



**MONASH** University



**Reimagining creativity in the 'enacted' English curriculum**

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(Image: Memphis Milano)

## **Abstract**

This practitioner inquiry presents a fine-grained account of creativity in one secondary English classroom in Victoria, Australia. In addition to work with my own students, the study also explored the experiences of several teacher colleagues, examining how students and teachers enact 'ordinary everyday creativity' in classrooms together. In doing so the study offers an alternative narrative that challenges current dominant discourses about the role of creativity in education. In particular, the study examined how various contemporary discourses of creativity—political, social, cultural and educational—mediate my work and the work of my colleagues and students, and constructs particular student and teacher identities, shaping how both students and teachers think about and enact creativity in their work and learning.

The study approaches creativity as a complex socially mediated practice and draws on traditions of inquiry grounded in an everyday perspective on language, culture and classroom life. The site of the research was my place of employment—a small independent girls school in inner suburban Melbourne. Employing a practitioner inquiry approach over several years, I generated data with my students and with colleagues through critical autobiographical narrative writing (Parr & Doecke, 2005), semi-structured interviews, focus groups. I also collected school and student documents and artefacts. Interview data was transcribed, coded and examined with thematic and discourse analysis approaches. Critical narratives are used throughout the thesis in a range of ways, including to evoke the complexity of classroom interactions.

The study found that the emergence of creativity as a priority in education policy is not necessarily reflected in the practical and complicated reality of English classrooms, where the often playful and subversive nature of everyday creativity can challenge official curriculum discourses and attempts to standardise English teaching learning. For many student participants, creativity in English can be anxiety ridden, however, the experience of facing the challenges of creative work, often through negotiation and collaboration between students and teachers, stimulated self-exploration and identity growth. The study also found that creativity is just as problematic for teachers as their students within an educational environment increasingly characterised by high stakes accountabilities and compliance. The thesis argues that creativity isn't necessarily the saviour of education or the enemy of rigorous pedagogy, rather, that through attending to the complexities of everyday social interactions in classrooms, both the challenging and enabling aspects of creative educational work in English teaching are seen and understood more clearly.

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## Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Signature:

Print Name: Chanie Stock

Date: March 2017

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I certify that I have made all reasonable efforts to secure copyright permissions for third-party content included in this thesis and have not knowingly added copyright content to my work without the owner's permission.

## Acknowledgements

When I returned to Monash in 2012 to embark on my Grad Dip Ed, my objective was simply to get the piece of paper needed to run an education/design business I had been road-testing since closing my fashion retail business two years earlier.

I never intended to become an English teacher.

Meeting Scott Bulfin, Graham Parr and Sarah Rutherford turned that plan on its head and sparked the beginning of new vision for me that felt both radical and strangely familiar. Through my involvement in the English education program at Monash I discovered I enjoyed teaching, and experienced a renewed passion for the written and spoken word. These three unique educators challenged my perceptions about teaching and teacher identity. Yes, I could be myself in a classroom, I could crack jokes and I could admit I didn't know everything. I learnt that teaching is, above all, about communicating and connecting with other people and discovering the beauty, vitality and newness in the simple ordinary moments of everyday life.

Scott, in particular, encouraged me to take this journey further. He has a knack of making you feel you need to know more—to mine deeper and experience the dark, murky gritty stuff that lies beneath the gentility of popular academic discourse. I always felt the learning went beyond the scope of the study, where I found myself questioning my ontological position on almost everything, but especially my relationship with conflict, something hitherto I had avoided at any cost. In the past few years, I have experienced the rich learning that comes from hearty, robust debate and with Scott's guidance, have been able to sit with my discomfort and reap the benefits of doing so. He's been the best kind of supervisor—an equal balance of honest, tough directness with the genuine compassion and good humour of a trusting friend.

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## CHAPTER 1

### THE CREATIVE AGONY AND ECSTASY

The excitement and pain of the effort are followed by the delight and rest of completion, and this is not only how the artist lives and works, but how [women and] men live and work, in a long process, ending and beginning again (Williams, 1961, p. 44).

#### Scene 1

LESSON: PERIOD 6	YEAR 9 WORLD OF WRITING (WOW)
LESSON TOPIC	FOOD WRITING
RESOURCES: (PROMPTS FOR CREATIVE WRITING)	GRANNY SMITH APPLE, VINTAGE AGED CHEDDAR, DARK CHOCOLATE DALWYNNIE WINE TASTING NOTES, GARAGITSE SAKE NOTES, MAYA ANGELOU'S 'HEALTH FOOD DINER'

The girls are relishing in the novelty of a mini feast in our 'world of writing' (WOW) class, jumping in and out of their seats, playing around with flavour combinations, while they share food memories. Evie jumps out of her chair—cheese in one hand, chocolate in the other—exclaiming, "I've made chocolate cheesecake." Iris sits quietly behind her, munching on a crisp piece of apple and sighs, "Granny Smith and cheddar was my grandpa's favourite snack." The food disappears in a flash, but the celebratory atmosphere lingers. We read the poem and share our food cravings, the memories and the seductive power of language to whet our appetites.

I read *Health Food Diner* to the class as they savour the last squares of dark chocolate (83% cocoa).

"The poem might give you some ideas for the content or subject matter of your piece, or purely to prompt you to write a poem yourself today," I explain. The wine and sake tasting notes are received with more curiosity (and some suspicion) but the girls are soon taken in by the fusion of the lyrical narrative style and razor sharp description. Some girls decide to mirror the stylistic features of the tasting notes to write about the food they've eaten, a group start writing poetry, and others short stories. Giselle is pulling out different coloured pens and I wonder what she's up to. A three-character play: Chocolate, Apple and Cheese—each embodying their respective qualities and flavours. In presentation time, we spontaneously cast the play and act it out. The concept is inspired and she has, in 20 minutes, brought it to life. It's witty, nuanced and entertaining and brings roars of laughter from the class. I feel overjoyed in that moment, because it's been the best fun I've had in weeks, and it's happening here, in an English classroom. Am I

really a teacher right now? It feels more like a cool workplace in there... a writing room of sorts, where I am in amongst it. While I'm aware this is a girls' school and this is a class the girls have actively chosen to take, I am still blown away by the atmospheric cocktail of play, artistry and focused hard work.

**Scene 2 (Two hours earlier)**

LUNCHTIME	GIRLS' TALK*
IDEA/THEME FOR DISCUSSION:	FREE FLOWING HAPPINESS AND THE STUFF THAT GETS IN THE WAY

\* An informal quiet and confidential fortnightly meeting space I organised in 2016 to offer Year 10 & 11 students a forum to discuss issues important to them.

This is the third session of 'Girl's Talk' and there are about fifteen girls sitting in a circle with me. The mood is quiet and calm, though I can see some of the girls are feeling a little uneasy, shifting in their seats, averting their gaze when the talk gets heavier. But I can tell they're listening to everything that is being said. The girls who know me well—either as their English or Literature teacher, or from the gardening group—appear comfortable talking about (almost) anything and many are eager to vent about what's on their mind. Earlier that week the mainstream media news was hot with reports of high school boys running alleged 'porn rings' and serious concerns about the sexualisation of 'school girls' on social media, so I expected the conversation to begin there. However, when I bring up the topic, the girls are mostly pretty nonchalant about the idea of a photo of them scantily dressed (or less) floating around the internet, and despite my instinct that this session of Girls' Talk would be used as a space to discuss the sexual performance pressures on girls emerging from porn culture, they were more interested in talking about something else: their fear of being forced to grow up too quickly and not discovering and experiencing their passions. Eleanor starts to speak. She, like many others, is grieving for the childhood she feels was suddenly ripped away in the transition to Year 10. "Suddenly—as if overnight—there is no time for play and creativity because I'm expected to be planning and working towards what I'm going to do and who I'm going to be when I leave school".

"This annoys me," says Saskia, "It feels like I'm preparing for something that comes later, something that will benefit me later, something that will make me worth something later. And within all this preparing-for-a-life-that-is-going-to-start-later, I've forgotten that life is already happening."

Claire jumps in, "We have to face the truth; school is not about learning about ourselves and others and becoming well-balanced, capable and empathic individuals, but instead to skill and drill us to work in a society constructed upon jobs and economic growth".

The silence hangs in the air for what feels like minutes. I resist the urge to speak, and instead sit with the girls in the awkward pause. I look around the room—some girls have tears in their eyes, others are holding hands. “We’re under so much pressure,” blurts Saskia who then shares her struggle—balancing 8<sup>th</sup> grade AMEB Cello with the workload of a packed Year 10 curriculum and high parental expectations. She wishes she had more time to compose music and write poetry. Some of the other girls join in and the conversation moves to their outside of school interests and the challenge of living a so-called ‘balanced life’.

Crazy...I’m thinking to myself. Everything I know intuitively and have read (e.g. Reid, 1984; Vygotsky, 1991) tells me that children, especially teenagers, need to be creative and imaginative in their everyday lives, yet here they are, telling me a very different story.

## **1.1 Let’s talk about creativity**

As a secondary school English teacher, I think about creativity a lot. In fact, I spend a good part of my leisure time thinking deeply about creativity and innovation—in life, in the workplace and in schools. As an English teacher, creativity and how it is talked about in various discourses, thought about and woven into professional and everyday life is a key part of both my professional and personal identities. It's something that shapes my approach to my teaching and curriculum work, and it’s played a significant part in my work beyond teaching as a successful small business owner, parent and engaged community member.

The two short narratives above, describing incidents just two hours apart on one ordinary Friday afternoon in 2016, are examples of the narratives I have been writing in my research journal throughout the project. Writing and thinking about stories like these have helped me better understand my own teaching and the world as my students see it, and I hope evoke some of the complexity of these classroom moments and ‘the rich particularities of the characters and scenes that are the stuff of my professional life’ (McClenaghan, 2005, p. 7). Stories and narratives are a powerful reminder that the human and relational are at the heart of teaching and learning—mediated as they always are by personal beliefs and histories and institutional practices and policies (cf. Rose, 2009; Shann, 2015).

For example, the 'Girls' Talk' scene above captures the sense of disempowerment experienced by many of the Year 10 and 11 students because they feel a lack of agency in their own learning and in their lives. Their struggle to negotiate the expectations of conformity and academic success with a desire to explore who they are becoming resonates with what I believe Raymond Williams might have meant with the phrase 'creative agony'—the pain of not being able to express adequately and genuinely how one feels or what one believes (Williams, 1961, p. 43). As I wrote the 'Girls Talk' narrative and reflected on the girls' comments, I sensed their longing for a space where they could experiment with new ideas and have the opportunity to discover what they are passionate about. These students are not alone in these desires, for example, *The Age* recently published an article by a former Year 12 student, echoing my own students concerns about the heavy focus on testing, increased pressure and the fallout from a system that often struggles to 'foster individual development' (Talon, 2017). In a similar vein, *Harvard Ed Magazine* recently reported on the growing culture of student disaffection because 'school has already decided what matters' (Jason, 2017)—so despite being social beings who are often politically orientated, students' voices are rarely heard. These issues impact on teachers too, with many of my colleagues expressing the need for a space to discuss new ideas and explore aspects of teaching they are passionate about. It is not always easy for students or teachers to see their classrooms as spaces for 'imagination, play and thinking otherwise' (Barnes, 1976, p. 14), particularly within the current educational policy environment characterised by standardised testing and preconceived learning outcomes (ACARA 2016a; ACARA 2016b; Doecke, Kostogriz & Illesca, 2010). However, the WOW classroom scene above provides an example of the small, but nonetheless powerful, shifts I have witnessed in both classroom culture and individual learning experiences through my attempts to develop a creative teaching practice. My work as an early career English teacher has, of course, not been a heroic tale; none of my 'creatively risky' (see 4.3) work has come without anxiety and doubt. But for me, those moments can be ecstatic and fuel my enthusiasm and resolve to re-envision the creative potential of the English classroom. Furthermore, I have been fortunate to work with colleagues both within my school context and outside of it, through supportive professional 'networks,' which encourage a responsive and innovative approach to

English teaching, despite the often stifling forces within our workplaces and within the broader educational culture (see 5.3). Engaging in regular, rich and ongoing conversations with colleagues has helped strengthen my belief in creativity as an 'ordinary' quality of classroom life and culture, enabling both students and teachers to negotiate learning expectations within a narrow, predetermined curriculum (ACARA, 2016a) and generic, uninspiring professional standards (AITSL, 2012).

## **1.2 Another study on creativity? Research questions and aims**

These days, creativity seems to be on everyone's lips. From curriculum documents to industry reports, TED talks, to government policy, 'creativity'—and its cousin 'innovation'—have taken on celebrity status as 'key skills' for future individual and national prosperity. There is little doubt that the hype and buzz emerging from popular discourses has been useful in bringing renewed attention to the important role of creativity in education. However, the danger of general, broad policy platitudes and bland hollow rhetoric is that they offer a loud but illusory quick-fix to a perceived social problem, without really getting to the heart of the issue because they are disconnected from the work and lives of teachers and their students. While there are likely more studies on creativity than one could read in a lifetime, I believe much can be learned from a situated and quieter narrative offered by English teachers in the tradition of practitioner research. I am not claiming the local knowledge of teachers should be privileged over other voices in the creativity debate, but rather, the variety of voices and perspectives signals that things are complex and not as straightforward as they may seem. Creativity, and its place in education is a vast and murky territory. Aside from ongoing arguments about the 'meaning' of creativity and who gets to define it and be creative, the values often espoused in education policy documents do not necessarily reflect the practical realities of everyday life in classrooms.

In this study, I explore this contested ground as it touches on my work as an English educator, and how, despite very difficult policy and curriculum environments, it might be possible to open up spaces for unexpected creative experiences for both my students, myself and my colleagues (Doecke & Parr, 2005; Doecke, Parr & Sawyer, 2014). As such,

the study can be seen as situated within, and contributing to, a strong tradition of practitioner inquiry within English teaching in Australia and internationally where educators have created rich, reflexive accounts of their practice in an attempt to explore that practice and how it is mediated by various texts, discourses and practices beyond their immediate context (e.g. Doecke & McClenaghan, 2005; Howie, 2006; van de Ven & Doecke, 2011; Yandell, 2014).

The following questions lie at the heart of this thesis and provide focus for the study:

1. How are creativity discourses and creative practices realised and enacted in particular secondary English classrooms within the current educational policy environment in Australia?
2. What are the implications of ordinary, everyday creativity in the secondary English classroom for student engagement, learning and growth?
3. How does the practice of everyday creativity in secondary English teaching mediate teacher engagement, learning and professional identity?

Examining these questions as a practitioner researcher has meant generating a variety of narratives of my own work with students and colleagues, as well as generating data through interviews and focus groups with students and colleagues. It has meant examining how various creativity discourses mediate my work and the work of my colleagues, and how these discourses are used to construct particular student and teacher professional identities. As a practitioner researcher, I aim to provide a perspective on creativity in English classrooms that is not necessarily available to other researchers who are detached from classroom life.

### **1.3 Outline of thesis**

In the chapters that follow I examine and interrogate contemporary creativity discourses, particularly those around the role of creativity in secondary English education, within the

context of my school and community. The thesis comprises six chapters, starting with this introductory chapter where I have discussed my motivations for the project and briefly outlined the study's research questions and aims, including the important place of story and narrative in my approach. Chapter Two sketches various perspectives on creativity that emanate from various discourses and frame the study within an understanding of creativity that acknowledges the social nature of learning and recognises English as a subject for 'self-exploration' (Howie, 2006, p. 287). Chapter Three outlines the study's methodological approach, making the case for the use of a data design and analysis strategies drawn from traditions of practitioner research. This chapter also discusses ethical considerations.

In Chapters Four and Five, I present my analysis of data, including my own narratives and transcripts of interviews and focus groups. Chapter Four focuses on students and examines the nature of creativity in the secondary English classroom from their perspective. The analysis affirms that despite being riddled with challenges, creativity is an essential ingredient in English classrooms, particularly in environments increasingly characterised by high stakes accountabilities and compliance. In Chapter Five, the focus shifts to teachers and examines the dialogic relationship between creativity, professional learning and professional identity. Through analysis of a range of data, including interviews with teachers and my own reflexive practice, I demonstrate that creativity is just as problematic for teachers as their students. In the concluding chapter, I argue that despite these difficulties, English educators cannot afford to simply accept a shrinking space for creativity and must continue to make the case for a 'cracked creativity' and a fresh language to encourage robust and nuanced conversations that re-envision creativity as a normal quality of a secondary English classroom.

## CHAPTER 2

### REFRAMING THE CREATIVITY PICTURE

In this chapter, I discuss some significant debates related to creativity in education in recent years, both in terms of a broader social and cultural understanding of creativity in education and how this has shaped my own interest in the research area and particularly, this project. In the case of such a ubiquitous term as 'creativity,' the landscape is especially broad and contested. This chapter provides a reading of the terrain as a way of indicating my engagement with relevant literature and policy. I also sketch key concepts which have proved useful in framing the study and my approach to thinking about creativity in English teaching.

For some time now, in both popular and scholarly literature a dominant story about creativity as the saviour of education has been told. Unfortunately, this loud and overly enthusiastic story tends to overshadow a quieter narrative which emphasises creativity in the everyday classroom. Hype and buzz emerging from the loud, prominent messages, voiced globally and often publically by politicians (cf. Birmingham, 2016; Gillard, 2014), policy makers (ACARA, 2016a), academics (cf. Beghetto, 2010, McCallum, 2016) and industry leaders (cf. Burrus, 2013; Khai Meng, 2016) alike all champion creativity as 'a key learning outcome in our times, and thus the core business of education' (McWilliam, 2009 p. 281). This narrative is significant because it has moved people to pay renewed attention to the role of creativity in education (Holden, 2014; Lassig, 2009; Robinson, 2006). However, like all issues in the political sphere, addressing the heart of the problem proves far more challenging than espousing inspiring rhetoric. This is where the space in English teaching comes in—to offer a divergent perspective on creativity—grounded in and attuned to the complexities of everyday social interactions in classrooms. As a teacher researcher, I see more benefit in taking my lead from the rich history of researchers and practitioners in this tradition (e.g. Barnes 1976; Boomer 1982, 1988; Yandell, 2012, 2014) who are more interested in the specificity of the creative learning experience than presenting general, broad policy platitudes and prescriptions. In the first

two sections of this chapter (see 2.1 and 2.2), I explore sample discourses of creativity in two key mainstream spaces—first, the broader international community, and second, educational policy and curriculum design—to examine popular constructions of creativity. In the third section (see 2.3), I move into a story that makes most sense to me—the lived experience of teachers and students—and draw on a set of key ideas developed within various traditions of practitioner research in English teaching (cf. Doecke & McClenaghan, 2011; Parr, 2010; van de Ven & Doecke, 2011) to help me understand what creativity looks like within the current policy environment, and more specifically, my particular professional context.

## 2.1 'Creativity' in the world: Discourse, media, power and politics

The very nature of creativity, and its essential contribution to teaching and learning in the 21st century, has been on the educational agenda for some time now, albeit with inconsistent definitions and no common or consistent understanding (Armstrong, 2013). These days, discourses of creativity have hit the mainstream. With over 41 million views of Sir Ken Robinson's TED talk on 'How Education is killing creativity (the essential skill for our future success in the future)', everyone seems to be thinking or talking about creativity (de Bono, 1995; Brown, 2008; Gilbert, 2009). The common contemporary notion of creativity as an essential tool for grappling with the rapidly changing social and economic world isn't as new as it purports to be, having been coined a 'spirit of the times,' reflecting the 'zeitgeist' of mid-20th century problems back in the 1950s (Pope, 2005, p. 20). Nevertheless, the nature of today's fast changing and interconnected global world seems to have intensified and magnified the interest in creativity.

Aside from champions of creativity like Robinson, the huge amount of activity and thinking focused on creativity and its cousin 'innovation' as the key skills for future prosperity comes from a range of sources, such as: governments, academia, the media, industry, and the education sector. Within this ferment of activity the word 'creativity' is thrown about in a myriad of ways—from the essential tool for innovative thinking and problem solving (Csikszentmihalyi, 2006; Pink, 2006) to developing leadership and creative confidence through 'collaborative design thinking' (Kelley, 2013). McWilliam

coins the term 'epistemological agility' (2009, p. 282) to encompass this broadened notion of creative capacity—one seen as 'an outcome of social processes with generic applicability' (p. 3) whereby an individual or team is adaptable and able to work across 'knowledge domains'—in order to respond to the demands of an increasingly complex economic and social world. Carol Dweck's popularisation of the idea of a 'growth mindset' (2008) assumes a similar disposition, whereby openness to questioning prevailing ideas and problem posing can help students cope with challenges and uncertainty. From business organisations, like IDEO, to authors and commentators like Malcolm Gladwell (2008) and David Perkins (2009), there is a consistent message—even if it is inconsistent in its agreement about what creativity is—that creativity is a key component in the education of young people today in order to thrive in the 'conceptual age' (Pink, 2004). However, despite this popular understanding of 'creativity' now being 'a necessity for all' (Csikszentmihalyi, 2006, p. xviii), in education systems and schools it unfortunately can be the case that creativity and creative teaching and learning can be 'a luxury for the few' (p. xviii). In a highly regulated and increasingly standardised system where schools are simultaneously compelled to go 'back to the basics' (Birmingham, 2016) *and* to innovate and be continuously creative, teachers can get caught in a bind and students can be left short changed.

Very recently, the 'new' discourse of innovation propagated in the early days of the Turnbull Government through the *Welcome to the ideas boom* (2016) policy, with its focus on developments in science and technology, reflects this global understanding of creativity as 'an engine of future productivity and social dynamism' (p. 283). The aim of this policy initiative is to 'encourage a culture of risk-taking' to counterbalance the 'fear of failure' perceived to lie deep within the Australian mindset (Finkel, 2016). This is just one example of how, through the voices of politicians, bureaucrats and business, the word 'creativity' has been 'repopulated' (Bakhtin, 1981) with the lucrative and exciting promise of technological innovation and economic development. However, even when framed within the context of future economic growth, Turnbull's policy has struggled to gain momentum, and has suffered from a combination of poor management and other more immediate fiscal concerns (Irvine, 2016). Similarly, with educational reform (see 2.2), there continues to be a policy-practice divide as educators negotiate the tensions

between widely held beliefs regarding the value of fostering creative thinking (and doing) in schools, with the pressures of a system anchored in measurable standardised outcomes and testing, promoted by the same government as the 'ideas boom' policy.

Whilst these discourses are evident in professional contexts, be it amongst educators, academics and educational 'experts', media commentary on education also contributes to generalised claims about 'creativity'. Some educators have raised concerns over the dominant opinions voiced in the media being 'inversely proportional to the expertise in the field' (Thomas, 2015) and the 'potential danger' of skewed public perception from the lack of empirical knowledge amongst commentators (Bronson & Merryman, 2010). Similar criticism has been aimed at the 'romantic theorising' of creativity from 'shallow' TED talks (Couros, 2015) lacking rigorous research and data-based evidence. These critiques are important and provide a challenge to reductive notions of creativity often promulgated in the media. Clearly, alternative accounts of creativity are needed to ensure grander claims about 'the brave new world of creativity' are greeted with healthy skepticism (Pope, 2005, p. 26). This is particularly pertinent when it comes to educational reform, which has in recent years been under the increasing influence of narrow measures of educational success and achievement (e.g. Hattie, 2009), without accounting for the 'voices and perspectives of teachers and students' (Doecke, 2014, p. 145).

In the following section, I explore the nuances of creativity discourses in the current educational policy and curriculum environment; in particular the mismatched messages between what is said and what is done, and how the negotiated meanings of creativity are constructed by various authoritative and authoritarian voices.

## **2.2 Creativity and curriculum: A mismatch in the world of standards based reform**

We live in a world where 'education policy is, in many ways, economic policy' (Pyne, 2014), and where students and teachers are viewed as human capital investments for the economic prosperity of the nation. The target outlined in *The Melbourne Declaration on*

*Educational Goals for Young Australians* (2008) (*Melbourne Declaration*), the national guiding policy document for the relatively new Australian Curriculum (AC) and Victorian Curriculum (VC), reflects this objective, defining 'successful learners' as those who are 'creative, innovative and resourceful... able to solve problems' and are 'enterprising and show initiative' (p. 8). Dominant notions of 'creativity' as they appear in the AC and VC emerged from the discourses of creativity embedded in key policy documents such as the *Melbourne Declaration* (cf. VCAA F-10 curriculum- planning and reporting guidelines, 2014), which acknowledge that creativity should be fostered in schools to prepare students for life in the 21st century. The AC and VC have attempted to add more specificity to the fairly broad-brush statements on creativity in their early policy incarnations. For example, the inclusion of 'Critical and Creative Thinking' as one of the key 'General Capabilities' in the AC positions creativity as fundamental in students being able to become 'successful learners' (ACARA, 2013, p. 67) and to 'live and work successfully in the twenty-first century' (ACARA, 2016a n.p).

On paper, the Australian Curriculum underpins the emerging status of 'creativity' as 'the most valuable commodity in the 21st century market' (Harris, 2014, p. 2), reiterating the popular and scholarly narrative of creativity as the savior of education. Unfortunately, the emergence of creativity as a priority in educational policy is not always reflected in the practical everyday life of schools (cf. Gannon, 2014; Sawyer, 2014). Here, the local knowledge generated by teachers can reveal what really happens in the classroom—a nuanced and murky reality which lies in between the binaries and tensions at the heart of the 'creativity' dialogue.

While it is beyond the scope of this study to present a detailed critique of the policy-practice divide in relation to creativity in recent curriculum reforms, it would be an oversight not to address the implications of 'creative thinking' being elevated to the status of a 'General Capability' within both the AC and VC. This conceptualisation of 'creativity' as integral to 'assist[ing] students to live and work successfully' is problematic in at least three ways relevant to the present study. First, the mismatch between a human capital model of education driven as it is by economic imperatives, and a system dominated by preconceived learning outcomes; second, the clustering of 'creative' and

'critical' thinking skills, and third, the attempt to attribute 'achievement standards' along a schematised curriculum continuum for creative thinking (VCAA, 2016a).

First, it is oxymoronic to expect students to develop the skills to be 'confident and creative individuals' (MCEECDYA 2008, p. 8) when their learning is in thrall to the ideology of standards that 'sees more value in compliance than in dialogue' (Parr & Doecke, 2012, p. 161). The conundrum is fairly simple: while 'creativity' can hold a vital place in educational policy such as the *Melbourne Declaration* and in curriculum principles such as the Australian Curriculum's 'General Capabilities', the 'free-floating quality' of creativity makes it very difficult to teach and learn in measured, quantifiable terms (Parr, Turvey & Lloyd, 2014, p. 109). So despite creativity being hailed as an essential skill for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it sits at odds with a culture of predetermined learning outcomes as evidenced in global standardisation trends such as PISA tests or as reflected nationally in Australia through the current NAPLAN regime (Parr & Bulfin, 2014). More recently, the current VCE English curriculum changes (VCAA, 2016b), with an increasing focus on essay text literacies at the expense of creative and imaginative writing, have potentially further undermined the importance of creativity in English (see 4.2).

The second reason the inclusion of creativity as a general capability for successful learners is problematic is due to the associated clustering with critical modes of thinking. This policy design raises similar questions about the intended role and scope of 'creativity' in new curriculums, in particular, whether it is limited in so far as it supports critical thought and analysis. Pope explicitly addresses the tension between creative and critical thinking through E.M. Forster's aphorism, 'look before you leap is criticism's motto. Leap before you look is creativity's,' (Pope, 2005, p. xvii) prompting deeper inquiry into this seemingly unusual marriage designed to promote the essential thinking skills for the 21st century. On the one hand, there is abundance of literature to support the symbiosis between the two modes of thought, which can work together in many ways (cf. Bloom, et al., 1956; Gardner, 2009; McGuinness, 1999). On the other hand, concern has been raised over the unfeasibility of combining a 'mismatch of a students' skills' and a belief that creative thinking skills will be subsequently sidelined. (cf. ACARA, 2011, n.p).

Moving to the third point, the problematic nature of evaluating creativity according to a single continuum of development continues to be an issue (ACARA, 2011). The belief that creativity develops along a linear trajectory simplistically assumes skill development as a child progresses in their education, overlooking the inherent complexity in teaching, learning and assessing creativity.

So despite creativity being a policy priority, there are various practical difficulties to mediate in order to enact a creative teaching practice in the English classroom. Of course, a key issue is the ambiguity around the word 'creativity' itself, and the myriad understandings of the role of creativity in education. As Bakhtin reminds us, the meaning of 'creativity'—or any word—is socially negotiated and only grasped against the background of views, values and beliefs of other speakers and their own use of language—a process whereby individuals and groups, draw on texts, discourses and practices already imbued with meaning and which 'sparkle with ideology', repopulating these same words, texts, discourses and practices with new meaning and intention as different circumstances, contexts, histories and futures present themselves. (Bulfin, 2009, pp. 16-7). In the following section, I aim to provide a more nuanced picture of 'creativity' by including the voices and perspectives of teachers and students—adding these to the more general social discourses of creativity, and to educational policy and curriculum. Through the theoretical lens of practitioner research, I attempt to bridge the gap between what is said about creativity and what it means for who are living the experience in the English classroom.

### **2.3 'Creativity' is the new black: A critical historical perspective on creativity and English teaching**

This section explores the important yet too often overlooked quieter narrative told by teachers and their students through practitioner research, the space in which I have situated my study with the aim of contributing to an alternative discourse of creativity. However, rather than engage in an exercise designed to define more closely what the term 'creativity' means, I am more interested in adopting a 'ground up' approach, situated within the English classroom, that challenges the dominant story told about

creativity. That is not to say I am rejecting other notions outright (e.g. Pope, 2005; Robinson, 2011), but rather reflecting on the multiple and varied definitions of creativity and presenting an argument for why the student and teacher perspective brings a valuable dimension to the creativity discourse.

Creativity has long been an area of interest for educators, well before its current reappropriation as a cure-all for contemporary social and economic challenges. For example, in the 1960s and 70s, language and literacy educators argued for a move away from 'lifeless' institutionalised understandings of language, to a recognition of the value in the informal, creative use of language in education and in the lives of young people (Dixon, 1967; Langdon, 1961). A deep interest in creativity and in democratic understandings of culture and language lay at the core of these moves. Even prior to the 1960s, Vygotsky (1978 [1934]) encouraged educators to be sensitive to the dialectical relationship between the 'local' knowledge students learn everyday and the 'disciplinary' knowledge taught at school. Language and literacy educators since this time have drawn on this work to think about the challenges of creativity up until the present day (cf. Yandell, 2014). The work of English educators such as John Dixon, James Britton and Douglas Barnes continues to inspire contemporary work in English teaching (e.g. Beghetto, 2013; Doecke et al., 2014; McCallum, 2012; Morson, 1985).

Even prior to beginning my research, Barnes' theory of the 'enacted' curriculum (1976), together with Boomer's (1992) belief in 'negotiating the curriculum' and Yandell's (2014) work on the transformative impact of play and the social experience in the classroom were informing a professionally reflexive approach to my teaching practice. I have always been far more interested in the 'life stream of the classroom' (Campano, 2009, p. 33) rather than in a set of depersonalised data, or in measuring predetermined outcomes which do not adequately capture the complexities of creative educational work. Additionally, the pedagogical principles espoused by John Dewey (1934, 2005) and those developed by writers within arts and aesthetic education (Eisner 2002; Greene 1995)—in particular, the prioritising of the aesthetic experience over the utilitarian and valuing process over product (Harris, 2014)—resonate with my personal and professional understanding of creativity. More recently, Harris' (2014) work towards 're-broadening

the possibilities of creativity, curiosity and its applications in secondary' education (p. 9), has also given shape to the project.

Whilst my intention is not to uncritically valorise this earlier work—produced as it was during a rather different policy environment and social world—it is important to acknowledge that the contemporary interest in creativity is not unique to our time and there is much to gain from a critical re-engagement with these earlier 'progressive' thinkers and educators (cf. Doecke & Seddon, 2002). These earlier traditions provide a fertile background to better understand and theorise my own practice. Rather than marking a beginning or end to my critical engagement with the various contexts which mediate my work, my engagement with this earlier work is ongoing and dynamic. And like creativity itself, my work and thoughts have emerged and continue to grow 'from the middle' (Pope, 2005, p. xv), not only in the course of this research, but also through an ongoing reflexive approach to my professional identity.

The following two sub-sections provide some conceptual tools for investigating how creative practices are 'enacted' by teachers and students in English classrooms. I first focus on creativity and identity formation and the important role of English in facilitating self-expression and discovery, and then move to explore the nature of creativity in the lived social experience of the classroom.

*So what is different about 'creativity' in English and why is this important?*

At a time when creativity is more often seen as a valuable economic commodity rather than a means for self-expression or identity formation, the historical function of English offers a powerful focal point for grounding conceptualisations of creativity as evident 'in all our living' (Williams, 1961 / 2001, p. 54). Furthermore, English is a subject concerned with the means for representing ourselves—formulating our interpretations, values and beliefs in an always changing world. If the goal of education is to prepare students to lead confident and productive lives, the role of English to open up possibilities for young people to experiment with their identity and imagine a meaningful future is vital (Kress, 1995). While the English classroom offers fertile ground for this kind of 'everyday'

creativity as a means of contributing to the 'formation of a particular kind of person' (Peel, Patterson & Gerlach, 2000, p. x), the enormous pressures on teachers to comply with the 'new orthodoxy' of performance standards (e.g. AITSL, 2012) makes this kind of creative identity work, for both students and teachers, feel like a 'luxury,' needing time and space which teachers don't feel they have (Gill & Illesca, 2011, p. 23). However, I believe there should be more value placed on this kind of pedagogical work, which in providing a powerful counterpoint to the narrow reform agenda, views the 'cultures and languages that students bring into [English] classrooms as resources for meaning-making of a richly heterogeneous kind' (Doecke, 2014, p. 141; Yandell, 2014).

This kind of 'creative' work in English teaching has been described in a range of ways, at times using language that doesn't necessarily invoke the term creativity at all (cf. Bakhtin, 1981; Barnes, 1976), or in the case of Raymond Williams' work, conceptualised without the English classroom explicitly in mind. Nevertheless, Williams' theory of creativity, whilst focused on culture and society rather than English education, makes a similar connection between 'creative practice' and identity formation—a dynamic process of 'remaking' our view of ourselves and the world around us (Williams, 1977, p. 212). Creativity, according to Williams involves a personal 'struggle at the roots of the mind' resulting in a journey from 'the known' to the 'unknown' (p. 212) potentially shaping our sense of who we are and where we belong. His sense that creativity is entwined with the heightened and sometimes contradictory consciousness of oneself and others, resonates with more recent notions of multiple identities in a 'liquid modern' era (Bauman, 2004, p. 12) where the 'kind of person' we present is changeable 'from context to context' (Gee, 2001, p. 99). Gee, echoes Bakhtin's view that 'we all live within language' (Doecke, Gill, Illesca & van de Ven, 2009, p. 27) whereby words are more than tools for communicating, but intrinsically linked to who we are or purport to be. It may sound dramatic, but if in the process of identity formation, one 'cannot make sense of anything or interpret anything without a language' to do so (Gee, 2001, p. 112), it follows that a student who is denied a voice in the classroom may be missing out on the 'social and semiotic' experience that is critical for personal growth and development (Yandell, 2014, citing Tomasello, 1999).

Similarly, Barnes emphasises the importance of recognising the identities of young people and believes there should be opportunities for all students to participate in the 'communicative life' (1976, p. 14) of the classroom, in order to enhance the learning potential of the group, through 'exploratory talk' (see next sub-section). His reasoning behind an 'enacted' and democratic curriculum is grounded in a Vygotskian sociocultural model where the potential for rich identity work comes through encouraging values of tolerance and acceptance of the views of others and a willingness to have one's own views challenged by someone who sees the world differently (Yandell, 2014). Here, the focus is on the value of working towards an ethical classroom practice, where through bringing your own self into the conversation, all voices can be heard.

The ideas explored in this section are timely reminders of the pedagogical and personal value of 'ordinary' creativity in the English classroom, through opening space and scope for 'student voice' (Peel, et al., 2000, p. 8) to engage in forms of communication that are meaningful. So despite the shrinking space for creative or exploratory teaching approaches in English in the current educational climate (see 2.1 and 2.2), it is possible, through 'dialogic inquiry' for students and teachers to explore issues of identity and develop a sense of their place within the social relationships that constitute the classroom (e.g. Bellis, 2006; Bulfin, 2006; McClenaghan & Doecke, 2005). I pick up this thread in the following section, where I explore Barnes' notion of the 'enacted' curriculum in further detail to highlight the connection between creativity and communication in English teaching. For me, his work is fundamental, as it encapsulates the social, collaborative and sometimes messy nature of creativity and its capacity to open rich possibilities for both student and teacher learning.

### *Creativity and learning in the social world of the classroom*

Despite writing over 40 years ago, Douglas Barnes' work still speaks to the heart of creative teaching, across disciplinary fields and educational institutions. His seminal text, *From Communication to Curriculum*, has provided a key lens to support the theorising of my own practice—in particular, his distinction between the intended and enacted

curriculum—whereby the learning experience of students can exceed the expectations spelt out in any syllabus, curriculum or teacher plans. Barnes (1976) notes:

When people talk about “the school curriculum” they often mean “what teachers plan in advance for their pupils to learn”. But a curriculum made only by teachers’ intentions would be an insubstantial thing from which nobody would learn much. To become meaningful a curriculum has to be enacted by pupils as well as teachers, all of whom have their private lives outside school. By “enact” I mean come together in a meaningful communication—talk, write, read books, collaborate, become angry with one another, learn what to say and do, and how to interpret what others say and do. A curriculum as soon as it becomes more than intentions is embodied in the communicative life of an institution, the talk and gestures by which pupils and teachers exchange meanings even when they quarrel or cannot agree. In this sense curriculum is a form of communication (p. 14).

Exploring the difference between my ‘intentions’ as a teacher-researcher to embed creativity into my syllabus, and what can be achieved together with my students (and perhaps other teachers) as we collectively ‘enact’ the curriculum, has been one of the main aims of this research project. In examining examples from my work, I evidence how it is possible to mediate some of the restrictions imposed by standards-based reforms, at least in temporary classroom moments or in the cracks of classroom life. For me, one highlight of being a teacher is chatting with students about their experiences as we are ‘bound together in reciprocal communication’ (Barnes, 1976, p. 155), as people working and learning together. Through the process of exploring and documenting ‘creativity’ with my students in my classroom, I am constantly reminded that ‘every lesson is a new beginning’ (Doecke, 2014, p. 140) and ‘what goes on [inside that room] is mysterious’ (Yandell, personal communication, 2016). By becoming more attuned to the unpredictable and nuanced social interactions at play, we open a ‘space for students to be other than they were when they arrived through the door’ (Yandell, 2016).

This pedagogical approach, one that takes seriously the social nature of learning, resonates with what Boomer (1988) calls ‘negotiated classroom cultures’ (p. 177). These are cultures in which students take on a ‘shared responsibility for their learning’ (Boomer 1988, p. 92) and ownership of their experiences. Adopting this strategy in a classroom is risky—it creates ambiguity, uncertainty and anxiety, but is fundamental for enabling young people to achieve their creative potential (Doecke, Illesca & McClenaghan, 2014).

For me, the process of negotiating the curriculum with students has required a major leap of faith—to persevere even as the veneer of classroom order and productivity threatens to unravel. As a teacher, my own resolve is strengthened when I sense that students are willing to ‘come along for the ride’ as active participants in the ‘social relationships of the classroom’ (Barnes, 1976, p. 14). As Barnes reminds us, ‘communication’ in the classroom is not always smooth sailing and includes ‘arguments, disagreements and times when we don’t get along or cannot see eye-to-eye’ (1976, p. 14). It is a ‘gutsy’ move to open up room for ‘argy bargy’ and potential challenge and chaos in the classroom, but I believe the potential benefits of students communicating freely, and learning how to cope when people ‘become angry with one another’ (p. 14) outweigh the risks of a teacher ‘losing control’.

There are interesting connections to be made here between Barnes’ focus on the intricate everyday ‘communicative life of an institution’ (p. 14) and Michel De Certeau’s (1984) notion of the ‘uses and tactics of consumers.’ He coined the phrase ‘procedures of everyday creativity’ (p. xiv) to describe the ordinary practices people employ to maintain a sense of self in the face of the dehumanising cultural, social and political forces. Whilst his work was not written with the education system specifically in mind, the practices De Certeau describes that help people ‘make do’, by resisting and manipulating authority or established systems, will resonate with many who have been in a classroom as a student or teacher. Later in the thesis (see Chapter Five), I explore how some teachers, including myself ‘vigilantly make use of the cracks’ in the curriculum, despite the ‘grid of “discipline”’ (p. 37) imposed by their job. Be it through influencing the mood in their classrooms, narrative writing and storytelling (e.g. Parr & Bulfin, 2014; Shann, 2015) or meditation during school assembly (Cleo interview) teachers employ ‘tactics’ to avoid being ‘reduced to’ their institutionally imposed roles (De Certeau, 1984, p. xiv). Similarly, De Certeau’s notion of ‘uses and tactics’ is relevant to the ordinary everyday creativity of students in schools where they employ ‘clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things’ (p. xix) to “put one over” on the established order’ (p. 26). Students find many ways of resisting total conformity to the rules within schools—for example, young people often reclaim language in their own voice by adopting alternative ‘phrasings’ to what a school task requires in order to make it more personally meaningful. For example, by re-

writing assessment rubrics using their own language, or employing their cultural references, such as 'emo' to analyse Shakespeare's Hamlet (Diamond, 2016, lecture). This particular tactic resonates with Bakhtin's (1981) ideas about double voicing where a word becomes "'one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention' (Bulfin, 2009, p. 52).

In both these conceptualisations, while creativity inheres 'in the relatively simple and direct practice of everyday communication' (Williams, 1977, p. 212) and is seen as an ordinary and 'common place' (De Certeau, 1984, p. 1), it does not follow that 'it' comes easily or without a struggle. If the English classroom is solely the embodiment of adult intentions, directed towards achieving predetermined outcomes, students will find ways to creatively 'get around the rules of [that] constraining system' (p. 18) and 'negotiate' the curriculum anyway—even if only in their decisions to engage half-heartedly with what is on offer to them (cf. Bulfin 2006). 'Tactics' and 'negotiations' are always at play within the 'communicative life of an institution' through the 'talk and gestures by which pupils and teachers exchange meanings even when they quarrel or cannot agree' (Barnes 1976, p. 14). These examples of 'everyday creativity' may be 'ordinary' but, as Williams describes, they involve a continuous 'struggle' to understand ourselves and the world around us (1977, p. 212). Boomer's view of this kind of creativity as central to a negotiated curriculum, involving a 'continual' and 'self-conscious struggle... to reformulate' (1988, p. 177) also recognises the dynamic connection between creativity and the social experience of the classroom whereby students and teachers are in a continual state of learning.

Still highly relevant to the challenges in English education today, Ian Reid's 'literature workshop' model outlined in *The Making of Literature* (1984) presents a counter model to what he describes as the 'fixed' and restrained 'gallery' mentality that 'artificially separates text from the reader' (p. 12). With its focus in play, possibility and the importance of encouraging students to think and create their own meanings through interactions with a text, Reid's model exemplifies 'curriculum as a form of communication' (Barnes, 1976, p. 14) which embraces the creative possibilities in the classroom 'exceed[ing] the expectations that might be spelt out in a lesson plan or

syllabus' (Doecke et al., 2014, p. 13). Written over three decades ago, Reid's work still speaks powerfully to 21st century concerns, acknowledging the connection between the 'elaboration of creativity skills' and the development of 'problem solving capabilities [of students] through the fusion of play and work' (Reid, 1984, p. 14). Furthermore, it poignantly resonates with the current challenges of teachers working within externally mandated curriculum and the assessment policies. Like Barnes, Boomer, and more recently, the work of Yandell and Doecke, Reid's vision celebrates the transformative learning potential of play with texts and language, where an engaged classroom looks and sounds 'messy and noisy' with 'argument [and] joking' (1984, p. 13).

Reid's work resonates with my own experience as both a teacher and student, where I have discovered first hand (see Chapter 4.3, Extract 4.13) that the opposite of 'play' is not work, but 'compliance' (Winnicott, 1971). Ironically, the quiet and ordered compliance of 'The Literature Gallery' (that is still presented in many school brochures today) deceptively depicts an image of diligent students hard at work. Conversely, in the seemingly chaotic 'room for making' (Reid, 1984, p. 13) the 'curriculum [becomes] a form of communication' (Barnes, 1976, p. 14) where the 'voice of the class is never a hushed respectful one, it generally shouts or cries or hoots with laughter of the joy of it all' (Thompson, 1965 as cited by Doecke et al., 2014, p. 5). Barnes emphasises the importance of student 'talk' in thinking and shaping ideas. Rather than being concerned with 'neat, well-shaped utterances from pupils' he values the role of 'exploratory talk'—where students can 'grop[e] towards a meaning' collaboratively through classroom discussion (Barnes, 1976, p. 28). More recent studies (e.g. Gill and Illesca, 2011; Yandell, 2014) have observed how these classroom conversations have encouraged students to think and create their own meanings through interactions with a text. Prue Gill writes how through the use of 'exploratory talk' in her senior Literature classroom, her students felt 'empowered because of the way their view of the world [was] both developed and acknowledged' (Gill & Illesca, 2011, p. 40). This disposition involves a 'willingness to listen to what everyone has to contribute to a conversation, even though it may be hesitant or inarticulate' (Doecke, 2014, p. 144), which isn't easy, especially in light of the pressures of a tightly packed syllabus and an audit culture that encourages lessons with a direct, linear relationship to measurable outcomes. Furthermore, it requires that the teacher takes 'seriously the work that school students do' (Yandell, 2014, p. 176) and trusts in both their

capacity to discover new meanings through the process of building on each other's language work and the creative value in the sociability within a collaborative classroom space.



In this section, I have attempted to offer an overview of quite different approaches to creativity which recognise its role in various social practices—from innovation economies to the identity formation and transformation of young people. Rather than be aggressive or go on the attack, this alternative account of creativity—one that is informed by the lived experience of students and teachers in the everyday classroom and simmers away alongside the 'snap crackle and pop' of more dominant discourses—aims to provide a powerful counterpoint to the charged political agenda of policy reform (Doecke, 2014). I am guided by the humble work in the tradition of practitioner research, which might not appear to be overtly political, but at its core favours an anarchy of sorts, where the dominant political perspective is challenged via the deliberate, engaged indifference and/or defiance of both individuals and groups of educators. Here, a different type of politics is enacted—first, in terms of localised cultural shifts (in a particular classroom, faculty or even school) through dialogue and community; and second, through the important presence of teacher and student perspectives in academic and policy discourse.

The next chapter outlines the specifics of my research approach, including the study design and process of data analysis. I explore the methodological and ethical issues typically associated with practitioner research and discuss the methods implemented over the course of the project. My aim is to make explicit and justify the procedures and methods followed to establish a sense of transparency and trustworthiness (Freebody, 2003) in my role as teacher-researcher.

## CHAPTER 3

### KEEPING IT REAL - MY RESEARCH APPROACH

Having outlined the conceptual framework for the study in Chapter Two, in this chapter I detail my research 'approach'—practitioner inquiry—and the particulars of how the study was enacted. The work of Doecke and Parr (2005), Bulfin (2006), Doecke and McClenaghan (2011), amongst other kindred English educators (e.g. Bellis 2014; Gill & Illesca, 2011; Sawyer & Howie, 2011) ignited my passion to pursue postgraduate studies and has continued to inform my practice since beginning my teaching career. Collections of practitioner research studies such as, *Language and creativity* (Doecke et al., 2014), which explore what English teachers mean by 'creativity' and the possibilities of creative work within English, have influenced my decision to adopt a practitioner inquiry approach. At the heart of this decision lies a recognition of teaching and learning as grounded in human relationships and social interactions—and 'that children and teachers are shapers of meaning and interpreters of experience' (Featherstone, 2001, p. xii, as cited in Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Ideologically, this research approach and paradigm, concerned with the 'life stream of the classroom' (Campano, 2009, p. 33), closely aligns with the theoretical and conceptual discussion in Chapter Two grounding my study of 'creativity' as a socially mediated practice.

As with any social practice, educational research can be a messy and problematic activity in which 'the researcher is, necessarily, deeply and personally implicated' (Yandell, 2014, p. 44). Consequently, the research process is often 'a fumbling act of discovery, where researchers only know what they are doing when they have done it; and only know what they are looking for after they have found it' (Hamilton, 2005, p. 288). In many ways, my study itself became a form of creativity where I found myself regularly negotiating tensions between the 'known' and the 'unknown' (Williams, 1977, p. 212). In what follows, I provide a snapshot of my project—including ethical considerations and decisions made at various stages of data generation.

### 3.1 Practitioner inquiry: An ongoing conversation

#### *Working towards a methodology in the early years of my career*

My work as a practitioner inquirer began the moment I stepped into a classroom as a pre-service teacher in 2012. At the time, my motivation for adopting a reflexive approach to my practice was to draw on the theory I was learning in my university classes as a way of better understanding my practice. At the time this meant keeping journal notes and engaging in conversations about pedagogy with colleagues as a way of challenging myself 'to teach better' (Lytle, 2008, p. 373). Since these preservice teaching days, and in the years that have followed, I have become acutely aware of how these early attempts at critical reflection on the intersection of theory and practice (cf. Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993) have shaped my ongoing professional practice and identity, and my ideological perspective on the current educational environment.

In addition to my Masters coursework, some significant professional learning experiences have allowed me to continue my ongoing attempts at practitioner inquiry. These have included: involvement in the *stella2.0* project (Parr & Bulfin, 2014, 2015); participation in the Monash English Education Group, an informal reading and writing group of like-minded colleagues who meet regularly to engage in forms of practitioner inquiry; ongoing collegiate teaching in my school (for an account of this relationship, see Parr & Bulfin, 2014, pp. 61-62); and being an advisory board member for Think Plus (2010-2013), a private sector educational think tank developing 'metacurriculum for learnable intelligence and thinking tools'. Each of these experiences, while different, has enabled me to explore central questions about my practice as an English educator through engaging in critical inquiry into the mediating influence of current educational policy and curriculum on the work that I (and my colleagues) do with particular young people in particular contexts. In this study and thesis I have examined more directly various discourses of creativity and how these shape my classroom work, taking critical account of the values and practices espoused by a standards-based education system that 'sees more value in compliance than dialogue... and does not invite inquiry into, or

conversation about, the particulars of educational experience' (Parr & Doecke, 2012, p. 161).

I am not alone in wanting to explore these sorts of concerns. For example, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) express a similar concern about the constraints of the 'current educational regime,' (p. 2) which characterises teachers as 'technicians,' delivering the syllabus by way of transmission in a highly regulated accountability system (cf. McClelland, 2005; Parr & Bulfin, 2014). Despite this seemingly inhospitable climate, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) demonstrate that the practitioner research 'movement' is alive and well. They offer numerous accounts of teachers as 'deliberative intellectuals, who constantly theorise practice as part of practice itself' (p. 2). Similarly, Doecke, Locke and Petrosky (2004) define practitioner inquiry as 'intellectual work,' whereby teachers are obliged to 'engage in more complex forms of critical reflection than are usually suggested by the literature on practitioner research, and to interrogate the social role they perform' (p. 110). In this research project, I explored the local knowledge and practices specific to my students, school and the cultural context. Through these interactions, I was able to discover a more nuanced understanding of how creativity can enable meaningful learning beyond predetermined boundaries and encourage the 'kind of educational experiences' (McWilliam, 2009, p. 284), which make a real difference for both students and teachers.

### *The current study*

Following in the Australian tradition of practitioner inquiry within English education, my study aimed to provide a 'warts and all' account of creativity, from the bottom up (cf. Bulfin & McGraw, 2015; Doecke, 2014; Gill & Illesca, 2011). Over a period of three years, I used my own work as an English educator, within a particular school and community context, to inquire into the nature of creativity in secondary English classrooms, exploring what creativity means and how it gets 'done' by teachers and students in my particular location, mediated as it is by various attempts to define and regulate what teachers and students do in schools (see Chapter Two). In addition to a focus on my own practice, I

engaged with colleagues in a series of ongoing dialogues and professional conversations about our work.

In both these instances—working with my own students, and ongoing engagement with colleagues—I have generated a range of writing, as a method of documenting my practice and other day-to-day experiences as an English educator, via critical autobiographical narrative accounts and research journals (Parr & Doecke, 2005), for example, writing produced as part of my involvement in the *stella2.0* project (e.g. Parr & Bulfin, 2014) and other published writing (Stock, 2014). The theoretical justification for the inclusion of my own writing is founded in the 'dialogic potential' (Bakhtin, 1981) of professional narrative-based writing whereby storytelling is valued as a 'vital means of grappling with complexity' (Doecke, 2013, p. 20; Parr, Doecke & Bulfin 2015; Parr, Bulfin & Rutherford 2013). Furthermore, journal writing, as a form of 'inner speech' (Vygotsky, 1962) has facilitated the dialogic connections between myself, as teacher and researcher, and the social world of the classroom, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of what 'ordinary' creativity looks like in an English classroom.

As outlined in Table 3.3, this writing, generated as 'data' for the project, was supplemented or 'triangulated' with other data generated as transcripts of semi structured interviews with colleagues and focus groups with students. I have also been collecting a range of documents relevant to my teaching, such as samples of student work (e.g. see Figures 4. 3 and 4.4) and teaching resources generated individually and collaboratively (see Appendix D).

This brief overview of the project is elaborated on in the remainder of the chapter.

### **3.2 Data generation design**

In this section, I discuss the site of the research (my current school), the participants in the study and the data generation process I undertook. Here, my aim is not only to outline what I did, but also to reflect on and evaluate the decisions made in those

processes, and describe the tools used to support the generation and analysis of data. In following sections I discuss my approach to data analysis (see 3.3) and various ethical considerations related to the project (see 3.4).

### *The research site*

I have been employed on a permanent part-time basis at the site of the research since August 2013. Shelby School (a pseudonym) is an Anglican, small independent, non-selective, single-sex school in Melbourne's inner south-eastern suburbs. It enrolls approximately 600 students across K-12, with approximately 350 in the high school. Many students are from the surrounding suburbs, while others come from further away due to the reputation of the school's scholarship programs, high academic achievement and strong performing arts programs. While the school is known for its outstanding academic results (often amongst the top 10 performing schools in Victoria), there is a balanced focus on pastoral care, student wellbeing and co-curricular involvement. In particular, the school supports students with a range of disabilities, for example, autism, cerebral palsy and paraplegia, fostering a 'safe, caring and supportive community' (school website, 2016). Students are relatively diverse, with the majority from Anglo backgrounds, however, 26% have a language background other than English (My School, 2015). There have also been an increasing number of international enrolments from China, with a corresponding growth in EAL and Chinese Language students. The majority of students come from highly advantaged backgrounds, both economically and in terms of education and occupation, with 74% of the school's distribution falling in the top quartile of the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) (My School, 2015). Teaching staff number approximately 80, within a regular faculty structure (English and Humanities, Sciences and Arts etc). There are about 16 non-teaching staff, with some positions, such as school gardener, outsourced to contractors. Historically, members of staff have generally remained at the school for many years, even a career lifetime. However, more recently, there appears to have been a shift in this culture, with increasing staff movement and a larger number of younger teachers.

*Recruiting and organising participants*

The students recruited for this study were aged between 16 and 17, which in the Victorian school system corresponds to Years 10 and 11 (Year 12 is the final year). Subsequent to receiving approval from the Principal to conduct the study in the school, I invited eleven students from Year 10 and twelve from Year 11 to participate in the study via an email sent to them via their respective Year Level Coordinator (YLC). These students were approached on the basis that they had participated in at least one of the units/subjects explored in my research. Students represented a range of personalities, interests and aptitudes in English. The 11 students who agreed to participate in the project self-selected by return email (see Table 3.1 for an overview of student participants). All participants and their parents/guardians signed consent forms (see Appendix H for sample documents). When grouping the students for focus groups, I was sensitive to creating a dynamic that would enable them to feel comfortable contributing to the focus group. I have used colour coding to highlight close friendship links. Esme and Emma were not part of the three main friendship groups but were included with girls they got along well with.

TABLE 3.1 Overview of participating students

NAME	YEAR LEVEL	BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF STUDENT (e.g. personality, interests, friendships, engagement with subject English)
Maude	10	While generally reserved, a keen observer of her surroundings. A dry wit & shows a mature & insightful perspective on life. A talented violist, passionate about fashion & coffee.
Kat	10	Best friends with Maude. High academic results across all subjects. Extremely quiet in English. Written work outstanding. Like Maude, a dry sense of humour. An accomplished musician.
Isla	10	As a baby, Isla suffered from meningitis & is paraplegic. A passionate & dedicated student in English & active participant in all co-curricula activities. Gets along with Kat & Maude but is part of a different friendship group.
Esme	11	Esme is a polite & courteous student with an excellent work ethic. English is not her strongest or most liked subject. An attentive listener & at ease with expressing emotions.
Emma	10	A dominant personality in Year 10. Often plays the role of goofy 'class clown,' yet simultaneously a sensitive young woman keen to improve her English abilities.
Robbie	11	Outgoing & popular. Loves dramatic arts & socialising. Finds English challenging but actively participates in class. Robbie, Michelle & Veronica are in the same friendship group.
Veronica	11	Has a 'no nonsense' approach to life, including studies. Always speaks her mind. A humble student with excellent work ethic who usually achieves strong results (not the case in English until recently).
Michelle	11	Bubbly & enthusiastic, highly confident expressing herself but finds writing more difficult. Sporty, social & active in co-curricula activities.
Miranda	10	Highly imaginative, easily distracted & always speaks her mind. Capable of achieving strong academic results in English, but only applies herself if the task makes sense to her.
Harriet	10	Friends with both Miranda & Clementine. A talented visual artist & locates her creativity in that medium, rather than in language. Confident, outgoing & playful.
Clementine	10	A sweet, earnest young woman. Always eager to please friends & teachers. Loves writing short stories. English is one of her favourite subjects, despite finding it difficult.

In addition to inviting these student participants, I sent an email to all nine members of the English Faculty inviting them to participate in the study. Teacher participants from the Drama and Music faculties were emailed individually to ascertain interest and availability. Of the six participating teachers, four were English teachers, one a drama teacher and one a music teacher (see Table 3.2 for an overview of teacher participants).

**TABLE 3.2 Overview of participating teachers**

NAME	FACULTY	BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF TEACHER (e.g. personality, teaching experience, pedagogical style, engagement with theory/curriculum policy)
Noni	English & Humanities	A career teacher of over 35 years (most spent at Shelby). Raised in country Victoria. Softly spoken; a warm, reserved nature; loves spending time with her children & grandchildren.
Donna	Head of English	A career teacher of 25 years, mostly in the public system. Moved to Shelby as HOD in 2015. An independent assessor of VCE English for 20 years; regular contributor at professional association events.
Joe*	English, ESL & Politics	An Irishman who completed a Grad Dip Ed at Monash in 2011. Began at Shelby in 2012 as a graduate. A humble & generous teacher & colleague; always keen to share an interesting story.
Jackie	English, Humanities & Year Level Coordinator (YLC)	A confident, passionate career teacher of 15 years & mother of three. More comfortable in the Humanities domain, or teaching English in earlier secondary. Has a key pastoral care role in the school, as a YLC.
Judy	Head of Music	An orchestra conductor (the only woman in a male dominated industry) for over 20 years, before moving into teaching. Boundless energy & passion for music & life. Highly respected & admired member of staff.
Cleo	Head of Drama	An imaginative, passionate & innovative educator. Grew up wanting to be like Anne of Green Gables & thinks sensible people are boring. Cleo loves teaching Drama; wishes the subject was held in higher regard by the school administration.

*\*Joe has given me permission to use his name in the thesis but all others are pseudonyms*

*Data generation methods: process and reflection*

The study employed the following methods to build a multi-faceted dataset to examine how creativity discourses and creative practices were realised and enacted by a particular teacher with her students in the English classroom (see Table 3.3):

- focus group interviews with students
- semi-structured interviews with teacher colleagues
- researcher journal reflections
- documents and artifacts (e.g. sample student work).

Overall, the focus group discussions and interviews (together with the research journal notes) were the main focus of data generation and accordingly were given priority in data analysis. Table 3.3 provides a summary of the data generated, and an elaborated description of the focus group and interview processes is detailed below. Some elements of the data set, such as policy documents and a range of teaching resources and student work, were useful in the earlier analytical stages of the project to refine and focus the research. However, when it came to writing this thesis, interviews and focus groups transcripts, together with my collection of writing (see 3.1) proved most useful in my analysis.

**TABLE 3.3 Data generation summary**

TOOLS	DETAILS
Semi-structured interviews with teachers Focus group interviews with students	6 x 30 minute interviews = 3 hours. (audiotaped) 3 x 45 minute focus groups = 2 hours & 25 minutes (audiotaped)
Research journal	13 detailed entries (November 2015 – June 2016)
Critical autobiographical narratives	5 narratives generated (October 2013 – August 2016)
Lesson plans & task materials	Planning materials & resources created by myself & colleagues for:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time Creative task (Year 9 English).</li> <li>• <i>The Merchant of Venice</i> Fan Fic (Creative response) task (Year 10 Literature).</li> <li>• Poetry blog (Year 10 Literature)</li> </ul>
Student samples produced in relation to the tasks outlined above	2 x Instagram posts 1 x blog post 1 x short story (creative response) 1 x musical score and lyrics
Policy & curriculum documents	The relevant national, state & school based curricula including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Australian &amp; Victorian Curriculum</li> <li>• AC &amp; VC: English</li> <li>• Melbourne Declaration</li> <li>• English Faculty curriculum documents</li> <li>• School policies &amp; mission statements</li> </ul>

### *Focus groups and Interviews*

As outlined in Table 3.3, three focus groups and six semi-structured interviews were conducted, generating approximately six hours of interview data. All student focus groups and teacher interviews were transcribed in full (see Appendix A for sample transcript). Following each interview and focus group, I wrote lengthy reflections in my research journal. These reflections are included in the dataset. I conducted the student focus groups prior to the teacher interviews and drew on my early analysis of this student data to help structure the teacher interviews. This early analysis led to the design of a thematic table (see Appendix B) to help me categorise and document the range of ideas explored by participants (see 3.3).

The student participants, in groups of three or four, were each involved in one focus group meeting over a lunchtime period of 45 minutes. Prior to a focus group, I emailed the participants a list of guiding questions and ideas to think about prior to the session (see Appendix C). I did not follow this list of questions strictly in the focus group, but used them to guide discussion. In my research journal notes I reflected on the comparison between my approach and a colleague's structured question and answer format I had recently observed – weighing up the efficiency of precise questioning versus the 'golden

moments' discovered through unexpected diversions. One of the reasons for employing this interview format was to allow the girls a sense of ownership of the discussion by allowing them to 'work off' each other and play a part in shaping the direction of the conversation (cf. Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). My aim was to build a space where the students could feel confident interacting with each other and with me as the teacher-researcher.

A similar approach was adopted with the semi-structured interviews for the participant teachers. Prior to the interviews, I emailed a list of sample questions and 'core issues to be covered' (Freebody, 2003, p. 133). The teacher semi-structured interviews occurred during school hours and on the school grounds during free periods. Some of these conversations spilled over into text messages or informal chats during the following day/s. While I was mindful of setting a conversational mood, and at times allowing space for the interviewee to digress from key discussion points, the interview was gently shaped by a visual flow chart (see Appendix D) to direct the conversation back to the key concerns of the research.

### **3.3 An approach to data analysis**

The approach to data analysis taken in this study is drawn from work in practitioner inquiry, particularly within English teaching (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Doecke & Parr, 2005), involving a combination of general thematic analysis and broad discourse analysis.

#### *Thematic analysis*

Loosely employing principles for initial qualitative analysis borrowed from 'grounded theory' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), analysis has involved the 'constant cycling back and forth' (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p.68) between data and the study's conceptual framework. As Barton and Hamilton argue, 'analysis is about looking for patterns in the data' (p. 68) and this has required an ongoing process of reflection, theorising, additional reflection and additional theorising. This has been enacted through a set of analytic

practices and strategies inspired by Barton and Hamilton's (1998) work in *Local literacies*. These are described (and italicised) in the text below.

First, *reading, re-reading and memoing* the transcripts after each interview and focus group, and writing reflections in my research journal, enabled me to identify, clarify, challenge, draw out and construct a broad range of initial ideas related to the data. I then followed up these emerging ideas with further reading and note taking through an 'iterative and recursive process' (Bulfin, 2009, p. 154) which lead to modifications in my thinking as I gradually developed new ideas, themes and concepts. For example, in my early journal writing, I articulated the building of 'optimum conditions' for creativity as a key element of the study. However, I soon realised the limitations of this idea from both a theoretical and data perspective and shifted my analytical attention to 'barriers or constraints' to creativity.

Second, *summarising* each focus group and then comparing across these focus groups allowed me to identify what I felt were significant themes and patterns in the data. Doing this helped me revise and *select* more focused questions for subsequent focus groups and the teacher interviews. As I did not conduct all the interviews at the same time, I was able to revise and refine my approach with each one. For example, deciding whether to ask personal questions about the interviewee's relationship with creativity earlier on in the interview, or to wait until later, depending on their openness to discuss their 'outside of school' life.

Third, by designing a *coding* and categorising system to *sort* the data in a thematic table (see Appendix B), I was able to closely examine and compare the range of data. The strategy of 'constant comparison' (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was useful in identifying similarities and differences, patterns and connections across instances and examples in the data. The table was continuously adapted and modified as the 'key' themes and ideas were reorganised and refined in the course of the analytical process. For example, initially, I planned to analyse the student and teacher data together to offer a multi-voiced perspective on creativity in the English classroom. However, through this process of thematic coding, the link between creativity and teacher professional identity began to

emerge as a more dominant concern than I had initially envisaged, necessitating a separate category and a separate chapter (see Chapter Five).

The general and initial strategies described here allowed me to make sense of the data and to focus my analytical attention on those aspects of the data that seemed to me to be most significant—'patterns', reoccurring ideas and language.

### *Discourse analysis*

A data analysis strategy for a study like this—in the tradition of practitioner research in English teaching (cf. McCallum, 2016; Yandell, 2014) that privileges the local experiences of teachers and students over generalised sweeping rhetoric (Doecke, 2014)—requires a broad approach to discourse analysis that is sensitive to the nuanced sociability of the classroom. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss the varied approaches to discourse analysis (e.g. Fairclough, 2003; Gee, 2005; Ten Have, 1999; Wodak & Meyer, 2015), but suffice to note, that their usefulness will depend on the researcher's purpose. In this study, I have adopted a broad approach drawing loosely on Gee (2005) and others, but also on the traditions of practitioner research in English education which have always encouraged a sensitivity to the language that young people use in and out of classrooms (see 2.2 and 2.3).

As the current study explores creativity in secondary English, I have employed a discourse analytic perspective when considering how the practice of everyday creativity in classrooms is made meaningful to students and teachers through the 'study [and use] of talk and text in context' (van Dijk, 1985, p. 3). This approach encourages a focus on the connections between the micro analysis of language use and descriptions of broader social and cultural practices (cf. Gee, 2005). My analysis therefore has mainly been with transcripts of talk and with other written narrative texts, and I have aimed to interpret these transcripts 'as a *reader* (and *re-reader*) of these data' (Yandell, 2014, p. 62).

For example, through the process of listening to, transcribing, reading and re-reading my colleague Noni's account of why she keeps her creative self 'at home or in the garden'

despite wishing she used 'it' better in the classroom (see Extract 5.3), I was prompted to keep going back to the data until I could identify the key factors working on and mediating Noni's teacher identity. The language she uses to describe her 'choices', relationships and her identity work, and her grappling with language to understand herself were very significant to my understanding and analysis. In another example, a sensitivity to language and discourse allowed me to more carefully analyse social interactions via 'naturally occurring talk' within the focus groups with students. Through asking students to reflect on previous creative tasks from their classes, I observed the girls recreating the excitement of those moments through talk, such as Clementine's memory of the '7Eleven Slurpee visit' and Robbie squealing over accents (see Extracts 4.4 and 4.5).

### **3.4 Thinking ethically in practitioner research**

While 'blurring boundaries and roles' in practitioner research opens new possibilities to generate 'innovative research and new modes of knowledge' (Cochran-Smith, 2006, p. 508), it also carries inevitable ethical issues. In this section I discuss the main ethical concerns that have arisen over the course of this project: first, relating to my relationships with colleagues and students, including my professional identity within my school; and later, regarding the representation of others' work in my journal, narrative writing and this thesis. These are what Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) describe as 'dilemmas that come with the territory of insider research in the increased politicised arena of educational change' (p. 20).

Since the beginning of my project, I have been sensitive to my relationships with students and colleagues as 'consequential stakeholders' (2009, p. 20). In the case of students, I was aware that they may feel obliged to participate in the study, or to say what they thought I might want to hear, for fear of disappointing me, their English teacher. One of the ways I addressed this issue was to arrange for consent forms to be given and collected by an administrative staff member, so the students would not feel pressured to participate. Furthermore, as much as was practical, I restricted invitations to girls who were not my students at the time of the focus groups to minimise potential conflict between their role as 'participants' in the study and 'students' in my English classes.

In terms of my colleagues, I am acutely aware that conversations with or between other teachers are influenced by the culture of a workplace—that self-censorship (consciously or not) in the name of professionalism may result in very little being revealed in potentially sensitive conversations. Fortunately, there are a number of colleagues at my school who were prepared to speak frankly, without fear of professional repercussions. Having said that, I was conscious of not gathering a skewed representation of teacher voice so I aimed to obtain (as much as was possible within the school) a range of perspectives from fellow teachers, including those with very different views and practices from my own.

A final ethical question arose once I had generated data, regarding the appropriateness of using examples of students' or colleagues' work, or describing attitudes or behaviours that might reflect negatively on them, or the school. As is common, all participants have been protected with pseudonyms (with the exception of Joe) and the school's name has not been published. Despite this, I remain somewhat anxious about the professional and personal repercussions of publicly criticising the work or beliefs of individuals and how this may constrain the authenticity of my writing. On the one hand, I recognise my research approach (like the creative practices I envisage for the classroom) needs to 'speak back' to the status quo to become 'something new and original' (Parr & Bulfin, 2014, p. 65). On the other hand, I have continued to be mindful of the ethical responsibility not to offend, or tarnish a participant's professional confidence or reputation simply for my own benefit. I value the robust collegial relationships and professional reputation I have developed in my years at the school and have maintained this standard of ethical conduct in my approach to the study.



In this chapter, I have outlined my methodological approach, operating in the tradition of practitioner research, to inquire into the nature of creativity in my secondary English classroom. Enquiring into the 'lived experience' of this research has been a theoretically driven reflexive process whereby the key focus of the study has been modified and

refined from its inception, to the writing of this thesis. That said, the motivations driving my methodological approach have remained grounded in the desire to explore the complexity and specificity of what creativity looks like in my particular context. In the following two chapters, I engage in an analysis of my data. Chapter Four is focused on the student participants and their experiences of creativity in English, along with various connections to identity, relationships and learning. While I originally intended to analyse the data generated from student and teacher participants together, during the process of analysis it became clear that a separate chapter (see Chapter Five) was required to focus on the issues specific to teachers and in particular the link between creativity and professional identity.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE TROUBLE WITH CREATIVITY: LIFE WITH KIDS IN CLASSROOMS

For Williams, 'creative practice' involves a grappling deep within the self and one's relations with others: an attempt to wrest from the complexities and contradictions we have internalised... something that helps us live to better purpose. Moreover, such creative endeavour must be a movement through 'the known' into 'the unknown.' It can be worked at in the present but the results cannot be predicted in advance (Pope, 2005, p. 11).

Rob Pope's description of Williams' theory of creative practice offers a useful lens through which to explore the nature of creativity in both the intended and enacted secondary English curriculum. For students and teachers alike, creativity is not easy. As I navigate the muddy territory of practitioner inquiry research, images of 'grappling' and 'wrest[ing]', resonate with my own personal and professional struggles in moving from the 'known into the unknown' as Williams describes it. This is reflected almost daily, be it in my relationships with colleagues as we negotiate quite different beliefs about English teaching, or in my work with students as we negotiate curriculum and life in classrooms. In this chapter, I take up and explore the idea that '[t]he brave new world of creativity is far from unproblematic' (Pope, 2005, p. 26) for there is no other term so ubiquitously celebrated and affirmed, yet simultaneously misunderstood or misused.

This is the case it seems, particularly in secondary English education, where, as outlined previously (see 2.2 and 2.3), spaces for creativity in both learning and teaching are diminishing. In addition to the myriad pedagogical reasons for its shrinking presence, Williams' conceptualisation of creativity (as synthesised by Pope above) as a kind of fluid process, points to the problem in teaching and assessing something that is 'ongoing and dynamic' (Pope, 2011, p. 113) and 'cannot be predicted in advance' (Pope, 2005, p. 11) in the contemporary education climate. The problematic relationship between creativity and assessment is only one of many forces at play influencing current policy trends, but one that is useful in scrutinising what it means to be creative in secondary English and opening a conversation about what it might and should look like, at least in my context

with my students and colleagues. Through my research I am endeavoring to enter and participate in this conversation, and, by using a range of examples from my interactions with students and colleagues in focus groups, interviews and more informal conversations, I explore the tensions, troubles and potentials of creativity in secondary English. In many cases, creativity can be confronting, isolating and unstable; it requires patience and courage, and is often stifled by self-doubt. But that all said, I arrive at the realisation that we can't discover who we are and 'live to better purpose' without it.

This chapter has three sections. In the first section, 'Creativity as identity making' (see 4.1), I draw on data from focus groups with students and various student writing to present a brief snapshot of student experiences with creativity in my secondary English classroom. One of the key ideas emerging from these interactions with students was a belief in creativity as an individual and unique expression of their identity; rooted in the 'self and one's relations with others'. Pope's reiteration of Williams' 'creative practice' as the 'complexities and contradictions we have internalised,' (p. 11) resonates with the student experience which often entails tackling the tension between 'vulnerability' and the fear of the unknown, with the desire to create something extraordinary and achieve academic success.

In the second section of the chapter, 'So I think I'm creative in my mind but it's shut down by the curriculum' (see 4.2), I move from the more personal struggle with creativity to the trouble flowing from practical issues in the real world of education policy, focusing on the VCE English curriculum and how it shapes attitudes to creativity in English across all year levels. From an increasing emphasis on analysis skills, to creative tasks that require only stylistic mimicry, the opportunities for both students and teachers to be creative and 'to become' creatively, are often difficult to recognise and to pursue.

In the final section, 'Creativity as imagination and play' (see 4.3), I attempt to demonstrate how, despite the challenges represented by narrow curriculum and policy reform efforts, everyday forms of creativity can still be realised in the English classroom through authentic interaction between students and their teachers. Here, I analyse a range of data—including my own critical autobiographical writing, together with

teacher reflections, student work samples, and reflections about their experiences with one particular creative task—to present a multi-voiced and nuanced perspective of the kind of creativity 'enacted' in my English classroom, at least from time to time. Channeling the spirit of Reid's 'literature workshop' and Barnes' 'enacted' curriculum, this pedagogical approach is one rooted in imagination, play and possibility.

#### 4.1 Creativity as identity making

In this section, I examine students' perspectives on creativity in life and English, as filtered through my voice as practitioner researcher. My observations emerging from the data are organised into two sub-sections. First, I discuss student perceptions about the unique and personal quality of creativity and why this makes it potentially troublesome for them—for example, feeling as though they are 'putting themselves on the line' and vulnerable to teacher and peer judgment. Second, I discuss the contradictions at the heart of creativity in the English classroom where students describe their fear and self-doubt whilst simultaneously acknowledging the deeply gratifying aspects—for example, a sense of self-discovery or satisfaction from overcoming their reservations around creativity in English.

*Creativity is an "expression of yourself" so it's a "vulnerable thing"*

One topic that regularly came up in focus groups was students' understanding of and relationship with the word 'creativity'. In one particular group, the girls were hesitant to respond at first, but once Esme broke the ice, the others joined in, each offering their unique interpretation of this complex notion which everyone agreed wasn't easy to put into words. In the excerpt below, this group of girls describe what creativity means to them in a more general sense, yet we soon focus in on how those notions of creativity look within the school context, particularly in English:

1. CS      When someone says creativity what comes to mind? What do you think it means?

2. Esme From experience it just seems like taking a concept of someone else's and then kind of like moving it around to make it your own.
3. CS Does anyone have anything else to add?
4. Maude I think [creativity is] more about how you express yourself, how you go about certain situations, how you personalise things.
5. Isla Yeah, in expressing yourself you come up with solutions or ideas that are outside of the box.
6. CS That's really interesting.
7. Kat Not following a set guideline to get to a result. You're coming up with your own way to get somewhere.
8. Isla And that's like an expression of yourself.

**Extract 4.1**

Echoing the sentiments of Williams, the girls expressed a shared understanding of creativity as something deeply personal—a dynamic process of 're-making', coloured by what they described as a unique expression of 'self.' While the views expressed in the above transcript differ in focus, they all draw on the language of 'movement'—be it Esme's imagery of 'moving' an idea around 'to make it your own', or Kat's metaphorical journey 'to get somewhere'—to describe creativity. While there seems to be an appreciation that the 'results [of creative tasks] cannot be predicted in advance,' Kat acknowledges the expectation for a result to be achieved and Isla talks about needing to 'come up with solutions.' Although I didn't ask them, at this stage in the focus group discussion, to express their views on creativity in the school context, the language used by the students recognises the murky and perhaps paradoxical nature of creativity in English education—simultaneously being 'an expression of yourself' and something that necessitates an assessable 'result'. The challenge of negotiating these competing tensions resonates with William's evocation of creativity as 'a struggle at the roots of the mind' whereby the girls simultaneously need to hold on to and let go of curricula constraints as they progress from 'the known' to the 'unknown' (Williams, 1977, p. 212).

The ideas identified by this group of students came up in all the focus groups across the study. What emerged was a complex and often contradictory relationship with creativity where students could articulate both the intimidating, yet deeply satisfying qualities of creativity in the school environment. Even Robbie, a self-proclaimed 'creative type' refers to creativity as 'daunting' and 'a vulnerable thing.' In the same conversation, her friend and filmmaking collaborator, Veronica, added that peoples' experiences with creativity will vary and 'if you're not afraid of what other people think then creativity is pretty easy, it's natural'. Despite this, she is quick to admit that creative tasks in English classes can be 'so awkward, it's embarrassing,' implying that feelings of creative confidence are like creativity itself—dynamic, ephemeral and changeable depending on context and situation.

Other participants, such as Isla and Kat associated feelings of self-doubt with creative tasks, echoing and expanding on Robbie and Veronica's sentiments above:

1. Kat        When it's creative you are expressing yourself and that's a more personal thing than a task you can follow a format for. So yes, [I experience self-doubt] more so in creative tasks.
  
2. Isla        I agree with Kat. I think English as a whole is a subject where you put a lot of yourself in, there's a lot of self-doubt. Unlike science or whatever, you can just learn the facts and learn the formulas, there's no pressure if you know what I mean, you just have to do the steps. But with English there's so much thinking and processing. And even with text analysis where there is a formula, there is still the ideas you have to develop to put into the formula.

#### **Extract 4.2**

Here Isla picks up on a commonly perceived difference between English and other subjects. Compared to, say Maths or Science, English is concerned with 'more than facts or content' (Patterson, 2000, p. 236). Rather, it is a subject 'concerned with possibility and transformation' where students are encouraged to work towards greater 'self-understanding' (Howie, 2006, p. 287). The experiences of self-doubt and feelings of vulnerability expressed by students in the excerpts above are magnified in English because the methods of 'thinking' and the 'ideas' generated exist beyond a prescribed formula and therefore require the individual student to, as Isla notes, put 'a lot of yourself

in'. Given the historical function of subject English (e.g. Peel, Patterson & Gerlach, 2000) and its continued purpose today—enabling students to learn about themselves, how they relate to others, their community and the broader world—creativity as envisioned by Williams, in and as 'ordinary' everyday human interactions, should be an integral part of the English classroom. English is about 'contributing to the formation of a particular kind of person' (Peel, et al., 2000, p. x), a creative process in itself that entails, as Pope describes, 'a grappling deep within the self' (2005, p. 11). Isla's candid remarks about the restrictive and sometimes paralysing effects of self-doubt in English convey the 'personal' nature of the subject, extending beyond explicit 'creative tasks', even when there is a 'formula' because as she notes, 'you are expressing yourself.' Like Pope suggests above, the 'personal' includes not only those affirming experiences that English teachers often want to encourage students to write about, but also experiences like Isla is describing here where students can 'wrest' and work through difficulties, such as 'self-doubt'. While Isla's creative response piece (see Appendix F) delighted me, providing unique insights into her personal voice, challenging conventional expectations of a Year 10 student, I am equally interested in the more problematic dimension of her creative process—the struggle 'deep within [her]self.'

However, Isla's challenges also appear to stem from the social relationships in the classroom, and in particular, feelings of insecurity through comparison in her 'relations with others' (Pope, 2005, p. 11). Here, Isla reflects on the pressure to, like her friend Louise, come up with a 'really cool idea' for a creative response task to *The Merchant of Venice*. She says of this particular task:

1. Isla            It took me a long time to come up with an idea. I remember I was sitting with Louise and she came up with this really cool idea and I felt so insecure about what to do (laughter).

**Extract 4.3**

Like many of the other girls, Isla admits it takes her 'a really long time' to think of an idea she's happy with, in this case, she laughs about coming up with 'the concept in a car park when [her] dad was picking up dog food.' Despite being a strong English student, with consistently excellent results, Isla often experiences feelings of insecurity during the

process of creating a piece of work in English because she is investing something personal and therefore exposing herself, a sixteen-year-old teenager, to the risk of judgment from herself, her peers and her teacher. While Isla's experience presents a particularly problematic dimension of creativity in English, it offers an example of how facing the challenges of creative work can stimulate identity growth, self-exploration and emergence of a personal voice.

*Creativity is 'risky' but... 'helped me with my fears' and explore 'who I am'*

One of the key dimensions spoken about by the participants was the difficulty they felt in overcoming the risks they associated with creative tasks, and acknowledging the personal benefits of doing so. As suggested by Isla (Extract 4.2) and elaborated by Kat in the transcript below (Extract 4.4), creative work in English was seen by many participants to be risky compared to the relative safety of 'following a method' or established process in a subject like Maths and Science.

1. Kat        It's a risk to be creative as opposed to following a method and I think it's easier to follow the structure. That's why my best subjects are Maths and Science.
2. CS        Is the risk worth it?
3. Kat        Yes, if it's good. Yes! (laughter)
4. CS        What's the worst thing that could happen if you take the risk?
5. Kat        Nothing really, you just make something bad, that's it.

**Extract 4.4**

Even in this short excerpt, there is a shift in Kat's perception about the value in taking creative risks. In her response to my question, 'What's the worst thing that could happen...?' I notice a small, yet significant 'transformation' (Howie, 2006, p. 287) where Kat is prepared to relax her tight grip on expectations for top results to discover that the risks could be worth it. Kat's uncharacteristically nonchalant 'you just make something bad, that's it', represents a fresh approach to her creative risk-taking, where fear of judgment and failure is set aside, even if just for that moment. Kat's comments offer a

glimpse into the creative potential of young people that transcends the institutional setting of an English classroom in a high achieving, elite girls' school. Although many of the participants expressed an awareness of the vulnerability tied up with doing creative activities, many, like Kat, also showed a willingness to at least temporarily suspend their preference for working to a method or structure, to work towards more unpredictable results.

Similarly, other students, like Esme, revealed a quiet confidence in their recognition of something very real and truthful about themselves being discovered along the way. Pope's notion of 'creative practice' as something that helps us 'live to better purpose' resonates in the following letter written by Esme (Extract 4.5) and in an excerpt from a poetry blog post task completed for Year 10 Literature (Extract 4.6). In the letter she writes about how studying a poetry unit within her Literature class had 'helped her with [her] fears' and 'taught her many life lessons'. I had designed the poetry blog task to demystify the perceived elitism of poetry and engage my students' literacy, analysis and imaginative skills with a familiar digital mode and social platform. I also wanted to provoke self-exploration, personal reflection, and to encourage students to voice their opinion. As Esme explains in her letter, her blog post ended up being more about her than a close engagement with W.H. Auden's poem, *Law like love*:

Dear Ms. Stock,

I really enjoyed writing this piece. I spent the whole Saturday in my Pyjamas writing it very slowly. As you'll notice I don't really get to the point very quickly, but I feel as though the introduction of this piece was important because it was poetry and Literature class this year has helped me with my fears. I'm not really sure if any of what I wrote in this assignment makes much sense, but it adds up in my head and I felt relieved after I wrote it.

My intentions of Literature class were to improve in my writing skills and I definitely feel more confident with it. But I also found that Literature class has taught me so many life lessons and I'm very thankful.

Thank you!

Esme xx

#### **Extract 4.5 Esme's letter**



# Breaking Out Girl

The Idea of poetry never really appealed to me, so I haven't really had much experience with it. I always stereotyped people who were interested in poetry. There were two kinds; the drop dead gorgeous girls who looked like Keira Knightley walking off the pride and prejudice film set or the quite the opposite. Because generally you don't see many girls like Keira Knightley, I related poetry to people who were dark and depressing, constantly questioning their life's importance. I was so stereotyping that boys didn't really fit into the poetry picture at all, which is interesting, because the poet that changed my mind was a man.

In recent class study, poetry has formed a new picture in my mind. It painted it by its self. And although it makes me feel very deeply and does make me question life, poetry doesn't feel depressing, it feels liberating.

One of my greatest fears is that I will never know my own values, to not know who I am. I think that if I don't discover myself, than how am I meant to represent me, or to know whether my decisions and actions are wrong or right?

As a child my parents knew what they thought and what they did and what was wrong and what was right and that was that. But it wasn't just that. They had reasons, and to me they were really good reasons. So I'd do go to school and I would share my parents opinions as my own and I'd share them with the same certainly as they would. But when I went to explain my reasons I felt weak and lost. I didn't have the passion, I hadn't made that thought, someone else did and although I thought I knew my opinion I truly had no idea. It was those years of mimicking, which made me scared. Scared of what people thought about me, the judgement that my family received from my false thoughts that I shared wrongly, the disappointment from them and the disappointment from myself.

But through not only poetry, but class discussion and the opinion of others I found some completeness. This particular poem that stood out to me was by a man named WH Auden. He wrote stanzas of beautiful, complex yet simple words which I truly believe have sent me on a path that isn't a never ending maze of mess and darkness or a one way street either, but a path which travels the world. The poem is known as 'Law like love'.

## **Extract 4.6 Screen shot of Esme's blog post**

Like the comments from the students above (see Extracts 4.3 and 4.4), Esme's observations point to the tight connection between creativity and identity (see 2.3). In this particular case, W.H. Auden's poem, *Law like love* is used as a 'tool' or method of rich and complex engagement with herself, with other views and ways of seeing. Having helped her confront her deepest 'fears,' she is less concerned that the piece 'makes sense' to me, the teacher, because what matters most is that it 'adds up in [her] head.' Through studying poetry with other students in the Literature classroom, Esme is discovering new ways of seeing her place in her world. Years of 'mimicking' her parents' confident views had left her feeling 'weak and lost.' In her writing she 'wrests' the internalised dread of never knowing who she is, not being able to represent herself in an authentic, honest way, and leaving her unable to know what is 'wrong or right'.

I have saved Esme's note and her piece of writing in my special fabric patchwork pouch (a teaching glory box of sorts) as a constant reminder of how much creativity matters in English. I am amazed by the dichotomy between what Esme describes—the natural, ordinary humanity that is possible everyday in an English or Literature class and the constrained reality with limited spaces for this kind of identity exploration and development. William's view of creativity is dynamic, 'a whole and continuous process' (1961, 2001, p. 44), which, in the context of English, holds the possibility for new opportunities for learning and discovery. Esme's growing confidence in her ability to use language to articulate thoughts made by her, not 'someone else,' is an example of an 'everyday' creative activity that is distinctively human (Pope, 2005, p. 55).

Esme is not an isolated example, with many of the students reflecting on the personal and educational benefits of their creative experiences in English and Literature (see Extracts 4.5 and 4.10) However, they also seem acutely aware of the 'expiry date' on this kind of creativity, often ceasing with the requirements and constraining influence of the senior VCE English curriculum. Even as Esme asserts her own identity, as distinct from her parents' views and values, as a senior VCE English student, she is aware of both the official and unofficial rules of the 'VCE game'. These rules imply that 'you can't write [ideas] your own way [and] have to follow a way to write it'—typically provided by teachers trying to prepare students for success in the competitive, high-stakes

examinations which loom at the end of the final year of secondary school. Robbie also picks up the theme of shifting expectations in senior English in the conversation below where she reminisces with Veronica about a book review program from a previous year (see Extract 4.5). The book review task was related to their study of Mark Haddon's (2003) novel, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* (CIDN) which the girls studied in Year 9 English. My colleague Joe and I were interested in engaging with outside of school literacy practices of our students, whilst opening up different sorts of meaning making opportunities with Haddon's text. The students were asked to respond to the text by selecting one of the following options (see Appendix D for detailed task sheet):

- Create and publish a series of 10 Instagram posts
- Write and present an acceptance speech for the prize winning novel
- Compose and perform a musical interpretation, including lyrics
- Script and perform an episode of a book club show (inspired by ABC's First Tuesday Book Club) reviewing the text.

The students had the option of presenting their work live, or via video or audio recording. Here, Veronica and Robbie talk about why they decided to create a book club show in response to the task:

- |             |   |
|-------------|---|
| 1. Veronica | We always loved filming. Years 7, 8, 9 and 10. Whenever we could we filmed.   |
| 2. CS       | Do you still love filming?  |
| 3. R & V    | Yeah.   |
| 4. Veronica | But we never get to film anymore (both laugh)   |
| 5. Robbie   | And like it was a lot of fun...   |
| 6. Veronica | Yeah accents...we were so excited to do accents...  |
| 7. Robbie   | Yeah... It was so funny. But then obviously we still used the text and stuff. I suppose that's my point... if we were in Year 12 it probably would have been frowned upon because it looked like they're being silly and not taking the task seriously. I mean we worked just as hard as everyone else. |

**Extract 4.7**

Despite acknowledging that the task involved hard work and genuine learning, Robbie is aware their approach would have been 'frowned upon' in Year 12 for 'not taking the task seriously' or for having too much 'fun.' While she is realistic about having to let some of her creativity go, laughing with Veronica about 'never get[ing] to film anymore' I detected in her a longing for a treasured thing of the past. She's not the only one aware of what has had to be left behind as they approach Year 12, with most girls (and myself included) identifying limited opportunities for creativity in English. The next section takes a closer look at these senior years to explore a different part of the creativity problem, one rooted in the discord between the subjectivity and unpredictability of creativity, and the requirements of a standardised educational system that is designed to score and rank students on their performance.

#### **4.2 'So I think I'm creative in my mind but it's shut down by the curriculum'**

The title of this section is courtesy of Emma, a Year 10 student and focus group participant, who paints a blunt picture of the constrictive impact of the Secondary English curriculum on her creativity. As explored in the previous section (e.g. Extract 4.7), Emma's experience is not unique, with most students acknowledging the shrinking presence of creative tasks as they creep closer to the senior years. This section focuses on the VCE curriculum and how it shapes attitudes to creativity in all years of secondary English.

The timing of my research study coincided with a significant change to the VCE English curriculum – the removal of the former 'Context' study and introduction of a new study focus, titled 'Reading and comparing texts.' To simplify: the Context study offered VCE English students to option to write creatively in two of their internal assessment tasks *and* the externally assessed examination. Under the new study guide, only one internally assessed creative response task is offered, and students are required to complete *three* analysis essays in the Year 12 English examination. It is not my aim here to rehearse all the debates related to this particular aspect of the English curriculum, nor discuss the content specific details of the old and new areas of study in minute detail. What is useful in the context of my research is the discourse related to creative or 'imaginative' tasks in

English prompted by this curriculum and policy change, revealing the complex factors at play in the contested space for creativity in *senior* English in particular.

The removal of a creative writing option in the end of year senior examination seems to be reflecting, and strengthening, the already shifting focus away from creative practices and onto analytical skills in English (Doecke & Parr, 2005; Doecke et al., 2014). It seems paradoxical that at a time when schools and education commentators often espouse the value of resilience and risk taking (cf. Farrelly, et al., 2014; Locke, 2015), qualities integral to and emerging from creativity, that students are being steered away from developing and practicing these skills at the cusp of adulthood. Herein lies the trouble—creativity in English sounds great in theory (and in Years 7 to 9 when marks matter less), but at the high stakes, 'pointy end' of schooling, its inherent subjectivity and unpredictability render it impractical to teach, assess, and rank and it is therefore typically avoided.

From conversations with colleagues outside my school, and anecdotal evidence from teachers involved in various professional networks, it is quite clear that, in the main, students are being advised against writing in imaginative/creative modes for their English work (Box, 2015; Coulombe, 2014). One such conversation with my colleague, Joe, captures the unofficial, yet authoritative directives students often receive from their teachers about the 'safest' option for 'successful' results:

There is advice that students shouldn't um you know, do the sort of creative task in the exam... an authoritative voice... who says, you know, this isn't the way it should be done ... it's too risky, um, it's too subjective. It can go wrong, students shouldn't do it.

**Extract 4.8 Interview with Joe**

Joe's comments echo many other conversations I've had with colleagues over the years. The hesitancy around recommending that students write a creative piece is also reflected in various other places, including in professional discourse, despite no official statement in the VCAA Study Guide or advice from the Chief Assessor (Hillman, 2016). In the excerpt above, Joe pinpoints the trouble with creativity in high stakes testing: it's 'subjective' and 'risky,' things 'can go wrong' compared to an expository essay where a uniform formula

can apparently be taught, learned and assessed. The Head of Department (HOD) in my school, Donna, a central exam assessor for over 20 years, articulates the perceived problem of assessing creative tasks in VCE. In the following excerpt, in response to the curriculum changes, she noted:

I think it's good because we weren't comparing apples with apples. It's very difficult to compare a creative piece in all its glory with a high soaring analytical... expository piece. So, I think that's why [the curriculum change] has been done and I agree with that.

**Extract 4.9 Interview with Donna**

Donna identifies the issue as being the unreliability of comparing different styles and forms of writing, and agrees the change was needed to ensure uniform assessment of 'apples with apples.' She elaborates, in our discussion below, on her reluctance to recommend the creative task in VCE examinations because 'it's a bit subjective' in comparison to the analysis essay, which is more likely to 'get the best result' for the student:

1. CS            Would you recommend creative pieces for any students? At the moment, while the curriculum is still like that.
2. Donna        No, no.
3. CS            Nah? Having been an English exam assessor yourself?
4. Donna        Yeah, because as much as there's criteria [for assessing imaginary exam writing] it's still a bit subjective. So that a student who's been able to really develop that idea and support it and give evidence, and all of those bells and whistles, it's a bit difficult to compare it to someone who's got a beautiful metaphor here or there.
5. CS            So you're thinking in a practical way? How to support the students, to get the best result?
6. Donna        Yeah

**Extract 4.10 Interview with Donna**

Donna's response to my questions highlight a contentious issue for teachers of senior English: the tension between supporting students to get the 'best results' in VCE and

honouring their individual voice and passion, or as Williams might say, helping them 'communicate successfully' (1961, p. 43). As a teacher of Year 12 English, I am often conflicted between encouraging students to choose a direction that is meaningful for them (and myself) that may be risky or unpredictable, and my obligations to prepare them for their outcomes and external examination so they achieve their desired study score.

Significantly and unsurprisingly, students also reflected on these tensions about the writing of creative and analytical pieces (see Extracts 4.2 and 4.4). The following comments by Michelle and Esme echo the view that the expository essay is the 'right way' for the task 'to be done' revealing how teachers' anxiety about recommending or setting creative writing tasks is taken on by students as an unofficial rule against creative writing in the senior years. The message, as repeated by Esme here, is that students 'won't get full marks' with the imaginative form, reiterating Joe's observation earlier, that 'it's too risky':

1. Michelle      Like, even though I hate essays, I do them because I just feel there's a right way to do something and I think, that in creative, I feel I can lose a lot of things I could put in an essay... Even though I do enjoy doing creative pieces, I'd rather pick an essay because I feel like there's a right way and that's how it has to be done...blah blah blah...
2. CS              Do you feel you have been advised not to do choose the imaginative form [in Context]?
3. Esme            She says if you do you won't get full marks.

**Extract 4.11**

There is a heavy message in Michelle's throwaway comment about her writing for the Context task. She 'hates essays', but the relative safety of knowing there's a 'right way', not only overrides her distaste for essays, but also the potential joy of the creative alternative. She seems to be parroting the bland nothingness of an authoritarian voice with her childish insolence ('blah blah blah...') gently mocking the way 'it has to be done'. Furthermore, her words here suggest she has narrowed her focus on getting the task done the way she has been told, knowing she has little chance of seeing any change in the situation. To contextualise her remarks, the excerpt below is from earlier in the same focus group where she describes her choice to write and perform a song for the CIDN creative task (see section 4.1) as an inspired 'why not' moment:

1. Michelle I just was kind of like, it's new, it's a new project, everyone's kind of just going out, so why not, let's just do a song...(laughs)...I think I've never done anything like that... usually I go for the safe option.
2. CS What would you have usually gone for?
3. Michelle Like, I don't know... Now I go with the expository essay rather than a creative piece. Like I go with the sub-standard... like normal
4. CS Substandard? Or more traditional?
5. Michelle Yeah more traditional. Um, I remember just being like "why not!"
6. CS Did that feel good, doing the "why not?" Like throwing caution to the wind? (laughs)
7. Michelle Yeah it was (laughs).

**Extract 4.12**

Despite her fond memories of Year 9 English, the requirements of the senior curriculum seem to be an increasingly dominant force in shaping Michelle's thinking. While she is able to vividly recall the vitality of her earlier creative process, there's an equally frank resignation of the need to suppress the 'creative side' of herself in Year 12 English. Michelle and her friends obediently follow their teacher's advice to write an expository essay over a hybrid or creative option for the Context task. The message is very clear—although creativity can be more fulfilling, it is the analytical essay that is most valued in senior English. The language used by Michelle to describe her essay choice as 'sub-standard,' is perhaps unintentional, yet particularly telling in terms of what students are sacrificing for 'success' in an environment of high stakes curriculum. This sentiment is reiterated by other participants, such as Hannah, who has herself noticed the curriculum focus moving away from creative tasks to analysis in Year 10 English:

I feel like in Year 10 we're not really discussing creative aspects. We're doing analysis, language analysis, analysing Macbeth. We didn't really do many creative tasks or things you'd phrase as creative tasks.

**Extract 4.13**

This perception is shared by a colleague, Noni, who, while she currently teaches English in Years 7 to 9 is acutely aware of the skills her students will need to demonstrate in the senior levels:

I actually feel a little bit threatened in moving that creativity to the next step, because I know at the end of the time in Year 12 they have to write these analytical essays and I'm not sure how to transition between the creativity and the analysis part.

**Extract 4.14 Interview with Noni**

Her concerns are soon to become more pertinent, with teachers at professional learning seminars across the state seeking advice on how to 'short-cut' the one remaining creative task in VCE English so they can concentrate on preparing their students for analysis essays (Box, 2015).

However, despite this challenging state of affairs in senior secondary English in Victoria, I want to think differently about my own teaching and my own response to these narrowing and standardising measures, policies and practices. Just because the creative option has been formally 'taken away' (arguably, an implied policy statement on its 'sub-standard' pedagogical value, or just a matter of end of year exam marking convenience), opportunities for creativity and creative practice still remain. My data, such as Esme's personal observations, and Robbie and Veronica's reflections on creativity in Year 9, tells of students thriving when they are given the opportunity to use a text as a source of rich and complex engagement with different experiences and voices previously unknown to them. The potential for creativity does not merely lie within explicit creative tasks, but in all aspects of the 'enacted' English curriculum, where through 'meaningful communication' (Barnes, 1976, p. 14) students are able to 'exceed the expectations that might be spelt out in a lesson plan or syllabus' (Doecke et al., 2014, p. 13). The following section explores this notion further, and while acknowledging the additional challenges of senior English, attempts to show how teachers and students can together negotiate opportunities for this kind of 'ordinary' creative work in the English classroom. Here, I envision a dynamic space for 're-making' that is not subject to fickle policy trends, but embedded into to the 'enacted' Secondary English curriculum.

### 4.3 Creativity as 'remaking' in the 'enacted' curriculum

In this section, I draw on a range of data to present a multi-voiced and nuanced perspective on a kind of creativity that transcends the limitations of the 'intended' English curriculum (see 4.2). Here, I present an approach to English teaching and learning grounded in Barnes' vision of an 'enacted' curriculum (see 2.3) through exploring what it means to work this way with my own students.

I begin with an excerpt from my critical autobiographical narrative, entitled, 'Yandell's article made me think' posted on the *stella2.0* website and subsequently reproduced elsewhere (Parr & Bulfin, 2014). *Stella2.0* is a partnership project between Monash and Deakin Universities and the Victorian Association for the Teaching of English (VATE) seeking to 're-imagine the professional learning possibilities of English teachers' and teacher educators' professional writing and professional conversation by creating social, collegial spaces ... to meet together and critically and personally engage with issues in English education' (Parr & Bulfin, 2014, p. 56). The narrative was written in response to a reading from the project (Yandell, 2012) that resonated with my 'grappling' (Pope, 2005, p. 11) thoughts at the time (see Chapter Five). The excerpt describes a single lesson I had taught only three weeks into my first proper teaching job with my own class, where I offered students the option of a text response task to CIDN involving the creation of an Instagram feed (see 4.1 for overview of task).

They were buzzing like bees and the classroom was a crazy hub of activity... To be honest, I had my doubts whether this task would lead to anything meaningful, both in process and outcome. The girls were passing phones around, feet on desks, some lying about on the floor. Fun was certainly happening in this mish mash of a space—something between a café, teenage bedroom and classroom—but was there any learning (or any work at all for that matter) going on?

Well, as they say, the proof in the pudding is in the eating, and I was overwhelmed by what these girls produced. Even students who had been struggling with English, found a 'way in' to engage with [the book's main character] Christopher and they went even further, creating a new version of his story with the familiarity of social media, resembling what Yandell describes as text being "remade, in the readers' interests" (2012, p. 54). What really amazed me is the girls had created new fictional users to represent the other main characters in the novel - the mother, father and teacher - and involved them in an interactive dialogue on Instagram. At no stage did I make this suggestion... Going back to the chaotic 'look' and 'feel' of

those classes, I realise the success of this activity was not just about connections with these girls' out of school literacy lives, but quite simply about having space to play. My instinct was to let things be loose enough to afford the girls the freedom to experiment and muck around, without self-consciousness or fear of getting it 'wrong'.

**Extract 4.15 'Yandell made me think...'**

The imagery I use to make sense of this English classroom—'something between a café, teenage bedroom and classroom'—is not the picture one would expect of a Year 9 English class at a private inner suburban girls' school. To be honest, I was grappling to make sense of this space myself as it unfolded from the 'known' (what I intended in advance) to the 'unknown' (what the students did with that space). Where I describe my 'instinct' to 'let things be loose enough', it is only a half truth, as my decisions are equally guided by literature and theory—in this case, the words and ideas of John Yandell and more broadly, Barnes' 'enacted' curriculum together with Williams' dynamic notion of creativity—where through opportunities for imagination and play, students (and teachers) exceed possibilities limited by a lesson plan or syllabus. I begin with a simile of the students 'buzzing like bees' to capture the distinct character of the 'crazy hub of activity' and rich social interactions amid the classroom 'chaos'. Rather than a state of disorder, the hubbub generated in the room can more productively be seen as 'pre-order' (Pope, 2005, p. 123) where the students are somewhere in 'the middle' (Pope, 2005, p. xv) of 'rema[king]' Haddon's text as a story told via Instagram. When reflecting on their creative process, the students alluded to the important balance between structure and chaos—'set[ing] out knowing what [they] were doing' with a preparedness to play around and 'fail'. Rather than perceiving chaos as disorder or in 'some absolutely negative sense,' (p. 123) the students seem to have picked up on my instinctive trust in the 'chaotic' classroom and the value of 'imagination and play [and] entertaining possibilities that exceed the present moment' (van de Ven & Doecke, 2011, p. 18) for enhancing the quality of their thinking and work in English.

My decision to focus on the CIDN text response task, and my close observations of this lesson is motivated by a 'methodological commitment to the particular'—a belief that through close inquiry into the specificity of my classroom, the benefits of this pedagogical practice can be better understood. In the following section, I draw on observations arising

from two student responses to the CIDN task—first, storytelling via social media, and second, music and lyrical composition—to illustrate how 'the freedom to experiment and muck around' lead to a collaborative 'rema[king]' of Haddon's text in the students' 'interests'.

*'Re[making]' via storytelling on Instagram.*

Below are two samples of work produced by Harriet and Clementine for the Instagram task that I showed them in the focus group meeting. In the transcript included below (see Extract 4.14) they reflect on the creative process, swiftly transported themselves back to a time, where more than 18 months earlier, they interacted with Haddon's text to create a story of their own via Instagram.

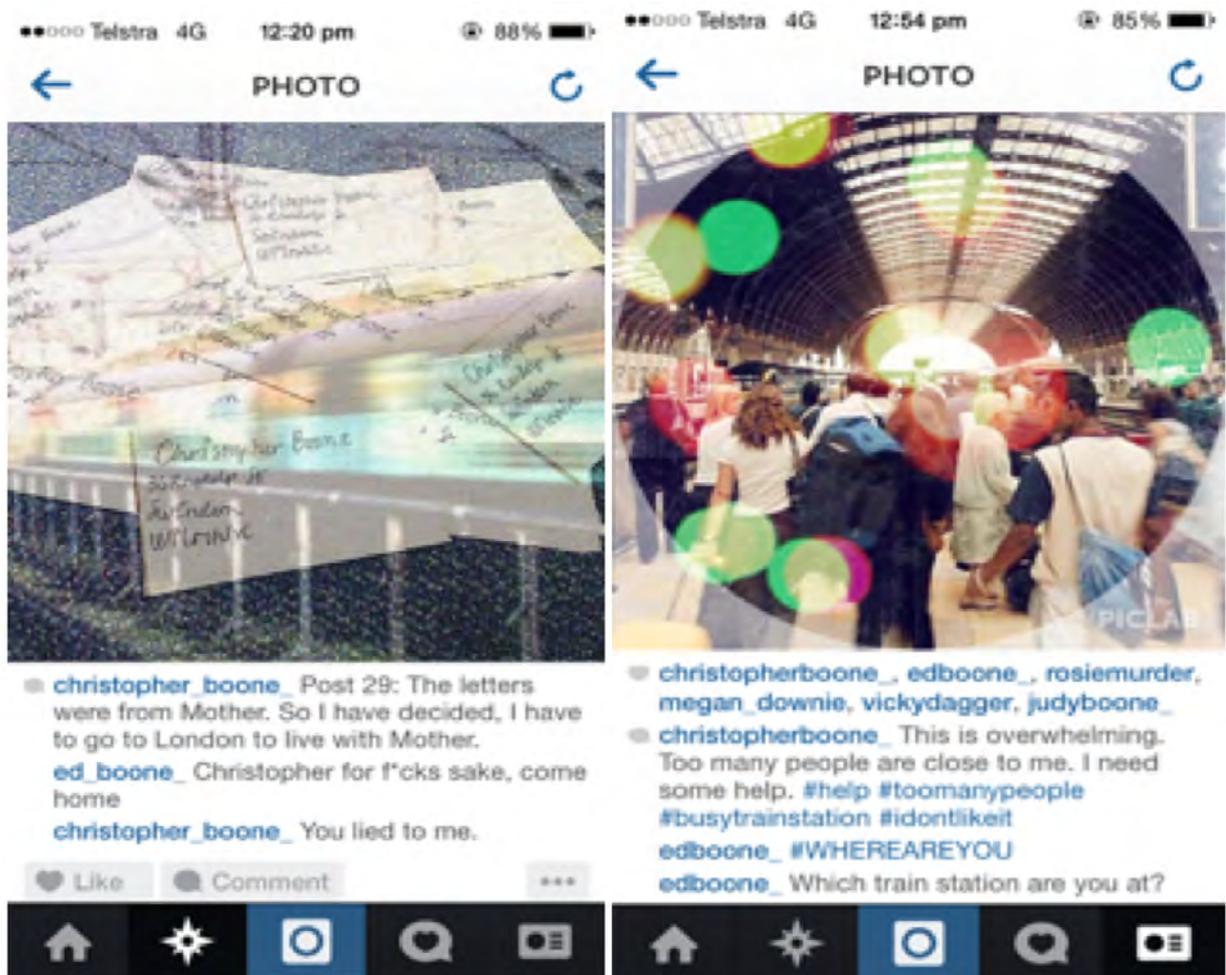


Figure 4.1 Sample Instagram posts by Harriet and Clementine

*Reimagining creativity in the 'enacted' English curriculum*

1. CS I have some examples to trigger your memory... Can you talk to me about the technique here?
2. Clementine I made that one!
3. Harriet Clementine wrote...
4. Clementine I wrote them all...
5. Harriet and then I positioned them on my carpet...no, it was the school one...
6. Clementine It was the school carpet (laughs)
7. Miranda yeah, that's not your carpet...
8. Harriet um the background images...
9. Clementine oh we found the signature of Christopher Boone written by the mother and we tried to copy that and do the same writing but it failed...
10. Harriet Clementine did amazing...the two main things we wanted to pull out were the train and the letters and it's like the letters which are predominantly in the foreground are kind of what caused him to get on the train...
11. CS How did you do this overlay?
12. Harriet I downloaded a few Apps and mucked around with the editing...it was pretty much a trial and error of what worked and what looked effective...
13. Clementine We used different Apps for different...what we were trying to do...like we tried one App and that worked really well but then we wanted to do this overlay thing and we started overlaying lots of other images...
15. Harriet It was something we worked with a lot, the overlaying...
14. CS So in terms of time, effort...
15. Clementine It was really fun so it didn't seem like effort...like and you know, we did the photos and went out, walked up to 7 Eleven and got a Slurpee and just chilled and a good fun day and now let's just take some photos for our project and load them up...
16. Harriet The thing is we actually set out knowing what we were doing so... if I had no idea what we were doing it would have been a lot more difficult.

**Extract 4.16**

The animated style in which they recount their experience, such as Clementine's 'I made that one!' and Harriet's 'Clementine wrote... and then I positioned them on my carpet' depicts the collaborative and sociable spirit of their creative process. Perhaps Harriet's mistaken recollection of laying the photos on her own carpet subconsciously reveals her awareness of having blurred the lines between her 'out of school literacy li[fe]' and the English classroom? In any case, Harriet's description of her technical editing process as 'muck[ing] around' and 'trial and error' convey the playful and experimental approach to achieving their creative vision. Similarly, Clementine's retelling of their 'fun' productive day that 'didn't seem like effort' – walking up to '7 Eleven and [getting] a Slurpee' and 'chill[ing]' in between taking 'photos' and 'load[ing] them up'—resonates with the social interactions happening in the 'mish mash' space of our classroom.

For these girls, like others, this task seemed to offer a 'way in' to meaningfully engage with the characters and narrative of the text— a process that Yandell (2012) describes as a text being 'remade, in the readers' interests' (p. 54), in this case, a photographic text. When reflecting on her creative decisions, Harriet identifies the two key textual elements — 'the train and the letters' and mirrors the narrative in her image by choosing to place the letters 'predominantly in the foreground [because they] are kind of what caused [Christopher] to get on the train'. Later in the interview, Harriet reflects on how the process of creating these Instagram posts required them to go 'really [deeply] into Christopher,' with Clementine adding that this detailed understanding helped her writing because she 'could understand his voice and his point of view.' Observations like these support the pedagogical value of this kind of creativity where students, through bringing something of themselves to their reading of the text, are able to access 'language, thought and feelings that might otherwise have seemed fairly remote from them' (Yandell, 2012, p. 54).

#### *'Rem[aking]' via musical composition and performance*

While the Instagram option was a popular choice, some students, like Maude, Kat and Eloise, chose to draw on their confidence as musicians to compose and perform an original musical score and lyrics in response to the text. Here, they explain the why, what and how of their creative process with this task:

1. CS            When you first received the task, what was your first reaction?
2. Kat            I didn't really know what I was going to do. Me, Maude & Eloise wanted to be a group and then we thought what can we do to play to all of our strengths and this was the most logical.
3. CS            How long did it take you to compose an original piece of music that thematically responded to the text, write lyrics...and then actually perform it...Can you talk me through the process?
4. Maude        Well, us musicians and musicians in generally are really used to doing this kind of thing.
5. Kat            Yeah...
6. Maude        We learn how to write music and when we get it we learn how to interpret it and make it our own. So, when we first got this task, it's obviously a very personal thing to do something creative, but we just stuck to what we knew best, and as Kat said, we drew on all of our strengths. Kat played the piano and I played my violin and even though Eloise wasn't very comfortable with singing, knowing it would make the whole presentation better, she did it and it actually turned out to be a really good experience for her.

**Extract 4.17**

Maude and Kat's conversation resonates with what I think Williams meant by creativity as the human need to 'describe [her] experience'—because it is through the language of music that these girls were able to 'communicate successfully' their own understanding of that novel and its characters. Maude elaborates below on what I interpret as the creativity in her everyday life, on this occasion being channeled to engage with Haddon's novel. It follows with an excerpt of the musical composition and lyrics created by the group.

1. Maude        When we were reading the text and I don't know about other people...but I find that I have this kind of humming noise in my head and it sort of matches the tone of the story.
2. CS            Especially with that text or everything?
3. Maude        With everything really... (laughter).

**Extract 4.18**

**Curious incident**

Ella Perlen Kira Maher and Marla Kennedy

Piano

The Cu - ri - ous in - ci - dent of - the dog in the

Pno.

9 Night - time A dog on the ground with a fork in its side. A

Pno.

13 boy finds the dog and can't fi - gure out, the cause or the cul - prit; Such a

**Figure 4.2** Excerpt from musical composition

When I interviewed the school's Music Head of Department, she was not only astounded by the professional quality of their work but the resonance with the tone and mood of the original text. For Kat and Maude, music is a powerful way in which they make meaning of the world, so together with Eloise, each of the girls 'le[ft] their mark on the text' (Yandell, 2012) by contributing their specific musical interest to their collective remaking of the text. It is a shame I was unable to include Eloise in the focus group conversation. While she brought her keen interest in writing lyrics to the project, unlike Kat and Maude, she was uncomfortable taking on a performance role, yet did it anyway

to support her friends and see their vision through to fruition. In her, I observed what Williams would describe as 'remaking' of how we see ourselves and the world around us (1977, p. 212) where through challenging her self-perception as a reserved 'non-performer', she discovered that she had the ability to not only carry the performance but channel the mood of Haddon's text in her sensitive delivery.



In this chapter, I have presented a range of student voices, filtered through my own, to explore what creativity looks like (and has the potential to look like) in the English classroom. While the participants' experiences and observations were varied, there was a common recognition of creativity as something deeply personal *and* social in nature— involving 'a grappling deep within the self and [its] relations with others' (Pope, 2005, p. 11). The next chapter shifts the focus to my teacher colleagues, who like their students, 'wrest' with issues around creativity, be it in relation to the English curriculum, their pedagogical approach, or through negotiating their role and identity within a profession increasingly organised according to centrally prescribed standards and learning outcomes.

## CHAPTER 5

### IS EVERYDAY CREATIVITY IN ENGLISH TEACHING SIMPLY A REFLEXIVE CRITICAL APPROACH TO PROFESSIONAL LIFE AND BEING A GOOD TEACHER?

Apart from obvious differences in age and life experience, the position of teachers and students in schools is quite similar. The expectations on teachers to help students meet and exceed standards (e.g. VCE study scores, NAPLAN results) and to satisfy the requirements of a narrow, crowded curriculum are analogous to many of the pressures experienced by students to succeed academically in those same institutions. Teachers and students also face similar challenges with respect to their institutional identities (as 'teachers' and 'students') as they negotiate externally imposed pressures to conform to particular values and 'ways of knowing and doing'—what makes a 'good' student or 'successful' teacher, for instance. While students are expected to engage with an imposed, externally developed curriculum, teachers increasingly find themselves bound by externally imposed standards and accountability measures, devised by others and imposed on them.

My analysis of data generated from interviews and conversations with colleagues, and in more informal staff room discussions, suggests that, within these difficult conditions, it isn't easy for English teachers to embrace creativity within their professional practice. While a variety of reasons were given by teachers in this study, the shrinking space for a reflexive critical approach to professional life (together with colleagues) was a common factor. Paradoxically, while there is a growing body of research that suggests teachers, like students, learn and construct knowledge through collaborative, dialogic means (e.g. Doecke, Brown & Loughran, 2000), the way many schools and classrooms are organised means there are often few opportunities for this kind of learning in welcoming and

relatively open 'discursive spaces' (Bulfin & Mathews, 2003) and through 'authentic conversation' (Clark, 2001).

Taking up these issues, this chapter explores the connection between creativity, teacher learning, and professional identity. Where Chapter Four focused on the experiences of students, this chapter examines what it is like for teachers working within an educational culture which places utmost value on quantifiable learning outcomes, pushing aside creative practices as non-essential, or at best seeing them as a 'luxury'. I argue that for teachers to become better at what they do (and happier doing it), they need to grapple with the complexities of their work through opening themselves up to unexpected creative possibilities (Parr & Bulfin, 2014), as daunting as this can often be. In Chapter Four I explored examples of how everyday creativity is reflected in my work with students as we negotiate curriculum and life in classrooms together. Here, the analysis focuses on my relationships with colleagues as we negotiate quite different beliefs about English teaching.

The chapter is organised in four sections to reflect the different dimensions emerging from the data relating to the dialogic relationship between creativity, professional learning and professional identity. In the first section (see 5.1), I return to an excerpt from an earlier critical autobiographical narrative (see Extract 4.15) in order to highlight dimensions of my professional learning—both in and around this classroom experience—enacted together with my students and colleague, Joe. The second section (see 5.2) explores why a creative approach to teaching and professional learning was challenging for some of my English teaching colleagues, as opposed to colleagues in the creative arts subjects. In the third section (5.3), I return to my collaboration with Joe—this time focusing on our professional learning outside our school context through involvement in two professional learning 'networks': *stella2.0* (see 5.3) and the Monash English Reading/Writing Group. Finally, section four (5.4) returns to the everyday difficulties in my professional life at school and within my faculty. Despite experiencing the value of taking creative risks in my own classroom and 'learning to become, creatively' (Parr & Bulfin, 2014) with Joe, my confidence as a teacher is sometimes shaken by the dominant

discourses in my workplace and pressures to conform to others' ideals about 'effective' or productive teaching practice.

### 5.1 Professional learning understood and experienced creatively

As described in Chapter Four, I wrote the narrative 'Yandell's article made me think' (see Extract 4.15) during my participation in *stella2.0* and only three weeks into my first 'proper teaching job with my own students.' At the time, I remember feeling a sense of trepidation, unsure of the unspoken 'rules' and expectations of a new school, English Faculty and students. Fortunately, I found myself in a faculty with a colleague who shared my enthusiasm for doing things 'differently' and from our first meeting we began building a solid friendship—we seemed to understand where the other was coming from and quickly established a reflective conversation about our work, questioning the value of the syllabus we had inherited and encouraging each other to take creative risks in our teaching and curriculum work. This narrative is significant for me because it represents a first key classroom moment where through the writing of the narrative, as well as the 'doing' represented in the narrative itself, I learned something of the value of taking creative risks, not only for my students, but for my own professional practice.

Reflecting back on those first weeks in my teaching life, I certainly had my 'doubts'—I feared the assistant principal would walk by, take one glance 'at the chaotic look and feel' of my class and fire me on the spot, and, the whole time I wondered whether any real 'learning was going on' in this 'mish mash of a space', or were the girls reveling in the playtime and 'let[ting] it all hang out' (Pope, 2005, p. 23) without concern for the task criteria. Despite these concerns, I was compelled to take that risk because doing so felt like an honest expression of my creative pedagogical vision—one that was still nascent, but that had been nurtured during my teacher education program. My approach at the time was grounded in the importance of play and social interaction, and drew on the critical-analytical work I had engaged with during my teacher education program (e.g. Vygotsky, 1978; Yandell, 2012). Yandell's ideas and his particular words, having attended a seminar run by him earlier in that year, had given me a 'kind of sustenance and focus'

(Parr & Bulfin, 2014, p. 63) which, together with Joe's collegial support, fueled my vision and desire to do something different in that particular English unit.

Furthermore, the writing process itself, as well as being involved in the *stella2.0* project and community (see 5.3), provided a rich experience of professional learning which transferred to my everyday teaching life. This experience included: regular engagement in formal and informal discussions with colleagues beyond my school, critical reading, journaling, email exchanges and focused narrative-based writing (cf. Bellis, 2014; Gannon, 2012; Parr and Bulfin, 2015). Compared to the professional learning activities mandated by my school in compliance with national and state teaching standards (e.g. VIT 2016; AITSL, 2012), the 'professional development' that Joe and I enacted in our work together was embedded in our practice, and in the social interactions with our students and colleagues in the classroom and staffroom. Later that year, Joe and I were given the opportunity to share our experience of creative and collaborative professional learning with Monash University English Education students in a guest lecture. Our aim in this lecture was to show how our informal learning as colleagues provided a counterpoint to the kinds of professional learning often offered by schools and commercial providers, driven as it often is by concerns about productivity and measurable outcomes. In our guest lecture to final year English education students we tried to open a space for conversation about the complexity of educational work. Figure 5.1 is a screen shot from the lecture where we juxtaposed an application Joe had been writing for full accreditation with the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT), with anecdotes from our rich experience with *stella2.0*.



Figure 5.1 Comparing the VIT process and *stella2.0*

It was not our intention in that lecture, nor is my intention now, to glamorise the kind of creative work Joe and I were doing in the Year 9 Instagram task (see Extract 4.15), for it was in equal measures messy, uncertain and with moments of hope that were difficult to grasp. Without the support of a colleague who shares a desire to grapple with the complexities of our work and continues to ask, 'what's the point?' I doubt I would have been brave enough to even try 'something new and original' (Parr & Bulfin, 2014, p. 65), particularly as a 'fresh' graduate in a new school. More significant perhaps is the way the Instagram task (and the writing, conversations and reflections around it) gave us both the confidence to continue to take more creative risks in our teaching together in the week, months and years that have followed. As a result, Joe and I have created a degree of professional space and freedom to regularly enact, together with our students, a different kind of classroom culture to that which typically prevails at our school; a culture which, inspired by Boomer and others (Boomer, Lester, Onore & Cook, 1992), I am confident, has opened up creative possibilities in English, at least some of the time.

Our collaborative and negotiated approach to professional learning in the 'ordinary' and everyday of our work, has helped us develop broader perspectives about the importance of creativity and its role in English classrooms. These perspectives continue to inform our developing practice. The extract below is taken from a comment Joe posted on the *stella2.0* forum, in response to my narrative piece on *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* (CIDN) creative task. Joe reflects on our collaborative, dialogic approach to professional learning where, through careful examination of our practices together, we have gained a better understanding of what worked, what didn't, and the unpredictability of the English classroom. Joe reflects:

Working on the CIDN task with Chanie, one of the most interesting things for me was the unintended consequence of a seemingly minor provision to the task. While students in both classes signed up or signed in to Instagram or Twitter, to view the models we linked to, only Chanie's students actually completed their tasks online. All students were completing individual responses, but for those that were completed online, students began to comment on others' accounts, and a conversation was begun. For some in her group, this social element was vital to the success of the task, with students undertaking much more than was asked of them. None of the students in my own group entered into this sort of online conversation, and, reflecting on the task with my own group, I realised that I'd asked for a paper copy of their final work to be submitted for assessment at the end, whether or not it was completed online. (Chanie, in contrast, was happy to review their work online to assess it.) Since all the students in my group who chose this option would have to submit a paper copy in the end anyway, they all created their responses individually, on paper or in digital documents- not in the virtual space we'd anticipated, and without entering into the type of conversation Chanie's students began. While it would have been possible for students to "comment" on others work on paper, it isn't a practice students associate with their work in that medium- it comes much more naturally to them online. It's not enough to include a tokenistic "social media" option for responding. In setting up this task for the students, I needed to keep sight of a much bigger possible benefit of giving such an option: allowing the natural social impulses of the students to enrich their responses.

**Extract 5.1 Joe's comment posted on the *stella2.0* forum.**

A feature of our professional conversations has always been a willingness to question the effectiveness of our teaching and learn from each other's experiences. In this example, while the task worked better as a digital text, this was not something I had 'predicted in advance' (Pope, 2005, p. 11) or knew from the outset. Joe and I were so focused on the task itself, that, out of inexperience perhaps, we had skipped over the details of how

student work would be submitted. As the mode was not stipulated on the task sheet given to students, it was a spontaneous decision we both made on the spot in the hustle and bustle of classroom activity. At the time, neither of us gave it much thought, nor mentioned it to the other. It was only weeks later, through sharing our different experiences with the same task as we were assessing the work, that we were able to make sense of what had happened in our classrooms. While Joe wished in hindsight that he had given his students the opportunity to submit a digital text, he did not regret the decision, nor did he feel sensitive about discussing the limitations of the approach that he had taken. For us, our shared professional learning is not only about demonstrating our competence according to the VIT standards (see Figure 5.1), or finding answers or quick solutions. Rather, through our ongoing professional dialogue, we find comfort in the unpredictability and provisionality of our work, and being open to further possibilities to 'grasp the known' in order to step into the 'unknown' (Williams, 1977, p. 212). In doing so, we are seeking to become responsive English teachers (Parr et al., 2015) who are attuned to our own needs, and those of our colleagues and students as we negotiate our work.

## 5.2 Grappling with the 'unknown'

While my relationship with Joe has been critical in my developing a more confident professional identity as a particular kind of English educator, I was interested to hear what other teachers in my school felt about their own professional identities and the role (if any) creativity had to play in these. As mentioned earlier, mine and Joe's willingness to grapple with the sorts of complexities and challenges described above is rarely shared by other English teachers in the school for a range of reasons. But Joe and I have found other allies outside of the English Faculty. In this section, I describe and contrast the views of both our English colleagues and others from the performing arts area.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, data generated through interviews with colleagues in the Arts—Cleo, Head of Drama, and Judy, Head of Music—suggested a strong link between creativity and both their personal, and professional, identities. Both Cleo and Judy expressed the connection between creativity and their identities as teachers of the Arts

as simply 'who they are,' without any separation between school and outside of school life. Judy believed the richest learning experiences (for her and her students) came from having the 'freedom to explore and play'. Similarly, Cleo liked the 'idea of doing something different' in the classroom and not always knowing how to go about it, because 'that's where the teaching happens'. In the extract below, Cleo, when asked if she ever felt concerned about her professional reputation within the school, expressed her unwavering commitment to her particular approach to risk taking in the classroom:

1. Cleo            Oh I don't care what other people think.
2. CS             Yeah?
3. Cleo            I'd like to see them try and challenge me.
4. CS             Yeah.
5. Cleo            Go for it... yeah, go for it, have a crack. I'd like to see you try. Because the research is there, the evidence is there and the results are there.

**Extract 5.2 Cleo interview**

Like Joe, Cleo was also critical of the artificiality and ineffectiveness of 'mainstream' professional development, where even a topic that is 'apparently interesting [is] delivered in the most didactic, boring, dull kind of way'. Further, she felt that the majority of teachers in her experience (like the students in 4.1) find creativity intimidating. She was acutely aware that many teachers are afraid of appearing 'vulnerable' or 'losing control of the classroom' and as a result 'play it safe'. Putting the benefits to teachers' professional learning and job satisfaction aside, Cleo's observations raise an important question: how can teachers expect their students to become more confident taking creative risks if they are unsure about taking risks themselves? Cleo believes that teachers, like their students, need space and time to be creative and most importantly 'need to be trained' through being in the classroom 'watching this stuff happen.' Unlike a one-hour professional development session, practical learning that involves observation, discussion, reflection, experimentation and practice is not easy to get off the ground. It takes time and sometimes courage, and can depend on faculty and school support.

Compared to colleagues in the creative arts subjects, my English colleagues explicitly acknowledged the barriers—both in their classroom practice and ongoing professional learning—to creativity in their work. While my music and drama colleagues identified creativity as closely linked to their personal and professional identities, for the English teachers I interviewed there was a more complex relationship with creativity. For example, my colleague, Noni, expressed a disconnect between her identity as a creative person at home or 'in the garden' and the teacher at school. While she wishes she used her creativity better in the classroom, she admits being conditioned by how she 'learnt to be a teacher' and a myriad of factors in her daily professional life, such as: time pressure, regulated assessment requirements and the 'looming giant of the VCE'. Noni's observations are consistent with the responses from other English teachers interviewed at the school (e.g. Jackie and Joe) and informal conversations with other colleagues. The pressures she alludes to—such as juggling heavy teaching loads, a packed curricula and preparing students for Senior English—have been widely documented as contributing to a shrinking space for creativity for both teachers and their students (e.g. Bulfin & Mathews, 2003; Parr & Doecke, 2012).

While the constraints of a curriculum increasingly focused on analysis skills and rote literacy, is one of the significant factors in the shrinking space for creativity (e.g. Doecke et al., 2014) the data generated from my interviews with colleagues revealed additional reasons why teachers of English may be feeling pressure to 'play by the rules'. Other factors included faculty culture, pressures on both teachers and students to achieve exemplary academic results, judgments about English, and personal identity. These are just some of many concerns that may be weighing on English teachers' minds as they try to negotiate the complexities of their work. I continue to explore why some English teachers may be resistant to try 'something new and original' (Parr & Bulfin, 2014, p. 65), even by someone like Jackie, a colleague who professes to 'love the creative side' of teaching. Here, she is candid about her initial reaction to the CIDN task and her discomfort at working in an unfamiliar mode:

1. Jackie            I remember one of the earlier discussions that we had when you raised [the task] and I remember Kathryn saying, 'can't we just get them to write a paragraph' (both laugh). It was really funny and I was kind of like 'a paragraph would do the job just as well,' but I loved the creative side and that's what I've always loved... But these are girls more comfortable with tech than I am and that was my first thought when you mentioned it, Instagram, I thought oh my god...
2. CS                To be honest, did you feel a little bit threatened by that, or not threatened, but a bit itchy or a bit uncomfortable because it was...
3. Jackie            Well, I'm a control...I like to be in control and I think that, you know, particularly with the Instagram task
4. CS                Yeah
5. Jackie            Um, my thought was, oh my god, what if they come, my fear
6. CS                Yeah
7. Jackie            was they would come to me and say Ms D, 'We don't know how to do it'
8. CS                Yeah
9. Jackie            and I would have to say to them 'I have no idea at all' (both laugh).

**Extract 5.4 Jackie interview**

Reflecting on the task, Jackie is able to laugh here about feeling vulnerable working with an unfamiliar mode and be honest about her discomfort at admitting to students she 'ha[d] no idea at all' about Instagram. Her jovial tone reflects her appreciation of the value of taking creative risks as a teacher, and her willingness to be open to experimenting with something new. That said, she still admits that from her perspective, even if jokingly, that 'a paragraph would [have done] the job just as well'. She felt that on the whole, the work submitted was 'creative [but] didn't have much of the English bit' because too many students chose Instagram as the 'easier' option, and 'more often than not' just copied the colloquial and offensive language from the novel at the expense of demonstrating 'proper' English skills. On one hand, I acknowledge her point—there were students who short cut the task, with quick screen shots and simply inserting quotes from the text as hashtags. On the other hand, there were students who had been struggling with English, yet through this task, found a 'way in' to engage with the book's protagonist,

creating a new version of his story with the familiarity of social media, exceeding both their own expectations and mine. Some even created fictional users to represent other characters in the novel, involving them in an interactive dialogue on Instagram, resembling what Yandell describes as texts being 'remade, in the readers' interests' (2012, p. 54).

Jackie's reflections on the CIDN task reveal the competing tensions between her desire to instill a 'love for English' and be 'more creative,' with the pressures to comply with dominant notions of what 'good' English teaching and 'proper' rigorous assessment looks like. In this case, while she acknowledged creativity was happening, she believed the Instagram task lacked rigor because there was not enough evidence of English skills in the final submissions. Jackie's comments represent what seems to be the norm in English teaching within the current policy environment, to focus on 'final drafts' (Barnes, 1976, p. 114) and 'outcomes' with little acknowledgement of the pedagogical value in the creative process along the way. Judy touches on a similar issue in her music teaching, where she struggles to find enough time for creativity within the constraints of the school system because 'ultimately [the school, parents and students] want product.' However, unlike her English counterparts, she expresses an unwavering resolve and confidence to resist those institutional pressures and ensure there is always time for her and her students to 'explore' through improvisation and play and trusts that the 'results will come.' For English teachers, the difficulties in creating opportunities such as these, for meaningful engagement with a text are magnified in the senior years, when teachers are expected to do everything possible to prepare their students for assessable outcomes and examinations. While Jackie admits she had the courage to challenge the directive of our Head of Department (HOD) who 'doesn't like creativity,' and diverge from the official English syllabus in Year 9, she 'backed off completely' when her attempts to get more creativity into the Year 11 program were rejected. Despite her desire to develop in her students, 'a love of English', the more powerful motivator in senior English is 'to get [her] students... good grades' through 'working to outcomes and requirements and... ticking the boxes.'

As a teacher of senior English, it is impossible (and I would argue irresponsible) for me to ignore the 'dominant policy-orientated discourses' (Yandell, 2014, p. 66) that influence my teaching and learning practices. However, within my everyday professional life at school, I have found ways—together with Joe as described above (see 5.1)—to resist and challenge the constraints of our working conditions to discover a richer understanding of the learning that can take place in the English classroom. But even with three years teaching experience behind me, I still too often doubt my pedagogical approach; that compared to my colleagues who 'teach to the test' via mandated content and essay formulas, my students may be at a disadvantage. What really strengthens my resolve to continue embedding creativity into my teaching and professional learning is being part of supportive collegial communities outside my school context. In the next section, I focus on two of these spaces, both of which have enabled Joe and me to continue experiencing our professional learning creatively and develop confidence as creative English teachers.

### **5.3 Enacting professional learning within professional communities**

The desire Joe and I share to continue grappling with the complexities of our work is something many English teachers can relate to (e.g. Bellis, 2006, Bulfin, 2006). Fortunately for us, we do not have to enact our professional learning in isolation. Outside of our school context we have found support through talking and writing with other English teachers through projects such as *stella2.0*, and in networks like the Monash English Reading/Writing Group. These networks are supplemented by informal conversations with fellow students and colleagues from other schools. At work, Joe and I often feel our beliefs about teaching and learning are not valued, however, these out-of-school collaborative spaces help legitimise our practice by providing a space where our dilemmas are heard, and our difficulties and questions are reflected in the voices of other teachers (Bulfin & Mathews, 2003). Prue Gill's description of her collegial writing and sharing of stories resonates with the rich learning Joe and I have experienced beyond our school:

We share our different worlds of teaching, we clarify for ourselves and each other the sort of teaching relationships that interest us, our purpose in teaching, our

pleasure, our frustration. It seems a luxury to be so mindful (Gill & Illesca, 2011, p. 34).

In the busy workplace, the kind of professional learning Prue describes here may often feel like a 'luxury', but moved into a different context, this reflexive practice can feel like a 'new normal' (Parr & Bulfin, 2014, p. 65) where reflective, critical and supportive discursive spaces are accepted as an integral part of professional life.

Below I have included an extract from a journal entry written after a session with the Monash English Reading/Writing Group (March, 2016) to illustrate how the kind of 'teacher talk' (Doecke, Brown, & Loughran, 2000) encouraged in this group provides a counterpoint to the pressures on teachers to have all the answers (Bulfin & Matthews, 2003). The group meets every four to six weeks, after hours to share a critical reading and also to write over nibbles and a drink. The reading for this particular session—a paper by Riley (2015) *What teachers bring: The intellectual resources of adolescent literacy educators in an era of standardisation*—had spoken to each of us in different ways, and sparked many questions, as modeled by Riley, to open more spaces that 'leverage teachers' resources' (Riley, 2015, p. 163). The group's discussion, while initially prompted by the reading, ended up going in all directions, with each of us taking the opportunity to vent our frustrations over what we 'bring' as individuals to our teaching rarely being acknowledged. I cannot recall how we got there, but the issue of the so called informal 'rules' for Year 12 essay writing reared its problematic head, unleashing a collective vitriolic outburst. The following narrative piece is based on my recreation of the conversation that occurred during the session:

"Teaching Year 12 English is really getting me down this year. There's so much pressure to give the kids this magic formula for a 40-plus study score, with little regard or desire for thinking."

"Yes, there's been a cultural shift within the faculty towards delivery of a prescribed method... a 'right' way of approaching an essay that will be rewarded by examiners..."

"What do you mean?"

"The 'yes, no, however' response to every essay..."

"That doesn't even make sense"

"Do you mean instead of TEEL?"

"No, in addition to TEEL."

"When I was originally given the structure I thought the point was to encourage the students to challenge the topic and consider a number of perspectives. But it's become a formula the girls are being taught. Oh, and there's another thing - if you want to get a 9 or 10, you need 4 body paragraphs. I've had students stressing over only having three and worried they'll only get an 8."

"That's crap. I'm an examiner and that's rubbish."

"Where's this coming from in your school?"

"The top. The boss. I resisted it last year, but there's a lot more pressure to teach to it this year."

"Was there much discussion or theorising around this essay writing approach within the faculty?"

"Yes...that from her 25 years of experience this method has worked. The kids like it."

[Laughter]

"But sadly, it's true. One of my focus group participants referred to the 'yes, no, however' formula as the best thing that had happened to her in English. She said the kids in other classes who weren't taught the technique were 'freaking out because they had no idea how to write an essay.'"

Joe goes red and covers his face with his hands. We are laughing together, which seems so inappropriate in that context, but is an involuntary release. It feels good to be in a space where neither of us feel judged. I look at Joe. He is still red. It feels really good to have let that all out in this room, with these supportive colleagues. Reassuring to know that we aren't losing the plot, that we aren't 'bad' teachers.

**Extract 5.5 Narrative excerpt from research journal.**

The conversation felt therapeutic for everyone in the room, because unlike some of our colleagues at our school (and many of the students), we don't want to be told what to do and how to teach; instead we want to make some sense of our teaching by talking through the possibilities and perspectives without there being an externally imposed 'recipe' or definitive 'right' way of doing things. Through further reflection, I have come to realise that the way we learn to become a teacher is closely tied to our professional identity, and can shape the way we teach our students. If teachers are expected to uncritically comply with faculty directives on how to teach particular English skills, and when tensions or difficulties arise, told 'not to worry...everything is fine' (Bulfin & Mathews, 2003, p. 53) why would they expect their students to behave any differently? It is not too far a stretch to see the link between a culture of teacher professional learning where teachers are expected to look confident and have all the answers, with a formula driven pedagogy in the classroom, such as the 'yes, no, however' method.

Luckily, Joe and I have been invited into alternative discursive spaces where we are encouraged to think and create own meanings and feel 'empowered because of the way [our] view of the world is both developed and acknowledged' (Gill & Illesca, 2011, p. 40). However, back at school, there are times that we both struggle with our resolve to be reflexive, responsive English teachers due to factors such as faculty politics and dominant views about what a 'good' teacher looks like. In the following section, I return to everyday professional life at school, with a particular focus on how professional identities are shaped by those around us and their values, and how through negotiating and resisting these values there is potential for perceptions around creativity to shift.

#### 5.4 Negotiating teacher identity: a 'self-conscious struggle'

In providing snapshots from a range of teacher attitudes and experiences in my particular context, I have discovered that the story behind why creativity is problematic for many teachers is more complicated than it first seemed. In this final section, I include an extended narrative piece about the challenges in my faculty because through the focus on a particular relationship in a particular context, it is possible to understand more about the 'complexities and contradictions we have internalised' (Pope, 2005, p. 11).

My relationship with my colleague Donna is unusual. On the one hand, as HOD, she is quick to exert her authority and put me in my place when I voice a divergent opinion or challenge her judgment of a student's English skills. But on the other hand, she regularly turns to me for professional advice—for example, how to handle a staff or student complaint—and is often warm and affectionate. While she was willing to participate in this research project, she seemed tentative leading up to the interview and unsettled when I went outside the list of questions I had given her beforehand. That said, for someone who has not been shy in expressing her dislike for creative tasks at various times, she adopted a more moderate stance in response to the interview questions. While it is hard to forget comments such as, 'I like my students in their seats' (in response to a suggestion that the girls act out a scene from *Romeo and Juliet*), and her mandatory directives for writing essays, I detected a genuine shift in perspective during and following the interview. The extract below opens with me reflecting on the dynamic between us at the time:

In the days following the interview, Donna continues to ask me questions and seems genuinely interested in my research project work. I'm wondering whether general talk around my own teaching practice, creativity in teaching and, I suppose, my open, reflexive (and as some people have told me guileless) professional style is prompting some shifts in her own thinking and work? But here's the thing. It doesn't come easily for her. There's an evident tension in her professional identity—who she may be becoming and who she has been for over 20 years.

Her eyes welled up with tears when I shared an observation this morning—that I could see how (like our students in the classroom) she had become more comfortable in her new professional environment and perhaps this feeling of comfort had enabled her to take more risks with her teaching. She shared the story of her past school, the mistakes she felt she had made and having had the chance to do it again differently, she would. An openness to admit her quick, hot temper and difficulties with classroom management. Feelings of resentment from her team, lack of appreciation from school leadership. Perhaps even to the point of despair.

What fascinates me, is how Donna's raw moments of reflexivity bluntly juxtapose with her dogmatic and single minded approach to teaching Senior English. By way of example, the same colleague who is showing keen interest in my research, is equally quick to shut me down in front of the whole Year 11 cohort for using the word 'reinforce' rather than 'complement' when describing the intended impact of an accompanying visual image. In the same orientation session, when I jokingly suggested the girls should consider breakfast choices as a potential topic for their oral, it was met with horror and a shift, "Oh no, that's something they'd only do in Health, NOT English."

We don't see eye to eye on many matters. Perhaps it comes from a lifetime of teaching, or simply the person we bring to our professional identity. Reflecting on how I felt when Donna took over as Faculty Head, I recognise my own professional identity has developed. From what was a frustrating, uncomfortable, possibly even alienating collegial environment, I am discovering what kind of teacher I am becoming. Being faced with divergent pedagogical views has the benefit of encouraging us to define what you value most. At some point, I have had to make tough decisions about what I am willing to fight for, and equally, not to sweat the small stuff. Depending on the day, Donna may snap, but she's generally reasonable; and once the argy bargy subsides, an open, honest conversation begins. Barnes comes to mind, like an old but not forgotten friend. I wonder what he would have to say about our "meaningful communication" – how through "becom[ing] angry with one another" we stretch and grow the possibilities of collegial collaboration within an English Faculty.

#### **Extract 5.6 Narrative excerpt from research journal**

So it is in this context of shifting ground that I'm learning to better understand the slippery and vulnerable nature of teacher identity and 'the enabling effect' (Britton, 1970, p. 240) we can have on each other through our interactions in everyday communication. I believe my enthusiasm towards a creative practice has prompted Donna to reconsider her views on the value of creativity in English, even if only temporarily, such as when she texted me in the

evening after the interview: 'hey, I think we are often creative together. D x.' Likewise, I have picked up some important skills for teaching VCE English and come closer to finding a way to marry my desire to encourage unique thought with the need for a pragmatic approach to the strict rules of the senior English 'game'. Nevertheless, when she says something that makes me feel uncomfortable (e.g. labeling a student a '6 – that's what she is') I find myself politely, but assertively 'speaking back.' It annoys her, I know, but with each debate I am playing out the tensions in my professional identity—a 'continual' and 'self-conscious struggle' (Boomer, 1988, p. 177) to reconsider what I know and what I value as a teacher.



In this chapter I have drawn on the experiences of teachers in my school and broader collegial networks to explore the connection between creativity, teacher learning and professional identity. Through my collaborations with Joe and our sustained reflexive and intellectual conversations, I have developed a sense of confidence in the kind of teacher I am learning to become. Equally, the challenging relationship with my HOD has afforded valuable professional learning for me, strengthening my resolve to learn and teach creatively. That said, I believe it would have been very difficult for me to speak or behave in ways that challenged established ways of thinking and doing in the school and faculty without the support of a colleague like Joe who shares a desire to grapple with the complexities of our work. When I compare our guileless professional conversations to the more guarded interactions amongst other English teachers within our faculty, I appreciate how lucky we are to have created a space for meaningful discussions about our work.

At the same time, I am reminded that the professional relationship we share is not the norm, and opportunities to regularly engage in a reflexive, critical approach to English teaching can be rare. It takes time, courage and a willingness to grapple with uncertainty. Despite being a rich source of professional learning it is generally undervalued in schools because, like creativity, there isn't a measurable standard of achievement and there aren't simple answers.

## CHAPTER 6

### CREATIVITY IN THE CRACKS OF CLASSROOM LIFE

'There's a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in' (Cohen, 1992).

These lyric lines, from Leonard Cohen's iconic 'Anthem' might seem a strange opening to a concluding chapter of a Masters' thesis on creativity in English teaching. But when I heard these cathartic words in the days following his death in November 2016, I found a way to capture my thinking about creativity in the 'enacted' secondary English curriculum. In my life, and in the context of this study, creativity is both the crack and the light. Cohen's words can be read as a powerful and prescient message that speaks to the nuanced interplay of darkness and light in 'our troubled and troubling times' (Popova, 2016, n.p.). Of course, there are myriad meanings to be drawn from and given to these words, and as Bakhtin reminds us, these multiple meanings can only be interpreted as they 'exist in other peoples' mouths, in other peoples' ... contexts, serving other people's intentions' (1981, pp. 293-94). In the particular time, place and context of my research, my intentions are to employ these words both literally and metaphorically to help frame the 'findings' of this study and support my main argument—that although '[t]he brave new world of creativity is far from unproblematic' (Pope, 2005, p. 26), it is an integral part of ordinary, everyday life in English classrooms, and we cannot teach, learn and 'live to better purpose' without it (p. 11).

This study has aimed to provide a 'warts and all' account of creativity, from the bottom up, through generating detailed accounts of my own work in and around the classroom and also my participants' experiences and understandings of creativity in secondary English (and other disciplines). In doing so, the thesis offers another means of representing what 'creativity' looks and feels like for students and teachers in the current educational climate.

The original research questions posed at the outset of this study were as follows:

1. How are creativity discourses and creative practices realised and enacted in particular secondary English classrooms within the current educational policy environment in Australia?
2. What are the implications of ordinary everyday creativity in the secondary English classroom for student engagement, learning and growth?
3. How does the practice of everyday creativity in secondary English teaching mediate teacher engagement, learning and professional identity?

However, as is the nature of all social practice, the process of actually carrying out practitioner research has been unpredictable, and, somewhat paradoxically I have come to better understand what I was 'looking for after [I had] found it' (Hamilton, 2005, p. 288). These questions have helped frame and guide this study, but it is through the 'doing' of the study that other questions have arisen along the way, crafting an intricate and interwoven story of creativity that challenges dominant discourses. In this alternative narrative, creativity cannot be captured by binary claims positioning it as either the heroic 'saviour' of education, or 'the enemy' of rigorous pedagogy (Doecke et al., 2014, p. 6). Rather, through an interest in the particularity of creative learning experiences, this account has been sensitive to the complexities of everyday social interactions in classrooms, and, like Cohen's meditation on life, has had to embrace the cracks and imperfections that confront and are an essential dimension of the human experience of education.

This chapter has two objectives. First, to bring together the key ideas about the nature of creativity in secondary English education that have emerged from this study; and second, to extend thinking about the role creativity can play in enhancing teaching and learning experiences for teachers and students in English. While I acknowledge my methods and practices will not appeal to everyone, I have aimed to make my research as 'conceptually informative, professionally useful and ideologically productive' (Freebody, 2003, p. ix) as possible within the constraints of the study. And although my findings are grounded in the specificity of a place and time, I believe we can learn much about ourselves from the

experiences of others and so this study may hold broader relevance to teachers and students beyond my particular context.

The chapter is organised into three sections. The first (6.1) makes the case that creativity should play an integral role in the English classroom and be evident within our work as English teachers in spite of how 'cracked' and problematic it can be. The second section (6.2) offers some additional reflections on some examples from the data analysis presented in Chapters Four and Five to illustrate the potential value of creativity as an 'ordinary' quality of classroom culture for English teaching and learning. Finally, I close the thesis with some final comments (6.3) and pose a question: does the 'baggage' often built up around the word creativity discourage fresh approaches to English teaching? If so, should we be developing language to better describe what it means to both re-imagine and practice creatively in the 'enacted' secondary English curriculum?

## **6.1 'Making do': Creativity in the cracks of classroom life**

A literal reading of Cohen's lyrics above provides a powerful way to think about positive action in the face of the shrinking space for creativity within current educational policy: teachers and students must 'vigilantly make use of the cracks' (De Certeau, 1984, p. 37) to work against the limitations of various systems within and beyond schools. In difficult and challenging policy and practice environments, the crack is a space of possibility, of refusal and of challenge (cf. Bulfin, 2009). The crack is a weakness or contradiction in the system that can be exploited to do work other than what might be expected, and that affords some cover in which to operate out of view of various forms of regulation and standardisation, at least for a time (cf. De Certeau, 1984). For example, the space Joe and I have carved out to re-create, together with our students, different kinds of classroom cultures (Boomer et al., 1992) has given us a degree of freedom to explore the creative potential in our English classes (see 5. 1). The often necessarily brisk reflexive chats we sneak into the brief pauses of our busy working day let in some light—'a vitality or life force' (De Mille, 1991)—which helps (re)fuel our passion for our work.

That is not to say it is easy to find ways to be creative in the cracks and fissures of classroom life. Many of my teacher colleagues reflected on the difficulty of finding space, time or even permission to be more creative in their teaching and professional learning (see 5.2), and I probably would not have had the resolve to maintain a creatively confident professional identity without a supportive colleague. As Cohen observes, creativity is never perfect, and that is the point. When the 'light gets in' it is not always warm, uplifting and life affirming; creativity does not have a 'consistently positive reference' (Williams, 1961, p. 19). Both light and creativity can be harsh and glaring, exposing, or even blinding. The light that gets in through the cracks compels us to face what is troublesome: the flaws, inconsistencies and complexities within ourselves, others, and the contexts we inhabit. The nature and function of creativity in English can be complicated, messy and unpredictable, as illustrated in the literature (see 2.2) and in my data analysis (see 4.1). Most students reflected on their fear or anxiety associated with working creatively because this often required a vulnerable expression of themselves and risked exposing something deeply personal. Similarly, teacher participants often expressed a reluctance to use 'creative tasks' for a variety of reasons, such as being time poor, difficulty with assessment, losing control of the classroom as they perceived it, and a lack of relevance to end of year high stakes examinations.

## 6.2 Student learning and engagement

### *Creativity and learning to love English*

In the current educational policy environment, educators are often told that a 'back to basics' approach (e.g. DET, 2016; Pyne, 2014) will improve Australia's declining slide in OECD literacy rankings (cf. Buckingham, 2016; Reid, 2017). However, a focus on developing 'spelling-punctuation-grammar producing machines' rather than 'communicating beings' (Doecke et al., 2014, p. 10) has tended to sideline more creative work in the English classroom, ironically a rich source of knowledge that enables teachers to get to 'know their students and how they learn' (VIT standard 1, 2016). Also, the more emphasis that is placed on a narrow instructional approach (NAPLAN etc), the worse

many Australian students perform on the very measures a 'back to basics' (Birmingham, 2016) approach was designed to address.

While it may seem more administratively efficient to regulate teacher and student performance through standards, this study has shown that this depersonalised approach falls short when it comes to engaging young people in meaningful learning. For example, Isla, a student participant, felt the need to ask permission in a focus group to have an off-topic 'rant' about being 'drilled and skilled' (Doecke et al., 2014, p. 11) to write a language analysis essay where a teacher had written a sample response on the board and asked students to copy it down. Because the main 'points and stuff,' of the essay had been highlighted for students, Isla felt she had not been 'included in the learning' so her 'brain completely switched off'. From the perspective of teacher professional standards in my school, the class activity Isla describes would likely be seen as an efficient exercise in teaching language analysis through modeling the 'key skills and knowledge' required to 'perform' the task. Some students in the class would have been quietly nodding and taking notes, but I wonder how many others, like Isla, had simply 'switched off'. Other students, including Maude, agreed that it's 'harder' to learn when a teacher delivers the content without 'connecting with [them]' and emphasised the importance of enacting the curriculum through 'communication' in the classroom (cf. Barnes, 1976).

As discussed earlier (4.1), opening oneself up to creativity—be it an explicit creative task, or any engagement with personal ideas in the English classroom—can be challenging and for many students is associated with vulnerability and feelings of self-doubt. Unlike other subjects, in English 'students learn to relate to themselves, to others and to the world' (Patterson, 2000, p. 237) and this can entail a struggle as students, like many of the participants in this study, experiment with their emerging identities whilst negotiating the expectation of peers, their teachers and parents. The struggle with 'self-doubt' in English experienced by many students, such as Isla, resonates with Cohen's meditation on life, where through the discomfort of facing what we may not want to see or reveal in ourselves, we grow towards 'greater self-understanding' (Howie, 2006, p. 287). A number of participants shared experiences, which clearly show this process in motion, catalysed in significant ways by their work and relationships in English classrooms. For instance, Esme,

found some 'completeness' (see Extract 4.6) in the literature classroom, by taking a small step towards facing her 'greatest fear' of never knowing herself.

One key historical function of English—the personal growth and 'ethical formation of individuals' (p. 286)—recognises the need for students to invest something of themselves and express a 'personal impulse' (Doecke et al., 2014. p. 5). I believe students should be given opportunities to engage in forms of communication that are meaningful to them and explore personal connections with the texts they are studying because this is a key way in which young people get excited about English. This can be difficult, confronting and anxiety inducing for both students and teachers (cf. Bellis, 2014). Helping young people make these sorts of meaningful connections can also take more time than drilling and skilling on how to write a language analysis essay. But this project and many other practitioner research accounts (see 2.3) continue to support the claim that this pedagogical approach is worth the effort, time and difficulty.

#### *Analysis is better with creativity*

Many student participants were able to identify a link between what they learnt through the creative task and how they approached the text analysis essay at the end of the unit (see 4.3). For Maude, because she could create a piece of music and 'play [the ideas], it was easier to convey' them in her later writing. Alternatively, while her co-collaborator, Kat, felt the creative task helped her 'understand the ideas and themes in the book better' she didn't think it helped her write the essay any better or more confidently. The potential 'gains' then are clearly not straightforward for all. In the same conversation, Isla commented that she 'had to focus so hard before [she] wrote the piece to get [her] understanding of [*The Merchant of Venice*] so when it came to write' it flowed'. In another focus group, Clementine felt that by getting 'really into' the main character it was easier to 'understand his voice and his point of view'. These are just a few examples from my analysis where students recognised that their engagement in more creative-analytical tasks helped them in various ways when it came to more straightforward analytical activities. However, as noted in Chapter Five, the situation for teachers is more complicated, with many participants (e.g. Noni) conscious of the pressure to focus their

teaching on more isolated analysis skills only, rather than to take a risk with a creative task.

### 6.3 What's in a word? Finding a fresh language for creative practice in English teaching and learning

When Williams claimed, 'no word in English carries a more consistently positive reference than creativity' (1961, p. 19) he was pointing to the difficulty of understanding and using a term that is almost always used in an uncritically positive and unproblematic way. Since Williams' time, it's clear that the term is again part of the *zeitgeist* and has emerged as something of a celebrity across many dimensions of social and political life. But in contemporary times, things have become more complex, particularly when popular and positive creativity discourses meet with the discourses of standards based-reforms in education (see 2.2) and human capital or corporate innovation discourses those of neo-liberal economics. In the current context, 'creativity' is often positioned negatively as 'perversely equated with student disempowerment' (Doecke et al., 2014, p. 6) because it supposedly denies students the stability and the confidence generated by rules and formulas purporting to guarantee success in English. Furthermore, the playful and subversive nature of the creativity that unfolds in the everyday life of classrooms sits uneasily in a system of measurable standards and regulation. Cohen might have called it, 'cracked creativity' because it is often avoided for being troublesome, non-compliant and too risky, yet in many cases such practices enable far richer educational experiences than when students and teachers play it safe and simply do what they're told.

Mike Rose in his book, *Why school? Reclaiming education for all of us*, warns of the dangers of dominant terminology narrowing 'our shared respect for the extraordinary nature of thinking and learning' (Rose, 2009, p. 29). In this case, overly simplistic uses of a word like creativity in public discourses, be they positive or negative, can limit the creative potential of English classrooms by making it too easy for people to accept or reject the idea without being invited to think about what it might mean more carefully and deeply. Because of this it is worth enriching our language related to creativity—

developing a fresh vocabulary to open up how everyday creativity in the English classroom is spoken about, and thereby encouraging its critical exploration. Furthermore, by collecting together and using a wider repertoire of allied terms to support and nuance the way we talk about creativity, it seems likely that additional possibilities can be imagined and achieved in the English classroom.

When I talk about creativity with others, more often than not, people tell me they're not creative. But if I ask them if they are 'curious, reflective, uncertain, or willing to take a chance' (p. 27) they will often respond quite differently. Throughout this study, a variety of words and phrases collected around and about creativity: communication, collaboration, risk taking, 'thinking outside the box', being open-minded or having a 'growth mindset'. This family of terms has helped participants talk about creativity in ways meaningful to them, choosing language in an attempt to describe their experiences.

Some may argue that the creativity club shouldn't be opened up to everyone—that the word may lose its power through being, as Cleo suggested, 'hijacked by these incredibly uncreative people [such as policy wonks] jumping on the bandwagon'. But what use is everyday creativity if it's the preserve of a few artsy creative types on the one hand, or captured by the language of commerce and reframed as corporate creative innovation on the other? The kind of creativity explored in this thesis goes to the heart of the lived human experience and therefore, I believe, should be 'a necessity for all' (Csikszentmihalyi, 2006, p. xviii). Creativity is as complex and contradictory as we all are and the meaning of the word should forever be subject to creative, robust debate and dialogue. Everyday creativity in the English classroom can't be safe, predictable and clearly definable, but it can and really must be regular and everyday, even normal.

I want to believe this reimagined notion of creativity is possible because I cannot envisage enjoying my professional life as a teacher without it. That said, it would be cheap of me to finish this thesis on an optimistic note that glosses over how tough it is for teachers to enact and sustain a creative practice in the current policy environment. The narrative below was written after a Year 10 literature class where our focus was Sylvia Plath's

*Mushrooms*. It captures my sense of this ongoing struggle, what is at stake and where I hope we're headed.

The girls are starting to become obsessed with this poem. Having absorbed themselves in a feminist reading two classes ago, they are now grappling with broader interpretations that touch the contemporary world, or more personally, their own. Giselle's observation—that the invisible people 'nobody sees' are everywhere, "like at school, where the dominant kids are always on stage giving speeches or winning awards and many others go almost unnoticed"—causes a ripple of awkwardness. Corrine changes the topic and starts talking about slavery and I'm only half listening because I'm starting to see my study in this poem. I can see that Plath is also writing about me, about the teachers who despite dominant policy discourses and ideology of standards are finding ways to 'discreetly, very quietly... acquire the air'. Plath's depiction of early 1960's women as 'edible' consumables eerily resonates with the role of teachers within a human capital model of education. They are built for purpose, like 'shelves' or 'tables,' to achieve their function—to improve their students' learning outcomes. But like Plath's mushrooms the work I'm doing together with Joe and the Monash crew is deceptively anarchical. Through storytelling and conversation we are finding ways to 'widen the crannies' within the constraints of the system and together enact a more reflexive practice. Like the mushrooms that grow 'on the crumbs of shadow,' I know from my own experience that creativity in English teaching is happening in spite of the difficulties. I am hopeful 'our kind multiplies' and continues to challenge the powerful discourses that paint teachers as 'bland-mannered, asking little or nothing' from their personal and professional life. I can tell, 'our foot's in the door.'



## APPENDIX A

### EXTRACT TRANSCRIPT: FOCUS GROUP 1

- Maude: When we were reading the text and I don't know about other people...but I find that I have this kind of humming noise in my head and it sort of matches the tone of the story.
- CS: Especially with that text or everything?
- Maude: With everything really...  
(laughter)....
- Kat: Yeah, I just knew I wanted to write that in B minor and I don't know why. It seemed to work.
- CS: So that humming was already in B minor for you?
- Maude: Yeah, because that was the tone of the story and it was great to be able to use that in a project to represent the book using that method.
- CS: Why B minor? What does that mean to you?
- Kat: Well, it had a mysterious tone. That's how I see that key. I don't know really why. And that is related to the book, all the mystery and things...that just seemed to fit it.
- CS: For you M?
- Maude: I don't think major & minor mean major equals happy and minor is sad. This story had happy moments in it as well and I think the key of B minor, it has the sad moments but it also has those longing happy moments which aren't usually thought of when you think of a minor key.

## APPENDIX B

### DATA GENERATION THEMATIC ORGANISER

#### Reworked version (update 25/4) Next stage of analytical work

1. Refinement of key ideas for closer analysis/ examples for writing
2. Ask: What are the big ideas and how do I use my data to open up these issues?  
Look across the data to find common ideas; build a complex picture of that issue using different examples and write text around it.
3. *Analysis of Interview design and strategy (see doc 20/2) Methodology Chapter 3*  
*E.g. interviews as a research methodology - draw on the readings and literature (e.g. reflections on D's comments in the classroom vs interview responses; reflections on my style as an interviewer)*

Theme or idea + questions to explore	Student FG 1	Student FG 2	Student FG 3	Eng Teacher 1 (NA)	Eng Teacher 2 (DO)	Eng Teacher 3 (JH)	Music	Drama	Theoretical framework + questions
<p>(4.1) Creativity as something deeply personal Vulnerability/exposure E.g. investing something of yourself so therefore criticism (or failure) is taken personally. (cf. a 'formula' or set task re: demonstrating knowledge of content is less angst ridden).</p> <p>Creativity involves risk taking/courage (overcoming self-doubt)</p> <p>Explore Idea that for some of us creativity goes to the very heart of our identity – it is the only way we can live. (cf. other who need those optimum conditions or be 'taught' how to engage in the creative process)</p>	<p>E: From experience it just seems like taking a concept of someone else's and then kind of like moving it around to make it your own</p> <p>M: I think [creativity is] more about how you express yourself, how you go about certain situations, how you personalize things</p> <p>I: Yeah, in expressing yourself you come up with solutions or ideas that are outside of the box</p>	<p>R: It's a vulnerable thing. So if you're partnered with someone you might not know very well... ..It is a vulnerable thing. And then you go on the safe side...like do you want to just write a poem... V: Maybe with less creative tasks it's okay to be with people you don't know. V: So awkward...it's embarrassing.</p>	<p>M: ... creativity's definitely the creation of something individual that may be the same as something but it's still your creation of it that makes it different. So I feel like it's the creation of something different, something that's not the same.</p>	<p>"Their thoughts are on the line. They are really exposing themselves..."</p>	<p>For me, as well probably as a person and a teacher, it's about authenticity um, and a unique perspective and find an ability to express that. So to be in touch with that in yourself , but to have um the forum or the medium to express that.</p> <p>Q: where/how? "I think I do this in the classroom. Once I get on a roll. Once we start talking or if I start talking and then something else</p>	<p>JH: "Okay. So, I think my understanding of it has changed over time and certainly since becoming a teacher. So I'm thinking about it more. CS: yeah J: But I think my original understanding of creativity was that understanding, the new, the novel, the imaginative writing, the kind of imaginative writing, the making things up. Which is when I look at it at now, it's a kind of narrow and it was very much about writing, producing things, which I</p>		<p>"It doesn't need to be an artist with a paint brush. And I think we have to separate creativity from practical skills. CS: Mmm, yes CJ: So I'm not remotely artistic. I'd love to be but I can't paint. You know what I mean? CS: yeah CJ: I can't draw very well CS: But that doesn't mean you're not creative CJ: that's right. And that's how we need to re-frame it. "</p>	<p>Provisional defns of creativity- Pope, Robinson</p> <p>Problem solving (McWilliams)</p> <p>Creative thinking cf. creative doing What's in a word? Why are certain words 'hijacked' or re-appropriated? In particular, in English education?</p> <p><b>Bakhtin</b> Other language to describe this new kind of creativity- is it the 'Flow' or Barnes' 'enacted' curriculum/ communication as enablers of creativity. In the creative process- at what point does the creativity happen vs preparatory stage?</p>

## APPENDIX C

### STUDENT FOCUS GROUP SCHEDULE AND GUIDING QUESTIONS

**Week 3, Term 4**

**Lunchtime: Room J16**

<b>Tuesday 20/10</b>	<b>Thursday 22/10</b>	<b>Friday 23/10</b>
Maude	Veronica	Harriet
Kat	Michelle	Clementine
Isla	Robbie	Miranda
Esme	Emma	

**Some Ideas we will be discussing together with a couple of sample questions:**

#### **1. Creativity can mean different things to different people**

- When someone says 'creativity' what sorts of things first come to mind? What does it mean to you?
- If you had to draw an image or use a word to best represent creativity, what would that be?

#### **2. English as a creative subject**

- Which tasks and activities in English do you find most challenging? What makes them challenging for you?
- Do you think English is a creative subject? What aspects are particularly creative and explain why you think they are?
- In your opinion, should English be more creative?
  - If so, in what way/s could this be achieved?
  - If not, why do you think it does not need to be?
- Are there ways in which you think learning the key skills and knowledge in English could be enhanced by creativity?

#### **3. Specific creative tasks**

*(These questions relate to a specific task – either the 'Creative folio task' for *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* OR the 'Creative response' to *The Merchant of Venice*)*

- What were your first thoughts when you received the task?
- How did you decide on which approach (option) to take for the task?
- What did you find challenging or surprising about the process?
- How satisfied were you with the result you achieved?

APPENDIX D

THE CURIOUS INCIDENT OF THE DOG IN THE NIGHT-TIME CREATIVE TASK

2013 YEAR 9 ENGLISH

STUDENT NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DUE DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

Having read *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time*, you are invited to complete **ONE** of the following three options as a creative response to the text:

**OPTION ONE: Social Media- Your Digital Story**

1. You are going to create a twitter feed (20 tweets) posted by Christopher Boone, main protagonist and narrator in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time*. You can include tweets and retweets by other related characters from the book. (20 tweets)

**OR**

You are going to create an Instagram feed (10 images with comments) posted by Christopher Boone, main protagonist and narrator in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time*. You can include comments by other related characters from the book. (10 images with comments)

**OPTION TWO: Getting Creative**

2. Write from the point of view of Christopher or his mother and create a story 5 years on.

**OR**

Write a song and/or accompanying music telling the story of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*.

**OPTION THREE: Text Talk**

3. (a) Acceptance speech for an award **OR** (b) Book club discussion show **OR** (c) Radio interview.

**ASSESSMENT CRITERIA:**

The extent to which the response demonstrates:

	Very High	High	Medium	Low	Very Low
<b>Knowledge (10 marks)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>demonstrate knowledge and understanding of characters their implications</li> <li>demonstrate knowledge and understanding of events and their implications</li> </ul>					
<b>Application (10 marks)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>make appropriate inferences about how characters act in situations (or would react in hypothetical situations)</li> </ul>					
<b>Format (10 marks)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>effectively adopt or explain stylistic features of the characters</li> <li>effectively adopt or explain stylistic or thematic features of the narrative</li> </ul>					

TEACHER COMMENTS:



Instagram

You are going to create an Instagram feed (10 images with comments) posted by Christopher Boone, main protagonist and narrator in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time*. You can include comments by other related characters from the book. Before you begin planning your Instagram feed you need to see some sample posts from [this user](#) (who models the amount of text we expect from the comments you attach to your posts) and answer the following questions.

Refer also to [this user](#) and [this user](#) as examples of the type of images we are looking for.

1. Why do you think this artist (author/photographer) chose Instagram as the medium to tell stories?
2. How does the telling of the story here differ from other more conventional genres (novel, play, theatrical performance, film)? Do a PMI (positives, negatives, something interesting) analysis of telling a story through Instagram.
3. How are the conventions of Instagram (think visual image, written commentary, hash tags, @ symbol) used to develop and convey richness of character and narrative? Give an example of each.

Make notes to indicate how you plan to use this research and the conventions of Instagram to tell the story of your chosen scenario.

Write a list of Christopher's personality, interests, likes/dislikes, abilities and limitations (& any other characters who will be commenting) so that the posts you create are 'in character'. The way Christopher sees the world and his perspective of reality needs to be conveyed.

You should also consider Christopher's speech patterns, as they appear in the book, since he would probably write comments in a style that reflects his narrative voice.

You must abide by the real life conventions of Twitter– limit of 140 characters per tweet and remember, to make use of the tools such as retweeting, hash tags and many more...



You're going to host a book club discussion show, on radio or TV. You'll be discussing *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, by Mark Haddon. Before you get started on planning your own show, you should need to look at an example to see how a discussion might be run. Watch [this show](#) and answer the questions.

- 1 What's the first question that's asked of Bob Carr, the person who chose the book for discussion?
- 2 Which book does Marieke compare *Peter Pan* to? In what way does she see it as similar?
- 3 The Book Club discussion addresses the issue of whether adults would read this book in the same way as children. How do the various participants respond to the question?
- 4 What emotions did it arouse in those participants who (re)read it?
- 5 What differences are noted between the novel and the various popular dramatic productions of *Peter Pan*?
- 6 Who do the participants recommend the book to?

As a way to get started on planning your own book club discussion, you should adapt these questions or topics to a discussion of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*.

Reading group guides to the novel could provide other questions which you might consider raising or addressing. Here are a couple of links.

[http://www.readinggroupguides.com/guides3/curious\\_incident\\_dog1.asp](http://www.readinggroupguides.com/guides3/curious_incident_dog1.asp)

<http://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/13-fiction/238-curious-incident-of-the-dog-in-the-night-time-haddon?start=3>

[http://bestsellers.about.com/od/bookclubquestions/a/curious\\_q.htm](http://bestsellers.about.com/od/bookclubquestions/a/curious_q.htm)

**Remember, however, that the book club discussion show should be a conversation, rather than a list of questions which you are trying to answer.**

Link: <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/firsttuesday/s2258144.htm>



## APPENDIX F

### STUDENT WORK SAMPLE: EXCERPT FROM CREATIVE RESPONSE TO THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

#### The Merchant of Venice: Creative Task

The divide between the two societies is very clear, despite the absence of a physical barrier. Grand buildings made from stone and mortar give way to small clay huts, where polluted air melds into fresh. On one side live the Carnivoros; rich and fat. They harbour a lot of hate. On the other side live the Vegetarianos; poor and oppressed, struggling to feed themselves and their families. They too, harbour a lot of hate. Every month the Vegetariano harvest their crop - bundles of wheat, carrots as long as forearms, crisp lettuce, fresh fruit, and all kinds of beans. A small amount of produce goes into a storage warehouse, but the rest is packed into wooden carts, and sent into the city under the cover of darkness. A group of Carnivoros wait for them, and exchange coins for an armful of vegetables. The meeting is held in tense silence. Everyone is aware that the situation is a cloud of hydrogen gas, and a mere spark will ignite it. When the Vegetarianos return home; the money is given to the sick who can't pay for healthcare, the rest is put away, and then the fields are re-sown. They are not legally permitted to sell their produce, as their goods are seen as contaminated and unworthy.

It is a long established cycle and no one expects it to change in the way it does. It is halfway through summer, when their crops should be thriving, but suddenly the Vegetarianos are finding that their plants are all dead. Green leaves have withered into fragile brown paper that crumbles when touched, fruit shrivelled and rotting; attracting flies. The air is filled with a sweet, cloying stench. Luckily, whatever has happened to the plants has only affected the one field. There will be less produce to be sold at the end of the month, but no great loss. And then the next day, there is another field full of dead plants, and the council can no longer ignore it. They take samples from the soil, and arm a handful of farmers with long sticks to stand guard over the remaining fields during the night. The farmers stand around for hours, shivering; their linen shirts doing little to protect them from the biting winds. It is around midnight when they spot something. A dark shape; hurrying across the pasture. Without pause the farmers give chase, sticks raised above their heads. They're excited, hearts pumping quickly - in a few minutes, perhaps they'll have stopped whatever it is ruining their crops. The shadow, seeming to realize that it's being pursued, speeds up, but the farmers are closing in. With triumphant yells they surround it, sticks at the ready. The shadow stills, straightens, long arms and legs becoming distinguishable, moonlight glinting off a cropped beard. The farmers murmur in surprise - it is a man. Not a Vegetariano though; his black cloak is of far too high a quality, his shoulders too broad. A Carnivoro.

The farmers march the intruder back to the council chambers, giddy on adrenaline, spitting abuse at the man in their midst. He stares straight ahead, seeming unaffected by the mistreatment. The council members will be asleep in their chambers, so the group dispatch a farmer to wake them. His footsteps echo loudly against the stone floors - this is the only building of made of such material, constructed before the revolution. The head councilman is reasonably young for his position, but he has a strong walk and a steady mind. He receives the party in his nightclothes, sleep gathered in the corner of his eyes as he assesses the Carnivoro. The farmers watch nervously, waiting for the verdict.

"You, Carnivoro," booms the councilman. "What is your purpose here?"

The man pauses, and then grins, reaching into the folds of his cloak to retrieve a vial of clear liquid.

The councilman steps forward, snatching the bottle from the intruder's outstretched hands. Uncorking it, he sniffs it, and then snaps away like a blade of grass caught in a sudden wind.

"Poison," spits the councilman, confirming everyone's suspicions. "You're what's been killing our crops."

He circles the Carnivoro, a glint of rage in his eye. "Have you done this on orders? Or are you acting alone?"

The man snorts. "On whose orders would I be acting? The king's? He wouldn't sanction this - he'd be too *worried* about what people would think. No, I act alone." Despite his situation, he seems bizarrely proud of himself.

"For what cause?"

"I know you've been selling your goods to us. You pigs are contaminating our ranks, weaseling your savage ideals into our heads, one *filthy* carrot at a time. I'm putting a stop to it."

"We are not the savages in this equation," barks the councilman, eyes hard.

The farmers' nerves have turned into anger; they're waiting eagerly for their leader to give them the command to teach the intruder a lesson - but when the councilman turns to them, his expression is suddenly calm. Without taking his eyes off the Carnivoro, he says: "I will take this man to the city court at noon, and there we shall receive justice for his crimes against us."

## APPENDIX G

### HUMAN ETHICS APPROVAL



#### Human Ethics Certificate of Approval

This is to certify that the project below was considered by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee. The Committee was satisfied that the proposal meets the requirements of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* and has granted approval.

**Project Number:** CF15/3447 - 2015001473

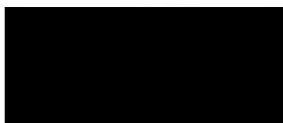
**Project Title:** Investigating the nature of 'creativity' in the secondary English curriculum and classroom

**Chief Investigator:** Dr Scott Bulfin

**Approved:** **From:** 22 September 2015 **To:** 22 September 2020

**Terms of approval - Failure to comply with the terms below is in breach of your approval and the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research.**

1. The Chief investigator is responsible for ensuring that permission letters are obtained, if relevant, before any data collection can occur at the specified organisation.
2. Approval is only valid whilst you hold a position at Monash University.
3. It is the responsibility of the Chief Investigator to ensure that all investigators are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure the project is conducted as approved by MUHREC.
4. You should notify MUHREC immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.
5. The Explanatory Statement must be on Monash University letterhead and the Monash University complaints clause must include your project number.
6. **Amendments to the approved project (including changes in personnel):** Require the submission of a Request for Amendment form to MUHREC and must not begin without written approval from MUHREC. Substantial variations may require a new application.
7. **Future correspondence:** Please quote the project number and project title above in any further correspondence.
8. **Annual reports:** Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an Annual Report. This is determined by the date of your letter of approval.
9. **Final report:** A Final Report should be provided at the conclusion of the project. MUHREC should be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.
10. **Monitoring:** Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by MUHREC at any time.
11. **Retention and storage of data:** The Chief Investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data pertaining to a project for a minimum period of five years.



Professor Nip Thomson  
Chair, MUHREC

cc: Ms Chanie Stock

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ABN 12 377 614 012 CRICOS Provider #00008C

13 May 2015

Mrs Chanie Stock  
Masters research student  
Faculty of Education  
Monash University  
CLAYTON VIC 3800

Dear Chanie,

**Masters of Education research project: Reimagining creativity in the "enacted" English curriculum**

Thank you for your request to use your work as an English and Literature teacher at Girls' Grammar for the above-named research project.

I have read and understood the project overview and hereby give permission for this research to be conducted at                      Grammar.

Yours sincerely,

  
Principal

APPENDIX H

EXAMPLE EXPLANATORY STATEMENT AND CONSENT FORM



**EXPLANATORY STATEMENT**

Secondary students at Shelford Girls' Grammar

**Project:** Investigating the nature of 'creativity' in the secondary English curriculum and classroom.

**Chief Investigator's name**

**Student's name**

Dr Scott Bulfin  
Faculty of Education

Chanie Stock

You are invited to take part in this study. Please read this Explanatory Statement in full before deciding whether or not to participate in this research. If you would like further information regarding any aspect of this project, you are encouraged to contact the researchers via the phone numbers or email addresses listed above.

**What does the research involve?**

The aim of this study is to explore student perception, understanding and experience of creativity in the secondary school English classroom. You will be asked to participate in a semi structured focus group discussion where I will be asking some general questions about the nature of creativity and some more specific questions about class activities or assessment tasks you have been involved in. I will arrange for this to take place during school hours at a convenient time for all participants (for example, a lunchtime or spare period). I estimate that it will take approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour. You may be asked to bring in some work you have done that you feel is 'creative'.

**Why were you chosen for this research?**

You have been chosen for this research because you are a student who has participated in a learning activity or task that is the subject of my study, but are not one of my current students.

**Consenting to participate in the project and withdrawing from the research**

The consent process involves signing and returning the consent form, which is attached. You have a right to withdraw from further participation at any stage.

**Possible benefits and risks to participants**

Aside from giving about an hour of your time, I do not foresee any potential inconvenience or discomfort arising from participating in this research. Your name will not be identified in the data collection, analysis or publication.

**Confidentiality**

My research will be submitted by thesis at Monash University, but may also be published in journals or book chapters. I will maintain confidentiality by using pseudonyms for all participants involved.



**CONSENT FORM FOR SEMI STRUCTURED FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS**

**Students**

**Project:** *Investigating the nature of 'creativity' in the secondary English curriculum and classroom.*

**Chief Investigator:** Dr Scott Bulfin

**Student Researcher:** Chanie Stock

I have been asked to take part in the Monash University Masters research project specified above. I have read and understood the Explanatory Statement and I hereby consent to participate in this project.

I consent to the following:	Yes	No
• Taking part in a focus group of up to 5 people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Audio recording during focus group	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Showing or providing samples of my work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Participating in informal conversations with the researcher after the focus group.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name of Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's parent or guardian (if Under the age of 18) \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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