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Comparative study of Literature in English curricula across jurisdictions

Dr Bethan Marshall

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Introduction

This study looks at how the subject of English is conceptualised in eight different English-speaking jurisdictions: Australia – New South Wales and Victoria; Canada – Ontario; United Kingdom – England, Scotland and Wales; New Zealand; and the United States. It looks at how the curriculum is organised and what is included, whether it is mandatory, and how it is assessed. The discussion of each jurisdiction is brief and looks predominantly at the literature part of the curriculum. Where a prescribed list of texts is produced we examine the criteria and processes for the production of those lists, where available. We consider, too, the type of literature that is considered. This research asks to what extent issues such as diversity and post colonialism are considered by governments or local government agencies in the process of creating text lists (where they exist) and to a lesser extent (due to lack of data) by teachers in selecting which texts to explore in class.

Questions relating to how inclusive the school curriculum is are not new, nor are debates about the novels, plays and films students should read/experience in class. However, the Black Lives Matter movement heightened awareness of the need for post-colonial perspectives in schools, and broader so-called 'culture wars' have once again brought these questions to prominence. Although Toni Morrison died before the Black Lives Matter campaign her work exudes the issue both in her own writing and when discussing, in her case, American literature. She argues that, 'The readers of virtually all American fiction have been positioned as white. I am interested in what that assumption has meant to the literary imagination' (Morrison, 1992: xii).

Later she writes,

The entire history of the [African] culture has had no significant place or consequence in the origin and development of that culture's literature ... such knowledge, assumes that the characteristics of our national literature emanate from a particular 'Americanness' that is separate from and unaccountable to this presence (ibid.:5).

The assumption, made by white critics, that literary 'genius' was white was,

One of the most furtively radical impinging forces on the country's literature. The contemplation of this black presence is central to any understanding of our national literature and should not be permitted to hover at the margins of the literary imagination (ibid.: 5)

Thus, it is past time to ask to what extent issues such as diversity and post colonialism are considered in the generation of and selection from text lists for students to explore in school.

Executive Summary

NAME AND FOCUS

The English curriculum has many guises and different names, such as English Language, English Literature, though all of them have English in the title except the States (Language Arts). Some include literacy including Scotland and Victoria, Australia.

ASSESSMENT

All jurisdictions in this study have examination systems that allow for coursework except England and potentially the US. Canada is 100% coursework and New Zealand has the potential for 100% coursework. Australia is 50% coursework and Scotland have just under a third. Wales is under review. There is some evidence that a rigid examination system (where prescribed texts are externally examined rather than as part of locally examined coursework) restricts the number of texts studied and lends teachers less autonomy in the selection of texts for their students.

RANGE OF TEXTS

All ask students to study some kind of digital or media text apart from England. All countries state that you should study your own country's literature. England, New South Wales and Victoria list authors for study at examination. England, and at present the Welsh, make it mandatory to study a Shakespeare text at 16, as do New South Wales at 18.

SELECTION OF TEXTS

Three jurisdictions give lists of texts to be studied (as well as Wales for the present) England, New South Wales and Victoria. Only Victoria gives a rationale for the texts selected. (https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/vce/Principles_Guidelines_Texts.pdf). Evidence suggests, however, that despite the often wide range of texts offered, a narrow selection and they tend to be by British authors (see page XX). England just looks to the specifications of

the national curriculum and again evidence suggests that the majority of texts chosen are by dead white men. Only 6% of pre-twentieth century texts chosen are by women and 1% of writers after 1914. Only 0.7% texts chosen are by people of colour (see Elliott et al. 2021) . The US has lists of texts to be studied if schools decide to follow what is known as the Hirsch curriculum. Again, texts by dead white men predominate.

DIVERSITY OF TEXTS

Jurisdictions in Australia, Canada and New Zealand include first nation authors in their curricular aims and, in Australia, within their exam syllabi, so students have to encounter some texts by first nation authors. Despite this, diversity is not often achieved. Canada does seem, however, to be making headway in promoting first nation literature. In Great Britain, organisations such as the National Association of the Teaching of English (NATE) and the English and Media Centre, promote the decolonising of the curriculum as well as ethnically diverse writers and again some are evident in the English exam syllabi. Penguin and the Runnymede trust have also recently published a report entitled *Diversity in Literature in English Schools* (Elliott et al. 2021). The National Council of Teachers of English, in the US, also who encourage teachers to diversify, particularly in the light of Black Lives Matter.

English curricula by jurisdiction

This desktop study looked at the role of the English curriculum in a selection of English-speaking countries: Australia (New South Wales, Victoria); Canada (Ontario); United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales); New Zealand; The United States of America. In each jurisdiction English is taught and assessed differently. In most, some form of literacy is mandatory and the role of literature varies. In some jurisdictions where a second language is spoken, particularly in a post-colonial context, mandatory requirements vary and the importance of national literature is emphasized. Where there is a prescribed list of texts, the composition of that list is outlined and, in one of the jurisdictions examined is the rationale or process for selection provided.

Australia

English is mandatory for students up to 18 but each state has a different final examination so the curriculum goes from Foundation to year 10 and then has an additional section for senior years 11 and 12. All states have to follow the curriculum in that the demands of the Australian curriculum overarch the state requirement. Each state, however, interprets the national curriculum slightly differently. So South Australia, for example, takes on the Australian national curriculum as is, with no changes. New South Wales has its own curriculum, into which the national one is subsumed, and Victoria makes additions to the national curriculum, as we shall see. The Australian English national curriculum has three areas or strands: language, literature and literacy.

If we look at the study of literature, we find that:

Texts provide the means for communication. They can be written, spoken, visual, multimodal, and in print or digital/online forms. Multimodal texts combine language with other means of communication such as visual images, soundtrack or spoken words, as in film or computer presentation media (ACARA, 2021).

So 'Across the years of schooling, students will engage with literary texts in spoken, written and multimodal form, including digital texts, such as narratives, poetry, prose, plays and films' (ibid). Moreover, the texts,

Recognised as having enduring artistic and cultural value are drawn from world and Australian literature. These include the oral narrative traditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, texts from Asia, texts from Australia's immigrant cultures and texts of the students' choice (ibid).

Within these strands are threads such as literature in context, responding to literature, examining literature and creating literature. Each of these strands and threads 'are integrated ... to learners'(ibid). It adds that, 'Teachers and schools are best placed to make decisions about the selection of texts in their teaching and learning programs to address the content in the Australian Curriculum: English while also meeting the needs of the students in their classes' (ibid).

Work by Davies and others (see for example, Doecke et al 2011; Davies, 2012; Gelder, 2013; McLean et al, 2017; Yates et al, 2019 and Davies et al., 2020) has shown that the uptake of Australian literature is problematic: 'The socio-political history of the country has resulted in continuing uncertainty about the substance and status of 'Australian' literature (Yates, L et al, 2019). Often students are just given poetry or anthologies of writers rather than lengthier texts (see for example *Growing up Aboriginal in Australia* (2019) or *Growing up Asian in Australia* (2015).

ASSESSMENT

Assessment in English is completed in the final year of schooling by the separate states, however, students are tested every two years through the National Assessment Programme Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). Although NAPLAN writes that the, 'Tests are one aspect of each school's assessment and reporting process, and do not replace the extensive, ongoing assessments made by teachers about each student's performance' (NAPLAN, 2021), English departments take the brunt of the assessment process and it can alter the curriculum. They

test 'reading, writing and language conventions (spelling, grammar and punctuation)' as well as numeracy. Their focus is very much on literacy skills. Klenowski and Wyatt-Smith (2012) and Wyatt-Smith and Jackson (2016) write about the detrimental effect of the high stakes testing on the English curriculum in schools. Others have written about the effect on teachers (see for example Thompson and Harbaugh, 2013; Thompson, 2013; Polesel, et al, 2014,; Thompson and Cook, 2014). Carter et al (2018) have written more recently surveying how teachers view the tests, most of it negative, with an emphasis on literacy skills and teaching to the test. There are also books and articles which explore the impact of NAPLAN on student wellbeing (Rice et al, 2015; Rogers et al, 2016).

New South Wales

The English curriculum in New South Wales is called a syllabus in the Education Standards Authority and contains the national curriculum within it. So, 'Australian curriculum content descriptions included in the syllabus are identified by an Australian curriculum code which appears in brackets at the end of each content description' (NESA, 2012: 8). The overall aim, 'Is to enable students to understand and use language effectively, appreciate, reflect on and enjoy the English language and to make meaning in ways that are imaginative, creative, interpretive, critical and powerful' (ibid.: 11). At the heart of the curriculum is 'making meaning through language' (ibid.: 20).

At stage 4 (12-14) students have to study examples of, spoken; print; visual media; multimedia and digital texts. This includes 'A widely defined Australian literature, including texts that give insights into Aboriginal experiences in Australia' (ibid.: 23), 'A wide range of literary texts from other countries and times, including poetry, drama scripts, prose fiction and picture books' as well as 'texts written about intercultural experiences' and 'texts that provide insights about the peoples and cultures of Asia' (ibid.: 23).

When students are in stage 5 (15-16) they also have to study Shakespeare, who is the only named author. By stage 6 (17-18) they take the Higher School Certificate (HSC) where the majority take either standard or advanced levels. For standard English there are key cross curricula priorities including: 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures; Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia; Sustainability' (ibid.: 9). Again, they are required to, 'Engage with and explore texts that include widely acknowledged quality literature of past and contemporary societies and engage with the literature and literary heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' (ibid.: 10). There is also an advanced English in which students again have to study Shakespeare along with prose and poetry or drama.

ASSESSMENT

The HSC is 50% examination and 50% school-based coursework. The coursework is moderated by groups of schools together. Significantly, if the coursework is graded higher than the examination it is the coursework that moderates the exam result.

SELECTION OF TEXTS

In a document called *English Prescription 2019-23* (NESA: 2017), they list the texts that schools can choose from. For example, in the Texts and Human Experience they can choose one of the following Doerr's *All the Light We Cannot See* (2015), Lohrey's *Black Inc* (2009), Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (2004 version), and Parrett's *Past the Shallows* (2013). What is interesting about the list is that although three of these are written by Australian writers the most popular is *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Under close study of literature, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* by Mark Haddon (2014), also an English writer, is popular. On the Advanced papers, again, the choices are often of canonical texts so under critical study of literature you can study Austen's *Emma* (1815/2000) or Dickens *Great Expectations*. (1861/1992). Under Poetry or Drama you can study texts such as *Under Milk Wood* (Thomas, 2014). For an Australian curriculum many of these texts have a very British, not to say colonial feel, and yet are often chosen to be studied.

Of course there are Australian texts and these do have to be studied but the majority of plays, poems and novels studied are British. Even the films *Looking for Richard* (1996), *The Hours* (2002) and *Bright Star*, (2009) that are on the list, in the section Textual Conversations are ones with canonical authors – Shakespeare, Woolf and Keats. Two of the others have British writers in Donne and Hughes. The thrust is canonical British texts. Larissa McLean-Davies has written frequently on the subject. In an abstract of a paper she writes, alongside Truman and Buzacott, (McLean- Davies et al., 2020) that the literature is 'tethered to its lineage', often British canonical writers. They cite a speech given by Beneba Clarke for the Miles Franklin award. In it, Clarke urges publishers to, 'Take more risks when considering children's books' asserting 'it is the right of every child to see themselves in story' (Alcorn, 2016, cited in McLean et al., 2020).

In NSW, there is a text list for Year 12 (final year) called 'Prescriptions'. This list contains a range of text choices in each of the Modules in the HSC course. The large number of texts in the list gives the appearance of a lot of choice. This is often not the case, however, because teachers must select a mandated number of types of texts (e.g. prose fiction, drama, non-fiction, media etc.). So, for example, if you select prose fiction in one Module, you cannot select prose fiction in another Module. The Standard course requires the selection of 3 texts; the Advanced course requires the selection of 4 texts, and one of these must be a Shakespeare play.

The process of developing the Prescriptions list (which remains current for an average period of 3-5 years) is a very closely-guarded one. It is one that occurs behind closed doors, confidentially, and is led by a committee made up of hand-picked members (there is no advertising of positions for this committee). The regulatory authority (NESA) establishes a committee, often chaired by a member of the NESA Board. The committee is made up of around 6 people – teachers, academics, other stakeholders such as Special Ed reps. In recent years, this committee has been reduced. In past years, the committee would typically include about 12 people. The committee decides on the texts on the list and there does not appear to be any consultation with the wider teaching profession in the development of the list. There is no publicly available information on who is on the committee and there is no opportunity for any feedback. The Prescriptions document is approved by the NESA Board and then released to teachers.

The committee has a set of criteria for the selection of the texts. These criteria include literary merit, enduring significance, relevance for the cohorts, and accessibility (in terms of how easy it is for schools to access the texts without an undue additional financial burden). To address this issue of financial burden, the requirement is that there can only be 15% of the text list that is 'new'. 'New' is defined as a text that has not been on any previous list. The 15% rule doesn't apply to film or media, since these types of texts are usually more readily accessible, and do not involve additional cost to schools or students.

Victoria

The curriculum in Victoria 'F-10 incorporates and reflects much of the Australian Curriculum F-10, but differs in some important respects, most notably the representation of the curriculum as a continuum of learning and the structural design' (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, VCAA).

In English it is organised into 'language modes and strands' (ibid.) So under language modes it adds 'reading and reviewing, writing, speaking and listening' and 'Within each language mode, the content descriptions are grouped into strands and sub-strands' language, literature and literacy.'

In the Language strand, students develop their knowledge of the English language and how it works.

The Literature strand engages students in the study of literary texts of personal, cultural, social and aesthetic value.

The Literacy strand aims to develop students' ability to interpret and create texts with appropriateness, accuracy, confidence, fluency and efficacy for learning in and out of school, and for participating in Australian life more generally (ibid).

These are divided again into sub-strands, which are similar to each other but not identical. The literature strand, for example, has 'literature in context' and 'creating literature' whereas in the literacy strand they have 'texts in context' and 'creating texts'. The literacy strand has references to the visual in a way that the literature strand does not. So under 'interpreting, analysing, evaluating' in the literacy strand it writes, 'Students learn to comprehend what they read and view'; the only mention of something similar in literature, under 'creating literature' is 'Using print, digital and online media, students develop skills that allow them to convey meaning, address significant issues and heighten engagement and impact' (ibid.).

Research shows that there is a dearth of Australian, indigenous and Asian writers studied. In the year 12 exams the vast majority take the English exam, only around 5% take the one entitled literature. Bliss and Baclja (2020), for example, found that ‘the lists [of recommended authors] show significant shortfalls in meeting objectives for Asia-literacy, literature by Indigenous Australians and diversity in text type’(ibid.:1). They looked at the set lists of the Victorian English exam between 2010 and 2019. Apart from the dominance of texts set in Europe, their, ‘Findings showed that there was a distinct lack of Indigenous-authored novels and directors on text lists ... Of the 360 texts in our sample, only 3.6%, or 13 texts, contained an Australian Indigenous protagonist (ibid.:15)’. In addition, they ‘Found, that 58% of all texts set in Australia explored themes of colonisation and Indigeneity’ (ibid.:17). Yet they also saw that, ‘The gap between the high presence of themes about Indigeneity in Australian texts and low representation of Indigenous authors and Indigenous protagonists can be linked to arguments about the ‘colonial world view’ (ibid.:17). They add, ‘This is especially the case where texts, authored by non-Indigenous Australians, contain tokenistic Indigenous characters, or ‘symbolic’ figures that play little active role in the narrative’. (ibid.:17).

Moreover, when texts did represent indigenous characters,

The vast majority of texts explore relevant themes from a non-Indigenous character’s perspective and are the work of non-Indigenous creators. As expressed by Leanne: “I am not suggesting that this work and others like it be scrapped – they are important texts that reveal synchronic slices of settler consciousness of and about Aboriginal people at any given time. But I am challenging the notion that these are Aboriginal stories. They are not” (Leanne, J. 2016, p. 42)(ibid.:18)

They conclude,

Contradictions between VCAA’s adherence to principles of inclusivity and for the need for diverse points of view in relation to cultural and political issues, with the hegemonic reality of the curriculum are brought to light here. We argue that the mere presence of themes about colonisation and Indigeneity is not enough, especially given the

documented history of the objectification of Indigenous peoples by non-Indigenous Australians, from a literary point of view, from the late 18th century onward until present day (Moreton-Robinson, 2004; Nakata, 1995)(ibid.:18).

ASSESSMENT

Students take either English, English Literature or English Language exam, though approximately only 5000 take the literature and 5000 the language exam as opposed to the 55,000 who take English. Both the English and Literature exams have, as we have seen, set book lists from which schools select. 50% is exam based and 50% is course based. Significantly it is the external exam that informs or acts as a moderator of the coursework. Teachers have to rank order the students in their class through coursework. If they do differently in the exam, and the rank order is affected, it will moderate their coursework position. In addition to the class/school rank order all students achieve an Australian Tertiary Entrance Rank Literature which is an amalgamation of all the subjects taken. Each subject is marked out of 50, some subjects gaining bonus points based around their popularity at university. Subjects such as chemistry have 15 bonus points added whereas literature gains two and English stays the same.

SELECTION OF TEXTS

In Victoria Text Lists are decided by a Text Advisory panel. This Panel is Chaired by the English Curriculum Manager for English and consists of about 8 - 10 teachers from a range of school settings and typically one academic. Teachers apply to be on the Panel. Ultimately, approval of the Panel's decision is given by the Curriculum Board – they have rejected choices in the past, if they are considered too controversial. There is often debate in the media about text choices and merit, and the Curriculum Authority attempts to avoid this through the publication of their principles and guidelines document. Here is the link to the relevant Victorian Government Policy:

https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/vce/Principles_Guidelines_Texts.pdf

Canada: Ontario

The Ontario curriculum for English, which is mandatory until 18, has four strands, which are compulsory – Oral communication; Reading and literature studies; Writing; Media studies. It is a substantial document of 221 pages. This may be in part because it includes how students are to be assessed as well as what is in the curriculum in a section called ‘Assessment and evaluation of student achievement’ (MofE, 2007: 21). There are no separate, external exam syllabi, for the way in which a student succeeds is entirely based entirely on the school and teacher’s evaluation. The only mandatory requirement is that they study a Canadian text. So, in addition to the overview of the curriculum, starting on page forty, the courses, both compulsory and optional, are set forth and this takes up the vast majority of the rest of the document. But it is not only that. The curriculum from pages one to forty, suggests a way of approaching English and this needs explanation and illustration.

The document begins with a quotation from UNESCO,

Literacy is about more than reading or writing – it is about how we communicate in society. It is about social practices and relationships, about knowledge, language and culture. Those who use literacy take it for granted – but those who cannot use it are excluded from much communication in today’s world. Indeed, it is the excluded who can best appreciate the notion of “literacy as freedom”. (UNESCO, Statement for the United Nations Literacy Decade, 2003–2012)

The quote situates the English curriculum within a discourse of critical literacy with notions of “literacy as freedom” and links the underlying approach of the curriculum to writers such as Giroux and Friere. Specific reference is made to critical literacy later in the document. So, for example, in the section entitled ‘Anti-discrimination education’ they write,

The development of critical thinking skills is integral to the English curriculum. In the context of what is now called “critical literacy”, these skills include the ability to identify

perspectives, values, and issues; detect bias; and read for implicit as well as overt meaning. In the English program, students develop the ability to detect negative bias and stereotypes in literary texts and informational materials (ibid.:35).

And add

Critical literacy also involves asking questions and challenging the status quo and leads students to look at issues of power and justice in society. The program empowers students by enabling them to express themselves and to speak out about issues that strongly affect them (ibid.:35).

At the same time the English curriculum, rather than a literacy only curriculum, offers a 'personal growth' model of English and this predominates (Dixon, 1967, Gibbons 2017). In the section entitled 'Principles underlying the English curriculum' it states, for example,

The English curriculum focuses on developing the depth and level of sophistication of students' knowledge and skills associated with each of these key overall expectations by increasing the complexity of the texts they work with and the tasks they perform over time (ibid.:13-14).

And again,

Frequent exposure to good writing will inspire students to work towards high standards in their own writing and will help them develop an appreciation for the power and beauty of the written word.

The study of literature is central in the secondary English curriculum; it offers students opportunities to expand their intellectual horizons and to extend and strengthen their literacy skills. As a creative representation of life and experience, literature raises important questions about the human condition, now and in the past. As students increase their knowledge of accomplished writers and literary works, and vicariously experience times, events, cultures, and values different from their own, they deepen

their understanding of the many dimensions of human thought and human experience.
(ibid.:16)

There is no official guidance as to what consists of ‘accomplished writers and literary works.’ Key is the fact that literature is ‘a creative representation of life and experience, [and so] literature raises important questions about the human condition, now and in the past.’ Through encountering ‘accomplished’ writers they will ‘deepen their understanding of the many dimensions of human thought and human experience’. Moreover, everything is student-centred. They will be ‘inspired’, ‘increase knowledge’, ‘experience’, ‘deepen understanding’. All imply or look to growth through ‘an appreciation of the power and beauty of the written word.’

This means a degree of autonomy for the learner. So for example it states, ‘Research has shown that when students are given opportunities to choose what they read and what they write about, they are more likely to discover and pursue their own interests’ (ibid.5) and ‘That the curriculum requires that students select some of the texts they read and decide on the topic, purpose, and audience for some of the works they produce’ (ibid.:5). But this goes hand in hand with teachers supporting them so that, ‘By identifying and explicitly teaching these skills and strategies, teachers enable all students to become effective communicators’ (ibid.:5). The overarching aim is again that of personal growth.

In implementing this curriculum, teachers will help students to see that language skills are lifelong learning skills that will enable them to better understand themselves and others, unlock their potential as human beings, find fulfilling careers, and become responsible world citizen (ibid.:5).

The aim, or ‘underlying’ ‘principles’, speak also to critical literacy in that students should become a ‘responsible world citizen’ and, too, to progressive thinkers such as Dewey, whose seminal book *Democracy in Education* (1916/2004) talks extensively of experience in education and again starts with the student. This sets the Ontario curriculum against the ‘knowledge rich’ proponents such as Young, who actively opposes the, ‘Progressive, learner-

centred tradition [which] can be traced back to Rousseau and took its most sophisticated form in writings of those influenced by Dewey' (Young, 2013,:102). Young goes on to say that 'The curriculum must start not from the student as learner but from a student's entitlement or access to knowledge' (ibid.:103). For him it must be all be about 'A question of knowledge' (ibid.:103), which is given to or transmitted to the student. Yet it is not that the Ontario curriculum is without knowledge, as we have seen, but it is one that is progressive, starting with the students, 'The English curriculum focuses on developing the depth and level of sophistication of students' knowledge and skills' (MofE, 207:13). And again,

In the core English curriculum (the compulsory courses offered in every grade), the overall expectations outline standard sets of knowledge and skills required for effective listening and speaking, reading, writing, and viewing and representing (ibid.:13).

Knowledge is then integral to the curriculum but unlike Young, the student is central. So

The English curriculum focuses on developing the depth and level of sophistication of students' knowledge and skills associated with each of these key overall expectations by increasing the complexity of the texts they work with and the tasks they perform over time (ibid.:13-14).

ASSESSMENT

All students do take one externally examined test in literacy at the age of fifteen (Ontario Secondary School Literacy test) but teachers do not view this as anything to do with English and see it as 'cross curricular'. 'It's about literacy not about English or literature' (Helen) (Marshall and Gibbons, 2018: 211).

Other than the literacy test, all students are assessed using course-based assessment which is marked by their class teachers and occasionally, but not mandatedly, moderated within schools. There are problems with this in that it is difficult to know whether one school or even one teacher assesses in the same way as another. For that reason, the International

Baccalaureate is becoming increasingly popular as it is 'instilling confidence in [university] admission officers' (Fitzgerald 2015, :21). Unlike the Ontario system of in-school, course-based assessment, there is also "the rigour of the programme" (ibid.:15). There is coursework for the assessment of the IB, but this is externally, as well as internally, moderated.

Nevertheless teacher-based assessment is still the norm and this can allow for formative as well as summative assessment to take place even while completing a final assessment. When researching English teaching in Ontario, one teacher, completing a culminating task (a summative assessment) used AfL while the students were completing the task, an oral presentation. She asked questions of the student presenting which were cumulative and helped his performance as well as others following (Marshall and Gibbons, 2018).

It also lends the teachers agency in their teaching. One teacher in the study said, 'Luckily I mean we don't have standardised tests' (Wanda). The teacher goes on to say,

Some classes don't even do a novel study like a whole class novel study, they do something more like reading circles or book groups so that students have more choice. So they might get a list of eight titles and they select one of those to be their novel study and then there's three other people in the room reading the same book. And so that can be what the novel study looks like (Wanda) (ibid.:211).

SELECTION OF TEXTS

The lack of prescribed texts lends the teachers a far greater autonomy, although the vast majority of schools study renaissance texts which includes Shakespeare. The only prescription is Canadian literature. The inclusion of Canadian authors has allowed greater diversity of texts. Although there is no official guidance on texts chosen, the number of schools studying first nation writers has increased. Two of the schools in the study carried out by Marshall and Gibbons (2018) had taught *Fifth Business* by Robson Davies (2015) but now taught *Indian Horse* by Richard Wagamese (2012). It is about a boy abused in the care home system.

It is phenomenal and the kids connect with it and the reluctant reader boys and I have a student who wrote his final reflection on this that he is half Mohawk and that his whole life he would lie and tell people he was Hispanic because he never heard anything good about being Indian. Then he read this book, it was the first time he ever felt proud to say I'm a Mohawk. (Marian) (Marshall and Gibbons, 2018,:7).

Their pupils' desire to identify with the text is strong and links Marian not only with the statutory need to teach Canadian literature but again with the personal growth model of teaching (Gibbons, 2017).

United Kingdom: England

The latest national curriculum for English in England was introduced in 2014 and applies to students up to 16. The aim, according to the then Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, was,

To reform English – the great tradition of our literature Dryden, Pope, Swift, Byron, Keats, Shelley, Austen, Dickens and Hardy – should be at the heart of school life. Our literature is the best in the world – it is every child's birthright and we should be proud to teach it in every school (Gove, 2010).

Interestingly, however, although the dates mentioned in the curriculum document imply pre-twentieth literature the only named author is Shakespeare. Students have to study two Shakespeare plays between 11 and fourteen (key stage 3) and at least one between fifteen and sixteen (key stage 4). At KS3 they have to study 'high-quality works' (DfE, 2014 :14) in 'English literature, both pre-1914 and contemporary, including prose, poetry and drama' and 'seminal world literature' (ibid.:14). At KS4 they are to be 'taught' to 'read and appreciate the depth and power of the English literary heritage through' which includes 'works from the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries' and 'poetry since 1789, including representative Romantic poetry' (ibid.:14) as well as 'a wide range of high-quality, challenging, classic literature and extended literary non-fiction, such as essays, reviews and journalism' (ibid.:14).

Several points are worth noting. The first is that the curriculum only applies to local authority schools. Schools, which are academies, free schools or private schools, do not have to follow it. They are free to teach whatever they want. If they take GCSE exams, however, which do follow the national curriculum, they will have to complete what is required at KS4 (15-16 year olds). Even though around 75% of all secondary schools are now academies or free schools, therefore, the assessment regime ensures that the national curriculum is followed. Given that schools have league tables of results and English is a core subject there is not only a requirement to fulfil the prerequisites of the curriculum but an immense pressure to do well in the exams. As Stobart noted, 'Policy makers have realised that assessment can be used as a

powerful tool for reform in education. What is tested, especially if it carries important consequences, will determine what is taught and how it is taught' (2008 :118).

The second is the language that is used, particularly at KS4. The first is that students should be 'taught'. There is no sense that they should learn about literature, even though one of the things they should be taught is to 'appreciate the depth and power of the English literary heritage' (DfE, 2014 :14). The juxtaposition of the words taught and appreciate make the latter seem more like an instruction following a directive rather than a process of learning. The fact that what they are being taught is 'literary heritage' which has 'depth and power' reinforces the notion that the students' appreciation is bounded by the weight of the instruction, which will be hard not to say impossible to deviate from.

English teachers have tried to negotiate around the statement. In research carried out in England, Canada and Scotland one teacher said she tried,

To start the lesson with something that's a bit more contextually relevant for them so when we were doing the balcony scene we looked at a Justin Bieber fan page about how much they loved him. At the beginning when we looked at the Prologue we looked at lots of adverts for football matches between Man United and Man City so I do try to contextualise it for them to make it a bit more relevant for them and they do seem to quite enjoy that. (Catherine) (Marshall et al, 2018: 68)

Yet the demands of the examination system are so exacting that it is very difficult for them to do. One of the tasks that students have to do in order to meet the assessment criteria of the AQA language exam is to compare pre-twentieth century non-fiction with twentieth century non-fiction. Another teacher, commenting on the language exam made his frustrations clear:

Why on earth compare Victorian writing on prisons with a blog on it now ... why on earth would you do that? And I have not found a way where I can revivify that. It's hard enough for the top end where you can imagine ok, you're a kind of hipster reviewer ...

take the kind of relaxed view of 'hey what were things like back then? How's it changed?' But for a kid for whom reading is not normal not his normal way of discovering things – it's deliberately exclusive. (Nigel) (Marshall et al, 2018,: 78)

His complaint that the exam syllabus and by default the national curriculum are 'deliberately exclusive' implies an act on the part of the curriculum makers that is forcing him to teach in a way that will exclude certain students. His choice of the word 'discovering' is also interesting. It contrasts with what he is being asked to do. He has become an instructor from the top down preventing students 'discovering', learning, from the bottom up. Catherine comments:

I think particularly with the changes we've just gone into, more than ever, the sense of these kinds of kids not having enough cultural capital is more prevalent than ever. ... they don't have the cultural capital or the knowledge of society on a lot of the levels these texts are based on. Whereas at different schools perhaps they do ... I think there's going to be a much wider divide now between schools from different boroughs and schools with different intakes than perhaps there before. I think because there aren't lots of texts from writers from different ethnic backgrounds, from different cultural backgrounds, that's something that was really important to our kids. (Catherine) (ibid.: 79)

Her use of the words, 'cultural capital' contrast with the national curriculum's literary heritage and she appears to question whose heritage it is speaking of. Her comment also brings us to the third point, that of KS3 (11-14 year olds). The language of what is demanded at KS3 is looser. Students are to 'develop an appreciation and love of reading' (DfE, 2014:14). Although there is still an emphasis on pre-twentieth century literature there is also mention of 'seminal world literature'. It is hard to say how much this has been picked up. In a survey of texts that were studied at KS3 in the west of England only one book, *Face* by Benjamin Zephania (1999) (Smith, 2020), was mentioned. It is possible that in areas with a high ethnic minority population, this is different. Books such as *The Girl of Ink and Stars* by Kiran Millwood Hargrave (2020), is becoming increasingly popular as is *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas (2017).

The English Teaching Magazine, the professional publication of the National Association for the Teaching of English dedicated a whole issue to 'Decolonising the Curriculum' in the summer of 2020 in the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests.

ASSESSMENT

In England there are two separate qualifications available, English language and English literature. These are both terminal exams, though during Covid they have been teacher assessed. Both the language and literature exams count in the Progress 8 scores that were introduced to track progress. In progress 8 they double the marks for English and Maths. After protests from the English teaching profession, it was decided that that could either be a literature mark or a language one. This was done to prevent schools just focusing on language to the exclusion of literature. In the 2019 exams 765,332 took language as opposed to 587,052 for literature. Although on the surface it would appear that more students do take language, that number includes the retakes of year 12 pupils, which might distort the figures. It is still true that more people take the language exam but the desire of English teachers to ensure that the vast majority take literature seems to have played out, even if the content of the literature exam is not ideal.

As has been said above, it is through the exam syllabi, which schools have to do, unlike the national curriculum, that the national curriculum is followed. The result is that the curriculum and therefore the syllabi, lack diversity. All the texts in the pre-twentieth century are white writers. The novels and plays of the twenty and twenty first century have the occasional ethnic minority writers such as *Anita and Me*, by Meera Syal, Benjamin Zephania's *Refugee Boy* or *Boy's Don't Cry* by Malorie Blackman but these are rarely chosen and texts such as *An Inspector Calls* by Priestly and Golding's *Lord of the Flies* predominate. There is a move by some boards, for example OCR, to increase the selection from British ethnic minorities.

SELECTION OF TEXTS

The exam boards, of which there are four in England, (AQA, Edexcel, OCR, WJEC.) are independent of the DfE but still have to subscribe to the national curriculum. Students studying the literature exam have to study one Shakespeare play, a nineteenth century novel and a twentieth century British playwright or novelist. Again, although there are no authors other than Shakespeare within the national curriculum, the list of texts given by the examination boards for potential study is limited even though there are no official criteria given to the boards as to what texts should be chosen. So, for example, for AQA the most popular books chosen are *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* or *A Christmas Carol*, though also on offer are *Frankenstein*, *Jane Eyre*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *The Sign of Four*. Edexcel does not offer the *Sign of Four* but offers *Great Expectations* and *Silas Marner* instead. The vast majority take the AQA exams. The selection of texts for all boards is done by a committee of individuals, who are asked to be members. No posts are advertised. They are made up of teachers, who typically examine for the board, and academics, as well as people who work for the board. It is very much a system about which there is very little information publicly available.

Scotland

The national curriculum for Scotland, the Curriculum for Excellence, is voluntary and designed to be a 'framework [that] promotes the development of critical and creative thinking' (CfE n/d:24) up to the age of 16. The majority go on to study English at 17, however. Although it is not mandatory for schools to follow it most do (Daugherty and Ecclestone, 2009). This is partly because Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HMIE) use it as the core of their inspection process. The English curriculum, then, sits within the Curriculum for Excellence, which is designed to 'provide[s] professional space for teachers and other staff to use in order to meet the varied needs of all children and young people'(CfEn/d:3). Moreover, 'Across all subjects, the Experiences and Outcomes (Es and Os) constitute[ing] the curriculum, as it would be experienced by pupils, were deliberately written in a way that left to teachers local decisions about the practical means by which they would be explored and achieved'. (Marshall et al, 2018,:138).

There is some evidence that the CfE has provided a 'professional space' for teachers. In research carried out amongst English teachers in Canada, Scotland and England one teacher commented, 'Curriculum for Excellence has been the greatest thing for me as a teacher. It's validated me, it's validated me as a teacher' (ibid.:139). Another said,

The principles of CfE really articulate with the way I teach anyway, so I've found it liberating, as I was teaching in a particular way anyway and this has kind of validated it. ... I think for English and my own practice it has allowed me to be even more creative, which I've enjoyed. It's certainly challenged my thinking' (ibid.:140).

Both these comments, along with the other findings in the report, suggest both that the curriculum supports them as teachers and gives a sense of agency, of validation, of liberation.

There are four main strands to the curriculum: health and well-being, literacy across learning and numeracy across learning and it is intended that subject specialists will bear these in mind when planning their work. So, for example,

The importance of the development of literacy skills across all areas of the curriculum is stressed in Building the Curriculum 1. All practitioners ... are in a position to make important contributions to developing and reinforcing the literacy skills of children and young people (CfE:21)

Yet literacy is particularly related to English; it actually appears first in the curriculum title given to it – Literacy and English. Under the heading Principles and Practice, which starts the six-page introductory section to the English curriculum, it begins with a more general desire for literacy:

Language and literacy are of personal, social and economic importance. Our ability to use language lies at the centre of the development and expression of our emotions, our thinking, our learning and our sense of personal identity. Language is itself a key aspect of our culture.

Before making it more specific to an English curriculum:

Through language, children and young people can gain access to the literary heritage of humanity and develop their appreciation of the richness and breadth of Scotland's literary heritage. Children and young people encounter, enjoy and learn from the diversity of language used in their homes, their communities, by the media and by their peers (ibid.:124).

The emphasis is on being literate because, 'Literacy is fundamental to all areas of learning' (ibid.:124). Those areas which are inclined toward the literary, are deemed more English. So, for example, they have a separate section on 'Scots and Scottish texts':

The languages, dialects and literature of Scotland provide a rich resource for children and young people to learn about Scotland's culture, identity and language. Through engaging with a wide range of texts they will develop an appreciation of Scotland's vibrant literary and linguistic heritage and its indigenous languages and dialects. (ibid.:127)

It adds, 'This principle suffuses the experiences and outcomes and it is expected that practitioners will build upon the diversity of language represented within the communities of Scotland, valuing the languages which children and young people bring to school' (ibid.:127). Though they do not say so, languages could also represent the diversity of background as well as language, which are not Scottish, that students may have. The focus, emphasis and naming of Scottish texts is, however, significant.

Under the 'experiences and outcomes' section, written from the point of view of a student, the majority of items are under literacy, the minority English. So, 'The development of literacy skills plays an important role in all learning. I develop and extend my literacy skills when I have opportunities to:' lists six items. 'In developing my English language skills' there are two, which are largely (and ironically) literary: 'I engage with a wide range of texts and am developing an appreciation of the richness and breadth of Scotland's literary and linguistic heritage'(ibid.:129) and 'I enjoy exploring and discussing word patterns and text structures'(ibid.:129). Interestingly they add two notes to the section:

1. Texts are defined in the principles and practice paper. They will include texts which are relevant to all areas of learning, and examples of writing by Scottish authors which relate to the history, heritage and culture of Scotland. They may also include writing in Scots, and Gaelic in translation.
2. The languages of Scotland will include the languages which children and young people bring to the classroom and other settings (ibid.:129).

The curriculum is then divided into three 'organisers', which, despite being about divisions within the curriculum, has a slightly more holistic feel. They are – listening and talk, reading and writing. Again, bearing in mind that they emphasise literacy, which can for some mean decoding print texts, it is significant they have put listening and talk first. They also, as we have seen above, define texts, wanting to be 'future proof' as 'the medium through which ideas, experiences, opinions and information can be communicated' (ibid.:127). So it includes 'the spoken word' as well as 'films, games and TV programmes labels, signs and posters recipes, manuals and instructions reports and reviews text messages, blogs and social networking sites web pages, catalogues and directories' (ibid) as well as novels etc.

Within the organisers, they have put listening first, implying its significance, and that it is followed by the word talk. Talk, in some ways, has a more dialogic feel to it. If you speak it can mean that you speak alone. You have, for example speakers at conferences or debates; you have keynote speakers. Here the person has, in effect, become the verb; the person has become the speaker. You can give a talk, but then the person who is giving the talk is separated out from the verb. There is the idea of a talker but seen in that context the idea of a talker has a somewhat pejorative feel. It is a person who talks too much. Talking is also more ordinary, everyday. Speaking is somehow a more delicate or refined word.

These organisers are further split up into strands. These too are significant. Reading, for example has three strands Reading for Pleasure, Reading for Information and Reading to Appreciate the Writer's Craft. To begin with it divides up what we mean by reading, putting first, and, therefore, possibly most importantly, reading for pleasure. It may be difficult to assess how much someone was reading for the sheer enjoyment of reading and yet the Scottish have declared its importance.

Significantly they separate this out from reading for 'information' and reading to 'appreciate the writer's craft'. One way of understanding this is that reading to be informed is not a pleasant activity just one that has to be done. It is also different from appreciation. Appreciation is an interesting choice of words as well. Again, it is more associated with liking, and also in some ways, connoisseurship, than, for example, the word criticism. What they are

being asked to 'appreciate' is the 'craft of a writer'. The word craft connotes both the artistry and artisanship of the writer.

Writing is subdivided into four strands. Again, these strands, although all the Experiences and Outcomes are categorised under literacy, the last only having English ones, they give a different feel to literacy as it is conceived, for example, in England. The section begins with 'Enjoyment and Choice' and ends with 'Creating Texts.' It seems designed to be more proactive with student deciding, using 'Tools for writing', rather having rules imposed which they follow.

ASSESSMENT

Although it was mooted that there should be compulsory tests, as there were in England and Wales, after much public debate and disquiet, it was agreed that while they were mandatory, pupils should do tests as and when they were ready. Yet the tests began to dominate. As Louise Hayward, wrote,

Attainment targets dominated thinking in schools and classrooms and National Tests were used to decide whether or not a child had achieved a level of attainment in English and mathematics. Rather than being used to confirm or to challenge teachers' professional judgement, National Tests were replacing it (2007 :255).

Again, in language that has become all too familiar, testing becomes synonymous with measuring a child's attainment rather than the totality of what they might achieve.

A single test can only sample a very small part of the content of a programme or course and so may not give the student a chance to show what s/he knows and can do ... 'Ability' comes to be defined as what is measured in tests, rather than as learning what is taught in programmes and, because the score or grade looks seductively tidy and exact, we attribute considerably more meaning to it than is actually justified by the evidence (Hutchinson and Hayward, 2005, :242).

Assessment is for learning has become a central focus in the Scottish system and it, along with the new Welsh curriculum has a clear commitment to AfL. As of 2014 students in Scotland take the National 4 and 5 at 16 and at 17 they take Highers. Students undertaking National 5 have two exam papers worth 70 marks and one written portfolio worth 30 marks. All are marked by the Scottish Qualifications Authority In the first paper they have to write about a Scottish text.

The portfolio-writing is a final summative assessment and when a candidate begins the process of drafting their pieces of writing this must be under the direct supervision of their teacher or lecturer. At this point, no other person can be involved in the discussion or review of the candidate's work.

Where there is doubt over the authenticity of a piece of writing it must not be accepted for portfolio submission (SQA, 2018,:13).

There are criticisms of the exam, however.

The unintended, practical effect of the SQA certification system over the period 2000-2017 has been to narrow significantly the range of English work done by many 15 to 17 year old pupils, including the range of literature studied. It became even more likely than before that teachers could predict quite precisely the minimum requirement for a pupil to achieve a unit pass and an examination pass grade. Very concentrated 'teaching to the exam' has therefore been the pattern in many English departments (Marshall et al, 2018,: 44).

SELECTION OF TEXTS

The school decides the texts to be studied but that must include a Scottish author. Choices such as *Sunset Song* (Gibbon, 2006) predominate.

Wales

A new national curriculum is coming to Wales in 2022, for students up to the age of 16, and has already been legislated for in the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act (2020). Unlike previous versions of a national curriculum this has been created by working alongside schools and teachers. It is designed so that consideration of what is asked in the curriculum comes first and how it is assessed is secondary. Although it is mandatory and English is a core subject, the curriculum itself is designed by the school according to certain principles. The first being that the overarching curriculum has to follow four purposes whereby students are:

- ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives
- enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work
- ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world
- healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society (Education Wales, 2021)

Underpinning these purposes are skills integral to learning and teaching. Yet,

At the heart of these skills is the importance of learners recognising, using and creating different types of value. In this context, value means worth and importance in a range of contexts, including financial, cultural, social and learning value (Education Wales, 2021).

Not only do they want to transport the meaning of skills, something usually associated with functionality to something that has value, (despite putting financial before cultural) they even go on to define it with another noun not typically associated with skills – worth.

Moreover, 'The Framework reflects Wales, its cultural heritage and diversity, its languages and the values, histories and traditions of its communities and all of its people' (Education Wales, 2021). The statement can be seen as having post-colonial implications in arguing for consideration of Welsh 'histories and traditions of its communities', a Welsh 'cultural

heritage' and above all the Welsh language but it also implies ethnic diversity as well and other 'histories and traditions of its communities', 'cultural heritage' and language.

There is, however, something uniquely Welsh about the design of the curriculum in that it uses a Welsh word that cannot be translated – *cynefin*. 'Learners should be grounded in an understanding of the identities, landscapes and histories that come together to form their *cynefin*' (Education Wales). Often translated as habitat it has more of a sense of both past and ongoing belonging to a place, a community, a familiarity with all that that word implies. To be robbed of the sense of *cynefin* can lead to *hiraeth* – another untranslatable word that is often replaced with homesick or longing but is so much more. It also means a loss of the Welsh culture, the landscape, of Welshness. To put the word *cynefin* into a curriculum, then, centres it more firmly, more resolutely in Wales than any definitions of the language. And yet it links Wales to the outside world. 'This *cynefin* is not simply local but provides a foundation for a national and international citizenship' (Education Wales, 2021).

The English curriculum itself can be found within the section language, literacy and communication and within this there are five main areas which a school has to look at in order to write a curriculum. In the Introduction it states that 'Languages and *literacy* are fundamental to human communication. They enable us to make sense of what is heard, read and seen, and thus to develop our understanding, empathy and our ability to respond and to *mediate* effectively' (Education Wales, Languages etc., 2021). Literature is separate and is defined as (Llenyddiaeth) spoken, written and visual materials which are works of creative imagination, such as poetry, drama, fiction and non-fiction from different periods and cultures.' 'It expands horizons. In all its forms it can inspire and motivate us, while also helping us to learn more about language and communication' (ibid.). In the section Statement of What Matters it goes on to say,

Experiences support them to appreciate a creator's craft as well as develop their own creative skills. They should be encouraged to experience and respond to a variety of literature that gives them insight into the culture, people and history of Wales as well as the wider world (ibid.).

Again, the indication is that Welsh writers as well as writers from 'the wider world' should be studied. None are named, though, in the section which looks at Illustrating Breadth it has a long and diverse list of suggestions from Welsh writers, such as T.H. Parry Williams via Shakespeare to former asylum seekers, in Eric Ngalle Charles, to script writers as in Russell T.Davies. All,

Different perspectives and interpretations of Wales and Welsh experiences which could inspire learners to express their own identity and understand changes over time in society ... [and] support[s] learners to be active and successful citizens of Wales and the world (ibid.).

The aim is clear, 'Through this, as their understanding of their own and other people's experiences, beliefs and cultures is enhanced, learners can develop their ability to demonstrate empathy. This in turn can contribute to their emotional and mental well-being' (ibid.). Literature aids personal growth.

As in the Curriculum for Excellence, in the section on Descriptions of Learning there are progression statements which are written from the student's point of view. There are four areas of learning that are to be considered, three are on language, the fourth literature:

- language connects us;
- understanding language is key to understanding the world around us;
- expressing ourselves through language is key to communication;
- literature fires the imagination and inspires creativity.

This last one has statements which include the student's own creativity as well as appreciating the craft of others. So for example it has statements at progress level 4 such as 'I can use my imagination and experiment with different creative forms and techniques to create my own literature' or 'I can explore, analyse and compare key ideas using relevant

terminology, supporting my views with relevant textual detail' (ibid., 2021) . The one on communication, the third on the list, subsumes the Scottish 'listening and talk' and the English 'speaking and listening'. All progression statements have a separate section on Welsh in English medium setting/school/streams. It is possible that because English itself is not specifically referenced the statements are not as specific as ones which do. Presumably these statements are for Welsh in a Welsh speaking school as well as other modern foreign languages so it would be possible to have different progress statements depending upon which language was being reported.

Schools are, however, expected to take these broad descriptors of learning that are designed to occur roughly every two years and work out how students are progressing within the two years.

The potential danger is, however, that the very large number of detailed points to be assessed could lead easily into a fragmented 'tick-box' approach, failing to match the complexity of pupils' varying real learning processes and real grasp and use of language' (Camau,2018. 99)

ASSESSMENT

Currently Wales completes two qualifications in English at 16 one in language and one in literature, however, due to the pandemic they are reconsidering the GCSE qualification. The recent publication by Qualification for Wales said, 'We will consider how the changes to qualifications in response to the Covid-19 pandemic can help us to think differently and consider new possibilities' (QW, 2021:1). Having said that, they are not considering abandoning the current qualifications of GCSE, which, at the moment, has one for language and one for literature.

Although students do not have to take both qualifications the majority do though the numbers taking literature is less than those taking language. In the literature exam there is a paper which asks about Different Cultures Prose. There is one further paper, in which students either are examined in literary heritage, drama and contemporary prose (unit 2a) or

contemporary drama and literary heritage prose (unit 2b). The final component is completed through course work and has two parts – one is a study of a Shakespeare play, the other Welsh writing in English. Qualification Wales is now consulting with teachers as to a way forward for 2025. A particular concern is that,

Learners in Welsh-medium and bilingual contexts typically take four GCSEs in this Area: English Language, English Literature, Welsh Language and Welsh Literature. In English medium contexts learners typically take three GCSEs in this Area: English Language, English Literature and Welsh Second Language' (QW, 2021,: 27).

The proposal is to,

1. Create a new combined language and literature GCSE in English and a new combined language and literature GCSE in Welsh to replace the existing separate GCSE qualifications. These new combined GCSEs would each be roughly the size of 1½ GCSEs.
2. Discontinue GCSE Welsh Second Language and create a new, bigger GCSE designed for learners in English-medium contexts that reflects the expectations of the Curriculum Guidance. The new qualification would be roughly the size of 1½ GCSEs (ibid.: 29).

The desire is to 'help to secure equity of provision for learners within and across schools' (ibid.:30). The introduction of a new GCSE in Welsh, 'will mean all learners in Wales, in all contexts, will have access to Welsh language qualifications of equal size and status that appropriately reflect the level of proficiency they are expected to achieve' (ibid.:34).

Teachers are currently [in 2021] being asked in the survey how much they agree or disagree with the proposals.

SELECTION OF TEXTS

At present the choice of texts, as with England, is through the exam boards, in this case the WJEC. This, however, is under review although the WJEC will still be in charge of the new assessment system, whatever that may be.

New Zealand

The English curriculum in New Zealand is compulsory until 16. After that the majority of students take English in year 12 and slightly fewer in year 13. They define English as,

The study, use, and enjoyment of the English language and its literature, communicated orally, visually, and in writing, for a range of purposes and audiences and in a variety of text forms. Learning English encompasses learning the language, learning through the language, and learning about the language. (Ministry of Education,2021)

They place writing last in the list of the ways English can be used. Interestingly the word literature is not mentioned, when asked 'Why study English', until halfway through. Rather it locates the study of English within literacy, 'Literacy in English gives students access to the understanding, knowledge, and skills they need to participate fully in the social, cultural, political, and economic life of New Zealand and the wider world' and adds, 'Students appreciate and enjoy texts in all their forms'. Only then is literature mentioned, at the end of the third paragraph: 'The study of New Zealand and world literature contributes to students' developing sense of identity, their awareness of New Zealand's bicultural heritage, and their understanding of the world' (Ministry of Education). Despite the fact that literature 'contributes to students' developing sense of identity' and too to 'their awareness of New Zealand's bicultural heritage' (MofE) no authors are mentioned that they have to study.

Interesting too is the way in which English is learned. It is divided into two strands – 'making meaning and creating meaning' and this they divide into modes which can overlap. So,

- making meaning of ideas or information they receive (listening, reading, and viewing) [sic]
- creating meaning for themselves or others (speaking, writing, and presenting) [sic] (MofE,2021).

The thrust of the curriculum is, however, one of skills. So students, 'Need to practise making meaning and creating meaning [sic] at each level of the curriculum'. The use of the word

practise is significant as it implies perfecting a skill. Progression, it suggests comes through using these same skills 'To engage with tasks and texts that are increasingly sophisticated and challenging,' but that 'they do this in increasing depth' (MofE). The content, then, only provides an opportunity for the skills to be carried out in 'increasing depth'. These same two strands appear in the achievement objectives and are further subdivided into: processes and strategies, purposes and audiences, ideas, language features and structure, each having indicators of how these will be achieved.

As in England, however, it is the way the curriculum is assessed that is significant rather than the curriculum itself. This is done through the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA). Pupils from year 11 (sixteen) onwards have to take these national qualifications, which do correspond to the curriculum, but it is to the exam specifications that schools look rather than to what is required in the curriculum. The document cites all the various courses that might be taken at each level – one to three. The only level students have to take in English is level one at sixteen.

There is a vast array of courses that schools can choose, the majority being teacher assessed, all having a certain amount of credit attributed to them. In order to gain a National Certificate of Educational Achievement they have to achieve fourteen credits, though typically they will do around eighteen. Students can either achieve with excellence, merit, achieve or not achieve in order to gain the NCEA. What is interesting is that they can still get the NCEA in English without having studied literature.

This has caused some disquiet. Although it comes from a right leaning paper, one headline in from the New Zealand Herald was, ' "The year that literature died": School dropped Shakespeare, replaced him with magazines to get students through NCEA' (Collins, S., 26.03.2021). It goes on to report that,

An Auckland University researcher who has written about the incident in her doctoral thesis, Dr Claudia Rozas Gomez, believes it was part of a growing trend to use simpler

texts in senior English classes to get students through the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (ibid.).

At the least this means that gaining an NCEA will mean very different things for different students. It is entirely dependent on what the school decides you need to do. The key lies in the skills you use rather than the content of what you study. The NCEA is currently revising the variety of course students can do which will possibly make the variety less great.

Maori culture and language is prominent. So at the start of the English curriculum it has Ko te reo te tuakiri/ Ko te reo tōku ahurei/ Ko te reo te ora. Translated it means language is my identity, language is my uniqueness, language is my life, though it is not translated in the document, unlike the Welsh curriculum which uses Welsh when no English equivalent is available. Maori writers are recommended as texts to be studied, as are canonical authors. So, for example, on the NZQA website under resources, it offers '\$200 of high-quality books for their libraries'. Other reports focus on the Maoris, such as *HE AWA ARA RAU A JOURNEY OF MANY PATHS The Journey of our Rangatahi Māori Through Our Education System* (The Southern Initiative, 2019). None of the texts are compulsory, however.

ASSESSMENT

English is mandatorily assessed at 16. The vast majority of it is assessed through teacher assessed coursework which may be written or produced orally. They internally moderate within a school - another teacher (or head of department) checks 10% of each set of assessment marking. There is also external moderation once a year. The NZQA notifies the school of the particular tasks they would like to moderate (usually two per subject, out of five or six offered in each subject), and then generate a random list of 6-8 student names whose work they want to see in that task. The school has to go back and find the work that those students completed on that task in the previous year and send it away for moderation. External exams are marked by examiners outside the school. It is not uncommon for students to be marked wholly through coursework.

The United States of America

English is known as the Language Arts in the US, which is interesting in and of itself as it commends it more to the creative, imaginative sphere than the transactional. The US does not have a national curriculum or a national assessment system. Everything is delegated to the individual states. Having said that forty one of the fifty states now use the Common Core Standards even though controversy surrounds them. It was once forty-five. They were first introduced under the Obama administration in 2009 after Bush's No Child Left Behind, where standards-based tests introduced to hold schools accountable had run its course. But the fact that No Child Left Behind was a Federal initiative, encouraged by financial reward (you could refuse to do them but then you would not get federal funding) made the Common Core Standards easier to introduce. They were initially supported by some:

We believe that English language arts teachers can view the adoption of the Common Core State Standards as an opportunity to generate innovative, engaging curriculum that will enhance instruction in our discipline, [and] raise intellectual aspirations for all students (Beach et al., 2016 :5).

Since then, and at the time too, they have been seen as overly prescriptive, highly reductive, and authoritative.

Part of the reason for the hostility may lie in a series of publications designed to guide teachers through the core standards and align them with lessons they might teach (see for example Maniates, 2016.; Pearson, 2013). There is a difference between what the Common Core actually says and the publications that followed. This is particularly true of the *Revised Publisher's Criteria*, written by David Coleman and Susan Pimentel (2012), who themselves were lead authors in the writing of the original Core Standards. The *Revised Publisher's Criteria* was actually written for publishers, who were contemplating writing textbooks for the standard, rather than teachers themselves. There is much on the commercialism of the common core standards, a commercialism that is separate from anything educational (see for example Zancanella and Moore, 2014). As Lechtenberg et al, put it, 'It reduces the scope of

the standards, presenting a narrowed view of what publishers should emphasize in reading instruction' (2020 :267).

Moreover, Coleman (2011) presented a shift in what he thought suitable to study and moved the language arts curriculum away from literature or narrative texts to informational ones and also towards close reading of those texts (ibid). He also suggested more challenging texts as students progressed. Interestingly he believed that the answers in any given close reading ought to come from the text itself and not extraneously. This mitigated against reader response type teaching where students could draw on their own experiences when reading a text. Instead, he focused on the text itself as if this had a right answer. This tendency is also seen in Pimentel's writing where she talks of studying the Gettysburg address and Lincoln's proclamation that all men are born equal. The question 'Why is equality an important value to promote' is deemed poor because you don't need the text to answer the question. The analysis is not 'text dependent'. Such an approach has overtones of the Hirschian knowledge-based curriculum where answers in English can be right or wrong.

Lechtenberg et al (2020) go through the core standards in a detailed critique and then look at what the *Revised Publishers Criteria* (RPC) suggest. What they find is the way that the Common Core encourage, in their 'introductory statements,'

Set the tone and provide an overview of the nature of the standards that appears to reject a technocratic approach to literacy learning, emphasizing teacher autonomy and critical student dispositions rather than a compliance-based approach to isolated skills and knowledge (Lechtenberg et al 2020,:262).

But they point out that,

The *RPC* narrows the reading process to close reading, that is, reading that focuses only on what is in the text itself with little attention to sociocultural or emotional knowledge and experiences that readers bring to the text. In close reading, students pay attention

to key details in the text in order to make literary claims and inferences based on textual evidence (ibid.:267).

In addition, they note that 'Coleman and Pimentel's (2012) language in the *RPC* has authoritarian undertones, most notably, the modal verb "should" is used 124 times in the document.' (Lechtenberg et al 2020,:267) and there is a litany of criticism from other sources:

Pearson (2013) laments the *RPC*'s role in "compromising the CCSS promise of teacher prerogative" (p. 254) and says the document represents "a betrayal" of the more nuanced approach to reading comprehension that exists in the standards themselves. Newkirk (2013) bemoans the "sterile view of reading" (p. 2) that the standards have come to represent, and he places blame more with the *RPC* than with the standards. Several scholars point out the *RPC*'s role in narrowing the breadth of pedagogies, texts, and teacher choices that appeared to be available in the standards themselves (Allington, Billen, & McCuiston, 2015; Beach et al., 2016; Bridges-Rhoads & Van Cleave, 2016; Eppley, 2015) (ibid.:264).

The manner in which the common core framework has been introduced into schools has also impacted on teacher autonomy within the language arts. On the committee, which designed the common core, there was only one teacher educator, no teachers or union representatives, no one from the National Council of Teachers of English or the International Reading Association. What drove the acceptance throughout the States of the Common Core, then, was something other than a grass roots pedagogy into English teaching. 'What is most remarkable is how quickly they moved from a mere possibility into an accepted fact of American education' (Zancella and Moore, 2014,:207). Again, finance may have had something to do with it and it was also backed by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and competitive grants under Race to the Top were also awarded if they adopted the standards.

Having said this there is still a thirst for alternatives to literature teaching within the States, a keenness for initiatives such as Black Lives Matter. The 2021 National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) convention in November was on, for example, *Equity, Justice and Antiracist Teaching* and in a blog 'The members of NCTE's Standing Committee Against Racism and Bias have felt an urgency since we each joined the committee to stand against racism and bias,' adding that, 'There is no apolitical classroom'. They have suggested a large number of resources for teachers including books, blogs and videos that address the issue such as another blog *Dismantling Racism in Education*.

In her chapter 'The politics of the canon: Reading for the rest of us' Thomas looks at two texts that are often taught in the States, one of which headed a 2018 poll on the most frequently taught books, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (PBS, 2018) and *Huckleberry Finn*. Both, she claims are questionable from a black students' point of view even though they are ostensibly anti-racist. The first because it has a so-called 'white saviour' and is written from the point of view of a naïve child, the other because it uses the n-word frequently. It is, for her, the danger of a single story:

If Huck Finn is one of the few novels in our already besieged curriculum charged with illustrating the fraught history of race in the United States for young people, we run the risk of telling a single story. When chattel slavery is focalized through the perspective of Huck instead of Jim, we run the risk of allowing a single story to shape our classrooms (Thomas, 2020: 254).

So, she advocates writing stories from a different point of view. Although she argues that 'Both novels will continue to have a place in our national story', she adds that,

We would do well to reflect on the myriad ways that stories about Black Americans – real or imagined – are focalized primarily through the lenses of White authors (however brilliant and well-meaning) in many of our classrooms throughout the United States. Literary significance notwithstanding, if the only images of Black people in the novels

that we teach are of dehumanization and suffering, our students' objections about racial slurs are but the tip of the iceberg (ibid.:255).

E.D. Hirsch's core knowledge curriculum, however, has a hold over many schools. They claim that '[Knowledge-based schooling](#) opens doors to enabling knowledge, which in turn opens doors to productive and responsible citizenship.' Part of its stated aim is to,

Shrink the excellence gap between the academic achievement of American students and that of their international peers from high-performing countries

shrink the fairness gap between the academic achievement of American students living in poverty and that of their economically advantaged peers (Core knowledge, 2021)

And yet, although the same Core Knowledge now recommends *The Narrative Life of Frederick Douglass* all the rest of the texts are written by dead white, predominantly male authors with no room for re-writing them from a different perspective.

ASSESSMENT

As there is no national curriculum so there is no national assessment system other than that the language arts are taught until students leave school at 18. Having said that the States is a standards-based, test dominated system.

There is a nationwide system of testing organised by the National Centre for Educational Statistics but written by the Education Testing Service. These are completed by a randomised sample of pupils, across the country, at grades four, eight and twelve in both public and private sector schools. Called the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) these tests used to be carried out at four yearly intervals but with the No Child Left Behind legislation it changed to being two years.

Most universities also require a Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), published and administered by the College Board, or an American College Testing (ACT) score. These are both

predominantly done by multiple choice because the reliability of the test is paramount. It is also possible to take Advanced Placement (AP) exams, also administered by the College Board, in your final years in high school and they are intended to give you credit for college courses later. There are two APs in the language arts, one on language the other literature. For the latter, one paper is multiple choice, the other – essays where students have to apply what they have studied in the course to generic questions.

Interestingly and possibly significantly, the Common Core Standards had, on the fourteen - person committee writing the standards, four employees of ACT and three from the College Board. In other words, half the membership. Further, 'Perhaps even more important ... is the work to create assessments that are aligned with standards' (Zancanella and Moore, 2014,: 204). Two groups, one of twenty-five states, the other twenty nine, got together to offer two summative tests twice a year and optional benchmark exams. McGraw Hill and Pearson are the publishers which gives them unprecedented control of the testing process. In effect these two publishing houses, in particular Pearson will have control over all the instructional material a school may want to order as well as the tests themselves.

Those who believe school curricula should be the product of broad transparent discussion and that school curricula should be thoughtfully connected to schools and communities, may be alarmed by the idea that a single company or organization, and even a single person should have so much influence' (ibid.:204)

Conclusion

The English curriculum has many guises and different names though all of them have English in the title except the States and some include literacy including Scotland and Victoria, Australia. Broadly speaking they fall into three main categories: skills (New Zealand, The United States if they follow a core content style syllabus), personal growth (Ontario, Wales, Scotland) and cultural heritage (England, the United States if they follow a Hirsch knowledge-based curriculum). The Australian curriculum has elements of all of these.

Their assessment systems differ too. The majority allow for course work, some assessment systems are entirely based on coursework, others have an assessment split 50/50 between coursework and terminal assessment. Only England and the United States assess entirely through examinations, and the States only do the CCS and APs through exams rather than a national qualification. Countries differ too in what they demand students' study; all, apart from England, ask students to study some kind of digital or media text. When they stipulate what authors students should study all say you should study your own country's literature and New South Wales and England ask you to study Shakespeare, as well as the Welsh in the GCSE. Other authors are suggested in examination – England, New South Wales, Victoria and Wales but the committees that select the texts do so without a transparent process or published procedure.

Although there is a keenness within some of the authorities to include texts from first nation and aboriginal writers, other than in Canada, this is often not done. There is a desire, however, from groups such as the National Association for the Teaching of English and the National Council of Teachers of English to include diversity within their approach and selection of texts for students to read.

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