Making English:
The National English Syllabus Committee and the Re-defining of High School English in New Zealand, 1969-1983

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in History

Massey University (Albany)
New Zealand

Charles Laing
2013
ABSTRACT

The English curriculum is in some ways at the forefront of high school educational politics. Language and literature are inherently political insofar as they can reflect, challenge, or normalise ways of thinking about or seeing the world. The language we inherit, learn, imitate, and use is a signifier to others of who we are, where we have come from, what we believe, what social groupings we might belong to. The literature we study reflects the values of our societies and those of individuals in our societies, and can be used to persuade, challenge, undermine, or reinforce our beliefs. On a practical level, English has traditionally been, and still remains, the only subject in which a certain level of proficiency is required for entrance into tertiary education, and the national demand for literacy is intrinsically and philosophically bound to a nation’s perception of its collective intellectual status. Students use language across all curriculum areas and English is the language that is the most widely understood in this country; as a result, people widely link proficiency in it to a young person’s social and vocational potential.

This means that, historically, high school English syllabi / curricula have assumed a symbolic role in reflecting philosophical and political directions in education that transcend the notion of subject-as-academic-discipline. By studying the process of English syllabus / curriculum development and the agents of change, we can better understand how, and to what extent, such factors influence our educational framework.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to my supervisor, Peter Lineham, for his guidance; to Russell Aitken and Barry Gough for their time; to the Archives New Zealand staff for their assistance; and to Takako Fujiwara, without whose influence I would not have undertaken Masters study, for her support.

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the university's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher is responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract...........................................................................................................................................i  
Acknowledgements......................................................................................................................ii  
Table of Contents.........................................................................................................................iii  

INTRODUCTION.............................................................................................................................1  

PART 1: Climate change leads to the NESC...............................................................5  

PART 2: From *Education in Change* to English education in change.............17  

PART 3: The NESC: personnel selection and other influences on the *Draft Statement of Aims* ..26  

PART 4: The NESC: process, progress, and support towards the 1978 *Statement of Aims* .49  

PART 5: Three *Statements*: a comparison of the 1972, 1978, and 1983 *Aims* ........77  

PART 6: Criticism and critiques of the NESC and the *Statements of Aims* ..........87  


CONCLUSION...............................................................................................................................101  

Bibliography.................................................................................................................................105