Panel was commissioned by the Director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) to undertake an evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading, and its implications for reading instruction. The panel found, from an examination of a variety of public databases, that approximately 100,000 research studies on reading had been published since 1966. In the context of a discussion paper focused on the ‘essentials of English’ it is useful to review some of the main elements of that research.

Given the size of the research base, trends identified in several key reviews provide access to significant perspectives relevant to answering the question ‘What is English?’ in relation to the early years of schooling. In a recent review of reading research in Australia and New Zealand, Wilkinson, Freebody and Elkins (2000) note that in Australia ‘reading’ as a topic for study and practice has been subsumed under ‘literacy’ and is broadly defined. In *Literacy for All*, the monograph on Commonwealth Literacy Policies for Australian Schools (DEETYA, 1998), effective literacy is seen to require:

the ability to read and use written information, to write appropriately, in a wide range of contexts, for many different purposes, and to communicate with a variety of audiences. Literacy is integrally related to learning in all areas of the curriculum, and enables all individuals to develop knowledge and understanding. Reading and writing, when integrated with speaking, listening, viewing and critical thinking, constitute valued aspects of literacy in modern life.

Wilkinson et al. suggest that the focus on literacy rather than reading can be largely attributed to research in the Australian context by linguists, ethnographers and cultural theorists (in addition to psychologists and educationalists). They suggest that the culturally and linguistically diverse environment of Australia, and the tendency in schools and pre-service teacher education programs to work with a variety of pedagogical methods and materials have been two important aspects in the history of literacy education in Australia.

In this review, Wilkinson et al. examine recent trends and issues in literacy education in Australia, using the terms ‘skills’ and ‘cultural’ approaches that were utilised by Christie et al. (1991). Reference is made by Wilkinson et al. to cultural approaches to literacy learning in Australia seen in a number of Commonwealth-funded Children’s Language and Literacy Projects in which literacy is defined as ‘a set of cultural practices’ that is studied in naturalistic settings, sometimes through combinations of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. Reference is also made to research on critical literacy (for example, Luke, A 1994) and gender issues (for example, Alloway & Gilbert, 1997).

In recent years, curriculum writers, teacher educators and practitioners in the English learning area have taken up the ‘four resources’ model of literacy put forward by Luke & Freebody (1999). In this model, skills and cultural approaches are drawn together in the four resources (or ‘roles’ or ‘practices’) of decoding, participation in the meanings

of text, functional use of text, and critical analysis of text. Each of these resources is seen as necessary, but in and of themselves not sufficient for literate citizens in present-day society. In the literature review of emergent literacy research for *100 Children Go to School* (Hill, S et al. 1998) these four roles, or resources, are seen to ‘provide a useful framing for literacy educators to consider in instructional programs’. All these aspects are seen to be required in emergent literacy, and the review by Hill et al. cites Street in arguing that the role of text analyst is important because the young child is:

learning cultural models of identity and personhood, not just how to decode script or write a particular hand. If that is the case then leaving the critical process until they have learnt many of the genres of literacy used in that society is putting off, perhaps for ever, the socialization into a critical perspective.
(Street, 1994, p. 140)

Reading development and factors that contribute to reading outcomes were the main emphases in the extensive synthesis of research in *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998) a study commissioned by the US Departments of Education, and Health and Human Services. These federal departments requested the National Academy of Sciences to establish a committee (National Research Council) whose function was to examine the prevention of reading difficulties through a study of the ‘effectiveness of interventions for young children who are at risk of having problems learning to read’ (Snow et al., 1998, p. 1). A summary of key elements of Early years classroom literacy instruction identified by Snow et al. is provided in Table 2.

Table 2 Conceptualising reading and reading instruction

Adequate initial instruction requires that children:	Adequate progress in learning to read English beyond the initial level depends on:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use reading to obtain meaning from print, • have frequent and intensive opportunities to read, • are exposed to frequent, regular spelling-sound relationships, • learn about the nature of the alphabetic writing system, and • understand the structure of spoken words. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having a working understanding of how sounds are represented alphabetically, • sufficient practice in reading to achieve fluency with different kinds of texts, • sufficient background knowledge and vocabulary to render written texts meaningful and interesting, • control over procedures for comprehension and repairing misunderstandings, and • continued interest and motivation to read for a variety of purposes.

(Snow et al., 1998, pp. 3–4)

This research-based summary provides an important basis for specifying what is essential in English in the foundation years. Knowledge about language is central (the alphabetic principle, vocabulary, the structure of spoken words); the centrality of a range of texts is identified (fluency with different kinds of texts).

The National Research Council also provided clear research-based recommendations on writing from the first year at school to Year 3:

Once children learn to write letters, they should be encouraged to write them, use them to begin writing words or parts of words, and to use words to begin writing sentences. Instruction should be designed with the understanding that the use of invented spelling is not in conflict with teaching correct spelling. Beginning writing with invented spelling can be helpful for developing understanding of phoneme identity, phoneme segmentation, and sound–spelling relationships. Conventionally correct spelling should be developed through focused instruction and practice. Primary grade children should be expected to spell previously studied words and spelling patterns correctly in their final writing products. Writing should take place on a daily basis to encourage children to become more comfortable and familiar with it.

(Burns, Griffin & Snow, 1999, p. 10)

The work of Marie Clay, amongst others, has been influential in Australia. Her work on systematic observation measures that guide the teaching of young children in formal school programs (Clay, M. *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement*, 1993) provides another perspective on key elements of Early years literacy teaching. She suggests the following observations, and related measures:

- oral language, and a child’s control over sentence structures and inflections
- the reading of continuous text (running records)
- letter knowledge
- reading vocabulary (words known in reading)
- writing vocabulary (words known in writing)
- concepts about print (how print encodes information)
- hearing sounds in words (dictation)
- making links between those sounds and letters. (Clay, M 1993, p. 1).

Clay provides a succinct description of reading that underpins key aspects of the English curriculum:

Reading is a process by which children can, on the run, extract a sequence of cues from printed texts and relate these, one to the other, so that they understand the message of the text. Children continue to gain in this complex processing throughout their formal education, interpreting statements of ever-increasing complexity.

(Clay, M 1991, p. 22)

The key learning area of English in the primary years makes provision for these critical aspects of literacy acquisition in a variety of ways. The *English CSF II* is designed as a progress map, showing typical development in the learning area. Processes are identified, as is specific knowledge about language, such as knowledge of the alphabetic principle. The importance of being able to comprehend and compose a range of different texts is emphasised, together with recognition of the ways in which these texts increase in complexity over time.

English as a school subject: Perspectives from the professional literature

Major theoretical orientations

Historians of the subject have conceptualised the shifts in the nature of subject English in a number of ways. Hunter (1997) refers to the history of English as shifting between *ethics* (the affective development of students), *rhetoric* (teaching linguistic competence) and *aesthetics* (a concern with literature and literary criticism). He sees debates around the nature of the subject as essentially concerned with the shifting emphasis between these key components. Freebody (1999) argues the history of the subject as a constant struggle between the rhetorical and literary wings. He sees these as enacted in three general informing philosophies: *responsive paradigms* (skills-based approaches; approaches to social and cultural appropriateness; critical literacies); *growth paradigms*, and *cultural heritage* paradigms. Ball (1982, 1983, 1985) sees the essential disputes in English teaching as being over the competing importance of, respectively, grammar, the place of literature, and the place of pupil-self expression. Ultimately, none of these accounts are a long way from Dixon's famous (1967) triad of *skills*, *cultural heritage* and *growth*.

Drawing away from this specific set of paradigms, Medway (1990) sees English by the 1970s as falling between: the *ordering of experience*, represented by Britton (1970) and Dixon; *social communication*, represented by Hasan and Williams (1996), and the study of language itself in all its variety, represented by the work of Halliday. This latter paradigm serves as a reminder that while a number of authors effectively link 'growth' with a 'literary' approach to the subject, and even to a Leavisite tradition (Medway 1990, Patterson 1992, Christie 1993, Hunter 1997), the other key debate in the history of the subject has been that between *language* and *literature*, as represented in the 1960s and 1970s by London and Cambridge respectively (Hodgson 1974, Ball 1982, 1983, 1985).

Finally, probably chief among other accounts of the competing paradigms of the subject is that presented by Cox (1991) as *personal growth*; *cross-curricular*; *adult needs*; *cultural heritage* and *cultural analysis*.

The personal growth model of English was, of course, heavily influenced by the work of John Dixon (1967) and James Moffett (1968). *Personal growth* has served English in Australia very well. In stressing English as an active pursuit – and thus encouraging extended discourse in speaking and writing, group activities and wide reading – it moved English away from the emphasis on skills.

The dominant paradigm of the subject in terms of curriculum discussion in the 1990s, especially in Australia, has undoubtedly been *critical literacy* (see, for example, Griffith 1992, McCormick 1994, Morgan 1997, 2004, Lankshear et al. 1997, Prain 1998). Many critical literacy advocates have levelled significant criticism at both the

cultural heritage and *personal growth* models of English teaching. This paradigm is heavily influenced by socio-cultural approaches to language and literacy. Critical literacy advocates argue for English classrooms in which all language practices (including literature) are contextualised socially and critiqued for their underlying ideologies. Morgan's approach to critical literacy (2004) would seem to encapsulate a number of the most useful questions for teachers issuing out of this paradigm:

- Where does this text come from?
- What kind of text is this?
- What social functions does this text serve?
- How does this text construct a version of reality and knowledge? And what is left out of this story?
- How does this text represent the reader (or viewer or listener) and set up a position for reading? And what other positions might there be for reading?
- How does this text set up its authority and encourage your belief? And how might its authority be deconstructed and challenged, where its ethical stance is at odds with yours?

(Morgan 2004)

Morgan would argue that developing skills in answering questions such as these would leave students free to produce either submissive, negotiated or resistant readings of any text being studied.

Critical literacy issues, of course, largely out of *post-structuralist literary theory*. Misson (2004) highlights the importance of post-structuralism for classroom practice in explaining that post-structuralism sees the process of the creation of the individual human being and their positioning within ideology as largely happening through language, since it is language which 'constructs' us. This provides a strong theory of how we are locked into certain belief systems. This theory, Misson argues, gives an urgency to work on examining how texts are positioning us, because these texts may in fact be quite powerful in creating identities and belief systems. Critical literacy is also interested in analysing reading practices. Questions such as: 'Why do certain reading practices come into existence?' and 'Whose interests are served by reading texts in certain ways?' interest practitioners of critical literacy. Reading in the secondary English classroom has often been viewed as an ideologically neutral activity. An approach through cultural studies helps students become aware of a wide range of reading practices that are applied in textual and cultural analysis. They would be encouraged to consider the assumptions and values behind different ways of responding to texts. They would also be given the opportunity to experiment with such reading practices when they develop interpretations of a text.

A related position is that which sees the body of texts on which English is to draw as issuing out of *cultural studies*, rather than privileging traditional notions of literature. This model pays attention to popular culture as much as any other form of cultural practice.

Textual analysis itself is connected to wider questions of culture and ideology (Fuery and Mansfield 1997, Kramsch 1998). For Fuery and Mansfield, 'canons' of selected texts cannot be avoided, as some texts are inevitably chosen for cultural analysis.

However, they point to the importance of seeing canons as contingent social constructions and of critically evaluating their function in the wider society. Kress (1995) also discusses the culturally salient text, the aesthetically valued text and the mundane text as all important subject texts in creating critical readers. Thus, a wide definition of texts should prevail: ‘high’ literary texts, disks, film, media, documentaries, CD-ROMs, websites, magazines, music clips, newspapers, advertisements, television, cartoons, as well as biographies, autobiographies, political speeches, treatises and tracts, essays, memoirs and reports.

This dominance of critical literacy has begun to be questioned by those who would want to go beyond critique to a kind of ‘*critical*’ *creation*. Kress (1995), for example, argues that the creation of critically literate citizens is not enough if those citizens do not *do* something with that knowledge – he calls this education for social action: the envisaging, design and making of alternatives. Ultimately Kress emphasises going beyond *critique* into *creation*. The subject of English is a vital site in which to facilitate the development of active and informed citizenship. Kress argues that students and teachers should view themselves as empowered designers, not just critics, of social futures.

One important model of English that would seem to encompass emerging paradigms as well as currently dominant paradigms, while retaining some valuable continuity with ‘growth’ and with the *CSF II* is a *rhetorical model*. Andrews (1996) postulates that a curriculum for English should ask the question ‘What are the best forms of language in the current context?’ and he argues that the need is for a conception of language as social practice determined by social structures. But, unlike the critical language study (CLS) of Norman Fairclough (see Fairclough, N, 1992) and others, his preferred ‘rhetorical’ perspective is concerned with the *arts* of discourse, and hence more concerned with *production* than CLS. A rhetorical perspective sees as much artistry in everyday language as in literature. Hence, literature becomes an important part of the repertoire of English, but is no longer its *raison d’être*. Questions asked of assignments in a rhetorical perspective could include:

- Who is the audience for this communication?
- What is my/our purpose in this communication?
- What do I/we want to say?
- What media are best on this occasion?
- What large-scale forms of language are appropriate?
- What tone/audience orientation is required?
- What stylistic features are appropriate?

In Locke’s view (1999–2000), a rhetorical model allows for a dynamic understanding of genre as something far more adaptable and socially rooted than a series of prescriptive recipes. Locke draws on the inquiry-oriented curriculum developed by Gordon Wells (see Wells, Gordon 1999) (involving the five steps of launch, research, interpretation, presentation and reflection) to facilitate student exploration of, especially, argument as a mode of discourse. This is an approach to learning about language and acquiring a meta-language through inquiry that is not prescriptive about genre. Students gain in understanding the functions they want their texts to serve, the target audiences to which they are appealing, and the role of social context in

communication. Under such a regime, programs in English would revolve around problems to be solved in language, not fixed genres, or themes or exercises.

It would be simplistic and somewhat anti-intellectual to argue that teachers should just 'mix' such models in the name of classroom pragmatism, if only because many of them issue from such different intellectual roots that simply 'mixing' would create contradictory aims and practices. However, the fact that conceptual models of curriculum present such different views of the world still prompts the question, 'Whose world?'

The world in which teachers operate differs from class to class and, indeed, from day to day, let alone from school to school. Context is all in teaching and, while pragmatic 'mixing' conjures up images of anti-intellectualism and contradiction, an intelligent and intellectualised eclecticism that allows teachers to make conscious choices between models, depending on the current contexts in which they are operating from day to day, would seem to be an appropriate approach to curriculum design. In this view, an intelligent and intellectualised eclecticism is not just simple pragmatism; nor is it theoretical, but rather, *multi-theoretical*. The appropriate metaphor is not the classroom 'recipe' in which a number of models and concepts are thrown in the mix, but a metaphor of the staffroom library, in which teachers are aware of the contents of the models, choose approaches appropriate to present contexts, and replace them with others as contexts change.

Thomson's overarching model (2004), which he calls a *Rhetorical, Ethical, Socio-cultural, Political Model*, is one such intellectualised eclecticism involving personal growth as well as full awareness of the relationship between language and power, familiarity with social practices and their discourses, and understanding of the political and ideological formation of texts and of matters of value and ethics. It is the stress on the last of these that gives Thomson's view of rhetoric its particular flavour. In fact, the kind of intellectualised eclecticism envisaged is that which has been recently promoted in Howie's important conceptualisation of English as a recursive curriculum model integrating significant models of English teaching into a coherent, developmental teaching and learning cycle of *subjective frame (personal growth) > structural frame (social view of language and close reading practices) > cultural frame (post-structuralism) > critical frame (critical literacy) > subjective frame* (Howie 2003, 2004).

Ultimately, what encompasses much of the above and what constitutes the unique domain of English in the secondary school is the notion of *reflection on the language* with the stress on 'reflection'. Curtis's view (1993) is that while *competence* comes from *using* the language – from speaking, listening, reading and writing – it is only by pausing and reflecting on the language that the student's *knowledge, understanding, attitudes and skills* will benefit (for example, listening to themselves on tape, keeping a readers journal, drafting a short story with a critical friend). Any area of language, he argues, could be addressed in terms of composition and response; investigative and analytical work; individual and collaborative work; and sharing and evaluation.

Recent perspectives on English as a school subject

Pope's excellent encyclopedic handbook (1998), which itself reconfigures the nature of English, provides a very useful outline of the ways in which the subject has undergone a number of shifts in recent decades. These include:

- a shift from a focus on 'literature' to a focus on a wider range of texts and genres
- a shift from studying a text in isolation to studying it in its social context and from a range of contemporary social perspectives
- an emphasis on standardised language use giving way to the ability to recognise, analyse and negotiate linguistic variety in uses of the English language in local and global contexts
- encouragement for students to engage in critical-creative 'rewritings' of texts, as distinct from passively receiving the meanings of a literary canon – the 'creative' being as important as the 'critical' in contemporary English studies (indeed all responses to texts are in part 'creative')
- a shift from studying the history of 'literature' to studying how literature and other texts are part of historical and social processes
- a shift from literary study to the study of cultural and meaning-making practices in general
- a shift from the formalist analysis of 'aesthetic' texts to a cultural analysis of how and why values change over time and how texts are produced and used, evaluated, institutionalised and transformed in social contexts
- a greater emphasis on the materiality of communication practices (i.e. viewing the text as a material object and analysing the impact of technologies of communication, modes of production and social organisations on its production and reception)
- the recognition of non-Western-European genres of writing, oral performance and cultural production, and including these in the English curriculum – hence texts in translation being more likely to be included
- a shift from a monocultural version of cultural heritage to a recognition that students need to be aware of a wide variety of regional, national and global cultures and their associated myths and belief systems
- a shift from seeing 'culture' as something defined from above to being part of a continuing conversation
- the precedence of dialogic, interactive and interpersonal modes of teaching and learning in English studies over the teacher-led 'banking' model of education
- a shift from assessment in English studies based on essayistic analysis to a broader range of new forms of assessment, including rewriting tasks, cross-genre and cross-media transformations, the creation of generically hybrid texts, collages, script-writing and electronic texts.

Within Australian secondary English teaching, Thomson (2004) lists the following as the key changes since 1968:

- the importance of metacognition, of students reflecting on their learning
- the importance of language as a tool for learning: journals, informal talk, expressive writing
- the conscious exploration of language and classroom work on textuality and critical literacy
- the development of deeper understandings of the relationship between language and power
- widening definitions of 'text'
- developing understandings of contemporary cultural and literary theory
- developing understandings of multimedia technology
- an increasingly powerful range of assessment and evaluation procedures.

Work in this area also picks up *the shift in the nature of the language itself as a form of communication*. Goodman and Graddol (1996) examine the theoretical and practical implications of the global spread of the English language for English teaching. The contributors to Goodman and Graddol's book see current uses of language as being intricately connected to dominant social practices such as consumerism, global marketing, and online interaction. The main developments explored include how new communication technologies are shaping the way language is used, the way English is being expanded to express new forms of social relations and hybridised identities, the increasingly multimodal nature of texts in English, the impact of market forces on discursive practices, and the relationship between globalisation and the English language. The key issues they see resulting from this are:

- the blurring of genres and styles in contemporary uses of English
- the importance of visual literacy and the relationship between visual and verbal communication
- the role of English in cyberspace
- the new genres and more fluid texts created through Internet communication
- the increasingly informal and marketised use of English in a consumerist culture
- the forms of local and regional resistance to English that are changing the English language itself.

The impact of information communication technologies in the past decade has potentially further expanded the territory of English teaching. Richard Andrews argues that ICT has highlighted the 'power of the visual and its position in relation to the verbal code' (2004, p. 58), thus providing scope for reconsidering the place of visual texts within texts studied in English.

It seems that there have been three main shifts in English teaching and learning over recent decades, involving:

1. an increasing number of objects of study in the field, objects originating in a range of media;
2. an expansion in the range of interpretive options and paradigms available for textual and cultural analysis; and (following from both of these)
3. modes of analysis and cultural practices superseding the traditional centrality of a canon of privileged and selected objects of study.

Reflecting complementary or competing views of English has been debate over the very *name* of the subject. There is an argument that the name ‘English’ effectively forms the central metaphor of the subject and has a powerful influence on how teachers and learners see themselves and the nature of the discipline. It has been historically associated with ‘England’, ‘Englishness’ and ‘English Literature’. A number of curriculum frameworks throughout the world have dropped the name ‘English’ for such titles as ‘Reading/ Language Arts’ (California), ‘Language, Literacy and Communication’ (South Africa) and ‘Language and Languages’ (New Zealand).

In the light of these increasing developments, the argument is that another term such as ‘Communications’ might more readily fit the broad study of language, textuality, transnational cultural practice and multiliteracies than the current name of ‘English’ (see Kress 1996) – or that a term like ‘Language Arts’ might more readily capture the skills to be mastered. These other terms may better signal that being able to recognise, interpret and negotiate linguistic, cultural and ethnic differences is becoming increasingly valuable in a globalised world. In particular, in our own post-colonial society situated in the Asia–Pacific region, there is an argument that the subject may warrant a different central metaphor that positions teachers and learners more as global citizens engaged in transnational cultural practice and effective communication. There might also be a democratic impulse behind such a re-naming exercise that encapsulates popular culture, Indigenous oral storytelling, literature in translation and sign language as much as it does British canonical texts.

Issues and questions for discussion

A number of issues and questions arise from the *English CSF II* and from a review of professional literature.

1. ***The special and particular role of English in the development of the affective domain and values.*** English is defined – more than any other school subject – by the *values* it tries to create. Historically, English has been about the shaping of the ‘self’. This has meant the promotion of humane values, the enrichment of the imaginative life and the development of aesthetic sensibility through engagement with literary texts. It has also meant a concern with the personal growth of the individual. The idea of ethics and of personal development as having a central place in English positions the subject as itself having a special role in the generic *Social and cultural skills, values and attributes* area of *Victorian Curriculum Reform 2004*. Almost all of the projected generic social and cultural skills, values and attributes already have a place in the ‘Rationale’ and ‘Goals’ of English in *English CSF II*.

2. **The key discipline concepts of English** as represented in current literature can be summarised as:
- knowledge of language and the development of linguistic competence
 - a focus on text. Of equal importance here are: creating and analysing texts; understanding the meaning(s) of texts; and moving beyond meaning to be able to critique texts, especially in terms of the relationship between language and power.

What developmental differences are important in these discipline concepts at different points in schooling?

3. **A broad definition of text.** The question here is ‘Which texts?’ The *English CSF II* values workplace and everyday texts (see, for example, p. 8). Should these be within the domain of English? Workplace and everyday texts could justifiably be considered cross-curricular concerns. Only English, however, has a traditional and legitimate concern with: *imaginative* literature; *film* and *media* texts; texts reflecting the *personal* in print, electronic, graphic and/or multimedia forms.
4. **The study of language.** No other area of the curriculum has the conscious, deliberate study of language for its own sake as its particular area of concern. What are the implications of this?

Curtis’s argument (1993) that *competence* comes only from *using* the language, and that it is only by pausing and reflecting on the language that the student’s *knowledge, understanding, attitudes and skills* will benefit is a compelling one. This includes composition, response/creation and critique. Such reflection should include questions of audience, context, purpose and appropriate stylistic features.

Section 2: The place of English in the school curriculum

The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century (MCEETYA, 1999) identifies English as one of the eight agreed key learning areas in a comprehensive and balanced curriculum in the compulsory years of schooling. Three key issues arise in a consideration of the place of English in the school curriculum. First, what is the rationale for English as a key learning area? Second, what is the relationship between English and literacy? The third issue concerns the teaching of English to students whose first language is not English.

A rationale for English

James Britton, when asked what the content of English was, once answered that if we conceived of the curriculum as a pie, then English was the slice left when every other area had taken out its slice. This may not be as remarkably unhelpful as it first appears. One way of conceiving of a 'space' in the curriculum is to ask a question about what a subject covers that is not covered by any other area of the curriculum. Other than the creative arts, for example, English is the only area of the curriculum that potentially values a role for personal experience and imagination. We do need an area of the curriculum that takes seriously students' personal experience if we are going to do more than pay lip-service to notions of culturally responsive curricula and if we really believe in constructivist forms of pedagogy.

Thus, those key discipline concepts of language and texts and the modes of reading, viewing, writing, speaking and listening described in Section 1 are each areas in which English plays a role that is, on the whole, not catered for elsewhere in the school curriculum.

These should all be seen within a context of the special and particular role of English in the affective and values development of students.

'English' and 'literacy'

The relationship between English and literacy

Gunther Kress, in his closing remarks in Sydney at the 2004 annual conference of the four national professional associations concerned with school English and literacy (AATE, ACTA, ALEA and PETA), suggested that English and literacy are not the same. He posed some central questions concerning the connections between these two areas of learning: *Is English distinct from literacy? If it is, how is it different? If English is not distinct from literacy, why have English?* He drew a distinction between literacy as a cultural technology, central to multiliterate social practices, and English as a school subject. In relation to English as a school subject, Kress suggested that two questions require answers: *What is it for? Who is it for?* (Kress, July 2004). These questions are central in a discussion paper intended to support the development of a framework of essential learning in English.

The national professional standards research project, undertaken by the English and literacy teachers professional associations with university partners, used the acronym STELLA (Standards for English Language and Literacy Teachers in Australia) to

affirm the importance of English teaching in both primary and secondary schools. The purpose of this major project was to develop professional standards for English/literacy teachers in primary and secondary schools (AATE and ALEA, 2002). The linking of 'English' and 'literacy' in the project acknowledges the close connections between the two throughout schooling.

In the early 21st century, any literature review seeking definitions of the subject English will locate definitions almost always in terms of literacy/ies, especially in terms of multiliteracies. In effect, these define the subject English in terms of the literacy skills being developed. Literacy education is now commonly understood and manifest in much of Australia in terms of literacy in *all* key learning areas, or curriculum literacies. Two scenarios in approaching English and literacy are reflected in school culture and policy:

- primary schooling is about 'acquiring literacy' and secondary school is about 'using literacy' in all key learning areas (the on-the-ground practice scenario)
- each key learning area has a set of literacies (*curriculum literacies*: Cumming et al. 1998) which are particular to itself.

These scenarios are not in conflict – they are about different things – but their combined effect can tend to separate English from literacy in the secondary school and to see a primary–secondary divide enacted in the terms 'literacy' and 'English'. However, when teachers in all key learning areas, at all levels of schooling, develop awareness of specific curriculum literacies and take responsibility for the development of these literacies, the continuities in the primary to secondary years become more obvious, and the separation of English from literacy becomes less of an issue. Indeed, the role of providing support for literacy in learning becomes a shared responsibility for all teachers:

The findings [from the Literacy–Curriculum Interface research project] demonstrate that curriculum learning may be facilitated by explicit use of the language of the subject. Teachers should model the appropriate language and literacy of their subject and provide explicit instruction for student development of specific curriculum literacies. Teachers should make explicit also the nature and purpose of this instruction in a way that motivates students, helps to construct the nature of the subject, and facilitates linkages with other activities. (Cumming et al., 1998)

In some parts of Australia this English–literacy divide is more pronounced than in others. Secondary teachers in Queensland and Western Australia, for example, refer readily in their local professional journals to themselves as teachers of 'English/literacy'. In New South Wales, this is far more problematic. The attitude that English subject specialists have to foster the concept 'literacy' will, of course, depend largely on the definition of that concept. Where the definition of literacy that operates at an official level is perceived as especially reductive, then English subject specialists will tend to reject it. Apart from anything else, little scope is accorded to the creative and aesthetic functions of the imagination. The manifest limitations of functional and social definitions of literacy in establishing standards of student performance are of particular concern to English teachers who have greater ambitions for their subject.

The manifest tension between ‘English’ and ‘literacy’ is exacerbated by the very plurality already mentioned. Despite terms such as ‘literacies’ and ‘multiliteracies’ (linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, spatial and the multimodal: Cope & Kalantzis 2000) suggesting a breadth of skills across a number of areas of life and of the school curriculum which, it is argued, are necessary for the modern student/citizen, high-stakes public testing of literacy is often reductivist. Davies (1996) argues that in an era of cross-curricular concern with literacy, English should focus on its core concerns – media study, knowledge about language and the study of literature – and should abandon its unique claims to teaching transferable skills of general literacy.

Nevertheless, English has a historic and special role with respect to literacy, clearly recognised in the 1994 *Statement on English for Australian Schools* (cited above). Teachers have had, and continue to have, as a central notion in their teaching, the teaching of reading, writing and oral communication (though Marenbon [1994] questions whether English should be dealing with speaking and listening at all, and argues that government mandate of English curriculum should not go beyond teaching pupils to read fluently and accurately, and to write Standard Australian English correctly using a reasonably wide vocabulary). Ultimately, the skills being developed in English are *literacy skills*. With the development of information communication technologies, this has extended to reading and producing texts with visual and graphic components. However, this does not make English a ‘service’ subject for other subjects. Like other subjects, English is not only defined by its skills, but by the specific foci of those skills. As argued above, one aspect that distinguishes English from other subjects is its central concern with the study of *how* language works. English is further defined by the nature of the texts with which it engages. Historically, this meant the texts of the cultural heritage, just as it now means the inclusion of the texts of popular culture. English is essentially the study of language as a social and cultural semiotic in its multiplicity of textual forms.

English is also defined, as already discussed, by the values it tries to create and by an expanded concern with the personal, which continues to include the personal growth of the individual.

Perhaps above all, English makes possible the *(re) imagining of other ways of being*. At this point, students are in a position to become ‘designers’ of social futures (Kress, 1995). This shifts the emphasis in English pedagogy from student response to students being essentially centred in their own creations. Understanding language as a social and cultural semiotic makes it natural that, in the English classroom, these creations will range across a number of areas, including the visual and multimedia. The concept of *design* also restores to the centre of English the fundamental role of the development of an aesthetic sense, and the development of the imagination – ideas which mass standardised literacy testing can never aspire to assess. Approaches to literacy that are based solely or predominantly on notions of utility and functionality are outdated and accordingly to be challenged by English teachers.

How literacy itself is being re-defined

The following set of definitions of literacy indicates a significant breadth and variety.

The definition provided in the 1991 Australian Language and Literacy Policy has been widely used. This is a broad definition:

***Literacy** is the ability to read and use written language and to write appropriately, in a range of contexts. It is used to develop knowledge and understanding, to achieve personal growth and to function effectively in our society. Literacy also includes the recognition of numbers and basic mathematical signs and symbols within text.*

*Literacy involves the integration of speaking, listening, and critical thinking with reading and writing. **Effective literacy** is intrinsically purposeful, flexible and dynamic, and continues to develop throughout an individual's lifetime.*

***Language** in its broad sense ... is the primary means of human communication, manifest generally in systematic ways through the communication skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing. Language in terms such as 'language and literacy proficiency' is an inclusive term, covering both English and other languages.*

***Australian English** is the variety of English which has developed in Australia in response to the Australian physical, social and cultural environment. Within it, there are further varieties, including **Standard Australian English**, which is spoken and recognized by most native speakers of English in Australia.*

(Australia's Language. The Australian Language and Literacy Policy. Companion Volume to the Policy Paper, DEET, Canberra, 1991)

Lo Bianco and Freebody (1997, p. 40) argued some years later that there is a need to define the specifications for teaching and the curriculum that will form the sufficient conditions for formal apprenticeship into a literate society.

An acceptance of the necessary status of the domains (breaking the code, participating in the meanings of texts, using texts functionally and analyzing them critically) for becoming literate leads to two significant questions about the comprehensiveness of current literacy curricula and teaching practices:

- *Does any one of these domains come naturally or easily such that its learning can be left entirely to incidental, indirect or implicit processes?*
- *Does learning about these domains have some natural or inevitable developmental progression such that some domains can be left exclusively to instruction in later school years?*

They also suggest (pp. 41–43) some general conclusions about the power of literacy and about the dimensions of literacy and its importance:

- Literacy as coding and decoding*
- Literacy as multi-modal*
- Literacy as plural*

- d) *How readers and writers 'operate'*
- e) *Societal functions of literacy*
- f) *Texts as cultural products*
- g) *Literacy and identities*
- h) *Active literacy and public participation*
- i) *Literacy for international communication.*

The term 'multiliteracies' has gained significant currency in recent years, and this highlights two most important, and closely related, changes. Cope and Kalantzis (2000) suggest that:

The first is the growing significance of cultural and linguistic diversity. The news on our television screens screams this message at us every day. And, in more constructive terms, we have to negotiate differences every day, in our local communities and in our increasingly globally interconnected working and community lives. As a consequence, something paradoxical is happening to English. At the same time as it is becoming a lingua mundi, a world language, and a lingua franca, a common language of global commerce, media and politics, English is also breaking into multiple and increasingly differentiated Englishes, marked by accent, national origin, subcultural style and professional or technical communities. Increasingly, the name of the game in English is crossing linguistic boundaries. Gone are the days when learning a single standard version of the language was sufficient. Migration, multiculturalism and global economic integration daily intensify this process of change. The globalisation of communications and labour markets makes language diversity an ever more critical local issue.

The second major shift encompassed in the concept of Multiliteracies is the influence of new communications technologies. Meaning is made in ways that are increasingly multimodal – in which written-linguistic modes of meaning are part and parcel of visual, audio, and spatial patterns of meaning. Take for instance the multimodal ways in which meanings are made on the World Wide Web, or in video captioning, or in interactive multimedia, or in desktop publishing, or in the use of written texts in a shopping mall. To find our way around this emerging world of meaning requires a new, multimodal literacy.

The impact of information communication technologies, and the presentation of literacy as social practice has also expanded the definitions:

Literacy can be defined narrowly, as the ability to understand and create written language. It is, however, frequently defined in two broader senses... Firstly, the scope can be expanded so that written language becomes written language and graphical or pictorial

representation. Secondly, the skill can be treated as social, rather than psychological; in this view, literacy is the ability to operate a series of social or cultural representations. (Andrews et al. 2002)

A socio-cultural view of literacy as social practice is the dominant view taken to literacy(ies) in current literature (Gee 1990, Anstey & Bull 2004, Hasan & Williams 1996, Maybin & Mercer 1996, Mercer & Swan 1996, Schirato & Yell 1996, Street 1997, Christie & Misson 1998, Kramsch 1998). Emphasis is given to the way form, function and the meanings in literacy events differ across cultures, communities, social groups and ‘literacy domains’ (for example, work and school). Resulting perspectives on literacy teaching and learning include:

- systemic functional linguistics (Hasan & Williams 1996, Maybin & Mercer 1996, Schirato & Yell 1996, Christie & Misson 1998, Gapper 1998) and related genre-based and discourse approaches (Gee 1990, Mercer & Swan 1996)
- critical literacy (see references in Section 1), and
- multiliteracies (Lo Bianco & Freebody 1997, Cope & Kalantzis 2000)

This socio-cultural approach of one branch of ‘New Literacy Studies’ also argues for a blurring of the distinctions between speech and writing and the hybridising of genres (see Baynham & Maybin in Maybin & Mercer 1996, Snyder 1996, Tweddle et al. 1997, Christie & Misson 1998). North American studies in genre also (Freedman & Medway, 1994) distance themselves from a view of genre teaching that involves teaching the abstracted and decontextualised features of text types. Instead, genres are located as forms of social action in context. Thus, there are political and ideological dimensions involved in the conventional use or subversion of genres. This ‘rhetorical’ model of genre pays attention to notions of audience, context, purpose and occasion, and draws on socio-cultural approaches to language and writing, functional grammar and speech-act theory. The implications of this view of genre for a revitalised genre-based literacy pedagogy are that:

- students can be seen as using generic resources to act effectively on a situation through a text, rather than simply imitating the formal features of a text type
- there is less emphasis on ‘banking’ or transmission pedagogies – students are able to criticise genres, discern their social functions and evaluate why some genres are assigned greater value than others
- students are able to subvert and ‘rewrite’ genres, combine generic resources in inventive ways and invent new discursive forms, especially in the light of new technologies.

Thus, Devitt (2000) argues that a nuanced and complex understanding of genre that brings together a range of theories can be used to *help students read and write flexibly, with an eye to the rhetorical function of discourse but without becoming fixed in a single set of formal conventions* (p. 714).

Curricula and assessment that reduce literacy to a few simple, mechanistic skills fail to do justice to actual literacy practices in people’s lives. Work on multiliteracies stresses understanding of language and literacy codes, multimodal reading and writing practices, multimedia authoring skills, multimedia critical analysis and Internet

exploration strategies. Students should be able to apply multiple semiotic modes in *design* and gain control of information-management problems (Lo Bianco & Freebody, 1997). Kress's notion of students as designers of social futures (Kress, 1995) becomes important in the pedagogy of those advocating multiliteracies. The key themes that emerge from 'New Literacy Studies' are 'multiplicity', 'hybridisation', 'plurality', 'complexity'. Curricula based on the idea that simple and 'pure' text types exist to be imitated as the basis of writing pedagogy is an out-dated notion.

Access to Standard Australian English in Australian society: Learners of English as a second or additional language

In arguing that one of the key discipline concepts of English is 'teaching linguistic competence', it is assumed that the one of the fundamental aims of that teaching is enabling all students to gain access to Standard Australian English (SAE) in written and oral forms. This is equally true for those students for whom English is a first language and for those for whom it is an additional language.

Aboriginal English is a social dialect of English used among Indigenous Australian speakers. It is not a dialect of Australian English, if by that is meant a sub-variety of the English spoken by other Australians. It stems from a different speech community, a different history and a different Australian identity. It co-exists with Australian English for the expression of meaning shared among Indigenous people. (Malcolm, I et al.2002)

For students who speak Aboriginal English, English language teachers are encouraging 'code-switching' capacities (Education Department of Western Australia, 1999). The focus of such teaching is on broadening the linguistic repertoire of students and on encouraging awareness of language use that is contextually appropriate. Thus schooling can affirm the appropriateness of using Aboriginal English in certain contexts and the appropriateness of using SAE in certain contexts. As language use is closely connected to cultural identity and world-view, this means also that different perspectives on the world are also being affirmed. The recommendations from case study research of Ashton-Hay and McKay (1997) summarise recent work with Aboriginal students whose first language is not SAE:

- being aware oneself [the teacher] of cultural differences
- encouraging students to share aspects of their own culture, and to value this knowledge and their mother tongue
- designing appropriate tasks to enable students to use and draw upon their own heritage as well as to learn more about their own culture through successful role models, songs, poetry, drama, sport, art, stories etc.
- designing appropriate tasks and activities to support favoured learning styles
- providing plenty of time modelling, explaining, giving plenty of examples and activities which enhance understanding of Western written cultural genres.

There is a growing awareness of the strong link between the study of language and the study of culture and cultural identity (Peim 1993, Luke, Comber & Grant 2003, Mercer & Swann 1996, Maybin & Mercer 1996, Kramsch 1998). For learners of English as a second language in general, a number of curriculum documents around the world

foreground cultural and linguistic diversity as a key issue. The New York Curriculum Standards for English Language Arts (2004), for example, favours a ‘culturally responsive’ approach to instruction in which diversity is viewed as an advantage rather than a deficit. Teachers include multicultural texts in the classroom, and students are encouraged to see their home language as a valuable resource and to learn about language variety as well as standard English uses and forms.

As with first-language learners, the key issue is students having access to the mastery of Standard Australian English in written and oral forms – but this again needs to be complemented by critical literacy strategies and the opportunity for transformative meaning-making activities.

Issues and questions for discussion

- English/literacy in the early years of schooling and beyond. The questions raised by Gunther Kress (see p. 18) highlight the key issues for discussion in relation to this issue: *Is English distinct from literacy? If it is, how is it different? If English is not distinct from literacy, why have English? What is it for? Who is it for?* (Kress, 2004)
- The shared responsibility for literacy learning between teachers in all key learning areas and teachers of English. Will the generic skills, values and attributes within the proposed framework of ‘essential learning’ promote the explicit teaching of literacy in all key learning areas? What is the extent of English teachers’ responsibility for literacy learning? What aspects of literacy learning are ‘essential’ in the English key learning area?
- How broadly should literacy be defined within a framework of essential learning? Do the generic communication skills identified in the *Victorian Curriculum Reform 2004 Consultation Paper* suggest a broad view of literacy?
- What are the implications for English of cross-disciplinary or integrated approaches to curriculum design? What is the respective relevance of literacy and English in cross-disciplinary curriculum? To what extent are the opportunities for deep learning in cross-disciplinary units enhanced by explicit teaching in response to the literacy demands of the texts studied and composed?
- How much time should be allocated to English in the school curriculum? Should this be different at different phases of schooling? Literacy learning occupies a significant component of the day in Early years classrooms. How much time should be devoted to English in later years?
- Access: Provision for ESL and ESD learners. This is a significant issue – what are the implications in the context of a framework of essential learning?

Section 3: The Essentials of English

There are two possible approaches to articulating the ‘essentials’ of English within a framework of essential learning for students in the compulsory years of schooling in the knowledge society. One thesis is that the essentials of English concern those aspects of English that are unique to the subject area. It can be argued, for example, that the study of literary texts is unique to English, and that therefore this is essential. The ‘core discipline concepts’ discussed in the *Victorian Curriculum Reform 2004 Consultation Paper* fit with this thesis.

The other thesis is that the essentials of English are those that are essential for students to progress in the learning area. Issues of continuity and the management of transition from year to year and from one phase of schooling to another are significant in relation to this thesis.

The essentials for progress

Insights into what might be held to be the ‘essentials’ of English can be found in discussions of the nature of development in English across the years of schooling. The ‘essentials’ increase in complexity as students progress through school. One account of this development is found in the *Statement on English for Australian Schools*.

The *Statement* (p. 16) describes development in English across the years of schooling by outlining a set of ‘Bands’. Band A relates to the first years of schooling. At this stage, emphasis is on a number of key aspects:

- teaching students to use spoken language appropriately in many new formal and informal situations in the school and classroom
- expanding students’ vocabularies in both spoken and written language
- the teaching of reading and writing skills
- fostering critical perspectives on texts
- introducing students to literature and teaching them how to relate it to their own knowledge and experience
- the teaching of handwriting.

Band B describes the English curriculum as focusing on ‘expanding the range and complexity of the texts which students read, write, speak, listen to and view’.

The focus of Band C, which coincides with the early years of adolescence, is on ‘a closer examination of the critical and cultural dimensions of language’.

As their [students’] dependence on family and peer group begins to change, students need to be accepted by, and to identify with, new groups, generally based on common interests. A key aspect of this group identification is the development of a common language. Students often experience dilemmas caused by the conflicting demands of their loyalties to both established and new groups. They need to find ways to resolve these conflicts, and to understand how

their behaviour is shaped, through language, by the values, attitudes and beliefs of these groups. (p. 28)

This example of a developmental view of English identifies some aspects of learning that might be essential at different stages of schooling. The case of reading provides a useful example.

Reading

Learning to read in the early years of schooling is essential for success in subsequent years, and thus is one of the essentials of English. 'Reading', therefore, is essential in a general, 'big picture' sense. But are there more specific aspects of what is essential in reading?

A major synthesis of research on early reading development undertaken by a committee commissioned by the US National Research Council (Snow, Burns & Griffin 1998) clearly states what is essential for young children. The research indicates that adequate progress in learning to read English beyond the initial level depends on:

- *having a working understanding of how sounds are represented alphabetically*
- *sufficient practice in reading to achieve fluency with different kinds of texts*
- *sufficient background knowledge and vocabulary to render written texts meaningful and interesting*
- *control over procedures for monitoring comprehension and repairing misunderstandings*
- *continued interest and motivation to read for a variety of purposes.*

(Snow et al., p. 4)

This list of essentials for learning is specific. The skills and knowledge listed are essential for students to make progress in reading. An issue in the development of a framework of essential learning in English will be the degree of specificity required.

At a later stage in schooling, other aspects of reading are seen as essential. The PISA (Programme of International Student Assessment, OECD, 2001) was an international study of reading literacy in 15-year-olds. The study was designed to gather information to help answer a number of questions:

*Are students well prepared to meet the challenges of the future?
Are they able to analyse, reason and communicate their ideas
effectively? Do they have the capacity to continue learning through
life? (OECD 2001)*

The [PISA] reading literacy assessment was built around a framework for reading that is of major interest because of the breadth of the view of literacy. Three different processes were assessed. 'Retrieving information' was the first process, and is based on ability to locate information in a text. 'Interpreting texts' is based on ability to construct meaning and draw inferences from what has been read. 'Reflecting on and

evaluating texts’ is based on students’ ability to relate what they have read to their knowledge, ideas and experiences. Further richness came from the use of a range of item types to assess the framework categories.

The described proficiency scale for reading literacy provides clear descriptions of what is being measured at five levels, for each of the sub-scales (retrieving information, interpreting, and reflecting/evaluating). At the highest level, Level 5, students can ‘critically evaluate or hypothesise, drawing on specialised knowledge... [deal] with concepts that are contrary to expectations, and draw on deep understanding of long or complex texts’ (see Lokan et al. 2001, p 48).

The three processes identified in the PISA reading framework are seen as essential for making the transition from school to participation in the wider society.

Core discipline concepts

As identified previously, the core concepts of English are *language* and *texts*. Texts include: imaginative literature, film and media texts, and texts reflecting ‘the personal’ in print, electronic, graphic and multimedia forms. The concept of language includes learning to use language, and knowledge about language.

These core concepts represent the special and particular role of English in the affective and values development of students. Again, the issue of generality and specificity is of importance.

Language modes

The language modes of reading, viewing, writing, speaking and listening constitute the core skills of English. (They also comprise the generic communication skills.) The language modes identified in *English CSF II* are speaking, listening, reading and writing. While it is understood from the definition of texts outlined above that reading and, indeed, writing, include visual texts, it could be considered whether a stronger, more explicit, representation of visual and graphic language should be present – especially given the increasing prevalence of multimedia text and notions of multiliteracies. The NSW English Syllabuses for Stages 4–6 (Years 7–12), for example, could be diagrammatically represented as follows:

Table 3 Diagrammatic representation of NSW English Syllabuses for Stages 4–6

	Spoken language	Written language	Graphic language
Producing/Creating mode	SPEAKING	WRITING	REPRESENTING
Receiving/Interpreting/ Analysing/Critiquing mode	LISTENING	READING	VIEWING

This representation gives a much more explicit place to graphic language – and not only to its interpretation (as in viewing film), but to its creation, which in NSW has been tagged ‘representing’.

Diversity of texts

Media and film, as visual texts, have increasingly found a place in the teaching of English since the 1970s. Nevertheless, the general sense of what constitutes a ‘visual text’ has, itself, been broadened beyond traditional media texts and film. Visual texts generated through modern computer technology (video and computer games, CD-ROMs and the Internet) are also highlighted in the development of resources and models for teaching viewing skills (cf. Beavis in Snyder 1997, Beavis 1998, Sefton-Green 2000, Stroupe 2000).

Richard Andrews (2004) argues for the development of understanding of how the visual and verbal relate to each other in contemporary literacy. He offers a model of the interface of the verbal and the visual:

The model is not confined to still images and fixed print: it can be extended to embrace the moving image and also to account for cultural icons. What it tries to do is array the various degrees of visual and verbal to express a relation between them and to allow teachers to locate what they are asking learners to do and why. At the same time, it suggests that in creative and critical terms, addressing the visual as well as the verbal is an important part of education in the language arts. (Andrews, 2004, p. 65)

This argument suggests that study of the interface between the visual and the verbal is an essential of English in contemporary society.

There are arguments for an integrated approach that does not separate visual texts from the teaching of literary texts. A number of recent publications (Cartmell et al. 1996, Campbell 1999) focus on an integrated approach to teaching about texts and textuality that crosses such things as the literature–media divide. An important theoretical dimension in such approaches is the notion of comparative textuality, whereby the meaning-making resources and practices in one form of textuality (for example, the novel) are compared to those of another (for example, film). Comparative textuality should be a key theoretical underpinning to the teaching of a broad range of texts and cultural practices, and how they come to have meaning.

The increased focus on visual literacy amidst our image-oriented culture is a key finding in the research (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996, Stroupe 2000, Hancock & Simpson 1997) and connects to the practice of teaching multiple literacies. Moreover, visual literacy (Hancock & Simpson 1997) is increasingly being seen by literacy educators as a means of connecting to, and building on, students’ existing literacy competencies. The reading and producing of visual texts, in other words, is being seen as a contemporary path to both print literacy and a more fully multimodal literacy.

The research indicates the need for the subject of English to address itself to the techno-literate demands of contemporary society. An important point raised by a number of commentators concerns the ‘technologised’ nature of current literacy practices (Green & Bigum 1996, Snyder 1996, Tweddle et al. 1997, Lankshear, Snyder & Green 2000). Technoliteracy is not simply an ‘add on’ to the activities of the English classroom. Technologised and multimodal literacy should ‘infuse’ the entire teaching and learning of the subject English. Multiliterate practices carry significant cultural capital in the ‘information age’. With equality of access to resources, English can offer a key point of access for all learners to such practices.

Students should be given the opportunity to compose a range of texts using new technologies and to consider the social, economic and political implications of technology use. This can involve not only the use of word-processing and keyboarding skills, but creating websites that deploy a range of modalities (image, text and sound), producing emails, interacting with and establishing virtual communities, researching on the World Wide Web, using databases, experiencing appropriate interactive multimedia programs for the subject English, designing hypertexts, experiencing MUDs (multi user domains), experiencing video conferencing, using digital cameras, and making presentations using presentation and multimedia software.

However, technoliteracy in the English classroom will involve much more than just skills in using new technologies. Students will be able to reflect on the socio-political dimensions of ‘technocultures’. The model of technologised literacy consisting of the ‘three dimensions’ of the ‘operational’, the ‘cultural’ and the ‘critical’ has been developed and considered by a number of commentators (Green & Bigum, 1996; Lankshear, Snyder & Green, 2000). The ‘operational’ involves reading and writing in a range of contexts; the ‘cultural’ pertains to understanding social practices and discourses, and the ‘critical’ involves a recognition that all social practices and literacies are constructed and selective, and can thus be actively transformed.

Another aspect of English that may be essential is *the personal*, as represented in the opportunity to represent and analyse personal experience. This area of experience is not adequately catered for in many areas of the curriculum other than English and remains an important English discipline focus, notwithstanding important critiques of the metaphor of ‘voice’ (Kamler, 2001). English teachers regard the personal aspects of the subject as part of the English teacher’s identity and of the subject’s essence.

Moreover, concern with ‘the personal’ need not exclude more socio-cultural perspectives. Concern with the personal growth of the individual today can enable students to understand how their subjectivity is situated within social and cultural contexts, and constructed through language and text. Accordingly, students are able to deliberately conform to or challenge relations of power and the social processes inherent in textual practices. Contemporary English teaching includes the study of text in terms of ‘how...?’ and ‘can...?’: ‘How does it ask to be read?’ and ‘Can I read it another way?’ English teachers embrace such a ‘critical’ literacy, but work to ensure that it is not developed at the expense of the imaginative and the aesthetic: ‘How am I able to now organise my thinking, and draw on my knowledge of language and textual forms, features and functions to most effectively communicate my message, given the demands of my context, purpose and audience?’ and ‘Can I draw on or imagine other ways of communicating my message?’

English teachers embrace such a rhetorical approach to the subject and recognise that such study of language foregrounds an expanded sense of the personal – explorations of self and identity as they are socially, culturally, historically and politically constituted in and through language and text.

Issues and questions for discussion

- Clarification of a rationale for defining what is essential in English. Does ‘essential’ mean key foundational skills and knowledge – knowledge and skills without which further progress cannot be made? Or does it mean the unique concepts and skills involved in the discipline of English?
- With what degree of specificity or generality should the essentials of English be articulated?
- What are the differences in what is essential at different points in schooling?
- What is essential in relation to the core concept of language? Why?
- What is essential in relation to the core concept of texts? Why?
- To what extent are information and communications technologies essential to English in a knowledge society?

Section 4: Pedagogies

Issues of pedagogy are most relevant to the context in which the ‘essentials’ of English may be taught, but they also have implications for understanding these essentials.

Hattie (2003), on the basis of a review of the literature and a synthesis of over 500,000 studies, identified five major dimensions of ‘expert’ teachers that it is claimed can distinguish them from other ‘experienced’ teachers. Sixteen attributes of expertise, which are outlined in Table 4 (below), are subsumed under these five dimensions. These dimensions are indicative of pedagogies that focus on the ‘deep learning for understanding’ that is one of the goals of the proposed Victorian framework of essential learning.

Table 4 Attributes of teacher expertise

Identifies essential representations of subject

- Deep representations about teaching and learning, resulting in ability to concentrate on instructional significance and adapt lessons to student needs
- Problem-solving approach, focusing on individual students’ performance and a flexible approach to teaching
- Anticipate, plan and improvise, seeking and using feedback
- Decision making, skilful in building on student input while maintaining learning focus.

Guides learning through classroom interactions

- Optimal classroom climate – increased probability of feedback, error is welcomed and engagement the norm
- Multidimensional perspectives on classroom situations – effective classroom scanning
- Sensitivity to context – knowledge of students.

Monitors learning and provide feedback

- Feedback and monitoring learning
- Test hypotheses about learning difficulties
- Automaticity of classroom skills – deal with situational complexity.

Attends to affective attributes

- Respect for students – able to overcome barriers to learning
- Passion for teaching and learning.

Influences student outcomes

- Engage students in learning – motivate
 - Challenging tasks and goals
 - Positive influence on student achievement
 - Enhance surface and deep learning.
-

In the field of English/literacy teaching, an important new Australian study of effective teaching practices that lead to improved learning outcomes for students in the Early years of schooling is pertinent to a consideration of pedagogy in relation to the 'essentials' of English. Through close observation, the study has identified a range of practices used by teachers who have demonstrated their capacity to bring about better than expected learning outcomes for their students. *In Teachers' Hands: Effective Practices in the Early Years of Schooling* (Louden et al. [in press 2004]) will provide a key resource for consideration of literacy pedagogy in the Early years of schooling.

An interest in the pedagogical strategies used in English classrooms can be seen both in current research and in international curriculum documents. In the 20th century there was a general shift away from the 'banking model' of education and towards exploring the implications of 'constructivism' for English teaching practice. Texts are no longer seen as transmitting a single, authoritative meaning and this connects with the constructivist emphasis on the active creation of knowledge by learners. Moore (1997) and Pradl (1996), for example, advocate a pluralistic, dialogic and enriching approach to reading and teaching literature through which teachers enable students to join an ongoing conversation about texts and meanings. Peel & Hargreaves (1995) argue that English teachers should create dialogic classrooms in which different ways of reading – and their implications – are foregrounded and contested. Similarly, Pope (1998) and Williamson and Woodall (1996) claim that dialogic, interactive and interpersonal modes of teaching and learning in English should take precedence over the teacher-led banking model of education.

Such 'constructivist' developments have coincided with the new collaborative cultures generated by emergent technologies (Tweddle 1995, Snyder 1996, Buckingham 1999) that are changing both textual practice and English teaching. Collaborative learning is advocated by most contemporary English curriculum documents and is designed to mirror the team-based problem solving in the contemporary workplace (Gee, Hull & Lankshear 1996). Situating students in technology-rich 'work stations' (Creely, 1995) may possibly be commonplace in the near future (Lankshear, Snyder & Green 2000). This should not result in students working in isolated ways. The collaborative culture is encouraged by the use of new technologies through such things as multi-authored texts (Creely 1995, Snyder 1996, Tweddle et al. 1997, Luke 1997, Buckingham 1999). This is balanced by the importance placed on independent learning and research. Thus, through the networked classroom, emphasis is given to both independent and collaborative learning.

The trend in curriculum documents in Australia and elsewhere is to assume that students are at the centre of the learning process, play an active role in constructing knowledge, have prior knowledge, and should interact with others. Within this general framework, most take an eclectic approach to pedagogy. Approaches generally advocated include a mix of:

- language immersion in a 'language-rich' environment
- the active use of language by students in whole, meaningful, authentic contexts
- observational learning
- discussion in both whole-class and group environments, preferably based on heterogeneous grouping
- collaborative learning

- workshop approaches
- negotiated activities
- modelling and demonstration
- direct instruction and explicit teaching
- guided practice
- peer tutoring
- a multimedia environment for both student use and teacher instruction
- differentiated instruction for different student needs.

There is some emphasis on interdisciplinary approaches to pedagogical practice in English teaching (Kress 1995, Pope 1998) related to such developments as Cultural Studies (Moore 1997) and the impact of new technologies (Luke 1997, Lankshear, Synder & Green 2000). Another interesting development in pedagogical thinking related to English teaching is the increasing validation of the teaching of information management, research and design skills (Kress 1995; Lo Bianco & Freebody 1997). This includes, for example, work on applying inquiry and problem-based learning to the English classroom. (Locke 1999–2000).

Specific techniques and activities developed and advocated by the research on the teaching of English can be categorised under each of the language modes, although, of course, these are integrated in actual practice. For the development of *oracy*, or the language modes of listening and speaking, attention has been given to such things as ‘in-voicing’ (Anderson & Hilton 1997, Otte 1995), or the taking on of other voices in society, and ‘play’ with new voices by, for example, recasting a chat show or courtroom drama (Anderson & Hilton 1997). Greater validation of the explicit study of spoken language is evident in most of the research. For Peim (1993), arguing from a perspective heavily influenced by sociolinguistics, students should have the opportunity to engage in a social analysis of conversational styles (for example, the connection between gender and casual conversation, or the role of pedagogical cultures in establishing classroom oral discourse practices) and explore the link between oral language and cultural and class identity. The ascendancy of the spoken word, along with the visual image, in contemporary culture has been noted by a number of commentators (Kress 1995). The ‘secondary orality’ of electronic communication practices that sit somewhere between spoken and written communication (Green & Bigum 2003) and the oral culture of the media suggest the need to give increased attention to the pedagogy of oracy.

For the development of *written communication skills*, various strategies are proposed. These include:

- context-bound use (Curtis 1993)
- use in ‘authentic’ contexts (Street 1997)
- process approaches to writing (Atwell 1998, Doecke & McClenaghan 2004a)
- rhetorical problem-solving activities (Freedman & Medway 1994, Andrews 1996)
- conscious reflection on language in use (Curtis 1993, Street 1997)

- provision of models and an explicit meta-language about literacy practices (Mercer & Swann 1996, Christie & Misson 1998)
- activities focused on the critical-creative ‘rewritings’ of existing texts (Pope, 1998)
- scaffolded instruction (Christie & Misson, 1998)
- the teaching of technologised literacy
- the use of simulations that develop communication skills (Bambrough, 1994)
- the teaching of multimodal/multimedia textual creation (Kress, 1995).

Strategies for the teaching of *reading* practices explored in the research include:

- wide reading (Atwell 1998, Tucker 2004)
- critical literacy techniques (Morgan 1997, Lankshear et al. 1997, Misson 2004)
- the social contextualisation of language practices (Gilbert 1994, Schirato & Yell 1996)
- Cultural Studies approaches (Fuery & Mansfield 1997, Pope 1998, Peel 2004)
- explicit exploration of the interpretive protocols that are applied in reading contexts (Morgan 1995, Moore 1997)
- imaginative recreation activities that achieve interpretation by recreation (Adams 2004)
- the teaching of reading practices in multimodal (Kress 1995) and hyperlinked electronic (Synder 1996) environments.

For the development of *viewing and representing* competencies, suggested strategies include the critique and creation of televisual, filmic and multimedia images. The critique of the visual image is connected with the teaching of critical literacy techniques (Hancock & Simpson 1997, Stephens 2004) and creation relates to such things as ‘representing back’ activities that can achieve a ‘media activism’ (O’Shaughnessy 1999).

Pedagogic techniques that develop *thinking skills* in the English classroom have also been considered in the research, and a number of international syllabuses already incorporate ‘critical thinking’ into the integrated language modes, as language and thought are intricately connected. Associative thinking is seen as being encouraged by the use of hypertext and new technologies in the classroom (Synder, 1997). Metacognition is increasingly more important in the teaching of English; Cranny-Francis (1994), for example, argues that students in the secondary English classroom need to have access to the skills that enable them to produce readings as well as analysis and criticism of those readings. Such metacognitive awareness about reading practices can be achieved, according to Thomson (2004), through journal writing. The journal is a site in which students can deconstruct their own reading and writing practices, and reflect upon the learning process itself.

The pedagogies of middle schooling

The learning needs that relate to early adolescent developmental needs identified in the research can be uniquely addressed by an English curriculum. In early adolescence, students experience growth towards independence (Cormack, 1991). International curriculum documents stress the importance of independent learning (that is, independent of total teacher input, not ‘independent’ in the sense of neglecting co-operative learning or peer tutoring). One of the key tools that enables independent learning is research skills. In the Reading/Language Arts Framework in California (California Department of Education, 1999), for example, students in the Middle years conduct multiple-step information searches and create texts which give credit to supporting references. It would be useful for teachers to explicitly model the research process for learners and to encourage and reward research effort. Students should be given the opportunity to negotiate aspects of the curriculum and initiate individual research projects. This can not only create self-direction in early adolescent learners, but can also play a key role in developing schooling cultures that produce lifelong learners and ‘knowledge workers’.

Another key learning need identified is a set of curriculum and teaching methodologies focused on learners – their self-esteem, interests and social skills (Hancock & Simpson 1997). This can be achieved in a number of ways through the English curriculum. Doecke & McClenaghan (2004b) claim that a student-centred curriculum in English must affirm the validity of youth culture as a site for debate and interpretation. Hancock and Simpson argue that through the analysis of images in popular culture and the media, students can learn that knowledge, identity and values are constructed and can be critiqued and resisted. Students should be given the opportunity to study cultural representations of young people and debate the commodification of youth culture in contemporary society. The English classroom can be a site in which both the pleasures of youth culture texts are acknowledged and the socio-political and commercial dimensions of youth culture texts are analysed and critiqued.

Another means of focusing the curriculum on learners is to embrace the technologised and multimodal nature of contemporary literacy practice. As students live in an image-oriented culture and technology-rich society, such an emphasis connects to their ‘real-world’ experiences. According to Hancock and Simpson, early adolescent learners need a relevant, practical and inclusive curriculum that applies learning to real life. As stated, the English curriculum should thus embrace the teaching of contemporary multiliteracies so as to connect with the life aspirations of students and provide ‘authentic’ contexts for learning in the digital age.

One can extract from this mix quite specific practices to advocate for Middle years/ Junior secondary teaching. Among these are:

- positioning students as both independent and collaborative learners; giving students the opportunity to show independence and initiative and to work with others in self-managing teams
- encouraging students to reflect critically on the language processes and strategies they use
- having students use new technologies extensively
- having students research and solve problems.

Issues and questions for discussion

What do we mean by ‘deep understanding?’ Bransford, Brown & Cocking (2000) argue that really effective teachers develop a set of strategies rooted in their pedagogical content knowledge, and that ultimately this in turn issues from the discipline itself – not its content, but how knowledge is structured in the discipline.

This suggests that deep understanding has its roots at least as much in discipline-based – rather than generic – approaches to curriculum.

Section 5: Development and Achievement in English

Issues relating to the nature of development and achievement in English will influence the eventual development of performance standards to measure achievement in the key discipline concepts and skills. The *VCAA 2004 Consultation Paper* indicates that the performance standards will be set at ‘a challenging level, not minimum competence’. An important purpose of performance standards in a framework of essential learning could be to provide teachers with valid information about their students’ development and achievement that will enable them to plan teaching and learning activities to support students’ future learning.

The development of performance standards for English will require attention to the nature of development and achievement in English. An exploration of the professional literature provides a number of useful insights.

English CSF II constitutes a progress map in English, showing typical progression in the learning area over the years of schooling. While curriculum frameworks throughout the world almost always include statements of levels of achievement, it is not always clear on what holistic basis the levels are based. Work samples provide examples of attainment with annotated descriptors, but the continuum itself and the elements that form the continuum are not always presented in overview.

One of the most important theoretical discussions of development in English remains James Moffett’s 1968 classic, *Teaching the universe of discourse*. Moffett argues that all discourse can be essentially reduced to three elements: a speaker, a listener and subject, which he formulates in traditional grammatical terms as ‘a first person, a second person and a third person’. Hence, all discourse consists of ‘I-You-It’ relationships. Moffett’s thesis led to the argument that development of discourse occurred along certain central lines, most importantly:

- a) increasing distance between audience and speaker (the ‘I-You’ continuum). The key stages here are called:
 - *Reflection* – intrapersonal communication
 - *Conversation* – interpersonal communication between two people in vocal range
 - *Correspondence* – interpersonal communication between remote individuals or small groups with some personal knowledge of each other
 - *Publication* – interpersonal communication to a large anonymous group extended over space/time.

Each stage is more selective, composed and public than the one preceding, and at each stage feedback is increasingly slower, until it disappears altogether.

- b) increasing distance between speaker/writer and subject, that is, increasing abstraction of subject matter (the ‘I-It’ continuum). The key stages here are represented in the following table:

Table 5 Stages in the 'I-It' continuum

<i>What is happening</i>	Drama	Recording
<i>What happened</i>	Narrative	Reporting
<i>What happens</i>	Exposition	Generalising
<i>What may happen</i>	Logical argument	Theorising

The first column represents what Moffett saw as paradigmatic verbal forms in which particular abstractions (the third column) occur. The second column represents the traditional discourse categories of schooling represented by those levels of abstraction. It can be seen that Moffett is able to 'fit' traditional school genres to particular points on the abstractive hierarchy. Moreover, each degree of abstraction in the continuum is represented by a corresponding characteristic verbal form. According to Moffett, one of these stages cannot take place until after the previous one, and 'outer events' are increasingly replaced by 'inner events'.

Moffett discusses the research on the relationship between knowledge of grammar and improvement of writing, arguing that the debate is ultimately a question about how to achieve access to standard dialects and about how to develop linguistic elaboration in students. The former is a social question that entails class-based and racial de-segregation of schools; the latter is largely a matter of cognitive development, since, orally, most children master most grammatical transformations prior to schooling. As far as written grammar is concerned, experiencing the spectrum of discourse is most likely to develop grammatical elaboration, though Moffett does suggest certain 'cognitive tasks' as alternatives to grammar teaching that are likely to aid syntactic maturity.

Moffett's work was self-consciously based on moving 'English' from 'grammar' to 'rhetoric'. He discusses the structure of discourse which underlies his curriculum as specifically and consciously a question of rhetoric.

Another very important text on development in English – this time based on extensive empirical research – is the Crediton project from the late 1970s. This research (Wilkinson et al. 1980) remains one of the most extensive mappings of language development that has ever been carried out. It covers the age range from seven to thirteen years. Based on four writing tasks Wilkinson and his team mapped written language development in four areas: stylistic, cognitive, affective and moral. The last of these has been somewhat controversial, but the resulting sets of developmental guides are extremely detailed and remain today important guides to written language development.

To take just one example, the cognitive model traces language development along the following continuum (each succeeding line in both columns represents a developmental progression):

Table 6 Cognitive model

DESCRIBING	
	labelling
	naming
	partial information
	recording
	reporting
INTERPRETING	
	explaining
	inferring
	deducing
GENERALISING	
	abstracting
	summarising
	overall evaluation
	concluding
	reflecting
	classifying
SPECULATING	
	irrelevant hypothesis
	relevant but inadequate hypothesis
	adequate hypothesis
	exploring
	projecting
	theorising

It can be readily seen how useful the cognitive model alone is in terms of connecting development of English with the generic thinking skills listed in the *Victorian Curriculum Reform 2004 Consultation Paper*.

Throughout the early 1980s Dixon, Stratta and Farmer produced a very worthwhile series of ‘staging points’ for development in a range of genres, based on empirical research on student writing, mostly at 16+ (Dixon & Stratta nd, 1982 and 1983, Farmer & Dixon 1985). Again, to take just one example – that of narratives based on personal experience at 16+ – Dixon & Stratta (nd) find a development from:

- an oral model (marked by a reliance on simple clauses, elementary conjunctions, central verbs, minimum commentary) to

- a transitional phase (paragraphing, forward and backward-looking, commentary, speech) to
- an early literary model (simple and complex sentences, deliberate choices about conjunctions for effect, variation on verbs, developing dialogue as an indication of character) to
- a mature literary model (increasing complexity from previous).

Thomson (1987) has produced one of the few developmental models of reading and reading response based on empirical research. His model argues for reading development along a continuum from unreflective interest in action > empathising with characters > analogising > reflecting on the significance of events and behaviour > reviewing the whole work as the author's creation > consciously considered relationship with the text, recognition of textual ideology, and understanding of self and one's own reading processes.

McGregor and Meiers (1991) have produced a comprehensively detailed set of 'signs of achievement' across the language modes of talking and listening, reading and writing. These, again, are based in detail on specific contexts and specific tasks, though staging points, as such, are not included.

The New Standards for English Language Arts (New York City, First edition, 1997) provides an example of very specific performance standards. A broad description of each standard is followed by performance descriptions illustrated through examples of the work students might do to demonstrate their achievement.

Reading is a process which includes demonstrating comprehension and showing evidence of a warranted and responsible interpretation of the text. 'Comprehension' means getting the gist of a text. It is most frequently illustrated by demonstrating an understanding of the text as a whole; identifying complexities presented in the structure of the text; and extracting salient information from the text. In providing evidence of a responsible interpretation, students may make connections between parts of a text, among several texts, and between texts and other experiences; make extensions and applications of a text; and examine texts critically and evaluatively.

- E 1a Read twenty-five books of the quality and complexity illustrated in the sample reading list.
- E 1b Read and comprehend at least four books on the same subject, or by the same author, or in the same genre.
- E 1c Read and comprehend informational materials.
- E 1d Read aloud fluently.

This example prompts consideration of the degree of specificity required in performance standards in a framework of essential learning.

Issues and questions for discussion

- In what ways can the nature of growth and achievement in English be represented in a framework of the essentials of English?
- How specific should the English performance standards be?

Section 6: English and Generic Skills, Values and Attributes

English has a significant contribution to make to the development of cross-curricular generic skills, values and attributes outlined in the *Victorian Curriculum Reform 2004 Consultation Paper*. The development of effective communication skills are essential learning within English. Students develop a range of cognitive and meta-cognitive skills in English: information processing, creative thinking, reasoning, and problem solving. English provides many opportunities for students to develop moral and spiritual attributes, cultural understanding, and civic understanding.

The texts students encounter in English provide many contexts for the development of these generic skills, values and attributes in ways that are distinct from the ways these may be developed in other disciplines. Likewise, the ways in which core concepts about the use of language and knowledge about language are enacted in the English curriculum will make a particular contribution to the generic skills, values and attributes.

The nexus between the generic communication skills and English poses a particular issue for English. The *Victorian Curriculum Reform 2004 Consultation Paper* outlines a set of communication skills that underpin all learning: *reading, writing, speaking and listening, visual and graphic representation, mathematical representation, ICT, and non-verbal; and physical forms of communication*. (p. 8). However, the core skills within the discipline of English suggested on page 6 (*reading, writing, speaking and listening*) are included within the above set of generic communication skills. For English, this raises the question of how to deal with skills that are both core and generic.

One possibility is that all of the communication skills be dealt with as a strong, central focus through either inter-disciplinary or trans-disciplinary tasks in the Early and Middle years of schooling, or through inter-disciplinary or trans-disciplinary subject areas. This leaves the specific subject-based skills to be given emphasis in later years. However, it has been suggested that a cross-disciplinary task focus can run strongly against the desired ‘deep learning for understanding’, and current research into effective schooling emphasises the importance of the deep understanding arising from traditional discipline structures, especially discipline pedagogy (Byrne 1983, Darling-Hammond 2000, Bransford, Brown & Cocking 2000). In this respect, the *Victorian Curriculum Reform 2004 Consultation Paper* already differs significantly from, say, the Tasmanian model of *Essential Learnings* (Department of Education, Tasmania 2002) in giving the key learning areas a fundamental place in the *Framework* – a position more consistent with the *Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling* (MCEETYA 1999).

A more feasible possibility is that the core concepts of *language* and *texts* will shape the way in which the core skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening are framed in English, in ways that are unique to English. These communication skills will also be developed, in other significant ways, through the attention given to the curriculum literacies of the other key learning areas.

As discussed in Section 1, English has a special and particular role in the affective and values development of students. English is defined – more so than any other school subject – by the values it tries to create. Historically, English has been about the

shaping of the 'self'. This has meant the promotion of humane values, the enrichment of the imaginative life and the development of aesthetic sensibility through engagement with literary texts. It has also meant a concern with the personal growth of the individual. The idea of ethics and of personal development as having a central place in English positions the subject as itself having a special role in the generic 'social and cultural skills, values and attributes' area mandated in the *Victorian Curriculum Reform 2004 Consultation Paper*. Almost all of the projected generic 'Social and cultural skills, values and attributes' already have a place in the 'Rationale' and 'Goals' of English in *English CSF II*.

Issues and questions for discussion

- How might the broad contribution that English makes to the development of generic skills, values and attributes be mapped?
- What are the relationships between the core discipline concepts of English and the generic cross-curriculum skills (for example, communication)?
- Which of the generic skills of communication are 'essential' in English? What aspects of communication are particular to English? What are the differences between what is essential in English and generic skills?
- In what ways do the core concepts of language and texts provide the context for the development of core skills in English relating to reading and writing, speaking and listening?

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