This article is downloaded from

http://researchoutput.csu.edu.au

It is the paper published as:

**Author:** B. Green and P. Cormack  
**Title:** Curriculum History, 'English' and the New Education; or, Installing the Empire of English?  
**Journal:** Pedagogy, Culture and Society  
**ISSN:** 1468-1366 1747-5104  
**Year:** 2008  
**Volume:** 16  
**Issue:** 3  
**Pages:** 253-267

**Abstract:** The paper takes as its starting point the relationship between the "New English, a curriculum movement commonly associated with the 1960s and 1970s, and the "New Education, an influential general educational reform movement of the latter part of the 19th century and the early 20th century. It inquires into the discursive-ideological (dis)continuities between these two moments in educational history, with a view to positing that developments and debates in English teaching always need to be understood historically, within the larger context of the history of education and schooling and the politics of nation and empire. Its immediate reference-points being Britain and Australia, but with implications more broadly for the curriculum history of post-Imperial, Anglophone countries more generally as well as the history of educational ideas, the paper seeks to explore why it was that "English was installed at the heart of the modern(ist) school curriculum.

**Author Address:** bigreen@csu.edu.au

**URL:**  
http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~content=a902904642~db=all~jumptype=rss  
http://researchoutput.csu.edu.au/R/-?func=dbin-jump-full&amp;amp;object_id=10070&amp;amp;local_base=GEN01-CSU01  
http://bonza.unilinc.edu.au:80/F/?func=direct&amp;amp;doc_number=001181292&amp;amp;local_base=L25XX

**CRO Number:** 10070
Curriculum History, ‘English’ and the New Education; or, Installing the Empire of English?

Bill Green (a) and Phil Cormack (b) *
(a) Charles Sturt University, Australia; (b) University of South Australia, Australia

Abstract

The paper takes as its starting point the relationship between the ‘New English’, a curriculum movement commonly associated with the 1960s and 1970s, and the ‘New Education’, an influential general educational reform movement of the latter part of the 19th century and the early 20th century. It inquires into the discursive-ideological (dis)continuities between these two moments in educational history, with a view to positing that developments and debates in English teaching always need to be understood historically, within the larger context of the history of education and schooling and the politics of nation and empire. Its immediate reference-points being Britain and Australia, but with implications more broadly for the curriculum history of post-Imperial, Anglophone countries more generally as well as the history of educational ideas, the paper seeks to explore why it was that ‘English’ was installed at the heart of the modern(ist) school curriculum.

Published in
Pedagogy, Culture and Society
It is one of the humbling ironies of curriculum history that the historical record is so littered with assertions and affirmations of the ‘New’. Our concern in this paper is with English curriculum history, first and foremost, and is motivated by an interest in locating the school-subject English, and more specifically the so-called ‘New English’, within the larger sweep of the history of curriculum and schooling. A distinctive curriculum formation emerging in the 1960s and arguably still evident to some degree in the early 21st century, the New English was widely perceived as a decisive break in the history of English teaching. It has since become clear both how deeply implicated it always was in that larger history and, hence, arguably less innovative than originally claimed (Green, Cormack and Reid 2000; Green 1997). What has not been understood to date, or sufficiently appreciated, is the extent to which such matters can, and need to, be related to and contextualised within a more general educational history. That is precisely the task of this paper. We begin however with some observations taken from that historical record evoked here.

Writing in the first decades of the 20th century, John Adams (‘Sometime Professor of Education in the University of London’) pointed to what he explicitly called the ‘New Teaching’, in the context of his various accounts of ‘modern developments in educational practice’ (Adams 1922a, 1922b). He was mindful of the perhaps too easy rhetoric of the New, noting that ‘[w]e may not like the popular fashion of tacking on the adjective new to all sorts of words, and speaking of the new theology, the new politics, the new psychology’, and continuing thus:

The more severe among us may even find pleasure in demonstrating that the term when used in these clichés almost never describes anything really fresh; that the more things appear to differ from their older forms the more they are the same (Adams 1922b, p 1).

Elsewhere, striking a note that is even now all too familiar, he wrote: ‘The reader’s first reaction to the much used adjective is one of opposition’ (Adams, 1922a: 1). ‘Still’, he observed, ‘the popularity of this use of the adjective must have a cause, and it may be worth our while to see why it effects teaching’. As he continued:

Whether there is a new teaching or not may be an open question, but the mere fact that people are talking about it shows that it is at least desired. It is when people are tired of the present form of anything that they begin to talk of a fresh form (Adams 1922b, p 1).

And, at the outset of this early 21st century exploration of English teaching and the New Education, a further, final comment: ‘Fortunately our profession is safe from the danger of violent change coming from within’ (Adams 1922b, p 2)…”

What makes these rather wry observations on history of interest and relevance here is that Adams was expressly concerned with not only the ‘New Education’ but also the ‘New English’ which emerged in the early years of the 20th century, arguably culminating in the 1921 Newbolt Report. The Newbolt Report is commonly seen as a key document in the curriculum history of English teaching, ushering in the formal
period of the subject’s ascendancy in the school curriculum, and hence in a sense announcing the installation of the Empire of English – something that is still in existence today, across the English-speaking world, although there is at present clear evidence of growing resistance and unrest… Adams was in no doubt himself as to the significance of English teaching and English studies, within the ‘new education’:

‘From the nature of the case, English inevitably takes rank as one of the most important, if not the most important, of all the school subjects’ (Adams 1922b, p 39).

This assertion is echoed through the educational literature of the period, as much in Australia as in the UK (Green and Reid 2002; Peel, Patterson and Gerlach 2000).

Indeed, Peel and his colleagues refer specifically to ‘the huge empire of English, its fragmentation and specialisation’ (Peel et al 2000, p 17), linking this explicitly to an endemic sense of insecurity, a pervasive anxiety, as the Other side of its introspection.

What is not commonly marked out, however, more especially in general historical accounts, is why this was so, and how it came about. What was ‘English’ doing within the emerging symbolic economy of the modern(ist) school curriculum? What function was it serving, to be assigned such significance, and such ambivalent centrality, in the new forms of popular-public schooling that were being consolidated at this time? Why English?

In this paper, we present a necessarily abridged account of the history of English teaching and the English subjects in Australia, focusing on the first half of the 20th century. We explore the formation of the English curriculum in this period, with particular reference to the New Education and its associated reforms and debates. These various developments need themselves to be understood as part of a more general program of nation- and empire-building, something that was evident right across the post-Federation space of the Australian nation-continent (Birrell 2001). It is this relationship between English teaching and the New Education – a broad-based educational reform movement that emerged as a more or less coherent ideological-discursive formation in the UK and elsewhere in the latter part of the 19th century (Selleck 1968; Baker 2001) – that is of particular interest here. The historical significance of literary ideology is an important issue in understanding that relationship: that is, we want to consider the role of ‘literature’ and English studies in the cultural and intellectual history of the New Education, as a significant moment in the formation of modern schooling. Moreover, our concern here is expressly with English in Australia, and hence we need to take into account the distinctive features of the Australian context, post 1901, as a ‘commonwealth’ of former colonies with enduring ties to the UK and the British Empire.

This in turn connects with other questions and concerns. Given the way in which ‘literature’ and ‘English’ alike have been increasingly considered within the terms of a postcolonial problematic, it seems imperative that account be made of such work here, drawing in due consideration of notions of nationalism and imperialism. What does the curriculum-historical study of English in Australia have to contribute to a critical understanding of the (post-)colonial imagination? Recent work in the history and politics of English teaching raises a number of issues, accordingly, regarding the relationship between educational developments in Australia and the UK. How and why is it that 'English' has occupied such a central place in the school curriculum for over a century now, not just in the UK but in the Anglophone countries more generally, and more particularly in its erstwhile colonies, such as Australia and New
Zealand? What does 'English' mean, educationally and discursively, within the curriculum-historical dynamics of 'Nation' and 'Empire'?

In what follows, we shall firstly discuss the New Education as a complex and contradictory trans-national educational reform movement, following which we want to take particular account of English teaching in that regard, focusing particularly on literary ideology, or what might be better called the literature-literacy complex. We then present a case-study of early 20th century educational developments in South Australia, with specific regard to the vexed question of subject English. We conclude with some more general observations on English curriculum history.

In his early study of the New Education in Australia, Turney (1983, p 1) noted that it was a very broad movement, best characterised as having ‘no set pattern’. Nevertheless, he said, it was frequently used as a label for reform efforts in the first two decades of the 20th century. Meadmore (2003), in describing the New Education in terms of ‘an array of reformist discourses’, observes that the movement was characterised, at best, by diversity, contradiction and ambiguity, and as “multifaceted”, with the discourses in question ‘not always align[ing] in theory or practice as a single process of reform’ (Meadmore 2003, p 2). Similarly, Baker (2001, p 429), in a review of the links between Child Study and the New Education in the USA, describes a range of ‘discursive intersections’ which, as she saw it, provided the ‘conceptual struts’ upon which the New Education could be based. These ‘struts’ cast the New Education ‘as scientific, as sympathetic to the child, and as concerned with citizenship’.

Studies such as these indicate that the New Education was wide in scope and a more or less piecemeal collection of reforms, rather than being a tightly conceptualised project. That indeed was how Selleck (1968) characterised the New Education, some time earlier:

[I]n a sense, there was no New Education: that is, no clearly defined set of theories in which a neophyte might be instructed. There were no commandments nor articles, no creed nor manifesto requiring a universal assent.

‘It was’, he concludes, ‘a remarkably accommodating movement’ (Selleck 1968, p 331). Yet, as he argued, something certainly existed under that label in the period in question, which informed and animated a range of educational developments and debates. However ‘derivative’ it might be, without however being simply or simplistically ‘imitative’, it became deeply inscribed into the educational thinking of the Empire, energising and productive notwithstanding its internal ‘ambiguities and contradictions’ (Selleck 1968, p 335). His now classic account of the New Education was itself prompted by an interest in early 20th-century Australia as a theatre of educational reform. With New South Wales as an initial reference-point, he notes in his Preface a litany of profound educational changes right across the country. Explicitly marking sharp and arresting criticisms of the NSW system by figures such as Francis Anderson and Peter Board, who refused to join the prevailing ‘conspiracy of adulation’ about the current system, he points to rousing proclamations by a range of educational leaders and social commentators across the country:
In other states and sometimes as dramatically, other men were making ... similar statements: Frank Tate in Victoria, for example, or Alfred Williams in South Australia, or Cyril Jackson in Western Australia. Generated by men such as these there began at the end of the nineteenth century a movement for educational reform which came to be known as 'the New Education' (Selleck 1968, p vii).

Meadmore (2003) traces a similar pathway, from Cyril Jackson through W.L Neale in Tasmania to Tate, Board and Williams, noting that Queensland was a marked exception in this regard, clinging to an older 'spirit', despite taking on almost holus-bolus the 'letter' of the NSW Primary Syllabus. Something momentous was clearly underway, contradictory and incoherent as it might have been, philosophically – 'an educational awakening' (Turney 1983, p 1). Selleck’s invocation of the ‘slogan’- system at work can be taken as evocative: ‘close to life, real life, learning by doing, activity, all round development, many-sided interest’ (Selleck 1968, p 336) – to which can be added various notions of ‘growth’ and ‘autonomy’. The following can be taken as indicating, further, the ‘core’ program of the New Education:

The New Education embraced such diverse aspects as child study, manual training, experimental education, learning-by-doing, self-activity and freedom, moral education, physical education, nature study and agricultural pursuits, Herbartianism, kindergarten work, Pestalozzian pedagogy and Montessorian approaches. A vital underlying theme was a movement towards teaching and learning concerned essentially with the child, its nature, and all-round development (Turney 1983, p 1).

Selleck’s later account of ‘state education and culture’ in Australia dramatically evokes the contrast between what was the dominant educational system – an archetypal expression of the ‘instrumentary education’, as he had previously described it – and the New Education as it played out in the Antipodes. As with other social and economic reforms of the period with which it must be associated, ‘the New Education owed much to overseas examples, especially British, or European and American as mediated by the British’ (Selleck 1982, p 10). He argues that what was fundamentally at issue in the new movements for educational reform was a cultural project, ultimately class-based, which pitched against each other two opposing versions of schooling and their attendant social visions. ‘[W]hatever the movement’s origins and inconsistencies’, he writes,

it was concerned with providing an introduction to culture, not a substitute for it: literature, art, music, science, history – in uncertain and primitive guises and at a level designed to be palatable to young pupils – were offered to state school children (Selleck 1982, p 10).

This was, moreover, ‘a dramatic venture: the introduction of the culture, which had been the possession of the few, to everyone’ (Selleck 1982, p 10). He then goes on to
show how this brave new educational project ‘failed’, and continues to do so, reminding us of the intractability and complexity of educational politics and class struggle (cf. Teese 2000).

Elsewhere, an argument has been initiated about the links of the New Education, however understood, with English teaching and the so-called ‘New English’ (Green, Cormack and Reid 2000; Green 2003). That argument turns on the assertion that there may well be largely unacknowledged or under-appreciated associations between educational developments in the early 20th century and the phenomenon popularly understood, from the 1970s onwards, as the New English – otherwise known as the ‘Growth Model’, or post-Dartmouth English teaching. Seventy-odd years separates these two events, which prompts the question as to what happened to this particular discourse on and in English teaching in the interim period. Did it simply go underground, as it were, waiting a propitious moment to emerge once more, triumphant? Does this mean buying into the somewhat problematical (curriculum-)historical debate about the ‘break-out’ of the 60s and 70s (Baker, 1996; Connell, 1993; Musgrave 1988)? We see that as, at the very least, debateable. What is clear is that ‘English’ became the avowed cornerstone of the new school curriculum, from the early years of the twentieth century, a veritable ‘empire’ that endures still, even though its historically significant Imperial associations have now faded and indeed have been surpassed, in what is inarguably a New World Order.

At this point we want to (re)turn to the question of English, bearing in mind the various and complex associations with which the term is invested, referring at once and at different times to the language, the nationality and the (school-)subject. These distinctions are commonly glossed over or often overlooked. They are important, nonetheless, we contend – all the more so in the context of globalisation and English as a lingua mundi. The wider historical significance of English has been discussed by scholars such as Crowley (2003) and Pennycook (1998), indicating the intrication of this whole area in complex issues of knowledge, culture, identity and power – something that is further attested to in avowedly postcolonialist work by London (2002, 2003) and others. Our concern here is more localised, however: the installation and formation of the English curriculum at the heart of popular-public (‘state’) schooling in Australia.

While most commonly understood as a secondary subject, English has long been considered as central to primary schooling, as the historical record readily indicates. Whether or not the label refers to the same thing is debateable, however, and accordingly a matter of considerable historical interest. While some locate its emergence in the institution of the elementary school (Peel, Patterson and Gerlach 2000; Selleck, 1982; Cormack, 2004), others emphasise the University and the newly formed discipline of English studies, predicated on literary criticism and the Romantic culture of the self (Reid 2003, 2004; Hunter 1988; Doyle 1989). Whatever the case, English is best understood as quintessentially a hybrid subject, mixing up elements and moments that, among other things, attest to its postcolonial legacy. It is therefore intimately connected to questions of imperialism and nationhood, and implicated in the formation of both personal and national identities and their associated struggles and settlements (Bell 1994). Board’s location of English at the ‘hub’ of his new Primary Syllabus in 1905, thereby inaugurating the New Education in the former ‘mother-colony’ of New South Wales, is symptomatic in this regard. English in
Australia was to be as much about nation and empire as it was about language and culture, or literacy and literature (Green and Reid 2002), though this was always a matter of non-coercive compliance and a subtle dialectic of discipline and pleasure. This became the dominant pattern across the country, and indeed elsewhere across the Anglophone world.

Why English? Meadmore offers one rationale. He describes the new Syllabus as focused on ‘English, “the basis of the curriculum” … “the basis of the fabric instruction, the root from which the whole course grows”’, drawing directly from Board’s Preface. Indicating how English served various neo-Herbartian purposes, Meadmore notes that there was no necessary reason for choosing English in this regard, or for (as it were) effectively ‘inventing’ it as a new subject. In choosing English as ‘the hub of all curriculum activities’, Board was ‘follow[ing] Ziller’s inclination which made historical and literary topics the central focus, although other Herbartians had argued for different subjects’ (Meadmore 2003, p 382; our emphasis). This still doesn’t explain why, in this case and also more widely, English was indeed so chosen, and invested with a new aura. Something of the answer may lie in Selleck’s (1982) insistence on ‘culture’, which is in fact part of the received self-understanding of English teaching – although such a view, referencing as it does Matthew Arnold and proceeding sometimes catechistically through Newbolt, Sampson and Leavis, has been contested by Foucaultian scholarship (Hunter 1988; Patterson 2000). For Selleck (1982, p 5), ‘culture’ equates with ‘high culture’, understood as referring to ‘“the general state of intellectual development, in a society as a whole” … and encompassing not only the arts and humanities, but also mathematics and the sciences, including the social sciences’. English clearly is only part of this, although importantly so, embracing more specifically what might be called literary culture – ‘literature’, expressly in the classic, canonic sense of the term, ‘the only source of light’ (Selleck 1982, pp 17-18).

For Selleck, what was installed in the school curriculum as ‘English’ (1), however admirable it might be, was inevitably a project of impossibility, just as the desired innovations and reforms of the New Education were a flawed attempt to make a difference in terms of social structure. Cultural pessimism goes hand in hand in Selleck’s account with an almost angry, elegiac sense of failure, mingled with hope and heroism. Schooling itself is a failed, flawed program, as is English. ‘State education, despite the establishment of secondary schools and the reform of primary education at the turn of the century’, has not only been unable to sustain its promise to ‘flood society with sweetness and light’, but it has ‘in part … worked to prevent its realization’ (Selleck 1982, p 17). This is a powerful, arresting account, and we focus on it here only because, in our view, its historical insight is predicated on its own ideological ‘blindness’. Such a reading of the historical record overly invests in categories that are themselves partial, problematic – in this instance, ‘culture’ and (at least implicitly) ‘literature’. It is unable to see, pace Foucault, that ‘failed’ programs are nonetheless immensely significant, and always ‘effective’ – and that, notwithstanding their failures, both schooling and English are intricated cultural and discursive projects, fraught with ambivalence and yet charged with complex productivity.

In this regard, it is insufficient to emphasise only literature and the literary, understood as a particular conjoining of reading and culture, in thinking of English
teaching. ‘Literature’ is to be understood as caught up inescapably, ineluctably with ‘literacy’, as social concepts as much as focus-points of value and activity, knowledge and skill. ‘Culture’ is similarly to be understood within a broader context of communications, as a socially contested field of technologies, attributes and constituencies (Dixon 1991; Williams 1977). It is this that makes ‘English’ as a distinctive curriculum practice so generative, historically. Its social and educational meaning cannot be properly, fully grasped outside of due acknowledgement of the literature-literacy complex (Green 1988), predicated as that is on the significance of written language and the print apparatus – what we want to call, here, literary ideology (2). Moreover, while issues of canonicity and standardisation are fundamental to national(ist) formations of language and literature, it is not just a matter of particular, preferred texts and associated forms of cultural and curriculum selection that is to be acknowledged here, but also quite crucial questions about conduct and sensibility – in classrooms and beyond – that need to be considered in this context. Pedagogy connects thus with governmentality, and hence new practices and realisations of power and freedom. Selleck’s work on English primary schooling and what he identifies as ‘progressive’ educational theory and practice – work that he links explicitly with his earlier account of the New Education (Selleck 1972, p ix) – is immediately pertinent in this regard. Noting the pervasiveness of ‘the “growth” metaphor’, he goes on to observe that ‘these three [themes] – “individuality”, “freedom” and “growth”’ were ‘inextricably intertwined and sometimes almost indistinguishable and very important for progressive theory in the ten years after 1914’ (Selleck 1972, p 59). The link with ‘English’, inflected through literary ideology, is unmistakable. Moreover, it is the very hybridity of ‘English’ that makes for its generosity: its capacity to serve a range of purposes and functions, and to allow for a multiplicity of social, cultural and educational effects.

Returning now to the question of New Education, it is possible to begin to see why English, in practice and in policy, was so important in this early period. It functioned as, in a quite particular sense, an ‘echo’ of the complex, contradictory promise of the new forms of schooling, the ‘new teaching’ (Adams 1922b) – something that arguably continued, on through the 20th century, although the subject itself underwent a process of change and (dis)continuity. It is in this sense that we see the task of understanding the New Education as usefully extended by a better, more informed engagement with the history and politics of English teaching, and vice versa. Further, we believe that Baker’s (2001) argument that the New Education was located within ‘discursive intersections’ is suggestive for curriculum-historical research. Rather than seeing the establishment of state-funded primary schooling and its curriculum in the late 19th century, and their extension into post-primary forms in the early 20th century, as a conscious project of reform, it is possible to understand them as a somewhat contingent achievement that was formed out of a network of discourses and programs. These often contradictory discourses and programs appear to have allowed the concept of state-sponsored schooling to ‘hang together … rather than fall apart’ (Baker 2001, p 448). Our own approaches to curriculum-historical inquiry in the English subjects (3) (Cormack 2002, 2003; Cormack and Green 2007; Green, 2003; Green and Beavis 1996) have attempted to take account of such insights into the ways that discourses have constituted the curriculum. In particular, we have been interested in curriculum history as addressed to an ensemble of ‘discourses’, ‘programs’, and ‘effects’ (Green, 2003) in a way which is sensitive to the multiple and
discontinuous forms that programs such as the New Education took. Therefore, we have examined the New Education as a loose ‘assemblage’ of reform in relation to the discourses available at the time and the ‘effects’ and practices that it involved and enabled.

In this way it becomes possible to avoid assigning a single identity to subject English, or a single purpose and effectivity – English was, and is, inescapably plural, which is in fact a measure of its educational and social complexity. This means that there is a need to attend, as much as anything else, to the differences in its modes of existence, forms of operation and conditions of intelligibility, without dispersing the subject altogether, as a repository of historical traces and material-symbolic effects. One such difference is its realisation in a range of historical sites and settings, within a common geopolitical organization. Hence we turn now to a necessarily brief consideration of the formation and fortunes of English curriculum in South Australia over the three decades from 1900 to 1930, as a localised and specific manifestation of English in Australia more generally.

The turn of the 20th century was a heady time for school education in South Australia. Various commissions and reviews of education in the state and elsewhere were recommending an expansion of state schooling beyond the primary level, higher standards of teacher training, and a renovation of the curriculum. The New South Wales government had established a Commission, conducted by George Knibbs and John Turner, which in 1903 reported on primary education and in 1904 on secondary education. In 1907 the Director of the state education system in South Australia, Alfred Williams, embarked on an overseas trip to study school provision in Europe, Britain and the USA, focussing on the ‘extension’ of schooling beyond the primary level, publishing a report in 1908. These reports linked to, and to some extent, took their lead from the Mosely Educational Commission in England, in which 26 privately sponsored commissioners visited the USA in 1903 in order to consider the way that education in that country had contributed to its industrial and commercial pre-eminence.

Each of these reports quite explicitly tapped into contemporary anxieties that England and Australia (the latter formed in 1901 from six former British colonies which now made up its federated states) were falling behind in what the Mosely Report referred to as the ‘world’s race’ for industrial and commercial success. In the opening page of his preface, Mosely himself related his experience in South Africa, specifically referencing the Boer War (1899-1902) which, at that time, provided a challenge to assumptions about the stability of the empire and about the superiority of British troops (Lesko 2001). In this story, he noted that it was an American engineer to whom the British nation owed ‘a debt of gratitude for his engineering work … by repairing bridges as fast as they were destroyed by the enemy’ (Mosely Education Commission 1904, p vi). Through this story, the capacity of the nation to maintain its Empire was brought into question and made to relate to the education it offered its workers, professionals and future leaders. This linkage between national well-being, economic competition and education was laid out in the first paragraph of the joint statement by all the Commissioners:
The undersigned members of the Mosely Educational Commission are deeply impressed by the evidence they have gathered in the United States of the absolute belief in the value of education both to the community at large and to agriculture, commerce, manufactures and the service of the State. Although, in the past, the belief in education has been the effect rather than the cause of American prosperity, during the last quarter of a century education has had a powerful and far-reaching influence; and it cannot be doubted that, in the future, it will become more and more the cause of industrial and commercial progress and of national well-being. They are satisfied that, in the years to come, in competing with American commerce we shall be called upon to face trained men, gifted with both enterprise and knowledge. They desire to impress on the British public the absolute need of immediate preparation on our part to meet such competition (1904 Mosely Education Commission p xxiii).

Here we can see what Foucault (2000) labelled the process of a ‘problematisation’ at work; a process which involves the hitching together of different concerns into a problem requiring attention to which various programs of reform are articulated. Mosely and the other reports took the ‘given’ of newly globalising commercial and industrial competition, and turned it into a question about how best to train the children of the nation to become the kinds of citizens that would ensure their nation’s and the Empire’s future. It was in relation to this problematisation that many of the discourses and programs of education operated at this time. It opened up an anxiety to which education was seen as an important solution. As is indicated by Mosely’s reference to the Boer War, conceptions of Nation and Empire were strongly implicated in this anxiety. Also it is notable that the concern was about the ‘boy’ (at least initially) who would become the virile, competitive, technically skilful and innovative man who could defend and lead this nation and empire.

The New Education was a label often used by reforming educational administrators in South Australia, especially in the first decade of the century. In many ways it formed a kind of catch-phrase which could represent everything that was ‘progressive’ in education, marking the educational approach of the new century as against the ‘dreaded cram’ of the traditional methods of the 19th century. Indeed, one of the most accessible ways of explaining the New Education is to understand what it was set up as not being about. These two quotations were side by side in the Education Gazette (4) (EG) of April 1906, and demonstrate some of the flavour of the way in which New Education ideas were consistently placed in opposition to ‘drill and memory’ approaches:

The education of children should not aim at cramming them with ready-made facts, which would give them mental indigestion, but at teaching them to observe, to reason, and to acquire knowledge as much as possible by themselves, and to stimulate their imagination so that they have an interest amounting to a love for their studies (Philip Gibbs, ‘The old way and the new’, quoted in EG April 1906, p 104).

To feed the memory to plethora whilst the heart is left waste and desolate is not education; to stand outside the region of feeling and drill the children into obedience, order, mechanical proficiency, and even correct
knowledge is not education. The true method is to find our way into the region of feeling, and, keeping the children’s feet steadily within the charmed circle of pleasurable sensations, to train them step by step, to the enjoyment of useful activities, to manual dexterity, to effort in the pursuit of knowledge, to manly dignity in the defence of the right, to sympathetic jealousy over the rights of their fellows, to gentleness towards all mankind, to firmness in the discharge of duty, to admiration for all that is noble in character, to love of truth and justice, and faithful adherence to both and to veneration of age, of experience, and of virtue (Jane H. Clapperton, ‘Scientific Meliorism’, quoted in EG, April 1906, p 104).

Such passages also provide an indication of some of the ways in which the child or adolescent learner was imagined in the language of the New Education. Here there was an emphasis on:

- activity
- interest and desire (love)
- observation and manipulation
- self effort
- pleasure
- dignity and sympathy
- virtue

Such a listing allows us to see that the child or adolescent constituted within the New Education was both borrowed from other educational discourses, but also an innovation on them. For example, it is possible to see the emphasis on virtue and dignity being strongly connected to the ideals of a Classical Education. Similarly the use of observation and manipulation were present in early versions of technical education in order to train the future worker in dexterity. The innovation appeared to be the way in which this child combined such virtue and activity with Romantic notions of sympathy for others and love for learning, and, importantly, that the learning would be driven from within the child’s own nature as a ‘developing’ learner. In this way, discourses of Romanticism and Developmentalism were crucial elements of the New Education.

References to newly established ideas of adolescence are an indication that the New Education was connected to Developmentalist discourse, incorporating racialised constructions of childhood and adolescence as ‘growth’ through ‘stages of development’ recapitulating the ‘progress’ of the ‘race’ towards civilisation. The child in Developmentalism was equated with early savage forms of the race, seen as naturally inquisitive, pleasure-seeking and driven to learn according to divinely ordained (but scientifically knowable) stages of growth. One of the key educational movements in this regard was Child Study, widely promoted as a way to scientifically study the ‘contents of children’s minds’ (Hall 1883). Such conceptions of childhood saw its movement into adolescence, as connected to racial development towards civilisation, and allowed education to be mapped onto teleologies of national and imperial progress. These teleologies themselves incorporated the possibility of decay or miscegenation which might deny the possibility of racial improvement.
Romantic constructions of the learner were evident in representations of adolescence as a period of ‘storm and stress’ in the stage between childhood and adulthood. Hall, the so-called ‘father’ of adolescence, stressed in his 1904 book that education for adolescents needed to be outdoors, active, and close to nature. Lesko (2001, p 51) traces this emphasis to German Romanticism, noting Hall’s own personal experiences in Germany and his possible contacts with the German Youth Movement. The Romantic belief in the power of literature to provide superior moral and cultural insights into how to lead a proper life, strongly associated with the writings of Matthew Arnold (Mathieson 1975, p 40), was also important. This Romantic view was extended to the figure of the literature teacher, as a distinctive sympathetic figure, furthering the idea that the study of English could supplement, and even supplant, religion as a source of moral training in balancing obedience to social authority and an ‘authentic’ personal liberty. Donald (1992, pp 6-7) has labelled the approaches arising out of Romantic views of education, originally based in Rousseau’s work, as ‘sentimental education’, which involved balancing the two poles of authority and liberty through the ‘artifice and manipulation of “well-regulated liberty”’.

It is possible to see the New Education as constituted in relation to both of these discursive fields, even though that at first sight they seem somewhat contradictory – the ‘scientifically’ inspired discourses of Developmentalism on the one hand, and the more culturally related Romantic and Literary discourses on the other. In what follows, we provide a snapshot of how this discursive constellation played out in South Australia through focussing on concerns about the role of literature in subject English.

One of the ways that literature was employed in the curriculum texts of the early 20th century was in the development of a particularly English culture in students, or a programmatic ‘Englishness’ (Morgan 1990). In this view, literature could be put to work in building and inspiring the child as a particularly ‘English’ (or ‘British’) citizen. English literature was brought into the centre of the curriculum as a site where the progress of the nation and race could be affirmed and its future assured through the training of the young. In Australia, that theme was complicated by its role as a colony and, after 1901, a dominion of the British Empire. In this conception of English, the child in a State school in South Australia was, first and foremost, a member of the British race and the Empire and, at the same time, a prospective citizen of a newly formed Australian nation. According to Pennycook (1998), this complex relationship between centre and margins has always been crucial to the use of English for colonial purposes. He notes that the use of English as a means of developing a subject of Empire was first developed in the colonies and then imported back into England – a point also made by Morgan (1990, p 205), in noting that ‘English as a school subject began in the colonies’.

One of the strong points of continuity between the tradition of literary study in Classical-Liberal education and English as a site for the development of a ‘British’ citizen was the emphasis on literature as the basis of a moral-ethical education. In the New Education, though, the morality conveyed by a ‘literary’ education was turned to the production of a member of the British Empire, rather than a generally educated ‘man’ of the world:
What higher aim can the schools have than to implant in the minds of boys and girls those principles that will lead them to become worthy citizens of a great Empire! (Chief Insp. Strong 1922 EG, p 109).

For Strong, stories and songs were the chief means of developing an emotional commitment to Empire and Nation – something to be achieved through appealing to ‘the moral law which is our heritage from thousands of generations of bygone men’, and to be ‘implanted in the youth’. This is an extreme example of the ways that the cultural heritage of the Empire was seen as a means to ‘implant’ patriotism in the new generation, in order to maintain the vitality of the race.

Alongside the concern to produce a child-subject who was an inheritor of the values and achievements of the Empire and the British race, there was also a concern to use the English (teaching) subjects to produce an Australian citizen. That aspiration was seen not to be contradictory to the focus on a colonial English citizen, as discussed above; rather, it was a complementary subject-position, situating Australia as both an outpost of Empire and a site for its vigorous growth, as well as a distinctively new nation.

In 1907 Director Williams commented that the Children’s Hour, a Reader for students produced and published monthly by the Education Department, had recently begun to include a series on Australian explorers. This, he claimed, ‘should remove from us the reproach that we do not teach our Australian children anything of their own land’ (EG, p 187), indicating that the Department had previously been criticised for its dependence on English sources for reading material. In 1900 Inspector Smyth (EG, p 47) had called for ‘a set of Australian’ Readers to be compiled by the Department because the treatment of subject matter ‘from the Australian standpoint’ would be more interesting to pupils and provide contact with the ‘best Australian authors’.

This reading material situated Australia as a colonial outpost, emphasising themes of exploration, discovery, conquest (of a hostile land) and settlement. For example, one Australian book celebrated for its suitability for ‘boys of a certain age’ (12 to 14 years old) was ‘The Captain General’ in which the author, W.J. Gordon, was praised for showing ‘what a glamour of romance may be thrown around the attempt to colonize the north-west coast of Australia by the Dutch in the seventeenth century’ (Roach 1907 EG, p 79). This comment was made by Roach in a conference paper entitled the ‘Literature of Children’, in which he argued that such local, uplifting tales of Australian life, and other ‘dramatic tales of history’, were needed to reclaim the spirit of adventure required to explore and settle Australia’s vast interior. Thus literature could be deployed for the development of an (adventurous and hardy) Australian citizen; a development which served to continue the colonial process of exploration and the claiming of new resources in undiscovered places. ‘National poetry’ was encouraged as suitable for Empire Day celebrations (1908 EG, p 71) and the teaching of the ‘national literature’ was cast as a ‘grave … problem’ for the teacher because such an issue could no longer be left to the vagaries of the development of individual ‘taste’ (1908 EG, p 277).

In one remarkable speech on ‘Some Principles of Education Reform’, Professor Findlay (EG, 1914, pp 319-322) summarised the changes in English (ie ‘British’) education, based as they were on the principles of developmental stages arising from
Child Study, including the important stage of adolescence. In giving advice to his colonial audience, he wondered aloud how colonial educators would maintain in their children the emotional links to England held by the present generation of leaders. Findlay had two main prescriptions for maintaining long-term emotional links to the mother-land. Firstly, he called for using the ‘peculiar force of the national story’ by allowing children to ‘play’ at history:

The pageant, the child drama are coming to their own through the direct performance, a story to the level of his own impression. A child can take into his inner life the sentiments and ideals which will make him a patriot (Findlay 1914, *EG*, p 321).

He then went on to indicate how this inner-life of the sentiments and ideals might be transferred to the local:

But secondly, he must find a basis for these virtues in a sphere which is nearer to him than London … If the boys and girls of South Australia are to grow up to be Imperialists in adult life, then in childhood and youth, they must be taught to love their city, their township, their State. Local history, local memorials, the story of the pioneers who made a way through the wilderness and a path through the desert, these are the foundations; here in the modest records of local service and devotion which imperialists so often tend to despise, will be found the source from which the children can first learn to love and serve his fellow men (Findlay 1914, *EG*, p 321).

Helping children to ‘grow up … Imperialists’, according to Findlay, involved using the power of story and participation in performance to maintain an emotional link to England and Englishness, and more generally to the Empire. As laid out in the quotation, his second strategy involved shifting children’s attachment to the local as an outpost of the principles of the ‘service and devotion’ which made up the Empire. In this way, the focus on Australianness and the use of national stories was complementary to the construction of Empire and the development of Australian children as colonial citizens.

[4]

It is perhaps clearer now why ‘English’ as such was invented at this time and invested with such importance. It brought together an emergent concern for language and culture, with a more utilitarian interest in shaping subjectivity and developing capacity. It was both amenable to the new reform movements then underway and, in significant ways, an intelligible effect of their complex social and ideological identity. We have argued in this paper that the New Education was constituted within a range of discourses that tied together racialised constructions of child development and concepts of national culture, realised through foregrounding national and imperial (‘English’) literature and the mother-tongue. In the Australian environment at the turn of the 20th century, these ideas were available for imagining the child as both a British subject and an Australian colonial figure connected through constructions of race and development. Now, in this first decade of another, new century, when issues of global competition and the challenges to economic and cultural borders are at the
forefront of educational policy considerations, we believe received notions of the English subject(s) need to be historicised, revisited and challenged.

Importantly, we need to consider any uncomfortable continuities there might be between the character and conduct of English in its period of establishment – its installation – and its recent history, so that (among other things) racialised underpinnings of development and of ideal cultural outlook can be understood and addressed. Baker (2001, p 556) has argued that childhood could not be talked about, nor prescriptions for educating children considered, at the turn of the 20th century, without an appeal to ideas of race and the progress of ‘man’. A similar case has been made about ‘literature’, and about literary education: ‘It is impossible … to divorce the rise of an aesthetically and racially organized English studies from … British imperialism, whose school editions of “Standard Authors” served as its literary armature’ (Morgan 1990, p 205).

However, these connections have largely been forgotten in the present, when conceptions of ‘stages’ and ‘growth’ have been naturalised through the mainstream discourses of developmental psychology and English teaching. Similarly, we have forgotten that the ideals of a literary education were largely built around notions of English sensibility and outlook (‘Englandism’ – Dale 1992), connected with Romantic constructions of national culture and sensibility. Such conceptions of development and culture, nevertheless, like those of nation and empire, have long remained powerful underpinnings for authorising and rationalising the centrality of the English subjects, at all levels of schooling, as truly an Empire of Signs and Wonders (Bhabha 1994) (5).

As we have argued in this paper, further, it is important to review the discursive network from which the New Education was built, in order to help us to see some of the lineage of the distinctive curriculum formation of that version of English teaching – the New English – that arose in the 1970s, in all its contradictory politics and possibility. In the New English, as arguably in English teaching more generally, developmentalist notions of learning and a focus on self-generated learning were almost seamlessly combined with Romantic conceptions of the child and a belief in the power of literature to shape an ethical subject. Such seamlessness was made possible only by a systematic forgetting of the racial origins of developmental learning, and of the use of literature as a colonial project. Such a ‘disremembering’ (Baker 2001 p 556) of its own origins meant that the ‘Empire’ of English was unaware of, among other matters, the raced and gendered aspects of its work. To return to John Adams (1922b), the application of the word ‘new’ when applied to English – at various moments in curriculum history – was always somewhat misleading; indeed, ‘the more things appear to differ from their older forms, the more they are the same’…

Notes
1 It bears noting that Selleck himself distinguishes quite sharply between ‘elementary’ and ‘secondary’ education in this regard. Our view however is that ‘English’ in the fullest sense is best viewed historically and conceptually as operating across the primary-secondary schooling division, and as seeking to bring together in an always uneasy synthesis precisely those elements that Selleck and others keep apart (Green and Beavis 1996 [“Introduction”]).
This needs to be further elaborated with specific reference to the legacies of British Romanticism in and for late 19th and 20th century literary studies, and indeed to the manner in which ‘literature’ itself, as a distinctive socio-historical concept, is heavily charged with Romantic culture and discourse (Eagleton 1983, pp 18-22; Reid 2004).

We use the plural form here to acknowledge the way that English was formed at the turn of the 20th century out of a range of subjects in the Primary School, such as Reading, Spelling, Writing, Composition, as much as it became a study of literature in secondary schooling.

The Education Gazette was a monthly publication of the Education Department of South Australia which contained official announcements, regulations, lists, appointments and records. It also contained articles, speeches and extracts selected by the senior administrators designed to educate teachers across the far-flung state about the latest educational thinking.

Further work is needed on the relationship between the (post)colonial imagination and the curriculum history of ‘English’ as a distinctive school-subject, elaborating on the manner in which English teaching was realised in the Antipodes, in Australia and New Zealand, and widening the scope to include other national contexts such as the West Indies and other ‘post-Imperial’ countries (London 2002; Soler 2006).

Correspondence

References


Cormack, Phil and Green, Bill. forthcoming. (Re)Reading the Historical Record: Curriculum History and the Linguistic Turn, In New Curriculum Histories. ed. B. Baker, Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.


Green, Bill, Cormack, Phil and Reid, Jo-Anne. 2000. Putting Our Past to Work…., *English in Australia* Nos. 127-8, 111-119.


