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

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
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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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