Building a knowledge structure for English: Reflections on the challenges of coherence, cumulative learning, portability and face validity

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A curriculum is a knowledge structure outlining what is to be learned in what order. The Australian curriculum for English emphasises creation of a '*coherent*' and '*cumulative*' 'body of knowledge about how the English language works', with learning that is '*portable* and applicable to new settings across the school years and beyond' (National Curriculum Board, 2009, p. 9, emphasis added). But what happens when those charged with implementing curriculum cannot agree on 'what counts'? This article reflects on key differences between stakeholders about disciplinarity in English, drawing on sociological categories of Bernstein and Maton. The fourth challenge facing implementation is '*face validity*'. The creation of a viable knowledge structure for English makes it crucial that teachers and professional bodies find it acceptable. The article concludes with a heuristic figure for representing key parameters of knowledge structure in English and a proposal for interrelating these so as to optimize implementation of the curriculum in Australian classrooms.

Introduction

A curriculum is a knowledge structure—a statement about what is 'to count' as learning in a given domain of enquiry and about how learning should progress during a nominated period of apprenticeship. This is not to say that a curriculum is identical with knowledge itself. As Bernstein emphasised, school curriculum is a 'recontextualization' of established 'official' discourses in distinct knowledge fields (Bernstein, 2000, pp. xxv–vi). What is to be learned in this national version of English has been 'lifted' (de-located) from knowledge discourses produced elsewhere in universities and other sites of knowledge production and relocated in school English. Like other school curricula, the national curriculum for English is a socially organised and recontextualised knowledge structure. It is constituted and legitimated through institutional relations of power and control in the larger field of social relations. Any knowledge structure carries with it 'knower' structures (and, some would argue, semiotic structures that communicate these).

But what happens when 'knowers'—teachers, teacher educators and academics—cannot agree about 'what counts' as valued knowledge in a discipline? This is the situation facing the Australian curriculum for English. Although all states and territories have agreed in principle to adopt the current version of the curriculum, there is a groundswell of opposition to its three-strand structure (language, literature and literacy) and to its strong emphasis on knowledge as 'content' rather than as 'process'. In addition, many are concerned at the absence of 'the learner' and 'the teacher' in the curriculum. Such contentions have been a marked feature of responses to the English curriculum by professional associations like the English Teachers' Association of New South Wales (ETA) and the national umbrella body—the Australian Association for the Teaching of English (AATE). How is consensus on knowledge structure to be hammered out in a field comprised not just of different groups of stakeholders—curriculum authorities, academics, professional associations, teachers and parents—but of very different orientations to disciplinarity? What are the possibilities for an integrated account of disciplinary learning?

Struggles over legitimation are not confined to English of course. All four subjects chosen for initial development—English, mathematics, science and history—have been the focus of national debates. Stakeholders have argued, for example, over the depth of coverage of content in science, over the emphasis on Australian history and over the level of challenge in mathematics. But subject English is perhaps the most complicated for reasons beyond debates about core content. English is not simply a school subject but the portal to the spoken and written language of school learning. It is the subject that inducts children into language across the curriculum. Language enters into the learning process in English in three related but distinct ways. As Michael Halliday first described in 1981: 'Language development is three things: learning language, learning *through* language and learning *about* language' (Halliday, 2009, p. 216, emphasis added). English, therefore, is the language students must learn, the language through which they learn most other subjects and it is the object of their learning—what they learn about. The relationship between learning *about* language and learning *of* language is a complex and under-researched issue. But recent debates about English across some of the key states and their professional associations have brought it to the surface and require adequate reflection if competing claims about core business of this discipline are to be resolved.

This article explores the challenges of knowledge structure with a special focus on language in English. It explores this issue in light of four factors. Three of these were announced in the Framing Paper that guided writers and advisers on the content for English. The Australian national curriculum was to give all students access to a '*coherent*' and '*cumulative*' 'body of knowledge about how the English language works' and ensure that this learning be '*portable*' and applicable to new settings across the school years and beyond (National Curriculum Board, 2009, p. 9, emphasis added). The remit of the new curriculum has been enunciated in the call to produce knowledge that hangs together and makes sense (coherence), that

progresses learning across the years of school English (cumulative knowledge) and that can be transferred from one context to another (portability).

These three challenges can be investigated along two axes. The first axis is disciplinary—the relationship between disciplinary practices and students' development over time. As the documents published by professional associations have emphasised, the national curriculum has ignored the persistent influence of different models of English on contemporary classrooms. A coherent disciplinarity does not have to mean homogeneity. But the question of coherence calls for a meta-model of English that gives unity to the complex practices of the discipline. It calls for access to principles of 'recontextualization' (Bernstein, 1990, 2000) so that both commonalities and differences in disciplinary practices can be discerned. How can the diverse practices of English be construed so that they contribute to cumulative learning? (The relationship between these two aspects of disciplinarity in English is discussed later.)

The second axis is epistemological—how knowledge is construed in the current version of English and in professional discourse. While the Framing Paper stressed the importance of 'content'—bodies of knowledge about language: for example, key stakeholders in the associations emphasise the dynamic aspects of learning—processes of reading, writing, viewing, listening and speaking. The initial proposal for discussion put out by the National Curriculum Board cautioned against treating disciplinary content as arbitrary. It argued that a focus on 'process' to the exclusion of 'content' led to

> a focus on scientific investigation rather than science, a focus on historical method rather than history, and a variation in content across schools that is arbitrary or even idiosyncratic. That kind of separation of content and process is not helpful and will be avoided in the development of the national curriculum. (National Curriculum Board, 2008, p. 7)

As will be seen, however, the orientation in English towards processes (the how of English) rather than towards content (the what of English) has made the development of knowledge base difficult. In this respect, the role of learning *about* language, the third aspect of Halliday's framework, is obscured by a preoccupation with learning through using language. This article explores the interplay between learning *about* and learning *how* in struggles between the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) and professional associations like the ETA and AATE.

This brings me to a fourth challenge facing implementation of the national curriculum in English—that of 'face validity'. A curriculum is far more than a document—a blueprint for practice. It must be seen to be valid by those who have to make it work for students in diverse classrooms (different 'knowers'). What 'counts' as knowledge, as know-how and as cumulative learning is always going to be a matter of professional judgement; it must make sense, become coherent, and seem 'right' to those charged with its implementation. What Berstein (1999, 2000) called the 'recontextualizing field' includes academics, professional associations and teachers. But when it comes to implementation in this field, teachers are the key 'knowers'.

Can English become a site of disciplinary learning with a strong knowledge structure *and* an acceptable 'knower' structure? In elaboration of this challenge, I draw substantially on Bernstein's late work on knowledge structure (Bernstein, 1999, 2000) and on recent developments of this by educational sociologists Karl Maton (2009, 2010, 2011) and Johann Muller (2007) who are endeavouring in conversation with educational linguists to make knowledge structure and the basis of its legitimation more visible and more accessible to non-insiders.

The challenge of coherence in a heterogeneous discipline

The challenges outlined above were latent in the Framing Paper produced in 2009 to guide writers and advisers on the national English curriculum's content. This document emphasised the long-standing importance of English as the discipline that develops students' knowledge of language and literature and for expanding students' literacy skills. The Framing Paper argued that English should be built around three core elements (later called strands):

> Element 1: *Language: Knowledge about the English language*: a coherent, dynamic and evolving body of knowledge about the English language and how it works.
>
> Element 2: *Literature: Informed appreciation of literature*: an enjoyment in and increasingly informed appreciation of the English language in its capacity to convey information, to express emotion, to create imaginative worlds, and to convey aesthetically and ethically significant experiences through reading and viewing a variety of literary texts.
>
> Element 3: *Literacy: Growing repertoires of English usage*: the ability to understand and produce the English language accurately fluently, creatively, critically, and effectively in a growing range of modes, and digital and print settings. (National Curriculum Board, 2009, p. 2, emphasis in original)

It is true to say that this construing of content was not something most teachers— at least as far as we can gauge from responses by professional associations like ETA in New South Wales and its equivalent associations in Victoria—found useful. The final submission from the ETA to the National Curriculum Board in 2009 took issue with the emphasis on the 'what' of English and the lack of attention to the 'who' and the 'why'.

> A question that is continually asked by our members is: where, aside from recognition of the need for professional development, is *the teacher* in this document? What is his/her role in its delivery? How much scope will there be for teachers to program for and shape the learning of their students, in order that dynamism in teaching and a sense of ownership of the curriculum can be captured in classrooms around the country? (English Teachers' Association, 2009, p. 2)

This same refrain was taken up in the later response to the ACARA by the national body of English teaching associations. The report on responses from professional associations across Australia decried the failure to acknowledge the importance of

different models of English, particularly those associated with personal growth, cultural studies and critical literacy, which many felt had been downplayed in favour of cultural heritage and skills models of English in the Framing Paper. The national report bemoaned the lack of recognition accorded to 'esteemed names in the field' like John Dixon, Douglas Barnes, James Moffett, Garth Boomer, Ken Watson, Ian Reid, Wendy Morgan and Gunther Kress—all of whom have 'established that English teachers must acknowledge and draw on students' existing repertoires of language use and textual practices' (Australian Association for the Teaching of English, 2009, p. 5).

The counterposing of these various 'who*s*' to the 'what' of the Framing Paper is an instance of what Maton (2009, 2010) called a 'knower code'. Drawing on the late work of Basil Bernstein into the internal structure of disciplinary discourses, Karl Maton distinguished between school discourses that privilege 'knowers' rather than 'knowledge' as the basis of their legitimation codes. Maton argued that 'discursive practices can be analysed according to whether they emphasise as the basis of legitimate insight the possession of explicit principles, skills and procedures (knowledge code)' or 'attitudes aptitudes and dispositions (knower code)' (Maton, 2009, p. 46). In its orientation to the 'who' of the discipline—teachers and the esteemed names in the field who guide them and students—the English of the 'guild' embodies a knower code. It is knowers who decide on 'what counts' in disciplinary practices of English, not 'knowledge' in the sense identified by Maton and earlier by Bernstein in his description of hierarchical knowledge structures like physics. Unlike these curriculum structures that develop through the integration and subsuming of an increasing array of empirical data, Bernstein suggested that English could be regarded (like cultural studies) as developing through the periodic addition of a 'new language'—one that 'offers the possibility of a fresh perspective, a new set of questions, a new set of connections, and an apparently new problematic, and most importantly a new set of speakers' (Bernstein 2000, p. 162). In their insistence on the importance of different models of English and of key theorists within these models, the ETA and the AATE underscored the importance of the 'knower code' in the production of a coherent account of disciplinarity in English.

Subject English has always been an unstable epistemological mix. In its relatively short history as a discipline of school learning—150 years—it has been construed variously as an induction into basic literacy skills, an engagement with great works of literature, an opportunity for personal growth and for critical and cultural analysis. These different models of English have emerged over the years, their presence remarked by several writers (for example, Christie et al., 1991; Goodwyn, 2003; Green & Cormack, 2008; Locke, 2005; Sawyer, 2005; Thomson, 2004). But their status vis-à-vis each other has not been well theorised or explained (see Christie & Macken-Horarik, 2011, for further discussion of the relationship between the models). In fact, English is a discipline striated—some would say fractured—by various forms of knowledge that make different claims on students' attention. Identifying the principles underpinning the practices associated with each model is problematic, especially given the invisibility of the criteria by which students can access knowledge. Of course, the national curriculum will not change

the fact that school English has been a heterogeneous discipline for many years. Students of high ability or symbolic capital (or both) are exposed to a curriculum rich in linguistically challenging texts, a range of interpretive practices and a strong emphasis on essayist literacy (cultural heritage and to a lesser extent, cultural analysis models). Students of less ability or symbolic capital are offered a curriculum of 'thin gruel': a diet of basic skills or personalist literacy activities or a combination of these. For this latter group, a 'knower code' obscures the basis on which disciplinary learning is acquired. In a school system where English is a compulsory subject for all students, the social consequences of diversity require adequate theorisation. In this regard, the defensive responses of professional associations about its 'knower'-based disciplinary claims are never going to serve such students who are without access to 'low road' transfer to specialised knowledge offered by a 'knower code' (Maton, 2009, p. 54).

This is not to argue that a 'knower code' can be done away with by fiat as it were. Any coherent account of English must engage with the 'knower' orientation of English and with the heterogeneous practices associated with different models. These are part and parcel of the development over time of what Bernstein has called a 'horizontal knowledge structure'. But the different 'gazes' each model activates—typically without the awareness of the students—are shaped by principles of recontextualisation that have a social origin. Bernstein explained this process as follows:

> Because a horizontal knowledge structure consists of an array of languages (models), any one transmission necessarily entails some selection and some privileging within the set recontextualised for the transmission of the horizontal knowledge structure. The social basis of the principle of this recontextualising indicates whose 'social' is speaking. The social basis of the principle of the recontextualising constructs the perspective of the horizontal knowledge structure. Whose perspective is it? How is it generated and legitimated? I say that this principle is social to indicate that choice here is not rational in the sense that it is based on the 'truth' of one of the specialised languages. For each language reveals some 'truth', although to a great extent this partial truth is incommensurate and language specific … At the level of the acquirer, this invisible perspective, the principle of recontextualisation structuring the transmission, is expected to become how the acquirer reads, evaluates and creates texts. A 'gaze' has to be acquired i.e. a particular mode of recognising and realising what counts as an authentic sociological reality. (Bernstein, 1999, pp. 164–5)

If the national curriculum is to makes sense to those outside its 'knower code' (especially students for whom it is a heartbreaking mystery), then all need access to shared principles of recontextualisation that work within and across the different models. This will require access to semiotic and social principles that reveal how 'one text is like another in some respect' and how language works in different contexts (see Muller, 2007, for discussion of this point).

How can we use Bernstein's notion of recontextualisation to understand the linguistic demands of each model of English? In the growth model, the student sees the text as a surface for the exploration of personal responses, an opportunity for

reflection with others on 'what I found meaningful in my reading' of the text. Pedagogic practices like reader response and journal writing are common here. With the skills model, the student's gaze is on formal elements of texts (for example, their generic structure, formal rules of punctuation, paragraphing) and on correct expression (spelling or pronunciation). In the cultural heritage model, by contrast, his or her gaze is on the text as tissue of meanings. In the traditional approaches to the great works, the focus lit on the canon (a selective tradition) and canonical knowledge (how this work is structured to enable particular readings). More recently, the array of texts available for the cultivated gaze has widened to include filmic texts amongst others. And in cultural analysis (critical literacy), the text is situated within social practices and readings are regarded as socially constructed. In this model, theory is welcome and so are theoretical categories that bring out the interpenetration of social and semiotic structure. In each model, the principles of recontextualisation are more or (usually) less visible, more or less tacit. All give partial access to the disciplinary practices of English and each state within Australia varies in the extent to which the models figure in examinations. There is not space in this article to reflect on the obvious hierarchies of understanding and competence buried in the models (but see Christie & Macken-Horarik, 2007, and Macken-Horarik, 2006a, for an account of the hierarchies embedded within apparent diversities). The issue of how to build a unified account of disciplinarity in English across these different 'languages' must be resolved if students are to gain access to the gazes privileged in the discipline at those vital moments of transition within and beyond schooling.

The release of the national curriculum has clearly not resolved the issue of this complex heterogeneity of English—especially in the accounts prepared of the discipline by professional associations. It can only be resolved if teachers and students have access to the principles of recontextualisation on which each model is founded. Of course, this level of visibility is not only a challenge to any theorist of its various 'languages' but a threat to the hidden ideological power base of the discipline. But it is necessary if a coherent account of English is to be produced and access to the possibilities of each model offered to all students.

The challenge of cumulative learning

Probably the most telling development in English is the acknowledgement of the importance of cumulative learning. The Framing Paper put this at the forefront of its remit, calling all teachers of English to take responsibility for continuity in the growth of knowledge across the school years.

> The knowledge building process will be neither linear nor the same for all students. Establishing greater continuity in the growth of knowledge about the English language across all the years of schooling, however, is none the less the priority. (National Curriculum Board, 2009, p. 9)

Student engagement with language is at the heart of cumulative learning and this is reflected in the 'threads of learning' linking work on language with literature and literacy in the current structure of curriculum content. Cutting across the vertical

organisation of the three strands of content, the curriculum has attempted to highlight how language learning grows through years of schooling. In the language strand, for example, within 'Language for interaction', students at Year 4 will learn about the differences between 'the language of opinion and feeling and the language of factual reporting or recording'. In Year 6, students learn how 'strategies for interaction become more complex and demanding as levels of formality and social distance increase'. In Year 8, students explore 'how language codes and conventions of speech adopted by communities influence the identities of people in these communities'. The logic of increased complexity and abstraction is discernible in this progression from Years 4 to 8. Students are asked to move from a fairly rudimentary understanding about differences between fact and opinion into a more nuanced appreciation of the impact of social distance on interpersonal meanings and then into study of how social community shapes the codes and conventions of interaction.

However the curriculum is organised (and an attempt has been made to build in consistent threads of development in K–10), continuity of learning can only be achieved in practice if teachers share a set of common assumptions about how to facilitate it. This requires a 'view across time' (Freebody, 2007, p. 8) in which teachers at each stage can build on what has been learned earlier and anticipate the learning their students need to do next—in this and later years. One key aspect of disciplinarity is the capacity to build knowledge over time but, as Maton (2009, 2010) has observed, school English is an example of a 'segmental knowledge structure'; this is obvious in the lack of commensurability between the gaze acquired in one model of English and that in another. The challenge of cumulative learning can be met if teachers have access to principled accounts of language development in schooling and in particular how they can foster the capacity for abstraction, evaluation and interpretation increasingly called for in later years of schooling.

The key here is to develop a shared meta-language for English—a language for talking about language. Recent work by educational linguists like Frances Christie and Beverly Derewianka on the development of abstraction in school discourse offers helpful leads here for creating shared understandings amongst teachers about how to build knowledge cumulatively over time (Christie & Derewianka, 2008). Of course, a linguistic meta-language is not the only one necessary to understandings of literature and literacy. One of the challenges (not considered in this article) is to create an interface between linguistic and literary ways of talking about texts—something stylistics has attempted in other times and cultural studies in a different milieu. But, however the meta-languages are designed, there is a clear need for a set of principles on which meta-languages for language, literature and literacy can rest on for professional access to both the principles *and* to the knowledge base on which they draw. Only in this way can teachers make judicious decisions about how to recontextualise learning for students at one stage of schooling and anticipate the learning they need to do at the next stage of schooling in English. Teachers, like students, need access to the keys of cumulative learning.

The challenge of portability

Thirdly, there is the challenge of portable understandings that students can apply to new contexts and texts. Along this dimension of disciplinarity, we consider the relationship between knowing *about* language and knowing *how* to use it.

The Framing Paper made it clear that both aspects of knowledge were crucial and that the English national curriculum should:

- be developed around a view of the coherent and connected bodies of knowledge that students accumulate, broaden and refine over the school years.
- involve a systematic movement back and forth between learning the knowledge skills and dispositions that characterise the discipline, and applying them in new settings.

> This dual goal of learning in English—*knowledge about* language, literature and literacy, and the increasingly powerful *application of that knowledge* to different kinds of texts—is a general model for the interaction between the elements [later strands]. (National Curriculum Board, 2009, p. 9, emphasis added)

This dual mandate informing the creation of a knowledge structure in English has a history in much curriculum theorising in recent years. In their comprehensive account of disciplinarity, Anderson and Valente (2002) asserted the importance of the interplay between conceptual enterprise of a discipline that constrains and guides learning and the practical regimen of its application that gives agency to those who apply it. The importance of both conceptual knowledge and 'know-how' has been underscored in recent research into the disciplinary demands of English.

Freebody, Maton and Martin draw on the work of Anderson and Valente to make the point quite forcefully: 'To put it bluntly, without the regimen we cannot tell a new idea from a good idea from a sustainable good new idea' (Freebody, Maton & Martin, 2008, p. 192). The disappearance of knowledge about language from the study of English makes shuttling between these two poles of the disciplinary continuum very difficult. It has led to a bits-and-pieces curriculum as teachers draw from fragments of one theory of language or another. But the Framing Paper pointed out the importance of moving between content *and* process when it comes to language.

> The goal of teaching grammar and textual patterns should *go beyond* students' labelling of various grammatical categories; it should centre on goals such as clearer expression of thought, more convincing argumentation, more careful logic in reasoning, more coherence, precision and imagination in speaking and writing, and knowing how to choose words and grammatical and textual structures that are more appropriate to the audience or readership. The goal here centres on the gradually more powerful conversion of *'knowledge about'* language into *a resource for effective reading, listening, writing, speaking and designing*. (National Curriculum Board, 2009, p. 6, emphasis added)

For many in English teaching, this is where the territory becomes far more complex and the technicality forbidding. As many studies show, teachers are anxious about their ability to teach grammar because their own knowledge is so fragmentary and fragile. Many do know about parts of speech—nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs,

pronouns, conjunctions, prepositions; many are aware of the prototypical structure of text types and the importance of consistent tense, of logical sentence structure and of keeping track of participants through pronoun reference. But many are also worried about their ability to diagnose the nature of the struggles their students are having and to name these struggles accurately. As one recent study of teachers' knowledge base discovered, many teachers have a fragmented knowledge about language and this 'lacks depth' (Harper & Rennie, 2009). The situation is particularly acute for beginning teachers as other studies have revealed (Department of Education, Science & Training, 2005; Louden et al., 2005). But the problem of a patchy (bits-and-pieces) knowledge base is something even experienced teachers struggle with as an earlier study of the knowledge base of 128 experienced primary teachers revealed. Within this large cohort of teachers, the vast majority (86%) claimed that knowledge about grammar was crucial to good literacy teaching but only six teachers from this group (4.6%) felt confident to undertake this (Hammond & Macken-Horarik, 2001). Many teachers don't (yet) have a coherent map of language as a whole and how to deploy it in English teaching.

Of course, this is not simply a problem of lack of knowledge or even of a fragile or fragmentary knowledge of language as a system. It is a fraught issue for the profession at large. Many teachers are unsure about the role of grammar in English teaching itself. Some argue that while grammar has always been part of 'core business' in English, it should be taught at the point of need rather than systematically (Doecke, Howie & Sawyer, 2006, p. 7). Others disagree, claiming that the absence of a systematic approach to teaching about language has contributed to continued disadvantage for already linguistically marginalised groups of students (see, for example, Valdez, Bunch, Snow & Lee, 2005). Certainly, systematic and rhetorically oriented descriptions of grammar have long been absent from school English, as Christie (1993) showed.

Any meta-language worth its salt must yield generalisations relevant to different text types and also be adapted to precise work on particular texts. And even within the content of the national curriculum, there is a gap when it comes to a broader semiotic grammar. Some real challenges remain when it comes to the logo-centric orientation of most grammars. The commitment to multi-modality in English is only partially resolved if one scrutinises the content strands in the current document. It is not yet possible to talk about message structure in print (say in a picture book) and to relate this meaningfully to message structure in pictures (say the illustrations accompanying a story). A portable meta-language needs to allow not only for generalisations about verbal texts but also visual and multi-modal texts.

The deeper problem for English when it comes to the dual mandate of disciplinary knowledge is revealed in the responses of professional associations to the curriculum. Countering the position outlined above by Anderson and Valente, and later by Freebody, Maton and Martin, about the 'dual mandate' of disciplinary learning, the ETA's final submission to the National Curriculum Board in 2009 about the Framing Paper is telling in its conflation of knowledge and knowing.

> In English therefore, the distinction between process and knowledge is not as clear as the Framing Paper would have it. If one takes into account *who* is learning English and for what purpose, and surely this is fundamental to a workable curriculum*, knowledge and processes are interdependent and barely distinguishable*. Knowledge of the discipline is expressed through its processes and processes in general are only viable using the content of the discipline. (English Teachers' Association, 2009, p. 4, emphasis added)

In this summary, and in the final submission by the AATE to the National Curriculum Board on the Framing Paper, members of the profession were representing disciplinarity in terms of processes of knowing or doing rather than in terms of content. It is clear that 'developing a body of knowledge about language' is problematic. Nevertheless, even within a process-approach to knowledge, students (like teachers) have to have something to apply. Conflating knowledge and process makes this untenable; in effect, it removes or 'disappears' knowledge in the expression of learning in processes. A portable knowledge toolkit is rendered impossible for all those unable to 'abstract away' from processes and thus produce relevant generalisations about how one process is related to another and what counts in what contexts. Knowledge structure is flattened in tacit and unfolding experiences of learning and doing. This is not to say that a focus on know-how is not crucial. It is (see Macken-Horarik, 2006b). But without access to a meta-view—a view across time—made possible through a shared understanding of what knowledge is relevant to which processes, many will suffer the fate of those who are just not 'naturally good' at English.

Perhaps the anxiety of many in the profession about what kinds of knowledge are relevant to what kinds of literacy tasks and processes is making it impossible to distinguish knowing from the systems that knowing draws on. The effect is to strand students in what Bernstein (1990) referred to as a continuing 'present tense' of learning, where principles of acquisition are rendered invisible to learners.

The challenge of face validity

Finally, there is the issue of face validity. Any curriculum that is going to be broadly acceptable to teachers charged with implementation needs to have a high degree of 'perceived rightness'. Of the many forms of validity in research, face validity is perhaps most important when it comes to professional take-up of curriculum. A curriculum construct will have face validity if it appears to do what it is designed to do (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). Teachers have to 'buy it'. This is perhaps the greatest challenge facing the national curriculum in its current moment.

While many accept the need for a national curriculum, a large proportion of the profession has rejected the current organisation of English into three content strands: language, literature and literacy. The response to the consultation draft of the curriculum was particularly strident in Victoria and New South Wales. But the ETA response to the curriculum released in 2010 is worth quoting for its revealing commentary on the nature of disciplinarity as perceived by the professionals charged with implementing it. In his report for the New South Wales journal, *mETAphor*, the president proclaimed:

It is difficult to conceive of anything that could be more *un*-English than using the three strands of language, literature and literacy to delimit curriculum content. For, in effect, the draft Australian curriculum is asking the nation's English teachers to forget everything they know—ironically enough—about the nature and workings of language, literature and literacy, in order to accept the three strands as valid and useful. No wonder that participants in the March ETA consultation meetings reported that they were having difficulty finding a 'way into' the draft Australian curriculum because of the three strand structure. Borders both lock in and lock out; a curriculum that is locking out teachers because of the way it locks in content is hardly a supportable proposition. (Howie, 2010, p. 2, original emphasis)

Howie's report is telling in its commentary on the epistemological stance of many in English: it eschews 'borders' around knowledge, it rejects the imposition of content on teachers who already know about 'the nature and workings of language, literature and literacy'; in short it identifies English as a 'knower code' rather than a knowledge code (Maton, 2009, 2010). Its fidelity is to dispositions and experiences of those who teach (and those who learn) rather than to a disciplinary content outside teachers and students. The emphasis within the profession on 'processes of learning' rather than on content is one instance of the challenge of face validity. How can English teachers generate coherent, cumulative and portable understandings about language if their understandings of their remit vary so profoundly from those enshrined in the current draft of the national curriculum?

The rejection of English K–10 has become entrenched in New South Wales and Victoria especially. As I write, it is being revised in these states to adapt 'content' to processes of learning or modes (such as reading, writing, speaking and listening). It is being turned into a disciplinary structure more recognisable and more legitimate to those who have to teach it. The knowledge structure is being reconstrued in terms of 'knowers', processes and (to a lesser extent) diverse models of English.

Conclusion—towards a heuristic of integration

A key feature of the Framing Paper and of the emerging versions of the English curriculum for Australia is the emphasis on the development of a coherent knowledge base. In relation to knowledge about English, the Framing Paper argued that, 'Systematically guiding students in the development of *a coherent body of knowledge* about how the English language works is a fundamental responsibility of the English curriculum' (National Curriculum Board, 2009, p. 9, emphasis added). But the stress on '*a body of knowledge*' proved to be anathema to the professional associations who argued that English is not constituted out of one but of several 'models' of the disciplinarity and that it is 'knowers' rather than 'knowledge' that English privileges. In attempting to create out of the various elements in its history that have prevailed in one form or another over the years, Peter Freebody—its chief architect—has attempted to build a knowledge structure for English that gives weight to three key aspects of disciplinary learning: language, literature and literacy. But few in the English teaching profession are happy with this constitution of their

discipline. Responses from different states have varied but there is no uniform expression of agreement with what has been delivered.

This polarising response from the profession to the Australian curriculum for English invites us to consider the nature of knowledge and knowing in this discipline and to wonder whether a coherent, consistent and nationally agreed knowledge structure is possible in an era of relative fragmentation and even disjunction between official and professional versions of this important site of learning. I argue that the implementation of an effective and world-class curriculum makes the resolution of this issue a priority—especially when it comes to ratification by state and territory bodies.

This article concludes with a proposal (and a heuristic) for bringing different aspects of curriculum knowledge into relationship—for relating processes of learning (speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing and representing) to systems underpinning these, for relating disciplinary practices to the development of students' repertoires. Figure 1 relates the four dimensions of knowledge in English along two axes. The vertical axis focuses on the relationship between disciplinary practices and student development. It interrelates the issue of coherence in the knowledge structure of English and cumulative learning for students as 'knowers'. The horizontal axis focuses on the relationship between two aspects of knowledge: the synoptic (meta) aspect of knowledge as 'content' and the dynamic aspect of knowledge as 'process'.
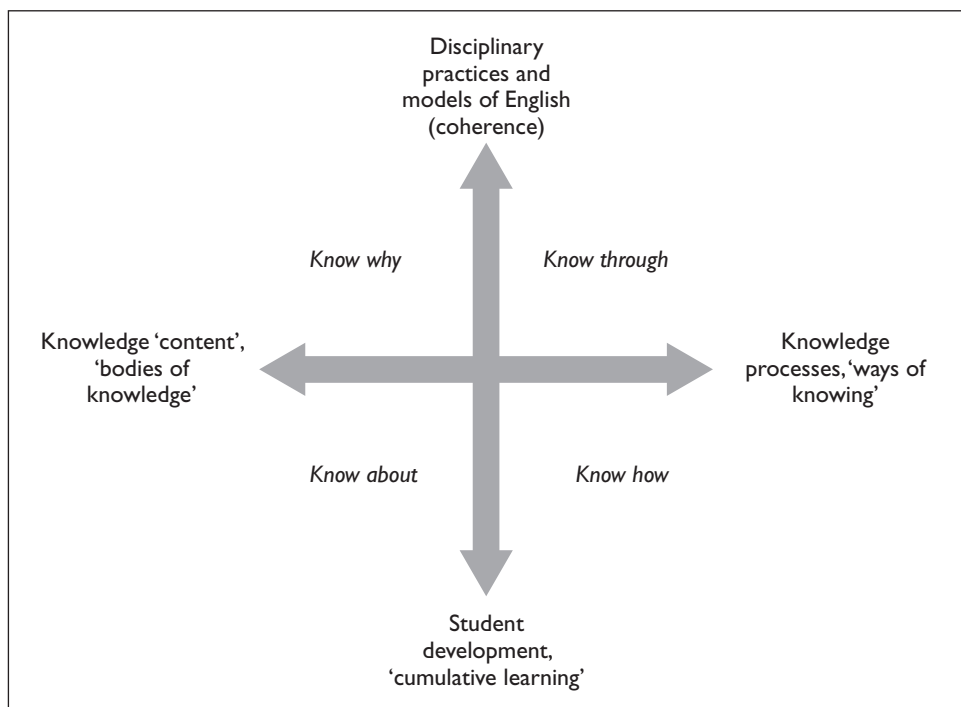

Figure 1 A heuristic for developing an integrated knowledge structure for English

Subject English is a crucial disciplinary point of access not just to the standard variant of English but also to learning in other curriculum areas. It has its own disciplinary identity—a fact that has been revealed in striking ways by the 'no' of the profession to the three-strand structure offered by the curriculum bodies of the Commonwealth Government. Figure 1 represents the different orientations to knowledge structure adopted by the national curriculum authority (ACARA) and by the professional associations (for example, ETA). Those charged with developing a new official curriculum emphasise bodies of knowledge (knowing about) and cumulative learning and can be ranged on the left of Figure 1. The professional associations are oriented to processes of 'knowing through' and to 'know how' (the right side of Figure 1). Knowing why English is the way it is (theorised knowing) is taken for granted in both orientations to some extent. We need access to sociological as well as semiotic models of disciplinarity if we are to come closer to understanding the why of knowledge structure in English.

Others in the field of curriculum theorising have puzzled about the why and especially about the difficulty of change in subject English. For example, Peim (2009) has explored two similar coordinates of subject regulation in English. The governmental dimension (what he calls the juridical) attempts to formally codify and control the structures of learning via curriculum amongst other things. But at the same time,

> the subject has another more personal structure—the veridical—that is concerned with the truths the subject purveys and therefore with the beliefs that breathe life into its practice. (Peim, 2009, p. 2)

This analysis of two often competing forces in curriculum change echoes that of Maton and colleagues in their exploration of knowledge and 'knower' structures in English (see, for example, Maton, 2009, 2010, 2011, and Muller, 2007). If English is primarily a 'knower code', the possibilities for making knowledge more visible are limited. In these circumstances, building a body of knowledge about language is going to be more of a challenge than the official bodies have realised. It seems banal to say so, but both content and process are important—though they need to be distinguished if students are to generalise about and abstract from processes of learning and become 'meta' in their reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing and designing. And along the vertical axis, we need access to the recontextualising principles that govern the different gazes constelled by growth, heritage, skills and cultural analysis models of English. Only then can students learn what counts in what contexts and begin to tease out the salient from the incidental. Only some differences matter when it comes to developing disciplinary understandings. Without a sense of how practices of various kinds contribute to the development of which literacy repertoires, teachers and their students are going to be left to work it out for themselves. We can do better than this.

This article is one contribution to the ongoing struggle to develop a clearer and more powerful knowledge structure that makes English accessible on all fronts to all students.

Keywords

national curriculum	English curriculum	knowledge base for teaching
language	grammar	professional associations

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