Making English:

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

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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.

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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.

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INTRODUCTION

Curriculum design is an inherently political undertaking[1] and English curriculum design is arguably the most political undertaking in high school education, not only because English has been a compulsory subject for post-primary students in New Zealand since the introduction of a school leaving age, but also because there has always been a requirement for students entering tertiary education to have attained a minimum level of English. High school students have, since 1944, therefore been exposed to English syllabi and curricula in a way that they have not to other subjects. In addition, the nature of English as a study of language and literature compounds the political element. Any study of language and literature requires one at the very least to understand – and in many cases, to adopt – ways of thinking that necessarily prioritise the culture, knowledge, and ways of learning that have given rise to that language and literature.

In 1969, the National English Syllabus Committee (NESC) was established 'in response to comments from teachers about the shortcomings of the 1945 English Syllabus' and to 'prepare guidelines for its revision'.[2] Although 'the teaching profession and the Department of Education followed a policy of regular, planned revisions of syllabuses and examination prescriptions'[3] since 1945, the English prescription had remained unchanged. The intention was to make the syllabus 'more relevant to the needs of students in the first three years of secondary school'[4], the implications being that the existing syllabus had lost relevance, that relevance to student needs was now an important facet of syllabus design, and indeed that student 'needs' were to be re-visited. The establishment of the NESC in response to this intention was a political decision insofar as it deemed the existing English syllabus outdated: to deem anything 'irrelevant' and subsequently to initiate a committee to remedy the irrelevance is to tacitly endorse the notion that

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[1] R. Openshaw, J. Clark, J. Hamer, and H. Waitere-Ang, *Contesting the Curriculum in Aotearoa New Zealand*, p.191.
[2] Russell Aitken, *Developing a New English Syllabus: The NESC Curriculum Development Project, 1969-83*, Department of Education, 1983, p.1.
[3] *Educational Standards in State Schools*, report by W.L. Renwick to the Minister of Education, Department of Education, 1978, p.13.
[4] Ibid, p.13.

what that committee will replace it with will inherently be relevant. The Committee was headed by Russell Aitken, a teacher at Westlake Boys' High School, who was approached by a Department of Education Curriculum Officer, Gordon MacDonald, with the School Certificate English Prescription – 'which was on a single sheet' – telling him the Department wanted it changed.[5] Over the next 14 years, the project would re-define, and attempt to re-construct, high school English in New Zealand, with its endorsement of productive skills, oral language, and internal assessment.

The essay will attempt to answer two main questions: 1. Why and to what extent did the NESC re-define high school English? 2. How far was English curriculum design by the NESC between 1969 and 1983 influenced by socio-political factors and / or trends in education? To answer the first question, it is necessary to look at what the subject of high school English was in New Zealand prior to the establishment of the NESC: to examine the extent to which it had become 'irrelevant', and thereby ascertain the justification for change; to see what it became during the committee's existence; and to assess the long-term impact of the changes. To address the second question the foci will be as follows: to examine the initial process that was undertaken to ensure that change would be effected; to examine how the NESC members were selected (because if curriculum design is an inherently political undertaking then justification for, and the selection of, such a committee is an inherently political act); and to determine how this selection impacted on the direction that the committee took. Answering these involves identifying the key agitators for change and the reasons that they wanted change, considering any previous changes that had attempted to address perceived inadequacies in the English syllabus, providing an analysis of the academic literature of the time that most influenced this direction, and examining the development of the curriculum through its drafts and trials to the final document. The potency (and efficacy) of any obstacles the Committee faced will also be examined.

[5] Interview with Russell Aitken, 2012.

Part one will survey the educational trends of the 1960s that established the philosophical basis, the political mandate, and the practical framework for changes in the high school English curriculum. Part two will examine how an increasingly influential Post-Primary Teachers' Association (PPTA) became an important agitator for those changes. Parts three and four will analyse how the composition and philosophy of the NESC, endorsed by the Department of Education's Curriculum Development Unit (CDU), established the direction that English curriculum change would take, and how that philosophy became manifest in practical application. Part five will compare three *Statement of Aims* documents from 1972, 1978, and 1983, to determine the scope and reasons for deviations in direction. Part six will summarise the strength of opposition to the NESC and its aims, and try to outline the extent to which this opposition influenced the committee. Finally, part seven will compare the NESC's aims and philosophy to more recent developments in English curricula and assessment development.

Traditionally, 'curriculum' has meant the content (or knowledge) of an educational course or programme: the body of knowledge to be learnt by all children and by all cultures and groups in society, delivered by the teacher. This is known as the *syllabus* view of curriculum[6]. More recently the *pedagogical* view of curriculum has come to offer a broader definition that encompasses all aspects of the teaching-learning situation: not only content, but also purpose, method, organisation, and evaluation. In this view, the curriculum is a pedagogical process, where it is not an object to be transmitted but rather a socially constructed set of shared understandings set within, and influenced by, the social and policy contexts of education.[7] While the NESC, as its name suggests, was charged with the responsibility of developing a new syllabus, what it in fact undertook was development of curriculum in the broader (and newer, developing) pedagogical sense. However, the prevailing *syllabus* view of curriculum at that time meant that the terms tended to be used interchangeably. Throughout this essay, I will separate the terms according to the definitions above. This means using the term 'curriculum development' when referring to the work of the National English

[6] R. Openshaw, J. Clark, J. Hamer, and H. Waitere-Ang, p.187.
[7] Ibid, p.188.

Syllabus Committee because, as we will see, the NESC adopted a pedagogical rather than a syllabus approach.

McGee, citing Tanner and Tanner (1980), suggests that a guiding philosophy is needed for the establishment of a curriculum. They argue that such 'visions' can be categorised as 'conservative, progressive, romantic, and inner'. McGee also references Bennett's 1976 'traditional versus progressive' dichotomy as a way of viewing teacher approaches. While we must acknowledge that such terms invite oversimplification of the complex business of curriculum development, these sources nevertheless provide a valid and important framework for understanding how the English curriculum has been viewed, revised, and shaped. McGee's definition of a progressive curriculum is one that 'seeks self-expression, integrate[s] thematic studies, [has] flexible discipline, [endorses] work[ing] in groups, [has] little formal testing, and [encourages] student choice', whilst a traditional one emphasises 'teach[ing] separate subjects, [endorsing] individual seat work, [requiring] strict discipline and a lot of formal testing, and [limiting] student choice'.[8] It is in this light that the terms 'traditional' and 'progressive' will be used throughout this essay, with clarifications where necessary.

[8] Clive McGee, *Teachers and Curriculum Decision-Making*, p.21.

PART ONE: Climate change leads to the NESC

By the 1960s, 'social and technological factors had combined to foster a climate…conducive to radical change'[9] in secondary education. The recommendations of the 1944 *Thomas Report*,[10] which was re-published to a wider audience in 1959, changes to primary school language programmes, and a 'radical awareness of overseas research'[11] contributed toward this climate, as did 'views rooted in the 'liberal optimism' of the time.[12] This 'liberal optimism' was not limited to New Zealand; rather, it was a trend that gathered momentum throughout democracies. While we clearly need to be cautious about placing high school English curriculum design within some kind of grand narrative about the swinging sixties and peace movements, it would be similarly remiss to deny that social movements had no influence over approaches to humanities' curricula, and Britain, Australia, and the United States were all interrogating traditional approaches in their education systems. The 1962 Currie Report recommended that curricula should be trialled based on recent educational research and that a Curriculum Development Unit should be established to ensure this, while new sociological research examined the politics inherent in school curricula and syllabi and challenged the authoritarian educational paradigm that progressives believed inhibited education. One sociologist, Eric Hoyle, affirming the link between the 'values pervading education' and those 'pervading other parts of society', posed the following four questions:

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[9] R. Openshaw and M. Walshaw, *Are Our Standards Slipping?,* p.71, citing Bach, R., *The Development of English Teaching in New Zealand: A Personal Unpublished View*, Christchurch: Hillmorton High School, *c*. 1980, ABEP, W4262, NS/50/2/ENG-GC, part 3, General Correspondence, 1980-81.
[10] 'The Post-Primary School Curriculum: Report of the Committee Appointed by the Minister of Education in November 1942' (hereafter, *Thomas Report*).
[11] Openshaw and Walshaw, p.71.
[12] Openshaw and Walshaw, p.72.

> Is education inevitably adaptive to economic and technological change, or can education itself generate change in these areas?
> Does the class structure inevitably shape the structure and content of education, or could educational change alter the class structure?
> If…we are experiencing a shift from elitist to egalitarian values, and from ascriptive to achievement values in education, to what extent is this a reflection of such value shifts in society as a whole?
> To what extent are changes in educational philosophy generated within the educational system independent of broader normative and institutional changes?[13]

The rise through the 1960s of disciplines such as socio-linguistics, child psychology, and sociology of education were instrumental in influencing curriculum design. The article from which the questions above were taken was one of those in the NESC document *Essential Background Papers* that would provide the early educational and socio-political framework for that committee's curriculum development. The questions stress the belief that education is a force for social change; the second and third questions tacitly promote social change. They also tacitly acknowledge the existence of what Philip W. Jackson would later refer to as the 'hidden curriculum' that the NESC would, through its *Statement of Aims* drafts attempt to challenge. Indeed, as the hidden curriculum is pervasive – by its very definition there is always a hidden curriculum – the NESC hoped to supplant what it saw as the undesirable and entrenched elements that existed in New Zealand classrooms with what it believed were elements more conducive to the educational growth of the child.

Hoyle's contention (albeit caged in the subjunctive) that society was moving from 'elitist' to 'egalitarian' was not simply a progressives' aspiration; it was already evident in the composition of high schools. Director of Education, Clarence Beeby, acknowledged in 1959 the growing tendency among parents to regard every pupil

[13] Eric Hoyle, 'How Does the Curriculum Change? A Proposal for Inquiries' in *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 1: 2, (1969), p.134.

who reached Form Five as a potential School Certificate candidate;[14] the School Certificate Review Committee in 1960 noted that pupils who previously would not previously have reached high school were now entering School Certificate[15]; and nearly 90 percent of all third formers were reaching Form Five and sitting School Certificate by the mid-1960s[16]. As early as 1960, correspondence from the PPTA to the Commission on Education in New Zealand outlined the former's view that courses and examinations should 'cater adequately for the entire range of abilities and careers' and that high school education should be 'sensitive and progressive',[17] albeit while still endorsing the recommendations of the *Thomas Report*. It called that report 'sound in general practice' and stated that it had the 'broad support of this Association'; it was supportive of the core studies and acknowledged that School Certificate had 'served the country well'.[18] The School Certificate Examination Board's (SCEB) generally egalitarian attitude towards subjects that time meant, for example, that in 1960 a subject like Homecraft had the same pass rate as a subject like Latin[19] (though this was to change with the introduction of the Educational (Secondary Instruction) Regulations of 1968). Clearly there was acknowledgement that while Latin was academically more challenging, students of Homecraft still had to master understanding of a quite different skill set. However, within five years, and motivated both by new research and by the rapidly changing demographics of the high school population, the union was making a broader call for a 'rethinking of the educational philosophies'[20] that underpinned School Certificate. It now wanted more meaningful change and an overhaul of the examination system came to be at the crux of its demands. The School Certificate

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[14] R. Openshaw, G. Lee, H. Lee, *Challenging the Myths: Rethinking New Zealand's Educational History*, p.218.
[15] Ibid, p.220.
[16] R. Openshaw, G. Lee, H. Lee, p.221.
[17] Correspondence from Robert C. Cotterall, Secretary, PPTA to Mr Sheen, Secretary, Commission on Education in New Zealand, under the title 'General Submissions, May 4th, 1960.
[18] Ibid.
[19] R. Openshaw, G. Lee, H. Lee, p.219.
[20] PPTA circular HO66/178, 22/9/66 cited in Judie Alison, 'The NCEA and How We Got There: The Role of PPTA in School Qualifications Reform 1980-2002' in *New Zealand Journal of Teachers' Work*, 5: 2, (2008), pp.119-138.

examination, then, was losing favour with a union that was becoming a more effective political voice.

In English, there was in fact already evidence by 1965 that the examination was being adapted to suit these changing candidate demographics. Alterations in the Form 5 English examination content and structure were constantly being made through the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. Because there was no English curriculum *per se* – only the *Thomas Report* definition of what high school English should be, and the School Certificate prescription that was 'on a single sheet'[21] – it is necessary to look at that examination to garner an impression of what English was in the decades prior to the establishment of the NESC. Comparison of the 1944, 1954, and 1964 examinations reveals a somewhat *ad hoc* approach by the School Certificate Examination Board (SCEB), but nevertheless one that tries to accommodate both the shifting demography of the candidates and new thinking about English education. This comparison indicates that adaptation was not beyond either the Department of Education or the SCEB but rather that the changes tended not to reflect a definitive direction.

The School Certificate examination focused on reading and writing. In 1944, the receptive skill of reading comprised 70 percent of the examination, although a pupil needed to be able to demonstrate his/her reading comprehension through the productive act of writing; that is, reading ability was tested by having a candidate write (as opposed to verbalise) their responses. The other 30 percent of the examination was given over to the productive skill of writing in the form of what might be termed 'creative' written expression, where there was a prompt from which candidates were required to write a composition. There were options for candidates to write instructionally, descriptively, argumentatively, or in the style of speech (such as a broadcast or a conversation). The examination comprised six questions over two sections. Question One was a reading comprehension section worth 30 marks, requiring students to summarise in their own words excerpts of a passage, to provide definitions for words, to generalise, and to demonstrate some 'beyond-text' critical awareness and/or empathy.

[21] Interview with Russell Aitken, 2012.

Compared to the comprehension sections in the 1954 and 1964 examinations, the 1944 comprehension was much more challenging with respect to the content and diction – a short analysis of this will follow – reflecting the more academic candidate base of the time. This was also the case with Question Two, worth 14 marks, which required students to show understanding of the meaning of Latin and Greek prefixes ('amphi', 'pseudo'), understanding of vocabulary that had contemporary relevance ('isolationism', 'propaganda'), and awareness of pronunciation (by underlining the stressed syllable in such words as 'inextricably' and 'formidable'). The pronunciation question was a typical reinforcement of existing rules around speech that would later be excised as emphasis on pronunciation, like that on register, came in the 1960s to be understood in socio-political terms as a means of disadvantaging students from particular backgrounds. Question Three, worth six marks, was a writing task requiring students either to write descriptively or instructionally. Question Four offered eight marks for explanation of four epigrams (such as 'Men are but children of a larger growth'). Question Five was a literary review worth 18 marks: pupils had to identify famous texts from brief descriptions then write extended summaries on three of them. The final 24 marks, Question Six, were offered for an essay composition of two to three pages. Of the 70 marks for reading, only 18 required knowledge of literature, yet for a pupil to gain full marks, s/he would need to know twelve storylines, three of these in some detail. Besides the pronunciation exercise, only in questions three and six was there any acknowledgement of a place for oral language – which, as will be examined, was under the NESC to be given much greater emphasis in the English curriculum – although neither question actually required oral 'production' (delivery). Question Three asked candidates to describe as though they were in conversation, a thunderstorm or sailing a model yacht or how to mend a puncture; Question Six contained eight options, of which two, neither compulsory, required knowledge of oral language (a valedictory speech and a broadcast for radio). The literature section reflected a survey course of set texts, none of which were written by New Zealanders: one paragraph of six sentences, and under two hundred words, alluded to ten works of literature, which candidates were required to identify. They were then asked to select three of those works and write about 60 words on each that showed their knowledge of the story.

Despite the number of questions, 82% of the examination – 52 marks from reading-based questions plus the 30 marks for writing – could not, short of memorising dictionary entries and vocabulary lists, be 'revised for' in the familiar sense of the term. Rather, the examination focused on what we might regard now as a pupil's existing (or prior) knowledge of language and events in addition to his / her life experiences – that is, knowledge as likely to have been accumulated beyond as within the school gates. Such examinations were to become anathema to education academics in the 1970s because the pupils they intrinsically favoured were those candidates with advantageous cultural, social, and educational capital.

Ten years later, in 1954, an illustration was included in the examination for the first time, offering acknowledgement of the rise in society of visual media. The examination comprised eight questions over two sections: an increase in variety. Section A, worth a total of 60 marks, required students to answer all four questions. Question 1 was a two-page composition (with the candidates' choosing an instructional, creative, transactional / informative, or personal option) worth 20 percent; Question 2 was comprehension worth 20 marks but with fewer multi-choice options than in 1944; Question 3, worth ten percent, comprised grammar exercises, understanding conversation in context, and writing instructions based on an illustration; Question 4 was an oral composition worth ten percent. Section B contained four questions from which candidates selected two, each worth 20 marks. Two of the Section B questions (Questions 5 and 7) required candidate knowledge either of dramatic texts or poems. The other two (Questions 6 and 8) were language-based: selecting from a list, synonyms for words such as 'acumen', 'caprice', and 'calumny'; and providing meanings for proverbs. The literature section was more varied than that in 1944, but candidates still had to identify, from a list of thirty, a minimum of eight set texts – all poems – and their writers. There was no requirement for the candidate to engage with either the theme of the poems or of the poets' stylistic methods. There was, however, a separate section on drama that again required knowledge of the writers and genre, and also of character and staging. However, candidates had the choice of avoiding the poetry and drama sections altogether without any penalty. Clearly, literature was still not

held in the same regard as were language-based questions – a direct consequence of the *Thomas Report*'s recommendation that there be no 'external examination of literature at the School Certificate stage…[other than in] the stricter sense of the term'.[22]

Although 70 percent of the examination was reading-based and 30 percent was composition, there was greater scope for student choice afforded in the 1954 examination than in the one ten years earlier: there was a broader range of questions, more options for candidates to select from, and an apparent increased acknowledgement from the examiners of the importance of an awareness of – although not necessarily and understanding of – oral language, in the form of a compulsory question worth ten marks that required candidates to be aware of the stylistic distinction between it and written language. In addition, although the examination still largely tested what might be termed prior knowledge based on pre-determined cultural, social, and educational capital, some essay questions did attempt to connect with a broader range of students, in some cases placing the student at the centre of the topic, as with the following: 'Give an account from your own experience of one of the following: stamp collecting; acting in a play; working in the holidays; travelling to see the Queen', and 'Explain clearly to someone without previous knowledge one of the following: how to use a library; how a sewing machine works; how a combustion engine works; how to play football or basketball; how to write the minutes of a meeting; how to train a sheep dog.' Thus there was evidence of an attempt by the SCEB to make the examination more accessible to the widening demographic of the candidates by making the questions more relevant to them and by asking the candidates to draw from their own experiences.

Ten years later, the year before the PPTA made its call for changes underpinning the philosophy of School Certificate, the composition question offered 19 options – an increase from 14 in 1954 and eight in 1944 – yet the overall ratio of productive writing to receptive writing based on reading comprehension and understanding actually dropped: the composition was worth 20 percent while reading

[22] *Thomas Report*, p26.

comprehension and responses comprised 80 percent. Fifty percent of the examination was given over to reading comprehension, grammar and vocabulary – a higher percentage than either 1954 or 1944 – and there was no mention anywhere of oral language. Again, a candidate could avoid literature altogether with no penalty, but there were poetry, drama, and – to reflect the growing regard of the form – novel questions offered, and the questions required candidates to engage with ideas and characters rather than simply with storyline.

Comparison of the comprehension passage of 1964 with those of 1954 and 1944 similarly indicates how increasingly aware the examiners were of the changing educational demographics of the overall candidate body. The 1944 comprehension passage was, at between 300 and 350 words shorter than the later two, but considerably more challenging with its sophisticated diction and abstract content. The opening lines to each examination comprehension were as follows:

> The moral character of a man eminent in letters or in the fine arts is treated, often by contemporaries, almost always by posterity, with extraordinary tenderness. The number of those who suffer by his personal vices is small, even in his own time, when compared with the number of those to whom his talents are a source of gratification. In a few years all those whom he has injured disappear. But his works remain and are a source of delight to millions.[23] (1944)

> Jubilee Day, 1897. Sweltering heat, after a grey beginning; baked streets. Irving, out of his wealth and generosity, had bought a block of seats in the Mall for the procession, and there the family sat.
> Imogen had a blue smock, gathered across the yoke, so that when she ran her fingers across the smocking it made a little soft, crisp noise. She held a fold of her mother's soft foulard dress tightly between her hot fingers.[24] (1954)

[23] *School Certificate Examination 1944*, New Zealand Education Department.
[24] *School Certificate Examination 1954*, Department of Education.

> The New Zealand adolescent may have a few superficial differences from the young person in Sydney, but not so many as to make a study of the effects of television there irrelevant to us. The programmes Sydney teenagers may watch are more numerous, but not much more varied, than those available here. The pattern of life in Sydney is not dissimilar to that of New Zealand cities and suburbs. [25] (1964)

The easier language of the latter two reflects the need for examiners of the time to cater for a median pupil whose English reading ability was lower than that of a median pupil in 1944. The more diverse (educationally, culturally, and linguistically) a student body is, the greater is the likelihood that the vocabulary and grammatical knowledge of the median student will be smaller.

The three years of examinations selected for this comparison are arbitrary but are representative of a pattern that indicated that the SCEB was not resistant to change with the times, albeit that the alterations did not necessarily indicate a coherent, structured progression that would characterise that in the 1970s. What the comparison shows is how the idea of the subject of English was one that was contestable and modifiable; however, it was always only within the paradigm of a written, externally moderated examination. It illustrates that the emphasis was, as recommended by the *Thomas Report*, very much on language comprehension, with only small outlets for candidate creativity or production. However the increase in writing topics suggested the SCEB's growing receptiveness to the idea that offering students the opportunity to draw from their experiences would assist them in their learning. It is evident, then, that the SCEB demonstrated a willingness to adapt the examination to meet the changing times. However, the variation in mark allocations and the absence of any recognition of oral language in the 1964 examination despite such an option being available in the 1954 examination, suggest that changes tended to be implemented in an *ad hoc* way, at the whim of SCEB members and determined by SCEB composition.

[25] *School Certificate Examination 1964*, Department of Education.

The shift from elitist to egalitarian was also precipitating (or reflecting) a growing anti-elitism which coincided with 'profound changes'[26] in the teaching of language and literature. Already there was growing rejection of phonics at primary school level, changing beliefs about the worth of teaching grammar and spelling, and a corresponding progressive philosophy of education that was born partly out of a rejection of the authoritarian philosophy of the past. It was enough for Auckland University lecturer Margaret Dalziel to express her 'general mistrust of large and grandiose aims in education'[27] and further to suggest the possibility that 'primary schools during the 1960s were being exposed to progressivist ideology'[28] noticeably more than they were in the 1950s.

Literature teaching was also affected by the traditional to progressive shift. Existing thinking about canonical texts was being challenged by the new social constructionist approach to literature, which was premised on the idea that such privileging of some texts over others was less about those texts being actually great and more about vested interests constructing greatness and promoting such texts as embodiments of it. The rejection of New Criticism, which had itself grown out of a rejection of historical or biographical or affective reading approaches, gathered momentum in the 1960s. New Criticism's focus on formalism no longer captured the mood of the post-structuralist literary time. From the new post-structuralist approach to literature, with its inherent claim that language was too illusory for a unanimously agreed understanding, emerged the idea of the reader as a valid text-maker rather than simply as a receiver. Such an approach, complemented by the greater willingness of publishers to give modern voices greater acclaim, was to become in the 1970s the accepted currency of the NESC approach to literature because it permitted multiple readings of texts, including a validation of affective readings that drew from students' own experiences.

The elite to egalitarian shift had its early critics who were to point to what they saw as both the privileging of liberal educational objectives over basic skills

[26] R. Openshaw and M. Walshaw, p.68.
[27] R, Openshaw and M. Walshaw p.69.
[28] Ibid, p.69.

teaching and the attempt to make the English curriculum a vehicle for left-wing political indoctrination.'[29] In 1961, Phoebe Meikle (a teacher who was later, as Executive Editor of Longman Paul, coincidentally to edit the PPTA's seminal 1969 *Education in Change* document) was voicing concern about the declining emphasis on English mechanics. She praised the *Thomas Report* for compiling a 'liberal, idealistic report, showing regard for moral, social, and aesthetic purposes in education as well as for intellectual ones', for its encouragement of 'breadth and diversity of aim and curriculum', and for its 'democracy of tone and control in place of the narrowness, rigidity and conformity by which [high schools] had so long been marked'. However, she noted that 'breadth and diversity were not intended to mean an anarchic do-as-you-please for teachers'.[30] She criticised the School Certificate examination not for the reasons that the NESC would ten years later – that external examinations were counter-productive to education – but because she believed them not to extend pupils and because the 'expectations of correct grammar, syntax and punctuation, and good manners in writing ha[d] become rarer':

> 'Most of the able Fifth Formers I knew fifteen years ago still understood and respected the rules governing number, case and the position and relationship of clauses in a sentence. Most used apostrophes, full stops and brackets correctly. In recent years I have found all such rules broken so often by so many able girls and boys…that, clearly, they do not believe their language's rules matter…and [they] feel no shame over irregular indentation, triple crossings out, mis-divided words, slovenly writing, and spelling mistakes.'[31]

The link between a rejection of an authoritarian conservative approach to education and the rejection of teaching in isolation of grammar and spelling rules is an under-researched area, but it is a logical one. By the mid-1960s progressives

[29] Ibid, pp.68-69.
[30] Phoebe Meikle, *School and Nation*, NZCER, 1961, p.7.
[31] Ibid, p16.

overseas had begun to agitate for a greater acceptance of different dialects of English: because traditional school grammar had historically served those with the existing educational and cultural capital to succeed in it, it came to be seen by progressives as elitist[32] and therefore as an obstruction to those of particular disadvantaged classes. This thinking was to be later mirrored in the NESC's *Statement of Aims*, which recommended that teachers encourage students to 'develop a respect for national, regional and cultural differences' and to appreciate 'the fact that such variety enriches the language and that no one variety is better or worse than any other'.[33] In the same vein, the 1974 Report of the Working Party on Improving Learning and Teaching mentioned 'the hypocrisy of offering a type and method of schooling which is designed for a "standard" middle-class academically-oriented child and then ignoring those from a different social background who reject it or who have a dismal record of failure or poor motivation'.[34] It was to be expected, then, that the 'elitist to egalitarian' shift that began in the 1960s and gathered momentum in the early 1970s would impact on high school English, being as it was the only compulsory subject and therefore one that all pupils would be exposed to, and also because of the nature of the subject as one that required the survey reading of literature and study of grammar. Thus, when the PPTA called in 1964 for a 'rethinking about the educational philosophies' around School Certificate, it was a call less for the re-visiting of examination content – changes in which over the previous twenty years clearly had occurred with the changing standards of candidates in mind – and more to do with the entire examination system itself.

[32] Hancock and Kolln, 'Blowin in the Wind: English Grammar in United States Schools' in *Beyond the Grammar Wars: A resource for teachers and students in developing language knowledge in the English/Literacy classroom*, Locke (ed.), p58.
[33] *Statement of Aims*, NESC, 1978, p.12.
[34] 'Improving Learning and Teaching', Report of the Working Party on Improving Learning and Teaching, Wellington, 1974, p.25.

PART 2: From *Education in Change* to English Education in Change

In 1969, the PPTA compiled (under the *Curriculum Review Group* moniker) a document entitled *Education in Change* that provided the political and pedagogical framework that the 1965 statement presaged and that would be influential to the establishment – and direction – of the NESC. The stated purpose of the document was to 'provoke public debate about the fundamental ends and processes of education'[35]. None of the members of 1969 The Curriculum Review Group of the New Zealand Post-Primary Teachers' Association that contributed to the document was to serve on the NESC, but the NESC found in that review of secondary education an aim that was 'compatible with emerging theory about the nature and significance of language development in adolescents'[36], namely that:

> Education should be concerned to promote at all times [and] the highest value is placed on: the urge to enquire; concern for others; and the desire for self-respect.[37]

The 'change' in the title of the document appears to have aimed both to reflect and to effect a mood among teachers. It also captured the group's belief that 'present trends should precede any detailed discussion of educational goals'[38], thereby elevating the socio-political *zeitgeist* to a central role in education. These trends, under the heading 'Agents of Change' included the growth of a world society, changing economic needs, changing demographics, changing family dynamics, the increasing influence of media on youth, changes in science and technology, growth of research, and changes in education.[39] Some of these were subsequently alluded to, with an English focus, in *English Syllabus Forms 3-5 Guidelines for Revision,* a Department of Education paper written following a conference of English teachers at Lopdell House in Auckland. Among the recommendations to come from that

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[35] *Education in Change: Report of the Curriculum Review Group*, (hereafter *Education in Change*), NZPPTA, 1969, p.xiii.
[36] R. Aitken, 'Curriculum development and teacher education in New Zealand', in *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 8:1, 1982, pp.76-87.
[37] *Education in Change*, NZPPTA, 1969, p.1.
[38] Ibid, p.2.
[39] Ibid, pp. 2-8.

conference were that the mass media be among the resources of the high school English programme, that increased attention be given to contemporary literature, and that the study of grammar for its own sake be postponed.[40] Five general points taken from the *Guidelines* course were adopted early by the NESC to justify the direction that it would take:

1. The dissatisfaction expressed by many teachers at the shortcomings of the 1944 syllabus statement.
2. A growing belief among teachers, students, and the community at large that many traditional aspects of the 1944 syllabus do not satisfy the personal and social needs of students.
3. A greater acceptance of the idea that education should be centred on the student rather than on the subject-matter.
4. A change in ideas, based on recent research, about the nature of the teaching and learning process.
5. Advances in knowledge about the nature of language and its importance to human growth, brought about by research in educational psychology and linguistics. [41]

Points one through four do not offer justification specifically for changes in English; rather they are concerned with more general educational and philosophical directions. It is evidence that the NESC considered English curriculum design as encompassing much wider philosophical goals. Assumptions underpin all curricula and 'learner-centred construction of English sat comfortably with [the NESC's] altruism'[42]. Furthermore, it indicates the extent to which English was perceived as a subject able to be shaped to meet objectives beyond the study of language. In other words, English was not a subject that should be studied as an end in itself but rather as one that should contribute towards the education of the whole child. Each of the five points examined in isolation offers insight into how

[40] Archives New Zealand, Curriculum Development Division papers, ABEP 7749, W4262, 3509, 53/2/16.
[41] *Draft Statement of Aims,* NESC, 1972, p.4.
[42] Terry Locke, *Constructing English in New Zealand: A Report on a Decade of Reform,* p.2.

wider philosophical goals underpinned proposed change and how pursuit of these philosophical goals was justified to the wider teaching community and the Department of Education.

Point one could be reconciled with earlier official statements from the PPTA regarding School Certificate[43], though there is no record in PPTA annual documents of specific levels of dissatisfaction (in the form of polling or statistics) among either PPTA members or the wider teaching community in 1967 or 1968. It is possible that such statistics exist, though it would be likely that such figures would be included in an annual report. In a 1980 SCEB sub-committee evaluation of the NESC, the late-1960's dissatisfaction was rendered as 'Expressions of teacher / student discontent with scope, range, and effectiveness of English syllabus'.[44] In the absence of figures, the phrase 'dissatisfaction expressed by many teachers' raises questions of which teachers, how many, and to whom they were expressing their dissatisfaction, but it is likely that teachers who were most inclined to express dissatisfaction were those who wanted to see the syllabus changed anyway and therefore were most likely to report their dissatisfaction to like-minded PPTA members. It is also unclear what specific aspects of the existing document that teachers were dissatisfied about. Some teachers might have been dissatisfied because they believed School Certificate to be overly prescriptive, while other teachers might have been dissatisfied about a reduced emphasis on grammar and spelling. A lack of discrimination between two such distinctive groups might have expected to cause the drawing of unwarranted conclusions about the inadequacy of the existing prescription, but such a potential discrepancy is not addressed. The dissatisfaction proffered as the first justification for change is unquantifiable, so the speed of the process from the call for change to the establishment of the NESC suggests that the mood had to an extent already been pre-determined. There was, as mentioned in the last section, a growing

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[43] New Zealand Post Primary Teachers' Association Circular, HO 66/178, 22/9/1966. NZPPTA files, cited by Judie Alison, 'The NCEA and How We Got There: The Role of PPTA in School Qualifications Reform 1980-2002' in *New Zealand Journal of Teachers' Work*, 5: 2, (2008) pp.119-138.

[44] 'The Evaluation of English (NESC) at Form 5: A Report', Education Department, 1980, appendix 4. Archives New Zealand, ABEP 7749, W4262, 2053, 34/1/41 pt.1.

progressive movement in education that drew from new research on child psychology and socio-linguistics, so although the 'many' cannot be quantified we can infer that there was a significant number of teachers who were enthusiastic about this type of research and who were more likely to agitate for its acknowledgment and consideration.

Point two highlights the shortcomings of the 1944 syllabus, expanding its attribution of a 'growing belief' beyond teachers to both 'students' and 'the community at large'. Again, both the extent to which and in what regard these latter two groups believed the 'traditional aspects of the 1944 syllabus [did] not satisfy the personal and social needs of students' is not clarified either here or from the Lopdell House group's recommendations. It is possible that the 'wider community' refers to the wider *educational* community (rather than the general public) in which case the latter group included 'teachers and principals from secondary schools, Teachers' College and university lecturers, and representatives of the PPTA and Department of Education [in addition to] head teachers of primary schools and the assistant-director of the New Zealand Council for Educational Research'[45]. If this is the 'wider community' or even the group that speaks for the wider community then, in the absence of statistical evidence to support the claim of a growing belief, the composition of such a group becomes significant. Of the twenty-three attendees, nineteen were from schools: four were from Auckland schools (Penrose High School, Saint Cuthbert's College, Hillary College, Glenfield College); four were from girls' schools and one from a boys' school (Hamilton); five were from the South Island. None of the larger Auckland grammar schools (Epsom Girls', Auckland, Auckland Girls', Takapuna, Mount Albert) was represented and nor were Wellington College, Christchurch Boys' High School, Otago Boys' High School, Whangarei Boys' High School or Whangarei Girls' High School, which implies that the belief emanated from schools that were less traditional and therefore more likely to embrace new ideas. In addition, seven of the nineteen school representatives would serve on the NESC at some point. That the attendees

[45] Archives New Zealand, Curriculum Development Division papers, ABEP 7749, W4262, 3509, 53/2/16.

were invited by the Director of Secondary Education[46] (i.e. the conference was not open) and tended to be receptive to change suggests a degree of co-operation between the Department of Education and proponents of change within the PPTA in ensuring a lack of dissenters at this establishment stage. This in turn created an environment that would more easily facilitate the establishment and philosophical framework of the NESC. Although there are no figures in PPTA annual reports, *Education in Change*, or the *Guidelines* report to support the NESC claim that there was a growing belief among students that the 1944 syllabus no longer satisfied their personal and social needs, the very inclusion of student opinion indicates a marked shift in direction from the students as educational objects to be acted upon into valid contributors to educational change.

The notion in the second point of satisfying the 'personal and social needs of students' is instructive in that it offers some insight into the philosophical shift in emphasis from the educational needs existing in and of themselves – that is, education for the sake of knowledge – to educational needs being intrinsically bound to a student's sense of self. Instilling in students 'self-respect' was an important part of the 'change' philosophy and challenged what hitherto had been an underlying norm of the education system: the teacher as authority figure. The belief was that such authority impeded rather than aided student achievement, partly because it placed the authority figure, rather than the student, at the centre of education and partly because authority was an end in itself insofar as it was a controlling rather than a liberating force and therefore less conducive to creativity. The *Guidelines* conference emphasised creative work and called for the subject to be regarded as a set of activities rather than as a body of knowledge.[47]

Point three argues explicitly for a shift from an emphasis on subject-matter and its associated placing of the teacher at the centre of learning, to one focused on the student. This is consistent with the philosophy of many of the writers of the

[46] Russell Aitken, 'Curriculum Development and Teacher Education in New Zealand', Resources Division, Department of Education, Wellington, 1982.
[47] Archives New Zealand, Curriculum Development Division papers, ABEP 7749, W4262, 3509, 53/2/16.

'Essential Background Papers'[48] document that was distributed by Russell Aitken to NESC members in the early years of the committee. Some of these background papers will be examined in greater detail later, because they were to become vital reference papers for NESC members in establishing the initial 1972 draft of the *Statement of Aims*[49] as well as at school-based in-service courses and at district and regional meetings of English teachers. The papers heavily endorsed a move toward 'oracy' in the classroom and would form the 'research-led change in ideas' mentioned in point four. There is inherent in this point a desire for a shift away from language study in the traditional sense of grammar drills and towards a more organic, contextualised application. Notably, point five is the only one to explicitly refer to English education but even so, in its reference to 'human growth', resonates with points two and three.

Comparison of these five points with the *Thomas Report*'s two aims for English – to 'develop the power of expression in speech and writing' and 'to develop the ability to understand the spoken and written thoughts of others'[50] – reveals a shift from the fundamental concept of English as an academic subject to one that encompasses growth and development of the whole child. The five points that served as the basis of the first NESC *Statement of Aims* stemmed from the *Guidelines* group recommendations which in turn stemmed from the PPTA-directed Curriculum Review Group that published *Education in Change*, which emanated from previously-stated (though apparently not polled) dissatisfaction of School Certificate and the examination system from the PPTA. Lack of clarity around the levels of dissatisfaction is not a moot point because without either raw figures or percentages of dissatisfied teachers, the inference might be drawn that the dissatisfaction was only to be found among teachers with a particular philosophical desire for change; in other words, a kind of self-fulfilling dissatisfaction. One reason for the notion of a pervasive 'dissatisfaction' gaining currency that would yield genuine change was the burgeoning strength of the PPTA through the 1960s. This strength was drawn from several key factors: the

[48] Archives New Zealand, ABEP 7749, W4262, 2053, 34/1/41 pt.1.
[49] Aitken, 'Curriculum Development and Teacher Education in New Zealand', Resources Division, Department of Education, Wellington, 1982.
[50] *Thomas Report*, p.18.

withdrawal of services in relation to the marking of the 1962 School Certificate Examination in order to assert negotiating rights around pay; the creation of a post of general secretary and the appointment to it of a full-time official; and the first large-scale lobbying exercise to try and secure the remedying of perceived defects in the 1964 review of the *Education Act*.[51] The publishing of *Education in Change* and the establishment of subsequent curriculum panels must therefore be seen in the context of growing union confidence and agitation.

However, dissatisfaction without a hard statistical basis was not enough in its own right to prompt change: in addition to vocal advocates for change, the ear of the Department of Education was needed. Though teachers, higher education institutes, and the government are the shapers of curricula and the product often reflects the competing goals and values of these groups,[52] the process of *initiating* English syllabus change in the late-1960s was a remarkably collaborative effort between the PPTA members who actively advocated change and sympathetic Department of Education representatives. By way of example, at the end of the *Guidelines* conference in August of 1969, Gordon McDonald, the representative of the Curriculum Development Unit of the Department of Education, wrote in his report the following:

> No decision has yet been made to embark on a revision of the syllabus but if a revision committee should be appointed, it will have as a possible starting point a set of recommendations from this course.[53]

However, within three months the first NESC was established with Aitken as its chair, which would tend to suggest an element of politic in McDonald's approach. Aitken believed that 'Gordon was the prime mover. He was a very open-minded, genuine humanist. He recognised it [the mood for change] and he knew classroom

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[51] B.A. Webster, 'The politics of the New Zealand Post-Primary Teachers Association', in Clark (ed.) *Politics of Education in New Zealand*, p.191.
[52] M.F. Young, 'An Approach to the Study of Curricula as Socially Organised Knowledge' in Young (ed.), *Knowledge and Control: New Directions for the Sociology of Education*, 1971, p.2.
[53] Archives New Zealand, Curriculum Development Division papers, 7749, W4262, 3509, 53/2/16.

teachers.'[54] Aitken recalled McDonald saying that he perceived among teachers a desire for change in the School Certificate English Prescription: 'There was a mood around that caused him to think that English teachers were upset and found the exam foreign and irrelevant,'[55] despite there being no figures in the PPTA's annual reports from 1969 to 1973 to validate this mood. There was mention made in the 1973 report (one year after the NESC had published its first draft *Statement of Aims*) that so few schools had responded to the School Certificate Examination Board's proposals for comment on the move toward partial internal assessment that the Board felt unable to take any action[56] but this could be evidence of resistance to change, passive acceptance of it, or simply of ambivalence on the part of heads of department. Because the survey was administered by the SCEB and feedback was solicited from union and non-union members, it does offer some evidence that the idea of a mood for change was not as intense among the wider teaching fraternity as it was within the PPTA, or even certain elements in the PPTA. There was, however, reference in the 1974 PPTA report to 'only eleven returns from the two hundred received indicat[ing] opposition to internal assessment at fifth form level'.[57] This suggests an openness among some teachers to changes in the way students were assessed, though again the gaps in the methodology prevent us from drawing conclusions about the intensity of any mood for change. (It is also difficult to ascertain how many PPTA members joined because they were in philosophical agreement with the organisation and how many joined because the union afforded them protection and better bargaining opportunities.)

The 'mood for change' in the English syllabus, then, stemmed primarily from the following interlinked sources: first, the changing composition of New Zealand high schools as a result of big increases in the numbers of students staying in school until Form Five and, correspondingly, of these students having to take English; secondly, the ability of the PPTA both to recognise this changing composition and to agitate for structural changes, ostensibly under the auspices of meeting the challenges of that changing composition but also to better reflect its progressive

[54] Interview with Russell Aitken, 2012.
[55] Interview with Russell Aitken, 2012.
[56] NZPPTA Annual Report 1972-73, p.6.
[57] NZPPTA Annual Report 1973-74, p.10.

educational philosophy; thirdly, the subsequent publication of *Education in Change*, which laid out the framework for that philosophy; and fourthly, the willingness of the Department of Education's Curriculum Development Unit to endorse this 'mood' and to facilitate the establishment of a National English Syllabus Committee, the chairperson of which was himself progressive.

PART 3: The NESC – personnel selection and other influences on the first *Statement of Aims*

In 1969, Russell Aitken was teaching at Westlake Boys' High School under the headmastership of Harvey Thompson, 'a change agent insofar as he encouraged boys to take activities that were not traditionally male, such as ballet.'[58] Westlake Boys' was a relatively new school, having opened in 1962, and Aitken recalled that he 'had to build up the English Department'. He was a proponent of group work and greater creativity in the English classroom – which often involved getting students out of the classroom. He 'just got people [employed teachers] who felt the same way and it became a whole new way of thinking within the school. It caused a few ruffles in some departments.'[59] He believes that his selection as Director of the NESC would have stemmed from the recommendations of Harvey Thompson and of certain school inspectors who were favourable to change.[60] Aitken's selection of teachers was also made easier by the more 'active and thinking'[61] regional inspectors, some of whom were responsible for seeking teacher nominations to the NESC. Some were, he says, 'curriculum developers before curriculum developers existed'. Though he recalls that, in general terms, the regional inspectors' attitudes were mixed, with one or two strongly philosophically opposed to NESC viewpoints, many were neutral and enough embraced the change to aid in effecting it. Aitken's own educational philosophy 'reflected the Department of Education's commitment to reducing the emphasis on traditional approaches'[62] while in Gordon McDonald the PPTA had a sympathetic Department of Education employee who was open to change, in a position to facilitate it, and with enough autonomy within the Department to initiate it.

Not everyone was convinced that the Department of Education was undergoing progressive change in the early 1970s. An anonymous article in the September 1973 edition of *English in New Zealand* took aim not at the omission from the

[58] Interview with Russell Aitken, 2012.
[59] Interview with Russell Aitken, 2012.
[60] Interview with Russell Aitken, 2012.
[61] Interview with Russell Aitken, 2012.
[62] R. Openshaw and M. Walshaw, p.72.

committee of more traditional voices but rather at what the writer referred to as the 'curriculum-making elite' in New Zealand. S/he contended that the structure in place for curriculum development excluded teachers in favour of politicians, bureaucrats, and academics. In support of this claim, s/he pointed out that educational power in New Zealand lay with the School Certificate Examination Board, the University Grants Committee, the Professors Committee, while curriculum power lay with the Curriculum Development Unit comprising Education Department officials and inspectors and only one or two 'ordinary' teachers. Furthermore, it was argued, several people belonged to different committees, which had the effect of keeping the power within a small group, and that the 'only links between the higher and lower levels of curriculum-making are provided by three Departmental officers: [Russell] Aitken, [Gordon] MacDonald, and [Inspector] John Osborn.[63] It is possible that some of the motivation for such an article was selfish – perhaps it was written by someone who was him/herself rejected for a committee or who had personal or philosophical disagreements with those named – and the article conveniently overlooks that many committee members were former teachers, but it does offer evidence that small groups comprising several people who would appear in more than one committee controlled much of the discourse. It was enough to prompt a response from the Minister of Education admitting a lack of 'opportunity' for teacher involvement in curriculum-making.[64] In a country of the size of New Zealand it was perhaps not so remarkable either that control of the decision-making process was within the domain of such a small group of people, or that the Minister of Education felt prompted to respond to charges of elitism and possible cronyism that appeared in one left-wing education publication; however, it does suggest that the composition of committees such as the NESC contributed towards the restriction of discourse about the educational direction of the country's schools.

The original NESC, selected in November of 1969, met in March 1970 and comprised 12 people: the then-Superintendent of Curriculum Development as the

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[63] 'The Curriculum-Making Elite', *English in New Zealand*, September 1973, p.33.
[64] 'The Curriculum-Making Elite – Minister's Reply', *English in New Zealand*, September 1973, p.34.

Chairman [sic], two curriculum officers, three inspectors of secondary schools, four representatives of the Post-Primary Teachers' Association, and two representatives of the Association of Heads of Independent Secondary Schools. Two further members, representing the New Zealand Educational Institute, were co-opted early to ensure continuity between primary and secondary English programmes.[65] Only one of the teachers from the *Guidelines* conference in August 1969, N.B. Matheson of Nelson College, was on the original committee. However, throughout the 1970s the personnel would be in constant flux and by the time the NESC concluded in 1983, seven of the 21 *Guidelines* attendees had sat on it. Members of the committee would, with rare exceptions, fall into two general categories: Department of Education representatives who were overseers and who had little real influence in the direction of the group, other than to give the Department a presence; and the teachers or former teachers appointed by Aitken who voluntarily committed to the project and who were philosophically in agreement with it. Aitken recalls, for example, that Jim Ross, the Director of Secondary Education, and Bob Bruce, the Inspector of Schools offered little but were not antagonistic, while the likes of Joan Holland, an Independent Schools representative and John Fletcher in a dual role representing PPTA and Christchurch Teachers' College were both active and enthusiastic participants. Peter Goddard and Karen Sewell, who were members in the early 1970s, were teachers at the newly-opened Green Bay High School. Sewell would, in a distinguished career in education, hold the positions of Chief Review Officer at the Education Review Office, head of the New Zealand Qualifications Authority as the National Certificate of Educational Achievement was bedded in, and, finally, Secretary of Education. Harvey McQueen spent time on the committee and was later, in the 1980s, instrumental in facilitating the Department of Education's co-operation with the Human Rights' Commission in 'develop[ing] resources to infuse several subject areas, including English,' with Human Rights' Commission topics of

[65] *Developing a New English Syllabus: The NESC Curriculum Development Project, 1969-83*, Department of Education, 1983, p.2.

concern.[66] Roger Mainwaring, Peter Timmins, and Garry Jeffery all served on the NESC as PPTA representatives.[67]

Charmaine Pountney, who was Sewell and Goddard's Head of Department at Green Bay, was a founding NESC member and whom Aitken describes as 'the academic among us', and fitted the kind of profile that the NESC wanted: progressive, enthusiastic, hard-working, and politically liberal. She saw 'uniforms, streaming, corporal punishment and all other coercive elements [as] inimical to good education'[68] and had a vision of schools that were 'student-centred, guiding young people to maximize their potential, rather than as a place of social control, replicating the structures of society and making young people fit them'.[69] In 1973, Green Bay High School opened espousing many of the progressive values that the NESC promoted. Pountney was an agitator for the abolition of examinations at Form 5 and Form 6 and for a mixture of internal and external assessment at Form 7.[70] Pountney's dislike for what she termed the 'social control' aspect of schools provides insight into the way that the NESC not only saw itself as a liberator of English education from the traditional, conservative dictates of the past, but also as the a pioneering official government education committee that would, it was hoped, alter the course of high school education in New Zealand. The suggestion was that traditional methods were a form of social control and that new, student-centred methods reduced that element of social control. The NESC, knowing any kind of curriculum or syllabus development was a political act, in fact wanted to replace existing forms of social engineering with a different form of social engineering: one which eschewed hierarchy, punishment, individualism, and competition, and aimed instead to instill – with the same intensity of force and ideology as did the traditionalists with their system – equality, self-regulation, group harmony, and personal growth.

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[66] English Inspectors' Liaison Meeting minutes, December 5 1984, Archives New Zealand, ABEP 7750, W4262, 4227 50/2 ENS-D, pt1.
[67] NZPPTA Annual Reports, 1977 to 1980.
[68] Charmaine Pountney, *Learning our Living*, p.40.
[69] Ibid, p.41.
[70] Ibid, p.104.

Few of those invited to serve on the NESC challenged the shift. Peter Quin was a dissenting voice on one of the early manifestations of the Committee, but it is instructive that his time on it was brief. He was a grammarian – that is, a traditionalist who wanted to retain an emphasis on examination of English mechanics. He was not selected by Aitken and was someone Aitken remembers as always being on the 'other side' and a 'kind of wall I bounced off'. [71] The reason for his short tenure is unclear, though it might be inferred that his own educational philosophy not corresponding with the Committee's would have been a reason. Aitken believes he might have been put forward by the PPTA, 'conscious of the fact that they would need to see how this would affect them, politically',[72] which suggests that Quin was a Department appointment, chosen to offer a traditional, 'conservative' voice in order to give the committee the appearance of democratic input. Barry Gough, who was invited onto a 1999 English committee charged with establishing unit and achievement standards recalls that he became aware quite early that he was appointed as the dissenting voice, and that he had the notion at the time that such committees were composed in such a way that any criticism of decisions could be deflected with the contention that "all voices were represented".[73] Gough left the 1999 committee six months into a two-year tenure and later worked under Terry Locke designing an alternative assessment system to the National Certificate in Education Achievement. Quin's brief inclusion on the NESC was likely similarly-themed, which implies that while there were attempts made in the selection of committee members to maintain open exchange of contrasting views, often these attempts were superficial, underpinned as they were by the prerogative of establishing the appearance of legitimacy. It is not a startling revelation in a political sense, but is relevant to the direction in which the NESC headed: without dissenting, conservative voices the greater was the likelihood of everything that had gone before – the traditional, authoritarian aspects of education – being more easily discarded.

[71] Interview with Russell Aitken, 2012.
[72] Interview with Russell Aitken, 2012.
[73] Interview with Barry Gough, 2012.

The selection of the NESC offers an interesting comparison with Mark Sheehan's finding in his study of the New Zealand history curriculum that 'in contrast to the international arena, where curriculum design is controlled by government agencies, the small size of the New Zealand academic and teaching community at this time, combined with the Department of Education's commitment to consensus in decision-making, allowed a minority group of conservative historians and teachers to have a disproportionate influence over this process'.[74] In contrast to History, in which the 'conservatives' – in the sense of those who favoured a discipline-based subject model – were in the ascendant, English curriculum development became driven, without significant opposition,[75] by progressive forces. Although the NESC was officially instigated by government, the thrust came from more liberal-progressive teachers within the PPTA – that is, teachers who were more open to, even inclined toward, change. Locke notes that teacher unions 'were strong and, on the basis of what might be termed their "guild knowledge", enjoyed an assured place at the negotiation table for all education-related issues' and that while curriculum reform was often very slow, 'officers from the Curriculum Development Units [were] usually ex-teachers for whom progression to the CDU was a natural career path for those with a desire to maintain their curriculum specialisation in a management, policy or advisory capacity.'[76]

Regardless, at the turn of the decade enough English teachers were more receptive to change than were teachers of other subjects – or at least, they were less resistant to change. Indeed Aitken himself found History and Geography (the latter was his university major) to be too content-driven: it was both the potential that English had for creative expression and the general receptiveness of English teachers to new ideas that encouraged him to take the position. One reason for this was that English was a subject that could be molded reasonably seamlessly with progressive ideals of the time. Emerging research about language complemented research in the burgeoning fields of child psychology and socio-linguistics to

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[74] Mark Sheehan, *Defending the High Ground: The transformation of the discipline of history into a senior secondary school subject in the late 20th Century: A New Zealand Curriculum Debate*, PhD Thesis in History, Massey University, 2008, p.1.
[75] Openshaw and Walshaw, p.73.
[76] Terry Locke, *Constructing English in New Zealand,* p.1.

provide the academic evidence to support a social shift in schools away from authoritarianism, competitiveness, and teacher-led instruction towards co-operation, anti-competitiveness, and student-centred learning.[77] The 1972 *Statement of Aims* draft endorsed fully the *Education in Change* group's aim of education as being to 'help young people develop fully as individuals and members of society by encouraging the growth of concern for others, the urge to enquire, and the desire for self-respect' and it is within this context that Russell Aitken compiled the *Essential Background Papers*[78] for distribution to NESC members. *Papers*, referred to by Aitken as 'our Bible'[79], comprised 145 titles spanning 1963 to 1970; however, only three were dated pre-1965, reflecting both the committee's preference for more recent ideas around education and, tacitly, a dismissal of older ideas. The list would form the early educational and socio-political philosophy of the NESC and the two writers who were the most influential were Andrew Wilkinson and John Dixon. Aitken cites Wilkinson's work on 'oracy' as being 'what [the NESC] was about'.[80] Wilkinson was a proponent of a switch in emphasis in English teaching from the survey reading of canonical texts and study of grammar, spelling, and paragraphing to the 'centrality of experience so that [those other skills] emerge in the *process* of verbalising the experience [rather than having] the status of immediate goals'.[81] The material selected for the reading list overwhelmingly corresponded in its progressivism with the findings of the PPTA *Education in Change* Curriculum Review Group. The 'centrality of [student] experience' was integral to the Curriculum Review Group's recommendations and to the NESC's goals. Both emphasised the importance of 'human growth', the former referring to 'growth' (or its variants) three times on its first page[82] and the latter using the term throughout the *First Draft*, including once from a direct quote by Wilkinson.[83]

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[77] *Draft Statement of Aims,* NESC, 1972, p14.
[78] *Essential Background Papers*, Archives New Zealand, ABEP7749, W4262, 34/1/41, part 1.
[79] Interview with Russell Aitken, 2012.
[80] Interview with Russell Aitken, 2012.
[81] Wilkinson, 'The Concept of Oracy', *English Journal*, 59, 1, January 1970, p.72.
[82] *Education in Change,* NZPPTA, 1969, p.1.
[83] *Draft Statement of Aims*, NESC, 1972, p.7.

It is clear that, in such contexts, 'growth' did not mean purely academic development in the sense simply of good grades which might in turn lead to a greater range of educational, vocational, and professional opportunities; rather it meant an intertwining of educational development with emotional development. It echoed in some regards the *Thomas Report*'s aims towards the 'full development of the adolescent as a person' and 'preparing him [sic] for an active place in our New Zealand society as a worker, neighbour, homemaker, and citizen'.[84] Indeed, the *Thomas Report* also acknowledged that 'personal needs and social needs have all too often been pushed into the background, especially by economic pressure',[85] that a 'fairly general change in approach' was needed for 'ordinary pupils who [learn] best through methods that give scope to his urge to be doing things' and that 'in [most core] studies, books have an essential place, but none of them need be bookish in the bad sense'.[86] However, 'growth' was broadened and emphasised, something that the NESC owed to the work of John Dixon. Dixon was part of a group of educational pioneers of counter-culture, anti-authoritarian education whose educational ideals were both informed and given audience by the Dartmouth Seminar. Locke identifies the 1966 Anglo-American Dartmouth Seminar, a pivotal conference in the articulation of the new education ideals, as being the point when the 'progressive consensus'[87] was reached on the futility of teaching grammar as a means to improving reading and writing. Dixon promoted the child's centrality of experience as the starting point for expression, contending that from that expression would come an authentic engagement with language. In addition, he endorsed the need for group work and open classrooms. In 'Creative Expression of Great Britain', he wrote of the 'silent classrooms of two decades ago…to expose their linguistic and educational limitations'[88], and of creative writing as leading to 'unique knowledge of one's self and the world'.[89]

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[84] *Thomas Report*, p.5.
[85] *Thomas Report*, p.5.
[86] *Thomas Report,* p.5.
[87] Terry Locke, *Constructing English in New Zealand,* p.32.
[88] Dixon in *English Journal*, 57, 6, September 1968, p.799.
[89] Ibid, p.801.

English, then, was becoming co-opted into part of a wider sociological and socio-linguistic experiment. Already in New Zealand, John Pride, a socio-linguist at Victoria University, was promoting the idea that language in high school must never be taught as a study in itself, but rather that it should 'always be seen in a situation'.[90] In response to such suggestions, linguists tried to defend their discipline by portraying it in terms of 'humanistic study', but they were ultimately unsuccessful: 'Almost overnight, the teaching of grammar disappeared from many English classrooms.'[91] Grammar textbooks by Ronald Ridout and other traditionalists were discarded at Form 6 and Form 7 with remarkable swiftness, with 'no gentle transition from the traditional to the new'.[92] Pride argued that there should be no direct teaching of meta-language or terminology, in doing so effectively eliminating the linguistic aspect from English and replacing it with socio-linguistic enquiry.[93] This sociological emphasis was exactly what the NESC wanted for Forms 3 to 5 and Pride was one of three tutors who convened the 1970 workshop – Russell Aitken was the course director and Gordon McDonald was the assistant course director – for the Department of Education from which the booklet 'Language Resource Material' was published.

The ease with which such transitions could be made was undoubtedly facilitated by two factors: New Zealand's relatively small academic community, which enabled voices that might in other countries have been regarded as radical to be more easily heard; and, again, the appearance on government committees of people – sometimes the same people – with progressive agendas, this being facilitated by a Department of Education that was itself populated by former teachers and academics who were themselves progressive. A three-man PPTA committee – of whom one was NESC member John Fletcher – in 1972 welcomed centralisation of curriculum construction, though acknowledging that there was in the wider educational community 'some distrust of what people see as [the possibility of a]…totalitarian' approach. The committee believed that the real

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[90] Elizabeth Gordon, 'Grammar in New Zealand Schools: Two Case Studies' in *English Teaching: Practice and Critique,* 4, 3, 2005, p.48.
[91] Terry Locke, *Constructing English in New Zealand*, p.32.
[92] Elizabeth Gordon, 'Grammar in New Zealand Schools: Two Case Studies', p.49.
[93] Ibid, p.50.

'danger' in a small country like New Zealand would be 'new orthodoxies inhibit[ing] experimentation'.[94] Ossification, then, was seen as a greater threat than centralised, top-down control. This is no doubt partly attributable to both the establishment of the Curriculum Development Unit and the increasing influence of the PPTA: it was the vocal and influential progressives on the PPTA who tended to be appointed to CDU's committees or to be invited to prepare papers for the Department of Education. That is, top-down control was not threatening provided the top could be reached and/or influenced by progressives; stagnation was threatening because it implied a lack of progressive thinking. Aitken favourably compared the conditions under which he worked with those that like-minded reformers in other countries had to operate under:

> There were much bigger political problems involved [elsewhere]. In Australia it was state politics. Lesley Strata wanted me to talk in England because they were getting nowhere. They said it was terrific what was happening in New Zealand. In England the power of the counties was…like an army [whereas] we had a department, a centralised system. We had the national political system that allowed it to operate here. [95]

In addition, teacher training establishments were receptive on the whole, apart from Christchurch.[96] Aitken recalled that some lecturers there would not allow him to speak to their trainees, but that they were the exception rather than the rule. Furthermore, the climate was conducive to a socio-linguistic approach to the teaching of language and for a corresponding de-emphasis on teaching grammar in isolation because one of the functions of socio-linguistics is to interrogate existing power structures through analysis of language. Hence Pride's Form 6 and Form 7 topics like the 'Language of Conversation', 'Language of Advertising', and 'Language of Political Persuasion' would have appealed to progressive reformers who were themselves educated in more authoritarian times and who were

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[94] 'The Secondary School Curriculum 3: The Challenge is Change', Department of Education, 1972, p.9.
[95] Interview with Russell Aitken, 2012.
[96] Interview with Russell Aitken, 2012.

determined to eliminate completely what they saw as 'boring, conventional class'[97] teaching and replace it with classroom facilitators. A socio-linguistic approach to language would inherently encourage critical thinking which would in turn help to dismantle existing power structures in the classroom, and perhaps facilitate the interrogation of societal power structures in the future. It is thus clearer how a mood for change was so confidently and vocally articulated in the period leading up to – and in the early years of – the NESC, and how a perception among progressive teachers of a mood for change very quickly transformed into vigorously-pursued goals.

A full exploration of the NESC's policy towards examinations will be explored later but it is important at this stage to note that a central tenet of the NESC was the rejection of examinations. The PPTA *Education in Change* group and subsequently the NESC saw examinations as a barrier to personal growth on two levels: first, many students lost interest in learning for its own sake because of the pressure to perform in examinations; and secondly, examinations impeded teaching and learning by narrowing focus. In Wilkinson's concept of oracy there was for Aitken strong academic grounding for the eventual call for elimination of examinations because underpinning the NESC's emphasis on oracy was the premise that because a child 'first explores language through listening and speaking', it is therefore preferable to establish an environment where 'wide-ranging discussion' and 'free exchange of ideas'[98] are encouraged. This drew from Wilkinson's contention that English was not, as previously believed, a subject of 'language, literature, and composition', but rather was about 'production and reception',[99] and that once those terms were acknowledged and accepted then it necessarily followed that speaking and listening were equally valid components of the subject as were writing and reading. An authoritarian, teacher-directed classroom environment was a barrier to the production component as it did not provide authentic opportunities for oracy:

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[97] Charmaine Pountney, p.44.
[98] *Draft Statement of Aims*, NESC, 1972, p.7.
[99] Wilkinson, p.72.

> In the conventional classroom, we often get to have a gigantic prestige figure, to use the language of the social-psychologists, and you have a series of low prestige figures, and they're seated in rows, so that the communication tends to go one way only. There may be a question-and-answer session, but the whole purpose of much fast questioning is to preclude anything but a single response. The teacher knows the answer and there's only one possible answer he [sic] will accept.[100]

To the NESC, the challenge to the traditional teacher role was thus: oracy was fundamental, ergo authoritarian classrooms in which teachers were sole selectors and disseminators of content were counter-productive to a child's growth; written examinations both denied students free expression on their own terms and at their own pace, and placed disproportionate emphasis on writing, which disadvantaged 'students with limited language experience'.[101] This latter point serves to highlight the wider social aims of the NESC to meet the changing demographics of the school population, but also exposed the proposal to eliminate examinations to charges of 'dumbing down' or dropping standards. Both the 1972 and 1978 *Statement of Aims* insisted that oracy and literacy were interdependent yet it was also acknowledged that written literacy stemmed from oral literacy and subsequently that written literacy was more challenging than oral literacy – a valid assumption. Students with 'limited language experience' were seen as having a 'particular need' of oracy to 'fulfill their immediate personal and social needs', whereas those 'with a richer language background need a programme which extends both the range and depth of their language'.[102] Yet the NESC wanted oral literacy and written literacy to be regarded as equally valid and the School Certificate Examination, being principally a test of a student's reading and writing, did not countenance such a view. And because School Certificate discriminated against those of limited language ability, it also failed to 'encourage acceptance of, and make provision for, the differing social, cultural, and intellectual backgrounds of students'[103] that the NESC was promoting. In other words, School Certificate was now too difficult for

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[100] Wilkinson, p.75.
[101] Wilkinson, p.75, and *Statement of Aims,* NESC, 1978, p.10.
[102] Ibid.
[103] *Statement of Aims,* NESC, 1978, p.20.

too many students, it needed to be overhauled, and the written examination discarded owing to its narrow emphasis on written literacy, which only served the needs of those from richer language backgrounds. The unstated challenge for the NESC, then, was to give oracy and literacy intellectual parity so that English would be more relevant to the wider range of students that were now exposed to it – and so that they would have the opportunity to gain some success in it – whilst tacitly having to accept that writing was a skill that developed later than speaking, and therefore was regarded a more intellectual pursuit. What Wilkinson's theory of oracy helped the NESC to facilitate was the acceptance of a new paradigm – one of 'reception and production', wherein reception (reading and listening) became the lower-level scaffold by virtue of the learner being acted *upon* as a recipient, while production (writing and speaking) became the higher-level one on account of the learner becoming an active agent. This elevated the oracy's production strand (speaking) to comparability with literacy's production strand (writing) and provided one scholarly justification for the elimination of external examinations.

Aitken recalls that the promotion of oracy concerned Bill Renwick, the then-Assistant Director General of Education, and that he, Aitken, 'had to make 'talk' a technical word. I had to make [a case for] 'language' first, 'talking' as language second, and 'writing' as language third.'[104] Renwick's occasional, apparent doubts about the NESC's direction would have been part of his job as the liaison between the committee and the politicians, but indications are that he was more receptive – or at least was to become so – to the NESC's philosophy than Aitken thought. In 1976, as Director-General of Education, he wrote a paper that reached similar conclusions about education to those from which the NESC was working: an acceptance that knowledge was contestable, an assertion that the changing 'sub-culture' of teenagers required new educational approaches, an awareness of the impact of the mass media on learning, the need to acknowledge New Zealand as a bi-cultural nation, an acknowledgement of the demands that urbanisation and a

[104] Interview with Russell Aitken, 2012.

shift from the industrial to the service society would place on the school system.[105] He was, then, a progressive himself, albeit one in a position that demanded greater circumspection than was required of PPTA or NESC members.

Resistance from within the Department of Education appears to have been minimal principally because Aitken was afforded a degree of freedom that was, for non-ministry personnel chairing a Ministry committee, quite possibly unprecedented in New Zealand education. Aitken reported directly to the Assistant Director-General (who for most of the period was Jim Ross), who would report to the Director-General (who for most of the time was Bill Renwick), who would then report to the Minister of Education. Aitken recalled that there was a certain naivety both on his own part and at the lower levels of Department of Education about what was being done, and that in some ways that naivety benefited the committee. He remembered feeling annoyed by the politics because he felt that 'what we were doing was education and education is bigger than politics [so] I was going to stick with it.' Bill Renwick would, throughout the committee's time, contact Aitken directly for progress and justification of the direction the committee was taking: 'I got the feeling he knew what was going on and wanted the chance to discuss it. He would question everything and he did it intuitively.' Even towards the end of the NESC, when Merv Wellington was Minister of Education, 'he was the shadow in the background. I got it from Renwick directly and indirectly – and from Jim Ross – that Merv was not going to like [particular aspects] and if he didn't like it, we'd have a battle on. I knew that was part of the deal, but I thought, "That's your job to convince him", and I just had to convince them. [Wellington] faded against the argument [for radical change].'[106] This last comment is debatable, particularly when viewed in light of the final *Statement of Aims*, in light of the control that Wellington exercised over the direction of primary schools, and in light of Wellington's 'closed…non-consultative

[105] W.L. Renwick, 'Social Change and Objectives of Secondary Education' in *Directions in New Zealand Secondary Education*, Codd and Hermansson (eds.), pp.17-19.
[106] Interview with Russell Aitken, 2012.

approach' during the Department's Review of the Core Curriculum.[107] However, there is ample evidence to support both Locke's and Aitken's view that the Department of Education had only a 'gentle hand on the curriculum tiller'[108] for much of the time that the NESC operated.

What the Minister of Education needed to be convinced of was English re-modelled to reflect Aitken's and the NESC's educational worldview. In 1973, Aitken posited this view in five dichotomous choices, with the second option in each being the short answers:

1. A selected content, or utilising the whole environment as a source of learning
2. The teacher as fountainhead, or the teacher as a particularly helpful bit of the student's environment
3. Memorising and exercising, or methods which ensure that learning can be equated with living
4. A 'show us what you know' attitude, or one which accepts as valid 'learning by using language and learning language by using it'
5. Teaching as the focus of the classroom, or learning as its main *raison d'etre*[109]

The longer answers to these questions could be found in the NESC 'Bible'. While Wilkinson's concept of oracy and Dixon's promotion of whole-child growth were the main influences on Aitken in the formative stages of the NESC, he highlighted several other sources that he included in the *Essential Reading List* which he regarded as influential to forming the philosophical and ideological direction that the committee would take. These articles shared the common strand of presenting the subject of English and the role of English teachers as harbingers of wider

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[107] Roger Shearer, 'The New Zealand Curriculum Framework: a new paradigm in curriculum policy development', ACE Papers, *Issue 7: Politics of Curriculum*, www.education.auckland.nz

[108] Terry Locke, 'English in the New Zealand Curriculum: Benchmarks and Milestones' at http//edlinked.soe.waikato.ac.nz/users/locket/EIAENZC.html

[109] Russell Aitken, 'What is English?' in *English in New Zealand*, June 1973, p.2.

educational goals. One of these writers was J.N. Hook. He critiqued an (American) education system that he saw as bigoted and uncaring of children, whom he felt needed to be at the centre of their own learning. He envisaged an English that rejected the formalism of New Criticism and that instead embraced affective readings of texts:

> Does the comparison of structure between a Petrarchan sonnet and a Shakespearean or Miltonic sonnet make a difference? Teach sonnets when they can speak to today's youth – yes. Mention structure…but emphasize the people in the sonnets, the problems they face, the continued existence of these problems, attempts at solution, the relevance to our world. Not an academic exercise…Probably we should throw out many of the scrubbed classics…To make a difference, it must get students involved emotionally as well as mentally.[110]

Hook advocated an approach to English that prioritised the learner's emotional and psychological connection to a text over a linguistic or formalist approach to one. In this new approach, elements of style such as structure or scansion were only valid – as in relevant to high school learners – if they contributed to the reader's understanding of the poem's emotional quality. His push to the periphery of textual and sub-textual skills shifted the learning emphasis from a logical, patterned discipline to a more visceral, empathic one. The worth to the NESC was that, first, more students would likely be able to respond to a poem if they were not confined to the near-mathematical precision of understanding needed to interpret sonnets, but instead were able to make an emotional connection to the content. This would potentially contribute toward wider student achievement because a need for 'formula' knowledge is replaced by a need for empathy, a capacity for which 13 to 15-year old students would have developed to some degree. Secondly, the role of the teacher and students was more likely to be altered because each student could feasibly bring his/her own interpretation and understanding to the text, thereby changing the role of the teacher into a guide

[110] J.N. Hook, 'English Teachers in a World We Never Made' in *The English Journal*, 58, 2, February 1969, p.189.

whose main aim was to elicit from students those individual interpretations. This was captured in 'Language Aim 2' of the first NESC *Draft Statement of Aims* – 'Extending their imaginative and emotional responsiveness to and through language'[111] – and neatly encapsulated the progressive/humanist approach to literature study: literature was not simply something written, but was also something received. It was within the 'capability of all human beings to create meaning through language in their engagement with experience'.[112]

Such an approach to the reading of a text was reconcilable with the NESC's adherence to what Aitken calls its 'humanist' philosophy. Traditional approaches to language study such as that outlined by Hook were regarded as narrow and as endorsing the old authoritarianism. The new approaches placed English as a part of, and as a vehicle for, the transmission of humanist enquiry: that is, it was no longer to be a study of language with some cursory literature and composition, but rather part of the 'stable' of subjects that were loosely termed 'humanities' (along with history, sociology, psychology, some aspects of geography and economics). Indeed, Hook explicitly averred that humanists should be more campaigning and assertive in their promotion of literature: 'Language is a living thing…a vehicle for honour and dishonour, honesty and dishonesty, passionate love and passionate anger…all that is human in humanity.'[113] It was a call to arms that Aitken embraced and was willing to defend, noting that critics of the NESC actually used the term 'humanist' as an insult:

> To be using the approaches we were using were seen as nasty and undermining. It was cutting against the idea of authority, because the English that we were talking about was about giving people a choice, freedom…and that smacks of liberalism.'[114]

Aitken and the NESC's humanist approach was similarly presaged in the *Essential Reading List* journal article by Robert A. Bennett, 'The English Curriculum: out of

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[111] P.11.
[112] Terry Locke, *Constructing English in New Zealand*, p.31.
[113] J.N. Hook, p.187.
[114] Interview with Russell Aitken, 2012.

the past, into the future', the title of which captured the prevailing progressive view that the traditional approach to English teaching had lost relevance. He wrote that English curricula were a 'product of the past' and that while the past was 'significant', the future was 'vital',[115] that 'language is…the greatest of the humanities', and that 'mastery of the language is not the task of the [any schools, but rather it is] a lifelong pursuit'.[116] In this we can hear echoes of the NESC principle of language being central to personal growth and of the progressive view of English as more than an academic discipline. Bennett also called for an end to the 'traditional fragmentation' of English into its component parts because this may 'prevent the curriculum designer from gaining a holistic view of his [sic] task',[117] which was in turn mirrored in the NESC's *Statement of Aims 1972* call for a 'unified approach, not a fragmentation of language activities'. Fragmentation within the subject came to be regarded by progressives as detrimental to the wider goal of integrated and unified education, in much the same way as was fragmentation of the high school system into 'subjects' and, further, of the traditional school layout into classrooms with students at desks independent of each other. In some respects, what was desired was a return to the kind of delineated knowledge that characterised thinking in the Enlightenment era, in which science and literature and art were seen as part of a seamless body of human knowledge, each part drawing from the other. That Russell Aitken was himself a geography specialist with a double major in Geography and English made him an appropriately symbolic choice of director. Indeed, the aims of the NESC contained what might be called a cross-disciplinary genus, drawn as they were from the fields of socio-linguists, sociology, behaviourist psychology, and transformational grammar.

Another article that challenged the traditional, compartmentalised approach to English teaching was that written by a high school teacher from the United States who had taught in the United Kingdom and who made the anecdotal observation that English in New York schools consisted mainly of multiple-choice

[115] Bennett in NAASP Bulletin, 51, 7, 1967, p.7.
[116] Ibid, p.8.
[117] Ibid, p.8.

comprehension tests, learning of vocabulary lists, reading gobbets from an anthology. In contrast, the English students in the English school in which she taught learnt their grammar and vocabulary from the process of writing that in turn grew from reading full-length texts of various genres. She concluded that the 'English teacher of English does not find herself in some isolation ward in her insistence that 'the word' is important', and moreover that English high school students were more interested and more literate as a consequence of the creative engagement that writing afforded them.[118] The NESC, perhaps in anticipation of critics who would challenge the omission in that draft of specific reference to the study of grammar, would state that such an omission was intentional and purposeful: 'Skill development should arise from the practical implementation of the language aims stated'[119]; 'consistent with the need for a sense of sequence and progress...[there should be]…a constant relation of work in the language programme to students' everyday language behaviour'.[120] The rejection of the kind of content-based curriculum and rote memorisation that formal grammar study required was an idea that had been bolstered by the educational research of Benjamin Bloom[121] – whose 1956 working group determined that memorisation was a lower-level intellectual skill than understanding or applying or creating. Bloom's taxonomy placed remembering at the bottom of an inverted pyramid that had analysing, evaluating, and creating at the top, thus providing progressives with sound justification for a change in emphasis in English programmes. The NESC here slightly re-interpreted the original intention of the taxonomy: while Bloom's group had indeed posited creating as a higher-level skill, it was not to be at the expense of remembering because for meaningful understanding, application, analysis, evaluation, and creation to occur, there had to be a base from which to work…and that base required some retention of facts. However, the new approach became to learn language by using it.

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[118] Barbara Pollard, 'Teaching English the English Way', in *The English Journal,* 58,4, April 1969, p.587.
[119] *Draft Statement of Aims*, NESC, 1972, p.1.
[120] *Draft Statement of Aims,* NESC, 1972, p.14.
[121] *Education in Change*, NZPPTA, p.26.

The unified, holistic approach model with its new emphasis on oracy would serve to complement the NESC's goal of student-centred learning premised on 'the choice by students of subjects [within English] close to their own needs and interests' and on 'the selection by teachers *and students* of materials'[122] [emphasis mine]. An example of how this might work in practice was outlined in an *Essential Reading List* article by Norman Felland, in which he described how a unit of work might be introduced by the teacher with just a couple of traditional lessons at the beginning, followed by a question-and-answer session (the longevity of which is determined only by the number of questions the students have), then ten days during which the student would undertake independent study on a topic of his/her choosing with the opportunity for dialogue with the teacher when it was required. He anecdotally reported that the student who had studied independently was much better prepared for further study.[123] Such an approach was probably not completely feasible for the Forms 3 to 5 levels that the NESC was ostensibly concerned with, but Felland's article offered the kind of prospect that the committee envisaged at higher levels of high school, and although the NESC's brief was limited to the lower levels, Aitken always felt that his committee was producing a kind of template for the future direction of education:

> The general feeling was that this is something a bit radical, a bit different. Once we got that language is behaviour, then what we're doing in the classroom is a bigger form of behaviour with minutiae of behaviour all the way through.[124]

This 'radicalism' also heralded an attempt to re-define the very term 'English'. An *Essential Reading List* article by Marian Shelby posited that the term 'English' was 'amorphous…parochial…convention-bound…out-of-date…[and] false'.[125] Initially the NESC preferred the title 'English Language Studies' in the belief that it would

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[122] *Draft Statement of Aims*, NESC, 1972, p.14.
[123] Norman Felland, 'English Independent Study for High School', in *The English Journal*, 58, 4, April 1969, pp.592-601.
[124] Interview with Russell Aitken, 2012.
[125] Marian Shelby, 'Toward a New English', in *The English Journal*, 58, 9, Dec. 1969, p.1349.

unify 'all language activities undertaken in Forms 3, 4 and 5'.[126] Perhaps conscious of the backlash that such a re-defining might cause, the word 'English' was retained in a transitional capacity; however, by 1978 it had been replaced with 'language' and an explanatory note was offered:

> For the purposes of this statement, "language" refers to English and all of the principles and ideas outlined are related to the theory and practice of learning English as the mother tongue.[127]

Besides one reference to 'English teachers' and some mention of the word in a few notes at the end of the document on historical background, the word was not used in the 1978 version. The introduction of new terms and the redefining of established terms is often an integral and strategic method of aiding the acceptance of new ideas and of exposing the flaws in existing ideas. The word 'English' in reference to the academic subject sat uncomfortably with some liberal academics and teachers because of its associations with a colonial past that was seen as destructive (in its treatment of indigenous and colonised peoples) and exclusive (in the sense that it connoted through its association with the colonising force a certain aura of superiority). Shelby expressed one such distinction between the subject name English and the practice of English when she pointed out that the world's varied literatures – from India, Australia, Nigeria, Canada, the United States – just happened to be written in English.[128] In other words, it was the message, the characters, and the ideas that mattered rather than the mode of their communication, which should be incidental but which had been given too much weight in the past. It might be regarded as the difference between English – the traditional subject – and english, the new approach. Her argument was part of one of the wider discussions around post-colonial literature regarding whether truly post-colonial literature could be written in the language of the coloniser. This had obvious relevance in a New Zealand context: urbanisation of Maori and a gradual acknowledgement of tribal claims of past injustice led to heightened

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[126] *Draft Statement of Aims*, NESC, 1972, p.1.
[127] *Statement of Aims*, NESC, 1978, p.5.
[128] Marian Shelby, p.1349.

awareness of issues of a bi-cultural nature, while the growing Pacific Island presence in New Zealand through the 1960s also forced policy-makers to re-consider existing education programmes that were believed to privilege those with established cultural capital. For the NESC, 'Language' was not only a more politically neutral term but also a more inclusive one.

The long-term educational impact of colonisation on minorities, and especially on indigenous peoples, was highlighted in an *Essential Reading List* article by James Squire. Writing in a United States context, he lamented the finding in the recent National Study of High School English Programmes that high schools there were too focused on upper-band students – that is, the motivated and able – at the expense of the less advantaged. He drew a link between the linguistic poverty of the disadvantaged and their economic poverty in later life.[129] The PPTA had expressed similar sentiments in *Education in Change* with its calls for 'special efforts…to design curricula which will help young people in [Maori and Pacific Island] communities to attain a sense of purpose' and for obtaining 'a thorough understanding of their cultural values and a knowledge of the thought-forms they bring into the classroom'. Moreover, the PPTA working group, drawing partly on a prevalent if well-intentioned stereotype, called for creating a learning environment that afforded children from these communities the opportunity 'to express themselves in dance, music, and role-playing'.[130] It was, then, not only on pedagogical terms that the NESC sought in its *Draft Statement of Aims* to extend the definition of language to include 'moving' and 'shaping', 'gesture' and 'facial expression',[131] but also within a spirit of cultural awareness and acknowledgement of increased geographic mobility, in addition to a recognition of the increasingly varied (in ethnic, socio-economic, and academic terms) student body at senior levels.

The articles outlined above from the *Essential Reading List* were among those that underpinned the philosophy of the NESC and which directly contributed the socio-

[129] James R. Squire, 'Six Major Influences on the Secondary English Curriculum', in *NAASSP Bulletin*, 51, 3, 1967, p.5.
[130] *Education in Change*, NZPPTA, p.4.
[131] *Draft Statement of Aims*, NESC, 1972, p.6.

political as well as educational ideals to the first *Statement of Aims.* The articles on this list covered new approaches to English education, but also encompassed wider educational issues of subject fragmentation, group work, and streaming; socio-historical issues of colonial legacies, power hierarchies, and ethnicity; and ideological positions on humanism and anti-authoritarianism. The list comprised articles written by teachers as well as academics, and this was important to Russell Aitken because he believed that academics could be too far removed from the classroom to understand how the practical application of educational theories might work. Because of a perceived mood of waning support for a high school English curriculum that was premised on traditional paradigms – such as what would later be called the 'cultural heritage model' and the 'textual and sub-textual skills model' – English was believed by the NESC to be the subject that would best be suited to experimental change and that could lead a progressive, 'personal growth model'[132] revolution in New Zealand schools. One of the early strengths of the NESC was its ability to transmit its own, new 'English', premised on these articles, to the wider teaching community.

[132] Terry Locke, *Constructing English in New Zealand*, p.28.

PART 4: The NESC – process and progress to the 1978 *Statement of Aims*

The aim of the NESC was to change the way that teachers (and subsequently government, students, and the general public) conceptualised high school English in New Zealand and, as has been touched on previously, part of this re-defining process meant trying to convince teachers that if students made sense of the world through language then language in any form had validity as a mode of understanding. There was acknowledgement in the *Draft Statement of Aims* that certain types of language behaviour was more appropriate than other types in certain situations and also of the 'gulf' in social and intellectual growth between the literate and articulate and those less capable of clear expression.[133] However, the increased emphasis on oracy was expected to help bridge that gulf and the School Certificate Examination with its 100 percent focus on written answers was, in its present form, a 'barrier before the bridge'. Thus, before turning to its more profound effects on School Certificate English during the 1970s, I would like to touch briefly on one of the smaller but symbolic successes of the NESC on that examination.

Sociologists and philosophers through the 1960s saw controlled human behaviour such as manners and etiquette as a mode of social control, one ancillary of which was to enable those who held power in society to maintain their position; manners were a means by which the powerful could not only establish standards of acceptable behavior, but also adjust or adapt them in order to ensure that the control would remain elusive to those outside of the predominate social group. Educational theorists, some of whom drew from sociological and anthropological studies of language and societies, increasingly saw language use and mechanics of writing in the same way. Perceptions of what constituted 'proper' language were hindering social mobility for many pupils who did not have the cultural or socio-economic – and therefore the educational – advantages that privileged pupils did. A growing number of studies proved that there was little link between the study of grammar, syntax, punctuation, and spelling in isolation and pupils' long-term understanding of them or successful application of them. Such studies

[133] *Draft Statement of Aims*, NESC, 1972, p.7.

understandably focused on tangible outcomes, such as whether a student's writing improved, rather than on the socialising function of grammar study: such study was undertaken independently, was text-book focused, and was done in silence, all of which reinforced traditional values in education. Moreover, while research indicated that meta-language study had no impact on the ability of students to produce more grammatically accurate work, the same research also indicated that such study did not necessarily detract from their own written production: that is, such study had no impact either way. However what grammar drills, syntax and punctuation correction, and rote memorisation did do was to reinforce particular traditional educational values because they demanded of students the willingness to sit still, to work individually, and to be quiet. There was no empirical evidence to show whether formal grammar study had any impact on these, but commonsense dictated that students were more likely to be submissive and compliant if they were given tasks that required silence and individual endeavor. These were the very values that the progressive forces of the PPTA and NESC were challenging. In September 1972, the PPTA-appointed committee that prepared the 'The Challenge is Change' paper for the Department of Education commented on morals, standards, and values, including the following:

> Where once schools could act on the assumption of generally accepted standards of dress, conduct, and belief, they cannot do so today. Much of the questioning of established values is coming from the most intelligent section of the school population. Schools, whether they like it or not, are becoming more centres for debate and discussion than places where established and unquestioned values are transmitted to the young. The Thomas Committee could talk about 'civilized values' confident that their readers would agree on what was meant. A definition of 'civilized values' might not be so easy today.'[134]

Progressives bound inextricably the pursuit of human growth, self respect, concern for others, and urge to enquire with more communal, less authoritarian, more

[134] 'The Secondary School Curriculum 3: The Challenge is Change', Department of Education, 1972, p.7.

egalitarian education. The ramifications of this on the School Certificate English prescription became increasingly apparent in the instructions to examination candidates regarding spelling and neatness. Specific demands in the School Certificate English examination for accurate mechanics and 'manners' (tidy work) first appeared in 1955, with two instructions beneath its header:

> Time allowed: Three hours
> Ten minutes extra allowed for reading this paper. Marks up to five may be deducted for careless and untidy work.[135]

In 1959 the five-mark penalty was removed along with any reference to untidy work, but an unspecified mark penalty returned the following year with an additional threat of penalty for bad spelling. In 1961, the directive was changed to 'Neatness, spelling, handwriting and setting out are important' with no threat of penalty, before the five-mark penalty was re-installed in 1962 for 'careless or untidy work' only. The 1963 directive was something of a watershed for its omission of penalty marks for poor spelling, as was the directive in 1971, the first year that the NESC influenced the examination. The instruction was changed to 'Neatness and legibility are most important' and the requirement for attention to spelling was removed altogether. In 1977, the instruction was more informal, almost conversational: 'You may write or print, whichever you prefer. Be neat.' In 1979, it was changed again to the less intimate but simpler, 'Write or print. Be neat. Do not use pencil.'

The directive against 'careless and untidy work' and 'bad spelling' was presumably born of examiners' perceived need for one. Yet it is also evidence of the friction between traditional beliefs in the importance of details and the educational reality that progressives were trying to accommodate. There are several possibilities for the shift away from penalty marks in English: one is that the increasingly diverse composition of high schools, and the subsequent possible increase in pupils from less educationally advantaged backgrounds, made such penalties seem punitive,

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[135] *School Certificate English Examination 1955*, Department of Education, No.63, 1955.

even discriminatory; another is that there might have been inconsistency among markers in their application of them, 'careless' and 'untidy' being subjective notions; another is that such penalties might have been increasingly considered irrelevant as a gauge of a pupil's English ability. What these comparisons illustrate is a microcosm of the conflict between the traditional, authoritarian English establishment and the newer, contemporary, progressive forces. What they also illustrate is how progressive forces in the 1960s and the NESC in the 1970s contributed toward the redefining of the role of mechanics in English. Handwriting, spelling, punctuation, and grammar had until the 1960s been regarded as fundamental components of English. Now, with the new emphasis on creative expression of ideas through language activities 'which demand[s]…sharing of feelings and sensitivity to the experience of others',[136] coupled with the notion that there were many valid varieties of language and that language should only be judged according to its appropriateness in a particular situation, mechanics were becoming de-emphasised. The NESC was of the view that the experience and the willingness of a student to convey that experience should take priority over the mode or accuracy of its expression.

However, the NESC influence on School Certificate was much greater than its efficacy in implementing a shift away from emphasis on the mechanics of language. Its deeper influence was to be in evidence in its trialling of internal assessment as an alternative to external examinations, in its promotion of new media, and its new emphasis on a thematic approach to literature study. The NESC viewed external examinations as the primary barrier to the new English that it envisaged. While the *Thomas Report* called for English programmes that provided 'constant oral and written expression' and demanded that 'oral work should be strongly emphasised',[137] the goal here was for students to speak with confidence and precision; there was no suggestion that these should be summatively assessed in an examination and there was no suggestion that examinations should be eliminated. Rather, the Report recommended that School Certificate comprise reading comprehension excerpts, exercises in précis, exercises in vocabulary, and

[136] *Draft Statement of Aims*, NESC, 1972, p14.
[137] *Thomas Report* p23.

'questions designed to test the candidate's ability to express his ideas on subjects of interest to him'.[138] In contrast, the PPTA *Education in Change* group had concluded that the examination system was inherently flawed – with poor feedback methods, narrow objectives, unreliable marking, and limitations of individual competition – and that examinations 'should be replaced by tests administered by teachers for their pupils' benefit'[139]. In its first draft, the NESC was more circumspect, instead focusing on the contention that oracy should have parallel importance with literacy because it was through oracy that student growth would be facilitated, and that there should therefore be 'reduced dependence on formal tests and examinations',[140] but the NESC embraced the fundamental aims of the *Education in Change* document and set out to 'relate its own statement of aims to it',[141] as Aitken explained:

> '[Elimination of examinations was] really what we were on about. We kept that up as a committee…it had to come. Once you accept oracy, spoken language, you have to give that primacy of place. One of the key resistances of teachers was, "But if we do that, we'll lose our authority in the classroom". They hadn't understood that you can talk with kids and still teach them, and that was a big shift.'[142]

Even allowing for the circumstances of the interview – a conversation in a coffee shop that lent a degree of informality to our meeting, and one that occurred 40 years after the publication of the document – it is indicative of Aitken's philosophy on teaching and learning that he used the construction 'with kids' instead of 'to students'. The substitution of the preposition, and the colloquialism that follows, capture his vision at the time for the future both of class discourse and teacher-student relationships: collaborative and less formal than existed in the early-1970s. Aitken captured here the corollary objective of an oracy-focused curriculum: the

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[138] *Thomas Report* p.26.
[139] *Education in Change*, NZPPTA, p.56.
[140] *Draft Statement of Aims 1972*, NESC, 1972, p.23.
[141] Aitken, 'Curriculum development and teacher education in New Zealand', in *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 8:1, 76-87, 1982.
[142] Interview with Russell Aitken, 2012.

erosion of traditional authoritarian values that had hitherto characterised the English classroom. The *Draft Statement of Aims* set out to establish language behaviour as moving, watching, shaping, and viewing in addition to the traditional reading, writing, listening, and speaking. *Aims* included a diagram of a circle split into eight component parts of equal size, the effect of which was to give the former, previously-ignored or -marginalised components academic equivalence with the latter four. For moving and shaping (in addition to speaking) to gain greater credibility among teachers would mean an acceleration of the elimination of the authoritative teacher role because such components required not only active, productive participation of students but also a classroom environment that permitted more input, more dialogue, more noise – a point whimsically made by Noel Price, a teacher who embraced early the NESC's principles: 'The new English means noise. All you can do is apologise to your neighbours, ask for acoustic tiles, ask for a different room, hang old curtains around, ask for carpets.'[143] The NESC view was also reflecting the shifting values of society: the authoritarian classroom of the 1950s largely demanded silence and compliance from students, many of whom at senior school level were compliant because of their respect for authority and because of their academic motivation. The changing demographics of school student bodies to include learners from backgrounds who lacked one or both of these characteristics, or who lacked English first-language ability, combined with a social shift from respect for authority to an ambivalence – or even contempt – of it, even among the more progressive teachers themselves, prompted the NESC to ensure that its approach reflected this change.

For the NESC, external examinations fostered competitiveness and were the antithesis of oracy and therefore of collaborative teacher-learner relations. The *Education in Change* group outlined its view thus:

[143] Noel Price, 'Groups in the English Class', in *English in New Zealand,* June 1973, p.11.

> Schools should be concerned with promoting the total growth of children so that they can contribute to society in many ways…External examinations, as they are conceived at present, fail to help this growth.[144]

It recommended the establishment of a professional unit that would design and validate a new testing system and that showed a student's development of ability rather than a raw mark, ultimately rendering external examinations redundant. The NESC, no doubt conscious of its only being in its infancy and therefore in a more sensitive political position than that of the well-established and outwardly political PPTA's working group, was more circumspect in its *Draft Statement of Aims*, calling only for a 'reduced dependence on formal tests and examinations' and 'increased use of systematic observation and assessment by the teacher of pupil activity and work'.[145] However, by the 1978 draft, the committee had had the benefit of eight years to promote the parity of the eight language modes, and it was now confident to state that a 'single mark or grade is of little value' because it obscured 'individual growth within the different language modes'.[146] The NESC recommended instead several methods of internal assessment which encompassed those modes and which themselves echoed the 1969 PPTA-instigated Curriculum Review Group's desire to establish a clear philosophical basis to the union's position on qualifications[147] – that is, that educational objectives should be advocated in place of exam-directed achievement and that qualifications should be standards-based rather than norm-referenced. It is evident here how the educational goal of aiding student achievement was intrinsically linked to socio-political goals of eroding traditional authoritarianism and adapting schools and assessment to meet the students' capabilities, needs, and demands rather than expecting the students to meet the institutions' capabilities, needs, and demands.

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[144] *Education in Change*, NZPPTA, pp.46-47.
[145] *Draft Statement of Aims*, NESC, 1972, p.23.
[146] *Statement of Aims*, NESC, 1978, p28.
[147] Judie Alison, 'The NCEA and How We Got There: The Role of PPTA in School Qualifications Reform 1980-2002' in *New Zealand Journal of Teachers' Work, Volume 5, Issue 2, 119-138, 2008*

There was also a socio-political dimension to the proposed elimination of School Certificate. Reflecting in 2000 on the qualification, Charmaine Pountney referred to it as 'Cruel Certificate' and argued that it was not a 'measure of what young people know or can do, but a measure of the wealth of their parents'[148] on the grounds that one mark did not differentiate between a student's ability to, say, write a story and his/her ability to deliver a speech, and on the grounds that children who had privileged socio-economic upbringings overwhelmingly performed better in it than did those who had under-privileged upbringings. Moreover, argued Pountney, the School Certificate system, being a method in the 1950s and 1960s for selecting students for higher education, was outdated because those who failed or who left school prior to Form 5 still had occupational opportunities that were, by the 1970s, diminishing. The NESC vision of ultimately replacing external examinations with internal assessment was therefore based on a combination of idealistic humanism that envisioned all students gaining some success within the high school system, and a pragmatic acknowledgement of the changing dynamics of the job market. By June 1975 the shift in mood in favour of this humanist vision was such that Russell Aitken could, with confidence that the SCEB would not react negatively, directly quote from Helen C. Lee's *A Humanist Approach to Teaching Secondary English* in an NESC 'Report and Recommendations to the SCEB on the Teaching and Examining of English at Form 5 Level'.[149]

Pountney was also opposed to the norm-referencing system that led to ranking of students stemming as it did from the common belief in the 'fixed nature of human intelligence, determined by genetic factors which could be measured and which would be a good indicator of how he or she would do at school and beyond'.[150] Such a system simply could not sit with the NESC's general views on hierarchical structures in education. The same code of values that led to the rejection of the authoritative teacher-obedient pupil dynamic determined that competition between, and ranking of, students was educationally damaging because it directly impaired for many students the growth of self-respect, which was a core

[148] Charmaine Pountney, p.231.
[149] Archives New Zealand, ABEP 7749, W4262, 3509, 53/2/16,pt2.
[150] Charmaine Pountney, p.236.

educational goal of the NESC. Articles from the *Essential Background Papers* such as *Grouping Practices in Relation to Educational Ends and Means* (Unesco Report, 1966) and 'Streamed no better than non-streamed', (Times Educational Supplement, 30/1/1970),[151] provided the philosophical counter to the traditional banding of students according to test results. Like research on the value of spelling and vocabulary lists at the time that proved that such lists had little effect on a student's ability to produce more accurate writing, research on streaming tended to conclude that such a practice had no noticeable overall benefits for students. As with the case of the spelling research, there was no evidence that streaming was worse overall for students – only that it was of no advantage either way – but the progressives' objection to the detrimental emotional and psychological effects of streaming on those in the lower classes was evidence enough that progress towards a key educational aim – to instill in students the desire for self-respect – was being impeded.

While elimination of the Form 5 examination was at the heart of the NESC's philosophy on assessment, and an internal assessment trial was in the preparatory phase, the committee was instrumental in effecting change to the School Certificate English Examination through the 1970s. The SCEB comprised twelve members of whom six were departmental officers, three were PPTA representatives, one was a private school representative, and two were university representatives.[152] With the Department of Education in progressive mode through the early part of the 1970s, with the likes of Gordon McDonald, Bill Renwick, Jim Ross, and Graham Aitken in key positions to influence change, the SCEB – on which NESC member Charmaine Pountney sat as one of the three PPTA representatives – was increasingly receptive to the new English, as a study of the examination through the 1970s shows.

The 1972 examination was divided into two sections. Section A was language-focused and compulsory, and comprised 70 marks. It required students to write

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[151] *Essential Background Papers*, NESC, p2. Archives New Zealand, ABEP7749, W4262, 34/1/41, part 1.
[152] 'Opinion', *English in New Zealand*, July 1975, p.27.

two compositions of 150 words each from a list of nineteen options, encompassing three styles: a summary, a descriptive piece, an argument. The composition section offered, for the first time, the option of visual prompts in the form of photographs and an accompanying instruction to candidates that they could 'write about it in any way you like'.[153] The recognition by the examiners that some students would be better able to draw inspiration from the visual image than from the written word was in keeping with the NESC's new ideas about creativity in the learning process. This was followed by a 'Comprehension' section then a 'Grammar and Usage' section that covered identification of grammatical errors, inserting punctuation, a vocabulary cloze exercise, and identification of misspelt words. There were then two short sections on library terminology and abbreviation knowledge. Much of Section A was no different to what had been in previous examinations and was what might be described as traditional in its prescription insofar as it endorsed the idea of Standard English and gave a 'nod' to the 'basics' of spelling and punctuation (even though the general requirement across the paper for good spelling and punctuation had been dropped from the instructions several years prior). It was in Section B, however, that significant changes were being made to reflect the work of the NESC. Candidates had to choose two questions from seven. The first question, entitled 'Themes in Reading' was a new option:

> Many poems, plays, novels, short stories, essays, and biographies include something about one of the following subjects: a) A journey b) A search c) Crime d) War e) Falling in Love.
> Choose one subject and write an essay telling what several authors said about it.[154]

In evidence was the NESC's theme-based approach to literature, which encompassed wide reading of texts from several genre and that dealt with one or two key themes. The NESC ultimately envisioned such a study being internally assessed in the form of speeches or dramatic performances or posters or essays,

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[153] *School Certificate Examination 1972*, Department of Education, pp.2-3.
[154] *School Certificate English Examination*, Department of Education, 1972, p.13.

but the format of the external examination allowed only for the latter. However, the speed with which NESC suggestions were incorporated into the examination was evident, and reflected the willingness of the Department generally and the SCEB specifically to change.

The second option was 'Drama', which had been available in preceding years. However, in addition to the more traditional question that required the candidate to discuss a character or idea there was, for the first time, the instruction to 'Draw a stage diagram, showing the position of the actors at some point in this scene' then 'describe what is happening on stage at the time you have shown' in the diagram.[155] What can be seen in this question is NESC's 'First Assumption' in its *Draft Statement of Aims* in action: if 'language is a form of human behaviour' and 'non-verbal elements' such as gesture, facial expression, movement, posture, and grouping were all intergral to language understanding and development, then it followed that students should be rewarded for showing understanding of these elements of language. Although this question was only worth five marks, it marked a seismic shift in a New Zealand English examination because a student was being asked to draw and explain rather than simply to explain. The NESC would ultimately wish for such student understanding to be shown under internal assessment conditions, through drama (moving and shaping) rather than through writing, but the philosophy behind the question was clear.

The third option was, again for the first time, 'Mass Media' (replacing the previous year's 'Newspapers', which in turn had been the first instance of that section). The first sub-section concerned newspaper terminology, and the sub-section on radio required candidates to show some understanding of how the medium could inform, persuade, and entertain. However, the third sub-section, on television, allowed students to write about their 'favourite story programme on TV [sic]', by describing an important character and 'showing how TV helps us to see [the character's qualities] through voice, language, appearance, and mannerisms'.[156] The section is a demonstration of the NESC's desire to democratise the

[155] *School Certificate English Examination*, Department of Education, 1972, p.13.
[156] *School Certificate Examination 1972*, Department of Education, p.14.

examination in much more forceful and meaningful terms than had been seen previously, by validating the candidate's own interests in and experiences with the burgeoning new medium.

The 'Poetry' section had been a mainstay of the examination in one form or another since the late-1940s, but even here there was change. Candidates were asked the customary questions about a previously unstudied poem to 'discuss what the poem is saying [and] the methods the poet uses', but also, for the first time, to give their 'own feelings about it'; then, in a sub-section, to choose a poem that they studied in class and to write 60-80 words on what they 'found interesting about it'.[157] What was significant here was the lack of prescription relative to that in previous years examinations. Such freedom to discuss their own feelings about a poem had not previously been afforded students in the 'Poetry' section, which had traditionally asked students to, for example, show 'what the poem says and the methods the poet uses to say it' in 150 words,[158] to match poem titles and lines with poets,[159] or to provide short answers of the right-or-wrong type.[160] Candidates were further invited to offer personal responses for the first time in the 'Prose' option: they could gain five marks from writing 60 words about what kinds of books they preferred and why, offering some titles in support of the appeal of those genres. Candidates could also opt to avoid, without penalty, the exercise to match authors' names with texts. This latter exercise was appearing for the final time in a School Certificate English examination, symbolically marking the shift away from the idea that there were texts that students should at least know about. The NESC approach to literature study at junior and Form 5 level was premised on reader-response and affective approaches to textual understanding, both of which were underpinned by post-structuralist and deconstructionist philosophy, and this new approach was reflected in the examination questions.

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[157] *School Certificate Examination 1972*, Department of Education, p.15.
[158] *School Certificate Examination 1971*, Department of Education, p.11.
[159] *School Certificate Examination 1971*, Department of Education, p.12.
[160] *School Certificate Examination 1969*, Department of Education, p.8 (and variously, 1944-1968).

The two remaining options were 'Paragraph Study and Writing Skills' and 'Kinds of Language'. The former was a short answer section on elements of text structure and style that had been part of School Certificate in various guises (such as 'Paragraph Construction and Precis'[161] or 'Style'[162] or 'Summarising'[163]); but 'Kinds of Language' was new and further evidence of the NESC influence on the examination. The introductory blurb that 'When people use English, they use different kinds of language' was a key component of the NESC's drive for a recognition that non-standard registers could be appropriate in some circumstances and that students should therefore not be penalised or made to feel insecure about their own language use. No such statement in any context had been made in previous examinations.

Changes to the examination continued to a near-revolutionary degree throughout the 1970s. In 1973, there were four photographs, four advertisements with a visual component, and a plan of a house, and candidates were able to write a review of a book for an imaginary school newspaper. The following year, two cartoons were added to the prompts for composition and the required length of the composition was reduced from 150 words to '100 to 150',[164] while further cartoons were found in the comprehension section. In 1975, there was no punctuation section and spelling was reduced to three marks (though it was raised to eight marks, then down to five, then up to six in the years following). Composition included the topic 'Do New Zealanders pay too little attention to the arts, such as music, painting, drama, ballet, and architecture?'[165] In 1977, science fiction or fantasy was an option in the section entitled 'Reading' (formerly 'Prose'). The poetry section of that year included a poem titled 'Exam Time, New Zealand' by Albert Wendt – the first by a Pacific Island poet to appear in an examination – the theme of which was to gently undermine examinations, and one of the

[161] *School Certificate Examination 1971*, Department of Education, p.13.
[162] *School Certificate Examination 1969*, Department of Education, p.7.
[163] *School Certificate Examination 1964*, Department of Education, p.7.
[164] *School Certificate Examination 1974*, Department of Education, p.4.
[165] *School Certificate Examination 1976*, Department of Education, p.15.

composition options was that 'Examinations do not measure a student's real ability'. [166]

But it was the comprehension section of the examination that became an outlet for liberal progressive concerns. Comprehension sections over the previous 20 years had comprised either excerpts from works of fiction or dry, uncontroversial works of non-fiction the intentions of which were to inform rather than to persuade. In 1974, the section included for the first time a story about a prominent Maori historical figure – there were two further in 1977 and 1979 – and also an overtly political editorial from the *Star* that argued New Zealand did not need to employ the 'fashions of other cultures in order to generate an art of its own'.[167] This new genre of comprehension passage was to mark an important shift into the overtly socio-political:

> It's that time of year again. The Trentham yearling sales are over and the beauty contests are about to begin. The typist clerks, receptionists, and Girl Fridays are about to get the big chance God never gave them – maybe to become Miss New Zealand.
> *The writer's tone in this introduction to an article is A. evaluative B. condemnatory C. enthusiastic D. sarcastic.*

The next question was on a letter from the *Listener* that pointed out that a top female athlete was referred to as 'girl' while no male athletes were referred to as 'boys'.[168] In 1976, the first passage was an article from *Designscape* magazine that promoted the 'whanau school concept' as a way forward for school design,[169] while in 1978 there was an excerpt from a report by the Royal Commission on the Sale of Liquor that highlighted the high number of people in New Zealand who drank to excess. The comprehension section of the examination became an outlet through which progressive social and political views and concerns could be expressed. The NESC's influence in examination content became more overt as the decade

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[166] *School Certificate Examination 1977*, Department of Education, p.19.
[167] *School Certificate Examination 1974*, Department of Education, p.8.
[168] *School Certificate Examination 1975*, Department of Education, p.6.
[169] *School Certificate Examination 1976*, Department of Education, pp.2-3.

progressed. So while dissolution of the external examination was the ultimate goal with regard to assessment methods, in the interim considerable changes to the School Certificate examination emanated from the work of the NESC and the recognition of the SCEB of the need for modernisation. For the NESC to have stated explicitly in the early years that abolition of the School Certificate examination was desirable would have been to court the kind of controversy that would have doubtlessly attracted negative attention and impeded the path to other, more immediate aims. It speaks to the NESC's awareness of the political pitfalls of curriculum and assessment reform that it instead built gradually towards such a recommendation, and that it was prepared to work within the existing examination system as well as to proffer an internal assessment alternative, before doing so more explicitly.

That it could do so was testament to its organisational efficiency and to its philosophical allies in the Department of Education and in the wider education community. First, the process for dissemination of NESC aims and methods was meticulous. Ten newsletters from 1970 to 1977 updated English departments on the process and on new approaches to language learning, and these were supplemented in the formative years (1971 to 1974) by nine more detailed Background Papers which drew from recent educational studies that justified the new direction. In 1975, sixteen District English Committees were established, with a further twelve established the following year. These committees directly involved almost 300 teachers in the revision project.[170] The motivation and determination of the members ensured the availability of practical research-based trial units of work, the centralisation of the process (owing to the existence of the Curriculum Development Unit) legitimised it, and the openness of Ross and Renwick to both the process and the philosophical and educational underpinnings of the operation meant that Aitken was afforded considerable freedom and resources to select members and orchestrate the direction of the committees to ensure their progressive momentum:

[170] Russell Aitken, 'Developing a New English Syllabus: The NESC Curriculum Development Project 1969-1983', Department of Education, Wellington, 1983, p.9.

> 'We were given money to run in-service training all around New Zealand. It must have been a bottomless pit at that stage. [The] regional committees around NZ…were fabulous. They were all in tune with what we were doing. I trusted them. Their job was to run local meetings. They were given money to run three a year. There were ten or eleven on each committee and they had money to do that. England and Australia couldn't get over that we had that sort of a) money and b) system.'[171]

It was a devolved process with the NESC at the centre disseminating information and supporting professional development to regions. While all of this contributed to the momentum, progress towards two of the core goals of the NESC – completion of the next *Statement of Aims* and the establishment of internal assessment for School Certificate – were under way. The *Draft Statement of Aims* was sent to all schools for comment in 1972, comments were considered for revision in 1973 leading to distribution at courses for further comment.

In 1973, sample units of work were distributed to all schools for Form 3 and in 1974 for Form 4. Trial Unit 8, entitled 'Here's What You Ought To Think', was an early pre-cursor to the Form 6 and Form 7 curriculum review group's 'Language of Political Persuasion'. It involved a 'starter', such as listening to a tape of radio talkback or a local meeting or a television discussion or interview, or reading letters to the editor or editorials, followed by a class discussions, role plays and group critiques. There was also room for individual written work in the form of empathic writing. It was recommended that group work, which comprised most of the unit, be evaluated and assessed by the groups themselves; and it was suggested that the individual work might be assessed by the teacher, although 'the class might like to be involved in this assessment too'.[172] Furthermore, assessment should not be determined only by group's final presentation, but rather by holistic evaluation of 'development of language and ideas through the unit'.[173] Another

[171] Interview with Russell Aitken, 2012.
[172] 'Here's What You Ought To Think', NESC Trial Unit #8, Department of Education, 1974, p.5.
[173] 'Here's What You Ought To Think', NESC Trial Unit #8, Department of Education, 1974, p.5.

Form 4 unit, entitled 'Loneliness', aimed to make students 'explore feelings about loneliness by using a wide range of language situations'.[174] The starters included viewing photographs, playing a song, reading a short story, or reading a newspaper article. Student activities included diary writing, pair discussion, a class-composed poem, production of a collage, and role-playing. Field trips were also suggested. Some components of the unit explicitly reflected the NESC's re-defining of English by encompassing the fields of music, social work, art, and psychotherapy. The recommendation for evaluation was that written and visual work be given to another Form 4 class for assessment. The collage would be assessed on three questions: 'How appropriate was it to the theme of loneliness? How aesthetically pleasing was it? Could the elements have been better arranged to express the theme?' Thus, assessment would comprise written feedback and no raw mark or percentage. The poem would be assessed on two questions: 'Did the poem have originality and impact? Did the poem explore loneliness in a sympathetic way?'[175] Though the poem was the only writing activity that was proffered, there was no assessment criterion recommended for written accuracy. While the first assessment question was understandable and neutral, the second suggested that loneliness was a condition that should always demand students' sympathetic response, and that to respond in a way other than this was to err. Although the assessment criteria were only suggested – because the NESC approach was one of anti-prescriptiveness and of encouraging schools to design courses that would 'meet particular needs and local circumstances' – the units were evidently used as a means to promote the socially liberal values of the committee.

Groundwork was thus being laid at junior school level for a more affective, more empathic, more socially liberal English course that would both subsume the skills of reading and writing into a broader programme of language, replace individual work with co-operative learning, and replace pass/fail assessment of a final product with evaluations of process – evaluations that were often made by other students rather than by the teacher. To consolidate this approach, internal

[174] 'Loneliness', NESC Trial Unit #9, Department of Education, 1974, p.2.
[175] 'Loneliness', NESC Trial Unit #9, Department of Education, 1974, p.2.

assessment of NESC English for School Certificate was approved in 1975 for a two-year trial. In 1976, twelve schools were involved and five more were added the following year. The trial was approved because 'of NESC's feeling that a single national examination cut across many of the developments taking place in the subject' and that a 'written exam can only test two of the eight language modes'.[176] At the outset of its formation, the NESC was philosophically opposed to external examinations, so it was necessary for it to show how reading and writing were no more valuable elements of the subject than were moving, viewing, shaping, listening, and speaking. Having proposed this view, committed it to the *Draft Statement of Aims*, revised the terminology by replacing 'English' with 'language', and then promoted it, the view came to form part of the committee's own justification for its internal assessment trial. That the fourth aim of the internal assessment trial was 'to enable further moves towards internal assessment to take place through the knowledge and experience gained by trial schools'[177] further suggests that the trial was, at least to some extent, pre-determined to be successful. In May 1976, just five months into the trial, the Curriculum Development Unit reported positively on the progress to the SCEB:

> Teachers report that students…are generally happier and working more consistently than previous fifth forms. I found, when I questioned students in all schools, that they confirmed this fact. They are enjoying their work. Second-year fifth formers also said this – a clear indication of the value of the trial.[178]

Elements of the report are unquantifiable: for example, it is unlikely that students in Form Five (besides those who were repeating) would be able to confirm that they were happier and working more consistently than previous fifth formers. It is more feasible that teachers would be able to judge such a matter, but the teachers

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[176] 'The Evaluation of English (NESC) at Form 5: A Report', Education Department, 1980, appendix 5, p.5. Archives New Zealand, ABEP7749, W4262 2053, 34/1/41 pt.1.
[177] Ibid, p.6.
[178] Letter from CDU to M.J.L. Cable, Secretary, SCEB, May 26 1976, Archives New Zealand, Agency: AAZY, Accession: 3901, Box/item: 507.

who were trialling the new system were already supporters of it. The report also stated that the 'range, scope, and quality of the English work being undertaken by the students is well up to School Certificate standard', but that there was concern about 'the pass/fail factor remaining a part of the trial'.[179] None of this is to detract from the trial itself or to claim that the situation was contrary to what was reported; rather it is to establish that the NESC and CDU's investment in and enthusiasm for the *Draft Statement of Aims*, coupled with the former's determination to see the abolishment of the School Certificate Examination in English, led to a pre-determined endorsement of the trial.

The selection of the schools was also influential to the success of the trial. Selection was premised on six criteria, four of which were that the head of the English department and staff be already teaching according to the *Draft Statement of Aims*; that the principal was supportive; that the schools should be closely located so that ideas could be shared; and that the range of schools selected should relate to size rather than type.[180] These criteria are entirely reasonable – it would be of little use to recruit a school that was antipathetic to the NESC's aims – but the chances of a positive response overall both to the trial and to the general philosophy of the NESC was virtually guaranteed by the criteria. Thus it proved: the schools saw the trial as 'having been extremely successful', while the 'predominant tone of the NESC's report on the trial of internal assessment [was] positive and optimistic' and 'where teachers expressed reservations about parts of the scheme, these were rarely sufficiently discouraging for them to prefer a return to the external examination'.[181] Moreover, Heads of Department reported that the two main reservations were the increased workload for the teacher and the shift in the teacher-student dynamic. In the first case, they noted that marking and preparation for teachers had increased. However, this would be alleviated with more staffing, smaller classes, and the removal of the pass/fail imperative. In the second case, they noted that some teachers found a 'strain' the increased emphasis

[179] Letter from CDU to M.J.L. Cable, Secretary, SCEB, May 26 1976, Archives New Zealand, Agency: AAZY, Accession: 3901, Box/item: 507.
[180] 'The Evaluation of English (NESC) at Form 5: A Report', Education Department, 1980, p.6. Archives New Zealand, ABEP7749, W4262 2053, 34/1/41 pt.1.
[181] Ibid, p.7.

on group work, something that could similarly be alleviated with more staffing and smaller classes. NESC English therefore provided the opportunity for Heads of Department to make stronger arguments for better working conditions, a point made explicitly by Auckland teacher Peter Shore reflecting on the new curriculum in 1982: 'The new syllabus demands smaller classes and you have to have a teacher who is very sure of the final aims…There are very few schools where class sizes allow teachers and pupils to work at their best.'[182] In addition, the language of some of the report revealed attitudes that were already embedded: heads of department who could deliver an effective NESC programme were referred to as 'strong' while teachers who accepted the NESC philosophy were 'able to teach well even [when] required to prepare students' for the external exam.[183] It was also stated that internal assessment favoured 'those who are prepared to work consistently throughout the year at the expense of those who are intellectually able but lazy',[184] a point that suggested both that students who worked hard deserved more recognition than before and that intellectual ability should no longer be the 'gold' standard.

Meanwhile, criticism by the trial schools of the NESC English was minimal. Heads of department conceded that the moving, watching, and shaping modes were proving difficult for teachers to assess, but added the optimistic 'experience is being built up in these'. Even the one outright criticism that Heads of Department had of the trial had an element of equivocation: 'the realisation the objectivity of the outside examination is no longer there has not been borne easily by some teachers'. [185] The 'some' here could either have been a general reference or a specific reference to teachers who preferred the traditional examination system. Regardless, one of the trial's biggest successes was its winning over of parents of children in trial schools. By the NESC / CDU's admission, it took public relations'

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[182] Louise Callan, 'The New English: Death or Metamorphosis?', *Auckland Metro*, October 1982, p.62.
[183] 'The Evaluation of English (NESC) at Form 5: A Report', Education Department, 1980, p.6. Archives New Zealand, ABEP7749, W4262 2053, 34/1/41 pt.1.
[184] Ibid, p.9.
[185] 'NESC English Internal Assessment for School Certificate: Report and Recommendation to SCEB', October 1976, Heads of Department Report (August 1976), Archives New Zealand, Agency: AAZY, Accession: 3901, Box/item: 507.

exercises to 'allay parent opposition' and to convince them to be 'guided by teaching staff', but by the end of the trial Department of Education research found that 42% favoured internal assessment against 12% who favoured the examination (and 44% who were 'split'). Of the latter 12%, the Department reported that 'several parents continue to challenge the scheme…or consider the issues beyond their competence'.[186] Parents reported the benefits as being the 'fairness' of the system, the elimination of examination 'nerves', 'improved motivation', but cited as disadvantages the 'possibility of teacher-student personality clashes' a 'lack of back-up examination' and a 'fear that the approach would lead to a decline in literary standards'.[187] The first of these disadvantages would be mitigated to some degree by a shift away from percentage marks. Examination papers were marked by a panel of anonymous teachers who had no knowledge of – and therefore no bias toward or against – the students whose scripts they were marking. The internal approach relied on teachers delivering (or facilitating) lessons, setting assessments, and marking them. Instead of a group of fifteen or twenty markers as was the case with external examinations, every teacher would become an assessor. The legitimacy of such a system would be dependent on markers/teachers from all over the country assessing to an agreed standard, and on those markers/teachers being able to dissociate their personal feelings about students from their assessments of students' work. It becomes clear that the argument for replacing a percentage mark with a general grade or comment indicating what a student can do – this being one of the NESC's goals – was therefore a practical as well as a philosophical one. Grades or comments were less likely to reflect inconsistencies in marking across the country than were percentage marks. The internal assessment trial was instrumental in validating in both a practical and political sense what the NESC had hitherto been advocating through its newsletters, background papers, trial units, and teaching resources: the NESC and SCEB could report that teachers and students in the trial schools were happy, that parents had been won over, and that the success of the new forms of

[186] 'NESC English Form 5: Internal Assessment for School Certificate. A Report on the Trial in Selected Secondary Schools 1976-77', by Vince Catherwood, Education Officer, English, September 9 1979. Archives New Zealand, Agency: AAZY, Accession: 3901, Box/item: 507.
[187] Ibid.

assessment were evidence that an external examination was no longer educationally necessary.

The NESC's efficiency was complemented by its ongoing support from within the Department of Education, even at the highest levels. The trial went into a 'holding year' in 1978, but was already being openly endorsed by the Department of Education, as shown in the Director-General's response to a suggestion by a Head of Department that an alternative School Certificate English paper 'which would eliminate questions on literature and concentrate on language for communication' was now needed to cater to the needs of 'immigrant pupils':

> There is no easy solution to the problem while the examination is held in such high regard by the public in general and, in particular, by employers requesting minimal qualifications. Present trials of NESC English including internal assessment for School Certificate are beginning to offer reputable guidelines for the future teaching and assessment of English.[188]

While it is clear that the government was attuned to the public perception of the School Certificate examination as a viable and rigorous assessment system, it is telling that the Department of Education was prepared to anticipate internal assessment as a solution to such problems as that highlighted by McMaster. Ministerial belief in the direction of the CDU with respect to English had become entrenched in the first five years of the NESC. Arthur Kinsella (Minister from 1963 to 1969) had a Master of Arts and a Diploma in Teaching. He lengthened teacher training from two to three years, fought for smaller class sizes, and predicted 'a future need for employees to be adaptable – to maybe change jobs four or five times in their lifetimes – and that the future would hold no place for the unskilled'.[189] It was under his watch that the *Education in Change* group's report was given credence and that ultimately led to the establishment of the NESC. Neither Brian Talboys (1969-1972) nor Herbert Pickering (1972) had education

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[188] Communication between C.P. Brice for the Director-General of Education and Nita McMaster, Principal, Wellington East Girls' College, December 1978. Archives New Zealand, ABEP 7749, W4262, 3509, 53/2/16, pt2.
[189] Obituary, *New Zealand Herald*, March 13th, 2004.

backgrounds, but neither did they impede the NESC's work. Russell Aitken remembers a general mood of 'watchful acceptance – we'll accept it but by God we've got our eyes on it'.[190]

Phil Amos, the only Labour Minister of Education between 1969 and 1983, trained as a teacher, fought for smaller class sizes, liked the 'patient, consultative approach'[191] to policy making, and would later leave the Labour Party to join New Labour after he became disillusioned with Labour's economic direction between 1984 and 1990. Thus, the first four Ministers of Education were either liberal and progressive, or not antagonistic towards the NESC's work. Furthermore, Kinsella and Amos were themselves trained teachers with a record of being sympathetic to teacher causes. By the time that Les Gander (1975 to 1978) had come into office, the NESC was five years old with established support from its immediate bureaucracy, including Renwick – an Amos appointment to the position of Director-General. Gander was much more conservative and requested from Renwick in July 1977 the review of standards in state schools in response to 'growing public comment'[192] about general decline. Renwick's findings were 'mixed', but in acknowledging as harbingers of positive change that teachers were more involved in planning curriculum, and that streaming and marking systems that involved rankings were in decline, he showed himself to be allied to the NESC. With respect to English, Renwick wrote disparagingly of the 'spontaneity of students [being] adversely affected by present examination requirements in English' and indicated that schools that were involved in the trial internal assessment scheme 'report improved standards of attainment'.[193] He also endorsed the use of drama in English programmes, acknowledged that students 'have a better understanding of the appropriateness of language to differing situations',[194] and wrote that the teaching of literature was 'flourishing'.[195] While there were negative aspects in his report – with regard to spelling and the increase

[190] Interview with Russell Aitken, 2012.
[191] Leader, *New Zealand Herald*, March 16th, 1975.
[192] *Educational Standards in State Schools*, Department of Education, Wellington 1978, p.3.
[193] Ibid, p.45.
[194] Ibid, p.40.
[195] Ibid, p.31.

in students' use of colloquialism in spoken English, these were outweighed by his endorsement of most areas that the NESC was targeting.

Renwick had earlier in the 1970s overseen the CDU's series on the 'Secondary School Curriculum' between 1972 and 1975, a series of papers that were influential in reinforcing the general need for curriculum change. Although they were concerned with wider education, they validated the NESC's direction. The first paper emanated from a 1971 Lopdell House conference chaired by the Director of Secondary Education, M. Hewitson and attended by Russell Aitken and John Fletcher of the NESC. The paper reiterated much of what the *Education in Change* group had advocated.[196] The second paper comprised a summary of responses to the first paper from teachers, secondary school boards, parents, and the public around the country. It provided an endorsement of the ideas of the first paper: that rote learning should be reduced, that there should be a reduction in authoritarian methods, that schools should be free to develop their own curricula, that examinations should be abolished or modified (although one group affirmed its support for examinations), and that there should be a 'halt to academic subjects' in favour of 'inter-disciplinary learning'.[197] Although there were only 59 responses – a small sample considering the potential audience of the first report – it enabled the CDU to offer evidence of validation of its, and therefore of the NESC's, general direction. The eighth paper in the series suggested a radical inter-disciplinary approach to curriculum design that replaced core academic subjects with theme-based 'realms of meaning' or 'studies' or 'broad fields'. Topics might include 'family living' or 'self-understanding' or 'living in a multi-cultural society'[198] and study within that could encompass, for example, literature, history, economics, ethics and values, or geography. While the NESC was not an outright advocate for a dismantling of English (or 'Language'), the theme-based thrust of such a proposal sat well with the units of work that the NESC had designed and distributed to

[196] 'The Secondary School Curriculum 1: Some Issues and Prospects', Curriculum Development Unit, Department of Education, Wellington 1972.
[197] 'The Secondary School Curriculum 2: Some Comments and Opinions', Curriculum Development Unit, Department of Education, Wellington 1973, pp3-5.
[198] 'The Secondary School Curriculum 8: Organising the Curriculum', Curriculum Development Unit, Department of Education, Wellington, 1975, p37.

schools for trial. The Renwick-penned introductions to these documents stated that the papers were designed to 'initiate' or 'stimulate' discussion, but based on the content of the papers it is at least equally likely that they were published as statements of progressive intent. Of all eight papers produced, only one – the 'Comments and Opinions' document – reflected any traditional views, and then only as part of a minority of submissions. The CDU was, understandably, instrumental in facilitating the NESC's direction and the 'Secondary School Curriculum' papers were important supporting publications that helped to normalise curriculum change.

In addition to its efficiency and to its support in both the middle and higher echelons of the Department of Education, the NESC had a strong, independent advocate and change-agitator in the forms of the *English in New Zealand* journal. The editors of *English in New Zealand*, George Bryant and Bernard Gadd, were themselves progressive in the sense of advocating a shift from traditional approaches to English teaching, though their politics were more radical-socialist than the progressive-liberalism of the NESC, so many of the opinion articles in their publication reflected their more radical philosophy. Nonetheless, apart from the one anonymously-written article about New Zealand's 'curriculum-making elite' (mentioned in part three), the journal was in philosophical agreement with most NESC developments. Russell Aitken's 'What is English?' was the first contribution to its first edition in 1973, in the wake of the *Draft Statement of Aims*. In it, he opined that the titular question needed asking because 'the circumstances of the times and the special conditions facing education demand that all teachers of English come to terms with the [*Draft*] *Statement of Aims*' and because 'we are maybe not as good at teaching as we think we are'. He conveyed the 'fundamental shift' that he believed needed to be made in English teaching: one that 'permits the student to bring his [sic] own experience, both emotional and intellectual, to the classroom, and to participate fully in the personal use of language'[199]. In granting parity between emotion and intellect he was both reflecting and promoting new thinking about English education.

[199] Russell Aitken, 'What is English?', *English in New Zealand*, June 1973, p.3.

In July 1975, the journal contained a scathing critique of the 1968 Educational (Secondary Instruction) Regulations under which the School Certificate examination was administered. The article highlighted what its editors believed to be major flaws: a SCEB with no defined constitution or functions and which was comprised of 'only three PPTA representatives' (out of twelve members), only one woman and no-one representing minority concerns. Its biggest criticism was of the scaling system, which it referred to as a 'blind monster…created by computer'[200] dictating educational standards. The article called for English teachers to 'stand up to the Department and insist that NEXT YEAR [writer's emphasis] the Minister allows schools to follow the NESC syllabus and frees them from the School Certificate machine'.[201] Two years later, in July 1977, in response to a 'campaign in the media against internal assessment of School Certificate subjects', the journal ran a defiant article under a whimsical title with school-ground allusion, 'Internally Assessed Fifth Form English: Stop Picking On It!' in which it re-iterated its previous charges against the external examination and suggested that improvement in the NESC internal assessment method would only come if ties to the external examination were severed completely.[202] It was not only the NESC's internal assessment that the *English in New Zealand* editors supported. In the July 1976 issue was an article based on a speech delivered by Bernard Gadd that espoused the virtues of modern classrooms in which students were more 'active and vocal' and in which a 'much less informal atmosphere' was evident. The article echoed the NESC view that language was intrinsically linked to the psychological development of an individual, that 'there can be no one perfect form of English', and that the 'traditional concentration on reading and writing is quite inadequate in a world in which so much important information and so many worthwhile experiences come to us through other media'. The importance of oracy was also highlighted:

[200] 'Opinion', *English in New Zealand*, July 1975, p.27.
[201] 'Opinion', *English in New Zealand*, July 1975, p.29.
[202] Untitled anonymous article, *English in New Zealand*, April 1977, p.45.

> We have woken up to the fact that speaking and listening are the fundamental modes of language learning, and that learning to read, to appreciate literature, and all other language skills follow behind, and depend upon, these basics.[203]

English in New Zealand was thus an important independent and progressive voice that endorsed much of the NESC's approach and philosophy. It harboured only minor criticisms – that the approach was too 'leisurely'[204], or not progressive enough in its support of groups that the editors believed were marginalised or disenfranchised from curriculum decision-making[205] – but it was overwhelmingly supportive of the *Aims*. Between 1973 and 1978 the journal contained no articles or opinion pieces endorsing emphasis on individual work (in the sense of working at a desk in silence – independent work was endorsed but under different circumstances), grammar drills, or bookwork. The journal was a strong voice, a kind of high-brow tabloid, that reached English Departments throughout the country through the 1970s, providing ideological support to the NESC's aims.

The support that the NESC had from the Curriculum Development Unit, the wider Department of Education, and strong independent teacher voices, coupled with its own efficient and regular output of materials, ensured that the committee's ideas gained traction. These factors combined to turn the mood for change into a reality of change. Change became the new standard, not only in an ideological sense but in an educational one: just as progressive ideas interrogated old standards then dismissed them as irrelevant in a changing world, so were English teachers now to constantly interrogate their own practices and be willing to adapt to the needs of their students.

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[203] Bernard Gadd, 'Teaching English in the Secondary School Today', *English in New Zealand*, July 1976, p.22.
[204] 'Opinion', anonymous contributor, 'NESC Units on Trial', *English in New Zealand*, September 1973, p.43
[205] 'Opinion', anonymous contributor,'NESC Units on Trial', *English in New Zealand*, September 1973, p.44.

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

The second completed *Statement of Aims* was published in 1978 and contained some distinctions from the first in both tone and content. The information from the *Draft Statement* on historical background and guidelines for revision were shifted from the beginning to the end with one alteration: where the 1972 draft cited the 1969 Lopdell House *Guidelines* committee as having 'emphasised the need for handbooks and resource units that translated theory into practice', [206] the 1978 draft cited the committee has having 'emphasised the need for *national guidelines*, and for a handbook that translated theory into practice'[207] (emphasis mine). The phrase 'national guidelines' did not appear anywhere in the first draft, but there was reference to the 'eventual national implementation of a revised approach to the teaching of English'.[208] This confidence of the language in the latter draft was to be reflected in several other areas. For example, a 1972 *Draft* statement that a 'co-operative emphasis rather than a competitive atmosphere' was preferred in the classroom – a statement that was a point of contention for one *Draft* critique (see part six) – was moved from page fourteen to page four under a title 'Important Assumptions About Learning'. The statement now read, more boldly, 'Learning is most effective when teachers and students work in a co-operative rather than competitive atmosphere'. There were five other statements asserting the effectiveness of learning, among which were that learning was better when programmes took 'account of the student's own view of himself and the world' and when 'teachers and students together plan[ned], implement[ed], and evaluate[d] programmes'.[209] The inclusion of the 'Important Assumptions About Learning' section in the latter draft served the important purpose of providing legitimacy to the progressive philosophy that underpinned the new English and it heralded what was to follow in the 'Language' section.

The defining of the eight modes (four production – speaking, moving, shaping, writing – and four reception – listening, viewing, watching, reading) as 'language'

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[206] *Draft Statement of Aims*, NESC, 1972, p.3.
[207] *Statement of Aims*, NESC, 1978, p.29.
[208] *Draft Statement of Aims*, NESC, 1972, p.2.
[209] *Statement of Aims*, NESC, 1978, p.4.

was moved from the 'First Assumption' about language (which appeared on page six of the first draft), onto an introductory page of its own in page five of the second draft. The effect was that it brought to the forefront of the *Aims* the NESC determination to have all eight modes recognised with equal validity. Following the first assumption, a new assumption was inserted: 'There is an important link between language and thought'. The assumption acknowledged that the 'relationship between language and thought is not fully understood' and that 'there is some evidence that thought precedes language and that language is not essential to thought',[210] both of which suggested a circumspection about the prevailing tendency among linguists towards belief in determinism. However, the assumption also made the point that 'language makes possible more precise and rapid thinking' and used this as evidence for promoting the 'widest range of language activities'[211] with students. Thus the notion that language helped to shape thought was nonetheless being offered as a reason for the need for an English course with less emphasis on the traditional (reading, writing, listening) and more on the progressive (moving, shaping, viewing, watching, speaking). The next assumption, that language was central to personal growth, remained, albeit without the references to oracy that were prevalent in the 1972 version of that assumption. The fourth and final assumption about language (the third in the 1972 draft) was that children first explore language through listening and speaking. In 1978, the words 'and extend' were added after 'explore'. The 1972 draft's comment that 'literacy is not ousted by oracy' was replaced by a comment on the 'interdependency' of both, followed by three paragraphs on the role of oracy in fostering 'confidence' and 'enjoyment', and on the need for students 'to talk, to plan and work with others, and to exchange ideas freely'.[212] All four assumptions about language, then, supported to various degrees the NESC drive for student-centred learning over teacher-directed instruction, for group work over individual work, and for collaboration over competition.

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[210] *Statement of Aims*, NESC, 1978, p.8.
[211] Ibid.
[212] *Statement of Aims*, NESC, 1978, p10.

There followed a section on the language aims, all three of which were the same as those in 1972, but this time with two columns, one of which outlined what teachers needed to do to accomplish the aims and the other of which outlined what students needed to do or understand. The 1972 'basic idea' that 'there are many varieties of language' became in 1978 something that teachers needed to acknowledge, while students needed to 'develop respect for national, regional and cultural differences, and an appreciation of the fact that such variety enriches the language and that no one variety is better or worse than any other'.[213] The boldness of the tone reflected an assertiveness that was not as pronounced in the 1972 draft. While the call for respect of differences was understandable and desirable in a secondary education environment that was increasingly multi-cultural, the claim that 'such variety enriches the language' was clearly subjective and premised on progressive views about language that were drawn from post-colonial, post-modernist, and relativist theories as much as they were from linguistics. As well, the 1972 'basic idea' that 'language utterances can be judged according to their effectiveness as communication and their appropriateness to a particular situation'[214] became in 1978 '[teachers need] to understand that language *should* be judged according to its appropriateness in a particular situation' and '[students need] to be aware that judgements of correctness are often affected by personal preferences and established attitudes'.[215] In determining these aims, the NESC wanted to further expedite a shift away from the primacy of the written word to an acceptance of the spoken word, and therefore of wider acceptance of vernacular. The consequences of such a shift was noted by Bill Renwick in his 1978 report to the Minister of Education:

> Most teachers still need to set a higher standard in clarity and in the mechanics of speech. This is especially true for students' speed of speaking, and for their articulation of vowels and consonants which affects their audibility…Plenty of talk does not necessarily mean good talk…In some classes, unsuitable vocabulary is more prevalent than it was. Acceptance of

[213] *Statement of Aims*, NESC, 1978, p12.
[214] *Draft Statement of Aims*, NESC, 1972, p10.
[215] *Statement of Aims*, NESC, 1978, pp.14-15.

> a greater range of speech forms should not mean a lowering of acceptable social standards in the classroom.[216]

It was an example of the NESC's attempts to democratise attitudes towards language use clashing with more traditional standards of speech. Pountney later explained that, 'If some child calls out, "Hey yous lot I'd like yous all to come see me next week", that's perfectly appropriate in a playground but not in a formal situation. [It is about] every child [having] the right to learn the forms of power, because that is what this is all about, power and the use of it.'[217] The NESC, conscious of the link between language use and existing power structures, and aware that it was neither feasible nor morally desirable to try and mold all students' speech to conform to existing standards of 'correct English', instead wanted to change public perceptions of what 'correct English' was by broadening the interpretation of it.

The second language aim – 'Extending their imaginative and emotional responsiveness to and through language' – described more assertively the need for a reader-response approach to literature study. Where the 1972 draft made general claims about the need for English courses to encourage 'understanding', to provide 'vicarious experience', to search for 'truth', or to offer programmes that could be 'therapeutic',[218] the 1978 draft expressly stated that literature and other resources were open to multiple interpretations and that 'many are possible and acceptable because they reflect different aspects of emotional and imaginative perception'.[219] The most significant change to the language aims was in the third of those. The first draft's four brief bullet points on values were expanded considerably. It was transformed into an examination of values and the importance of understanding and acknowledging variance in these. The first four recommendations had little to do directly with English; the latter two tied language use to values, including the suggestion that resources should 'illustrate

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[216] *Educational Standards in State Schools*, report by W.L. Renwick to the Minister of Education, Department of Education, 1978, p.40.
[217] Louise Callan, p.60.
[218] *Draft Statement of Aims*, NESC, 1972, p.12.
[219] *Statement of Aims*, NESC, 1978, p.15.

traditional and modern, majority and minority ideas and values'; and the section ended with a directive to teachers not to 'appear to impose his values as the correct or only ones'. [220] The NESC's view of English as a humanist force for social improvement – in the form of equality and acceptance of diversity – was channeled into the third language aim.

The bulk of the rest of both sets of *Aims* covered defining the modes and guiding language programme designers toward constructing a viable course that included said modes. These sections were followed by one on evaluation. The statement in the second draft that 'a single mark or grade…is of little value' was addressed in part five, but it is pertinent to note that the one-page 'Principles of Evaluation' section of the first draft was expanded to three pages in 1978. The first page outlined the purposes of evaluation, the second argued against an external examination, and the third offered alternative methods. 'Reduced dependence' on examinations that was called for in 1972; in 1978, examinations 'disguise[d] individual growth', 'provide[d] limited assessment of a narrow range of reading and writing skills', did not indicate a student's 'potential achievement', and provided 'only one audience – the examiner – and one purpose, demonstrating the ability to respond to the examiner's demands'.[221] The inclusion of such definitive statements about examinations was as much a political rallying call as it was about encouraging schools to embrace different and varied methods of assessment. As Aitken reflected, elimination of examinations was what the NESC wanted and although the draft *Statements of Aims* were committee documents, they were nevertheless government department-funded and –supported, and distributed to all schools.

The 1978 *Statement of Aims* marked the end of the NESC's committee-based work. It met for the final time in 1978, before handing control of the curriculum revision project to the Department of Education.[222] The NESC English trial schools had given their endorsement both to the new curriculum draft and to the move toward

[220] *Statement of Aims*, NESC, 1978, p.17.
[221] Ibid, p.27
[222] Russell Aitken, 'Developing a New English Syllabus: The NESC Curriculum Development Project 1969-1983, Department of Education, p.11.

internal assessment. The Department of Education accepted the schools' recommendation that a reference test be developed to moderate standards between schools, and that this reference test replace the means-analysis method that applied to external examinations and that had hitherto applied to the trial internal assessment.[223] This acceptance was partly attributable to the unanimity with which the trial school principals and teachers opposed the pass-fail concept, on the basis that 'students who work hard yet still receive a mark below 50% regard themselves as failures…[which is] discouraging'. The SCEB sub-committee's evaluation report cited the principals as believing such a system to be 'cruel and inhuman since it undercuts any sense of human worth and self-esteem'.[224] However, the schools', the SCEB's and the NESC's attempts to frame discussion on external examination along humanist progressive lines was not completely accepted by the Department of Education, as the final *Statement of Aims* was to reflect.

In May of 1982, the Minister of Education, Merv Wellington, approved the new English syllabus, but significant excerpts from the 1978 draft were removed and the Minister's influence was in evidence. Most notably, the entire paragraph entitled 'The Single Mark or Grade', which had captured one of the basic philosophies of the NESC, was omitted. There was therefore no comment to the effect of 'a single mark or grade' being 'of little value', nor of the view that such a mark 'disguises individual growth', nor of such a mark or grade providing 'a limited assessment of a narrow range of reading and writing skills'. Rather than recommending internal assessment, the final *Statement of Aims* was neutral, pointing out that 'students may be assessed against each other, producing a ranking of students, or they may be assessed in relation to specific criteria of performance in English'.[225] Other notable omissions were the prior drafts' 'Educational Aim' and the 'Assumptions about Learning'. The former stated that

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[223] Russell Aitken, 'Developing a New English Syllabus: The NESC Curriculum Development Project 1969-1983, Department of Education, p.12.
[224] 'The Evaluation of English (NESC) at Form 5: A Report', Education Department, 1980, appendix 4. Archives New Zealand, ABEP7749, W4262 2053, 34/1/41 pt.1, p14.
[225] *Statement of Aims*, Department of Education, 1983, p.24.

the aim of education was to help young people 'develop fully as individuals and as members of society by encouraging the growth of the urge to enquire, concern for others, and the desire for self-respect'.[226] Aitken referred to this aim as an 'overarching statement by means of which the nature of learning in general could be linked with the principles of language learning',[227] and he saw it as integral to the *Statement of Aims* because at its core were the NESC beliefs in the value of student-centred learning and anti-competitive learning environments. Such aims were, in strict terms, beyond the brief of an English document but were in keeping with the NESC's desire to see an English curriculum encompass wider educational goals and be part of a broader, more progressive educational narrative; however, the goals had by 1983 finally met the less idealistically-inclined blockade of realpolitik and a Minister of Education who was more conservative, more directly influential, and less consultative. This blockade also diminished slightly the moving, watching, shaping, and viewing components of the NESC's suggested language programme, and changed the NESC's statement that schools would decide their 'own priorities and emphases according to the particular needs of their students',[228] opting instead for the following statement:

> Teachers will decide their own priorities and emphases according to their *own views and experience*, and their assessment of what they should be doing to develop the abilities of their students as effective users of language. It is vital, however, that listening, speaking, reading, and writing form an important part of all language programmes in the secondary school.[229]

The emphasis on listening, speaking, reading, and writing was implicitly at the expense of the other four modes, while the diversion from the students' needs to the teachers' undermined to some extent the NESC's desire to see the implementation of language programmes that would require teachers to adapt to their students' requirements.

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[226] *Draft Statement of Aims*, NESC, 1972, p8 and *Statement of Aims*, NESC, 1978, p.3.
[227] Russell Aitken, 'Curriculum Development and Teacher Education in New Zealand', in *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 8:1, p.78.
[228] *Statement of Aims*, NESC, 1978, p.5.
[229] *Statement of Aims,* Department of Education, 1983, p.9.

Another shift in emphasis was evident in the 'Language Aims' section. In the 1978 document, each of the three language aims was divided into expectations of teachers and expectations of students. The 1983 document only listed what students needed to do. The lack of explicit statements indicating teacher responsibilities shows either how the Department of Education did not want to appear overly demanding of teachers or that the department felt that the overall document was itself a list of teacher expectations and therefore the implied directive did not need further explication. Apart from this, the language aims section was similar to the 1978 version, except that the final 1978 directive that 'the teacher should not, and should not appear to, impose his values as the correct or only ones' was omitted, lending some credibility to the theory that teacher goodwill was an important part of the process and the avoidance of such commands was tactful.

Russell Aitken suggested that Vince Catherwood, a departmental officer who had taken over responsibility for the NESC work following the 1980 SCEB evaluation, might have 'lost his nerve'[230] a few times in the lead-up to the publication of the final *Statement of Aims*, though such elements of the previous draft, such as the 1978 'Evaluation' paragraph, would have been too extreme for, and therefore unpalatable to, the public or to many teachers. Having internally assessed English approved by the SCEB and Department of Education was a victory in its own right, but convincing a Minister of Education that a national curriculum document should state that examinations were anathema to education was perhaps unrealistic. Catherwood was personally supportive of the NESC, having been an English teacher at Aranui High – one of the internal assessment trial schools – and having, as a member of the five-man SCEB sub-committee, contributed to the positive evaluation of the NESC trial. In 1984, he was secretary of New Zealand Association for Teachers of English (NZATE), a liberal progressive organisation of English teachers that was committed to the elimination of the School Certificate external examination. Moreover, some inclusions that might in the 1950s and 1960s have been considered radical were now entrenched, having been de-radicalised by the

[230] Interview with Russell Aitken, 2012.

NESC's endeavours: the earlier recommendations that logs, folders, teacher-student conferencing, peer- and self- evaluation, plays, and debates were all included, as were sections highlighting the availability of internal assessment for schools that wished to adopt it, an endorsement of the notion that students needed opportunities to work collaboratively, an insistence that teachers be sensitive to dialectical or regional uses of English that did not conform to notions of "correct" English, and a lack of prescription with respect to grammar or literature. Perhaps most importantly, oracy was given equal status to literacy, and all eight modes were recognised as valid, necessary components of an English programme.

The changes in the 1978 document from the 1972 document can best be described as minor insofar as the content from one to the other remained consistent in its philosophy of a student-centred, non-prescriptive, multi-faceted approach to language programmes. The 1978 document reconciled more succinctly its language aims with its expectations of teachers and students, re-iterated its designers' progressive, humanist principles, and more forcefully advocated the elimination of external examinations as a means of assessment. The ideological direction of the NESC was consistent throughout the period 1970-1978 and this direction was endorsed – at times explicitly, at times tacitly, at times by non-interventionism – by the Department of Education's Curriculum Development Unit. The alterations in the final document, however, were reflective of political influence from the education bureaucracy that was required to report to higher levels in the Department of Education. Catherwood encountered 'growing opposition' to the kind of reform that the NESC had been implementing. Nevertheless, even allowing for the considerable changes between the 1978 and 1983 documents, including the rejection of some of the socio-political statements that were so integral to the NESC's view of what English should be, a new English was approved and that English was one that, in educational terms, resembled the NESC's 1972 template. That such a progressive curriculum emerged from quite radical ideas about education and language programmes, speaks volumes of the levels of support that the NESC received through the 1970s, but it also raises a question about the levels of consultation and debate around the NESC's aims. The

establishment and selection of the NESC have already partially addressed this, so let us now turn to the external criticism and critiques.

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

Openshaw and Walshaw note that through the 1970s, there did not appear to be strong resistance to the NESC either from inside or outside education, and that it was not until the 1980s that opposition grew, following publication of the final *Statement of Aims* when the Committee's ideals were being translated into a new syllabus.[231] Apart from the 'back to basics' movement that emerged in the late-1970s, principally as a response to the way reading was being taught in primary schools, opposition was disparate and traditionalists were either in retreat or resigned to the inevitable. There were no government-endorsed or teacher-led publications in the 1970s that promoted more traditional approaches to English; any such views tended to be expressed through mainstream media outlets. However, there is evidence of having existed dissenting voices both in academic circles and the wider teaching community. The University of Canterbury Faculty of Arts convened meetings to protest the direction the NESC was proposing; in particular there was consternation about the lack of linguistic content anywhere in the Draft Statement of Aims.[232] In a presentation to the Canterbury English Teachers' Association, Dr. Kon Kuiper argued that the *Draft Statement of Aims* was 'not tight enough' and that the potential for an individual teacher to go on the 'wrong tack' was too great.[233] Although not a traditionalist himself – he argued forcefully, for example, that schools' tendency to enforce conformity was reflected in narrow attention to such things as examinations and rote memorisation[234] - Kuiper's view reflected the kind of wider derision directed by traditionalists towards the *Draft Statement of Aims*. His objection was that the open-endedness of the document meant that it both allowed too much freedom for, and placed too much emphasis on the interpretation of, individual teachers and departments. It is certainly clear that the *Draft Statement of Aims* was not a syllabus, but rather a

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[231] R. Openshaw and M. Walshaw, p73.
[232] Elizabeth Gordon, 'Pedants, Politics and Power: The English language teaching revolution in New Zealand' in *English in Aotearoa*, NZATE, September 2011, p.19.
[233] Mike Fowler, citing Canterbury English Teachers' Association, *Minute Book 1975*, in 'Restructuring the English Curriculum into Receptive and Productive Strands' at http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Media/Files/M-files.
[234] Koenraad Kuiper, 'Teaching English in a Closed Society', in *English in New Zealand*, September 1976, p.13.

curriculum designed on the pedagogical model. Such a curriculum will tend to free teachers from centralised constraints, one corollary of this being an erosion of a shared culture (beyond, that is, a general culture of more open learning). Put another way, and on a basic level: if students leave one school having learnt Shakespeare and the distinction between a noun and a verb, while students from another leave having learnt J.D. Salinger and how to make a film then a more open educational culture has been instilled by virtue of the education system giving students a wider variety of knowledge. On the other hand, there is a dilution to some extent of what is deemed necessary to nation-building – that is, shared understanding of what the nation (usually determined by central government departments) should know. It was in keeping both with the educational philosophy and the wider politics of the NESC that a specific set of 'essential knowledge' – whether spelling words or grammatical terms or canonical texts – was not deemed important. From an educational perspective, the right for departments to choose their own language programmes was imperative if students from all backgrounds were to be given more opportunity to succeed and if English was to be freed from its grammar / comprehension / vocabulary list confines; from a political perspective, it is understandable that nation-building was not seen as important as achieving the wider humanistic goal of concern for others, because progressive academics tended to adopt views that sat more comfortably with socialism than with nationalism. Thus although English is, along with History, the high school subject that is most suited to transmission of national values and culture, the words 'country', 'nation', 'citizens', or 'New Zealand' do not (other than in footnotes) appear in the *Draft Statement of Aims*, the broader term 'community' being preferred. In contrast, the word 'New Zealand' occurs three times (not including its use as part of a title) in the introduction *English in the New Zealand Curriculum* and the link between language and national identity is more obvious.[235]

In 1975, Warwick Elley, the Assistant Director of the New Zealand Council for Educational Research, indicated that while he was 'sympathetic to the idea of livening up the English syllabus' he had reservations about both the philosophy and the content of the Statement of Aims. In addition to the concerns that the *Aims*

[235] *English in the New Zealand Curriculum*, Ministry of Education, 1994, p.6.

document would not satisfy logicians and linguists, he felt particular 'discomfort' about two statements. The first was, 'Students are more important than subject matter', about which he asked, 'important for what?'[236] The truth of such a statement, he felt, depended on the criteria that the Committee itself decided – in other words, students were more important because the Committee believed them to be so. Looking back on Elley's critique of the word 'important', Russell Aitken was unequivocal:

> 'Growth of people. [Warwick] was an academic. A teacher has to worry about getting on top of the classroom. He's the person you refer to when you want to get the background, and as a teacher you turn that into what you need to for [the students] over here.'[237]

This concept of English as a subject that would primarily promote and foster 'growth' of people, rather than as an academic subject in the traditional sense, reflected the NESC's commitment to altering the high school English landscape. One politically ancillary benefit of a progressive and humanistic approach to English was that it granted a moral initiative to the NESC. By framing the discourse as one of the 'needs of the adolescent in our changing society [and therefore not seeking] to imposed prescriptive and mandatory methods',[238] the committee was able to portray itself as liberators of the subject. In doing so, linguists and traditional grammarians, as well as university representatives who served on high school-related committees and boards, by default came to represent old ways of teaching, even if some were not necessarily traditionalists and in fact only wanted to preserve some study of meta-language in the new curriculum. Aitken's view that the recommendations of academics needed to be balanced with acknowledgement of the reality of the classroom was echoed by Peter Shaw. An English teacher commenting on the NESC *Statement of Aims* in 1982, Shaw felt that while university lecturers were quick to criticise high school

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[236] Correspondence from Warwick Elley to Russell Aitken, October 9 1975, Archives New Zealand, AAVZ, ACCW3418, Box 14 B1/3/8/2.
[237] Interview with Russell Aitken, 2012.
[238] *Draft Statement of Aims*, NESC, 1972, p.1.

academic standards, they otherwise showed little interest in secondary school teaching and offered little support to them.[239]

It is also necessary at this point to consider the potential political motivations of the linguists, whose own jobs in academia relied to some extent on the continued teaching of grammar, and the traditional grammarian teachers, who would be required to acquire a set of teaching skills that the previous approach – which focused on content – did not demand of them. After all, the more students there were leaving school and who had a grasp of basic linguistics, the greater the chances would be that those students might consider linguistics as a course of study at university. Such academics and teachers would certainly have had a strong academic belief in the importance of correct grammar usage and of understanding the rules of grammar, but they would also have had personal motivation for ensuring that English students continued to be exposed to some meta-language. Thus what was most 'important' to them would not necessarily have most 'important' to progressive high school English teachers: in this political model of analysis, the two sides are each seen as trying to preserve their own interests. However, Elizabeth Gordon, who contributed papers to the NESC and who served on the Form 6 and 7 English Syllabus Committee, was an early advocate of the NESC's revision – a stance that did not always endear her to her linguist colleagues at the University of Canterbury – inadvertently raised the same point as Elley. Although she referred to a university as being a 'pedants' paradise'[240] and suggested that pedants in academia had already pre-determined that the NESC would be to blame for any drop in literacy standards, she also acknowledged that the speed of the replacement of grammar exercises with the inductive approach caused very quickly a situation where teachers simply 'had no idea what to induce…so [that] in some classrooms the study of the language of advertising or conversation became the learning of a checklist of features that might possibly turn up in the exams'.[241] Moreover, she conceded that university linguistics teachers observed an increase in first-year students who lacked any

[239] Louise Callan, p.60.
[240] Elizabeth Gordon, 'Pedants, Politics, and Power: the English language teaching revolution in New Zealand', p.18.
[241] Ibid, p.19.

linguistic knowledge. When Gordon joined the Form 6 and Form 7 English Syllabus Committee in the mid-1980s, her main objective was to bring some grammar back into the senior school syllabus.[242] It is an interesting contradiction: the process that the NESC underwent was meticulous and lengthy, spanning over ten years and several revisions of the *Aims* involving solicitations from the wider educational community; yet the change in core areas, such as the introduction of theme-based units on literature, the elimination of grammar textbook study, and the new emphasis on oracy and visual language was quick and widespread. One of the unforeseen drawbacks of this was that the more beneficial elements of the old ways were discarded along with those elements that genuinely needed eliminating, which is testament both to the single-minded focus of the NESC and to the bureaucratic conditions that enabled such change. In 1983, at a New Zealand Linguist Society committee chaired by Gordon, concerns were raised about the 'difficulties in getting teachers and examiners to tackle linguistic concepts'. A J. Rae noted that 'very few thought language study [in the traditional sense] was really relevant' and that most teachers at 'a big secondary school in Auckland, in response to a teacher preparing a brief and simple outline on simple and complex sentences, complained at having to consider looking at English in that way'. At the same meeting, M. McLaren was concerned about he number of examiners' comments on the 'poor quality of language control' and called for the re-introduction of 'exercises requiring editing of written material'.[243]

Elley also challenged the claim that, 'A co-operative atmosphere encourages learning', believing it presumptuous and prompting this response: 'Sometimes, with some students, for some objectives. But so does a competitive atmosphere. Many children learn best alone, or when competing against others, or when competing against their past record.'[244] Elley's attempt to provide some wider perspective indicated that he could see the vigour with which the NESC pursued its

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[242] Elizabeth Gordon, 'Grammar in New Zealand Schools: two case studies', in *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, 4, 3, December 2005, p.51.
[243] 'Report on 6th and 7th Form English Prescriptions and Examinations', May 1983. Archives New Zealand, ABEP 7749, W4262, 2047, 34/1/23, pt1.
[244] Correspondence from Warwick Elley to Russell Aitken, October 9 1975, Archives New Zealand, AAVZ, ACCW3418, Box 14 B1/3/8/2.

goals and felt that that vigour needed tempering. The idea that different children learn in different ways at different times is now a sensible staple of teacher training courses, so it is inevitable that a competitive or individualistic environment would work in some situations for some students. However, such a learning environment ran counter to the NESC's deeper philosophy that individualism and competition were more likely to inhibit whole-child growth, especially the growth of those who are more often likely to 'lose' (through low test marks or through being unable to complete tasks without help). The line between educational egalitarianism and utilitarianism became blurred in this respect. The fact that the *Draft Statement of Aims* made the point that 'There is no one structure of sequence of learning suitable for every student'[245], but did not include 'style' in that sentence suggests if not a conscious omission then an overlooked one. Finally, Elley had reservations about the committee's attempt to re-define the word 'language'. He argued that gesture and facial expression were forms of communication, not language.[246] As has been outlined previously, Aitken was unmoved by such a concern because the committee had decided at the outset that *communication* was a word that encompassed all language together; ergo gesture, speaking, and writing were 'languages' in their own rights – which fell under the umbrella term of communication.[247] Aitken had already won over Ross and Renwick on the point of re-defining the word for use in the *Statement of Aims*.

Elley's critique extended to offering some modified or additional assumptions for the revised *Statement of Aims* that could either replace or be added to those existing, and that he claimed were supported by the insights of research workers and linguists:

[245] P.15.
[246] Correspondence from Warwick Elley to Russell Aitken, October 9 1975, Archives New Zealand, AAVZ, ACCW3418, Box 14 B1/3/8/2.
[247] Interview with Russell Aitken, 2012.

> Most of our language learning is a result of repeated exposure and use
> (to replace 'language is learnt by imitation and practice')
> Learning about the grammar of a language has not been shown to help children use it with greater skill
> (to justify the lack of prescribed grammar study)
> Acceptable conventions in language change from one generation to the next
> (to replace 'language changes')
> Children learn best when the learning task results from a felt need or interest[248]
> (To replace, 'Students will best develop their language if each programme is designed to meet particular needs and local circumstances.)

He felt that the wording of these new assumptions had a stronger foundation of academic research. The word 'use' in the first suggestion was ultimately added to the final *Statement of Aims*, turning 'Language is a fundamental form of human behaviour, occurring in a vast range of personal and social situations'[249] into 'Language is a fundamental form of human behaviour occurring in a wide rand of personal and social situations. Like all forms of behaviour, language is developed principally by use.'[250] Arguably, the word 'developed' is also in this context an approximation of Elley's 'learning'. The second suggestion was not adopted and neither was the third, the phrase 'from year to year and from situation to situation' being preferred to 'from one generation to the next'. An element of the fourth suggestion was in the final *Aims*, with '…each programme is designed to meet particular needs and local circumstances' replaced with 'Language develops most readily when it is used in response to an actual need, and when both audience and purpose are clearly established'. The changes that were made between the first and second *Statements* suggested that the while the NESC was open to debate and consultation on the *Draft Statement of Aims*, the likelihood of suggestions being adopted was partly dependent on whether they were attuned to the committee's fundamentally progressive philosophy.

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[248] Correspondence from Warwick Elley to Russell Aitken, October 9 1975, Archives New Zealand, AAVZ, ACCW3418, Box 14 B1/3/8/2.
[249] *Draft Statement of Aims*, NESC, 1972, p.6.
[250] *Statement of Aims*, NESC, 1978, p.7.

There was also some criticism among teachers of the NESC and its *Draft Statement of Aims*. In 1972, a discussion group at an Ardmore Teachers' College Refresher Course wondered whether a 'new orthodoxy' was 'in danger of taking over' English education, while one attendee otherwise sympathetic to the aims of the NESC was concerned that the committee might be 'provoking a clash between neo-revisionists and reactionaries'. The attendee believed that the NESC needed to 'tone down the [supposed] newness of their policy and admit that much of what they preach is not entirely new'.[251] In an anonymous 1973 *English in New Zealand* opinion piece, the writer's general tenor towards the NESC was positive, but s/he opined that the 'extreme breadth, even vagueness' of the three language aims and the 'monocultural nature of the supporting units' of work were 'major' weaknesses.[252] Bernie Conradson of Riccarton High School stated at a Canterbury English Teachers' Association panel discussion that the *Draft Statement of Aims* 'gave justification and respectability to previous teacher experimentation', that the language was 'woolly', and that the importance of 'non-literary modes was overstated'. He concluded that teachers were being asked to be 'educational psychologists' and that the curriculum activities were often seen by students as a 'diversion from work'.[253] Where the editors and opinion writers of *English in New Zealand* were generally supportive of the freedoms afforded teachers by the *Draft Statement of Aims,* Conradson was representative of teachers of a more traditional bent who objected to the freedom on the grounds that it was excessive. Writer and Literature professor at the University of Auckland, C.K. Stead, would also later be critical of the language in *Aims*, calling it 'vague [and] nebulous' and 'pseudo-scientific'. Though he approved of widening the concept of English to encompass the modes, he lamented the over-emphasis on 'visual things', 'manual tasks, models, illustrations, decorating things'.[254] Richard Bach, the Head of English at

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[251] 'Reports from Five Discussion Groups at the Ardmore Refresher Course' minutes, January 1972. Archives New Zealand, ABEP 7749, W4262, 2054, 34/1/41 1C.
[252] 'NESC Units on Trial', *English in New Zealand*, September 1973, pp.43-44.
[253] Mike Fowler, citing Canterbury English Teachers' Association, *Minute Book 1975*, in 'Restructuring the English Curriculum into Receptive and Productive Strands' at http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Media/Files/M-files.
[254] Louise Callan, p.60.

Hillmorton High School, lamented the lack of reference in the *Draft Statement of Aims* to skills, though he did so in the context of the growing 'back to basics' movement and wondered what exactly 'skills' and 'basics' meant any more as the very terms were contestable.[255] Reginald Lockstone, Dean at Penrose High School, was one of the more vehement opponents of the NESC's English:

> An English teacher's job is to develop his pupils in three ways: first, to make them articulate in speech; secondly, to make them articulate in writing; thirdly to hope to add some sort of respect for literature that is worth respect…And you mustn't limit yourself to what is relevant for the kids. That's insulting the material.[256]

Overwhelmingly though, evidence points to criticisms of NESC English among the teaching community as being disparate and sporadic. It is clear that because dissenting voices from prominent positions – that is, positions that might have influenced the direction or philosophy of the NESC – were few, overall progress from the *Draft Statement of Aims* to the second *Statement of Aims* was steady and unimpeded by external or internal objections. Even those teachers who had criticisms and were willing to publicly state them tended not to be fulsome in them, often conceding that the new English was in some ways an improvement. Shaw perhaps captured the most balanced view of the *Statement of Aims*:

> The fault of the new English lay not so much in the syllabus but in the immense enthusiasm with which it was taken up because it was so much needed. The old system bored people to sobs…The 'back to basics' people have been right [though] I didn't like the way they expressed themselves. They have righted a balance. You have to be on your guard all the time to temper creativity with old basics.[257]

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[255] Richard Hillmorton, 'Skills and their Evaluation', *English in New Zealand*, April 1978, pp.21-22.
[256] Louise Callan, p.64.
[257] Louise Callan, p.62.

PART 7: The long view – The NESC, *English in the New Zealand Curriculum (1994), The New Zealand Curriculum (2007)*, and English now.

Often, the value or influence of shifts in policy are not fully realised or understood until years later. The tilt toward neo-liberal values in education throughout the 1980s and early-1990s has already been well documented and, anyway, has the appearance from the present of being tangential to development in English. Indeed, both the 1994 *English in the New Zealand Curriculum* and the 2007 *The New Zealand Curriculum* documents largely endorsed the fundamental humanist philosophy of NESC English. The 1994 curriculum document included in its introductory section entitled 'Characteristics of Learning and Teaching in English' the statements, 'Language programmes should be learner-centred', 'Language development is fostered by an environment which encourages creativity and experimentation', and 'Language is best developed when students understand and control the learning process',[258] while recommending varied assessment methods, none of which was formal testing or examinations. The 1994 document also reflected how much the humanist philosophy of the NESC had normalised views that were in the 1970s considered radical. The *English in the New Zealand Curriculum* writers were able to include in their document sections on 'The Gender-inclusive Curriculum', 'English for Maori Students', 'Students from Language Backgrounds Other Than English', 'Learners With Other Special Needs', and 'Gifted and Talented Students'.[259] Although the eight modes of the NESC *Statements* were reduced to three strands, each had two modes – oral language (speaking and listening), written language (reading and writing), and visual language (viewing and presenting) – and all three were to be integrated into language programmes. Moving and shaping were subsumed into the viewing and presenting strand, so were present in application, while a push for Drama as an independent subject was emerging. The only aspect of the 1994 document that the NESC would have been philosophically frustrated by was one telling sentence. Just as in 1983 when the final *Statement of Aims* emphasised reading, writing, listening, and speaking at the expense of the other four modes, the 1994 document slightly

[258] *English in the New Zealand Curriculum*, Ministry of Education, 1994, pp.10-11.
[259] Ibid, pp.13-16.

elevated one of the strands at the expense of the other two: 'Reading and writing will be of central importance in all English programmes at all levels.'[260] The NESC's push for all the modes to be regarded equally was still being resisted eleven years on, reflecting perhaps a state and public belief that the two English components of the three 'R's were fundamental to genuine literacy. The size of the publication was also contrary to the NESC's approach – 143 pages compared with under 30 pages for each of the *Statements* – but the pages were not prescriptive in the traditional syllabus sense and the document is philosophically compatible with the NESC's own publications.

The 2007 *The New Zealand Curriculum* document that is currently in effect collapses the three strands into two: 'Making Meaning' (formerly 'reception') entails listening, reading, and viewing; and 'Creating Meaning' (formerly 'production') entails speaking, writing, and presenting.[261] It reduces the overarching aims of English to one page that includes a definition of what English is, a justification for its study, and an explanation of how it is structured. The strands provide a direct connection to their predecessors established by the NESC, while the definition of and justification for the subject evoke the early principles of the committee's curriculum design, through phrases like the following:

> Understanding, using, and creating oral, written, and visual texts of increasing complexity is at the heart of English teaching and learning.
>
> By engaging with text-based activities, students become increasingly skilled and sophisticated speakers and listeners, writers and readers, presenters and viewers.[262]

In this document, writing and reading are not promoted over other modes – making meaning and creating meaning are interconnected and given parity – while the mention of 'text-based activities' implies thematic study premised on literature

[260] *English in the New Zealand Curriculum*, Ministry of Education, 1994, p.22.
[261] *The New Zealand Curriculum*, Ministry of Education, 2007, p.18.
[262] Ibid, p18.

texts. In this regard, we are closer to the NESC aims than at any time in the past. In addition to the one-page subject summary is a fold-out section applicable to each level of the curriculum that outlines processes and strategies that will lead students to greater understanding of purposes and audiences, ideas, language features, and structure. Although there is no prescription in the traditional sense, there is the assumption that at Form 5 / Year 11, students will be able to 'identif[y] oral, written, and visual language features and understand their effects',[263] a deviation from the NESC view that such identification was unnecessary. Meanwhile, the broader educational aims of the NESC are reflected in the document's 'Values' section, in which 'diversity', 'equity, through fairness and social justice', 'community and participation for the common good', and 'respect [for] themselves, others, and human rights' are among the attributes to 'be encouraged, modeled, and explored'.[264] The exclusion of, for example, individuality or independence from either the 'Values' section or from the 'Vision' section is a reflection of the kind progressives' collectivist ideals that emanated from the 1960s. Publication of the 2007 curriculum document was overseen by the then-Secretary of Education, Karen Sewell, an early NESC member.

In English, 2012 was the final year that Level 3 / Form 7 / Year 13 standard A.S. 90722 Read and Respond to Shakespearean Text(s) Studied was offered. Shakespeare was the only remaining prescribed English writer in the New Zealand English examination, although the structure of NCEA is such that students can opt not to sit a standard without too much in the way of repercussions. While external examinations still exist at Forms 5, 6, and 7, there is much less emphasis on them. Students in most schools are offered enough internal assessment for at least 50 percent of total available credits to be gained through that method, although the notion of 50 percent of credits being a 'pass' does not exist in official terms. The 'pass/fail' concept that the committee felt was detrimental to education has largely been eliminated (although universities still set minimum standards of entry). Although there exists a 'Not Achieved' grade, implicit in the wording is the

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[263] *The New Zealand Curriculum*, Ministry of Education, 2007, English fold-out page, Level Six.
[264] *The New Zealand Curriculum*, Ministry of Education, 2007, p.10.

prospect of future achievement, the likelihood of which is improved by schools being allowed to offer re-sits of internal assessments. Most Level 1 / Form 5 / Year 11 English programmes offer more standards internally (four) than are available externally (three), while two of the seven main achievement standards require no written work (A.S.90857 is speech production and delivery, and A.S. 90855 is static image production). Furthermore, only two require a high standard of competence in written grammar and sentence control (A.S.90052 is creative writing production and A.S.90053 is formal writing production) and four of the seven standards have a productive rather than receptive focus.

Russell Aitken approves of the NCEA, seeing it as a more equitable system and one much more closely aligned to the philosophy of the NESC:

> [The NCEA] is still bonded to assessment more than I would naturally like but it's a hell of a lot better than what we used to have. Internal assessment [is now favoured] throughout the year. [Abolition of examinations] was the spirit of [the NESC]. What we were talking about was education [rather than testing]. It became so widely accepted that it's part of the whole move of education in this country. [265]

Speaking on the topic of whether unit standards (with their not achieved/achieved grades) or achievement standards (with their not achieved / achieved / achieved with merit / achieved with excellence grades) were preferable, Aitken acknowledged that the latter allowed for the gradations that 'the general public and the administrators of schools' want, but 'on a purist level, no, [unit standards are better]'.[266] Interestingly, in 2011, more gradations were added to the externally assessed standards at Level 1 / Form 5 / Year 11, so that candidates are now awarded N1, N2, A3, A4, M5, M6, E7, E8. NZQA's official stance on this was that such gradations 'allowed greater accuracy in grade determination at boundaries' and 'increased transparency'; however, it was also deemed necessary

[265] Interview with Russell Aitken, 2012.
[266] Interview with Russell Aitken, 2012.

to clarify that it was 'not a return to marks. The scores stand for grades.'[267] That such a statement was necessary reflected the need to alleviate the PPTA concerns and demonstrated the magnitude of the shift away from the pass/fail concept. Ultimately the NESC's goal to eliminate external examinations in English has not been reached. As long as the public and enough schools regard examinations as more rigorous or objective or consistent, internal assessment methods will continue to be regarded as inferior. However, the true test of public perceptions of NCEA reliability will come over the next few decades: in 2032, the first NCEA students will be nearly 50 years old and NCEA-qualified people will outnumber School Certificate / Bursary-qualified people. It would seem likely that number of people who believe examinations to be the ultimate indicator of achievement will erode over time. One possible counter to this is that there are currently over fifty schools, mainly high-decile or private and in Auckland, that offer an examination-only assessment system through the Cambridge International Examinations (CIE). Students who sit this examination are the more academic in such schools and tend to possess the kind of cultural capital that offers them advantages over their lower-decile, NCEA counterparts. Already, these schools use the 'dual pathway' as a point of difference, and often the subliminal message in this 'dual pathway' offer is that CIE will provide more academic students with a greater challenge and better prospects. If this examination qualification endures then the perception of examinations as more rigorous might well endure with it.

[267] 'Modified Marking System for External Assessment – Grade Score Marking', SecQual Circular S2011/015, April 6 2011.

CONCLUSION

The NESC was instrumental in challenging traditional conceptions of what high school English should be. Its founding was the culmination of several factors. First was the changing composition of demographics in high schools, including an increase in the number of students staying to Form 5 and a corresponding increase in students from backgrounds that, for various reasons, did not respond as well to traditional, authoritarian methods of education. Second was the influence of new psychological and educational theories about child growth, complemented by both heightened sociological awareness of the political factors in curriculum design and an increase in the number of teachers who, having themselves been brought through the authoritarian system, embraced the freedoms promised by the new theories and approaches. 'Relevance' became a new catchword and it was applied within a context of meeting the needs of students rather than those of teachers and schools. Third was the support, both moral in the sense of shared belief and practical in the form of the *Education in Change* document, provided by the increasingly influential Post-Primary Teachers' Association. That document was the philosophical predecessor to the *Draft Statement of Aims* and its publication gave impetus to the Department of Education to embark on the revision, while the growing strength of the Association helped to perpetuate the 'mood' for change that so influenced the Curriculum Development Unit. Fourth was the appointment of Russell Aitken to the position of Director of the National English Syllabus Committee. Aitken was progressive in his politics and humanist in his outlook, and he compiled *Essential Background Papers* – a reading list comprising mainly recent and entirely progressive perspectives on education – for distribution to his NESC colleagues. The papers, a collection of journal articles by academics and teachers, provided a values template for English curriculum change. Fifth was the selection by Aitken and others in the Curriculum Development Unit of National English Syllabus Committee members who were, in the early stages, wholly supportive of change or neutral enough not to impede it. The early selections were facilitated by a CDU that was, with respect to English, progressive and liberal in its politics.

Having been established, the committee continued to be aided by the Department

of Education in the form of funding of meetings, teaching resources, and promotional material that was not directly connected to the project but which helped to maintain an atmosphere of progressive education revision. In addition, the Department granted Russell Aitken the autonomy to select committee members who would continue to endorse the committee's ideological direction. The dedication and enthusiasm of Aitken and committee members were supplemented by the words and actions of sympathetic teachers and heads of department, who invested considerable time and energy into such projects as the *English in New Zealand* journal and the School Certificate internal assessment trial, to add weight to the idea that NESC English was both workable and an improvement on what had preceded it. The committee also benefitted from a lack of coordinated opposition to its aims and methods and this, along with a sense of its own moral worth in improving delivery of language programmes to a more diverse New Zealand high school English body of students, ensured its momentum was not disrupted. Even when the final *Statement of Aims* was published in a form 'weaker' than its predecessors, so much of its content was NESC-inspired that the document was testament not to the power of a conservative Minister of Education with his 'hand on the tiller' but rather to how much the NESC had managed to normalise aspects of English that had only thirteen years prior been considered radical.

The NESC's role in altering the course of high school English in New Zealand is unmatched in the post-*Thomas Report* period. Its guiding humanist, progressive philosophy is now everywhere evident in high school English programmes, and its influence has been evident in both of the subsequent English curriculum documents. Literature is now at the centre of most high school English courses and while there are pockets of resistance to theme-based units of work at some schools at the senior level, even more traditional schools now use such an approach at junior levels: writing compositions in isolation has been replaced with writing compositions tied to the study of literature; oral and dramatic work are more regularly integrated into programmes, often connected to literature study; advances in technology combined with students' growing familiarity with new media mean that 'viewing' is now an essential component of junior English.

Examinations at all levels are no longer the sole determinant of a student's future academic path, and those that do exist are now assessed against standards-based criteria rather than given a percentage mark that is then norm-referenced.

On the other hand, grammar workbooks for high school students have seen something of a renaissance over the past decade. hey are less 'dry' and less voluminous than those of the 1950s and 1960s and they contain more practical exercises (rather than error correction exercises) than their earlier counterparts, but their proliferation lends weight to the argument that the pendulum might have swung too far from the traditional English that preceded the NESC English. In addition, the New Zealand Qualifications Authority, despite its insistence that examinations are standards-based, published on its website until 2011 'Expected Ranges of Achievement', which acted as a guide for the percentage of students they expect to pass any given standard. While this might not be norm-referencing, the fact that the expected range for the number of students gaining achieved, merit, or excellence in externally assessed standards at Level 1 / Form 5 / Year 11 invariably fell between 60 and 70 percent[268] suggests that general English standards are now, simply, easier than they were. Furthermore, research in the humanities is rarely an exact science, and what might have been considered definitive at one point in history might prove not to be so later. For example, the link between self-esteem and student achievement has since been shown to be causative, but not in the way that was believed in the 1960s: better performance causes high self-esteem, yet high self-esteem does not cause better grades, test scores, or job performance.[269] Enthusiastic adoption of new ideas might sometimes be at the expense of the kind of scholarly rigour that comes from longitudinal studies over time. Finally, English is still called 'English' in most high schools and it is as entrenched as a subject as it ever was. Despite the loftier goal implicit in an integrated, cross-disciplinary approach to education, teachers remain protective of their own subject areas, probably because many teachers continue to be attracted to teaching because of an interest in their subject area as much as an interest in students or education generally.

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[268] www.nzqa.govt.nz (until 2011)
[269] J. Twenge and W. Keith Campbell, *The Narcissism Epidemic*, p48.

In his examination of historical awareness, John Tosh draws important distinctions between difference and tradition, between context and nostalgia, and between process and progress[270], arguing that the former in each of those pairs are what the historian must strive to capture at the expense of the latter. Such an approach can perhaps provide a relevant template for an analysis of curriculum development. Traditionalists tend to view difference with a suspicion that is sometimes stubborn while progressives embrace it, occasionally with blind enthusiasm; traditionalists tend to be nostalgic and evoke that nostalgia when they bemoan declining standards, while progressives optimistically see themselves as capturing the zeitgeist and molding a better, more inclusive future; traditionalists believe that progress lies in students (and society) striving to meet the standards that traditionalists themselves set and that any standard other than this is inferior, while progressives believe that we must keep looking forward in search of a kind of utopian ideal. Often, the concept of process is lost to both sides. This is of course an over-simplification and probably a much-too-convenient dichotomy but it does offer a snapshot of English curriculum discourse. In every contestable narrative there are at least two sides and for many years in New Zealand there was embedded a traditional approach to the subject of English that denied students an outlet for creativity, that expressly and unashamedly privileged a small few with existing linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic capital over the majority who did not, and that primarily served the interests of teachers over pupils who were expected to be pliant and silent. The NESC set out to remedy that, and its aims – at least with respect to offering greater opportunity – have mostly been realised.

[270] John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: aims, methods, and new directions in the study of modern history,* 3rd ed., London, 2000, pp. 6-15.

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