

What is English? Understanding how subject English is framed in *The New Zealand Curriculum*

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Abstract

Since its emergence as a distinct subject area in the nineteenth century, English has been an important, but contested, subject. Competing discourses, resulting in different models of English, have vied for prominence, each with ideologies about the purposes of education and the needs of students and the state. However, while international research into subject English is plentiful, little has been written about the current state of subject English in New Zealand. Using content analysis and critical discourse analysis this article examines senior subject English in the *New Zealand Curriculum*. The results reveal that while subject English in New Zealand retains progressive features, it has been colonised by neoliberal educational discourses. This article argues that the results of these discourses include the commodification of learning, the entrenching of inequalities, and the reframing of teachers as mere technicians. While senior subject English in the *New Zealand Curriculum* is examined here, the results have implications across the curriculum, particularly in light of the NCEA review which began in 2018 and will result in changes from 2024.

Introduction

English is a nebulous subject. What English is, or should be, has long been contested (Marshall, 2000). Palmer, in one of the first histories of the subject, writes “Of their very nature, English studies resist arbitrary definition and consequently retain some curious features” (1965, p. 1). Locke (2007), writing from a New Zealand perspective, states how:

A number of debates have characterised its history: literature versus language; the place of grammar; the importance of ‘oracy’; the place of critical theory; the place of popular culture; English versus literacy; and most recently the place of information and communication technologies (ICTs). (p. 7).

Despite the contested nature of English studies, it has become an important subject within modern, anglophone education systems. As a subject, English is privileged in both school curriculum and timetable: it acts as a gatekeeper to higher education; through tests like the Programme for International Student Assessment, countries are ranked by their reading scores as a measure of the quality of their education systems; and there is a perennial concern about declining “literacy” levels. Clearly subject English is important, so it follows that it is important to know exactly what subject English is. Furthermore, it is important to understand what subject English is because no area of curriculum is neutral (Apple, 1979). Apple argues that there is a need “to make educational knowledge itself problematic, to pay attention to the “stuff” of curriculum, where knowledge comes from, whose knowledge it is, what social groups it supports, and so on” (p. 14). These concerns about which knowledge, whose knowledge, and in whose interest that knowledge is being taught have a particular relevance in New Zealand where there is ongoing concern about high levels of disparity in educational achievement (Ministry of Education, 2018).

Internationally, subject English has received significant scholarly attention in recent years (e.g., Clark, 2001; Gibbons, 2014; Marshall, 2000; Whitty & Wisby, 2016). However, most current research into subject English in New Zealand focuses on teacher practice and student achievement, rather than making curriculum matter itself “problematic” (Apple, 1979, p.14). Locke has written extensively about *English in the New Zealand* (Ministry of Education, 1994), the predecessor to the current curriculum document, and the first set of National Certificates of Educational Achievement (NCEA) achievement standards for English (e.g., 2002, 2007). The current curriculum document, *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) (NZC), and the current NCEA achievement standards for English (New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), 2011–2013), are mentioned only briefly (e.g., Locke, 2008). Consequently, this research seeks to understand how subject English has been framed within NZC and the implications of this for students and teachers. The current NCEA review, which began in 2018 and will result in significant changes being implemented from 2024, makes this investigation particularly pertinent as it contributes to an understanding of the state of subject English between 2011 and 2023. This research also provides a starting point to evaluate how the new NCEA standards fit within educational policy in New Zealand and the direction in which this policy is heading. Using the

results from content analysis and critical discourse analysis (CDA), this article will present findings that the progressive language used in *NZC* is only a veneer over neoliberal educational theories which result in the commodification of learning, the entrenching of educational inequalities, and the move of the teacher from professional to technician.

A brief history of subject English

English has a long, storied history, as an academic discipline and as a subject studied in schools (Palmer, 1965; Marshall, 2000; Locke, 2007). Since emerging as a distinct subject in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in England (Palmer, 1965), social, political, and economic forces have shaped English in various ways. The most influential and enduring of these are discussed below.

Basic skills

One of the early, significant models of English was one which focused on the basic skills of technical proficiency in reading and writing, at the expense of comprehension and expression. This model is linked particularly to the advent of compulsory, universal state education in nineteenth-century England. The monumental task of providing this education was viewed as needing to be, primarily, cheap and efficient (Palmer, 1965). To this end, the Revised Code for Education of 1862 was introduced, entrenching a drill-based system of reading, writing, and arithmetic. The focus on drill-based literacy was likewise present in New Zealand schools during this period (Soler, 2000a). While other models of English became prevalent in the twentieth century, the call for a “return to the basics” has remained present. In New Zealand, this pressure started with conservative business groups in the 1950s (Soler, 2000b), and became particularly significant in the 1990s as major changes to the English curriculum were made (Young, 2000). However, this model’s roots in providing cheap, efficient education for the working classes raise questions about whether this model is appropriate to equip all students to be successful in the twenty-first century.

Cultural heritage

The early years of the twentieth century saw the rise of the cultural heritage model of English (Clark, 2001). Driven by the English Association, a group

made up of early English studies professors, the cultural heritage model of English sought to support national unity throughout the UK and the wider empire by teaching “literature” and standard English language. Literature in particular was to pass on English culture and values to students, while standard English was to provide a common, unifying dialect for speaking and writing. This model was also dominant in subject English policy in New Zealand in the early years of the twentieth century. Children were to learn English culture through literature and to speak with Received Pronunciation despite their antipodean location (Soler, 2000a). While the cultural heritage model of English was meant to provide all students with the same language and skills, it has been widely criticised as privileging middle-class language and culture (Clark, 2001). Despite these concerns, this model continues to linger, with proponents subject English is important for developing a national identity and social cohesion (Rata, 2017).

Personal growth

The personal-growth model of English grew out of the advent of compulsory secondary education in the United Kingdom (Gibbons, 2014). For the first time, working class students were receiving post-primary education en masse, but in English they were forced to study texts and language that had little resemblance or relevance to their own lives. In response, the London Association of Teachers of English developed a model of English where the students’ language and experience were the starting points for learning. Canonical literature became only one of many voices in the classroom, joined by a range of texts, including those which reflected students’ own lives. Spelling, punctuation, and grammar were taught, as the need arose, in the context of students’ writing. Similar developments were occurring elsewhere in the anglophone world, leading to the Dartmouth Seminar in 1966, where the personal-growth model of English was discussed and formalised. This seminar, and the book *Growth through English* (Dixon, 1967) that came out of it, were hugely influential on New Zealand English teachers, who spent the next 14 years carefully developing and trialling *English: Forms 3–5: A statement of aims* (1983). The follow-up syllabus for Forms 6 and 7 was never published, overtaken by neoliberal education reforms (Brown, 1998). However, this model has also received significant criticism. Gibbons (2014) highlights how there are concerns that the model means disadvantaged students may not have

access to the kind of learning required for higher education and professional careers, and so entrench class inequalities. Whitty and Wisby (2016) also discuss how the progressive personal-growth model was seen as responsible for supposedly falling reading and writing standards, which neoliberal reforms aimed to address.

Neoliberalism

The neoliberal “turn” of the 1980s reshaped welfare, healthcare, and education alongside economic practices internationally. The reforms in education were characterised by: highly prescriptive skills-based curricula (Thrupp, 2001); more standardised assessments (Thrupp, 2001); undermining of teachers’ professionalism (Clark, 2001); and in relation to subject English, a focus on transferable literacy skills (Fairclough, 2010). The result of these reforms for subject English in New Zealand was a new curriculum document, *English in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1994), with a focus on skills that could be transferred across subjects and beyond schooling. This document was criticised by many teachers for the way it structured learning—eight sequential levels covered over 13 years of schooling, and hundreds of achievement objectives—as it did not fit with how they understood learning to occur in subject English (McFarlane, 2000; Locke, 2002). Others, like the influential Business Roundtable, were also unhappy with the document as it was not prescriptive enough in areas like grammar (Young, 2000).

The basic skills, cultural heritage, and personal-growth models have all shaped subject English in New Zealand. Each model is underpinned by different discourses which have different aims for learners: to become good workers; to have a common, unifying culture; to develop as a person through understanding language. This report will now turn to look at to what extent these models and the discourses that underpin them, particularly the personal-growth model and the progressive educational ideas it embodies, are retained and to what extent neoliberal reforms have restructured learning in subject English curriculum in New Zealand.

Methodology

This study uses qualitative approaches to investigate the discourses underpinning subject English curriculum in New Zealand, focusing on senior

subject English (taught in Years 11–13, the final three years of secondary school). It builds on the work of Terry Locke who extensively critiqued *English in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1994), the predecessor to *NZC* (e.g., Locke, 2002, 2007). *Curriculum* is used to refer to the range of documents which direct and shape what is taught in schools, including, but not limited to the official curriculum document. Consequently, two sets of documents which most directly shape learning in the senior English classroom will be analysed in this study. The first document is *NZC*, including both the learning area description for English and the achievement objectives for levels 6–8, which are usually taught in the final three years of high school. The second set of documents are the current NCEA achievement standards for English (New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 2011–2013) which assess levels 6–8 of *NZC*. There are other documents that could have been included when considering subject English in New Zealand more widely, including the *Literacy Learning Progressions* (Ministry of Education, 2010), but were not included as they do not focus on senior subject English. The Ministry of Education's site to support curriculum implementation, Te Kete Ipurangi, is considered in another phase of this study (see Ward, 2019).

This study uses content analysis “as a preliminary analytical strategy” (Prior, 2014, p. 361) to gain an overview of the documents and identify appropriate analysis categories for the CDA. The first content analysis method used was counting references to specific terms (Prior, 2014). The terms *students* and *teacher*, and any synonyms, were tallied because educational discourses view these participants as having very different places in the learning process. The method of data mining (Prior, 2014) was then used to note significant features in the layout and semiotics. The content analysis raised questions about the role of teachers, the content of subject English curriculum, and unclear articulation of discourses in it. The categories for CDA were then selected based on Fairclough's CDA framework where relevant categories for analysis are based on the question being investigated (2010). CDA provides the framework to analyse language, discourse, social life, and the links between these. It frequently uses Halliday's systemic functional grammar as a common theory of language to understand language functions. Based on the results of the content analysis, each document was analysed in terms of the grammatical features of theme, subject, actor, and process. Systemic functional grammar views a clause as needing to be considered from three perspectives: the theme, which is the

part of the clause which contains the information already understood within the clause; the subject, which is the participant or participants the clause is written or uttered in reference to; and the actor, which is the participant in the clause who is portrayed as “doing” the action (Halliday & Christian, 2013). These grammatical functions/are important for understanding if teachers and students are active, passive or absent participants in the learning process, and so enable understanding of the theory of learning underpinning the curriculum. Next, the systemic functional grammar category of processes, commonly referred to as verbs, was considered. Different theories of learning see students involved in different types of processes, for example those to do with doing, thinking, or being. The analysis then considered the categories of wording and coherence. Words and wording used repeatedly can signify the presence of a particular discourse (Locke, 2004). Coherence looks at how ideas are organised and connected in order to understand if a discourse is articulated consistently or if it is disconnected or interrupted (Fairclough, 2010). These findings were then theorised according to Fairclough’s (2010) social-reality framework in order to understand which discourses were present; where discourses from outside education are being used to shape subject Eng/lish (restructuring); where outside discourses have been im/posed on education (colonisation); and where ideologies are becoming dominant and so accepted as common sense (hegemony). The results from the analysis process are summarised below.

Results

The content analysis and CDA revealed four key findings about subject English as presented in *NZC* and the NCEA achievement standards for English. These are: the retention of progressive language within the documents; a focus on achievement over learning; the shifting purposes within the subject; and the emphasis on students being responsible for their own success.

A progressive veneer

Despite New Zealand’s education system having undergone radical neoliberal reforms in the 1980s and 1990s (Thrupp, 2001), the curriculum documents retain many progressive features that seem to indicate at least a partial retention of the personal-growth model within subject English. A key indicator of the continued presence of the personal-growth model within subject English is

its organisation into six “modes”. *NZC* is divided into two strands, Making Meaning which is broken down into the modes of “Listening”, “Reading” and “Viewing”, and Creating Meaning which is broken down into the modes of “Speaking”, “Writing” and “Presenting”. At each level of the curriculum, English has five achievement objectives which must be covered for each mode, effectively giving each mode the same importance. The NCEA achievement standards for English also follow this structure. While some standards, particularly those assessing speaking and writing, specify the mode to be assessed, others give a range of modes which could be assessed through the standard. For example, the Level 2 standard “Make significant connections across texts” states “This standard is derived from the Level 7 Making Meaning strand [listening, reading, viewing] and the Creating Meaning strand [speaking, writing, writing [sic]].” (NZQA, 2012, p.1). The achievement standards allow for approximately equal opportunities to assess each mode, with a slight weighting towards writing, as demonstrated in the table below:

Table 1. Number of achievement standards for assessing each mode

Mode	NCEA Level 1	NCEA Level 2	NCEA Level 3
Listening	5	5	4
Reading	5	5	4
Viewing	5	5	4
Speaking	4	4	4
Writing	8	7	7
Presenting	4	4	4

The new achievement standards for English proposed in the review NCEA is currently undergoing also attempt to provide an even assessment of all the modes (Ministry of Education, 2020). The inclusion of, let alone the equal weighting given to, the six modes are a direct legacy of the personal-growth model. As described in Dixon’s seminal *Growth through English* (1967), students’ language development was central to English and encompassed modes which included “drama” and “talking”, as well as audio-visual texts, such as television programmes, as part of the literature to be “read”. The six modes within subject English are a continuation of this model which embraced students’ development in spoken, written, and visual mediums. These modes

differ from earlier models of English which emphasised areas like reading, writing, grammar, and oracy. New Zealand's retention of personal-growth style modes also differs from current English curriculum internationally. In England's *National Curriculum* (Department for Education, 2014), for example, English is divided into reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary, and spoken English. These modes more closely resemble a cultural heritage model of English.

Another key indicator of the personal-growth model is the absence of specified texts, authors, periods of writing, nationalities of writers, or lists of grammar terminology. *NZC* gives five achievement objectives that students should meet through reading, but no guidance as to what should be read. Similarly, the only guidance given in the achievement standards in regards to written texts are whether or not they can be studied in class, and that they should be appropriate for the curriculum level being assessed. This again stands in stark contrast to other curriculums for subject English. England's *National Curriculum* (Department for Education, 2014), to make comparison to again, details which authors, places in the world, and periods of history when addressing which texts to cover. Likewise, no lists of language features are given in *NZC*, instead saying only that students should use features accurately. For example, the Level 7 achievement objectives state that students should use "a wide range of text conventions, including grammatical and spelling conventions, appropriately, effectively, and with accuracy" (Ministry of Education, 2014, n.p.). Similarly, the achievement standards for English also simply state that grammar and spelling should be accurate and appropriate. For example, in the Level 2 standard "Produce a selection of crafted and controlled writing", text conventions are required to be "accurate...so that the writing only contains minor errors" (NZQA, 2012, p. 2). The *National Curriculum* (Department for Education, 2014) for English includes a comprehensive list of grammatical features students are expected to learn and use. The lack of prescription in *NZC* and NCEA standards allow for a progressive, personal-growth styled English curriculum where grammar terms and language features do not have to be rote learnt at a certain age, but are introduced as the need arises.

The content analysis also suggested that the study of language is central to English, as it is when subject English is designed on a personal-growth model. The front section of *NZC* English starts with a whakatauki:

Ko te reo te tuakiri
Ko te reo tōku ahurei
Ko te reo te ora (p. 18)

This whakataukī translates as “language is identity, language is my uniqueness, language is life”. It sets up language rather than literature or literacy as the centre of subject English. This centrality is reinforced by the answer to the first question on the page “What is English about?” (p. 18) with the answer “Learning in English encompasses learning the language, learning through the language and learning about the language” (p. 18). The centrality of language in the learning area description for English is a feature of the personal-growth model where the core aim is to learn about language, learn through language, and learn about the context language is used in. Together with the organisation of the subject into six modes and the lack of prescribed content, both documents seem to indicate the retention of personal-growth ideas within senior subject English curriculum in New Zealand.

Measuring achievement

While the content analysis suggested the presence of a progressive discourse in the form of a personal-growth model of English in *NZC* and the NCEA achievement standards for English, a more detailed CDA suggests the introduction of more neoliberal discourses to the English curriculum. One way the influence of neoliberal discourse is discernible within subject English is through the focus on “achievement”. Within *NZC*, this is seen through the division of the curriculum into achievement objectives. For example, an achievement objective from Level 7 is “Select and integrate a range of language features appropriately for a variety of effects” (2014, n.p.). Each achievement objective is followed by one to four indicators of what achieving that objective involves. This structure draws on a neoliberal systems management discourse, which when used in education seeks to create a device to measure and control education from afar (Thrupp, 2001). The dividing of *NZC* into achievement objectives rather than say “learning outcomes” or even “areas for study” speaks to the creation of a curriculum document focused on measuring outcomes rather than students’ learning. The NCEA achievement standards for English are also structured along this neoliberal systems management discourse. Within the achievement standards, the learning is further broken down into achievement

criteria. However, this focus on “achievement” seems more appropriate for an assessment framework. The structure of *NZC* is very different from the personal-growth model which sees curriculum documents as a guide to learning. In their preface to *Growth through English: Set in the perspective of the seventies* (1975), Britton and Squire describe top-down education policies and documents as “helpful background to a teacher’s activities, but they exist only as options that *may* be taken up” (p. vii). They see good curriculum development as growing out of individual teachers reflecting on their own practice. Top-down lists of achievement objectives, indicators, and achievement criteria, while able to be used to measure students’ progress, do not match this description.

Shift in purpose

The content analysis suggested that language knowledge and use remain central to the model of English presented in *NZC*. However, a more detailed analysis of the coherence of ideas suggests a shift to a curriculum centred on developing transferable literacy skills, another feature of neoliberal curriculum (Fairclough, 2010). The second and longest section on the learning area description page for English in *NZC* is titled “Why study English?” (p. 18). Below this heading, a hierarchy of purposes for studying subject English are presented:

- i. Literacy
- ii. Using language effectively to communicate and be successful participants in life
- iii. The appreciation and enjoyment of texts
- iv. Developing identity through literature
- v. Being able to learn in other curriculum areas
- vi. Using the key competencies

Of these six purposes, four are to do with transferable literacy and communication skills. The first sentence sets up the importance of becoming literate: “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” (p. 18). Becoming literate in order to be able to function properly as a future adult in New Zealand is the first rationale for studying English. Language, part of the second purpose, becomes important because using it effectively to communicate leads to success: “To be successful participants, they need to

be effective oral, written, and visual communicators who are able to think critically and in-depth.” (p.18). Through these two purposes, the importance of developing skills that will be beneficial to future life is established as the central purpose of English. The final two purposes also emphasise that subject English is important due to the skills that can be used in schooling, both in other curriculum areas, and for demonstrating the key competencies, a set of five “soft skills” that should be developed in students across all learning areas. The emphasis on transferable skills which enable success at school and to become good contributors to the economy demonstrates a shift from the personal-growth model of English where the emphasis is on developing language knowledge in order to develop the person. It is interesting to note that on the new NCEA website, the description for subject English copies large parts of the learning area description from *NZC*. However, references to literacy learning, the usefulness of subject English for success in life, and transferable nature of skills learnt in English are either omitted or moved to the bottom of the page (Ministry of Education, n.d.). Further analysis will be required to establish if this signals a shift in subject English educational policy.

Students responsible for their own success

The content analysis and the CDA of the curriculum documents for English suggest that all students have the same opportunity for educational success. This idea is common within neoliberal discourses of education (Harvey, 2005). One of the ways this idea can be identified is through the grammatical structure of the sentences. For example, in the learning area description for English in *NZC* it states that “By engaging with text based activities students become...” (p. 18). “Students” in this sentence occupy the position of Subject, so grammatically they are responsible for the action of “becoming”. Discursively this sets up all students as being given the same opportunity to engage in these learning activities and through this to be successful. By implication, those who choose not to engage do not become successful. Furthermore, the description goes on to state that “Learning in English gives students access to the understandings, knowledge, and skills...” (p. 18). Here “Literacy in English” is the Subject, meaning subject English itself is responsible for the Process of “giving”, equally bestowing knowledge to all. Discursively, students are all being given the same opportunity to develop the skills needed for success. Teachers do not occupy the Theme, Subject, or Actor positions in any clause, meaning they are

not recognised as important participants in the learning process. In fact, the documents barely mention their existence, despite teachers presumably being at least one of the main audiences of these documents. Their important role in the learning process is not acknowledged.

The idea that students are set up as responsible for their own learning is also achieved through making learning an object instead of an action. For example, in the Level 7 achievement objectives for English in *NZC*, the Processes used to describe what students do in English are mainly material and verbal ones, such as “integrate”, “show”, “communicate” and “organise”. Cognitive processes, which might be expected to describe learning, such as “understand”, “comprehend” and “infer”, are either absent or have been nominalised, that is, turned into a noun. For example, instead of “understand”, “an understanding” (n. p.) is used. The grammatical shift is important, signally a significant shift in discourses framing learning. No longer is learning a process the student goes through, requiring mental and cognitive change and development. Instead learning becomes a unit given and received. It fails to recognise some students will learn faster, while others will need more support, nor does it recognise the role of teacher in enabling the process to happen. These grammatical features set up students as solely responsible for their learning and educational success, despite it being well documented that there are many factors which contribute to this (Harvey, 2005; Bishop & Berryman, 2009). The presence of this discourse is worrying as the New Zealand education system is characterised by unequal outcomes for Māori, Pacific peoples, and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Ministry of Education, 2018).

Discussion

This study's intent was to understand which discourses were shaping subject English in *NZC*. The findings from the content analysis and CDA revealed evidence of the retention of some organisational and linguistic features associated with the progressive personal-growth model of English. However, alongside this are the strong articulation of neoliberal discourses which have restructured the subject. Essentially, progressive language has formed a veneer over the curriculum hiding the way subject English has become focused on delivering transferable communication skills. Fairclough's (2010) social-reality theory gives a framework to understand this shift in the discourses

underpinning subject English. The introduction of neoliberal systems management and economic rational discourses, coming from the field of economics to the field of education, is a case of “restructuring”. Furthermore, as the introduction of skills-based curriculum divided into measurable pieces has not come from subject or teaching experts, but imposed as part of a wider curriculum restructure in New Zealand education, it is what Fairclough (2010) refers to as colonisation. Apple, writing in 1979, warns about moving models from other fields to education, arguing that they:

provide little in the way of the conceptual resources needed to grapple with the complex problem of designing environments and selecting and preserving ‘traditions’ which mediate between a student’s and concrete group’s search for personal meaning and a society’s need to preserve its socially sedimented fabric of institutions and knowledge. (p. 113)

This warning raises questions about the way subject English has been colonised and restructured. Is it suitable for enriching, growing and preparing students, or will the current model of English show itself as insufficient? This discussion will briefly consider how this restructuring has been able to occur through the commodification of learning and the devaluing of teachers, as well as the implications for students and teachers.

The commodification of learning

Both *NZC* and the NCEA achievement standards for English view education as a commodity. It is an object that can be gained, rather than a process that requires internal cognitive change and growth. Prior to the introduction of radical neoliberal reforms in the 1980s and 1990s, progressive discourses were the dominant ideology shaping education in New Zealand (Thrupp, 2001). In this worldview, education of the student is seen as a benefit to society. Neoliberal discourses of economic rationalism view education in a vastly different way—education becomes a personal good, for one’s own betterment and advancement, not the betterment and advancement of society (Harvey, 2005). Grammatically, this is achieved through nominalising cognitive processes, such as “learn” in the learning area description for English in *NZC* or “understand” in achievement objective pages. This small grammatical shift indicates a much larger shift in educational theory towards economic rationalism. This shift is supported by the breaking down of learning in the

curriculum document to a series of achievement objectives, and within NCEA to a series of achievement standards and criteria. This structure emphasises the quantifying and controlling of education through measuring achievement, instead of the process of learning.

Turning education into an object, while implying that all students have the same access to this object and thus the same chance to become successful, perpetuates the myth that equal access to the same education gives all students the same chance. Research, such as that of Bishop and Berryman (2009), demonstrates that there are many factors that influence educational outcomes. This is a concern when Māori, Pacific peoples, those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and those with disabilities have persistently lower educational outcomes. The commodification of learning which appears to give all students the same opportunities, can instead contribute to the entrenchment of inequalities. This view of education favours already dominant groups in society (Apple, 1979). Furthermore, this view on how to structure learning in English is becoming hegemonic. When the structure was first introduced with the predecessor to the NZC, *English in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1994), along with the first set of NCEA achievement standards, it was questioned by many teachers. They had been trained in Vygotskian and Piagetian theories of education and language development, and did not see learning in English occurring in this fashion (McFarlane, 2000). However, within 10 years Locke (2002) observed newly trained teachers accepting this model of English without question. Likewise, with the current review of NCEA standards, English continues to be broken down into standalone standards which can be achieved, or not, and added to an overall collection of standards (Ministry of Education, 2020). The education sector, including teachers, have consulted widely on these changes, but this structure is not questioned. This study does not have the scope to examine the many merits and drawbacks of this assessment system, but does seek to highlight that it is now taken for granted that English, like all school subjects, is a commodity to be measured, assessed, and gained.

The devaluing of teachers

Both content analysis and CDA clearly reveal the displacement of teachers from the learning process. Deprofessionalisation of teachers is a common theme within neoliberal education reforms, with teachers seen as guilty

of provider capture leading to falling standards (Clark, 2001). The results revealed the removal of teachers from occupying either the Theme, Subject, or Actor positions throughout the curriculum documents. Instead, English as a subject is responsible for providing students with knowledge and skills, and students are responsible for accepting these. This absence of teachers is in the face of extensive research, including New Zealand specific research (e.g. Bishop & Berryman, 2009) of the importance of teachers in the learning process. If learning is a discrete object, this displacement makes sense. Teachers are mere technicians, coordinating students getting their pieces of learning and credentials. The devaluing of teachers is reinforced through the lack of theorisation, evidence, or rationale teachers are provided with for the radical restructuring of English. This contrasts with the earlier personal-growth model of English. New Zealand teachers were able to draw upon the ideas from *Growth through English* (Dixon, 1967), which grew out of the work of the London Association of Teachers of English and the Dartmouth Seminar (Brown, 1998), and then use these principles to design an English syllabus over several years. While there are many voices who can contribute to curriculum development, teachers as professionals should at least be provided with the rationale behind curriculum structure. However, if teachers are mere technicians, they do not need to know theorisation and rationale behind the design for subject English.

Conclusion

This study explored senior subject English within the curriculum in New Zealand. There were limitations to the study in terms of documents analysed, and the focus only on senior subject English. It found that while there are some progressive elements within the wider curriculum for the subject, overall it has been colonised by neoliberal discourses. English is now a subject for the teaching of transferable literacy and communications skills. This shift has serious implications as it contributes to the entrenchment of inequalities for students and deprofessionalisation of teachers. Worryingly, many of the ways in which English has been restructured are common across all learning areas, making these implications curriculum wide. With the latest iteration of NCEA standards due to be phased in from 2023, further research will be needed to understand if neoliberal discourses are continuing to colonise and restructure subject English, and in turn understand the impact these potentially damaging discourses are having on education in New Zealand.

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