



MONASH University

Accounting for creativity:

Subject English teachers' everyday creative practices

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Abstract

This qualitative study of creativity in subject English teaching investigates the practices of eleven secondary subject English teachers who operate in diverse institutional and curriculum settings in Victoria, Australia. The settings include two state schools, two independent schools, and two supplementary education programs (see Myers & Grosvenor, 2011). The study is framed with contrasting human capital theories of creativity and the socio-cultural theories developed by Raymond Williams and others. The study presents situated, critical accounts of the English teachers' 'everyday' creative practice in and beyond the participating teachers' classrooms, and investigates how these practices are mediated by a range of disciplinary and contextual factors, such as standards-based reforms of education.

The study is situated within robust and ongoing debates about what constitutes creativity and how it may be usefully assessed. For example, creativity for students in schools is framed as an important 21st century skill, drawing on human capital discourses that highlight problem-solving and innovation. The importance of developing creative thinking skills is reflected globally in a range of OECD research and reports and, in Australia, in policy documents such as *The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* (Council of Australian Governments, Education Council, 2019). Within subject English, creativity has historically been linked to the imagination and production of particular forms of 'creative' writing. This has been the case in both a genre-based emphasis on the writing product (Christie, 2013), and in process approaches to writing pedagogy (Dixon, 1969).

Both human capital and imaginative understandings of creativity focus on developing creativity in *students*; however, there has been less attention to *teacher* creativity. This study pays particular attention to Williams' (1977) concept of everyday creativity in presenting and examining critical accounts of socially mediated teacher creative practices. The study presents narrative accounts that appreciate the ideological struggle of the participating English teachers, as they work through and beyond various tensions in their practice.

Data for the study was generated through a combination of semi-structured interviews with teachers, classroom observations and research notes taken during observations. The data analysis was informed by Erickson's (2011) notion of 'analytic induction' and utilised dialogic theories drawn from Mikhail Bakhtin (1981, 1984). This analysis highlights the teachers' creative negotiation of tensions across a combination of policy, institutional, ideological, curricular and system contexts.

The study argues that a key dimension of the participating English teachers' creative practice was dialogic interaction with their students, curriculum and policy priorities. It argues that creative practices—especially those practices which drew on professional knowledge of subject context,

teaching context and student needs—provided teachers with ways to manage the tensions between competing priorities. These priorities included wider education policy, their particular institution's interpretation of these policies, disciplinary ways of knowing, and student needs. As such, the study demonstrates the ideological struggles of participating English teachers' practices, especially when contrasted with teacher accountability frameworks. In doing so, this research affirms the valuable but often under-appreciated creativity of English teachers' practices, in ways that do not readily align with standards-based conceptions of teaching.

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:

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CHAPTER 1 *Accounting for creativity*

1.1 Introduction

This qualitative study of creativity in post primary subject English teaching investigates the understandings and practices of eleven secondary school subject English teachers who operate in diverse institutional and curriculum settings in Victoria, Australia. Using socio-cultural theories of co-construction of knowledge and meaning, the study explores the everyday creative practices of the participating teachers. In doing so, the study draws upon Raymond Williams' (1977) concept of everyday creativity. The underpinning conceptual framework utilises the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, specifically his concepts of heteroglossia and dialogism (Bakhtin, 1981). The teacher narratives used in this study provide accounts of teacher practice, filled with tensions as teachers find ways to negotiate the competing priorities of their work. These narratives of practice are played against a backdrop of standards-based reforms in education.

Trying to pinpoint or trace back to the moment this study came into being is difficult to chronicle. It was not the “development-by-accumulation” or “incremental process” (Kuhn, 1996, p. 2) that is often seen as a defining feature of traditional scientific discovery. Tracing origins is, as Kuhn (1996) suggests in his historical accounts of scientific discovery, a far more complex process, an accumulation of experiences whereby the pursuit of discovery cannot be separated from the influences of its contexts. As such, my experience of undertaking this study cannot easily be separated from my own professional experiences of teaching both subject English and science in secondary schools and in supplementary (non-school) educational programs, prior to my more recent work as a teacher educator, and my current work in civics and citizenship education. Even these experiences have been, and continue to be, mediated by changing contexts and a changing educational landscape that is increasingly focused on standardisation and metrics to generate ‘meaningful’ data (Ozga, 2009). These professional and wider educational changes have prompted, and continue to prompt, rich reflection on my part, and also often challenge my understandings of English teachers’ creative practice.

At the forefront of these reflections are questions of teacher creative practice and creativity. Contemporary education policy discourses frequently cite creativity as a desired outcome of

education practice. However, there is a great deal of ambiguity about what ‘creativity’ means in educational contexts. What does it mean to be a ‘creative’ teacher? What place does creativity have in education? And how do we assess students’ creativity? These questions have never been more crucial than now, a time when education policy and curriculum across the world are calling for creativity to be embedded in education practice, and in some cases for it to be explicitly assessed. Recently in Australia, key documents—such as the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment Training & Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), 2008), the *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration of Education Goals* (Council of Australian Governments (COAG), Education Council, 2019), the *Australian curriculum* (Australian Curriculum, Assessment & Reporting Authority (ACARA), n.d.-a) and the *Victorian curriculum* (Victorian Curriculum & Assessment Authority, n.d.-a), the state-based version of this national curriculum, and the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APSTs) (AITSL, 2017)—have sought to shape national, state and local conversations about creativity and its relationship to knowledge and practice.

For some international researchers (e.g., Smith, 2019), the current conversations about the nature and place of creativity in subject English teaching are a welcome phenomenon. It is timely to revisit the question of the place of creativity in subject English some 50 years after the lively conversations at the transatlantic conference about the discipline at Dartmouth, about which John Dixon (1969) wrote so enthusiastically in *Growth through English*. For others, the renewed focus on creativity is prompting an important revisiting of the work of cultural theorists, such as Raymond Williams, who wrote of intensely important but elusive keywords like ‘creative’ in English culture in the decade after Dartmouth (Williams, 1975). And yet the third decade of the twenty first century is a very different world. It is a world preoccupied with state imposed professional standards, standardisation of practices and curriculum, centralised and prescribed outcomes and learning continua, and a world widely persuaded by arguments about creativity as human capital (Becker, 2009; Comber, 2011; Thompson, 2013; Lingard et al., 2016). Since Dixon, we have learned much about what creativity can be for students, teachers, and communities. We have learned how it is mediated by large-scale policy and local cultural nuances (Breen et al., 2018; Coulombe, 2014; Lucas et al., 2013; Sellar & Lingard, 2013; Yandell, 2013a; Zhu et al., 2020). And we have learned how institutions, such as schools and other educational institutions such as

supplementary education¹, can support and/or subvert creative aspirations for our teachers and students (Bellis, 2014; Coulombe & Parr, 2011; Doecke & McClenaghan, 2011). This study seeks to learn from these perspectives and to generate knowledge of creativity and creative practice as it is enacted in contemporary subject English classrooms. To achieve this aim, the study examines how creative practice is understood by eleven participating subject English teachers in Australia. That is to say, this knowledge will be carefully and reflexively situated. It will speak from and to the particular and varied institutional, cultural and policy imperatives that subject English teachers in Australia face in their everyday lives.

1.2 Research questions

The research questions for this study emerged from my own experiences in education and my reflections on the process of conducting the study (Erickson, 2011). The research questions and the process of the study have reciprocally shaped each other and my reflections on the process of the research. In the initial stages of my PhD work, there was a much stronger focus on student creativity and how it is developed and assessed within the subject English classroom. But a common thread began to emerge from the participating teachers' narratives: while the teachers often used examples of student creativity, these narratives were layered with the complexities and nuances of their teaching practice. The teachers were using the opportunity to tell me stories, through a range of conversations, to reflect on, make sense of, and in effect *account for* their practice. Over time, I came to refine the focus of the study to attend to the process of subject English teachers reflecting on and making sense of their creative practices. After an iterative period of proposing and revising the focus of my study, as is common in qualitative studies (Erickson, 2011), the following questions and sub-questions came to inform the co-constructed representation of the participating English teachers' stories as well as my analysis and discussion of them:

Research question 1: What understandings do subject English teachers have of creativity in secondary school classrooms and supplementary education spaces?

- a. What are secondary school subject English teachers' understandings of creativity?

¹ Myers and Grosvenor (2011) describe supplementary settings as educational facilities adjacent to schooling, which may or may not be bound by the same regulatory constraints as schools, for instance state or national curriculum (see Chapter 4).

- b. How do subject English teachers identify and account for creativity in their students' work?
- c. How do secondary school subject English teachers account for creativity in their teaching practice?
- d. What can we learn about subject English teachers' creative practice?

Research question 2: How does context mediate teacher practice that is thought to be creative?

- a. How is creativity described within the context of education and subject English?
- b. How are understandings of creativity mediated by policy documents, teacher professional standards, and curriculum?
- c. How are understandings of creativity mediated by standards-based reforms?
- d. How does teaching context—the school, classroom and wider educational context—mediate understandings of teacher creative practice?
- e. How does professional knowledge of subject English mediate teachers' understandings of creativity and teacher practice?

The study takes a social constructivist (Palinscar, 1998) and qualitative approach to the research and this approach has informed the narrative-based inquiry approach used to generate the data with teachers. Narrative-based inquiry provides a way of representing and exploring the situated complexities of the participating teachers' understandings of their teaching practices and creativity, and how these understandings are mediated by their teaching context. Analysis of these narratives, drawing from socio-cultural understandings of meaning-making and knowledge construction, provides opportunities to explore what Williams (1977) refers to as 'everyday creativity', namely how the participating English teachers negotiate and find ways of working through and beyond the tensions in their practice, including speaking back to standards-based reforms. The analysis demonstrates how, in many ways, the teachers' practices exceed the parameters drawn for them by standards-based understandings of both teaching and literacy within subject English.

The following section discusses how the socio-cultural perspective of knowledge construction lends itself to understandings of creativity in everyday teacher practice and how these understandings are applied to this study.

1.3 Defining creativity

As creativity is a central concept for this study, it is tempting to offer at the very least a provisional definition of creativity that can be used as a framework for the discussion in the following chapters. The issue, of course, is that the descriptions and definitions of creativity used across the literature are dispersed and disparate. Put simply, as Henry (2009) observes, there is little agreement as to what specifically 'creativity' is:

Creativity ... seems to be one of those words that although commonly used is not easy to define. We may use the term regularly, but can struggle if asked to put into words specifically to what we are referring. (p. 200)

There are commonalities that underpin some definitions such as something—an idea or product—that is new, unique or novel. Henry (2009) also proposes that most definitions of creativity tend to be categorised as any of, or a combination of, process, product, person, or place. In school education, creativity has long been linked with knowledge, learning and problem-solving (Jones, 2009; Tanggaard, 2011), emphasising the processes that enhance or develop creative activity, or assess the products of that creative activity, and in some cases, identify students who are creative. The discussions of creative places, that is the material settings where the creative activity is situated, tend to focus on environments or environmental factors that enhance creativity (Davies et al., 2013). These environments and environmental factors can be presented as if they are separate and distinct from the everyday contexts of a classroom, giving credence to the argument that creativity is something separate or different from the everyday, that creativity is extraordinary (Davies, et al., 2013; Gingell, 2001; Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009). Additionally, there are many arguments in education policy and research about how to account for creativity in ways that allow it to not only be teachable but also assessable (Beghetto et al., 2017; Smith & Smith, 2010).

The tensions, contradictions and disparity between different definitions, and therefore the absence of a consistent definition, is often cited in the literature as one of the key challenges for education and subsequently the reason why teaching and assessing creativity is considered so fraught (Henry, 2009; Lubart & Guignard, 2004; Lucas et al., 2013; Plucker, 1998; Smith & Smith, 2010). One of these challenges is presented by the centrality of assessment to educational endeavours. Therefore, in order to be teachable and assessable, it has sometimes been assumed that any definition of creativity must offer a tangible and quantifiable framework that enables the assessment of creative thinking processes and the subsequent outcome or product of those processes. This is not just an issue of common definitions or frameworks, but what the chosen definitions privilege. In other words,

definitions foreground views, values and priorities that are invested in concepts, such as creativity. These views, values and priorities reflect the perspectives and purposes of vested interests and policy actors. The discussion in the remainder of this chapter first provides an insight into the multiple definitions of creativity and the tensions between these definitions using Bakhtin's (1981) concept of heteroglossia. Following this, I explore Barthes' (2009) concept of "mythologies" as a way of exploring the assumptions informing particular definitions of creativity, including what views and values are privileged. Two additional sections provide a framework outlining how the socio-cultural understandings of creativity are used throughout this study, especially in relation to the participating English teachers' narratives and teacher practices. The chapter concludes with an outline of the thesis structure.

1.3.1 Heteroglossia

As Doecke et al., (2014) argue, "creativity is a socially contested space" (p. 3), and therefore it is important to "resist[] the assumption that everyone knows what 'creativity' means" (p. 3). It is also tempting to offer a definition that attempts to address issues of quantifying creativity within the classroom, in light of the centrality of assessment practices to educational endeavour. However, such operational definitions do not recognise what Bakhtin (1981) refers to as the heteroglossic nature of language, in this case language about creativity. Bakhtin's (1981) concept of heteroglossia, which can help explain contested interpretations of creativity, argues that:

At any given time, in any place, there will be a set of conditions—social, historical, meteorological, physiological—that will insure that a word uttered in that place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions; all utterances are heteroglot in that they are functions of a matrix of forces practically impossible to recoup, and therefore impossible to resolve. (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 428)

The forces Bakhtin refers to are the centripetal and centrifugal forces that "are respectively the centralising and decentralising (or decentering) forces in any language or culture" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 425). In some instances, definitions of creativity offered in policy documents—such as those by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)—act as centralising forces, attempting to assert, and in so doing impose, some sense of a mutually agreed upon understanding. However, the centripetal forces of unification, as Bakhtin (1981) describes them, those that seek to create convergence in understanding, are in dialogic tension with the centrifugal force of heteroglossia, which tends to multiply and problematize any single understanding. This is

evident in the varied (and sometimes vague) use of the terms ‘creativity’ and ‘creative thinking’ found throughout the research and policy literature.

1.3.2 Mythologies of creativity

One of the ways in which language can possibly reach “a certain maximum of mutual understanding” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 270) is through the use of what Roland Barthes (2009) refers to as the semiotic understanding of mythology. Mythologies, Barthes (2009) argues, occur in language where the signifier, in this example ‘creativity’, has multiple interpretations, in other words there are multiple understandings signified from the signifier. Mythologies can therefore be analyzed using the semiotic system, in particular instances where the first order sign becomes the signifier for the second order system, one with a deeper meaning or connotation. This is where, Barthes (2009) argues, the myth becomes into being, where the deeper meaning or connotation is accepted as natural. The ‘myth’ therefore is where a word, concept or image presents the impression of a neutral, unmediated reality. In such instances, the myth

transforms history into nature ... what causes mythical speech to be uttered is perfectly explicit, but it is immediately frozen into something natural; it is not read as a motive, but as a reason. (Barthes, 2009, p. 154)

In the case of creativity, it is used almost universally as having a positive valence, which, as the forthcoming literature review demonstrates, can conceal the views, values and priorities of its usage. For instance, creativity has become synonymous with particular educational outcomes, such as innovation and problem-solving, and within subject English, particular genres of writing. Within the *Australian curriculum* creativity is defined as a ‘general capability’, a skill applicable across all subject areas, to be developed by students. ACARA’s (n.d.-g) understanding of creativity is one based on creative thinking processes useful in the development of new ideas—“seeing existing situations in a new way” (para. 6), developing positive solutions, and potentially using technology to do so. In accepting ACARA’s definition, other understandings of creativity, such as everyday creativity and its relationship to teaching practice, become less privileged and are potentially hidden or lost from the discussion. As Doecke and McClenaghan (2011) suggest:

[The] arguably democratic impulse reflected in this wider application of the word ‘creativity’, this trend runs the risk (at best) of emptying the word of all meaning, as in the way ACARA uses the word to name a ‘general capability’, and (at worst) of deflecting us from asking what the word might really mean and from seeing our own lives as fundamentally creative. (p. 42)

It is only through a process of demystification that the history of the sign becomes apparent and the myths become clear. For instance, within the *Australian curriculum* creativity signifies a way of “responding to the challenges of the twenty-first century—with its complex environmental, social and economic pressures” (ACARA, n.d.-g, para. 3). This understanding of creativity is best understood through exploring understandings of human capital (Lee et al., 2010), which equates education with investment in skill development resulting in future economic benefit (Storper & Scott, 2009). Using Barthes’ method for exploring mythologies in popular culture, or in this case in discourses of creativity, it is possible to see the various signifiers that construct the myth and therefore the political, historical and cultural ways in which language has been mediated and the cultural structures the myth reinforces. The following two sections begin to sketch out some lesser-privileged definitions of creativity, such as creativity as knowledge construction and everyday creativity in relation to teacher practice.

1.3.3 Creativity and dialogic inquiry

The following discussion represents some of the multiple voices within existing research into creativity and creative practice, and explores how they interact and combine in complex ways to give form and shape to this research project. I have constructed accounts of what might be interpreted as creative teaching, and presented them as narrative excerpts in the form of moments or episodes from a play. These ‘scenes’, as I call them, are crucial to the dialogic conception of the study. Kozorog and Stanojević (2013) describe a ‘scene’ as a combination of communication, things that matter (particular practices, ideologies or artefacts for example), a place, an identification (especially with the things that matter), and actors in a particular time. They further state that the “concept of scene refers to spatially contextualised communication on the basis of things that matter, which provide anchorage for identification to the participants of such communication” (Kozorog & Stanojević, p. 369). Kozorog and Stanojević (2013) argue that the ‘things that matter’ are found in what brings participants together and drives the communication of participants in the scene. Within the scenes, whether scenes focusing on my teaching practices or the teaching practices of the participants, this driver of communication, the thing that matters, is the construction of knowledge within subject English through dialogic inquiry. Therefore, in the first part of the thesis, here in Chapter 1 and again in Chapter 4, these scenes include reflections on my own teaching. They provide a way of illustrating how dialogic teaching practices relate to particular concepts or methodological considerations. In the later parts of the study, these

scenes recreate observational accounts of the participating teachers' practices. In scenes that represent the participating English teachers' practices, my role is provisionally that of an observer, however, on some occasions, where I am invited by either the students or the teacher to interact in the class, I am also present as a participant or actor in the scene, and in some ways a co-constructor of the scene.

The first of these, Scene 1.1, is reconstructed from recollections and reflections on my own teaching experiences, in this case not in a secondary school classroom, but in a 'supplementary setting' (Myers & Grosvenor, 2011). I present it here because it provides some insight into the affordances of a socio-cultural perspective on creativity and how such a perspective can be used to understand the social relationships of a classroom and the meaning-making process therein. The scene itself is from a moment in a Saturday afternoon workshop as part of a supplementary educational program involving children aged between 9 and 12 with high interest and ability in reading literature and writing. While the club catered for a range of student interests, the particular one I was teaching focused on literature and writing. The scene describes what was the first of four sessions I taught, after I had been brought into the program to replace another educator, whom I will call Laura (pseudonym), who was on maternity leave. I had been given the outline and materials that Laura had prepared, but essentially, I was assured that I had licence to do what I pleased as long as it linked to the outline that had been provided to parents when enrolling their children.

Laura had taught this Saturday afternoon workshop for years, many of her students staying on after Grade 6 to participate in a more informal group, specifically for older students. The theme of the semester was 'Tropes in literature' and the trope we were beginning with, on which the scene is based, was 'Fire'. To begin the initial discussion in the session, students had been asked to bring with them a text that used fire in some way. The teaching plan Laura had provided started with the group at some specific text examples that they had identified and finished with students writing their own stories that included a fire trope. Scene 1.1, recreated from my research journal notes, is a portion of class discussion related to Billy Joel's song, *We didn't start the fire* (see Appendix A).

Scene 1.1 — “What does Billy Joel have against Peanuts?”

Laura, whom I had taught for many times before, always started these particular classes with stimulus quotes from poems and literature, to prompt some informal discussion amongst the students at the beginning of the session. On this particular Saturday afternoon, 17 students sat at desks arranged in a U-shape with a whiteboard at the front of the room. On that whiteboard was a diverse selection of poems and quotes, all with some reference to fire, which Laura had given me and which I had written up before the start of the session. I had also added a quote from *Macbeth*:

*Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing. (Shakespeare, cc. 1610, Act 5, Scene 5)*

As the students settled for the start of the class, I listened in to their discussions. Many of them were taking mock offense and scoffing at Shakespeare's assertion that they might be “idiots, full of sound and fury”.

We began by discussing books that used fire as a trope. The students responded eagerly by referencing everything from *Hunger Games* to *Harry Potter* to *Jane Eyre*. (I had been given the ‘heads up’ about one student, Erin, who offered *Jane Eyre* as an example. I remember taking particular note that I would have in the group a Grade 5 student who was exceptionally well read!). I had decided to take some time to discuss another text that perhaps the students wouldn't be familiar with. This was Billy Joel's song “*We didn't start the fire*”.

Narelle: What is the poem ...

Jason: Really, is this a poem, Narelle?

Narelle: Sure, why can't lyrics be poetry? (Jason pulls a face but doesn't respond.) What is the poem, Joel's lyrics, saying?

Bella: They're just random things.

Jade: Disneyland!, What does Disneyland have to do with anything?

Narelle: Just take a look at one verse. Can you see any connections? What about if you compare verses?

Jy: Oh, they're historical events.

Narelle: Okay, so look at the chorus. Why is Joel singing “We didn't start the fire”?

Bella: Is he saying these things are bad?

Jade: Maybe, maybe he's angry?

Jason: But how can anyone say Disneyland is bad or be angry about Disneyland?

Erin: What's thalidomide?

Bella: I don't understand.... What's “British Politicians Sex” mean?

Jade:	Oh that's about gender and the issue of gays and trans people, what to do about laws and stuff, and marriage, you know ...
	(I stand in the middle listening to the conversation, watching students trying to understand the references, offering different interpretations. I resist the urge to give the students the 'correct' answer, and instead try to focus on responding to their questions in ways that help them make connections or provoke further thought).
Jy:	What does Billy Joel have against Peanuts?
Narelle:	Um ... nothing that I'm aware of. What are you referring to?
Jy:	Well, we said that this was a collection of things that he was angry about. Why would he be angry about Woodstock?
Narelle:	(I'm momentarily confused, trying to trace the logic between Billy Joel, Peanuts and Woodstock). Huh? ... Oh ... Woodstock the music festival, not the cartoon character! I know Charles Shultz created some Peanuts cartoons on the issues he had with education (I'm reminded of the cartoon featuring Lucy demanding to know what perspective the teacher had used to mark her coat-hanger art project) but I'm not sure if he did anything on Woodstock the music festival.
Jy:	What else did Charles Shultz create cartoons about?
	(Jy and I both agree that it's possible that Shultz may have also had some commentary on some of the events highlighted in the Billy Joel song, so we decide to investigate further. We discover that many of Charles Shultz's Peanuts cartoons offer social and political commentary, not just the educational one I'm familiar with, and that the 'Charles' in Charles Hebdo was in honour of Charles Shultz's work. Charles Hebdo was a familiar name to almost everyone in the group given the recent shooting in France only days before this session. Both Jy and I remark on the interesting connection and move on.
	The flurry of questions, interest and conversation continues).
Jason:	Why is Elvis mentioned?
Narelle:	It was probably his dance moves. It was similar to how some people have reacted to twerking.
Jason:	Sure.
Jade:	(Indignant) How could you ban someone from dancing?
Narelle:	Well, people still burn books they don't approve of?
Jason:	Really, like what?
Narelle:	I'm pretty sure Harry Potter was burnt in some places.
Students:	Why?
Narelle:	Witchcraft?

Erin: Oh! But that's so sixteen hundreds.

Narelle: *The Hobbit* was banned in my primary school; I've never read it.

Students: (Shouting, almost in unison) *YOU'VE NEVER READ THE HOBBIT?*

Despite not knowing many of the historical events that Joel's lyrics referenced, the students were keen to make meaning of the poem: what the actual historical events referred to; how they were connected; and what connections they had to Joel's assertions of not starting the fire. The task took longer than expected. On reflection, it would have perhaps been quicker to have students spend time 'Googling' information—in fact there is a Wikipedia page detailing every historical event referenced in the song—and doing so may have resulted in students reaching what some may deem the 'correct' interpretation of the different historical events. In the scene, though, the students do not need to know precisely what each event was in order to make some sense of the song. They are able to draw on the lyrics and their experiences of the world to make meaning. As Yandell (2006) asserts:

Reading is a semiotic activity, the construction of meaning motivated by the interests of the reader; reading is a process in which the whole subjectivity of the reader is implicated. Each reading is thus necessarily gendered, racialised, historicised: the product of a specific historical subject, reading in a specific historical context. (p. 319)

This would seem to explain what is happening as Jade and Bella attempt to make sense of the phrase "British politicians sex". The line refers to the British Secretary of State for War John Profumo's affair with a showgirl during the 1960's. However, the interpretation that Jade and Bella have attributed to this phrase, although not essentially correct in terms of Joel's intended meaning, has political and historical relevance for them. It is important to point out that this discussion was taking place at a time when Australia was in the midst of a robust and often vicious debate around legalising gay marriage and examining the exclusionary laws pertaining to transgendered peoples. One might argue dialogically that there is a tension between the intended meaning of the line and the 'situated' interpretation made by the students—that it's "about gender and the issue of gays and trans people, what to do about laws and stuff, and marriage, you know". And yet Jade and Bella's discussion demonstrates vividly that:

Meaning is not fixed ... it is continually remade, as different generations interpret it from within the framework of their own values and beliefs, appropriating it in new ways. (Doecke et al., 2014, p. 9)

While Jade and Bella negotiate the meaning of "British politician sex", Jy's question "What does Billy Joel have against peanuts?" demonstrates his own struggle to interpret the lyrics. He was able to recognise his interpretation of "Woodstock" did not fit within the context of the

song. By happenstance, Jy and I were able to make connections between Charles Schultz, Charles Hebdo and the political commentary, and therefore Jy's interpretation had potential to make sense, as had Jade and Bella's interpretation.

Wells (1999) refers to this negotiation of meaning through questions and dialogue as "dialogic inquiry", and what Doecke and Parr (2005) characterise as a "joint inquiry into language and meaning" (p. 7). Wells (2000) explains that dialogic inquiry is:

An approach to the chosen themes and topics in which the posing of real questions is positively encouraged, whenever they occur and by whoever they are asked. Equally important as the hallmark of an inquiry approach is that all tentative answers are taken seriously and are investigated as rigorously as the circumstances permit. (p. 62)

The 'inquiry approach' evident in Scene 1.1 is enacted through a dialogic combination of: students questioning the teacher (more than the teacher asking questions); the framework that Laura had planned for the session (i.e., investigating how fire is used as a trope across different literature); and students asking questions and proposing answers amongst each other. While I note in the scene that I "resist the urge to give the students the correct answer", I acknowledge that the circumstances did not actually permit a deep investigation of every question or event that Joel offers. My 'side conversation' with Jason, and then with the rest of the class, about Elvis's dance moves may have been another moment for investigation and inquiry. However, the topic for each of the Saturday workshops was different; threads of conversations, ideas and writing techniques, as well as the structure of the class, would be sustained across the workshops. This was the only Saturday where we would explicitly discuss fire, and therefore the time to pursue the line of inquiry regarding Billy Joel's lyrics was limited.

The limited timeframe of the Saturday sessions also did not allow for all students to undertake their own online extended research, so the research I undertook with Jy—when time was less pressing—was through my device. Jason's question about Elvis came just before a short break, where students needed to move into preparation for the writing task, so rather than provide Jason with an opportunity to explore and investigate the question of Elvis's dance moves, I moved the discussion on. According to Doecke and Parr (2005) dialogic inquiry is an important part of a creative English classroom, where "teachers and students explore the meaning-making potential of a range of literacy practices in which they engage in their everyday lives" (p. 7). For subject English teachers this includes the negotiation of the circumstances that Wells (1999) refers to. These circumstances include the immediate classroom context, such as student needs, timing, and planned curriculum, intended learning outcomes, and wider contexts such as the policy landscape.

Dialogic inquiry and the construction and negotiation of knowledge in the classroom is one understanding of creativity represented throughout the discussion in Scene 1.1. In the chapters that follow, I go on to show how this is predominantly evident throughout the scenes and accounts that I present from the everyday practice of participating English teachers. This will apply, in different ways, in supplementary settings such as the literature workshop, where there appeared to be few curriculum constraints, and in secondary school classrooms, where teachers are more obliged to implement a state-imposed curriculum. Another understanding of creativity that is used throughout the thesis is one that draws from Raymond Williams' (1977) concept of everyday creativity. I now want to briefly tease out this notion of English teachers' everyday practice as it relates to creativity in the English classroom. The concept of everyday teacher practice is the focus of the next section, and is used to explore how the participating subject English teachers navigate the tensions in their classrooms and the competing agendas that may constrain creative practice in subject English.

1.3.4 Teacher practice and everyday creativity

Everyday creativity, as Raymond Williams (1977) conceptualises it, is part of everyday life and experience. It is a dynamic and social process as we "struggle to remake ourselves—to change our personal organisation so that we may live in a proper relation to our environment" (p. 26). Building on Williams, for Doecke, Parr and Sawyer (2014), everyday creativity is:

a common possession, something that inheres within every moment of our lives, as we entertain the possibilities that might be opened up as we step from the present into the future, from the 'known' into the 'unknown'. (p. 13)

Within the context of teacher practice, this is perhaps best understood in terms of teachers' struggles to negotiate and make sense of the tensions that are inherent in their practice. For instance, teachers engage in everyday creativity as they are obliged to negotiate agendas of standards-based reforms and other policy imperatives that speak about creativity as a 'twenty-first century' learning outcome (Craft & Jeffrey, 2008).

As my review of the literature in Chapter 2 will show, teacher creative practice within teachers' everyday work has not been widely recognised. Hayes et al. (2017) acknowledge 'uncommon pedagogies', how creative "teachers put together a range of discursive and material practices, underpinned by principles of respect and recognition, that enables the design and enactment of situated, enabling pedagogies" (p. 93; see also Comber 2016). The focus of these uncommon pedagogies, specifically literacy pedagogies, is how they influence student identity and learning. Other literature has tended to focus on developing *student*

creativity through creative pedagogies (Cremin & Chappell, 2021), modelling and creative thinking approaches (Jeffery & Craft, 2004). The APSTs (AITSL, 2017) recognise creativity as something that should only be expected of the experienced teacher, one who is able to develop innovative teaching resources and in doing so model creativity to their colleagues. While the likes of Doecke et al. (2007) acknowledge the ideological struggle of negotiating tensions in practice, these tensions have also been constructed as a problem that needs resolving. Bickmore et al. (2005) for instance, refer to tensions as a “doubleness” in practice (p. 24)—talking about practice in one way, while teaching in another. Bickmore et al.’s (2005) solution to this ‘inconsistency’ is to focus attention back on pre-service teacher education, and seek to ensure that teacher education provides “greater conceptual unity in the programs [they] offer” (p. 49). They also agree with earlier research that schools should have a less “fragmented and disjointed” program in order to achieve “conceptual continuity” (p. 49).

The need for consistency across teacher practices is a key argument used to justify standards-based reforms such as teacher professional standards (AITSL, 2017) and policies that outline consistent teaching approaches such as the High Impact Teaching Strategies (HITS) endorsed by the Victorian Department of Education (Department of Education & Training (DET), 2017). These arguments for consistency or standardisation construct “doubleness” or tensions as something that needs to be erased rather than generative opportunities to explore how teacher practice and knowledge are mediated by the teaching context (Ellis, 2007). The term ‘teacher practice’ within documents such as the APSTs and HITS exemplifies Shulman’s (1987) observation that:

The advocates of professional reform base their argument on the belief that there exists a “knowledge base for teaching”—a codified or codifiable aggregation of knowledge, skill, understanding, and technology, of ethics and disposition, of collective responsibility—as well as a means for representing and communicating it. (p. 4)

Shulman (1987), however, argues that the base of teacher knowledge is more complex than the codified approaches taken by teacher professional standards, and as such “critical features of teaching, such as the subject matter being taught” (p. 6) are often ignored. Despite Connell’s (1985) arguments that teacher practice or work is difficult to describe given “teaching is a labour process without an object” (p. 70), Shulman attempts to offer a knowledge base for teachers that emphasises knowledge such as subject-specific pedagogies and content knowledge, alongside knowledge of the learners and school context.

Drawing on Shulman’s (1987) and Connell’s (1985) arguments, teacher practice within the context of this study does not simply refer to a repertoire of teaching strategies or activities enacted within the classroom. Rather, teacher practice refers to not only what teachers do,

but also how subject-specific knowledge and knowledge of their students, school education contexts mediate what they do. It is with these understandings of teacher practice and everyday creativity in mind that I present carefully contextualised accounts of participating teachers' creative practice in the chapters that follow. These accounts provide opportunities to illustrate and analyse how teacher practice is mediated by context, how teachers make and re-make sense of their practice in everyday settings, how they negotiate a variety of tensions, and how they find their own ways of stepping from the 'known' to the 'unknown'.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

The thesis comprises nine chapters. This first chapter has provided the background to and aims of the research, as well as an overview of how some key concepts are used to frame the research. The study aims to explore how subject English teachers account for creativity within their practice, and in doing so how their understandings of creativity and creative practice relate to teachers' professional knowledge and identity. The research therefore draws on Bakhtin's (1981) concepts of heteroglossia and dialogism, and Raymond Williams' (1977) understanding of everyday creativity. Chapters 2 and 3 critically engage with the relevant literature that has both informed and provoked the chapters that follow. The focus for Chapter 2 is the range of discourses in which creativity has been framed as human capital, exploring how creativity has been, and is currently, defined and operationalised in economic and broader education policy contexts. It explores the coupling of creativity with innovation and technology signifying economic growth and considers how these understandings of creativity have been embedded into policy discourses such as Australia's national education goals and national curriculum. In this chapter I argue that the meanings attributed to 'creativity' in education are shaped by specific agendas around building a certain kind of student subject as befits an entrepreneurial and individualist political economy.

Building on Chapter 2, Chapter 3 explores understandings of creativity within the context of different instantiations of subject English, providing both an historical and contemporary account of these understandings. Using Williams (1977), Chapter 3 also explores socio-cultural understandings of everyday creativity within the context of subject English and teachers' practice. This understanding identifies a perspective on subject English and teaching subject English that encompasses subject English teacher professional knowledge and acknowledges the relationship between teacher practice, teaching context (subject area and school or supplementary setting) and teacher identity. Chapter 4 is the methodology chapter in which I lay out the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the study. I

identify and discuss the social constructivist (Palinscar, 1998) and qualitative nature of this study and how narrative-based inquiry provides opportunities to explore the complexity of the underlying values and understandings embodied in the subject English teacher narratives that I present throughout the thesis. Furthermore, Chapter 4 discusses my approach to analyzing these narratives through creative reconstruction of classroom observations and appreciating the way each teacher was making and remaking meaning in her/his everyday teaching practices.

Chapter 5, the first of the three analysis chapters, focuses on one school setting, Ridgemont Secondary College in the east of Melbourne, and the experiences of two teachers, Sarah and Rosa. Both Sarah and Rosa's narratives explore how the priorities of Ridgemont mediate their teaching practices and understandings of creativity. The second part of the chapter focuses more specifically on Rosa's narrative, which explores how she navigates the constraints on her practice, and demonstrates some of the struggles of her everyday practice as she tries to negotiate the competing demands of the needs of her students, the curriculum, school policies, and the wider education discourses of data-driven practices and teacher accountability measures. I explore how she manages this while maintaining her sense of professional identity. In Chapter 6 I take the reader inside the classrooms of three subject English teachers— Steve, Anne and Rebecca—and explore how space, meaning and identities are created and negotiated within the everyday practices of the classroom. Chapter 7 analyses how wider education discourses such as high-stakes assessments mediate teachers' practices, specifically in relation to subject English teachers' knowledge of writing and approaches to teaching writing. It explores some of the struggles the participating subject English teachers, namely Steve, Anne, Laura and Catherine, experience when working through and beyond the tensions between accountability measures such as nation-wide literacy tests and developing meaningful writing experiences for students that connect the classroom to the students' lives beyond the classroom.

Chapter 8 draws together the insights of the analysis chapters to examine how the everyday creative practices of the participating subject English teachers provide opportunities to negotiate the tensions of teachers' practices and find ways to speak back to the constraints of high-stakes assessment and standards-based reforms. I show how the teachers' everyday creative practices afford them an opportunity to maintain and build on their professional identity and agency when many of the standardising accountability measures, such as teacher professional standards, devalue professional subject matter knowledge and the contexts of that knowledge and contribute toward the de-professionalisation of English

teachers. Chapter 9 concludes the thesis by discussing how this study contributes to understandings of creative teacher practice and offers recommendations for teachers, (school) leaders and policy makers, and finally makes recommendations for further research.

The combination of the contested nature of creativity, the high value placed on creativity in such official discourses as mandated curriculum and policy statements, and the perceived need for standardised practices and identifiable outcomes in formal educational systems, suggests the potential for a number of complex tensions. These tensions not only exist between the varied definitions of creativity, creative thinking and creative practice, but also are also evident in how the various manifestations of creativity are enacted and assessed in the classroom. This research therefore aims to explore how English teachers negotiate these tensions, and, as a result, how the participating teachers account for creativity in their teaching practice. This study, therefore, generates knowledge on how creativity and creative practice function as dimensions of teachers' professional identity and sense of professionalism.

CHAPTER 2 *Creativity in education*

2.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 1, creativity as a concept is highly contested. While I draw on a socio-cultural definition of creativity throughout this study, dominant discourses in current education policy are most often associated with human capital understandings of creativity (Lee et al., 2010; Sellar & Lingard, 2013). Human capital understandings of creativity are typically focused on “people who add economic value through their creativity” (Storper & Scott, 2009, p. 149; see also Florida, 2004) and how these same people can become productive, innovative and critical thinkers. And yet, the discussion of creativity in the wider education policy landscape also acknowledges that “concepts of creativity are always historically contingent, arising from social conditions and configurations of power at specific moments” (Adams & Owens, 2015, p. 5). The tension between these divergent views of creativity characterise much of the research and policymaking within education contexts. In foregrounding some of that history, particularly in relation to human capital understandings of creativity, one of the aims of this chapter is to demystify the history and motivations of human capital understandings of creativity (Barthes, 2009), and in doing so, provide a basis for more situated accounts of creativity within subject English and teacher practice in succeeding chapters.

The first section of this chapter begins with an overview of human capital understandings of creativity. This section includes a discussion of some of the common frameworks and assumptions connected to human capital understandings that underpin and support the teaching of creativity, specifically creativity as a generalised thinking skill, and the yoking together of creativity with youth and information communication technology (ICT). The conclusion of this first section points to some of the assumptions associated with creativity as human capital, such as the benefits to productivity and efficiency. The second section explores how creativity has been embedded within curriculums internationally, but in particular within national and state based curriculums in Australia, before concluding with a discussion of how creativity is assessed within education in line with human capital views. The third and final section of this chapter considers some of the limitations of human capital understandings of creativity. Overall, the chapter argues that the dominant understanding of creativity within education is shaped by specific agendas around developing innovation and entrepreneurial skills of individuals for economic sustainability and growth. And in doing so,

privileges particular understandings of creativity that are in tension with other, more situated accounts of creativity.

2.2 Creativity as human capital

There is a significant body of literature that explores creativity and its meaning and application in education, and it should be no surprise that none succeeds in providing a resolution to what Lubart and Guignard (2004) refer to as the “debate about the nature of creativity” (p. 43). As they say, the term ‘creativity’ has been used to mean everything from imagination to initiative to innovation. While arguments about the nature of creativity abound (see Halpin, 2006, 2008; Lucas et al., 2013), the importance of creativity has been widely acknowledged. As Craft (2003) reflects:

Creativity is becoming a part of a universalised discourse in the Western world. This reflects the globalisation of economic activity which has led to increased competition for markets and which has developed, therefore, an integral fear of obsolescence. As well as reflecting the wider world, creativity is a response to it, as continual innovation and resourcefulness have become necessary to economic survival. Another aspect of economic change, which also requires creativity, is the growth of the weightless economy as Seltzer and Bentley (1999) have classed it, i.e. the service sector, electronic communication and e-markets. These all rely on the intellectual and creative capabilities of workers, at least as much as on their physical energy and general intelligence. (pp. 113-114)

Craft’s observations highlight the relationship between creativity and the products of innovation whereby an individual’s creative capabilities, along with the “knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes ... facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being” (Keeley, 2007, p. 29). Creativity, often used interchangeably with innovation, is widely considered one of the skills “vital to individual and organizational success” (Beghetto et al., 2017, p. 1; see also Beghetto & Kaufman, 2013; Kaufman, 2009). These vital skills, often referred to as ‘21st century skills’—defined as “those skills and competencies young people will be required to have in order to be effective workers and citizens in the knowledge society of the 21st century” (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009, p. 8; see also Binkley, et al., 2010)—are believed to maximize an individual’s ‘human capital’; in other words the knowledge or skills one has acquired through education and training (Becker, 2009).

The development of creativity as human capital is considered fundamental in discourses of globalisation and economics, and it has become a powerful discourse within education as well, motivated by what Hall (2010) refers to as the “creativity as a savior discourse” (p. 489). This is consistent with Raymond Williams’ (1977) argument that the term creativity and its applications generally have consistently positive connotations, and it is therefore perhaps not

surprising that this ‘savior’ discourse is a common theme within educational policy and initiatives that yoke together creativity with economic sustainability and growth. Initiatives by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), such as *The Dakar framework for action: Education for all; Meeting our collective commitments* (UNESCO, 2000), present the idea that, for example in Africa:

Education shall prepare people to take control of their own destiny, liberating them from dependency and endowing them with initiative, creativity, critical thinking, enterprise, democratic values, pride and appreciation of diversity. (p. 27)

Within this discourse, individuals, especially young people, are imagined as innovative, nimble and agile, and are “touted by politicians, leaders, educators, and the media as ‘saviours’ for the ills of society” (Moran, 2010, p. 76; see also Moyle, 2011). Thus creativity no longer just represents skills, or the new, unique or original, but signifies a future economic and social hope.

According to Harvey (2007), the construction of the creative individual who is innovative, nimble and agile is congruent with the goals of neoliberal ideologies that focus on the development of individual skills that can be economised (see also Sahlberg & Oldroyd, 2010). The neoliberal ideology that drives this agenda considers that “social good will be maximised by maximising the reach and frequency of market transactions, and it seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market” (Harvey, 2007, p. 3). The neoliberal argument is that freedom in the market enables a larger variety of choices and therefore an expanded set of personal freedoms for the individual. While personal freedoms are upheld, “each individual is held responsible and accountable for his or her own actions and well being” (Harvey, 2007, p. 65). Harvey (2007) argues that neoliberalism requires individuals to take responsibility in developing the necessary skills for success “through dedication to education ... work ethic, submission to work discipline and flexibility, and the like” (p. 157). Within education, neoliberalism can therefore be aligned with human capital understandings of the creative individual, investing in human potential through the development of problem-solving skills, flexibility, entrepreneurial vision, and related abilities and skills. Human capital presents creativity as not so much as a choice but as an economic imperative, for individuals, institutions and the state.

Useful examples of both human capital and creativity as savior discourses can be found in Richard Florida’s work. Florida and Goodnight (2005) use a range of case studies to highlight the beneficial and less successful efforts to capitalise on the benefits of the “creative class”. In a case study of software company SAS they detail how the company increased

productivity by offering employees particular benefits—for example medical and child-care facilities—that “maximize their creative potential and in turn, produce great work” (p. 4). Florida capitalises on the human capital understanding of creativity, romanticising the idea of the entrepreneur and innovative businesses. These ‘creatives’ or the creative class—people who respond to situations by “engag[ing] in a higher degree of problem solving in their everyday work” (Florida et al., 2011, p. 29)—are constructed as the saviors of economies, with Florida (2005) suggesting that “the age we are entering [is] the creative age because the key factor propelling us forward is the rise of creativity as the primary mover of our economy” (p. 26). Thus, the critical role of education is for teachers to develop the creative problem-solving skills of individual students—by, for instance, modelling creativity through problem-solving (Jeffrey & Craft, 2004)—so that students are innovative, nimble and agile, and therefore able to productively and efficiently contribute to the economy in the future.

As Florida’s work demonstrates, creativity is both a producer of and a product of increased productivity and efficiency. As another marker of the neoliberal agenda, the productivity rhetoric gained prominence in Australia in the 1990’s and has since provided the basis for and justification of economic policy that favours productivity growth (Ferguson, 2016) across a range of industries, including education. In response to the economic demand for higher productivity and efficiency the Australian Government formed the Productivity Commission. One of the purposes of the Productivity Commission is to report on the Government’s productivity performance against key outcome indicators such as the value of a particular government sector’s contribution to the wider community versus the resource expenditure of that sector. In 2017, the Australian Government Productivity Commission included within its *Report on Government Services 2017* an analysis of the productivity of education in line with the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment Training & Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), 2008) and therefore uses the declaration as the foundation for its ‘framework for performance indicators’, which state that:

Improving educational outcomes for all young Australians is central to the nation’s social and economic prosperity and will position young people to live fulfilling, productive and responsible lives. The goals for school education are that: 1) Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence; and 2) all young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens. (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 7)

To evaluate productivity and efficiency the report therefore considers student retention rates, qualification attainment and expenditure, but also reports on the achievement levels on national and international standardised testing. The standardised testing results, or ‘student outcomes’, are considered indicators of whether the education system is providing students

with a “solid foundation in knowledge and understanding linked with complex skills that underpin problem-solving, critical thinking and creativity, so they can reach their full potential” (Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2017, p. 4.25). This link between ‘confident and creative individuals’ and productivity is further linked to economic prosperity. As Harvey (2007) explains, creativity as problem solving, innovation or entrepreneurial skills, results in “continuous increases in productivity [which] should then deliver higher living standards to everyone” (p. 64).

A human capital understanding of creativity emphasises the development of young people who are nimble and agile, and able to work productively and efficiently to contribute to a sustainable economy. However, in order to maximise an individual’s human capital, it is not sufficient that individuals develop creativity skills—they must also be transferable between different contexts. Therefore, human capital understandings of creativity are often treated as a thinking skill that can be generalised across contexts, such as subject or curriculum areas. The following section explores creativity as a transferable skill, namely creative thinking, by discussing how various education initiatives and frameworks have been used to develop students’ creative thinking in individualised and decontextualised ways.

2.2.2 Creativity as a thinking skill

The discussion in this section explores how a human capital understanding of creativity is operationalised within education, firstly through discussing the shift to creativity as a form of thinking, and secondly through discussing various frameworks that individualise and decontextualise teaching approaches to creative and problem-solving thinking skills. Lastly, I discuss the policy and curriculum associations between creativity, youth and information technology. This discussion begins by exploring historically the shift to thinking skills through international initiatives such as the 1989 OECD conference, *Learning to think: Thinking to learn* and Formal Aims of Cognitive Education (FACE) project in Finland (Maclure & Davies, 1991), before examining more closely several thinking frameworks used to develop student creativity. These thinking frameworks, in addition to their links to creative thinking skills, were used to inform the *Australian curriculum: Critical and creative thinking general capability* (ACARA, n.d.-g). Therefore, these frameworks are considered by ACARA to have relevancy in current curriculum and teaching practices. The second part of the discussion explores how the relationship between creativity, youth and technology constructed through policy may be used to economise an individual’s creativity and problem-solving skills.

2.2.2.1 Thinking skills and education

The focus on teaching generalised thinking skills such as creativity is what White and Gunstone (1992) describe as a movement in education from an “ability to recall facts or to apply standard algorithms” to considering whether and how “knowledge can be used to solve novel problems” (p. 1). This shift to ‘transferable skills’ (Nisbet, 1993) or, more recently, to ‘21st century skills’, is regularly attributed to the “changing social and economic demands of our modern way of life oblig[ing] our educational systems to aim at broader competences than the traditional ‘basics’” (Nisbet, 1993, p. 283; see also Ananiadou & Claro, 2009; Binkley, et al., 2010). According to the OECD (2011):

As the world economy becomes more integrated and competition more globalised, many OECD countries are shifting away from mass production of basic products in favour of goods and services that require high levels of knowledge, creativity and innovation. The rapid pace of change in our societies accelerates the need for developing human capital to create, promote, diffuse and adopt the intellectual and material innovations that can bring greater prosperity and social inclusion. (p. 25)

Thus, according to the OECD, there has been a shift to “developing expert decision making [skills] and metacognitive strategies that indicate how to proceed when no standard seems applicable” (Dede, 2010, p. 58).

The shift to transferable thinking skills as an educational approach is evident in, for example, the proceedings of the 1989 OECD conference, *Learning to think: Thinking to learn*. The focus of the conference was to detail approaches to promoting thinking in the curriculum from around the world at that time. The Proceedings mention various frameworks such as Bloom’s taxonomy, de Bono’s Cognitive Research Trust (CoRT), and other ‘thinking curriculum’ initiatives such as the “Formal Aims of Cognitive Education” (FACE) project in Finland (Maclure & Davies, 1991, p. 137). Many of these frameworks, such as de Bono’s (1983) CoRT, are focused on “thinking skills that help a learner to function better in his or her life outside of school” (p. 705). In a similar way, FACE is predominantly concerned with adapting “teaching to encourage students in analysis of their thinking” (Nisbet, 1993, p. 284). The FACE project was designed to systematically teach all Finnish students thinking skills such as “the formal qualities of concept formation, reasoning, explanation, and truth” (Scheinin & Mehtäläinen, 1999, p. 89). The thinking skills were integrated into subject areas, and teachers were positioned as “experts in their own subject matter and in how to teach it” (Scheinin & Mehtäläinen, 1999, p. 89). Interestingly, the particular thinking skills that needed to be applied in each situation “remained at the discretion of the teacher” (Scheinin & Mehtäläinen, 1999, p. 89). While the FACE programme did not explicitly teach creativity as such, it was implicitly

linked to students' cognitive self-concept and self-esteem (Scheinin & Mehtäläinen, 1999). In Scheinin and Mehtäläinen's (1999) study they found a positive increase in effect size for creativity for students who had participated in the FACE programme.

While the OECD conference, *Learning to think: Thinking to learn*, was more than thirty years ago, many of the thinking skills frameworks that were referenced are currently still in use in educational settings. Smith and Smith's (2010) exploration of 'creativity programmes' in teachers' practices highlight Gardner's Multiple Intelligences, de Bono's thinking curriculum, and Bloom's taxonomy, as the most popular approaches for teaching creativity in the classroom. Within the background documents to the *Australian curriculum* (ACARA, 2012a), Gardner's Multiple Intelligences, de Bono's thinking curriculum, and Bloom's taxonomy, are similarly referenced as shaping what ACARA refers to as the *Critical and creative thinking general capability*. There are other frameworks and research discussed within this background document relating to the *Critical and creative thinking general capability*. However, the discussion predominantly focuses on critical thinking or metacognitive strategies, which are not necessarily directly related to creativity within the context of the document. The creativity frameworks that are included in the general capabilities background document (ACARA, 2012a) are likely to inform or mediate how creativity is understood within current curriculum and teaching practices. The discussion below therefore considers how de Bono's, Bloom's and Gardner's frameworks are used to develop individual students' creativity.

2.2.2.2 Frameworks for creative thinking

The work of Edward de Bono is often closely associated with the intentional and explicit teaching of thinking skills, including creative or lateral thinking skills (de Bono 2014, 2015). Much of de Bono's work looks to "systematically apply a deliberate technique" (2015, p. 1) such as his work with provocations to encourage lateral thinking (de Bono, 1986). De Bono argued that provocation statements are integral to lateral thinking as they are designed to elicit a 'movement' value, a "mental operation in which we seek to go forward from a statement instead of comparing it to past experience as in judgement" (de Bono, 2002, p. 10). The provocations are "deliberate and defined" (p. 58) and have a strong "sense of ultimate purpose of the thinking" (p. 58). Within education de Bono's work is commonly used to generate alternative ideas (Copping, 2016), and as such he provides a range of strategies to promote individual students' lateral thinking. One of the key arguments to de Bono's work is a separation between the different ways of thinking, for instance through another strategy,

the “Six Thinking Hats” (de Bono, 2015). The Six Thinking Hats separates different aspects of thinking into six components or ‘hats’, where the green hat associated with idea generation and creativity is separated out from the other thinking hats². The Six Thinking Hats have been widely used in education from fields such as mathematics (Vernon & Hocking, 2014) to conflict resolution (de Bono, 2018). The Six Thinking Hats are widely considered to offer clear strategies for exploring all perspectives on a topic or an issue and critical thinking strategies to evaluate and reach group consensus (Pang & Burri, 2018). These strategies, de Bono (2015) argues, help to establish a culture of creativity—although the notion of culture is not theorised in his work—and when these strategies are used in conjunction with a provocation statement “provocation can become part of everyday creativity” (p. 241).

Similar to de Bono’s lateral thinking, Bloom’s taxonomy (Bloom et al., 1956; see also Anderson et al., 2001) is based on six hierarchical levels of thinking, and was initially designed,

to facilitate communication ... [It offered] a method of improving the exchange of ideas and materials ... developing a precise definition and classification of such vaguely defined terms as “thinking” and “problem solving” [that] would enable a group of schools to discern the similarities and differences among the goals of their different instructional programs. (p. 10)

In defining what Bloom et al. (1956) term ‘intended behaviours’ of the taxonomy, six different thinking categories were created, each attempting to represent an increase in thinking complexity, the higher categories assuming the skills of the categories beneath them. The highest category ‘*synthesis*’ was described as “the putting together of elements and parts so as to form a whole” (Bloom et al., 1956, p. 206). In the 2001 revision of the taxonomy, Anderson et al. (2001) refined the language to ‘*create*’. In doing so they also clarified the definition of ‘create’ by stating that:

Students should be able to synthesize material into a whole ... the student must draw upon elements from many sources and put them together into a novel structure or pattern relative to his or her own prior knowledge. *Create* results in a new product, that is, something that can be observed and that is more than the student’s beginning materials. (Anderson et al., 2001, p. 85)

The revision also clarified the relationship between the cognitive processes domain and the knowledge domain. So, for instance, ‘create’ was explicitly positioned as the highest cognitive challenge on the cognitive processes taxonomy and associated with a combination of factual, conceptual, procedural and metacognitive dimensions of knowledge (Krathwohl,

² The Six Thinking Hats are: the white hat for neutral information; the red hat for feelings and emotions; the black hat linked to negativity or problems; the yellow hat positivity and benefits; and the blue hat used to think about the thinking through setting agendas and summarizing information (de Bono, 2015).

2002). The new taxonomy, Krathwohl (2002) argues, provides a clearer indication of the depth and breadth of any cognitive activity within an educational context. Consequently, Bloom's Taxonomy has become a framework that is used to construct, teach, and assess a range of thinking skills (Horst & Prendergast, 2020).

Gardner's (1993) framework of Multiple Intelligences is not one that is immediately associated with creativity, given its focus on what Gardner proposes are the seven—since revised to nine (Goldschmidt, 2019)—ways an individual can demonstrate intelligence. The range of intelligences, Gardner argued, was an opportunity to remedy Western culture's narrow views of intelligence, namely "one's linguistic intelligence and one's mathematical/logical intelligence" (Smagorinsky, 1995, p. 20). The intersection between creativity and Multiple Intelligences arose out of researchers' interest in "whether creativity was similarly differentiated" (Gardner, 2011, p. 203). In originally proposing the framework of Multiple Intelligences, Gardner did not explicitly address creativity but, as Smith and Smith (2010) note, many of the teachers they interviewed identified Multiple Intelligences as one framework for teaching creativity, although interviewees did not specify how. In answering questions on the relationship between creativity and Multiple Intelligences, Gardner (2011) later concedes that it is possible to "be creative or noncreative [sic] in every sphere" (p. 303) and this may go some way to explaining the use of Multiple Intelligences as a framework for developing creative thinking. In a 2017 systematic review of how Multiple Intelligences is applied in education, Díaz-Posada et al. (2017) found that the Multiple Intelligences framework is used to enhance creativity through varying approaches to the curriculum, and improving education by taking into account an individual's intelligence, what they are capable of, how they develop knowledge, and doing so in a "creative and enriching way" (García-Retana, 2012, p. 2 as cited in Díaz-Posada et al., 2017, p. 81). Multiple Intelligences is therefore a framework for diversifying and encouraging innovation and innovative teaching and when linked with frameworks such as Bloom's Taxonomy—where Bloom's Taxonomy represents the complexity of the thinking process and Multiple Intelligences the type of knowledge used (Mumtaz et al., 2020)—Multiple Intelligences provides a framework for students to innovatively represent their knowledge (Smagorinsky, 1995). This suggests that the connection between creativity and Multiple Intelligences is not due to Gardner's original work on creativity per se, but rather how the construct of Multiple Intelligences has been taken up by educators and linked to other frameworks such as Bloom's taxonomy (Chen et al., 2009).

The incorporation of frameworks such as de Bono's, Bloom's and Gardner's are indicative of the move to a greater focus on teaching generalised thinking skills that are transferable between contexts. This shift highlights a human capital perspective where skills or knowledge that were once considered valuable are now seen to be insufficient in preparing current generations for an unknown future (Kay, 2010; see also Harris, 2014; Lee et al., 2010; Salhberg & Oldroyd, 2010). The next section focuses on how desirable skills such as creativity and problem-solving, are often yoked together with the ability to use technology as a key way of preparing the current generation for an unknown future and for creating a successful economy.

2.2.3 Creativity, youth and ICT

While there is debate about which particular skills are necessary to prepare young people for the 21st century (Lamb et al., 2017), it is widely accepted that the 21st century skills, such as creative thinking, are the ones most valuable for an era where technology and machines are shaping, and in many cases also automating, labour, as “computers and telecommunications expand their capabilities to accomplish human tasks” (Dede, 2010, p. 56). In schools the focus on technology has manifested as an increase in particular programs such as Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) programs (Fajrina et al., 2020). The focus on STEM is part of a desire to develop skills in new generations of the workforce through investing in “information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure in Australian schools” (Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2014, p. 96). As part of the quest for transferable 21st century skills, both the *Australian curriculum* (ACARA, n.d.-h) and the Victorian state iteration, the *Victorian curriculum* (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA), n.d.-f), have emphasised the importance of integrating ICT into each of the curriculum areas. The *Australian curriculum*, argues for instance, that “in developing and acting with ICT capability, students: generate ideas, plans and processes; [and] generate solutions to challenges and learning area tasks” (ACARA, n.d.-h, para. 12). ICT capability has become closely linked with innovation and the ability to create or design new products such as digital applications, especially to problem-solve. The use of ICT, especially in its capacity to enhance the design process, is often referred to as a desirable 21st century attribute (see Brown & Adler, 2008; Daniels, 2017; Foundation for Young Australians, 2017). Policies and initiatives in education therefore often yoke together the development of student ICT and innovation skills “creating momentum for integrating ICT in

teaching and learning and promoting innovative classroom practice” (Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2014, p. 4.96).

The development of human capital, especially a young person’s ability to innovate using technology, is part of a larger discourse, where the development of young people’s capabilities through innovation, collaboration, flexibility and inter-cultural awareness, can be seen as a panacea for a future that is uncertain (see Gladwell, 2000; Harris, 2014; Lee et al., 2010; Sahlberg & Oldroyd, 2010). For instance, Livingstone and Sefton-Green (2016) argue that many vital dimensions of childhood are changing: established values are being challenged, and traditions are being reinvented, shaking people’s confidence in the future and leading them to redouble their efforts to control various risks they might face into the future. For today’s young people, they argue, the possibilities for work, travel, relationships, and lifestyle are more varied than ever. But at the same time, young people face growing uncertainty and insecurity that, when combined with deepening social and economic inequality, means they may never benefit from the exciting opportunities that seem to beckon (Livingstone & Sefton-Green, 2016). Creativity, or innovation, is seen as a way of combatting this future uncertainty. While Livingstone and Sefton-Green (2016) argue that student innovation through the use of ICT enables student agency, human capital understandings of creativity and innovation also construct these skills as an economic imperative.

Banaji et al. (2010) argue that the affordances of technology and creative technology use should be “socially-situated” (p. 60) in order to address questions of evaluation of authentic use and access inequalities. However, one of the similarities between the thinking skills frameworks discussed above and the use of ICTs is the assumption that an individual can apply different thinking processes and creative problem-solving strategies to a range of contexts, even independent of context. The decontextualised nature of these strategies may explain why the frameworks to teach creative thinking discussed above are used extensively in education (Smith & Smith, 2010); the frameworks provide structured approaches to thinking processes that are often considered too difficult to quantify. The capacity to be able to apply these strategies and generate innovative solutions and novel ideas therefore becomes the responsibility of each individual student, and is constructed as a necessity as young people are expected to respond to increasing precarity and the rise of the ‘gig’ economy. Rather than critique or address the systems that create instability—one might argue by applying the critical and creative thinking processes to the system—young people are instead ‘responsibilised’ and charged with coming up with personal solutions (Anwar & Graham, 2020). The responsibility of the teacher is therefore to integrate these

decontextualised skills into the curriculum and classroom, hopefully in some meaningful way; a failure to do so is potentially seen as a failure on the teacher's part to prepare students for their future (Benade, 2017; O'Neal et al., 2017). This is particularly important given the connections made in the prevailing discourses between innovation in ICT and increasing productivity and efficiency.

Given the importance of developing creative thinking skills and teachers' responsibility to integrate these skills into the curriculum, the following section discusses how human capital understandings of creativity have been embedded in curriculum documents in Australia, and also within Europe, Britain, the United States (US) and Canada.

2.3 Creativity as human capital in the curriculum

In order to develop the creative capabilities of young people, multiple countries have embedded creativity as a thinking skill into their national curriculums. Although this PhD study was conducted within an Australian context, there are many similarities between the understandings of creativity presented in the *Australian curriculum* and those understandings presented in contemporary curriculums from other countries (Sahlberg, 2016). Attempts to encourage or capitalise on the 'thinking curriculum' in schools, specifically *creative* thinking, have come through initiatives funded by a wide range of organisations: e.g., the European Commission; Britain's 1999 National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE), and subsequently the Creative Partnerships programs, and then the more recent *Durham Commission on Creativity and Education* (Cohu et al., 2019). Furthermore, there are various national initiatives that seek to embed creativity into the curriculum: e.g., the Common Core in the US; policies from the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC); and in Australia, the *Australian curriculum* (ACARA, n.d.-a).

Within Europe, creative thinking skills have been encouraged through both country specific approaches, such as Finland's FACE project (see 2.2.2) and Europe-wide strategies, such as the European Commission's 2011 initiative, known as Creativity and innovation: Pedagogical framework for the LEARning chain (CLEAR). CLEAR aimed "to unlock the full potential of the cultural and creative sectors in the EU to boost jobs and growth" and to "promote the right conditions for the cultural and creative sectors to flourish" across Europe (European Commission, 2012, para 1-2). After reviewing "the results of two decades of research on creativity and innovation", Pisanu and Menapace (2014, p. 145) advocate enhancing creative teaching through flexible and practice-based approaches to increase students' ability in the

areas of problem-solving and risk taking, and through ensuring opportunities for entrepreneurship are identified. While entrepreneurship is clearly a goal of the European Commission, individual European countries also have an emphasis on creativity. For example, Finland's *National Core Curriculum* for students aged 7-15 years (see Vahtivuori-Hänninen et al., 2014) mentions creativity 80 times in 473 pages (Henriksen et al., 2018, p. 416). Henriksen et al. (2018) note that the curriculum documents do not offer a definition of creativity, but there are strong links to creativity as a generalised skill and to specific subjects, especially information technology.

In Britain, similar creativity and entrepreneurial initiatives have helped to shape the country's educational focus. In 1999, Prime Minister at the time, Tony Blair's call to leverage the "creative talent" of the country "to build a 'true enterprise economy' for the new century" (Hall, 2010, p. 482) resulted in the NACCCE (1999) report. The focus on creativity from the NACCCE report required a better "balance of the curriculum" (Hall & Thomson, 2005, p. 13) rather than solely addressing teaching practices. Since the publication of this report there has been a "steady flow of government policies and advisory documents which refer to the importance of developing the creativity of children and young people in England" (Burnard, 2008, p. 12). The Creative Partnerships initiative, for instance, aimed "to transform the practices of teaching learning, and in so doing, change whole schools" (Thomson & Sanders, 2010) with a focus on raising aspirations in schools in areas of economic deprivation (Sharp et al., 2008). These initiatives have not always been straightforward, and have often been in conflict with other educational policy directions. While the NACCCE (1999) report stated that they wanted "teachers to have more freedom to use their own creative and professional skills" (p. 15), this came at a time when government was committing "to tighter control of the teaching workforce and the curriculum, and the imposition of accountability measures and a standards agenda" (Hall, 2010, p. 483, see also Gewirtz, 2002). The more recent *Durham Commission on Creativity and Education* (Cohu et al., 2019) reiterates the constraining effects of the accountability measures, noting that the *National curriculum* "does not currently require schools to focus on teaching for creativity" (Cohu et al., 2019, p. 52). As such the Durham Commission recommends integrating creativity into the education system—through an emphasis of "teaching for creativity" (Cohu et al., 2019 p. 74)—as they conclude that creativity is "not just [relevant] in employment and economic success" (Cohu et al., 2019, p. 74), but across all aspects of young people's lives.

The way the United States has embedded creativity into the curriculum is more difficult to discern, given the state-based responsibility for curriculum (Henriksen et al., 2018).

Henriksen et al. (2018) use the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and national testing regimes to assess the degree to which creativity is supported at a national level. They conclude that the development of students' creativity is not supported by any current curriculum or policy systems at a national level. These conclusions align with Sforza et al.'s (2016) work which notes that the CCSS, when compared to previous state based curriculums, have less focus on higher order thinking skills (see also Porter et al., 2011). The reduction of creativity in the CCSS is despite earlier reports, such as the *Sources of Innovation and Creativity* report (Adams, 2005), recommending larger investments in creativity and innovation to support entrepreneurial endeavours. Similarly to the US, Canada does not have a national curriculum, with each of the provinces responsible for curriculum (CMEC, n.d.). However, CMEC (n.d.) identifies innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship together as one of the "six pan-Canadian global competences" (para. 4). These global competences are designed to "prepare students for a complex and unpredictable future with rapidly changing political, social, economic, technological, and ecological landscapes" (CMEC, n.d., para. 1).

The identified need in these policy and curriculum documents for students to develop creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship—in other words, to prepare these young people for a productive economic and social future—has clearly spread globally (Sahlberg, 2016) and therefore is also prevalent in the policy and curriculum documents within Australia.

2.3.1 *The Australian and Victorian curricula*

In Australia, the 'creativity as saviour' discourse has been embedded in education policy such as *The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA, 2008) and the more recent iteration of these goals as outlined in the *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* (Council of Australian Governments (COAG), Education Council, 2019). Both documents outline key roles for education as identified by the COAG³, namely the development of "confident and creative citizens" (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 7). In order to fulfil this goal, ACARA, an independent statutory authority, was formed in 2008 "with a vision to inspire improvement in the learning of all young Australians through world-class curriculum, assessment and reporting" (ACARA, n.d.-b, para. 1). Subsequently a national

³ Established in 1992, Council of Australian Governments (COAG) consisted of the "Prime Minister, state and territory First Ministers and the President of the Australian Local Government Association" (COAG, n.d. para 3); COAG has recently been replaced by the National Federation Reform Council.

curriculum was designed and implemented (from 2011) which, alongside disciplinary knowledge, included integrated knowledge and skills known as the ‘general capabilities’. The general capabilities are the *Australian curriculum*’s attempt at embedding 21st century capabilities, and include the general capability known as ‘critical and creative thinking’ (ACARA, n.d.-g).

Informing this *Critical and creative thinking general capability* within the *Australian curriculum* are a number of frameworks for teaching creativity. These frameworks, de Bono’s thinking strategies (e.g. 2015), Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences (e.g. 2011), Bloom’s Taxonomy (e.g. Bloom et al., 1956) (see 2.3), were included in the initial general capability background document for critical and creative thinking (ACARA, 2012a). This background document in part is ACARA’s response to the perceived lack of a clear definition of creativity. The background document states that:

Creative thinking involves students in learning to generate and apply new ideas in specific contexts, seeing existing situations in a new way, identifying alternative explanations, and seeing or making new links that generate a positive outcome. This includes combining parts to form something original, sifting and refining ideas to discover possibilities, constructing theories and objects, and acting on intuition. The products of creative endeavour can involve complex representations and images, investigations and performances, digital and computer-generated output, or occur as virtual reality. (ACARA, 2012a, p. 53)

The definition offered by ACARA incorporates many of the key elements of the human capital understanding of creativity, including the individual skill, new or novel product—with an emphasis on the “positive outcome”—and explicit links to technology.

The *Victorian curriculum*, implemented in full in 2016, is the state-based iteration of the *Australian curriculum* administered through VCAA. It should be noted that, while the *Victorian curriculum* is informed by the *Australian curriculum*, there are some differences in how each curriculum authority chooses to frame and represent critical and creative thinking. The *Victorian curriculum: critical and creative thinking* capability is represented through three inter-related strands: questions and possibilities; reasoning; and meta-cognition (VCAA, n.d.-a). These strands focus on “the development of increasingly complex and sophisticated processes of thinking” (VCAA, n.d.-a, para. 1). As a way of further supporting the implementation of VCAA’s particular understanding of critical and creative thinking, the curriculum provides a ‘scope and sequence’ resource, detailing the development of the thinking skills for students from ages five to 16. These scope and sequence statements provide details of the skills that students should be able to demonstrate at each level of schooling. For example, VCAA (2011) argues:

These [scope and sequence] statements should outline a developmental continuum and therefore be able to be applied to a range of formative and summative assessment and reporting processes and procedures. In order to enable the general capabilities to be effectively used for the purposes of assessment, each capability should be developed with a minimum of either five or six levels of achievement. (p. 5)

The articulation of these thinking skills into measurable components clearly defines what needs to be taught and assessed at each level, therefore constructing creativity as a cumulative skill, an approach that has been criticised as reminiscent of the behaviourist paradigm (Coleman et al., 2016). VCAA further compartmentalises creative thinking into separate components, with the critical and creative thinking capability only focusing on skills such as reasoning, often associated with critical thinking. This approach reinforces that creativity as a problem-solving skill can be developed independent of context, while other aspects of creativity—“creative expression, creative endeavour and creative collaboration” (VCAA, n.d.-d, para. 7)—are linked to particular aspects of the curriculum and are therefore less transferable, and within human capital understandings of creativity, potentially less desirable, and certainly less assessable.

Given the importance placed on creativity in sustaining and developing the economy, it has become increasingly important to assess student creativity. These assessments are driven by a combination of outcome and productivity discourses, increasing assessment regimes, and an increasing emphasis on creativity as a desirable skill. The following section considers both the history of and motivations for assessing creativity and the understandings of creativity that underpin these assessment regimes.

2.4 Assessing human capital creativity within education

Along with the inclusion of creativity within the curriculum, the influence of neoliberal agendas on education has led to an increase in importance of a variety of accountability measures that ensure curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices are congruent with the larger educational agenda (Ozga, 2009). For instance, educational policy that emphasises productivity growth, efficiency through increased student achievement and outcomes is evident in initiatives such as nation-wide standardised testing, now endemic in many westernised education systems (Gale, 2006; Lingard et al., 2016). More recently, these testing regimes include assessing student creativity at both a state and international level. The following discussion considers the different approaches to measuring or assessing creativity, before exploring how these approaches, as well as the human capital understanding of creativity, have informed the current critical and creative thinking tests. The

discussion begins with a brief overview of the psychometric tests for creativity developed by Guilford (1973) and Torrance (1962). The second section explores the structure of two current critical and creative thinking tests—one from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and one from VCAA. The purpose of this discussion is to demonstrate how human capital understandings of creativity frame the tests, and therefore how these tests privilege and reinforce particular understandings of creativity. The final section discusses some additional understandings of creativity, namely Csikszentmihalyi's (1996) "Systems Model" and Beghetto et al.'s (2017) continuum of creativity, with arguments from both Csikszentmihalyi and Beghetto et al. being used to frame and justify the international and national testing of creativity.

The need for assessing creativity can be attributed to both the desire to develop creativity as human capital, and increasing accountability measures. For instance, Kay (2010) asserts that creativity must be embedded rigorously into curriculum and assessment, arguing that without rigour and clear definitions students will see it as a "nice to have" skill rather than a "must have" skill (p. xx). Adams (2005) suggests that in order to further develop creativity in students, there must be systems in place to ensure "schools are as accountable for creativity as they are for performance in basic skills" (p. 50), and these system should also ensure that schools integrate into the K-12 mainstream curriculum aspects such as entrepreneurship, career exploration, and interdisciplinary learning. For Adams (2005), focusing on the assessment of creativity is one way to address the perceived lack of creativity in schools. Dede (2010) also argues that including creativity in high-stakes testing, such as exit examinations, would provide a remedy for a lack of focus on developing creativity skills in students. The excerpt below from a working paper by the OECD, *Progression in student creativity in school: First steps towards new forms of formative assessments* (Lucas et al., 2013) highlights the typically fervent nature of these debates about assessing creativity:

Most people agree that schools need to develop creativity in students just as much as they need to produce literate and numerate learners. Yet across the educational world there is no widely used definition of what creativity is, no agreed framework for assessing its development in schools and few assessment tools specifically designed to track learners' progress ... If creativity is to be taken more seriously by educators and educational policy-makers then we need to be clearer about what it is. We also need to develop an approach to assessing it which is both rigorous enough to ensure credibility and user-friendly enough to be used by busy teachers. (p. 5)

The measurement of creativity is contentious, partly because of, as Lucas et al. (2013) state, the lack of agreement as to what constitutes creativity and what specific aspects of creativity are being tested (Halpin, 2006, 2008; Henry, 2009). The two creativity tests designed by

Guilford (1973) and Torrance (1962) attempted to address some of these concerns, and in doing so are still widely used in education settings today, strongly shaping views of creativity.

2.4.1 Measuring creativity

The beginning of ‘modern’—i.e., post 1950’s—discussions around creativity and the importance of creativity in education, and therefore the need for testing, are often attributed to Guilford (Craft, 2003; Fasko, 2001; Piirto, 2004; Soriano de Alencar et al., 2015) who through his “Structure of Intellect” model, developed a psychometric test for creativity (Plucker & Makel, 2010). In attempting to define the process and characteristics of creativity, Guilford claimed to have “‘proved’ that one could measure divergent production” (Piirto, 2004, p. 9). As part of this work he created audit materials for teachers, including checklists for creative character traits—such as flexibility, fluency, originality and curiosity—and descriptions of environments, pedagogical approaches and activities to support creative development (Guilford, 1973). Plucker and Makel (2010) note that many researchers question the validity of a psychometric measure of creative potential such as Guilford’s as there are variations in how the test is administered and scored.

Recognising some of the limitations of Guilford’s test, Torrance later developed the *Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking*⁴ (TTCT) (Torrance, 1962) by refining both the administration of the test and the assessment measures (Plucker & Makel, 2010). The TTCT is a psychometric test considered a standardised measure of creative potential “as part of the larger effort to recognize and encourage creativity” (Cramond et al., 1999, p. 78). The verbal and figural variations of the test that can be used interchangeably or in conjunction with each other, increase the number of testing items and therefore it is argued increase the validity of the test (Plucker & Makel, 2010). The TTCT, and the subsequent validation studies of the TTCT, have been widely used in schools (Piirto, 2004) as a predictor of creative achievement (Cramond et al., 1999). One of the main advantages of such testing is “to point out potentialities that might otherwise go unnoticed—especially in children from culturally diverse and lower socioeconomic backgrounds” (Cramond et al., 1999, p. 78). Accordingly, as pointed out by the research on these tests, a lack of demonstrable creativity does not automatically negate the presence of creative potential.

⁴ Originally named *The Minnesota Tests of Creative Thinking* (Torrance, 1962).

While Plucker and Makel (2010) note that both of these tests are widely used in education, they also question the ability for the tests to predict creative potential. Along with validity concerns in the administration, categories such as ‘originality’ have been criticised for their subjective nature, raising questions such as ‘original in comparison to what?’ and ‘original to whom?’. Characteristics, such as ‘risk-taking’ and ‘play’, which are considered by many to be essential to creativity (Cremin & Chappell, 2021), are not taken into account in the control settings of the creativity tests. In addition, Baudson and Preckel (2013) question whether the decontextualised nature of the tasks can be applied to different fields that require subject-specific knowledge. They argue that creativity tests are:

limited by characteristics of the individual test that is used to assess it ... finding many uses for a brick will not necessarily predict outstanding scientific, literary, or artistic achievements in later life. (p. 189)

These approaches to creativity tests narrowly construct creativity as a discrete set of decontextualised skills, such as unconventional representations. While they do provide a framework for the measurement of creativity, these approaches do not, as the discussion below of contemporary creativity tests in education indicates, allow space for a pluralistic or situated understanding of creativity.

2.4.2 Creativity and high-stakes testing

In human capital discourses, attempts to provide clear definitions for creativity are considered important for assessment and therefore the ability to quantify an individual’s creative potential. Many current assessment programs such as PISA and that established by VCAA have devised their own critical and creative thinking tests. In relation to the PISA assessment program, creativity is defined as:

An individual’s capacity to engage in cognitive processing to understand and resolve problem situations where a method of solution is not immediately obvious. It includes the willingness to engage with such situations in order to achieve one’s potential as a constructive and reflective citizen. (OECD, 2013, p. 30)

This definition underpins the PISA administered ‘creative problem-solving’ assessment test, designed to examine problem-solving processes, and to measure students’ ability to identify the nature of a problem situation, and the problem context (de Bortoli & Macaskill, 2014). The test was supposed to be based on “students’ general reasoning skills” and, it was argued, did not require “specific curricular knowledge to solve” (de Bortoli & Macaskill, 2014, p. v). The assessment supports the human capital understanding of creativity as a generalised or transferable skill, focusing on students’ abilities to individually problem-solve.

Within Australia, VCAA has devised its own critical and creative thinking assessment through administering annual tests with “a sample of schools across Victoria” since 2016 (VCAA, n.d.-c, para. 1). Since 2016, the Victorian Education Department has been reporting on students’ achievement through a yearly factsheet, *Learning for life* (DET, 2019). These factsheets are designed to communicate progress towards the goals outlined in *Target: learning for life*, which aims to increase the number of students who have “developed excellent critical and creative thinking skills” by 25% before 2025 (DET, 2016). While the test was administered in 117 schools in 2018 (VCAA, n.d.-c) there is very little public information as to what constitutes the test or the marking criteria. However, a joint review of how best to define and measure the 21st century capabilities by ACARA, Education Services Australia and AITSL (2019) provides some detail of VCAA’s assessment in outlining proposed directions for a national test. These details include an overview of the “suite of 27 CCT [critical and creative thinking] assessment tasks” that “have been psychometrically validated and mapped to the existing scope and structure of the *Victorian Curriculum*” (ACARA et al., 2019, p. 4). According to ACARA’s documentation, these assessment tasks are “digitally administered” and “scenario-based” within the humanities and STEM, although the “assessments do not assess the subject matter content used to provide context for the task” (ACARA et al., 2019, p. 5). Like the PISA test, VCAA test also supports understandings of creativity as a decontextualised skill focusing on problem-solving.

While both tests reinforce particular understandings of creativity as it relates to student skill development, the testing regime also provides accountability for the teaching and assessment of creativity. ACARA, who are in the ‘discovery phase’ of developing a national framework for measuring critical and creative thinking, are “exploring options for the design of a learning progression and aligned assessments for this general capability” (ACARA et al., 2019, p. 15). But given the importance that PISA, VCAA and ACARA are placing on these tests, there is very little theorising of the structure and understandings of creativity that are used to underpin the tests. What theorising has been provided, especially by PISA, is discussed in more detail in the next section.

2.4.3 Understandings of creativity supporting standardised tests

Despite the importance placed on testing creativity in education, there is very little theorising available as to the development and structure of these critical and creative thinking tests. What little is available is based on the proposed 2021 PISA *Assessment of Creative Thinking*

that suggests a focus on “‘little-c’ creativity or everyday creativity”. ‘Little-c’ creativity has been conceived in various ways, including by Csikszentmihalyi (1996) who defines ‘little-c’ creativity as creative acts that are of personal value, but that are unlikely to change the social or cultural field in any significant way. Based on his “Systems Model” of creativity, Csikszentmihalyi (1996) argues for a distinction between ‘little-c’ creativity—or “creativity with a small ‘c’” (p. 8) as a pursuit for an individual’s self-fulfilment and “creativity with a capital ‘C’” (p. 27), where the idea, act or product results in cultural change. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) further explains the “Systems Model” approach as follows:

Creativity is any act, idea, or product that changes an existing domain, or that transforms an existing domain into a new one. And the definition of a creative person is: someone whose thoughts or actions change a domain, or establish a new domain. It is important to remember, however, that a domain cannot be changed without the explicit or implicit consent of a field responsible for it. (p. 28)

Thus, in the Systems Model, creativity is treated as a complex phenomenon, intrinsically linked to the socio-cultural context whereby “creativity can be observed only in the interrelations of a system made up of three main parts”: domain, field and individual” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 27). However, given the decontextualised nature of the skills tested by PISA and VCAA, it is unlikely that there is any importance placed on whether creativity with a small ‘c’ is personally fulfilling, but rather how small ‘c’ creativity is often considered a gateway for developing capital ‘C’ creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Beghetto et al., 2017). Unlike small ‘c’ creativity, which may only be recognised by an individual, creativity with a capital ‘C’ is recognised by experts in a given field and as such is creativity associated with changing the related domain.

The distinction between creativity as exceptional and creativity as personal is one that is recognized across the literature. For instance, Banaji et al. (2010) when discussing the different rhetorics of creativity comment that there has been a move from “the exceptional genius of a few inspired individuals” to “democratic inclusiveness” (p. 26) afforded by understandings of little-c creativity. Banaji et al. (2010) use Craft’s (2000) definition of ‘little-c’ creativity as “possibility thinking”, that is “being imaginative in order find a way around a problem” (pp. 3-4) to argue for the ubiquitous nature of little-c creativity. This possibility thinking, Banaji et al. (2010) argue is often associated with “romantic notion... as it has its roots in a sense of personal growth and fulfilment” (pp. 29-30). Beghetto et al. (2017), in the continuum model of creativity, take the distinctions between Big-C and little-c creativity further, arguing for four different types of creativity: “mini-c, little-c, Pro-c, and Big-C”

creativity⁵ (p. 23), where Big-C creativity is equivalent to Csikszentmihalyi's (1996) concept of capital 'C' creativity. In extending the continuum, Beghetto et al. (2017) offer strategies to develop and progress creativity along the continuum. Within this classification system they argue that mini-c:

Represents the personal insights that are part of the learning process. These subjective self-discoveries are meaningful to the person, even if other people may not recognize the ideas as being creative. (Beghetto et al., 2017, p. 23)

In making this distinction, Beghetto et al. (2017) then argue that almost everyone can develop from mini-c to achieve little-c, or everyday creativity through “feedback from other people, practice, reflection and growth” (p. 26). It's this definition of little-c—that little-c can be developed, recognised by someone other than the self, such as a teacher, and that it is not bound to a particular social or cultural context—that enables PISA's and VCAA's argument that little-c can be assessed by critical and creative thinking tests. In the formulation of the PISA and VCCA tests, the importance of little-c creativity within education is its ability to be developed, applied and assessed, regardless of context, as well as the potential to develop little-c creativity into Pro-c creativity within a given field.

While outside the scope of this study, it is worth briefly acknowledging some of the arguments relating to Big-C creativity that the OECD have alluded to in their rationale for testing students' creativity through PISA. According to the OECD (2019), Big-C creativity is “paired with significant talent, deep expertise and high levels of engagement in a particular area, as well as the recognition from society that the product has value” (p. 8; see also Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009). Big-C creativity is considered “legendary creativity”, the creativity that is associated with “the kind of genius and eminent work that will be appreciated and remembered for centuries” (Beghetto et al., 2017, p. 27). This follows the arguments in some of the literature that creativity is the domain of a minority of people who are deemed to be intellectually gifted or exceptional (Gingell, 2001; Piirto, 2004). The linking of creativity with high intelligence is found on the basis that people who score highly in divergent thinking tests often score highly in intelligence quotient tests (Piirto, 2004). Creative geniuses, according to Simonton (2010), are “highly eminent because they have contributed at least one product that is widely viewed as a masterwork in an established domain of creative achievement” (p. 175). The notion of everyday creativity—the view that all people can be creative—is therefore considered by some to ‘water down’ the

⁵ Mini-c is considered personal creativity such as personal insights through learning, while Pro-c creativity is considered professional creativity, achieved after deliberate practice over time. Big-C creativity is creativity that is associated with creative genius (Beghetto et al., 2017).

accomplishment of those who are ‘truly’ creative (Gingell, 2001). Instead, Gingell (2001) asserts that there needs to be a “realistic expectation of what schools can do” (p. 43), arguing that it is not a literature teacher’s role to develop writers, for example, but rather to expose students to literature and impart an appreciation for literature so that those who wish to pursue writing as a career can do so at a later date (Gingell, 2001). The critical and creativity thinking assessments aim “to minimize the importance of innate talent for performance and to put a stronger focus on the malleable capacity of individuals to engage in creative thinking” (OECD, 2019, p. 9). In doing so, all students can partake in the critical and creative thinking tests, not just those identified as gifted and/or talented.

Consistent across the different tests of creativity, regardless of the terminology used, is; firstly the belief that creativity can be measured; secondly, that creativity can be measured separate to the context of the creativity; and thirdly, the importance of little-c, personal creativity or everyday creativity is its potential to develop into Pro-c, Big-C or capital ‘C’ creativity. But as Baudson and Preckel (2013) argue there are limitations to the application and transferability of these tests beyond the tests themselves. Even so, these standardised tests and the human capital understandings of creativity they endorse, are increasingly used across the education sector and, along with policy documents such as those from OECD and ACARA, are used to underpin and inform teaching approaches, curriculum frameworks and assessment practices. The following section discusses further some of the limitations of the human capital understanding of creativity underpinning these practices.

2.5 Limitations of human capital understandings of creativity

The similarities of approaches to teaching creative thinking across the various regions of the world discussed above (see 2.3) are partly explained by what Peck and Theodore (2010) call policy mobilisation. They characterise policy mobilisation as the “transnationalization of policy norms and practices” and argue that this transnationalization constitutes “a field of adaptive connections, deeply structured by enduring power relations and shifting ideological alignments” (p. 169). Suggesting that this process can be dialogic, especially between policy and policy makers, Peck and Theodore (2010) further argue that policy mobilisation is not just an “efficient process for transmitting best (or better) practices” (p. 169), but rather policy travels as “selective discourses, inchoate ideas and synthesized models” (p. 170) which are capable of “remaking [the policy] landscape” (p. 170). However, Ball (2016) warns that “these re-assemblies may have convergent consequences in terms of modes of governance and the deployment of *global forms* and conceptions of policy” (p. 2).

While much of the creativity literature acknowledges the multiple understandings of creativity, the heteroglossic nature of creativity is cited as one of the main difficulties for education (see Jones, 2009; Lucas et al., 2013; Tanggaard, 2011). One of the ways to grapple with the heteroglossic nature of creativity is to offer a central definition of creativity, and this is evident in the way human capital understandings of creativity have permeated the curriculum and policy documents discussed above. That is not to say there are not benefits of this understanding, but rather that human capital understandings of creativity may not necessarily fit comfortably within specific subject areas or in relation to teachers' everyday practices. For instance, the application of the human capital definition of creativity predominantly focuses on the development of individual students' creative thinking skills, whereby creativity is conceived as exclusively occurring within and demonstrated by individuals. An individual's creativity is considered to be developed through, what Jeffrey and Craft (2004) term, either teaching for creativity or teaching creatively (see also Craft, 2003). In a systematic review of the literature, Cremin and Chappell (2021) found that there were several characteristics that encouraged creativity within students, including "generating and exploring ideas", "encouraging autonomy and agency", "playfulness" and "risk-taking" (pp. 311-318). In terms of teacher creativity, drawing on Lin's (2010) work, Cremin and Chappell (2021) concede that teacher creativity "is often overlooked", with only two studies, both which equated teacher creativity with possibility thinking, considering "the notion of teacher creativity as 'quietly' present" (p. 319) within teacher practice.

Within the APSTs (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2017), the representation of creativity is also limited, specifically to those teachers who are considered at a 'Proficient' standard or above. The implication is that graduate teachers are not yet able to demonstrate creativity in their practice, despite the wealth of research demonstrating the creativity of early career teachers (see Manuel, 2003; McCarthy et al., 2016). Furthermore, within these standards the understanding of creativity is further limited to teaching and professional activities such as creating resources, creating learning environments and creating relationships (AITSL, 2017). While 'Highly Accomplished' and 'Lead' teachers are tasked with promoting creative and innovative practices amongst colleagues, there is little discussion as to what might constitute these creative practices. The APSTs denote a very narrow understanding of creativity and, especially given their central importance as accountability measures, this understanding may even be understood to be counter-productive to fostering creative practice. While Jeffrey and Craft (2004) suggest that creative modelling has the advantage of teachers creating learning opportunities that are engaging, motivating and that encourage active participation, Buchanan (2017) notes that the

concept of creative teacher has been considered “an attribute often ascribed to effective teachers” (Buchanan, 2017, p. 118). Yoking together the creative and effective teacher potentially reinforces particular examples of teaching creatively. Hayes et al. (2017) explain that teacher practices, which may be considered creative—or “teaching against the grain” (p. 92)—are difficult in a teaching context that is increasingly focused on limited understandings of “what works trump[ing] the value of teachers’ professional judgement about what is needed and appropriate” (p. 92). Instead teachers are compelled to “adopt evidence-based practices ... [when] what counts as evidence is produced somewhere else ... completely ignoring the specificity of context” (p. 92). Therefore—despite teaching creatively modelling for students flexibility, risk taking, openness, and other characteristics associated with creativity—creative teaching, especially when linked to professional standards used for accountability, does risk developing standardised approaches to teaching, and may narrow the range of creative approaches seen as legitimate.

Within these documents, especially the APSTs (AITSL, 2017), there is little to no discussion or acknowledgement of teacher creativity in terms of teacher practice. The decontextualised nature of creativity as a thinking skill predominantly concerned with problem-solving and innovation, may be considered in tension with subject specific understandings of creativity, such as within subject English. Chapter 3 considers some alternative understandings of creativity, such as Raymond Williams’ concept of everyday creativity, and how these understandings can provide insight into teacher practices and subject specific knowledge, understandings which are not currently represented through the national education goals (see MCEETYA, 2008; COAG, Education Council, 2019), the *Australian* or *Victorian curriculums*, or the professional standards for teachers (AITSL, 2017).

CHAPTER 3 *Creativity and subject*

English

3.1 Introduction

In Chapter 2, while reviewing studies that examine creativity through a human capital lens, I argued that such literature tends to present creativity as a continuum—at one end mini-c and little-c creativity, and at the other end Pro-c and Big-C creativity (see Beghetto et al., 2017; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009; OECD, 2019). I also argued that, at least within education literature, this continuum predominantly focuses on individual student creativity and the student's creative 'products'. Much of the research used throughout Chapter 2 emphasises the importance of developing creativity in individual students, and while teacher creativity is discussed (see Craft, 2010; Smith & Smith, 2010), there is a preoccupation with how teachers might develop individual student creativity in order for them to generate 'creative' products. Teachers are seen to do this either through *teaching* creativity or *modelling* creativity through their teaching (e.g. Jeffery & Craft, 2004). This chapter focuses on a different understanding of creativity. My focus here is on socio-cultural dimensions of teachers' creativity, emphasising the social as well as the individual, with a particular interest in the creativity of teachers' everyday practices. The intention in contrasting the human capital and socio-cultural understandings of creativity is not to set up a binary between these two understandings of creativity nor is it the intention to simply provide another way of categorising creativity. Rather the intention is to consider, through situated accounts of teachers' everyday creativity, different ways of understanding teacher practice.

The chapter begins by exploring definitions of everyday creativity. I show how socio-cultural understandings of everyday creativity are by no means monolithic and are themselves contested. I draw on the work of Raymond Williams (1977) and contrast his framing of everyday creativity with human capital definitions such as those proposed by Beghetto et al. (2017), Csikszentmihalyi (1996) and de Bono (2015). Whereas human capital definitions of creativity tend to be less concerned with context—indeed, their attraction to policy makers in education is that they appear to be generalisable and therefore unproblematically transferable from setting to setting—discourses of everyday creativity emphasise the highly situated and contextual nature of creativity. My discussion of everyday creativity in this chapter is embedded within a context of teacher practice, and more specifically, teacher

practice in relation to subject English. As Shulman (1987) argues, subject-specific knowledge is an integral aspect of teacher practice. I therefore take time to explore understandings of subject English and its contested nature, both historically and in contemporary times. In doing so I highlight the tensions inherent in the subject, and how these tensions can be seen to mediate contemporary everyday creative practices. The chapter concludes by exploring how dialogic teaching practices provide ways of negotiating these tensions and can therefore be considered useful examples of teachers' creative practice.

3.2 Everyday creativity and the ideological struggle

Everyday creativity is sometimes framed as creativity that has personal significance, “the kind of creativity that influences a learner, but does not necessarily influence a field” (Lasky & Yoon, 2020, p. 2). Often this framing is associated with creativity as production, personal problem-solving, or having new ideas (Beghetto et al., 2017; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; de Bono, 2015). Banaji et al. (2010), in their review of the rhetorics of creativity, highlight that for some researchers who “favour [] retaining a particular link between creativity and the arts and culture” (p. 30), the personal problem-solving aspect associated with everyday creativity raises some issues. Banaji et al. (2010) draw on Thomson and Hall's (2006) work to demonstrate this point, suggesting that for researchers in the art and culture field the idea of creativity “add[ing] a special quality for life” through “divergence and challenge” is the most important aspect of creativity (p. 30). In contrast, Beghetto et al. (2017) argue that everyday creativity can be defined as any creative act that is important to oneself but not necessarily important or recognisable to others. At the other end of their creativity continuum (see Chapter 2) is professional (or Pro-c) creativity. This notion of professional creativity, Beghetto et al. (2017) argue, is a valuable and desirable skill that enables individuals to problem-solve in the workplace, leading to an economic benefit. For this reason, Beghetto et al. (2017) encourage the use of aspirational case studies with students that demonstrate Pro-c. They hope that, teachers will provide the right feedback and ‘training’ to facilitate the development of Pro-c creativity in students and that in time, for a few selected students, this will develop into Big-C creativity associated with creative genius. The emphasis in these arguments is on identifying and enabling *extraordinary* acts of creativity by everyday individuals, namely students. As discussed in Chapter 2, there is little consideration of the creativity of the teacher beyond developing the students' creativity, and there is also little consideration of everyday creativity as a social practice mediated by various contextual factors.

One concern raised in the literature about the notion of everyday creativity is that it equates the everyday with the inclusion of absolutely every educational act or practice (Gingell, 2001; see 2.4.3). Craft (2004), for instance, argues that everyday creativity equates to possibility thinking that allows people to solve everyday problems in their life. However, Williams (1977) presents a different understanding of everyday creativity and argues that not “any and every kind of practice” should be considered creative; to do so “masks” the difficulties and the “radical differences and differentials of these highly variable specific practices” (p. 206). He encourages researchers not to rely on any “short cut” understanding of creativity, which wants to associate creativity with an act of “timeless permanence” (p. 206). Contrary to the value placed on the extraordinary outcomes of Big-C creativity or the personal artistic forms of creativity associated with little-c creativity, Williams (1977) argues that creativity is found in the everyday as people find ways to describe their experiences in meaningful ways. These experiences are not the known or conventional experiences which can be described in already existing language, but rather experiences or “new information for which conventional descriptions are inadequate” (p. 24). The changes in language that Williams advocates for— “to amend old descriptions or accommodate new ones” (p. 24)—also involve an “organization and reorganization of reality” (p. 22). Williams (1977) therefore argues, “there is a real sense in which [woman or] man can be called a creator” (p. 22) as she/he finds ways to describe and make meaning from their experiences.

The process of learning to describe one’s creative experiences or environment is neither simple nor static; it is a continual process of interpreting and describing experience “so to understand our environment that we can live more successfully in it” (Williams, 1961, p. 23). This process is:

in the first instance, to every man [sic], a matter of urgent personal importance to ‘describe’ his experience, because this is literally a remaking of himself, a creative change in his personal organization, to include and control the experience. This struggle to remake ourselves—to change our personal organization so that we may live in a proper relation to our environment—is in fact often painful”. (Williams, 1961, p. 26)

This struggle to ‘remake ourselves’ according to Williams is most easily recognised in the artist’s struggle to communicate “new descriptions and new meanings” (p. 24), but he emphasises that it is an integral part of the “ordinary social process” (p. 24).

In much of the policy literature about teaching, there is an assumption that creativity as a skill—the skill of idea generation and/or problem-solving—is unidirectional, characteristic of human capital understandings of teaching (Kroeger, 2015). It is less about a social process and relationships, and more about the transmission of an idea or knowledge from one person

to another. This idea of the nature of teaching as unidirectional is often coupled with a particular understanding of knowledge, one where it is assumed that teachers' professional knowledge is static and just needs to be re-packaged and transmitted to students (Ellis, 2007). As such, knowledge in this context is considered something that students acquire and accumulate—as documented for example on the scope and sequence for the critical and creative thinking capability (VCAA, n.d.-b) rather than knowledge as constructed within a social and cultural context (see Yandell, 2006). There is therefore a tension between the different understandings of a creative teaching act: whether knowledge can be creatively co-constructed *with* students or whether it can only be transmitted from teacher to students.

Describing this tension for teachers of writing, Locke (2015) describes this tension as a productive struggle. He invokes Bakhtin's (1981) notion of creative inner dialogue. For example, teachers may desire to help students use writing creatively and analytically to reflect upon themselves and their place in the world, and yet also feel obliged to focus on the mechanics of writing in order to meet curriculum or achievement standards, such as those language skills measured in high-stakes assessments. In the case of high-stakes assessment, student achievement or their products of creativity are assessed against pre-determined criteria, which in instances such as the writing task on the National Assessment Program, Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) is linked directly by some to teacher quality (Thompson, 2013). These assessments therefore not only reinforce particular understandings of creativity and the assumption of unidirectional teaching of creativity, but they also reinforce the performative nature of teaching.

3.2.1 Ideological struggle and identity

Ball et al. (1990) argue that subject English, since the advent of public schooling, “has been a focus of keen political interest and political control” (p. 47), and therefore “what is to count as English has been a matter of struggle and conflict between contending interests” (p. 47). The tension—for instance, between the creative self-expressive forms of writing that are associated with the development of self and the mechanical aspects of writing that are strongly associated with high-stakes literacy tests—are indicative of the some of the struggles and conflicts within subject English. Locke (2015) refers to the struggle between the different purposes for writing as “serving two masters” (p. 204), and he believes it is a struggle or a tension not easily reconciled. It is a tension, Locke suggests, that subject English teachers learn to negotiate. Locke's assertions that subject English teachers will

learn to negotiate tensions in their practice, is consistent with Boden's (2001) arguments that as one develops more expertise in "culturally accepted style of thinking, or structured conceptual space" (p. 96), such as subject English, it is possible to engage in more exploratory and transformative forms of creativity (see also Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). In this way knowledge and creativity are intrinsically linked; knowledge enabling one to either explore possibilities within the rules or significantly transform one or more of the rules. However, the negotiation of tensions, or engaging in creative practice as Williams (1977) describes it, involves a degree of ideological struggle; "confronting a hegemony in the fibres of the self and in the hard practical substance of effect and continuing relationships" (p. 212). For instance, teachers must negotiate between creatively co-constructing knowledge with students and transmitting static notions of knowledge, and between catering for the diverse needs of students and meeting the standardised expectations of external governing bodies. There are also ideological tensions within and between the needs of the curriculum, the priorities of the school, and the expectations of leadership (at school level or at the level of regulatory authorities).

While Williams (1961) discusses various understandings of ideology—including class-inflected belief systems, "illusory beliefs ... contrasted with scientific knowledge" and "the general process of the production of meanings and ideas" (p. 54)—it is perhaps Bakhtin's (1981) understanding of ideological becoming that is most useful in exploring teacher creative practice. Bakhtin's understanding of ideology, according to Freedman and Ball (2004), is less overtly political in that it is less aligned to class and more concerned with the whole person, their "ways of viewing the world" and whole "systems of ideas" (p. 5).

Freedman and Ball (2004) explain that:

In effect, the ideological environment—be it the classroom, the workplace, the family, or some other community gathering place—mediates a person's ideological becoming and offers opportunities that allow the development of this essential part of our being. (p. 6)

For Bakhtin, one's ideology does not exist separately from one's environment, but exists in relation to it. Therefore, the notion of teachers negotiating tensions is not about finding a *balance* between a number of different priorities. Rather, as teachers negotiate the tensions in their day-to-day work they are engaging in creative practice, a practice that involves ideological struggle and finding new ways of being.

For Gee (2011) 'ways of being' or identity [work] is performed in relation to others. Gee (2011) explains that:

We often enact our identities by speaking or writing in such a way as to attribute a certain identity to others, an identity that we explicitly or implicitly compare or contrast to our own. We build identities for others as a way to build ones for ourselves. (p. 28)

These identities, Gee (2011) argues, are built through language (what we say) and actions (what we do), and this dynamic and ongoing comparison or contrast to other people generates a sense of who we are being. Gee's (2011) characterisation of action as practice is important in the ways this study frames creativity. His description of practice—as “a socially recognized and institutionally or culturally supported endeavour that usually involves sequencing or combining actions in certain specified ways” (p. 27)—considers what is said and what is done. And it speaks to the social character of creativity that I have been considering above. For Gee, an understanding of actions cannot be separated from language. They co-exist in a reciprocal relationship where one exists, in a sense, because of the other. In other words, language “gets its meaning from what it is used to do” (Gee, 2011, p. 14), and this has a powerful connection with identity. Gee believes that since action and language cannot be separated from each other and the environment in which they occur, it can be argued that identity is “socially situated” as it is “the ‘kind of person’ one is seeking to be and enact here and now” (Gee, 2011, p. 41). To that end, a teacher's identity is constantly (and one might argue creatively) being negotiated, not just in comparison to other identities but also in relation to the multiple systems of ideas, communicated through policies and curriculums that teachers are obliged to engage with.

For the purposes of this study I draw on Williams' (1977) understanding of everyday creativity in framing my investigation into how subject English teachers negotiate the tensions and the ideological struggles of their day-to-day practices and identities. This includes how they negotiate the ideologies of subject English policies and curriculum, and the representation of creativity within these policies and curriculum. To demonstrate this point, the next section explores in more detail the systems of ideas communicated through some of the policies and curriculums of subject English. I begin this discussion by first exploring the question ‘What is subject English?’ before exploring several key historical moments that have attempted to answer this question in different ways. The purpose of this discussion is to demonstrate how understandings of subject English have shifted throughout history, and yet are still the historical understandings are still influential in the current *Victorian curriculum* (VCAA, n.d.-f) and *Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE): English and English as Additional Language Study Design* (VCAA, 2014b). As Ball et al. (1990) argue “reading and writing evolve and exist within power structures and reflect the tensions between competing power and interest groups” (p. 47), and by exploring some of these tensions within subject English, the

discussion also demonstrates how subject English and creativity, within the context of subject English, are ideologically contested spaces.

3.3 What is subject English?

Any attempt to explain creativity, including everyday creativity, within subject English will invariably be shaped by the ways one understands subject English and its purpose for schooling in a particular context and its connections to the wider world. For the purposes of this study, I draw on Ellis's (2007) description of 'subject', which suggests:

variation, development, historical change, important disagreements, contradictions, debates, paradigm shifts and so on. It is these dynamic, social processes that make subjects worthy of study and allow us to *work* in the subject. (p. 450)

Therefore, in order to understand subject English, and the curriculum that represents these understandings of subject English, we must understand the political, cultural, social and other influences that have shaped and developed the curriculum up until the present moment and those likely to shape it into the future (Green & Beavis, 1996). In other words, curriculum is historically situated and contested. As Doecke et al. (2021) argue:

Questions about knowledge or knowing in English are hardly new to English teachers, though such questions have obviously assumed different degrees of urgency depending on the historical circumstances in which teachers have felt impelled to make claims about the place that English ought to occupy within the education of young people. (p. 1)

The questions then of 'what is subject English?' and, more specifically in relation to this study, 'what does creativity mean in the context of subject English?' are complex questions to answer given the contested nature of the space and how considerably subject English has changed over the last 100 years (Peel et al., 2000).

There have been several attempts to define the work of subject English and creativity's place within it. Early reports such as Matthew Arnold's (1908) *Reports on elementary schools 1852-1882*, suggested that within the context of schooling subject English was of "high importance" as it was a "pleasurable activity" that could "reliev[e] the strain of mental effort" and could be used "to relieve the passive reception of knowledge" (Arnold, 1908, p. 228; see also Peel et al., 2000). Arnold's allusions to creativity are focused on individual expression rather than more explicit social framings of creativity. A social framing of creativity also supports Arnold's arguments for pleasure and self expression that come from creativity, but also acknowledges creativity as the making and re-making of meaning within social spaces. Bellis (2014), for instance, argues that creativity within subject English involves "remaking", where students engage in the process of "re-visioning" (p. 91) their understandings of text as

well as understandings of themselves as writers, as creators. Doecke et al. (2021) argument that subject English is not a static body of knowledge to be learnt, but rather a “social space[] in which meanings are continually transacted” (p. 3), similarly keys into social understandings of creativity. In acute contrast, there are those, writing from a political perspective, who consider the knowledge of subject English to be instructional, “what is to be taught and how it will be assessed” (Wiltshire & Donnelly, 2014, p. 13; see also Manyukhina & Wyse, 2019), and creativity has little or nothing to do with it.

In order to explore the various understandings of subject English and its relationship to creativity, the discussion moves now to what might be considered ‘watershed’ moments that attempted to answer the question ‘what is English?’ and more pertinently, ‘what place does creativity have within subject English?’. In terms of engaging with these questions historically, as Seddon (1989) notes “curriculum history is important. It gives us our past and informs our present and future. It challenges our taken-for-granted notions of history, and of stability and change” (p. 2). As well as historically located, this discussion is geographically located from an Australian perspective in discussions of such ‘moments’ as the Newbolt report in England, Dartmouth Conference in the US, and the STELLA and stella2.0 projects in Australia. While this study takes place in Victoria Australia, these moments are widely recognised as attempting to articulate what subject English is, as well as contributing to understandings of subject English. And, more importantly in terms of this study, how the perspectives offered by these moments contribute to an understanding of how creativity is accounted for within subject English. My discussion of these ‘moments’ in no way attempts to provide definitive answers to the questions or provide an extensive consideration of all the perspectives that follows. Rather, my intention is to explore some of the varied historical understandings of creativity within subject English, and how these perspectives accommodated or promoted creative practices (of teachers or students).

3.3.1 Newbolt report (1921)

In 1921 in the United Kingdom a departmental committee was appointed by the Board of Education in order to:

Inquire into the position of English (Language and Literature) in the educational system of England, and to advise how its study may best be promoted in schools of all types ... [The report considered]: 1) the requirements of a liberal education; 2) the needs of business, the professions, and the public services; and 3) the relation of English to other studies. (Newbolt, 1921, p. 2)

The resulting report, commonly known as the Newbolt report (Newbolt, 1921), provides an historical account of the position of subject English in England's school education system as well as some general principles related to the purposes of teaching and learning English. For instance, it addressed the needs of students to develop their English as a common means of communication and as "the essential basis of a liberal education" (Newbolt, 1921, p. 28). The report affirms the importance of creative expression as experienced by the student through exemplary authors and through "provid[ing] conditions in which his [sic] ideas and his powers of self-expression may grow apace and abreast of each other... so far as English is concerned, chiefly in writing poems and plays" (p. 93). It further suggested that one of the key purposes of subject English was to teach how English language was to be *used*, separating the study of English language—for example, grammar as a scientific pursuit—from creative expression and writing as a form of artistic expression.

Perry (2019) argues that, despite the Newbolt Report's post World War I commission, "the report was the earliest comprehensive expression of the range of tensions still felt in schools and society about the teaching of English" (p. 2). This included the tension between what is now commonly referred to as the "cultural heritage" model (see 3.3.2.2)—with particular attention given to grammar and "narrow literary curriculum designed to reinforce a reduced and regulated version of national identity ... in response to times marked by increasing social, cultural and linguistic diversity" (Carter, 2016, p. 12) in literature teaching—and the need for creativity as self-expression through what has since become known as the "growth paradigm" (Dixon, 1969; see 3.3.2.3). In a cultural heritage approach to subject English, literature was "treated almost as an extension of history" (Perry, 2019, p. 3; see also Blyton, 1926). However, Newbolt (1921) noted that this approach included a risk that students in appreciating the literary canon may become "passive recipients" of knowledge, and argued that students should be "active participators" and creators of text (p. 277). But the desire to emphasise creativity as self-expression within subject English became mediated by the desire to "prepare[] children to become encultured into a single model of British culture" (Perry, 2019 p. 4). Regardless of the degree to which Newbolt's recommendations were embedded into the curriculum and teacher practices, the report has been credited with "laying the foundations for the personal growth model" (Perry, 2019, p. 4) some 40 years later at the Dartmouth Conference.

3.3.2 Dartmouth conference (1966)

The transatlantic Dartmouth Conference about English teaching brought together English educators from the United States, England, Scotland and Canada to discuss “major concerns for the teaching of English” and questions such as “What is English?” (Sublette, 1973, p. 349). Both Herbert J. Muller (1967) and John Dixon (1969) attempted to represent the complexity of the debates at the time. While Muller, from an American perspective, considered subject English as an opportunity to learn English language (Sublette, 1973), Dixon’s (1969) account identified subject English as a combination of three approaches or paradigms:

The first centred on skills: it fitted an era when initial literacy was the prime demand. The second stressed the cultural heritage, the need for a civilizing and socially unifying content. The third (and current) model focuses on personal growth: on the need to re-examine the learning processes and the meaning to the individual of what he is doing in English lessons. (pp. 1-2)

The personal growth paradigm has been most commonly associated with creative work in subject English (Frawley, 2014) as it places the individual at the centre of the subject and in doing so places a high value on “both to individual experience and to an active use of everyday language” (Reid, 2003, p. 98). One of the important aspects of the Dartmouth conference was therefore its attempt to define subject English as more than teaching a set of functional skills (Harris, 1991).

Despite what Harris (1991) claims as the conference’s inability to bring about a sustained shift in subject English from a subject-centred to student-centred approach, much of the work from the conference to define what “work in English *could* be” (Harris, 1991, p. 632)—especially the three paradigms (Dutton & Manuel, 2019)—still influence current understandings of subject English. Rather than alternative approaches to subject English teachers must choose from (Harris, 1991), the paradigms provide a way to understand practice and tensions in practice, and the place of creativity within subject English. As Doecke (2019) argues, Dixon’s account “might be read, rather, as an invitation to English teachers to reflect on their teaching and to inquire into the complexities of the interactions that occur within the social space of the classroom (p. 347). Drawing on Doecke’s (2019) argument for using the different approaches or paradigms for reflection, the following sections take up the invitation to reflect through considering how each of the paradigms—skills, cultural heritage and growth paradigm—mediate understandings of creativity within subject English.

3.3.2.1 English as skills

The Dartmouth Conference may have seen scholars such as John Dixon, advocate for student self-expression, and therefore creativity, but many of the arguments about what English is, especially in the early parts of the 20th century, centred around students' skills in using the English language, namely their abilities in spelling, grammar, comprehension and writing composition, including construction of writing within particular genres. This approach to English language, collectively known as 'skills acquisition' or a 'skills paradigm', has traditionally been framed as the foundations of literacy (Reid, 2003) whereby students are taught to

gain control of specific forms of expertise ... Learners are [considered] 'apprentices', guided by an expert into practical mastery of particular competences. The skills model is explicit in its pedagogy, emphasising the application of knowledge of language and texts. (Macken-Horarik, 2014, p. 10)

Within Australia this approach to subject English is identifiable in contemporary times through both a genre-approach to teaching writing and the literacy aspect of the NAPLAN standardised test. Both the genre approach to writing and the literacy component of NAPLAN have been widely criticised for reducing students' self-expression and creativity, as well as narrowing understandings of literacy (Dixon, 1987; Doecke & Breen, 2013; Rosen, 1988, 2013; Sawyer & Watson, 1987).

The genre approach to teaching writing focuses on the product of student writing and is based on teaching students the necessary skills to reproduce the most common reading and writing genres "encounter[ed] across the years of primary and secondary schooling" (Christie, 2013, p. 12). Developed by the so-called 'Sydney School', which emerged in the 1980s in Australia, the genre approach is underpinned by Halliday's (1978) theory of language as a social semiotic, as well as Bernstein's (1971) sociological theory of language as represented and investigated through a discourse of systemic functional linguistics (cf. Christie, 2013). Genre theorists found commonalities amongst certain types of writing and categorised them into a small number of genres or 'text types'. The approach was championed as a way of providing students from disadvantaged backgrounds and second language learners, access to the language and texts of the middle-classes (Hyland, 2003). As part of the "explicit and systematic explanations" (Hyland, 2003, p. 18) for teaching each genre is a clear purpose and structure. For instance:

Narratives: which introduce characters in some setting, unfold a series of events leading to a complication (sometimes more than one), and offer some evaluation, eventually bringing about some resolution; these are found in story books and literary texts of many kinds. (Christie, 2013, p. 14)

Derewianka (2015) argues that, while students learn language skills and genre through replicating the purpose and structure of writing, they are able to exercise creativity within each of the phases of a text such as a narrative, varying the character traits, complications and character responses to complications. However, the structure and language conventions that govern a particular genre such as a narrative remain; as such students are encouraged to emulate genre conventions in their own writing.

Christie (2013) and Derewianka (2015) have argued that a more structured, goal-orientated approach to writing through, for example, emulating genre conventions, is more useful approach than an approach “that focuse[s] on ‘processes of learning’ and the role of the teacher as ‘facilitator’ only of these processes” (Christie, 2013, p. 12). Informing the writing process that Christie and Derewianka critique is a process approach to writing encourages students to use their “everyday knowledge” and “their experience of language in the classroom” (Yandell, 2020, p. 7). A focus on the writing process, Yandell (2020) argues, allows for complex writing and thinking that “is accomplished when students are given the opportunity to use the semiotic resources available to them to grapple with and represent their own experiences” (p. 7). Christie (2013) asserts that a focus on the process of writing that explores student experiences and semiotic resources might be a way of encouraging “children’s self-expression”, but is done so “at the expense of any structured sense of goals or direction in writing” (Christie, 2013, p. 11). But as Doecke and Breen (2013) point out, within genre theory approaches to writing:

Students are not conceived as communicating with each other, but devoting their energies to simulating the texts that genre theorists deem to be the most powerful. The notion of the situation of a text is effectively reified into a property of the text itself, which must accordingly reflect the characteristic features that genre theorists ascribe to texts when they are used in situations of a particular kind (p. 294)

According to Doecke and Breen (2013) treating text in this way ignores the classroom as a context where young people, in relation to each other and their teachers, create texts and engage in important identity work as they negotiate the tensions between how they see themselves and how their social worlds attempt to construct who they are. In ignoring these social purposes of the classroom Doecke and Breen (2013) argue that Christie (2013) ignores this important identity work in favour of learning conventions.

One of the benefits, however, of the skills-based genre approach to writing is that it does offer measurability when assessing students writing. For example, one aspect of the NAPLAN standardised test is to examine student writing, which “focuses on the accurate, fluent and purposeful writing of either a narrative or persuasive text in Standard Australian

English” (ACARA, 2017, p. 14). This is accomplished through a series of ten differently weighted criteria. Students are assessed on:

Audience; text structure; ideas; character and setting (narrative) [or] persuasive devices (persuasive); vocabulary; cohesion; paragraphing; sentence structure; punctuation; spelling. (ACARA, 2017, p. 14)

Perelman (2018), in an independent review of the NAPLAN commissioned by the New South Wales Teachers’ Federation, considers the NAPLAN marking scheme problematic for both the number of assessable traits, the lack of transparency in determining the weighting of the different criteria, and the lack of clarity regarding criteria such as ‘audience’. Along with a focus on the operational aspects of literacy (Green, 2012), Perelman (2018) argues that the NAPLAN writing task reinforces particular understandings of writing—for instance the five-body paragraph persuasive response—that are only relevant within high-stakes tests. Whilst Christie (2013) argues that the genre is not to be considered as an “empty slot either ‘filled up with’ content or alternatively ‘imposed on’ content” (p. 13), the nature of high-stakes assessment has encouraged such responses (Frawley, 2014). For instance, the five-paragraph essay is also a popular form for responding to essay prompts on the final year subject English exam (McKnight & Wood, 2020), despite chief examiners’ reports often remarking on the ‘formulaic’ nature of student responses (VCAA, 2012).

While the genre approach is used as a way of constructing and assessing writing for high-stakes assessment, it does create for teachers a tension between teaching writing for social purposes—encompassing process writing and identity work—and teaching writing skills and conventions for, what some consider artificial, written genres (see Burdick, 2011), that are prevalent in narrow high-stakes assessments. Hyland (2003) notes that very few teachers would consider that it is a choice between one method or the other, but a combination of approaches for different purposes. Rosen (2013), an advocate for student expression in subject English, also offers a way of working through and beyond the tensions created by two seemingly different approaches to writing. He suggests that in order to provide students with opportunities for greater self-expression students should investigate not only the similarities but also the differences in language use across different forms of writing, importantly exploring why these differences exist. This approach to working through and beyond the tensions afforded by different paradigms, evidenced in different approaches to the writing processes, is not just about finding ways for students to be creative within narrow constraints of high-stakes writing tests, it is also representative of the ideological work that teachers do as they find ways to reconcile the tensions between the different paradigms of English, and therefore the purposes of, and approaches to, teaching subject English. Similar tensions are

evident across the other paradigms of subject English, such as the cultural heritage paradigm, which is the focus of the next section.

3.3.2.2 English as cultural heritage

A cultural heritage approach is closely associated with the literary canon through close study and literary responses (Macken-Horarik, 2014). This approach is therefore not mainly about the development of writers or creativity, but rather an understanding and appreciation of exemplary literary texts. This approach dates back to the beginnings of the industrial era in England where the study of “fine literature” was understood to bring about “improvement of character” (Mathieson, 1975, p. 52) and “the distinction between literacy as a technical skill as a moral technology” was often blurred by those in authority over education (Ball et al., 1990, p. 49). Worried that the working and middle classes would be exposed to poor quality reading material from mass produced books and newspapers, scholars and critics such as Matthew Arnold and F.R. Leavis began campaigning for the inclusion of ‘good quality’ literature in schools (Mathieson, 1975). Engaging with ‘good literature’ was considered a salvation as it would “protect[] readers against the corrupting effects of cheap fiction and the newspapers” (Mathieson, 1975, p. 40). As a consequence, the study of literature within the cultural heritage paradigm focused, and still focuses, on texts that are linguistically “complex and highly crafted” (Macken-Horarik, 2014, p. 10). In contemporary times, these ‘complex and highly crafted’ texts include many canonical texts such as those by Shakespeare and Austen, but also modern texts that are considered exemplary. It seems unlikely within this understanding of cultural heritage and the moral imperative of literature that there is space for creative responses that encourage self-expression or personal response, and especially not creativity associated with encouraging subversive behaviour (Banaji et al, 2010; Pope, 2005) or that encourages students to challenge the status quo and find “alternate modes of existence” (Craft, 2003, p. 123).

Beavis (1996), within an Australian context, argues that the purpose of literature study has always included a moral dimension, such as developing “civic virtues, pride and a sense of identity in the British Empire” (Education Department, Victoria & Blake, 1973, cited in Beavis, 1996, p. 21). The moral dimension of literature has continued into the early decades of the twentieth century, where the teaching of literature was often thought to enable a “pupil to obtain for himself [sic] the thought content of written and printed matter, to give him the power to express his own thoughts in acceptable and recognised English” (*Education Gazette*, vol. 33, no. 6, 26 Oct. 1933, p. 258, cited by Homer 1973, pp. 98-9, cited in Beavis,

1996, p. 24). Similar rationales around quality of content and writing are used today to explain text selection in the senior and final years of subject English. In Victoria, the text list for study in senior English in 2015 (VCAA, 2014a) included: *Wuthering Heights* (Bronte), *Medea* (Euripides) and *Henry IV Part I* (Shakespeare) as well as World War II war poetry by Wilfred Owen and a collection of cartoons by Australian cartoonist Michael Leunig. These texts were chosen on their “literary merit” as “excellent example[s] of form and genre” that “rais[e] interesting issues and provid[e] challenging ideas” (VCAA, 2014a, p. 1). Even with the inclusion of contemporary, and multi-modal texts such as Leunig’s cartoons, this rationale is reminiscent of Matthew Arnold’s arguments, usually strongly associated with the cultural heritage approach, where engaging with literature is considered a “means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world” (Arnold, 1869, p. viii).

The cultural heritage model is not, however, the only approach to literature, just as genre theory is not the only approach to writing within a skills paradigm. Critical literacy, for instance, has a different approach to literature, where “the aim is the development of human capacity to use texts to analyse social fields and their systems of exchange—with an eye to transforming social relations and material conditions” (Luke, 2012, p. 9). This approach affords students the opportunity to move beyond dominant readings of texts and explore issues of power and bias, and in doing so perhaps to find creative new ways to describe their experiences (Williams, 1961). This does create some tensions, especially given Australia’s long history of using subject English to reinforce social class, and therefore using the English curriculum “as a vehicle for reaffirming national identity” (Reynolds, 1996, p. 74). Reynolds (1996) states that subject English has been instrumental in:

Ensuring that all members of society are linked with the ideological processes of the state (that is, where texts, practices and forms of assessment engender conformity to particular attitudes and values); and, more narrowly but simultaneously, as a means of skilling the workforce to levels thought to be required by the economy and the labour market. (p. 74)

The “conformity to particular attitudes and values” that Reynolds (1996) notes prefigures the language used in more recent policy documents, such as the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment Training & Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), 2008) and the *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* (Council of Australian Governments (COAG), Education Council, 2019). These documents claim to articulate the educational vision and priorities for young people across Australia. For instance, the second goal of the *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* is that: “All young Australians become confident and creative individuals,

successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community” (COAG, Education Council, 2019, p. 6). Implicit in these educational goals are the development of certain types of young people, ones that are active and informed in ways that support a view of young people as innovative, nimble and agile (Moran, 2010, see also Moyle, 2011).

Again, for subject English teachers, the different approaches—one that reinforces particular understandings of culture and histories and one that challenges and critiques these understandings of the world—provide points of tension within practice. In recognising this tension, subject English teachers need not choose between different approaches to teaching literature, but again explore ways to negotiate the tensions between the purposes of and practices associated with the different approaches.

3.3.2.3 English as personal growth

Moving towards the 21st century, the character of subject English curriculum began to change, morphing from the teaching and appreciation of so-called canonical texts and ideas to focus more on students’ own compositions and texts (Dixon, 1969; Graves, 1983; Moffett, 1992), these compositions reflecting students’ lives, their emotions and language, and lived experiences. Ball et al. (1990) explains that:

The ‘English as language’ lobby [such as Douglas Barnes, Harold Rosen and John Dixon] sought to shift the canonical tradition from the centre of the English stage and replace it with the pupil, the learner. In other words to replace the emphasis on second-hand meaning, in the text, with first-hand meaning, in the daily life and authentic culture of the child. (p. 58)

The personal growth approach, therefore, starts with “an interest in students’ their [sic] experiences and ‘ways of talking and writing’ as a point of entry to classroom work on texts” (Macken-Horarik, 2014, p. 9). And, as Doecke and Yandell (2018) argue, it requires teachers to be mindful of “attempts by their students to give meaning to their experiences through language and the other semiotic resources available to them” (p. 159).

Emerging largely from the work of John Dixon, what became known as the “personal growth” model, promotes student creativity and expression by placing the student, their interests and their growth, “centre-stage” (Reynolds, 1996, p. 79). Those who advocate for a personal growth model of subject English teaching tend to focus more on students and students’ experiences “around which talking, writing etc. is organised, hence exploration of personal feelings and expression are validated” (Dutton & Manuel, 2019, p. 15). Philp (2005) characterises her teaching within the personal growth model as ‘doing’, in the belief that “‘doing’ would make them [students] better at English” (p. 8). It is important to choose texts

“to which the themes of the texts are relevant to the issues it is assumed that young people would choose” in these texts (Reynolds, 1996, p. 80; see also Dixon, 1969) and where the “relationships between teacher and students are personalised” (Reynolds, 1996, pp. 79-80). Peel et al. (2000) argue that what they call the “growth paradigm” is what English teachers across the UK, America and Australia, most readily identify as the work of English teachers who “support a model of English which nourishes individual self-development, provides pleasure and opportunities for creativity” (p. 118).

Reid (2003) argues that the personal growth approach “has never been a pure dogma or fully theorised position but denotes a cluster of attitudes with a hoary lineage” (p. 101). For Dixon (1969), the personal growth model seemed to be less about a way of teaching and more about how, for example, writing could be used to make sense of experience; how one might use “language to make that experience real to himself” (p. 6). Therefore, within the teaching of writing, the growth paradigm has been closely linked to the process of writing. Locke (2015) argues that this process can be interpreted as “a set of steps determined by the contextual demands on a particular genre” or “a sequence of instruction” (p. 154), however “a sequence of cognitive operations” (p. 153) that acknowledges the complexities of writing and the different recursive approaches to writing one might take is more likely to support and motivate students’ to develop their writing.

The recursive nature of the writing process, of students finding ways to represent and make meaning of their experiences, is perhaps why the growth paradigm is most associated with creativity in subject English (Frawley, 2014). Dixon (1969) argues:

The selection and shaping that language involves, the choices between alternative expressions so that the language shall fit the experience and bring it to life “as it really was”—these activities imply imaginative work. (p. 6)

The activities that Dixon refers to are not a sequence of defined writing activities that one must work through to produce a particular piece of writing. Rather the activities refer to finding ways of representing our worlds in similar ways to what Williams (1961) describes as the “organization and re-organization of reality” (p. 22) as part of the struggle to “remake ourselves” (p. 24).

As already discussed, Doecke and Breen (2013) consider the process of writing to be important identity work for students. But this work also provides opportunities for important identity work for teachers within subject English as they find ways of navigating the different tensions of their practice. Harris (1991), for instance, explains that the advocacy for the growth paradigm from the Dartmouth Conference was tempered by more traditional teaching

methods, such as “the demands of fixed school curriculums, standardised tests, and calls for improved skills and increased cultural unity” (p. 632). Teachers are therefore needing to “embrace a variety of views, some of which appear to be contradictory” (Peel & Hargreaves, 1995, p. 45).

3.3.3 STELLA & stella2.0

The identity work or everyday creative practices of English teachers was explored through the STELLA (Standards for the Teaching of Language and Literacy in Australia) project in the early 2000s. This project continued the early work from the Newbolt Report (Newbolt, 1921) and Dartmouth Conference in attempting to answer the question “What is subject English?” but with a “formal brief to develop professional standards for Australian English teachers across P-12” (Doecke & Gill, 2001, p.1). One key purpose of the project was to articulate what English literacy teachers should “know and be able to do” (Doecke & Gill, 2001, p. 129). These workshops were a way for participating English teachers to understand their practice through writing narratives, the writing and discussion of these narratives also providing a way to generate accounts of accomplished practice. These accounts were then used to develop the STELLA Standards (Doecke & Gill, 2001). Subject English teachers across Australia engaged in narrative, creative storytelling workshops, drawing on the conceptualisation of creative practice raised earlier in this chapter, which involves co-construction of knowledge (Yandell, 2006). The storytelling was analysed, synthesised and reconfigured as a website that presented professional standards showing how, and inquiring into the ways that, “accomplished English literacy teachers conceptualise and teach speaking, listening, writing, reading and viewing” (Doecke & Parr, 2005, p. 261).

The English teacher narratives provided accounts of many of the tensions highlighted earlier in this chapter. The standards for many of the English teachers provided frameworks for reflecting on “what is an incredibly complex, demanding and emotional job” (Philp, 2005, p. 9). McClenaghan, (2001) for instance, reflects upon a teaching moment observing, “five boys, with one exception, [who] were passive resisters, kids who could make no connections whatsoever with what they were offered in English” (p. 88). After providing students with an opportunity to “present an instructional text, written or oral, individually or as a group” (p. 88) McClenaghan (2001) marvels at “the success of the oral projects” where the students, including the 5 ‘passive resisters’, demonstrated imagination, organisation and collaboration. However, he is also cognisant that this success for the ‘passive resisters’ “did not carry over

into the rest of their work” (p. 88). In another account included in the STELLA project, Sue Rogers (2006) reflects on the various literacy practices of the 5-year-old students in her class, and whether these students are aware of the diverse literacy resources students bring with them to school. The discussions of standards through the STELLA project provided for Rogers (2006) “a framework for the questions with which I had been struggling, and enabled me to direct my critical reflections and transfer them into simple inquiries within my classroom” (p. 41). The narratives, alongside the generative work of developing the standards that Hayes (2000) notes, provided opportunities for English teachers to represent their teaching experiences. Doecke et al. (2004) describe this work as finding ways to “capture the multi-leveled nature of [teachers’] work” (p. 103) as “attempting to explain ourselves to ourselves” (p. 103). In doing so, Doecke et al. (2004) explain that representing the nature of English teachers’ work requires “a struggle to claim those words [professionalism and standards, for example] for our own purposes, to invest them with our own meaning and sense of reality” (p. 104).

More than a decade after the original STELLA project, the stella2.0 project took up the original work, aiming to explore English teaching in a new set of policy and social conditions. stella2.0 consisted of a series of creative workshops with English teachers in Victoria. The workshops were framed in a way that acknowledged the connections with the earlier STELLA project, but also made explicit that stella2.0 “spoke to a new policy setting that was radically different from the professional world of English teachers at the turn of the century” (Parr et al., 2015, p. 138). The stories generated by English teachers at various stages of their careers, including pre-service teachers and teacher educators, in the stella2.0 workshops highlighted some of the policy shifts since the original workshops 14 years before, namely the “now commonplace for governments and regulatory bodies to demand of education ‘providers’ comprehensive compliance with generic standards” (Parr & Bulfin, 2015, p. 159). In reflecting upon the writing that one teacher, Helen, posted on the project’s website, Parr (2016) notes that although Helen’s initial writing “had been a struggle” it had “helped explain her personal and professional history to herself and others” (p. 65). Reflecting on another teacher narrative, Parr (2016) observes that what first appears to be a “deficit stor[y] of pre-service teachers, struggling on their teaching practicum” (p. 67) actually

involved a different struggle—to negotiate a way of teaching English in the face of rigid imperatives like ‘the standard University lesson plan // structure’ and the P2 Framework definition of creativity’ ... one of many commercially produced frameworks that schools are adopting to help them ‘meet the standards’. (p. 67)

The stella2.0 workshops and the narratives generated through the workshops, were therefore interested in how the participating English teachers were able to creatively ‘speak back to’ the various standards they encountered in their teaching practice, especially standards driven by standards-based reforms at both a national and international level, including the narrow constructs of generic teacher standards such as the APSTs (AITSL, 2017).

The English teachers participating in the STELLA and stella2.0 projects, in similar ways to the student writing Doecke and Breen (2013) describe, were engaging in important identity work as they found ways to represent and therefore make meaning of their teaching practices. This wasn't, as the accounts above demonstrate, a straightforward process of merely “seeking to ‘capture’ the practice of the English teachers” (Doecke et al., 2007, p. 17). Rather the narrative accounts demonstrate the struggle to find ways of representing the complexities of teacher practice. In constructing these accounts, English teachers are also negotiating who they are in relation to their teaching practices. As Hayes (2000) observes in relation to the STELLA workshops:

In evoking those narratives, good practitioners demonstrate that they do not make a conscious choice to be either 'bomb thrower' or 'establishment'. They are necessarily both. They both 'create cultures' and 'contest them'. They 'unsettle certainties', often of their own making (the quotes are titles of English/literacy educators conferences I have attended in the past five years). They are constantly testing and dissolving their own comfort zones. (p. 26)

Likewise, the notion of teachers negotiating tensions is not about finding a *balance* between a number of different priorities, such as the different understandings of subject English discussed above. Rather, as teachers negotiate the tensions in their day-to-day work they are engaging in creative practice, a practice that involves ideological struggle and finding new ways of being.

3.3.4 Contemporary understandings of subject English

Understandings of subject English have continued to evolve historically, reflecting both social and political purposes for education (Luke, 2000) and incorporating “all of the older models of English teaching, but [also going] beyond them” (Thomson, 2019, p. 28). More contemporary developments include new understandings of literacy that encompass critical and digital literacy. O'Mara et al. (2021) consider the “divisive approach towards literacy pedagogy in Australia, where practitioners and theorists were positioned in different camps” (p. 32), further arguing that:

it was in this environment that Luke and Freebody designed the *Four Roles of the Reader*, a framework for understanding the repertoires of literacy practices [which] is inclusive of the many theoretical and practical positions held about literacy. (p. 33)

Included in the *Four Roles of the Reader* framework is an understanding of critical literacy, which has:

an explicit aim of the critique and transformation of dominant ideologies, cultures and economies, institutions and political systems. As a practical approach to curriculum it melds social, political and cultural debate and discussion with the analysis of how texts and discourses work, where, with what consequences, and in whose interests. (Luke, 2012, p. 3)

The ‘text-analyst practices’ that are most closely associated with critical literacy ask readers to consider “how texts position readers” and use language and visuals to “constrain interpretation and influence the reader” (Freebody, 2007, p. 34). As such, “the pedagogies associated with Critical Literacy interrogate texts for particular perspectives/ideologies and the possible ‘reading positions’ one might take up in approaching a text” (Dutton & Manuel, 2019, p. 16).

Understandings of literacy practices have continued to evolve to encompass multi-literacies and digital literacy. For instance, Pangrazio (2016) points out that the definitions of digital literacy are complex “as the spaces, texts and tools which contextualise such practices are continually changing” (p. 163). These digital literacies can incorporate understandings of design, especially in relation to multi-literacies, which can “lead the learner to a critical and practical knowledge of digital text production—a critical digital literacy” (Pangrazio, 2016, p. 166). The term ‘critical literacy’ may lend itself to analytical and critical thinking understandings within subject English. However, the interrogation of power and ideology within texts (including digital texts) supports “an understanding that texts inevitably have multiple meanings” (Thomson, 2019, p. 29). By engaging in critical literacy practices, through interrogating texts and producing texts in response, students are encouraged to actively make meaning of the texts, and it is this meaning-making that is considered to be creative (Doecke, 2014; Yandell, 2006; Williams, 1977; see 1.3.3 & 3.4.1)

While this section has considered some historical perspectives, as well as some contemporary understandings, of subject English and creativity the discussion in the following section considers how creativity is understood within subject English curriculums across the *Australian curriculum* (ACARA, n.d.-c), *Victorian curriculum* (VCAA, n.d.-f) and the senior English curriculum within Victoria (VCAA, 2014b).

3.4 Creativity and subject English curriculum

Many of the tensions invoked in the previous section, such as “the relative significance of language versus literature” (Perry, 2019, p. 1) are still evident in current understandings of subject English in the curriculum of the state of Victoria (Australia) where my participants were practising English teachers at the time of this study. The discussion below explores in more detail how the different understandings of subject English and creativity within subject English are represented in both the *Australian curriculum: English* and *Victorian curriculum: English* (ACARA, n.d.-c & VCAA, n.d.-k respectively). The discussion then moves to exploring how creativity can be understood in terms of meaning-making and social interaction, not as a solution or alternative to the tensions within the curriculum, but as a way for teachers to work through and beyond these tensions.

As discussed in Chapter 2, creativity is represented in the *Australian curriculum* as a general capability, a cognitive skill addressing the need for students to develop their capacity to problem-solve and innovate as part of a set of skills that “young Australians [need] to live and work successfully in the twenty-first century” (ACARA, n.d.-f, para 1). When explaining the place of *Critical and creative thinking general capability* in subject English, ACARA argues:










Critical and creative thinking are essential to developing analytical and evaluative skills and understandings in the *Australian Curriculum: English*. Students use critical and creative thinking through listening to, reading, viewing, creating and presenting texts, interacting with others, and when they recreate and experiment with literature, and discuss the aesthetic or social value of texts. ... In creating their own written, visual and multimodal texts, students also explore the influence or impact of subjective language, feeling and opinion on the interpretation of text. Students also use and develop their creative thinking capability when they consider the innovations made by authors, imagine possibilities, plan, explore and create ideas for imaginative texts based on real or imagined events. Students explore the creative possibilities of the English language to represent novel ideas. (ACARA, n.d.-g, p. 3)

Creativity in this description is framed initially as a thinking skill, but is also linked to producing, ‘creating’, and imagining. All this suggests a close connection with what both the *Australian curriculum: English* (ACARA, n.d.-c) and the *Victoria curriculum: English* refer to as imaginative writing (VCAA, n.d.-l, para 15).

Within the *Australian curriculum: English*, content descriptions are marked with icons indicating each content description's⁶ relationship to various capabilities⁷. Content descriptions marked with the *Critical and creative thinking general capability* icon, as shown in Figure 3.1, are linked to verbs such as 'create', 'experiment' 'analyse', 'identify', 'explore', 'understand', 'explain', 'compare' and 'evaluate'.

Figure 3.1

Excerpt from Australian curriculum: English Year 8, Literacy strand (ACARA, n.d.-e).

Interpreting, analysing, evaluating
<p>Analyse and evaluate the ways that <u>text</u> structures and <u>language features</u> vary according to the purpose of the <u>text</u> and the ways that referenced sources add authority to a <u>text</u> (ACELY1732 - Scootle ↗)</p> <p>  W L S R</p> <p>Apply increasing knowledge of vocabulary, <u>text</u> structures and <u>language features</u> to understand the content of texts (ACELY1733 - Scootle ↗)</p> <p> W R</p> <p>Use comprehension strategies to interpret and evaluate texts by reflecting on the validity of content and the credibility of sources, including finding evidence in the <u>text</u> for the <u>author's point of view</u> (ACELY1734 - Scootle ↗)</p> <p>   W R</p> <p>Explore and explain the ways authors combine different modes and media in creating texts, and the impact of these choices on the viewer/listener (ACELY1735 - Scootle ↗)</p> <p>   L S</p>

Note: Icons show content descriptors connections to the general capabilities: Literacy (book icon), critical and creative thinking (concentric 'C's icon), personal and social capability (juggling person icon). Other icons indicate the relevant language mode: writing ('W'), listening ('L'), speaking ('S') and reading ('R').

While the term 'create' is used throughout the curriculum document, it is most often used in reference to students producing pieces of writing, with language denoting creativity, such as 'experiment' or 'adapt', used sparingly (for example content descriptor ACELY1738, see ACARA, n.d.-d). Within the *Australian curriculum: English*, creativity is most commonly associated with language such as 'imaginative' texts, used to describe one category of text type (the others are 'persuasive' and 'informative' texts) that students should be creating or producing. The word 'imaginative' is also linked to how students from Years 8 to 10 should

⁶ The structure of the *Victorian curriculum: English* (VCAA, n.d.-k) is such that each strand—language, literacy, and literature—is broken down into a collection of content descriptions, describing the key skills and understandings that students should be developing to achieve the standards at that level.

⁷ The term 'capabilities' is used in the *Victorian curriculum* for what is known as 'general capabilities' in the *Australian curriculum*.

“use a range of software ... to create, edit and publish texts imaginatively” (ACARA, n.d.-d). The *Victorian curriculum: English* (VCAA, n.d.-k), does not specifically explicitly indicate which content descriptors relate to the *Critical and creative thinking general capability*. However, given that the *Victorian curriculum: English* is derived from the *Australian curriculum*, terms such as ‘imaginative’ and ‘create’ are used in similar ways across the Foundation to Level 10 (ages five to 15) subject English curriculum.

In the state-based senior levels of subject English, the VCE: English, there is even less focus on creativity. The main ‘creative’ task with the mainstream senior English study requires students to:

Prepare sustained creative responses to selected texts, demonstrating their understanding of the world of the texts and how texts construct meaning. In developing a creative response [students] explore issues of purpose and audience and make key choices about structure, conventions and language. They develop a credible and effective voice and style and use the chosen features of the selected text, for example characters, narrative or dialogue, to offer an interpretation of the selected text. They produce and share drafts, practising the skills of revision, editing and refining for stylistic and imaginative effect. (VCAA, 2014b, p. 18)

Early iterations of this senior English ‘study design’ required students to respond to texts in a variety of writing forms: persuasive, information and imaginative (VCAA, 2006, 2011). In a recent iteration of the study design—*VCE: English and English as an Additional Language Study Design 2016-2022*—there is more emphasis placed on students’ abilities to develop creative responses to text, including the ability to “transform and adapt language and literary devices ... with consideration of the original text” (VCAA, 2014b, p. 19). When evaluating the implementation of the study design in 2016, VCAA noted that schools had “missed opportunities to foster student learning” that the creative response afforded students (VCAA, n.d.-e). This was largely attributed to schools taking an analytical rather than creative approach to the relevant assessment tasks, preferring to model the school-based assessment on the high-stakes final year examination, which does not require students to write any creative response. Regardless of the curriculum frameworks—Australian, Victorian or VCE—creativity is used as an outcome, as in ‘to create’ or as creative problem-solving, innovation or imagination. Inherent in these understandings of creativity are widely accepted assumptions of creativity as linked to particular styles of writing, and linking creativity with production, innovation and technology.

Throughout the curriculum there are elements of most of the different paradigms discussed in earlier in this chapter, rather than privileging one specific understanding of subject English (or paradigm) over another (Seddon, 1989). It is clear, however, that particular understandings, such as genre approaches, are strongly mediating how writing is represented in the

curriculum and in standards-based reforms such as high-stakes tests like NAPLAN (Derewianka, 2015; Frawley & McLean-Davies, 2015). This is evident in the categorisation of writing as imaginative or informative or persuasive; each with clearly, and narrowly, defined purposes: to entertain, inform or persuade. Writing in order to demonstrate knowledge of the rules of a particular genre, Christie (2013) argues, provides students with a framework from which they can construct their work. It also simplifies the challenge of assessing students' written work. Assessment can focus on the degree to which a student has replicated the 'rules' or conventions of the genre and produced a written piece that uses "the conventions of spelling, punctuation and syntax of Standard Australian English" (VCAA, 2014b, p. 30).

3.4.1 Creativity as meaning-making within subject English

The discussion so far has focused predominantly on historical and curriculum-focused understandings of creativity, and understandings that largely categorise creativity as product, problem-solving and/or imagination. This is not surprising, as Cremin and Chappell (2021) note:

Co-constructing and collaborating may be less well recognised by policymakers for whom notions of creativity and attendant pedagogies as individualised tend to persist. (p. 323)

In contrast to these policymakers, are the many researchers have framed creativity within subject English as social meaning-making in the context of English classrooms (e.g., Bellis et al., 2009; Coulombe, 2014; Cremin & Chappell, 2021; Doecke et al., 2011, 2014; Bellis, 2014; Thompson, 2011; Pahl, 2007; Yandell, 2006, 2013b). For these researchers, the social dimensions of meaning-making are inherently creative, because of the involvement of complex interactions between students and their teachers, and between students themselves, as they draw together ideas from a particular text, their current context and/or their prior experiences.

Researchers have focused on three different 'types' of creative meaning-making acts within classrooms. The first involves traditional creative activities such as creative writing, or a creative response to a text that is mediated or promoted by the social interaction amongst students and/or with the teacher. The other two creative acts evident in this literature include writing as creation or 're...creation' or 're-making' (Pope, 2005; cf. also Bellis, 2014) and creative thinking as a synthesis of experiences to create new interpretations of text and/or experiences. According to Pope (2005) re...creation is the "ongoing act of making afresh" (p. 84), as distinct from the 'quasi-divine' act to create something from nothing. In this re-

definition of creation Pope uses suspension dots to separate 're' from 'creation', establishing a gap or lacuna, which we are invited to both acknowledge and bridge (p. 85). In doing so Pope (2005) argues "it invites us to *see through* the existing possibilities to words and worlds beyond as well as between; and it encourages a view of 'difference' that is genuinely otherwise" (p. 88). According to Pope (2005) re...creation encompasses a range of ideas including 'de-construction', 're-construction', 're-visioning', 're-interpreting' and 're-membering', further arguing that

All these ideas complement the notion of re...creation as an ongoing transformation of past-through-present-to-future and self-through-other-to-otherwise. They do not depend upon the illusion of absolutely determined beginnings or end; though they do (importantly) require provisional and preferential points of opening and closure. Neither do they presuppose an absolute distinction between the processes of reading and writing and, by extension, of re-reading and re-writing. (pp. 86-87)

This understanding of re...creation within subject English blurs the distinction between critical and creative, and therefore questions what may be considered creative work within the subject English classroom. Pope (2005) further arguing that any act of writing or reading can be considered both critical and creative. This type of re-creation has a number of incarnations that, according to Sawyer (2014), "envisage a kind of response to literary texts in which students create texts in response to, or 'alongside', the authors of the original" (Sawyer, p. 27).

Bellis et al. (2009) recall more 'productive' accounts of groups of students constructing meaning in and with texts by re-imagining the more 'traditional' notion of creativity in the classroom. Drawing on Reid's (1984) workshop approach to literature, Bellis et al. (2009) recount students constructing art works as a representation of their emerging understandings of the text. As Bellis observed:

[Students] were reflexively engaging in a process of meaning making, drawing on the resources available to them: materials such as paint brushes and paper; their understanding of symbolism and other artistic conventions; their knowledge of Australian Aboriginal art; their own values, interests, beliefs and traditions. Consequently, the texts that my students produced reflected their knowledge and understanding of *Njunjul the Sun* ... and much more. (pp. 166-167).

Parr frames what is first perceived as Lisa and Jen's "social chit chat" while creating a painted response to Atwood's novel *Cat's Eye* as a "complex dialogic process" (p. 169), whereby the exchange between Lisa and Jen "can also be seen as a process of spontaneously creating a story between the two of them in response to Atwood's story" (p. 169). In the same article, Doecke draws upon a "more unpleasant" (p. 171) experience, describing the juxtaposition between his love of Henry Lawson and the "groan(s) of boredom

... as the students writhingly endured what (for them) was the worst story imaginable” (cf. Doecke, 1997 cited in Bellis et al., 2009, p. 171). The three accounts demonstrate, as Doecke states, the ways “that *texts* are a function of *contexts*, revealing the instability of the *meaning* as they are read and reread by different interpretive communities” (Bellis et al., 2009, p. 171) and are therefore examples of creativity as a synthesis of experiences to create new interpretations of text and/or experiences.

The creative thinking, or meaning-making, in the examples discussed by Bellis et al. (2009), is evident in the complex social interactions between students and their teachers as they draw together ideas from the current text, their current context and their prior experiences. The students in these examples would seem to be demonstrating what ACARA describes as the creative ability to “imagine possibilities and connect ideas, consider alternatives, seek solutions and put ideas into action” (ACARA, n.d.-i, para. 1). But in each instance where the meaning making could be deemed successful (by definition offered in the *Australian curriculum* and by the authors themselves), the teacher’s pedagogical practices, and perhaps the curriculum, have allowed such creative spaces to exist. Craft (2003) points out the ambiguity in the definitions of creativity arguing that there are “distinctions between creative teaching and teaching for creativity” (p. 118) and that creative learning and learning creatively are also distinguishable aspects of pedagogy and curriculum. Craft (2003) also highlights the dilemmas for the educator, suggesting that:

A curriculum which is fixed, compulsory, which involves a great deal of propositional knowledge, and which takes up a great deal of learning time, may pose challenges to stimulating creativity—possibly more so than a curriculum which is more flexible. (p. 123)

In what appears to be a dichotomous relationship, tensions emerge between the recognisable need to foster creativity to fulfil the neoliberal desire for economic growth through innovation, and the need for productive and efficient education through a centralised control of the curriculum. The varying definitions of creativity and the assumptions about the place of creativity in the classroom may be problematic for pedagogical practices.

In describing and advocating for a range of creative practices in the secondary school English classroom, Yandell (2006) acknowledges that teachers “know that there is stuff that they [the students] need to know if their readings are to be adequate, informed and meaningful” (p. 321), and he characterises this ‘stuff’ as another dimension of socially situated practices. Applying a similar definition of creativity, Pahl (2007) proposes that creativity is an element of literacy practice that is socially situated. Through discussing the ‘creative’ text of one child Pahl is able to trace where students “get their ideas for [their]

drawings and writing” (p. 86), explaining that “the orchestration of the text came through the multiple activities that were going on in the classroom and in the home at the time” (p. 89). Pahl is therefore able to argue that by “looking at the histories of children’s texts and ... hearing out-of-school voices within children’s composing activities” (p. 91), these texts provide insight into the creative generation of ideas and the basis for further creative developments.

3.4.2 Teacher creative practice within subject English

The discussion above offers several socially mediated understandings of creativity as problem-solving and/or imagination—namely, creativity as re...making, as meaning-making, and as a social dimension of students’ work that is the synthesis of various experiences. These understandings of creativity within subject English offer alternative perspectives of creativity as problem-solving and/or imagination that are offered within curriculum or general capabilities (see Chapter 2).

As with the various historical understandings of subject English presented earlier, these exist not separate from, but in relationship to each other. It is not, as Seddon (1989, see also Reynolds, 1996, p. 82) suggests, a matter of settling for one definition or one paradigm over another. Nor is it the case, as Ellis (2007) points out, that subject knowledge is “fixed and universal” while considering “teacher knowledge as tacit and uncodifiable” (p. 449). Rather, Ellis (2007) argues for a model of subject knowledge in English that is a combination of “cultural identity”, “individual knowledge” and “collective knowledge” (p. 456), and in doing so he argues that:

Practice ... suggests the potential by which individual knowing can be validated as knowledge according to the rules operated by the community and the extent to which individuals are permitted to work on these rules themselves. (p. 458)

This negotiation of the knowledge is consistent with the literature that shows that subject English teachers in Australia, as in other parts of the world, are constantly negotiating understandings of subject English, and negotiating ways to work with/in the tensions and ideological struggles that the various understandings of subject English present. Working through and beyond these tensions is not just, as Cremin and Chappell (2021) suggest, predominantly based on “ideational exploration and generation” (p. 323), but may require teachers to find new ways of being (Gee, 2011) or different ways to interpret and describe their work that is, as Williams (1977) describes it, everyday creativity. It may be more productive to speak of teachers’ creative practice as not merely finding ways to teach

creatively or teach creativity, but rather to work in ways that promote the social conditions for their students to make meaning (Bellis et al., 2009) and to learn ways of saying, doing and being in subject English (Gee, 2011). Sometimes that work takes place in a classroom; at other times it can involve teachers exploring ways of interpreting and describing their practice (see Doecke & Gill, 2001; Hayes, 2000; Parr et al., 2015).

This chapter has shown many of the ways in which the history of subject English teaching has shaped current understandings and practices of creativity. This includes the perceptions of what constitutes a ‘creative activity’ and the value placed on completing such a creative activity. In examining some examples of formal curriculum, I have illustrated how creativity can be seen either as an act of production or an act of imagination when producing particular forms of writing. Yet, Williams’ (1977) understandings of everyday creativity that I began this chapter with provide opportunities for alternative understandings of creativity within subject English, such as those detailed in the social teacher practices in 3.4.1. This perspective of everyday creativity that Williams (1961) offers suggests that “there are, essentially, no ‘ordinary’ activities, if by ‘ordinary’ we mean the absence of creative interpretation and effort” (p. 37). Viewing teacher practice through a lens of everyday creativity enables a shift in focus from creative teaching or teaching creatively (Craft, 2003; Jeffrey & Craft, 2004)—a focus on developing individual student creativity—to socially mediated teacher creative practice. This perspective on creativity involves some recognition of the ideological struggle that English teachers are engaged in, as they work through and beyond the tensions of their practice.

In Chapter 4, I consider the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of this study and lay out the methodology for exploring teacher creative practice. This includes a discussion of generating and analysing data through narrative-based inquiry, and the ethical considerations of the study.

CHAPTER 4 *Methodology*

4.1 Introduction

In reviewing the literature in Chapters 2 and 3, I have considered how creativity is understood in education, as well as within current policy and curriculum discourses in Australia and internationally, and within subject English. The literature was provisionally divided into those studies that frame creativity as human capital, and those that conceptualise it using socio-cultural framings. I have argued that the word ‘creativity’, depending on the context of use, often signifies a particular understanding and set of assumptions, such as creativity as problem-solving, innovation and/or imagination, the focus on the creative individual, and creativity’s relationship with technology and creative writing. In this chapter, I outline my methodological approach to exploring how English teachers understand creativity and account for creativity in their practice. To do so, I first return to the aims and research questions of this study, before exploring the ontological considerations, and how these considerations have shaped my approach to the project. Secondly, I discuss the ways I have enacted a qualitative approach to the research. Included in both of these sections are narrative-based accounts, or ‘scenes’ (Irwin, 1997; Kozorog & Stanojevic, 2013; see 1.3.3), from my own practice. These ‘scenes’ illustrate how I represent the multiple voices in the study and how narrative-based accounts can provide insight into teachers’ understandings of their practice. In the third section, I outline my approach to generating the data, namely through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. The final section of this chapter is concerned with how I worked with the data to construct narrative-based accounts of teachers’ practice and subsequently analysed these accounts using an inductive analysis approach.

4.2 Epistemological and ontological considerations

In this section, I explore the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of the study. To do this, I first re-introduce the research aims and questions that are the foundation for the methodological considerations outlined in the remainder of this section. This discussion not only outlines the questions but also provides an overview of how these questions relate to the aims of the study. In the following section, I discuss the dialogic epistemology of the research, exploring the relationship between knowledge and socio-cultural context. To

demonstrate this, I again draw on a scene from my teaching in a supplementary education space, where one of the students contests my presentation of gender as a male-female binary. The third and fourth sections extend the argument that one's understanding of concepts, such as gender or creativity, cannot be separated from the context in which these concepts are constructed. The discussion in the third section focuses on understandings of context, and how this mediates understandings of teacher practice. Finally, the fourth section considers how a socio-cultural approach to research acknowledges the multiple voices that mediate understandings of concepts such as creativity, and how this approach provides opportunities to explore the complex relationships between teacher practices, everyday creativity and context.

4.2.1 Research aims and questions

The primary focus of this study is to explore English teachers' understandings of creativity. However, beyond this, the study investigates if, and in what ways, teacher understandings of creativity influence or mediate teacher practices and the effect of context on creative practice. The research therefore is guided by three main questions along with a range of associated sub-questions that are designed to both focus and guide the investigation. As well as outlining the questions and sub-questions below, I offer an explanatory paragraph for each to provide some context as to how these questions were formulated.

Research question 1: What understandings do subject English teachers have of creativity in secondary school classrooms and supplementary education spaces?

- a. What are secondary school subject English teachers' understandings of creativity?
- b. How do subject English teachers identify and account for creativity in their students' work?
- c. How do secondary school subject English teachers account for creativity in their teaching practice?
- d. What can we learn about subject English teachers' creative practice?

This research question and sub-questions were initially developed in response to the development of curriculum policies and initiatives in Australia and Victoria that place a high premium on creativity as a desirable skill for the 21st century (see ACARA, 2012a; Department of Education and Training, 2019; Gale, 2006; Harris & de Bruin, 2018; VCAA, n.d-g; Williams et al., 2013). The policies, outlined in documents such as the *Melbourne*

Declaration (MCEETYA, 2008), *The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* (COAG, Education, 2019) and Victoria's *Education State* initiative (DET, n.d.), advocate for creativity and creative thinking as a skill that should be taught and assessed across curriculum areas (see ACARA, n.d.-g & VCAA n.d.-h). And yet the supporting documents have little in the way of theorised discussion regarding the various ways creativity can be defined or enacted. Drawing from the literature on teacher perceptions (Biesta et al., 2015; Capan, 2014; Fang, 1996; Pajares, 1992), I proposed that the ways English teachers accounted for creativity would consist of complex interactions between policy, context, and personal experiences and understandings. Therefore, the purpose of the first three sub-questions is to provide opportunities to explore the various ways subject English teachers view creativity in respect to these policies and their students' work. The second research question and related sub-questions specifically focus on teacher practice, and therefore seek to address a gap in the literature, namely research that conceptualises teacher creativity within teaching practice rather than as an add-on, and how it relates to professional knowledge, practice and policy.

Research question 2: How does context mediate teacher practice that is thought to be creative?

- a. How is creativity described within the context of education and subject English?
- b. How are understandings of creativity mediated by policy documents, teacher professional standards, and curriculum?
- c. How are understandings of creativity mediated by standards-based reforms?
- d. How does teaching context—the school, classroom and wider educational context—mediate understandings of teacher creative practice?
- e. How does professional knowledge of subject English mediate teachers' understandings of creativity and teacher practice?

In Chapter 1, I argued that knowledge and language are socially and contextually constructed. As Vygotsky (1962) comments, “a word acquires its sense from the context in which it appears; in different contexts, it changes its sense” (p. 245). Gee (2011) refers to this as “the situated meaning” which arises “because particular language forms take on specific or situated meanings in specific different contexts of use” (p. 80). Therefore, one important purpose of the sub-questions for the second research question is to consider the relationship between the context of teacher practice—the classroom, subject, school, and wider contexts such as state and national policies—and teacher understandings of creativity.

4.2.2 Consideration of the dialogic nature of the research

Research, researchers and/or the phenomenon under investigation do not exist in a cultural or epistemological vacuum; all research is mediated by and generated in and through a researcher's relationship to the world. This relationship is, in turn, mediated by social context and experience. In my own work as a secondary school teacher and leader in government schools and alternative settings, it is problematic for me to separate these experiences and my research, or my English teaching from my teaching of science or more recent work in civics and citizenship education; the lines between these were, and still are, deeply blurred with one informing the other in what Bakhtin would consider a dialogical relationship.

Bakhtin's (1981) concept of dialogism is explained through his understanding of the novel. The novel, at least in the hands of authors like Dostoevsky, represents a combination of different voices, "a diversity of social speech types ... and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 262). Dialogism can therefore be considered:

a dynamic, unstable but ongoing interchange of ideas, meaning, values, and cultures. This dynamic interchange can inhere between speakers (or *within* a single speaker), between texts (or within a single text) and between communities (or within a single community). (Parr, 2010, p. 14)

Scene 4.1 below illustrates how teaching can be seen as dialogic, through its dynamic interchange of ideas and meanings. In the scene, Grade 2 student Sophie, and her Grade 1 and 2 peers, find themselves in one of my science workshops, which is titled 'The monster mash'. The workshop is part of a 'supplementary education' program—an educational context that is not bound by all of the typical institutional structures of mainstream schools (see Myers & Grosvenor, 2011). The workshops are available for parents to enrol their children in, and most of the children are identified as either having a strong interest or strong ability in the subject matter of the workshop/s. 'The monster mash' workshop focuses on the concept of 'dichotomous keys' as a classification system. A dichotomous key is one method of classification, whereby a group of animals, or in this case monsters, is separated into sub-categories based on identifiable characteristics and a series of yes/no questions. For example, "Does the monster have horns?" The monsters are then separated into sub-categories of those who have horns and those who do not. This is followed by other questions as the monsters are separated into further sub-categories. The idea is that anyone using the same dichotomous key should be able to group the monsters in exactly the same way, and more importantly identify to which group a new or unknown monster might belong. In Scene 4.1, I home in on a moment at the beginning of the workshop where Sophie questions the dichotomous key example we are working with.

Scene 4.1 — Challenging dichotomies

It is a Tuesday afternoon, early December. Approximately 600 Grade 1 to 6 students from schools across Melbourne have converged on an all girls' independent school in the inner, affluent suburbs for a 'festival of workshops'. I (Narelle) have 19 of these students. They are a mixture of Grade 1 and 2 students, 14 boys and five girls, many of them meeting each other, and myself, for the first time that morning. I have decided to re-present the program 'The monster mash' that I had taught to a different group of students at a 'festival of workshops' two years earlier. The scenario is based on classifying monsters for different classes at a 'scare school'—the students need to design a classification system using a dichotomous key for their incoming monsters that will also withstand the introduction of a new monster, the 'exchange' student monster. The teaching episode begins during the first activity, which involves students and the teacher exploring 'objective' characteristics. I ask students to find different ways of separating themselves into two groups. The question has a dual purpose: one, to investigate dichotomous keys; and two, to have students interact with each other to help alleviate any nervousness from being in an unfamiliar school with unfamiliar students.

Narelle: How can we divide you in to two groups?

Students: (Shouting Rapidly) Hair colour. Height. Just draw a line down the middle ...
(Silence falls)

Narelle: Okay, but if someone else came into the room and used the same rules or categories ...

(We digress momentarily to discuss the meaning of the word 'categories'. I scribble some notes on the board)

... would you end up in the same groups every time?

Students: (The responses are slower, more considered) No. Maybe. Probably not ...

Narelle: How else might we separate you into two groups?

(There is a pause, students look at each other)

Darragh: We could do boys and girls, but the groups wouldn't be even.

Narelle: Did I say the groups had to be even?

(They hesitate for a moment as they consider my question and their assumption. They then begin arranging themselves into groups of boys and girls).

If someone else came in and you asked them to arrange you into groups of boys and girls, would they come up with the same result?

Students: (Students take a moment to look around the room and at each other, a random smattering of students respond as one.) Yes.

Sophie: (Looking puzzled) But it wouldn't always work. Some older people aren't boys or girls, or they choose what they want to be. Sometimes you can't tell.

Narelle: Good point.

Sophie's point is indicative of one of those teaching moments I hadn't anticipated. I was conscious of the age of these children and the fact that I didn't know them. Therefore I acknowledged Sophie's point and I quickly navigated the conversation in a different direction, sending the students back to their seats in preparation for the next activity. Sophie's comments certainly highlight one problematic dimension of dichotomous keys: as with taxonomies, dichotomous keys can lack the ability to demonstrate complex relationships (see Sokal, 1974). I've done this activity countless times in various contexts: as a Year 7 science activity, as part of professional development workshops for primary school teachers, and as a Grade 1 and 2 workshop in another supplementary education program. Sophie was the first to ever question this gender binary. Sophie's experience of the world prompts discussions in classrooms around the concept of gender and gender stereotypes. Such discussions are increasingly common and often robust.

In reflecting upon this scene, it stands out as a moment where my teaching of this activity shifted. Sophie's understanding of gender was that it is culturally, socially and historically constructed and as such Sophie had interpreted the task in terms of a social context and history, adding a third category, 'maybe'. This resulted in an unexpected and yet still 'correct' answer and therefore an answer that could potentially be viewed as 'creative'. Through this dialogic interaction, Sophie, the class and I have together co-constructed a new understanding of the dichotomous relationship of gender, and in the process changed my perception of this task as a demonstration for which I had often assumed there were limited correct answers. It is likely that Sophie's connection between the discussions of dichotomies and gender is more complex than it would first appear; her logical conclusion masks a multitude of influences in reaching the final destination (cf Pahl, 2007). In the same way, the relationship between teachers' professional practice and their understandings of concepts such as creativity are also complex. They are likely to be formed in a crucible of past experiences, histories of curriculum and subject (which are complex in themselves) and mediated by their contexts.

The relationship between one's experiences, context, practices and understandings of concepts such as creativity, is an important consideration for this research. It informs the study's epistemological view that knowledge is not fixed, but rather something that is constructed (often co-constructed), often provisional, and reconstructed. This is a social constructivist view of knowledge (Palinscar, 1998) and as such this research is predicated on the understanding that "entities we normally call reality, knowledge, thought, facts, texts,

selves, and so on are constructs generated by communities of like-minded peers” (Bruffee, 1986, p. 774).

4.2.3 Context and teacher practice

In many instances, the context in which creativity takes place has been accorded little or no importance in the literature, with few exceptions. However, influenced by socio-cultural theorists’ understandings of creativity, my study will be investigating how context mediates how subject English teachers understand and account for creativity in their practice.

In qualitative research, as Gee (2011) argues, the notion of context

is indefinitely large, ranging from local matters ... to historical, institutional, and cultural settings. No matter how much of the context we have considered in offering an interpretation of an utterance, there is always the possibility of considering other and additional aspects of the context, and these new considerations may change how we interpret the utterance”. (p. 82)

Gee (2011) refers to this as the ‘frame problem’—that is, how a researcher frames the context of the research, and in turn how this frame affects the interpretations of the utterance, or in this case the participating English teachers’ narratives. In order to provide a frame for the context of this research, I focus on three different contexts for teacher creative practice: the school; the classroom; and the broader educational policy landscape. While schools and classrooms are often defined by physical space, the understanding of context that I draw upon is one that also encompasses the language, relationships and identities within these spaces (Cremin & Chappell, 2021; Glass, 2012; Kemmis et al., 2014). The study focuses on how the language, relationships and identities—including teacher and student relationships, and student identities—within these spaces both mediate and are mediated by understandings of creativity.

In exploring the spaces and manifestations of creativity across a variety of contexts, I take the opportunity to investigate how a particular educational context mediates what can be understood as teachers’ creative practice. In terms of the context of this study, ‘teacher practice’ refers to the practices—observable or implied—both within the classroom and beyond that support the teaching of subject English. This includes, but is not limited to, interpretations of the curriculum, collegial discussions, sourcing and generating resources, thinking, relationships with colleagues and students, planning, assessment and administration activities in either preparing for teaching or the teaching itself (Connell, 1985). But as I argue above, these actions, interactions and negotiations of space do not occur in

unmediated ways (Glass, 2012; Kemmis et al., 2014). My decision to move on from Sophie's point about gender binaries was influenced by the context in which I was teaching: the time and space, as well as the social relationships that we were negotiating as a newly formed, and temporary, class. These interactions are also shaped by the interactions between language, material space/time and social relationships that define a context and distinguish one context from another. They are all "held in place by the combined effect of social practices" (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 2; see also Glass, 2012). Therefore, the potentially multiple understandings of creativity are unfinalizable (Bakhtin, 1984; see also Morson, 2010). They are formed (and continue to form and reform) from experiences both inside and outside the classroom, in constructions of curriculum, formation of pedagogy and interactions with students as well as colleagues, and governing policies that are embodied in teacher practices.

4.2.4 The multiple voices in socio-cultural research

As highlighted by Sophie in Scene 4.1, the concept of gender is socially, culturally and historically constructed. Thomas Kuhn's (1996) seminal work in *The structure of scientific revolutions* also explores scientific discovery from a socio-cultural perspective, Kuhn arguing a socio-cultural understanding of scientific discoveries relative to "[their] own time" (p. 3). This enables an exploration of what is often hidden from view—the various paths and intersections of knowledge and experiments, including "the congeries of error, myth, and superstition" (Kuhn, 1996, p. 2) that feature in scientific developments. For instance, to understand the work and accomplishments of Galileo with "historical integrity" (p. 3), Kuhn argues one must consider "the relationship between [Galileo's] views and those of his group, i.e., his teachers, contemporaries, and immediate successors in the sciences" (p. 3). This is contrary to more traditional comparisons where historians may seek "the permanent contributions of an older science [such as Galileo]" (Kuhn, 1996, p. 3). Galileo's accomplishments, according to Kuhn, are therefore far more complex than what is often presented as "finished scientific achievements ... recorded in the classics and, more recently, in the textbooks" (p. 1). In Kuhn's representation of science, he presents an understanding that a particular scientific theory is a combination of 'voices' mediated by the field of science.

Green and Beavis (1996) make a similar argument to Kuhn when exploring the history and various understandings of subject English, stating that many subject knowledge discussions "tend to proceed, largely and significantly, on the basis of myth, caricature, and limited forms

of binary or oppositional thinking” (p. 1). As a consequence of these limited discussions of subject knowledge, different pedagogical approaches:

are [often] taken up relatively uncritically or else critiqued in a profoundly ahistorical manner, as if their most recent manifestation on the scene of teaching and schooling has either no precedent or is somehow a ‘natural’ register of ‘progress’ and ‘truth’. (Green & Beavis, 1996, p. 1)

Through exploring the construction and representation of English teaching in Victoria, Green and Beavis (1996) acknowledge that subject English curriculum and pedagogies have a varied history where historical accounts are a “complex practice of representation” and a “matter of contest and interpretation” (p. 9; see also Peel et al., 2000). The discussion in Chapter 3 represents some of these complexities and the history of iterations of subject English, and thus attempts to represent the multiple voices within the current iteration of the curriculum in Australia, especially in relation to understandings of creativity. Similarly, this research also represents multiple voices. Just as Sophie’s understanding of gender is not separate from its context, this PhD research does not exist separate from the multiple voices that make up my experiences of teaching, the participating English teachers’ voices, and their experiences and understandings of creativity represented through the research, or the previous research and experiences that have helped shape my study. In tracing the social, cultural and political histories—whether of science, curriculum or this research—I seek to provide opportunities to explore understandings of concepts such as creativity, that may have previously existed but have since been disregarded or overlooked (Kuhn, 1996).

4.3 Enacting a qualitative approach to research

The social constructivist and qualitative nature of this study, in conjunction with my research aims and questions, encourages the enacting of particular types of research methods. To some, my ontological, epistemological and research design choices may read like a dichotomous key, a series of yes/no questions denoting specific characteristics that, if the ‘correct’ pathway is chosen, will eventually lead to the ‘correct’ methods needed to find the ‘correct’ answers. However, a stated ontology does not rigidly dictate the research path one must follow; rather it is a complex series of relationships and decisions that sit behind the façade of a finished research study and its design. Some of the decisions I have made, and the reasons informing them, are outlined in the discussion below. The discussion includes a rationale for narrative-based inquiry used to generate and represent the data for this research, as well as a rationale for the selection of the research sites and participants.

4.3.1 Narrative-based inquiry

Aligned with social constructivism is a qualitative approach to research, which acknowledges that “worlds are multi-layered with many levels of interacting structures on-going simultaneously” (Cupchik, 2001, p. 3). Individuals bring distinct interpretations of these multi-layered worlds, evidenced by the complex and varied narratives that they tell. Narrative-based inquiry provides one way of both representing and exploring these understandings of the world, which can be ‘found’, or are generated, in the interactions, observations, narratives and ‘utterances’ of the everyday as subject English teachers construct, re-construct and mediate their practices within contexts and with others (students, colleagues, the researcher etc.). Through narrative, Doecke (2013) argues, teachers and researchers are able to identify important ideological considerations that other ways of accounting for teacher practice—for example the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APSTs) (AITSL, 2017)—are not able to do. Doecke (2013) argues, “the word ‘ideology’ has no place in the world of standards-based reforms, which are supposedly directed towards achieving learning outcomes that are beyond contention” (p. 16). Through narratives, teachers are able to find ways to ‘speak back’ to these standards that “typically reduce educators to mapping their practice against a set of performance indicators” (p. 16). Instead, these narratives represent not only the complexity of their practice, but also the “values and beliefs as they have been shaped by his or her life experiences” (Doecke, 2013, p. 15). Narratives are therefore able to humanise and give meaning to experience (Webster & Mertova, 2007; Wells, 2011).

Narrative, like creativity, is a highly contested concept in the literature. The particular understanding of narrative that underpins a study will be significant in framing that study’s construction and analysis of its data. For instance, Elliot (2011) describes narrative as an account of events that are chronologically sequenced and linked, and potentially evaluated. This understanding of narrative from Elliot (2011) is based on Labov’s (1997) five-stage structure. Wells (2011) evokes a similar understanding of narrative, which necessarily includes a beginning, middle and end. Rosen (1994), however, warns that a focus on narrative structure in such a way “always leads to perfect closure (resolution)” (p. 180). The understanding of narrative I utilise is one that is less concerned with closure, and more concerned about teasing out the “tensions, contradictions and variations” (Willig, 2008, p. 12) inherent in the participating teacher narratives, as a point of investigation to better understand the influences and constraints on teacher practice (Fang, 1996). And, most importantly for this study, this enables the exploration of everyday teacher practices and understandings of creativity within the context of particular education policy and curriculum,

the respective education settings of each participant, and the understandings of subject English operating in particular contexts.

4.3.2 Representing teaching experience through narrative-based inquiry

There is a rich tradition of narrative-based inquiry in English teaching research, both in Australia and internationally, that appreciates the dialogical nature of narrative. This PhD study draws on this tradition of exploring the co-construction of knowledge and the representation of this knowledge through narrative-based accounts evident in the work of Parr and Bulfin (2015), Shann (2015), Doecke et al. (2011, 2014), and Yandell (2013b). Yandell (2013b), for example, uses narrative-based accounts of classroom reading practices to explore and critique certain practices in teaching literary texts, showing how these practices construct particular views of reading, and how these practices may be productively contested. Likewise, in using a narrative-based approach, I explore and contest perceptions of creativity as a way of inquiring into the dialogic and situated nature of subject English teachers' creative practice, especially given that this practice occurs in the context of increasing educational standardisation and accountability (Parr & Bulfin, 2015; Parr et al., 2015). As I have discussed in Chapter 2, the neoliberal educational landscape is saturated with notions of "standards-based education reforms and accountability measures" (Parr & Bulfin, 2015, p. 159). The narrative-based accounts of teaching practice therefore aim to explore complexities and nuances of the classroom that are often not represented within teacher accountability measures. In doing so, these accounts also aim to explore the tensions between the global imperatives for both standardisation and creativity, as well as how teacher practices and understandings are mediated by context. The discussion below details how narrative-based inquiry can explore teacher understandings and ideologies. Once more, I include within this discussion, a scene (Scene 4.2) that demonstrates the value I place on narrative in my own teaching practice and the significance of narrative in this project in generating, representing and interpreting the data.

Scene 4.2 is again from a moment in one of my science classes, this time working with Grade 5 and 6 students in a 90-minute program that I would go on to repeat approximately 35 times within a 3-month period, with different students across different locations. It is a moment that encapsulates the usefulness of narratives in my teaching—to construct a curriculum or program outline, to engage students, and to provide context for an idea, or to demonstrate a potentially difficult or abstract concept. Scene 4.2 illustrates my use of an

analogy to address a student's (Matt's) questions about cell death. As the scene demonstrates, Matt's question can be potentially considered 'off topic' since the main topic of the workshop is 'twins', but given part of the program focuses on cell division and its relationship to the occurrence of twins, Matt's question exploring the life/death binary seems like a logical extension of the discussion.

Scene 4.2—What happens when cells die?

It's March, Canberra. I (Narelle) find myself squashed in a classroom with 22 Grade 5 and 6 students. I'm teaching a topic 'assigned' by one of the program coordinators, the 'science of twins'. The Program Coordinator had originally asked for me to present a program exploring the science of extrasensory perception, how twins can reputedly read each other's thoughts and feel each other's pain. However, I considered this pseudo-science and pedagogically problematic given the constraints of the program (90 minutes, moveable to various schools/classrooms, lack of scientific evidence, the need for hands-on activities). So I went 'rogue' and decided to explore a topic that I hoped would provoke plenty of lively debate: nature versus nurture, cell division, genetic inheritance, and the fascinating, yet unethical, discoveries from scientific twin studies conducted in the 1970's.

The scene below begins halfway through the 90-minute program. The students have discussed cell division and have just begun to examine cases of conjoined twins and mirror image twins. (This is where the identical twins are a mirror image of one another. In rare cases, this can include mirror image organs—i.e., one twin whose organs are on the opposite side of the body to what is 'normal', for example the heart is found on the right-hand side of the body.) In lieu of traditional science experiments, I had decided to use narratives, case studies and descriptions, which leads Eliza to share a story of her own.

Eliza: I ate my twin

Students: (A cacophony of responses) What? Gross! Ewww! Cool!

Narelle: (Aside) Um, No!

(To class) Not quite, Eliza.

(I am prompted to think on my feet, to figure out how to address Eliza's articulation of a common misconception without getting into discussions of miscarriage and all sorts of ethical and moral discussions. I search for an answer that I determine to be age appropriate and one that will hopefully not prompt questions that may prove even more difficult to navigate.)

Sometimes cells don't copy correctly and when that happens the cells die.

Matt: So Narelle, what happens to a cell when it dies then?

Narelle: Excellent question

(I search my brain for an answer ... 'phagocytosis' and 'apoptosis'. The explanation I favour is far less glamorous and still flawed, mostly as it lacks specific scientific processes—it is after all an analogy that demonstrates the premise but not the precise process.)

(To class) When a cell dies, it's called apoptosis. It's kind of like recycling. We recycle the useful parts of the cell and break down the non-useful parts.

(I am satisfied with the explanation; while not 100% accurate it provides a concrete process students are most likely familiar with. It also has the added bonus of hopefully removing the monstrous image of Eliza, the Grade 5 student in question, devouring her unsuspecting twin. Student expressions indicate that this is a satisfying response.)

(The explanation continues) Cells have a really good way of knowing when something has gone wrong, it's like they have a 'self-destruct' mechanism.

(Grins form on students' faces all over the classroom. Their 'tiny little hands' go up, mimicking tiny little explosions.)

Matt: So why don't cancer cells self-destruct?

Narelle: (Another really good question.)

Great question. I don't know. I think that is probably a question scientists are asking and if they can answer that, they may be on the way to answering a whole lot of other questions they have about cancer.

(Matthew nods to himself.)

Eliza's comments and Matt's questions were so interesting that it was this moment from class that I chose to share with my colleagues in our informal debrief in the taxi ride on the way back to the hotel at the end of the day. Again, as with Sophie in Scene 4.1, my teaching and understanding of a particular topic was shifted I once again, perhaps as evidence of my creative practice, I navigated the conversation away from what I perceived to be potentially 'dangerous' territory. It would perhaps be easy to dismiss the narrative I present in Scene 4.2 as "subjective" and merely "anecdotal" (Doecke, 2013, p. 12). However, Matt's question, as with my interaction with Sophie, challenged aspects of how I understand teaching and learning—in this instance the concept of an 'engaged' student—and therefore, these interactions prompted me "to amend old descriptions or accommodate new [descriptions]" (Williams, 1961, p. 24) of my teaching practice. Matt's two questions were the only times I recall him involving himself in the discussion. Up to that time, I had assumed that Matt's lack of involvement in the class was a sign of his lack of engagement.

Through sharing this narrative with my colleagues, I was able to reflect on aspects of my teaching practice in ways that would perhaps not be afforded to me had I used, for instance, the APSTs (AITSL, 2017). I could use this narrative to quantify my teaching and to demonstrate my achievement of particular standards within the APSTs (AITSL, 2017); after all, the policy documents tell me that analysis of my teaching and learning should be

“evidence based and data driven” (DET, 2005, p. 15). I may therefore tenuously assert that I am a science teacher who knows “students and how they learn” (despite knowing little about these students prior to this class) and that I also “know the content and how to teach it” (AITSL, 2017, Standards 1 & 2). However, I would argue that the narrative encompasses so much more than the two standards from the APSTs would indicate. My observational data, that Matt was visibly not engaged in the class, was misleading, evident in his questions, both of which displayed complex linking of ideas and are arguably demonstrative of his creative thinking (cf. Yandell, 2006, 2013b). The narrative also embodies something of the human experience, or at least of the educational experience, that it is:

characterized by ambiguity, uncertainty, paradox, and dilemma. Specific events may be experienced quite differently by different individuals; one individual may attribute different meanings to the same experience or event at different points in time; and one individual may attach multiple (possibly contradictory) meanings simultaneously to a single experience. (Wignall, 1998, p. 304)

For example, the scene explores the value I place on accuracy of language and representation in the science classroom as well as the value in working with students’ understandings of the world so that these experiences are “interpreted and made personally meaningful” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 477). It also explores the sometimes-contradictory nature of the human experience, and the sometimes disparate nature between what one values as a teacher and the way this might be enacted in the classroom. I have mentioned above that I value the accuracy of language and representation in the science classroom, and yet I am conscious that the explanation for the terms ‘apoptosis’ and ‘phagocytosis’ might be seen as incomplete and inaccurate. Yet, this understanding of my teaching practice—the value of language and meaningful experiences, as well as the tensions of teaching practice—is not something that is separated from my teaching practice in other areas such as subject English. As Hildebrand (2005) argues, “each [i.e., science and writing] is informed by the other” (p. 205), and in “transcend[ing] these binaries, [as an education researcher or teacher, I can open] up new possibilities for language and learning in my classrooms” (p. 206). In this way, the narrative in Scene 4.2 also demonstrates my “views and values” as a teacher (Doecke, 2013, p. 15) or my ideology in a way that the generic performance outcomes articulated in the APSTs (AITSL, 2017) cannot.

The presentation of Scene 4.2 and the subsequent discussion are intended to illustrate how narrative-based inquiry can be a powerful tool for exploring teacher practice (Fang, 1996). In this case, it enabled me to inquire into and articulate the complexity of the underlying values, perceptions and understandings embodied in the scene. It also provides opportunities to explore the nexus between teacher understanding of creativity, and how this both mediates,

and is mediated by, teacher practice and teaching context. Narrative-based inquiry is therefore “well suited to addressing the complexities and subtleties of the human experience in teaching and learning” (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 1). In my case, I hoped it would allow me to explore “assumptions and biases that might otherwise have remained hidden” (Lyle, 2009, p. 295). Narrative allows me to generate insights into the understandings of creativity articulated by the participating teachers in response to my interview questions. And it enables me to explain the relationships between these understandings, their teacher practice and teaching context, as well as some insight into how these English teachers theorise and make sense of their practice. The discussion in the next section therefore provides a description of the sites for the study and the contexts where these narratives were generated in order to account for how school context, such as school sector, may mediate the participating English teachers’ practices.

4.3.3 Framing context and sites for the study

In order to explore the way context mediates practice, I developed a number of narrative-based accounts of secondary school English teachers across different teaching sites, using a combination of semi-structured interviews, observations and responses to a provocation. One of the key reasons for the multiple narrative-based accounts across various sites is that, with few exceptions, the relationship between context and creativity has received scant attention in the literature, despite assertions that teachers are “shaped by school cultures that they themselves might possibly have helped shape” (Hongboontri & Keawkhong, 2014, p. 68). As I have discussed above in 4.2.3, context extends beyond the physical boundaries and locations of the school and includes contexts such as faculty and staff rooms, classrooms, communities, and wider contexts such as state, national and international policies. These cultural and social worlds often overlap, informing each other and mediating teachers’ practices. Therefore, influenced by socio-cultural theorists’ understandings of creativity and the importance placed on context (see Bakhtin, 1981; Vygotsky, 1962), I undertook fieldwork in a number of contrasting educational settings in Melbourne.

The six school sites chosen for this research are varied on three levels. First, they include teaching that takes place in government, independent and supplementary systems. Next, within each sector there are differences in how the education organisation views itself, including vision, educational philosophies and curriculum initiatives. Lastly, each school itself is unique in “the kinds of students who attended the school, local neighbourhoods and the workings of wider local, regional and national policies” (Thomson et al., 2012, p. 7). However,

despite these not insignificant differences, the research sites are connected by: (1) the teaching of a subject or subject matter that is identifiable as 'English'; (2) teachers who are amenable to exploring creativity and creative practice; and (3) the classrooms that are observed show evidence of creative practice. The six sites were selected, firstly based on the education organisation's preparedness to explore creativity and creative practice, and secondly on the English teachers' willingness to participate. This willingness to engage in the research was consistent with findings that schools are more likely to participate in research when the research aligns with an identified need or established strategic direction (Prendergast & Rickinson, 2018). In addition to the above criteria, the recruitment of supplementary education programs was based on whether the discipline was identifiable as subject English (for example, writing programs). The six sites, including the two supplementary education sites, are summarised in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1*Summary of research sites*

Site (pseudonyms)	Sector and location	Staff / student population	ICSEA* (Average ICSEA 1000)
Rydell Secondary College	Co-educational government Secondary School—South- eastern suburbs	50 staff 670 students	1020
Ridgemont Secondary College	Co-educational government Secondary School—Eastern suburbs	110 staff 1530 students	1070
Lowood Girls’ College	Girls’ independent K-12 school—Northern suburbs	110 staff 930 students	1150
Welton Boys’ College	Boys’ independent K-12 school—South-eastern suburbs	180 staff 1190 students	1150
Brightside Education	Supplementary educational setting, specialising in education programs for highly able students—predominantly Grade 1 to 6. Located in Melbourne.	Approximately 30-40 regular educators ⁸ 750-1200 students per school week	NA
Greendale Cultural Institution	Supplementary educational setting, specialising in cross- curricula and arts-based programs. Located in Melbourne.	6 permanent education staff. Approximately 20 regular casual educators. Approximately 4600 students a year across the 3 major programs	NA

*ICEAs—Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage⁹ (ACARA, 2020)

⁸ Educators at Brightside Education have a range of backgrounds including, but not necessarily, teaching. Many of the educators are experts in particular fields, such as scientists, artists, authors or actors, and present workshops relating to their expertise.

⁹ The ICSEA, created by ACARA, is a measure of socio-educational advantage and is based on the premise that student educational outcomes are “related to certain characteristics of their family (parental education, parental non-school education, and occupation) and school (location and socio-economic background of the students it serves)” (ACARA, 2020, p. 1). The range of ICSEA values is from 500 to 1300 with a median value of 1000 with a standard deviation of 100. The higher the ICSEA the higher the socio-educational advantage. ACARA (2020) argue that providing an ICSEA for each school on the *My School* website allows “fair and meaningful comparisons” (ACARA, 2020, p. 1) between “like schools”, i.e. schools with a similar ICSEA.

Table 4.2 provides an overview of the participants from each site and their roles within the school at the time of research and the year level and English subject for each of the observations.

Table 4.2

Summary of research participants

Site	Number of participants (N=11)	Participant details (names are pseudonyms)	Class observed
Rydell Secondary College	One	Anne – Head of English faculty/ Head of VCE (female)	VCE Units 1&2 English classroom
Ridgemont Secondary College	Three	Sarah – Head of English faculty (female)	Year 9 English
		Rosa –International Students Program Coordinator (female)	VCE Units 1&2 EAL
		Rebecca – classroom teacher (female)	VCE Units 3&4 English Language
Lowood Girls' College	Two	Steve – Year 12 student manager (male)	Year 9 'interest streamed' English class
		Catherine – Head of English faculty (female)	VCE Units 3&4 Literature
Welton Boys' College	One	Jane – classroom teacher (female)	VCE Units 3&4 English
Brightside Education	Three	Laura – Academic and writer (female)	Grades 5 & 6 Harry Potter Program
		Lana – classroom teacher of literature, history & Ancient Greek & Latin (female)	Grades 5 & 6 Harry Potter Program
		Caroline – Writer (female)	Grades 5 & 6 Gothic fiction program
Greendale Cultural Institution	One	Christine – Head of Education Programs (female)	Year 9 English program based on art analysis, drawing, drama and story writing

The representations of participating teachers in Table 4.2, as with the contexts in Table 4.1, provide a brief overview of the teachers and their educational contexts. Some of the details of these contexts are represented in the narrative-based accounts throughout Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

4.3.4 Reflexivity, ethics and recruitment of participants

There are a number of ethical considerations in opening up such questions as, ‘How do teachers understand creativity?’ and ‘What elements of their practice may they perceive as creative?’ When I as a researcher posed these questions to the participating teachers, I was conscious that they may feel prompted to become “stirred in to new practices of teaching and professional learning in their particular sites [contexts]” (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 130). And in doing so there was potential for “topics and issues not envisaged in the initial plan” (Marzano, 2014, p. 449) to emerge throughout the research process. This is an issue often associated with potential varying levels of unpredictability in qualitative research (see Marzano, 2014; Miller & Boulton, 2007). Therefore, ethical considerations include participants helping to construct or co-construct the various interpretations of both the interviews and observations (see Mishler, 1991; van de Ven & Doecke, 2011). The suggestion that researchers co-construct the narratives with the participants is based on the idea that “narrative inquirers understand that a person’s lived and told stories are who they are and who they are becoming and that these stories sustain them” (Clandinin & Huber, 2010, p. 451).

I have discussed in 4.3.2 the values that inform my teaching practice. This not only demonstrates a point of analysis in Scene 4.2 but also provides an illustration of a reflexive approach to the research (Greenback, 2003). Greenback (2003) explains that “even before data is analysed, interpreted and presented the researcher’s method of sampling, experimental design or questionnaires are likely to reflect their (often unconscious) values” (p. 792). The discussion in 4.3.2 therefore explains my social constructivist standpoint, the focus on language use and developing meaning in context. However, it also speaks to the generation and analysis of the data—the descriptions of the different teaching sites, the use of scenes to represent teachers’ practice and the multiple interactions and voices in the classroom, and my explanations of the participating subject English teachers’ practices from the semi-structured interviews. Reflexivity—that is, recognition of “how knowledge is acquired, organized, and interpreted ... relevant to what the claims are” (Altheide & Johnson, 1998, p. 284)—has been viewed as one way to enhance rigour (the quality and validity) in qualitative research. Reflexivity also helps to address issues of researcher bias and influence (Pillow, 2003, see also Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). It is a way of ‘checking’ the construction and representation of participants through reflecting on how the researcher is “in-the-world at each stage of a project, shaping it and being shaped by phenomena in it” (Cupchik, 2001, p. 2). Reflexivity can be understood as a “process of critical reflection both on the kind of knowledge produced from research and how that knowledge is generated” (Guillemin &

Gillam, 2004, p. 274). Teachers creating reflexive accounts of their practices are demonstrating commitment to the “possibility of interrogating the assumptions underpinning their work” (van de Ven & Doecke, 2011, p. 16). For example, research into teachers’ beliefs about reading asserts that, “teachers’ personal beliefs about teaching and learning affect their decision-making and behaviours” (Fang, 1996, p. 52, see also Nespor 1987; & Hoongbongri & Keawkhong, 2014).

Presenting and analysing narratives with occasional explicit insertions of my own ‘voice’ as a researcher and teacher within the narrative—such as in Scene 4.2 and the subsequent analysis in 4.3.2—is one of the ways in which some of these beliefs, or understandings of creativity, can be surfaced and interrogated. These insertions, in the first instance, acknowledge my dual role in my own teaching, such as in Scene 4.2, where the scene offers both an account and an explanation of my teaching practice; it is a teaching practice that aims to be dialogic in response to needs of the student and the classroom. Secondly, my approach acknowledges both my observation and my participation in the English teachers’ classrooms I observe. The insertions of my voice in different scenes through Chapters 5, 6, and 7 demonstrate the moments where my role as observer blurs with my role as participant. This reflexive approach to the data also enables a critical understanding of the constructed analyses and interpretations of narratives and accounts of teacher creative practices (Xerri, 2017). As Berger (2013) argues, reflexivity as a process should include

continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researcher’s positionality as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome. (p. 220; see also Pillow 2003; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004)

Therefore, the way I construct or reconstruct the particular teaching moments, or privilege particular aspects of the teacher participant responses, also says something about the way I view teacher practice, how I understand creativity and the value I ascribe to particular types of knowledge. The moments from the data generated and my own teaching practice that I choose to privilege in the autobiographical accounts included throughout the thesis, as well as how these moments are constructed, embody a reflexive approach to the research. In terms of this study, these reflexive accounts have been constructed through a combination of raw data from the semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and teacher responses to a scenario-based provocation. This combination of data was designed to surface some of the complexities and assumptions around creativity and the perceptions of creativity in teacher practice and the classroom.

In order to address the ethical concerns—*informed consent, confidentiality and minimisation of harm* (Yin, 2014)—prior to the commencement of the research, ethics approval for the project was sought and granted by both Monash University Human Ethics and Research Committee (Appendix B) and the Department of Education Victoria (Appendix C). This was to ensure that the participants’ “welfare was not compromised and that their agreement to take part was adequately informed and freely given” (Miller & Boulton, 2007, p. 2203). All participants were invited to participate by their school principals, a senior leader as delegated by the principal, or in the case of supplementary settings, a senior manager. Each participant was provided with an explanatory statement at the commencement of the study, detailing “the nature and purpose of the research and knowledge of how it will proceed” (Miller & Boulton, 2007, p. 2204), and they were asked for their informed consent to participate (Appendix D). By fully disclosing the research purpose and design, together with the opportunity to withdraw from the research at any time, the individual can potentially be protected “from risk, harm and exploitation” (Miller & Boulton, 2007, p. 2205).

One common principle of ethical research is confidentiality. Researchers are obliged to maintain participants’ privacy by removing any “identifying descriptions from published data” (Australian Association for Research in Education, n.d., para 20). This is to protect “those who participate so that, as a result of their participation, they will not be unwittingly put in any undesirable position” (Yin, 2014, p. 78). While this premise might sound ethically straightforward, issues of privacy and confidentiality are far more complex. Mishler (1991) argues that confidentiality often leads to the common assumption that anonymity allows participants or interview respondents to speak freely, without the concern of reprisal from superiors or peers. In narrative-based inquiry, “issues of anonymity and confidentiality” are more difficult “as the complexity of lives are made visible in research texts” (Clandinin & Huber, 2010, p. 16). Pseudonyms were used for participating teachers and educational settings. Where quantitative data was used concerning the different educational settings ICEAs and student/staffing numbers, these were rounded to the nearest 10 to further anonymise the research data. Anonymity through pseudonyms was extended to all research participants in school settings; however, consideration of anonymity was especially important regarding supplementary educational settings as these education settings are less common in Melbourne. The removal of identifying features from teacher participants from a significantly smaller sample than, for example, traditional school settings, may only partially provide anonymity. Anonymity is further complicated by the relatively small number of teachers who teach subject English in these contexts, and therefore could be deemed suitable for this study. In the case of the two supplementary settings, the sector and location

were more broadly described, to provide additional anonymity.

4.4. Generating data

This section outlines how the research data was generated. It includes a detailed description of both the semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. The underlying epistemological position of the research approach is that data is co-constructed by researcher and participant (Mishler, 1991) and therefore the participants, to some extent, have more ‘ownership’ of the research (see Herrilitz et al., 2007; Hetmar, 2007; van de Ven & Doecke, 2011). The type of data generated at each site and the data generation methods used are discussed in the next section and have been summarised in Table 4.3.

4.4.1 Semi-structured interviews with English teachers and classroom observations

I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews with the participating subject English teachers because I judged they offered the potential to establish an in-depth understanding of the complexities and nuances of the teachers’ understandings of creativity. The approach to the semi-structured interviews in this study was based on Csikszentmihalyi’s (1996) conversational style, where the priority was “to keep the interview as close to a natural conversation as possible” (p. 16). The semi-structured interview allowed for an exploration of the topic as directed by the questions, as well as opportunities to explore further the insights into, and reflections on, teacher practice and creativity offered by the participant. With this in mind, questions were prepared to help guide initial discussion and fit within the thirty to sixty-minute time-frame. The interviews were guided by, but not limited to, the following questions:

- What do you understand creativity to mean? What does creativity mean in terms of your teaching?
- Do you see yourself as creative? If so, how? If not, why not?
- Who amongst your colleagues do you perceive to be creative? What are the creative attributes these colleagues possess?
- What place and value does creativity have in the curriculum with which you work?
- What conditions do you perceive to hinder or encourage creativity, both in the curriculum and in your teaching practice?
- What tasks do you perceive as creative tasks?

- What do you perceive to be the attributes of creative students and successful creative work?
- What assessment strategies do you use to assess creativity?

An additional influence on the structure of the interviews with English teachers is what Mishler (1991) describes as a 'narrative approach'. In this approach, the "interview is jointly constructed by interviewer and respondent" (p. 52), and the questions become evidence of the interviewer's interpretation as to "whether a respondent has said 'enough' for the purpose at hand" (p. 55). The interviews for this study were conducted at times and locations largely chosen by the participants, and selected by convenience around teaching commitments—i.e., spare lessons, after school or school holidays. While the interviews were designed to take approximately 30 minutes, many participants chose to expand on their responses, sharing examples of their practice and discussing student work, resulting in slightly longer interviews. The stories of classroom practices, taken from the transcripts of the interviews, along with the classroom observations, became the basis for the construction of narrative-based accounts in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. The transcripts (see Appendix E) represent a construction of data as choices were made around the level of detail represented. In that respect, "transcribing [was also] an interpretive act rather than simply a technical procedure" (Bailey, 2008, p. 130). As Bailey (2008) notes, "representing audible talk as written words requires reduction, interpretation and representation to make the written text readable and meaningful" (p. 127). Bailey (2008) further argues that, "researchers' methodological assumptions and disciplinary backgrounds influence what are considered relevant data and how data should be analysed" (p. 127). Therefore, while the excerpts are accurate representations of participant responses, the act of transcribing and selecting excerpts from the participants' interviews can be considered an interpretive act. This aligns with the interpretivist epistemology of the research that is "not to discover universal, context and value free knowledge and truth, but to try to understand the interpretations of individuals about the social phenomena they interact with" (Rehmn & Alharthi, 2016, p. 55).

The classroom observations provided an opportunity to observe teacher practice and to investigate how creativity is enacted in the classroom. These observations were conducted for one lesson per participant, with each participating teacher nominating the class he/she wanted me to observe. Typically, these observations were 45-60 minutes in length, with the exception of the supplementary sessions—these varied from one to two hours, depending on the length of the program. To minimise disruption to the students' learning, I stayed for the duration of the session. During the observation, I generated notes on the activities and

discussion that occurred in the classroom (Appendix F), as well as the physical arrangement of the classroom including classroom displays, or lack thereof. In some of the observations, the teachers, and in one class the students, actively sought my input into and participation in the class. The classroom observations often highlighted some of the complexities and tensions that the teachers had begun to describe throughout the first semi-structured interview.

Subsequently, these classroom observations were used as part of a facilitated critical reflection on classroom practice and creativity in the second semi-structured interview. Using this data as provocation—the first semi-structured interview and classroom observation—in this second interview, participants were prompted to reflect on their understandings of creativity and their teaching practice. Furthermore, teachers were also asked to respond to a scenario-based provocation as a further prompt for reflection. The provocation, “Mr Henton” (Appendix G)—a student response to a practice NAPLAN test, where the student had responded to the persuasive writing task using a ‘creative’ narrative form—represents a combination of some of the ideas discussed in the first interview and was designed to challenge an aspect of creative practice that was discussed across the majority of interviews. The scenario provocation was constructed based on the concept of provocation originally proposed by de Bono (1986, see 2.2.2.2). However, the scenario-based provocation in this instance was used in a similar manner to Harwood’s (2012) monograph *Civic Provocations*—provocations that are “informal and [are] intended to provoke conversations” with the aim of “assist[ing] those conversations in moving to a deeper level” (p. X). Pangrazio (2017), who uses provocation as part of her research design, describes it as an opportunity to “interrupt the typical flow of everyday social processes so that social and cultural norms might be examined more critically” (p. 225). In the case of my research, this disruption offered an opportunity for the participating subject English teachers to discuss their teaching practice in a focused way, and to tease out some of the constraints, affordances and tensions in their everyday teaching. The provocation was designed to encourage teachers to reflect upon their understandings of creativity, to explore how these understandings are mediated by their teaching practice, and to reflect upon the ‘multivariate’ nature of creativity. Table 4.3 provides a summary of the data generated throughout the study, including the collection of artefacts and generation of research notes.

Table 4.3:*Data generated*

Data	Description	Estimated number of documents/words
Semi-structured interviews, prior to and post lesson observations	Transcripts of interviews conducted with teachers prior to and post classroom observations. Interviews were approximately 30-60 minutes in length and were audio recorded and transcribed.	22 transcripts, approximately 6000 – 7000 words each.
Scenario-based Provocation	The scenario was based on key ideas that emerged from the research, especially in the first semi-structured interview. The provocation formed part of the discussion for the second semi-structured interview.	One scenario (written by the researcher) used across the six sites— see Appendix G
Support materials and artefacts	Supporting documents included student hand-outs and worksheets, records of whiteboard notes, pictures of room displays, class outlines and curriculum support material	Approximately five documents per site
Observation notes	Notes and annotations from observations of classroom practice— classes ranged from approximately 45 minutes in length to two hours, and focused on teacher practice and interaction with the students	11 observations: five to six pages of notes and annotations per observation
Research journal	Included observations and discussions from the research. Also, ideas, narratives and reflections from my own teaching that had both informed and been informed by the research.	Approximately 10,000 words of notes, observations, reflections on conversations from my personal teaching practice

4.5. Analysis of qualitative data

The approach to the data analysis was informed by what Erickson (2011) describes as ‘analytic induction’, namely creating and testing assertions through reiterative analysis of the data generated from the initial research questions. An important part of this approach involved careful reading and re-reading of the transcripts of audiotaped interviews and notes from classroom observations, and then drafting a range of narrative vignettes, which I call

'scenes'. The scenes for each participant were creatively constructed from the classroom observations in combination with the representations of the understandings of creativity from the semi-structured interviews. I do not claim that this process of representation of the data is 'neutral' or 'natural'. Rather, I draw from Kozorog and Stanojević's (2013) description of scene that is a representation of the 'things that matter' within a particular context of space and time (see 1.3.3). Rather, it is already offering an interpretation through my decisions around what is and is not important to represent. This began by reflexively recognising my role as co-constructor of the semi-structured interview through the types of questions I asked participants and extended to the level of detail represented in the transcripts, and the utterances and moments in the classroom I saw as relevant and important. By acknowledging this, therefore, I recognise that there is:

no such thing as an 'objective' representation of classrooms, in the sense of an impartial account that transcends the perspective and values of an observer ... [there is] only a partial representation of the relationships that constitute any social setting. (van de Ven & Doecke, 2011, p. 5)

The 'partial' representations, research and analysis can therefore be seen as an interpretative and creative act, one where these narratives are made "afresh" in an act of creation or "re...creation" (Pope, 2005, p. 84). This 'seeing' renders the act of constructing the narrative-based accounts as an act of interpretation and analysis in and of itself, giving the narratives themselves a reflexive quality (Schaafsma & Vinz, 2011). The narratives for each participant were constructed as individual accounts at each of the research sites. Given the importance I have placed on context in generating the data, these accounts included details of the context of the various educational settings in which the data has been generated—traditional schools or supplementary settings, the classrooms, and some background on the teachers themselves.

In analyzing narratives, it is tempting, as Clandinin and Huber (2010) warn, to resort to 'dissecting' or 'disassembling' the experiences by beginning the "analysis and interpretation at a distance from participants" (p. 10). It may also be tempting to organise the experiences and narratives into neat and tidy themes, either preconceived or emerging, which explore particular sets of predetermined and preferred definitions of creativity. This approach to analysis might be seen to offer a 'consistent' approach to the data, as well as working to ensure common understandings of teaching practices that embody a particular definition of creativity (Herriott & Firestone, 1983). And this approach is perhaps even more appealing given the readily available and operational definitions of creativity or creative thinking from bodies such as the OECD and ACARA. In a neo-liberal climate that is preoccupied with

accountability, measurable outcomes, and the productivity of teaching practices, the standardised categories that these clear operational definitions offer are difficult to ignore and can be seductive in their apparently straightforward simplicity. However, I have tried to resist these temptations. Instead, I analysed the narratives, as I did with Scenes 1.1, 4.1 and 4.2, using Raymond Williams' (1977) understanding of 'everyday creativity'. This analysis involved seeking to appreciate the way each teacher was making and re-making meaning—finding ways to describe unfamiliar experiences—in her/his everyday teaching practices.

The transcripts and narratives were initially analysed for how the tensions in teacher practice were represented within the teacher accounts. What quickly became apparent was that while the participating English teachers almost invariably drew on understandings of creativity as expressed in policy and curriculum documents, their accounts of creativity within their narratives and practices also tended to be far more distinctive and complex. Subsequently, the narratives were further analysed in two ways. Firstly, each narrative was analysed for how teachers negotiated the tensions in their particular teaching practices. In exploring teacher practice, I drew on Gee's (2011) understanding of practice, that is "a socially recognized and institutionally or culturally supported endeavor that usually involves sequencing or combining actions in certain specified ways" (p. 27; see 3.2.1). These teacher practices, Gee (2011) argues, are enacted through language. Therefore, secondly, it was also important for me to focus in particular on how the participating English teachers spoke about their practices and identified the potential constraints or tensions of their practices. These may have been tensions as a result of the physical classroom, timetable, curriculum documents, or practices indicative of the social relationships or culture of a particular context. Or they may have been tensions in ideology, whereby policy, curriculum or a school's interpretation and implementation of such policy and curriculum, was in contrast with the worldview of the teacher.

Through the recursive approach to analyzing the narrative-based accounts for tensions in the participating English teachers' practices, I began to identify patterns in how the participating English teachers accounted for their teaching practice. There were three main frames of context within which teachers spoke about their practice, especially when prompted to reflect on their creative practice: (i) their work within the school; (ii) their work in the classroom; and (iii) their work in assessing student writing. These contexts of teacher practice, while they intersect and inform each other, ultimately became the basis for three analysis chapters, Chapters 5, 6 and 7. Another aspect of teachers' practice also began to emerge in these initial stages of analysis: how teachers were engaging in creativity in their everyday practice.

The understanding of everyday creativity, as advocated by Williams (1977), was in distinct contrast to how many of the English teachers described creativity. Many of the English teachers, at least initially, associated creativity with something new, original, unique, or ‘out-of-the-box’. However:

Part of the responsibility of the qualitative researcher is to go beyond what the local actors understand explicitly, identifying the meanings that are outside the awareness of the local actors. (Erickson, 2011, p. 1453)

As such, subsequent iterations of the analysis were framed by questions about what tensions were inherent in the participating English teachers’ practices and the language they used to describe these practices. Other questions included: ‘How did these teachers engage in creativity as part of their everyday practice?’; and, ‘In what ways did the teaching context mediate their practice?’ From the original data set, 11 narrative-based accounts were generated; however, since I wanted to present nuanced and complex accounts, not all of the narratives could be represented within the analysis and discussion. Through the recursive analysis of the data it became apparent that, although there were instances of creative practice across all 11 narrative-based accounts, particular accounts—those of Sarah, Rosa, Steve, Anne, Rebecca, Laura and Catherine—spoke more strongly to the everyday creative practices of the participating English teachers. Nonetheless, the individual narratives of each participant do not stand alone. In this study, these accounts of creativity are not only from the individual teacher but also from within and across educational sectors. In offering my readings or interpretations of the narratives, I have sought to present the narratives so as to promote not just the dialogic nature of the English teachers’ accounts within each narrative (Parr & Bulfin, 2015), but also the dialogic connections between the narratives. The small number of narratives enabled a focus on a certain ‘uniqueness’ of each participant’s story, while also noting the patterns across the data. I was able to represent the uniqueness of each account by paying close attention to the narratives that each of the participants told about their teaching practices and how they experienced them, as well as identifying and teasing out the tensions in their practice. Through focusing on the uniqueness of each narrative, I wanted my analysis to put “a brake on simply finding what we already knew/hoped/feared to be happening” (Freebody, 2003, p. 45). This allowed me “to discover new phenomena or to re-see familiar events in a new light” (Freebody, 2003, p. 50). The narrative-based accounts therefore provide an opportunity to make visible the everyday creative practices of the participating English teachers that may otherwise remain unseen, unrecognised or unacknowledged.

In the next chapter, I begin the analysis by focusing on everyday creative practices of Sarah and Rosa, subject English teachers at Ridgemont Secondary College. The chapter explores how Sarah and in particular Rosa, negotiate the different school priorities and accountability measures by drawing on their professional knowledge. This creative practice enables Sarah and Rosa to navigate the constraints in their teaching, and in doing so maintain a sense of professional identity and agency.

CHAPTER 5 ***Teacher creative practice***

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I argue that teacher creative practice involves navigating a range of constraints on possible teacher actions, and to find possible ways of working through and beyond these constraints. In doing so teachers are able to maintain a sense of professional identity and purpose in their teaching in spite of professional teaching standards that outline what a teacher must know and be able to do” with no regard to specific subject knowledge or teaching context (Parr et al., 2015, p. 134). I draw on the same metaphor Bakhtin (1981) uses to explain heteroglossia—the tensions between centripetal and centrifugal forces. In drawing on Bakhtin’s metaphor, I conceptualise all constraints on actions, whether visible or implicit, as centripetal forces, acting as tethers of teachers’ practice, in effect points of restriction and boundaries. The counteracting centrifugal forces can therefore be considered a teacher’s ability to find ways of working through and beyond constraints or generating possibilities for their practice.

The definition of creative practice that I develop in this chapter draws initially from ideas of creative problem-solving, where teachers identify constraints on their practice, and find or create possible ways around or through these constraints. However, teacher creative practice also encompasses creativity as imagination, as teachers imagine possibilities for ways to make learning and teaching meaningful for the students and, importantly, themselves. The two forces, centripetal constraints and centrifugal possibilities, work in ongoing and dynamic tension with each other within teachers’ practice. Working through and beyond these tensions, I argue, is made possible by teachers’ subject specific knowledge, in this case knowledge of subject English. Such knowledge invariably exceeds what is stated in any English curriculum, and is mediated by English teacher identities and how they understand the work, the ‘sayings’ and ‘doings’ (Gee, 2011), of subject English. In this chapter, I examine how several participants in this PhD study work with the centripetal constraints and centrifugal possibilities of their practice within the context of teaching subject English.

In order to develop this understanding of teacher creative practice and the ‘mythologies’ (Barthes, 2009) this idea challenges, I focus on one research site, Ridgemont Secondary College, a government high school of approximately 1500 students in the middle class, inner-

eastern suburbs of Melbourne. In particular, I inquired into the work of two of the English teacher participants at this site, Sarah and Rosa. Arguably, all of the teacher participants across the six sites in this study demonstrated and spoke about their creative practices. What was particularly intriguing about Sarah and Rosa was the diversity of their experience and the range of English subjects taught (mainstream English and English as an Additional Language (EAL) respectively), and yet despite the differences between their experiences and subject specialism there were threads of similar constraints, possibilities and practices woven throughout their accounts. I begin the discussion by exploring some of Ridgemont Secondary College's priorities and the constant change in these priorities as a way of demonstrating the centripetal constraints on teacher practice within the context of the school.

To illustrate these constraints I draw on data related to both Sarah—the Head of the English faculty at Ridgemont—and Rosa—International Students Program Coordinator—in the first two sections of the chapter. The third section of the chapter, focused on Rosa, explores and to some extent challenges some common assumptions about the relationship between creativity, innovation and newness. It also examines how Ridgemont's ICT priority helps to shape Rosa's identity and how Rosa's knowledge of subject English mediates the tensions operating on her teaching practice. A scene recreated from my observation of Rosa's classroom attempts to represent part of her teaching practice. This scene includes an evaluation of Rosa's use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in her teaching that was conducted by one of Rosa's colleagues during the lesson I was observing. The final section returns to the question of teacher creative practice and how an understanding of teacher creative practice can enable a strong sense of professional identity. I also argue that Sarah's and Rosa's accounts of their teaching practices provide a more nuanced understanding of the work of subject English teachers than currently offered in professional standards, such as the APSTs (AITSL, 2017).

5.2 Negotiating the multiple constraints of Ridgemont Secondary College

This section examines how the expectations of student achievement, teacher evaluation and school improvement mediate Sarah's and Rosa's teaching practice. Some of the constraints Sarah and Rosa experience are imposed by external policies, such as the APSTs (AITSL, 2017) or curriculum requirements set by the VCAA. However, this section is mostly concerned with how Ridgemont Secondary College imposes constraints on teachers'

practices in the name of regulating practice. The constraints to teacher practice at Ridgemont are constructed through accountability measures, such as data-driven professional development requirements and school priority imperatives outlined in, for example, the school strategic plan. In addition to these constraints, data generated from Sarah's interviews, demonstrates that some constraints are more implicit, inherent in the evaluations of teacher practice, as well as the culture of the English faculty in the school.

5.2.1 Mediating teacher practice through the use of student achievement data

There was a strong focus on data at Ridgemont, as it was part of the school's plan for continuous improvement. This was driven by the need not only to maintain the school's reputation for high academic results but also to improve on the results, evidenced by data on the *My School* website (ACARA, n.d.-j). The data was mostly based on students' performance on assessment tasks and tests; an aspect of each staff member's professional development plan was the analysis of student achievement using measurement tools such as Hattie's 'effect sizes' (Hattie, 2009), the Guttman Chart (DET, n.d.) and observations based on instructional rounds where teachers are provided with feedback on their teaching (City, et al., 2009). The 'effect size'—a statistical measure of effectiveness measured along a continuum where an effect size greater than zero indicates a "positive influence on achievement outcomes" (Hattie, 2009, p. 7)—is used to enable teachers "to move beyond questions about whether an intervention has worked or not, to questions about how well an intervention worked" (DET, 2017, p. 5). The use and analysis of this data at Ridgemont therefore, theoretically, improved student outcomes. This emphasis on improved student outcomes is in keeping with the educational goals set out in the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA, 2008) and the *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* (COAG, Education Council, 2019; see also 2.3.1). While Ozga (2009) argues that the focus on data is part of a range of accountability measures (see 2.4), Hooge et al. (2012) argue that this sustained focus on data not only helps schools to improve, but in turn also enhances their autonomy. It is

the combination of more autonomy and accountability [that] is expected to improve schooling by promoting effectiveness and efficiency, and by binding education professionals (teachers and other staff members) to educational purposes and goals. (pp. 6-7)

The teaching staff at Ridgemont are 'bound' to the educational purposes and goals set by the school's strategic plan and teaching priorities, administered through teacher accountability

measures, such as data collection on student outcomes and measurements of learning growth. This is evident in the emphasis that Rosa puts on data throughout her interviews. Below, Rosa talks about some of the ways she collects and uses the data of her student outcomes:

There's this graph that we look at, the effect size data graph. And it just says 'If x, y and z happens in your classroom, you will have a considerable rise in terms of the two pieces of work that you do,' blah, blah, blah, blah. So it's really interesting, like you can resent it a bit, thinking, my god, I've got to worry about that. I'm a bit excited about it, I want to sit after school tomorrow and just read about it and hash out my analysis of it.

And then we had the Guttman chart. A Guttman chart is all about breaking down the skill of that task into 15 sections, 15 criteria. And then, after the first one [activity] that you witnessed [during the observation] ... I went through and I put for each kid, for each skill area, I put a one or a zero. One meant that they reached it at that stage, zero meant that [they] hadn't ... I did it again for the second one. So when you put it on a graph ... green means I haven't gone from zero to one yet, blue means they have, and I have all of them blue.

So now, you can analyse how that shows one particular set of information, compared to Hattie, which shows another. So the thing, in my mind, that's really successful with this is it shows that a lot of them went up to the one, where with Hattie I was nowhere near what we predicted [0.04 effect size increase] and that's fine. It doesn't mean I've failed or anything. It's just an observation.

The data that Rosa gathers and analyses is the basis of her professional conversations with her faculty team, and her cross-faculty team. Teacher data is also used to determine the focus of the classroom observations and furthermore is used as evidence of her teaching practice for her professional development plan. The student achievement data that Rosa is generating through Guttman Charts and effect sizes helps to construct a linear view of teaching and learning, connecting student achievement directly to teacher effectiveness or to the use of 'proven' High Impact Teaching Strategies (HITS) (DET, 2017).

Connell's (1985) description of teaching, used throughout this chapter, suggests "something a little mysterious and evasive at the heart of the business of teaching" (p. 70), which suggests something more than the student achievement data generated and analysed by Rosa and her colleagues at Ridgemont. Connell (1985) argues that the work done in schools

does not produce things. Nor does it like other white-collar work, produce visible and quantifiable *effects* ... The 'outcomes of teaching', to use the jargon of educational research, are notoriously difficult to measure ... The fact remains that it is always difficult to specify the object of the teachers' labour, the raw material they are supposed to be working on. In consequence the definition of the task can expand and contract in quite alarming ways. (pp. 70-71)

One way the education system has traditionally sought to resolve these complications is by attempting to quantify and refine teaching and learning outcomes, such as through assigning measurement values such as "effect size" (Hattie, 2012). Hattie's (2012) statistical

measurement of the impact of different facets of education, such as the curriculum, teaching and learning approaches—as expressed as ‘effect sizes’—have been widely used to support policy discourses of ‘what works’ in education and have often led to a narrowing of understandings of teaching. The use of effect sizes and other similar statistical measurements used in meta-analyses and meta-meta-analyses such as Hattie’s (see also Marzano, 1998) have been criticised in part because such measurements cannot take into account differences (across different groups) in range restrictions and measure design (Simpson, 2017) and also in part for how standardising measurements, such as effect sizes, have the potential to narrow the understandings of what works (Comber, 2011). Simpson (2017) argues that “standardised effect size is a research tool for individual studies” and therefore the “meta-meta-analyses ... are poor selection mechanisms for driving educational policy” (p. 466). Despite Simpson’s critiques, these analyses have informed policies such as the APSTs (AITSL, 2017) and popularised teaching regimes such as HITS (DET, 2017; Hattie, 2012). These discourses and practices construct a relationship between teaching and learning that is narrowly transactional and linear, and pays little regard to the complexities of context. In the logic of such initiatives, the ‘object’ of teachers’ labour becomes measurable by increases in student achievement, especially student achievements on high-stakes standardised tests such as NAPLAN, and competitive senior curriculums such as the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE). Nevertheless, this kind of achievement data is what is used to establish a correlation between better student outcomes and teacher practice, as well as maintain a school’s reputation in the public marketplace, and it shapes the selection of educational priorities for the school (Forsey, 2008). As Hayes et al. (2017) argue, the focus on data is driven by “concerns about how to improve students’ performance outcomes on standardised tests” (p. 92) and is the result of teaching being “subjected to the demands of markets and their associated mechanisms, including increased competition between schools ... diversification of choice for families and accreditation of teachers against professional standards” (p. 92). These measurements have their own mythologies about data that is seen to transcend context; they often involve externally set and examined tests, administered under strict conditions, and therefore they are often regarded as valid and ‘true’ indications of students’ learning and subsequently a teacher’s effectiveness and ability to teach.

5.2.2 Mediating teacher practice through teacher evaluations

Rosa’s qualifying statement—“it doesn’t mean I’ve failed or anything. It’s just an observation”—acknowledges that the data is being used to not only inform teaching, but that

it also exerts other less visible evaluative pressures on teachers (including herself). It is perhaps this judgement, or the possibility of judgement, that contributes to the constraints that Rosa feels with respect to her practice. While Rosa may not feel judged or evaluated by the data, Sarah identifies that feeling judged could be a strong mediating factor in teachers' willingness to be creative and try new ways of teaching. Drawing a distinction between teachers such as Rosa and herself, and newer teachers, Sarah identifies experienced teachers as resilient and able to learn and adapt, but she characterises less experienced teachers as more constrained in their creativity due to the different pressures they feel. For Sarah, experienced teachers are

a lot more confident in trying something new. I'm, I'm happy to jump if you need. If you're bringing the bandwagon and want me on it. I will jump on it and I will test it out. I will do all the stuff. I am very confident in that, and I'm very confident in saying to my kids that did not work whatsoever but I tried. I think new teachers, they have that ability, they are not as jaded by the system and don't know how much that is actually involved and the pressures that are there yet. And they have that ability to be creative, but they don't have the confidence to be creative for that fear that they're going to get called out for something not working.

Sarah's distinction seems to be between 'experienced' and 'new' teachers. However, what Sarah has begun to identify is the different constraints to teacher practice, perceived or real, at various stages of the teaching career. 'New' teachers are often employed on contract work, which may "as potential weapons of management power, affect not only worker motivation, but ... the autonomy of thought, action, and expression" (Bess, 1998, p. 2). Cremin and Chappell (2021) highlight "practitioners own intellectual risk-taking" (p. 317) as a key disposition to creative teaching, however there is potentially a greater risk for teachers who in precarious employment than a missed learning opportunity in the classroom. Sarah, who is in a stable, ongoing position in the school, has the confidence to try new things; jumping on the 'bandwagon' appears to be for Sarah, a relatively low-risk, albeit sometimes frustrating, experience. Her comments on being "jaded by the system" and the "pressures" speaks to the continually changing priorities, high accountability measures, as well as the leadership responsibility she feels as Head of the English faculty to be seen to be supportive of the new "bandwagon". There is a sense that Sarah's perception of new teachers in her faculty is that they haven't been indoctrinated into the shared practices and discourses, the 'sayings' and 'doings' (Gee, 2011) of the faculty, and therefore can see the potential of doing things in new ways. These 'new', or different, practices (a distinction I discuss with respect to Rosa's situation below) may also be more visible in contrast with the accepted norms of the faculty, norms that the new teachers are still learning. However, for new teachers in the faculty, many of whom will be working towards teacher registration and may not have job security, creative or innovative teaching practices can be high-risk, especially if they are

perceived by staff, students or parents to be unsuccessful. The constraints for a new teacher, Sarah suggests, are different from those of an experienced teacher.

Regardless of experience, the practices of all teachers at Ridgemont Secondary College are evaluated not only through student achievement data but also through a strong focus on consistency in curriculum and student work. Members of the English faculty, for instance, are given timelines and curriculum outlines, specifying the common assessment tasks, as well as the conditions of, and the dates for, these tasks. Additionally, once a term, teachers are required to audit a random selection of student work, not to compare *quality* across classes, but to ensure the *quantity* of work completed by students (measured by the number of pages they are completing in a standard-issue student workbook) is in close alignment across classes. Sarah explains:

You know we even have, we have workbook audits once a semester, where the number of pages written in the student's workbook are counted and teachers are asked why does one class have 130 pages of writing per semester and yours has 22? And it's, so it's kind of saying I'm looking at this to see if our curriculum is being taught. You're allowed to put in anything they've written, so the reading journal, the writing journal. You can put SACs [school assessed coursework] in. You can put anything that they've written, practice pieces. But we've had teachers with 130 pages of writing in a book and another teacher with 22 in the same year level. And they see that as being inconsistent. And we know one of the teachers that has the least amount of writing is very discussion based in class, not a lot of note taking, but again, it's seen as being a negative because the number of pages aren't matching what should be there. So it discourages you from doing something a little bit, little bit too different.

It is noteworthy that in these audits, there is little consideration as to whether teachers and students had engaged in discussion-based activities. Sarah acknowledged as much in her first interview when she described one of her colleagues as favouring “very discussion-based” activities, but noted that this was inconsistent with activities favoured by other teachers. These are the types of accountability measures that Hooge et al. (2012) argue legitimise approaches to school improvement and autonomy. Ozga (2009) speaks about this type of audit as presenting only a façade of autonomy, and that such accountability measures invariably prioritise particular types of measures, pedagogies and student work—in this case writing over discussion, as well as the volume over quality of written work—over others. As Sarah notes, these measures can restrict and shape teachers’ practice, so that they become unable or unwilling to see possibilities or ‘work arounds’ to navigate the constraints, even when teachers are given permission and opportunities to try something different.

5.2.3 Mediating teacher practice through explicit and implicit constraints

Over the course of the data generation for this research, Rosa's and Sarah's school experienced a significant change in leadership—for the first time in 16 years the school had a new school principal. Rosa and Sarah both reported that with the new leadership the staff were feeling uncertain about the potential changes to the structure and priorities of the school. At the time of the research, the new principal implemented a new priority of 21st century learning, with a strong focus on Information Communication Technology (ICT) as part of the school's new strategic plan. Rosa explained that to facilitate the ICT priority "the school [had] organised cross faculty teams with the aim of introducing us to Microsoft OneNote, and what it had to offer in terms of its link or its stepping stone to 21st century learning", further commenting that the new principal's last school was "far more advanced" than Ridgemont. The use of technology throughout the school was therefore an aspect that needed to be addressed on teachers' professional development plans. While excited about the possibilities an increased emphasis ICT might bring to the classroom, Sarah also speaks about the complexities of embedding the technology into the classroom. She notes:

They push those things in 21st century learning. Flipped classroom, doing all that stuff. We're trying to put those things in. Trying to make it a bit more interesting, to have a bit more purpose to it ... So it was all exciting learning all of this new technology. And I'm getting ready to use it. And I'm really excited about it. And then something stops me.

Sarah's reticence in using technology seems to be due to multiple constraints: the logistics of access; permissions of shared work; and an expectation "to make the [laptop] device useful, because parents have paid 700 to 1200 dollars for this thing". However, there is also an expectation that this technology is not just useful for learning, but that the technology is used "to make it a bit more interesting, to have a bit more purpose to it". This was an additional pressure. The 'stop' Sarah experiences ("And then something stops me") is not just about the logistics of access, use and fluency with the technology. The 'stop' also refers to the number of priorities that Sarah and her colleagues had been asked to implement. Sarah's frustration therefore stems from how the expectations and priorities at the school had kept growing and changing. She notes:

And then, the other thing to that is, is the bandwagons. And, you know, I don't know how other high schools work. I've only been at this one bar in my rounds, and, you know, but, every time you turn around they're just hitting us with something new.

Ridgemont had in the last few years focused on a range of issues: improving school-wide literacy; improving the use of data—mostly through Hattie's (2012) 'Visible Learning' approach—focusing on feedback; and now 21st century learning and ICT. Each priority was

experienced as not replacing but adding to previous injunctions, so that priorities appear to accumulate across the years. Rosa comments:

Look, last year our focus was all about feedback, and it hasn't been easy but I've adopted the practices. So even though, it won't be what our focus is next year, I imagine it will be there. And we just keep learning and adapting, it's all there. It's just there.

While the priorities of the school are explicit, for Rosa, the expectation that teachers continue to work on previous priorities (“I imagine it will be there”) is implicit. Both Sarah and Rosa “just keep learning and adapting”, continuing to navigate the tensions in their classroom despite both seeming to experience moments where they no longer feel that trying new ways of teaching—jumping on the bandwagon, trying new technology, teaching creatively—is possible.

There are also implicit constraints to teacher practice within subject English. These implicit constraints consist of particular understandings about practice, classrooms or subjects that are mediated by school-wide expectations and experiences (see Herrlitz & van de Ven, 2007); they may not be explicitly articulated, but, according to Sarah and Rosa, they are understood as part of the culture of the school. Sarah shares an example prior to obtaining her position as Head of the English faculty where the senior English teaching team were reluctant to select their own film texts:

The expectations on us and what we have to meet, you know, there are so many, boxes that you have to tick ... I think a lot of it is we're forced, not forced but required, to teach certain texts and the year levels have to teach the same text and all. All the teachers teach the same text and you know, we don't have a lot of choice in what we do get to teach the kids.

But we have also found, a few years ago when context¹⁰ was still in year 11, I gave the teachers the opportunity to choose any film they wanted in context. And I chose *Gran Torino*. Don't judge me ... there's just a bit of swearing ... and the other teachers, bar one, just decided to do *Gran Torino* as well. So they had this open, clean slate, you could do whatever you wanted to teach and they still went with what someone else was doing and I felt that was really strange. Strange ... that you have this opportunity to take something, a film that you thought was going to touch the kids in some way, that was really going to teach them something.

And I don't know if it's a fear of having to be out there on your own and actually having to be creative and understand something without the root of support. I don't know what it is. But I think when we're given that opportunity, especially in a subject that is so heavily scrutinized and holds so much weight at every single year level in high school, that we become a bit afraid to ... step out.

¹⁰ Context was the term given to Area of Study 2: Creating and Presenting, in two of the previous VCE: English study designs from 2008-2015 (VCAA, 2006, 2011). Assessment of this area of study was through student responses to texts in persuasive, expository and imaginative forms.

Sarah understands that there are certain expectations (“we’re forced, not forced but required, to teach certain texts”) when it comes to the types of texts that students study in subject English. With the exception of the final year of English (see VCAA, 2014a), there are no texts that are required to be taught, rather the *Victorian curriculum* provides guidelines, suggesting students engage with ‘varied text types’ and that some Australian texts are included at each year level (VCAA, n.d.-I, para. 14). But implicit in the school culture are expectations that shape how the curriculum is enacted. Sarah, in her throw away comment “don’t judge me ... there’s just a bit of swearing” is cognisant of this and of the potential judgement by other teachers. She also seems to be sensitive to what students and parents may consider as an appropriate text at this particular year level and school; Sarah is aware that the classroom exists within a wider context that also mediates her teaching practice through explicit and implicit expectations. In the next section, the focus shifts to Rosa and how she perceives that both explicit and implicit expectations create tension and shape her work as a teacher of English.

5.3 Rosa: Navigating constraints and finding space for creativity

Rosa was an experienced subject English teacher, having taught for over 30 years. She had recently retrained as an English as an Additional Language (EAL) teacher. She taught in the year seven integrated curriculum program and EAL at the senior (VCE) level. At the time of the research she was also the International Student Program Coordinator, a job that she loved but was looking forward to stepping out of due to the demanding nature of the role. My observation of Rosa’s classroom was of a senior EAL class (Year 11). There were 11 students in the EAL class during the observation, predominantly from Chinese and Vietnamese backgrounds. The focus of Rosa’s class was a new aspect of the EAL senior curriculum in the *Analysing Argument* area of study (VCAA, 2014b), namely understanding of non-verbal language and gestures. Simon, Rosa’s colleague from a cross-faculty group, was also in the room during this class. He had been assigned to evaluate Rosa’s teaching practice as part of the school’s regular program of peer evaluation. His particular focus on this day was observing and providing feedback on Rosa’s use of ICT in the classroom using an evaluation scale provided by school leadership that had been taken from Microsoft Corporation’s *21st Century Learning Design* resource (Microsoft Corporation, 2017b).

Prior to the observation, Rosa had admitted that she was anxious about her ICT usage, and considered her knowledge of technology as a limitation, or constraint, to her teaching practice. Scene 5.1, and the discussion following, explores how Rosa navigated this

constraint and worked through and beyond the tensions that this constraint placed on her teaching practice.

Scene 5.1—It's Jes—chure, not Jesta ...

The students enter the small classroom and sit around the two grouped tables at the back. Simon and I are seated together at a table close to the front of the room. Rosa stands at the front of the room to make use of the whiteboard, moving between a combination of physical demonstrations using gestural vocabulary, discussions, student-lead translations, definitions written on the board, and questions to clarify student understanding and interpretation of the material. From the beginning of the class, the students are responsive and are quick to offer cheeky remarks in response to what Rosa is saying. The tone of these exchanges is playful.

The scene presented here begins a quarter way through the class, Rosa just having finished explaining the class's expected return to the text *12 Angry Men* in the following week.

Rosa: Read through the sheet called “enhance speech”. You need to clarify the vocabulary as you discuss. For example gesture. G is pronounced J and the ‘t’ like ‘ch’.

Rosa writes

G is J	Ges—ture
J	ch

on the board.

Say it with me ...

Students: Jesss Churrrrrre.

(Students giggle at Bin's deliberate over-articulation of the word and Lin's attempt at mimicking Rosa's accent.)

Rosa: What do we mean, ‘gesture’?

(Rosa answers her own question by writing on the board a definition: “unusual things with your body to exaggerate meaning”. Students consult their electronic dictionaries while chatting in their first languages, annotating their sheets and copying down Rosa's definition.)

(Rosa proceeds to write ‘Team A’ and ‘Team B’ on the board.)

Bin: Why are we in two teams?

Rosa: Because we're going to have a competition. I've got some gestures written on a piece of paper. You're going to take it in turns to guess the gesture. Whoever yells it out first ...

Ji: Do we get a prize? Chocolate?

Ping: Oh, we're going to act.

Rosa: That's right, you're going to have to guess what the other person is saying with no sounds.

(The students take it in turns to act out and guess gestures such as furrowed brow. Rosa draws an emoticon on the board to explain furrowed, and then uses another hand gesture to indicate 'beckoning'. There is some discussion how the beckoning hand gesture may be interpreted differently in different cultures. The students check with Rosa their pronunciation and occasionally ask for clarification on what a gesture is, such as timeout. Satisfied that there is sufficient understanding of the different gestures and vocabulary, the class moves on to the final activity—watching a TED talk without the sound. Rosa asks the students to count the number of times they see a particular gesture in the TED talk and write down any additional gestures they notice.)

Lin: I don't know what this one is. (Lin pulls her eyebrows up with her fingers.)

Rosa: (Raising eyebrows). You can also look at the background for clues and IDK [I don't know] is okay too. Okay you can now fill in the sheet about what you think it means, we'll be continuing on with it next lesson.

(Rosa turns her attention to myself and Simon, and addresses a comment to Simon.)

Tell Narelle what level of ICT I'm at. (Rosa chuckles.) I'm at a 'one'.

Simon: No you're not, most of the faculty are either at a two or three.

Ji: Can we have chocolate cake next lesson?

Rosa: (Purses her lips in a mock-unimpressed style.) Ji, No! Look at the prepositions. Miss Rosa is a good **or** bad teacher?

(Students snigger.)

Ji: (Grinning.) Bad.

Rosa: Hand in your sheets for next lesson, we'll finish this off before *12 Angry Men*. I don't want you doing this at home.

Ji: But miss, I've memorised all the questions.

(The gesture of mock-unimpressed pursed lips returns to Rosa's face. The students all laugh as they pack up.)

Simon: What would you give Rosa [for her use of ICT in the lesson]?

Narelle: Probably a four.

Simon: Really? I'd give a three.

Narelle: Why?

Simon: It wasn't innovative enough.

5.3.1 Observing creativity

During the observation of Rosa's classroom, Simon was using a numbered system to provide feedback to Rosa on her use of ICT in her teaching. The numbered feedback system that Simon was referring to was a scale that forms part of the Microsoft Corporation's *21st Century Learning Design* resource (Microsoft Corporation, 2017b). It had been distributed to all members of staff at Ridgemont Secondary College. The piece of paper the five-point scale is printed on is devoid of any authorship or publishing information. The scale that Simon uses during his observation to evaluate Rosa's teaching includes the following statements:

1. Students do not have the opportunity to use ICT for this learning activity.
2. Students use ICT to learn or practice basic skills or reproduce information. They are not constructing knowledge.
3. Students use ICT to support knowledge construction, BUT they could construct the same knowledge without using ICT.
4. Students use ICT to support knowledge construction AND the ICT is required for constructing this knowledge, BUT students do NOT create an ICT product for authentic users.
5. Students use ICT to support knowledge construction, AND the ICT is required for constructing this knowledge, AND students do create an ICT product for authentic users.

The scale focuses on what students are doing or not doing with ICT, and is used in this instance as a way of evaluating teacher practice with regards to ICT proficiency. Simon's evaluation is focused specifically on the technology and how the students are engaging with it. Inferred through the students' use of technology is Rosa's ability to integrate technology within her classroom.

Simon justifies his evaluation of Rosa's use of ICT as a '3' in terms of the lesson not being "innovative enough". The full Microsoft document offers the following definition of innovation:

Innovation requires putting students' ideas or solutions into practice in the real world ... In cases where students do not have the authority to implement their own ideas, it is innovation ONLY if students convey their ideas to people outside the classroom context who can implement them. (Microsoft Corporation, 2017a)

This is a definition very much in line with concepts of innovation—especially ones that assume that technology is always necessary—aligned with creative problem-solving offered by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2014) and the *Australian curriculum* (ACARA, n.d.-g) and the *Victorian curriculum* (Victorian Curriculum & Assessment Authority, n.d.-f; see Chapter 2; also Banaji et al., 2010; Lucas et al., 2013; Ministerial Council on Education, Employment Training & Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), 2008). However, any details, including a definition or explanation as to how the scale could be used, are not evident on the one-page document distributed to staff at Ridgemont—via hard copy rather than the full digital version available on OneNote. Nor does there appear to be any

acknowledgement that the Microsoft documents are designed to encourage and reward the use of Microsoft products. Rosa explained to me in her post lesson interview that there was limited discussion in the school as to what the scale meant in terms of evaluating a colleague's classroom use of ICT. Although Rosa also admitted that her knowledge of the cross-faculty goal to improve the use of ICT across the school was somewhat lacking, the staff meeting where the ICT goal and scale were discussed had clashed with an external professional development session that she had attended. Simon's evaluation, though, demonstrates how education often unproblematically aligns technology and innovation (see 2.2.3), and this raises some interesting questions as to what constitutes innovation and the place of technology in Ridgemont classrooms.

5.3.2 Creativity, innovation and newness

Simon and Rosa both link the use of technology with innovation, a powerful discourse and myth promulgated by Microsoft Corporation through the *21st Century Learning Design* resource, and also through the construction of 21st century skills more broadly (see Microsoft Corporation, 2017a, 2017b; Bellanca & Brandt, 2010; Foundation for Young Australians (FYA), 2017; Moyle, 2010, Lamb et al., 2017; Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE), 2018). Both the ability to be creative and use ICT are assumed to contribute to a better future, one which "reduces the need for workers to complete routine, manual tasks ... spend[ing] more time focusing on people, solving more strategic problems and thinking creatively" (FYA, 2017, p. 3; see 2.2.3; see also Banaji et al., 2010; Benade, 2017; Sawyer, 2014). The conflation of innovation and technology can be attributed to their use as economic measures. As MCEETYA (2008) notes in the *Melbourne Declaration*:

Widespread access to, and effective use of, ICT in Australia's education and training sectors has the capacity to create opportunities to transform learning and teaching environments that can improve education outcomes and increase social and economic participation across Australia. (p. 1)

As the *Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools* (DESE, 2018) suggests, ICT has the promise of revolutionising teaching through access to personalised learning, better quality education resources, as well as more efficient distribution of information and collaboration. The transformation of learning and teaching environments is based on an understanding of what Web 2.0 applications may achieve:

Sparkling an even more far-reaching revolution ... that emphasizes participation (e.g., creating, re-mixing) over presentation ... and that facilitates innovative explorations, experimentations, and purposeful tinkering that often form the basis of a situated understanding emerging from action, not passivity. (Brown & Adler, 2008, p. 30)

This understanding of technology and its ability to facilitate ‘production’ is reiterated through the marketing of particular technology devices and apps typically used in schools for their creativity potential (Daniels, 2017). This is even further reinforced in the *Victorian curriculum: English* through the assertion that “Information Communication Technologies (ICT) are powerful tools that can support student learning” (VCAA, n.d.-l, para. 17) and that students are “publishing texts using a range of software ... flexibly and imaginatively” (VCAA n.d.-j). As Moyle (2010) argues, “educators require the capacity to include in their repertoire classroom strategies that build the innovation and creative capabilities of students, and to do so using technologies” (p. 17). However, despite the potential development of student creativity from ‘little-c’ creativity to ‘Big-C creativity’ (see 2.4.3 & 3.2), a key critique of education and technology in the classroom is that it has not transformed teaching practices. Indeed, McKnight et al. (2016) argue that its use in the classroom is fairly perfunctory, and that students’ use of technology is largely as passive consumers rather than as active producers. These beliefs about technology seem to be shaping Simon’s evaluation of Rosa’s classroom: he could not see evidence of innovation, of students actively producing a tangible artifact using ICT. Nor did he see ICT as integral to producing the knowledge of gestural literacy that the students were developing.

Simon’s evaluation of Rosa’s class might be interpreted as informed by the ‘myth’ that innovation—and in this instance innovation with technology—is something new and unique. It is not unusual for innovation to be used synonymously with creativity, especially when it is to signify that an idea, a product or an outcome, is new or unique, for example when discussing entrepreneurial endeavours (see Pisanu & Menapace, 2014). The coupling of creativity and newness is also common in socio-cultural understandings, for instance, Csikszentmihalyi’s (1996) understanding of creativity based on an individual’s “production of novelty” (p. 113). And this is also the case in skill-based understandings of creativity and innovation: for example de Bono’s (2014) concept of lateral thinking is concerned with new “side-tracks”, thinking that results in new ideas that may not be immediately obvious. However, whether something is ‘new’ or ‘unique’ as a mark of creativity or innovation is questionable, as what may be considered new to one person may be familiar to another (Smith & Smith, 2010). This fraught relationship between creativity and ‘newness’ is something that Rosa’s colleague Sarah, also picks up on, pointing out:

We can think all we want that we're doing something creative and we're thinking out of the box and this is amazing and nobody in the world has ever done this. And the kids see it as just another regular old day, class. They don't see it as creative. You know? I'm probably one of the only people in the English staff room that uses playing cards to do everything. That's how my groups are decided ... But another teacher used them. They had never used playing cards

to do that and so they thought I was being creative and the kids are like well now you're just putting us into a bloody group ... We can do all of those things and the kids will never see it as creative, only we will.

The creativity or 'innovation' that Simon was looking for is aligned with Sarah's understanding of creativity, one where the teaching strategy is different or "new to me" (Smith & Smith, 2010, p. 255). In the context of Simon's evaluation of Rosa's class and Sarah's experiences with using technology to engage her students (see 5.2.3), innovation and creativity have been equated with newness, and in turn conflated with difference. As a result, the evaluation of Rosa's class as "not innovative enough" may in fact be an evaluation of how different or unexpected the use of ICT was in the classroom, rather than whether the use of ICT was actually innovative in terms of creative problem-solving, or even whether the use of ICT was needed across every lesson and effectively supported the learning and had a sound pedagogical basis. It appears that 'different' is the frame of reference Simon is using in his assessment of Rosa. Simon and I it seems were working from different understandings of creativity when we assess Rosa's use of ICT in the class. I saw the students and Rosa co-constructing knowledge, synthesising new information to form new understandings, and Rosa attempting to solve problems of practice—how to meaningfully integrate ICT into her classroom in ways that aligns with the curriculum, the needs of her students and her skills. Through observing the class through the lens of co-constructing knowledge the use of a TED talk without sound provided a purposeful use of ICT—one that was socially situated (see Banaji et al., 2010; see 2.2.3) for learning gestures within the EAL class. Furthermore, Rosa was also engaging in creative practice as she navigated the multiple constraints that mediate her practice and require her to find new ways of teaching. I saw evidence of her creatively seeking to work around or through those constraints. However, what I might construe as creative practice, working through and beyond the tensions of constraints and possibilities, are difficult to observe if the scale calls for more overt, or constrained, forms of newness, or if the evaluation is limited to one class.

Simon and I applied different understandings of innovation and creativity to the evaluation of Rosa's classroom. Simon was looking for something innovative, which he seemed to equate with something new or different—similar to Guilford's (1973) and Torrance's (1962) psychometric tests for creativity (see 2.4)—whilst I was considering how Rosa and the students used technology to create meaning. These different understandings of creativity and innovation that Simon and I used to evaluate Rosa's teaching could be used to argue the benefits of working toward shared definitions of creativity; a shared understanding of creativity and innovation would perhaps have resulted in a more consistent evaluation of

Rosa's practice. These shared understandings are one way the literature attempts to account for and validate creativity, or creative acts within a given context (see 1.3.1; see also Bakhtin, 1981; Lucas et al., 2013). A negotiated agreement between members of the cross-faculty team for what key terms will be used in the rubric, such as innovation, and what they might mean within each subject area, would also help to address how the rubric was implemented, potentially resulting in even more consistent evaluations. But a more consistent understanding of the rubric—in this instance what it means to be creative with ICT—also has the potential to become a key constraint, resulting in teachers feeling constrained to use ICT only in certain ways. The use of the rubric to evaluate teacher performance makes it even more likely that teachers might feel constrained to develop consistent approaches to creative teaching, just as Sarah notes that the evaluation of the number of pages of student written work had mediated the classroom practices of some of the English teachers' in her faculty. The consequence of these consistent approaches may be the directing or narrowing how members of the team seek to embed ICT in their practice. The teachers, therefore, maybe more focused on looking for new practices that have a 'wow' factor, in the belief that they will be positive and engaging (Wake et al., 2007), rather than practices that aim to co-construct meaning and balance the competing demands of the classroom. The use of agreed-upon definitions may enable consistent approaches and conformity, but not allow for teachers to act agentically to find other possibilities, especially possibilities that may be overlooked by policymakers (Cremin & Chappell, 2021) for their practice.

5.3.3 Creativity and identity

Rosa, who sees herself as creative, was aware of her lack of skills when using ICT, and this was evident in her throwaway line, directed to both Simon and during class, that her use of ICT was at "level one". She was conscious that this deficit impacts her ability to use technology in the classroom in ways that might be considered innovative. In our interview after the observation, she reflected on these limitations, commenting on Simon's evaluation:

No, no I think he was right ... there are some things I could have done. I'm still learning, I'm okay once I find a way to put a bit of 'Rosa' into it. But it takes time and I've said to the principal it takes time ... and support, us oldies need support ... So I was happy with it. Yeah, I was happy with it. And I can see room for more ICT next year when I use it ... in the end, all that you witnessed was what I did but I watched what the other people in my group did and they did some fantastic stuff. And I could see the value in it.

Rosa perceives her age ("us oldies") as a constraint to using technology in innovative ways, and in doing so she draws upon the myth of the digital native (Prensky, 2001). Prensky

(2001) argues that children since the 1980's have an innate confidence when it comes to technology, as not only have they grown-up around technology but that it is essential to their lives and identities. But as Selwyn (2009) and many others point out, young people do not necessarily have ICT skills, despite perhaps being immersed in the use of technology. Furthermore, the 'digital natives' discourse sets up a dichotomy, between the so-called digital natives and older generations, similar to the one Sarah constructs between the young/new and older/experienced teachers and their ability to be creative within the classroom. This leads to "'them' and 'us' arguments where adults [or older teachers] and institutions are rendered obsolete by the rise of the digital native" (Selwyn, 2009, p. 369). Or in this case, teachers who feel their deficit status in regard to ICT use, risk fears of being rendered obsolete by the revolutionary promise of technology.

Rosa's feelings of anxiety towards her ICT capabilities initially act as a constraint but my observation of her teaching and my analysis of her interviews suggest that she has begun, through watching others and thinking about the curriculum, to explore possibilities. In her post-observation interview, she notes

I know the course is going to change at Year 12, where it's not just going to be a listening task at the end of the year, it will be visual as well. So, I want to show them more examples of gesture and so forth. And also, get them to use technology with their own voice. And to record and to play it back, and to, somehow improve the way they speak and respond to that social [aspect].

Here Rosa is more positive about her ability to use ICT in her teaching and the affordances of various technologies for student learning. She acknowledges the struggle that she and other members of the cross-faculty teams have experienced throughout the process:

That's where we've [the cross-faculty group] struggled a bit with this cross faculty stuff and that's where [with the passion] we struggled a bit. Because we kind of had to be ... not a lot, but there has been a shift ... we've been asked to do, or be someone who is not you. Initially I found it a little bit 'ugh', but now I've grown into it, and I've brought 'Rosa' into it. So I'm more comfortable with it.

Rosa admits that that she is 'more comfortable' rather than completely comfortable. She is not just talking about the implementation of Ridgemont's ICT priority, nor is the use of ICT just about a new teaching tool. Rosa is attempting to maintain her professional identity by finding new ways of 'saying' and 'doing' (Gee, 2011) within her teaching that are recognisable as 'Rosa', but a version of Rosa that is more comfortable with using ICT in her classroom. This demonstrates what William's (1977) refers to as the "struggle to remake" oneself in order to exist comfortably within one's context. This is the "everyday creativity" (Bramwell et al., 2011) of teaching, the sorts of practices that work with complexity and ambiguity:

There are no clear-cut, explicit or correct solutions to address learning issues and teaching dilemmas; there are myriad of ways to conduct teaching and instruction emergent out of multitudinous frameworks. Therefore, the main preoccupation for creative teachers is to overcome obstacles, both for students and themselves. (Bramwell et al., 2011, p. 228)

It would appear that there are a number of obstacles for Rosa in her merging the use of ICT with her everyday teacher practice: the ICT and her technology skills; the curriculum; measurement of student outcomes; and the evaluation of her teaching practice (see Bickmore et al., 2005). The pressures imposed by school expectations have little consideration for the people (Rosa and her knowledge of and relationships with her students), the pedagogical appropriateness for a particular lesson, or the context (a senior EAL class during the third term of school). Rosa, in finding a way to implement ICT within or around the constraints of her classroom is engaging in both creative problem-solving and imaginative practice. The creative problem-solving Rosa engages in is not solely based on an economic imperative (see Banaji et al., 2010)—although the imperative to integrate Microsoft's version of ICT into the classroom might be—and the imaginative practice is not limitless (see Frawley, 2014). Instead Rosa is engaging in everyday creativity within her practice as she seeks to find different ways to meaningfully integrate technology and translate curriculum into pedagogy. It is perhaps a combination of the experience and confidence that Sarah speaks of, and Rosa's own reflexivity on her practice, that enables Rosa to engage in creative practice that is not represented on Microsoft's school; that is to navigate the tensions in her classroom, between the imperative for ICT use, her own technology skills, the evaluation of her practice, the needs of her students, and the knowledge and skills dictated by the curriculum.

5.3.4 Subject knowledge and creativity

Rosa is mindful that her selection and use of technology must be appropriate to her view of an effective EAL classroom. ICT in the classroom is not limited to the TV and laptop that Rosa uses to play the TED talk. The students are also using electronic dictionaries to develop shared understandings of language, and are writing on devices, mostly laptops. The TED talk provides students with an unfamiliar text in order to analyse and interpret different gestures:

I was conscious of [embedding ICT] for the sake of it. Look, I am excited by change. And I want to learn, that's what I said before, just make sure you're supporting us the whole time and the boss said he would. But at the same time I've always got a practical EAL hat on. Is it worth doing it? Not just for the sake of it. How is it going to benefit their language development? And, if it's really not going to do that, I am not going to force it down their throats.

Despite being cautious about the use of ICT in her classroom if it offers no benefit, Rosa is working through the tensions between the curriculum (introducing a new topic), school priorities (ICT) and what she understands is best for her students' learning and development, within the context of subject English, to find work that she believes is meaningful. For Rosa, it is her subject specific knowledge that encompasses her knowledge of her students and subject English (Shulman, 1987; see 3.4) that allows her to see the complexities and find new ways of meaningfully describing her experience (Williams, 1961)—in this case her teaching practice—as she works through and beyond these tensions.

Throughout the class I observed, Rosa moved between different aspects of developing students' literacy: decoding and doing phonics work such as pronouncing “gesture”; building cultural understandings of the different gestures through exploring meanings of gestures in different contexts; and critical analysis of how the different gestures are used to create meaning (see Green, 2012; see 3.3.2). The students were also engaged in working across a number of modes of communication—speaking, writing, reading, viewing and listening—core components of the *Australian* and *Victorian curriculum* structures (see ACARA, n.d.-d & VCAA, n.d.-k respectively). The decision to embed ICT into this lesson, and the function of ICT within the lesson, was built upon Rosa's understanding of her ICT skills and her understanding of the work her class needed to do. Her decisions to structure the class on gestural literacy were based on the tensions between these competing demands and many others, and yet these decisions, the creative problem-solving and imagining possibilities, seemingly remained invisible due to the evaluation tool Simon was using. As Connell (1985) notes:

Even talking at a blackboard implies time spent preparing the lesson, time spent getting the class settled and willing to listen, time spent supervising exercises and correcting them. Beyond this, running a class involves keeping order; dealing with conflicts between the kids; having a joke with them from time to time and building up some personal contact; discussing work with them individually; planning sequences of lessons; preparing hand-outs and physical materials; collecting, using and storing books and audio-visual aids; organising and marking tests and major exams; keeping records; liaison with other teachers in the same subject. Most of that has to be done separately for each class; and in the usual high school situation each teacher is dealing with a number of different classes each day. (p. 71)

Rosa's scene explicitly demonstrated some of these aspects, such as her relaying of instructions, her gentle corrections, jokes, and her use of audio-visual aids. Other aspects of the teaching—the planning, finding an appropriate TED talk in terms of topic, length, range of gestures—remain hidden from the classroom observation. Some of the constraints that Rosa was navigating surface during the interviews through her reflective comments such as having her “practical EAL hat on” and the amount of scaffolding needed to support students'

development of content knowledge as well as their knowledge of language. Rosa's teaching practices—as Connell (1985) describes them—are not separate from her subject-specific knowledge (Shulman, 1987), with some arguing that “creativity is grounded in [this] disciplinary knowledge” (Cremin & Chapell, 2021, p. 321; see also Boden, 2001). But in Simon's evaluation of Rosa's class, there seems to be little consideration for less explicit dimensions of Rosa's work in the EAL classroom: Rosa's teaching practices; the various tensions Rosa is negotiating; the broader contexts of the lesson; student needs; and the ‘invisible’ creative problem-solving that Rosa has already engaged in. The system of observation and evaluation used at Ridgemont means Simon's evaluation of Rosa's practice is focused on a narrow understanding of ICT implementation—ironically, the Microsoft-designed evaluation scale was framed as promoting creativity, but for Rosa this evaluation of innovation was one of the constraints on her teaching practice. It was Rosa's professional knowledge (Ellis, 2007) including her knowledge of subject English that allowed her to move beyond just focusing on ICT, despite her concerns, to engage in creative practice and consider what else might have been possible.

5.4 Teacher creative practice

My observation of Rosa's teaching (including Simon's peer evaluation), and my interviews with her contribute to an account of her as a subject English and English as an Additional Language teacher that is not limited to the dichotomous view of creativity often constructed between creative/innovative problem-solving and creativity/imagination. A socio-cultural conception of teacher creative practice, I argue, blurs this dichotomy (see 3.1). It enables recognition of the creativity in Sarah's and Rosa's practice, by appreciating the way they negotiate a range of tensions, constraints and possibilities in their practice. Rosa's creative practice can be seen as enabling her to grapple or deal with the complexities of her work and in doing so maintain a sense of professional identity.

But the creative practices that Rosa and her colleagues engage in can be easily dismissed as something every teacher does. Teachers, especially subject English teachers whose content knowledge can be perceived as less defined (Medway, 1980), can have a difficult time capturing their work (Connell, 1985), describing it as flexible, adaptive, resourceful, but not necessarily creative. The perception that teaching practice is not creative is reinforced by the APSTs (AITSL, 2017). There is some recognition in the APSTs of aspects of creativity: teachers are expected to ‘create’ safe learning environments, to select teaching strategies that are ‘flexible’, and to ‘create’ resources for the classroom (potentially using ICT); and they

are expected to develop 'creative thinking' in their students (see Chapter 2). However, the neat sequential graduations of skill level in the APSTs risks reducing the everyday creativity of teaching (Bramwell et al., 2011) and the mysteriousness and complexity of teachers' work (Connell, 1985) to the routine, measurable and observable. In this context, the demonstrations of teacher practice referenced by AITSL's (2017) examples of 'good practice' published on its website, can be seen as 'snippets' of teaching with little interest in the nuances of the teaching context (see Parr et al., 2015). They create an impression of teaching that is linear and transactional: the content is delivered and the students learn.

My critical and contextualised accounts of the practices of Sarah and Rosa in this chapter are more nuanced than the seemingly straightforward AITSL's professional standards that focus on the 'planning of a lesson sequence' or 'creating and maintaining supportive and safe learning environments'. I have shown how they are not just delivering the curriculum but are exercising "a certain autonomy and control of the process" (Jeffery, 2006, p. 401). Sarah's decision to teach the text *Gran Torino*, may be considered controversial given the explicit language and violence, and thus was potentially at risk of not being accepted. This type of authentic agency promotes creativity, as it is likely to result in a "person (or community) [trying] to figure out how to make the situation meaningful" (Kumpulainen et al., 2010, p. 28). In this instance, Sarah made a judgement about selecting a text that not only she had a personal interest in, but that she thought would "touch the kids in some way". In a context where uniformity and sameness were prioritised, she chose instead to make meaningful connections between the text, the curriculum and the needs of her students. It is this 'meaningfulness' that Sarah uses to describe and justify her decision.

Rosa's use of ICT required a shift in her understanding of technology, but also a shift in the way she imagined her classroom practice. As a result there was also a shift in her identity as she searched for ways, as she expresses it, to "put some Rosa" into it. It wasn't enough that the use of ICT was congruent with the school's priorities, to maintain her professional identity, Rosa also needed to create meaningful connections between ICT, her students' learning and her teaching capabilities. Her search to find meaning in her teaching had lead Rosa to 'reinvigorate' her career, and retrain as an EAL teacher:

One of the frustrations that was happening to me in the late 2014, leading up to starting the [EAL] course and getting out of mainstream [English], I was becoming a bit robotic. It was becoming just a little bit too comfortable. The passion was waning a little bit and it's come back with a vengeance, with an absolute vengeance. I love it. I mean I get to work at 7:30 every morning. Seriously, if I didn't like my job there's no way, there's just no way.

Rosa's refocus towards EAL teaching enabled her to reinvent, or 're-make, herself and to reconnect with her purpose for teaching of subject English. This re-invention had enabled her to stay in the teaching profession longer, a decision she continued to endorse in our interviews.

In this chapter, I have begun to argue that developing teachers' creative practice is not just about developing student creativity. I have done this by developing a contextualised and nuanced account of two English teachers' work that appreciates its complexity and recognises its creative agency during times where the constraints on the teachers' practice were demanding. As Rosa comments in her second interview:

It's funny you know because we are seeing so much change happening in our profession. But the community just see it as this abstract 2-dimensional job, it's incredible the difference between perception and reality.

My accounts have suggested that teacher creative practice is not just about innovations, new strategies or teaching practices, but can involve navigating the often multiple constraints of practice within the context of subject English, in ways that enable the teaching, as well as the learning to take place in meaningful ways. Through the narrative-based accounts, Rosa and Sarah are attempting "to amend old descriptions or accommodate new [descriptions]" (Williams, 1961, p. 24) of their practice. By making visible teachers' creative practice through narrative-based critical accounts such as these, there are opportunities to engage in discussions as to how constraints are navigated, and how teaching and learning are made meaningful, as well as what 'meaningful' teaching and learning means in different contexts. In other words, this work connects subject English to not just the lives and experiences of students, but more specifically to how English teachers learn to know and navigate subject English beyond the curriculum.

In Chapter 6, I extend the understanding of teacher creative practice through exploring the social accomplishment of creativity within the context of subject English classrooms. The chapter explores how the participating teachers—Steve, Anne and Rebecca—negotiate with their students ways of 'saying' and 'doing' in subject English as the teachers negotiate the dialogic nature of the classroom to co-construct knowledge with their students.

CHAPTER 6 *Social creativity*

6.1 Introduction

In discussing teacher creative practice in Chapter 5, I focused on the teachers at Ridgemont Secondary College. The discussion centred on Sarah and Rosa as they negotiated the constraints and possibilities of their teaching context, namely how policy, curriculum, school expectations, and teacher subject knowledge mediated the ways that they worked. In this chapter, I deepen the understanding of teacher creative practice through exploring how teachers of subject English negotiate the dialogic nature of the English classroom to co-construct knowledge with their students. The co-construction of knowledge leads into an argument that creativity, commonly thought of as the attribute of individuals, should also be understood as a social accomplishment. In other words, this chapter will examine how the participating English teachers in a sense collaborate with their students to “construct these settings” (Glass, 2012, p. 711), and in so doing teachers and students together negotiate ways of ‘doing subject English’. As Garfinkel (1967) argues:

The social world is constantly in a state of becoming, where we are not set into definite roles and settings. Instead, reality is an accomplishment. We are constantly “doing” the social world ... through our everyday activities. (p. 698)

Part of “doing the social world”, as Garfinkel (1967) describes it, is the “struggle to remake ourselves ... so that we may live in a proper relation to our environment” (Williams, 1961, p. 26; see 3.2). The focus of this chapter, therefore, is “how participants [in the English classrooms] come together and interact, collectively constructing these social worlds” (Glass, 2012, p. 697, see also Kleinman & Fine, 1979; Martin, 2004; Muggleton, 2000), and subsequently ‘re-make’ themselves within these social worlds. The discussion shifts from a focus on the individual teacher within the larger mediating contexts such as a school or a school system to the teacher within the context of his/her classroom. This shift in focus allows me to explore the “interactional accomplishment, constructed out of everyday interactions that generated, altered and defended definitions” of the English classroom (Glass, 2012, p. 712). This perspective on teacher creativity contests those studies that assume creativity is an individual’s achievement or practice, and also that creativity can be taught as a separate skill, devoid of context. This extends my argument that it is the context of creativity or creative work that makes it meaningful. To do so, this chapter draws on socio-cultural understandings of creativity, such as I reviewed in Chapter 3.

I present three accounts of English teacher creativity in contrasting educational settings: (1) Steve, who teaches at an independent girls' school, Lowood Girls' College, in the northern suburbs of Melbourne; (2) Anne, who teaches at Rydell Secondary College, a government school in the south-east suburbs of Melbourne; and (3) Rebecca, who teaches at Ridgemont Secondary College a government school in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. These accounts provide an opportunity to explore creativity as both an individual trait and as an accomplishment of social interactions and relationships. This is evident in the classroom as 'social creativity' is apparent in each, especially when one specifically focuses on the work of subject English. There is diversity also in the levels and kinds of teaching experience of the three teachers: Steve is within his first five years of teaching in a secondary school; Anne has taught English in secondary schools for over 25 years, the majority of which was in the UK; and Rebecca has been teaching for over 15 years, and teaches English Language and literacy. This allows the study to inquire into creativity as a social accomplishment in a variety of settings and contexts.

6.2 Creative environments and social accomplishments

The environments where the classroom observations took place were easily identifiable as classrooms: white boards, tables and chairs, arranged in either rows, groups, or a U-shape, with a teacher desk at the front of the room, and occasionally some technology, such as a digital projector or television, also at the front. There was little about the classrooms to denote that they belonged to any particular class or subject. Generally, they were in various states of decline, and there was occasional evidence on the walls of work completed in English classes, and sometimes from classes from different subject areas. The most common visual display were posters proclaiming school values and/or 'good learning habits'.

Steve's classroom was a vast space on the second floor of the school building, with high windows. The posters in the room were from years past—they were peeling off the wall with tattered corners. The student desks were arranged mostly in groups at some distance from the front of the room. In Rebecca's classroom, sitting on the front wall, alongside the inspirational quotes from positive psychology speeches, was a reference to the school-wide literacy approach to remind students of what good readers and writers do, but in print so small it was hardly discernible. The classroom Anne taught in was painted hospital green, a relic from when it was built in the early 1920's. The high windows looked out to a car park, and there was a small office, mostly used for storage, at the back of the room. It was largely unremarkable, with the exception of the fireplace and the school legends of the secret

tunnels that lay behind it. (A student had remarked when I first visited the room, “Did you know, Miss, the fireplace is an entrance to secret tunnels under the school?”) The desks were in a U-shape with one student, isolated, sitting in the row of tables in the middle. Every inch of space was seemingly taken up by furniture, technology, students and Anne herself. Anne and her computer were squashed up the front against the white board and projector.

The physical environments of these classrooms did not suggest an explicitly creative space, at least not in the way that previous studies have suggested. For instance, Bancroft et al. (2008) recommend sparsely furnished rooms so that the space can be used flexibly, allowing students to move around. Another study suggests that spaces should be sensorially stimulating to influence how young people experience the space (Vecchi, 2010). Addison et al. (2010) advocate for visually stimulating classrooms with students’ creative work on display. Davies et al. (2013), in their systematic review of the literature exploring creative learning environments, further argue that creative environments are ones that are well resourced in terms of a range of materials that students can use to make things and respond in creative ways. Another study suggests that the use of outdoor spaces might be preferable as this encourages student ownership of the space, in contrast to indoor spaces, which are often controlled by the teacher (Dillon et al., 2007). While these studies focus on the ‘creative’ physical environment and the individual students’ creativity within that environment, Davies et al. (2013) also cite that it is perhaps the pedagogical environment, rather than the physical environment, that is one of the key aspects of a creative classroom.

For the most part, the classes of Steve, Anne and Rebecca that I observed were not engaged in “establish[ing], transform[ing], and manag[ing] space” (Glass, 2012, p. 711) in the physical sense. Despite the lack of physical markings that identified the rooms as specialist English spaces where Steve’s, Anne’s and Rebecca’s classes take place, it was within these spaces that these teachers and students accomplished the reality of subject English in this particular context with these particular people (Glass, 2012). What made them spaces for subject English was how the space was filled “with meanings” and the “management” of the space (Glass, 2012, p. 711). According to Glass, this is maintained through “various strategies, including informal humor, subtle manipulations of the space, and more formal systems of management” (Glass, 2012, p. 711). The narrative-based accounts below investigate “how participants come together and construct these settings” (p. 711). I begin with the discussion with an account of Steve’s classroom and how he and his students negotiate *how to be* in this English class, *how to do English*, and *how to generate meanings*

of English texts. I then move on to discuss Anne and Rebecca respectively, and how their classes negotiate their roles and the ways of making meaning in subject English.

6.3 Creativity as co-construction of meaning (Steve's Year 9 class)

Steve was an early career teacher, approaching the crucial 5-year mark where many teachers reportedly leave the profession¹¹ (AITSL, 2016). Steve has been at Lowood Girls' College since he started teaching, even completing his teacher professional experience there. Lowood, a denominational parish school, is known for its high achievements and strong engagement with parents and the community; the school actively promotes these achievements on social media. Steve was aware of the importance of teacher accountability; as with Ridgemont Secondary College, accountability imperatives centre around discourses of effective teaching, largely driven and supported by student achievement data. Steve was a blogger, writer, theatre critic and podcaster, and described himself as both "flamboyant" and "creative". He considered the teaching of creativity, or at least creative writing, as an important part of the subject English curriculum.

In Scene 6.1, which I have titled 'Places of Importance', I represent my observation of Steve's Year 9 English class. This, however, was not his regular class. The Year 9 English classes at Lowood were all scheduled at the same time. This structure therefore afforded teachers some flexibility in what, how, and whom they teach. In Term 3, the English teachers at this year level nominated a number of texts written by females from non-Caucasian backgrounds for students to select from. The classes were then formed based on student text preference, and each of the teachers selected a particular text to teach. Steve selected *The Pillow Book* by Sei Shonagon, a collection of *zuihitsu* (literary jottings) of lists, poetry, descriptive scenes and thoughts. In his class, Steve had students exploring the list poem before asking them to return to the haiku that they wrote in the previous class.

¹¹ According to AITSL (2016), up to 50% of teachers are leaving the profession in the first five years of their career. Weldon (2018), from the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), Australia argues that attrition rates are difficult to measure accurately, adding that teacher motivation for leaving should be taken into account. Rajendran et al. (2020), drawing on Paris's (2010) work agree that attrition rates are difficult to measure, however they estimate that "30 to 40% of teachers leave the profession within their first five years" (para 1). The motivation for leaving teaching is partially attributed to workload, emotional stress and demands of the job (Rajendran et al., 2020).

Scene 6.1 — Places of importance

Izzy, a student teacher, and I see Steve in the classroom, so we let ourselves in and occupy the table closest to the door. The students soon filter in, either ignoring us or oblivious to our presence. They arrange themselves at the grouped tables, in what I presume to be friendship groups indicated by the casual chatter. It's musical production week at Lowood and a number of students are at full day rehearsals so the class is smaller than usual. Steve is sitting at the front of the fairly expansive room; he begins the class by marking the roll.

Steve: Okay who's here?

Jacqui: Shonali's missing. She's at production.

(Other students begin shouting out names of other absent students.)

Steve: (Laughs) Not exactly what I asked, but thank you.

(Steve looks down his roll, and picks a name from the list.)

Right Jacqui, tell me about your favourite body of water ... river, lake, pond ...

Jacqui: (There is a brief pause in a silent room, while Jacqui is in thought.) Oh, that would have to be the beach we go to on family holidays.

Steve: What is special about the beach?

Jacqui: Nothing really, other than it's where we go every summer, with my cousins and grandparents. We've done it for ages.

Steve: Great, thanks. Ying, what about you? What's your favourite body of water?

(Ying is softly spoken, the other students listen intently.)

Ying: A watering hole near home in China, it has monsters in it.

(The class giggles, including Ying.)

We know there's not, but it's what everyone gets told.

Steve: Phoebe?

Phoebe: A river that my whole family goes camping at over Christmas. We spend the day swimming or floating down stream.

Steve: Where is it?

Phoebe: Up on the Murray, few hours from Melbourne.

Steve: Fei?

Fei: There's a pond near our home in China. It's hidden by willow trees and reeds, not many people know it's there. In the middle of the pond there are lily pads and lotus flowers and in spring it smells like jasmine. It's my favourite place to read or just sit in quiet and the water turns a blueish-pink colour at sunset. It doesn't matter what the weather, it is always beautiful.

(There is an audible collective sigh.)

Steve: Oh Fei, that sounds idyllic.

Jacqui: It sounds like the pond from *The Little Mermaid*.

Phoebe: Or any Disney movie, like ever.

Steve: (Once he has finished marking the roll) Right, what were some common themes in your responses?

Students: (All talking over each other) Family, nature, quiet time, relaxation, weather ...
(Steve scribbles the responses on the board.)

Steve: Turn to poem number 10 “Mountains” in *The Pillow Book*. Let’s read. Do you know this word, ‘askance’?

(The class is silent. Steve writes ‘askance’ on the board along with other key phrases and ideas. The students take notes during the discussion as they move on to poems 14 “River Pools”, 15 “Bodies of water” and 35 “Ponds”. See Appendix H.)

Steve: Why do you think Shonagon included these specific places?

Fei: They are important to her.

Steve: Why do you think that?

Fei: I think you can tell that by the descriptions.

Phoebe: Some of the names just sound cool. Do all names sound cool in Japanese?

Steve: Does everything make the list?

Ying: Only the things that are important, or sound important, that gives the list a rhythm.

Steve: Great, tell me more about that?

Ying: It’s why I think it’s poetic It’s not everything. It’s selective.

Steve: I’m going to hand back your Haikus; we’re going to turn them into Tankas.

(He briefly writes the structure of both poetic forms on the board. Jacqui and Phoebe hand out the poems, Steve, Izzy and myself also receive poems.)

But ... (he grins) ... this is a competition. Work in pairs. You will get someone else’s Haiku. You need to add two lines to form a Tanka, the two additional lines must convey the opposite idea to the Haiku. And then ... you need to perform it.

The competition will be in a series of rounds, two groups competing at a time. You’ll cheer for your favourite group. The group with the loudest cheer wins the round and moves on to compete in the next round, until there is one group left. You have five minutes to write.

(Students begin working on their Tanka in pairs. Once the competition begins some groups simply read their Tanka. Another group screams their poem;

several girls visibly recoil at the shock of such a loud performance. Steve uses some chairs as a prop, climbing all over them as he performs his seven lines, before he dramatically throws himself on the floor. The students laugh and applaud his performance. Once Fei and Ying finishing reading their poem there is another collective sigh from the class, and the class's applause votes their poem as the winner.)

Steve: (Screams in mock protest) That's unfair. Bias, you're all biased.

(The students laugh in response.)

6.3.1 Learning how to do subject English

In this scene, Steve and his class are actively participating in creating and maintaining their space for subject English through shared activity and meaning making (Glass, 2012; see also Doecke et al., 2021; Wells, 1999). The students as a class had not been together for very long—four weeks in total. After the class finished, I remarked to Steve how cohesive this group of students seemed to be after a relatively short, and reasonably disrupted, period of time. There was a willingness from all students to share, I noted, and the feedback and interactions between the students were generally positive. Steve remarked that he found marking the roll by asking students to respond to questions, something he often did, allowed the students to get to know each other, especially some of the quieter students, who “had brilliant ideas but may not be willing to speak up”. He further explained that “the more reflective students [can] be as creative if not more so” than the “flamboyant, sassy sort of kids”, but “there's just less of a performative aspect to their creativity”. Scene 6.1 demonstrates this appreciation of the ways the quieter students, such as Ying and Fei, are individually creative. Both Steve and their peers demonstrate their appreciation for Ying's and Fei's descriptions of their favourite bodies of water, as well as their Tanka. But it can be argued that these moments are intrinsic to, not separate from, the context of the class and how they are learning *to be* English students in this class and negotiating ways *to do* subject English.

To some extent, Steve's role in the classroom is established through his physical positioning at the front of the room, in front of the whiteboard, with all the students' desks pointed in his general direction. He orchestrates the movement between the different stages of the class—marking the roll, the analysis of the text, and the writing of the Tankas. Steve's interactions with the students indicate to them his expectations as to how questions should be answered, and what knowledge and language are appropriate. Throughout the brainstorming and

analysis discussions, Steve directs questions at the students as a collective: “What do you think the author means?”, “Do you know what this word means?” Occasionally he selects who he wants to respond. Steve captures some, but not all, of their answers on the board. He acts as gatekeeper of knowledge, deciding what is valued by deciding not just what activities the students will be doing, but also what knowledge is represented on the board, and whose responses are worth noting. The students are also active participants in negotiating what might be considered an acceptable response. For instance, the class remains quiet through most of the descriptions, with the exception of Ying’s playful response about ‘monsters’ in the watering hole and Fei’s ‘idyllic’ Disney-like description of “lily pads and lotus flowers” that “smells like jasmine”. The class’s collective giggle and sigh reinforce that both of these responses have value.

How Steve and the students interact are examples of the “interactional rules” (Glass, 2012, p. 712) of the classroom. These interactional rules “describe a relationship that sets up ‘shoulds’ or expectations for behaviour” (Moran, 2010, p. 75, see also Biddle, 1986). Throughout this scene, these rules or conventions are established through the interactions while reading the text. For instance, while analysing the poem Steve asks, “Does everything make the list?” Reflecting on this question, Ying responds, “Only the things that are important, or sound important, that gives the list a rhythm”. Steve’s further question, “Tell me more about that”, results in Ying developing her answer further and linking her response back to the form of the text, replying, “It’s why I think it’s poetic ... It’s not everything. It’s selective”. While, this dynamic of interaction (Biddle, 1986) that is continued throughout much of the class could be referred to as *Initiate, Respond and Evaluate* (IRE¹²) (Cazden, 1988; Freebody, 2003; Lyle, 2008; Mehan, 1979), these interactions are much more than the teacher-directed “convergent teaching practices” (Beghetto, 2010, p. 450) or “seat-work” (Wells, 2000, p. 51) often associated with IRE. Steve and his students are co-constructing an understanding of the poem through dialogue, building on the previous ideas and collectively shaping their interpretation. Steve is as responsive to his students’ answers, as they are to his questions. Yandell (2013b) refers to this as the practice of social reading and argues that this is not a substitute or preparation for the often more revered practice of solitary reading. Rather, he argues that a social reading practice “should be taken seriously in its own right” (p. 2). In fact, Yandell (2013b) states, “it is precisely the fact that the reading of the class novel is ... entangled with the social relations of the classroom that offers the most rewarding perspective on this practice” (p. 2). Through Steve’s line of questioning, Ying has established

¹² Lyle (2008) labels these interactions as an Initiate, Respond and Feedback cycle.

a reading of the poem and has provided justification for her interpretation, one that makes sense both within the context of the text and within the context of the class (Yandell, 2006).

6.3.2 Making meaning

In the scene above, the dialogic teaching strategy (Lyle, 2008; Yandell, 2006, 2013b) is not being used to develop a static understanding of the text. Rather, it is engaging students in constructing knowledge while also constructing ways of ‘doing’ subject English. Steve starts the class by initiating responses to a provocation, directly asking Jacqui to “Tell [him] about [her] favourite body of water ... river, lake, pond”. His response to Jacqui requesting more information—“What is special about the beach?”—and Jacqui’s answer qualifying her original response is what Sawyer (2004) describes as “collaborative discourse” (p. 15). Sawyer (2004) argues that:

Children learn from collaborative discourse because there are multiple perspectives, and this form of learning can only work if the group is improvisational, with no predetermined outcome and no preset script. (p. 15)

Steve is not seeking ‘correct’ answers to his question. He recognises that the knowledge “exist[s] primarily in the knower’s ability to interpret ... thus making possible a negotiation between his knowledge and his pupils’ knowledge” (Barnes, 1976, p. 147). Therefore, there are many possible responses. His clarifying question at the beginning of the class to Jacqui—“What is special about the beach?”—indicates to Jacqui, and the rest of the class, that she needs to supply more details in her response. As the dialogue progresses, Steve asks different clarifying questions, such as to Phoebe when he asks about the location of her significant body of water. In this instance, Steve’s teaching could be considered improvisational as “the flow of the class is unpredictable and emerges from the actions of all participants, both teachers and students” (Sawyer, 2004, p. 13). These interactions are not, however, accidental, as Sawyer (2004) argues, this type of “creative teaching is *disciplined* improvisation because it always occurs within broad structures and frameworks” (p. 13). Steve’s evaluation of the responses by asking questions, teasing out the details, or the significance of the bodies of water, indicates the ways he is expecting students to respond. It is perhaps because of Jacqui’s and Phoebe’s responses, that Fei’s response, one of the last in the class, includes all the details Steve is looking for: what the body of water is, where it is located and why it is significant.

The classroom that Steve and his students have constructed is dialogic and intensely social in nature. Just as the interactions Steve has with Jacqui and Phoebe have indicated ways of

responding to his questions, Steve's playfulness has also created the space for student playfulness. While most groups do not perform their Tanka other than reading it aloud, Ying's earlier 'monster' response demonstrates some of this playfulness, even though she cautiously qualifies her response with, "We know there's not, but it's what everyone gets told." As Sawyer (2010) explains:

An actor's intention for an utterance is not necessarily the eventual meaning of the utterance; ... the actors purposely generate utterances with ambiguous interpretations, knowing that the other actors will later attribute more specific meanings to them. Likewise, no single actor can decide the direction that the scene will take; decision making, if it can be said to exist at all, is a collective social process. (p. 373)

Steve and his students are engaged in meaning making, negotiating together their understandings of favourite bodies of water, the analysis of the poem, and how these two phases of the lesson relate to, or are in dialogue, with each other. Steve uses the students' personal responses to build an understanding of some of the themes that may be evident in the Shonagon poetry. He then uses these themes as a starting point for the analysis of text, balancing the fine line between students' making or creating meaning from a text, and producing readings that are valid (Yandell, 2006). Drawing together experiences both separate from and within a text to construct new interpretations of the text is what Yandell (2006) terms "meaning making", where reading and students' interpretations are contextually bound creative acts (see also Doecke et al., 2006; Doecke & McClenaghan, 2011; Illesca, 2014). Even the class writing an additional two lines to transform a peer's Haiku into a Tanka is representative of this understanding of reading as a creative act. The students need to interpret and respond to the initial poem by writing another two lines, and then their peers in the round-robin competition evaluate these responses.

This is not, however, how creative work is traditionally defined in subject English, such as those definitions that emerge from human capital conceptions of creativity (see 2.3). Traditionally the writing of the poetry would be considered creative because of the vast possibilities of ideas and writing forms—although in this case the poetic forms of Haiku and Tanka are highly structured. This interplay between structure and freedom found in the poem forms is reflected in Steve's pedagogy. As Dixon (1969) notes, "improvisation can thrive only within a framework that expresses, more or less articulately, an underlying pattern of development" (p. 91). Dixon's argument is also supported by Cremin and Chappell (2021), who argue the balance between structure and flexibility must include a learner-oriented classroom where relationships between teacher and students allow idea generation to flourish. Teacher everyday creativity, therefore, does not just encompass the improvisational nature of responding to students, but also includes working within the tension between

structure and flexibility to facilitate “learning as *co-construction*” (Sawyer, 2004, p. 14). It is within the structures of Steve’s class that Steve and his students are able to negotiate how to do subject English and co-construct meaning of the texts. Anne’s class, the focus of the next section, appears to be more highly structured than Steve’s classroom, and yet her pedagogical approaches are also dialogic and provide space for students to construct both meaning and the interactional rules of the classroom.

6.4 Negotiating the classroom (Anne’s Year 11 ‘Head Start’ class)

Anne had taught subject English for the majority of her career in England. At the time of the data generation for this study, she was teaching at a lower socio-economic status (SES) co-educational government school in the south east of Melbourne, Rydell Secondary College. She held the dual roles within the school of Head of Victorian Certificate of Education¹³ and acting Head of the English faculty. Rydell had previously been a relatively low socio-economic area, but in recent years had seen both its ICSEA (Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage) (ACARA, 2015) and student enrolments increase (ACARA, n.d.-j). The school was structured around open-plan, inter-disciplinary learning, with student-negotiated projects in the lower years (Years 7 to 9). Year 10 followed a pre-Victorian Certification of Education (VCE) model whereby the Year 10 courses were largely structured around similar areas of study set out for each of the VCE subjects in their respective study designs. Toward the end of Term 4, students in Year 10 and 11 participated in a transition program, known as ‘Head Start’, beginning the following year’s work before the end of the year. The structure of the school and the transition program, along with approaches drawn from Hattie’s (2009) *Visible Learning*, were just a few of the initiatives the school had implemented to help improve their student results in their final year (Year 12) exams.

Scene 6.2, “The monster lives”, represents one of Anne’s Year 11 to Year 12 transition classes conducted toward the end of the academic year. The class had only been together for three 75 minutes classes before the observation took place. After they had covered the structure of the Year 12 subject English course, they had started work on Area of Study One, ‘Reading and Creating Texts’ (VCAA, 2014b). For the summative assessment or SAC (School Assessed Coursework, to be completed the following year) students would be required to write a creative response to a set text, in this case Mary Shelley’s novel,

¹³ The Head of VCE varies from school to school, but at Rydell Secondary College it included responsibility for enrolments in the VCE, administration of results, monitoring student academic progress, as well as monitoring student behavior and wellbeing.

Frankenstein. The students were to write this task in the style of Mary Shelley. At the front of the classroom, Anne had projected a PowerPoint presentation with instructions for activities, a countdown timer, and some key quotes from the text. The first slide outlined the learning intentions and success criteria¹⁴ as a dot pointed list as follows:

- *To be able to write in the style of Mary Shelley and adopt the voice of Robert Walton*
- *To understand how Mary Shelley presents Victor Frankenstein's early life and evokes empathy in the reader*
- *I can express how Walton would feel this morning*
- *I can identify key events in Frankenstein's early life and deduce how these impacted him.*

Scene 6.2—“The monster lives”

Anne begins the class in the small, crammed room, with a quick review of the learning intentions and success criteria projected on the white board, before recommencing the study of *Frankenstein*. The students are given the writing task to express their thoughts—about the day ahead, the holidays, their homework, their final year of school, life beyond school—using Mary Shelley's style, specifically the voice of Robert Walton.

Billy: (Sitting at the front of the room, in a middle table by himself) Can I write a letter to my crush?

Anne: Sure.

Max and Bryce:

OOOOOHHHHH!

(The rest of the class snigger, Billy grins.)

Anne: I want you to hand-write this. You need to write with a pen occasionally. You have 10 minutes.

(The timer starts and the students settle in to working silently. A couple of students ask quiet questions and Anne responds, also quietly. Occasionally there are louder interjections.)

We will be reading these out loud.

Julian: Oh no!

Anne: I won't force you. Give it a go. Remember free flowing prose, lots of rhetorical questions.

¹⁴ Success criteria and learning intentions have been widely adopted in education as part of the Assessment for Learning strategies (Crichton & McDaid, 2016). Crichton and McDaid (2016) define learning intentions as what the “intended outcome of the lesson with regard to [student] learning” and success criteria as “examples of [student] expected performance as a result of the lesson” (p. 190).

Mark: How do you represent hours? ...

Bree: I can't do creative ...

(Mark and Bree's comments are to no-one in particular and no-one responds.)

Brenton: How much do you expect us to write?

Anne: 10 minutes, not long.

(There are four minutes remaining on the clock, most students are still writing, some referring to their books, others looking around the room. The timer runs to zero.)

Who wants to share?

(There is silence, Anne waits.)

Scott: Just a sentence, Miss: "Do they never tire, the horror on their faces."

Anne: Nice.

Billy: Who? Who's they? Who you talking about?

(Scott doesn't respond.)

Anne: What makes that sentence work?

Brenton: Exaggerated.

Bree: Fear.

Amy Pessimistic.

Bryce: Old fashioned.

Anne: How so?

(Silence. Amy eventually responds.)

Amy: Verb at the end, 'tire'.

Steph: Embedded clauses.

Anne: Good. Anyone else?

(There is a further pause before another student reads an excerpt of her writing.)

Amy: "Every second efficiently used ... prepare me to write with eloquence of someone born with the fervour of these skills"

Anne: (Grinning) Are you referring to 'Head Start'?

(Amy nods in acknowledgement and Anne flicks to the next PowerPoint slide. The new set of instructions indicate that students are continuing the work they started in the last lesson: writing timelines of events from Chapters 1-4, answering questions about Victor and Elizabeth, and making a family tree of

the characters.)

Remember you can work together.

(The students work through the different activities. As they do so, different students make comments and ask questions, again to no-one in particular.)

Max: This book is rubbish.

Anne: (Pointing to Scott's book) Heightens his death for later? What do you mean?

Brenton: Where does Frankenstein fit into the family tree? Who's William? Nephew? Uncle? Brother?

Max: What the ...?

Wik—i—ped—ia! Frank—en—stein! (Over emphasising the syllables as he types)

(Max leans over to his friend to look at the computer screen. He copies down some text.)

(Pointing to the screen) What does this mean?

Julian: (Shrugging his shoulders) I don't know.

Max: (Pointing to a new part of the screen) What does that mean?

Julian: (Shrugging his shoulders again) I don't know.

(Anne moves about the room answering questions, directing students to different parts of the text. Students are flicking back and forward through their books, writing notes in the margins and answering questions in their documents. Amy, Steph and Bree, are sitting on the side in front of the fireplace, and are working silently. Eventually, she calls upon the students to finish up their writing, and soon after this addresses the whole class.)

Anne: Right, let's finish off, with Robert Walton and his letters. What do we know about him?

Brenton: Nervous but excited for adventure.

Billy: British.

Anne: Good. You can add to what a person said or say something new. Remember everyone has a go.

Max: He wanted to be the first person to the North Pole.

Amy: Ambitious and idealistic.

Scott: Passion, he has passion.

Steph: Has no friends, he's lonely on the ship.

Bryce: Before he left, he hired crew members.

Bree: He wanted to not die alone.

Anne: Is that good? (No one responds.)

Julian: Even though he was lonely, he was intelligent.

(Some students notice the time, and begin to pack up, the rest of the class follows suit.)

Anne: Next lesson, Chapter 5—an in depth look at the language, the monster comes to life.

Billy: Spoilers!

6.4.1 Structure and flexibility

Anne's school has for quite some time emphasised 'visible learning' as a structure and framework for the classroom. Visible teaching and learning, according to Hattie (2009)

occurs when learning is the explicit goal, when it is appropriately challenging, when the teacher and the student both (in their various ways) seek to ascertain whether and to what degree the challenging goal is attained, when there is deliberate practice aimed at attaining mastery of the goal, when there is feedback given and sought, and when there are active, passionate, and engaging people ... participating in the act of learning. It is teachers seeing learning through the eyes of students, and students seeing teaching as the key to their ongoing learning. (p. 22)

Hattie (2009) argues that "visible" teaching is "critical" to learning, and teachers' roles should be as "directors of learning" (p. 25). While not quite as extreme as the scripted curricula used as a way of "teacher proofing" education (Sawyer, 2004, p. 12), Hattie's (2009) *Visible Learning* is often heralded as a prescription for improved teacher quality, teaching that increases student outcomes through the use of 'High Impact Teaching Strategies: Excellence in teaching and learning' (HITS) (DET, 2017). Widely encouraged by the Department of Education and Training (DET, 2017) in Victoria, the HITS represent a ranking of "hundreds of teaching strategies by the contribution they make to student learning" (DET, 2017, p. 5), as measured by effect size (see 5.2.1). Learning intentions and success criteria are considered key elements of several of the HITS, including setting goals, clear lesson structures, and explicit teaching (DET, 2017, p. 6). It is expected at Rydell Secondary College that each class begins by clearly making visible the learning intentions and success criteria. The structure of Anne's class aligns with the learning intentions and success criteria she has outlined on the whiteboard. The first part of the class is dedicated to writing in the style of Mary Shelley, before moving to the comprehension questions that help students identify the key events in Frankenstein's early life and how they would have impacted him. There are other strategies that Anne uses to make clear the expectations in the class. For instance, the timer on the PowerPoint determines how much time students have (10 minutes). She also

directs students to hand-write their responses, tells students that the responses will be shared, and gives students permission to work together. Anne ends the lesson with a preview of the following lesson.

Anne's contribution to the classroom extends beyond the use of Hattie's (2012) *Visible Learning* strategies, and the clear structure she establishes at the start of the class. It is also established through her structured approach to working with the text *Frankenstein*. Much of the work Anne does within the class could fit neatly into the skills model of subject English (see 3.3.2.1), in the sense that students are focusing on comprehending texts, using the text as a model for their own writing, and focusing on the language conventions of the text (Macken-Horarik, 2014; see also Derewianka, 2015). The comprehension questions, such as Brenton's questions, "Where does Frankenstein fit into the family tree? Who's William? Nephew? Uncle? Brother?", are also indicative of a skills model. The comprehension work Anne is doing with the students during this class is based on an understanding of *Frankenstein* that can be found within the text—or in Max's case Wikipedia—that could be associated with a cultural heritage approach to literature (see 3.3.2.2). Anne is also clearly building the students' towards an understanding of the text—methodically working through chapters in sequential order—that allows for personal interpretation and expression that will be the basis for writing longer pieces of prose for the creative writing task based on the text (writing in the style/voice of Walton).

However, the work in Anne's class is more than just developing skills. Students are also drawing from their own "interests and lifeworlds" (Macken-Horarik, 2014, p. 11), engaging in "active reproduction" (Williams, 1977, p. 209) of characters. This requires making sense of Mary Shelley's language, and practising using that language in ways that are indicative of what Dixon (1969) refers to as the 'growth paradigm' of subject English (see 3.3.2.3). That is, there are opportunities for students to interpret the text and make it meaningful to them (see also Dutton & Manuel, 2019). In analysing teacher practices and pedagogies, Hayes et al. (2017) note that the common feature between teacher practices that stood out as either different or unconventional was:

how these teachers related to knowledge and how they worked with knowledge—both the knowledge that students brought into the room and the knowledge they anticipated that they would take out of the room—was more interesting, challenging and engaging than what we observed in the classrooms of their colleagues. (p. 116)

Anne has students combine both their out of class and in classroom knowledge to write pastiche responses. These student pastiche responses draw on personal experiences, such as Amy's feelings about her stress and overwhelm of 'Head Start' that is easily recognised by

Anne. Anne selects some responses, such as Scott's "Do they never tire, the horror on their faces" as the basis for the class practicing analysing and exploring the ways language works in the text. While this part of the class is about developing writing skills, the students' knowledge of language is being co-constructed. Anne sometimes evaluates the students' responses, to help build their understanding of language, such as analysing Scott's response by identifying the feelings the sentence evokes. Anne also asks the class to qualify Bryce's contribution—that the sentence is "Old fashioned"—and Amy and Steph respond, "the verb at the end, 'tire'" and "embedded clauses", respectively. Sawyer (2004) refers to the discourse that is occurring in Anne's classroom (as well as Steve's classroom; see Scene 6.1) as "collaborative emergence" (p. 13). Sawyer (2004) explains that:

Classroom discussion ... [is] emergent because the outcome cannot be predicted in advance, and [it is] *collaborative* because no single participant can control what emerges: the outcome is collectively determined by all participants. (p. 13)

The collaborative emergent nature of the discussion, and therefore co-construction of knowledge, does not occur in one instance within the class, but is built throughout the class (and presumably the other classes). It is, however, clearly evident at the end of class when Anne asks students to share what they know about Walton, by "add[ing] to what a person said or say[ing] something new". For instance, Steph's, Bryce's, Bree's and Julian's responses all elaborate on the theme of Walton's loneliness.

There is both structure and flexibility in the kind of dialectic tension that Anne and the students co-orchestrate. It is a tension that is negotiated within the classroom between "stability and novelty, between predictability and unpredictability" (Prentice & Kramer, 2006, p. 351). The structure of Anne's classroom is reflective of the constraints of the curriculum, and the purpose of the transition classes, as well as the length of the classes and the needs of the students that inhibit the space. But it is these constraints that provide opportunities for 'creative' work, not just in the students' creative responses to *Frankenstein* or the construction of knowledge, but also in the interactions between Anne and the students. Sawyer (2004) labels this as improvisational teaching, namely teaching that

emphasizes the interactional and responsive creativity of a teacher working together with a unique group of students. In particular, effective classroom discussion is improvisational, because the flow of the class is unpredictable and emerges from the actions of all participants, both teachers and students. (pp. 12-13)

It is, however, the "broad structures and frameworks" (Sawyer, 2004, p. 13) that provide the space for this improvisational teaching—as one aspect of everyday teacher creative practice—to occur. Anne comments on these structures and frameworks, such as curriculum documents, during our first interview prior to my observing her class. On the one hand, she

said, she finds them limiting, directing classes' focus to particular skills or ways of approaching texts, but on the other hand these same structures and frameworks enable her to find moments in her planning that "allow students to be creative", where they can "put their own spin, slant, or interpretation on things". This curriculum work "carries constraints and affordances that always allow creative improvisation in their application" (Wertsch, 1998, as cited in Sawyer, 2004, p. 17). Therefore, despite the appearance of a tightly structured classroom, Anne, much like her engagement in planning and negotiating the limitations and possibilities of the curriculum, has provided students a framework whereby they can also navigate the constraints and affordances of the text and the classroom. The classroom, however, is not just limited to the written work students undertake, but also to the roles and identities they negotiate within this space as they 'do' subject English. This is the focus of the following section.

6.4.2 Negotiating roles

I have discussed in the analysis above how each person in Anne's classroom, the teacher and the students, play a role in constructing meaning. Both teacher and students also negotiate the ways that the class experiences or *does* subject English. These classroom interactions are not just about creating knowledge, but also about how individuals create and negotiate identities, and therefore roles, for both themselves and others within the context of this English classroom. Gee (2011) argues that "We use language to get recognized as engaging in a certain sort of practice or activity" (p. 29) and in order

to get recognized as taking on a certain identity or role ... we often enact our identities by speaking or writing in such a way as to attribute a certain identity to others, an identity that we explicitly or implicitly compare or contrast to our own. We build identities for others as a way to build ones for ourselves. (p. 29)

There are several times throughout Scene 6.2 where students make comments, seemingly to no one in particular. When Anne notes that the students will be sharing their writing, Julian responds with trepidation, exclaiming, "Oh no!", implying that he will not be sharing his work. Anne proceeds to clarify for the whole class that sharing work will be optional. Bree's declaration that she "can't do creative", even though she sets about doing the work anyway, sets an expectation for herself and the class that this isn't her area of expertise. Cohen (2010) describes these interactions as "identity bids" similar to bids in a card game, such that:

We put out identity bids through particular forms of social interaction. The ways in which these bids are recognized by other relevant players influence both the determination of the game being played and the stakes of the game. (p. 475)

Throughout the comprehension-based activities Max, who indicates his dislike for the text, declaring “this book is rubbish”, searches “Wik—i—ped—ia! Frank—en—stein!” for help with making meaning in his work. Max’s next ‘bid’ is an attempt to engage Julian in help; Julian declines the game by responding, “I don’t know”. After a couple of failed attempts, Max returns to figuring the work out by himself. Julian doesn’t explicitly state he is unwilling to help, but rather these negotiations are “done implicitly” (Cohen, 2010, p. 475) through different social interactions.

Within the space of this English classroom, Anne and the students are negotiating the rules or practices for these interactions (Gee, 2011). These interactions are clearly language-based, but they also “include other ‘stuff’ that isn’t language” such as “ways of thinking, acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, and believing” (Gee, 2011, p. 39). Amy, Steph and Bree, through their lack of social interaction and concentration on their work during the activities, establish themselves as hard workers, their responses to the questions demonstrating that they are thinking about the work in ways that might be expected in the English classroom, while Billy, who is vocal throughout, is largely ignored by both Anne and the other students. Anne responds to his first playful comment confirming that a “letter to [his] crush” would be appropriate, and aside from Max and Bryce’s response of “OOOOHHHHH!” at the mention of Billy’s crush, for the rest of the class Billy’s comments, including his question about ‘who’ Scott is referring to, are left unacknowledged. Billy’s comments might be recognisable as something playful and therefore may be considered characteristic of a creative student (Banaji, 2010; Cremin & Chappell, 2021), although his isolation in the middle of the horseshoe may also indicate that Billy’s playfulness is construed as disruptive behavior, or at the least the potential for disruptive behavior. The disruptive or subversive nature of creativity is one of the reasons offered as to why education (or educators) have an uncomfortable relationship with creativity; such a critique of the school system argues that it prefers conformity and control to the unpredictability of creativity (Smith & Smith, 2010). Baker-Sennet and Matusov (1997) argue that typically in a classroom, comments and behaviour such as Billy’s, are “thwarted by educators through pointed stares or direct reprimands” (p. 201). The rules of interaction in this instance are established not by Anne reacting, but by Anne and the rest of the class largely ignoring Billy. Therefore, the rules of interaction or practices do not just establish the ways of “saying and doing” subject English, but also the ways of “being” (Gee, 2011, p. 15) in the classroom space. As Cremin and Chappell (2021)

argue, co-construction of knowledge is not just “active co-development between teachers and learners of curricula or tasks” but also “reinforce[s] learners’ social identities” (p. 317).

Williams (1961) presents the notion of the individual as an autonomous-self, conscious of:

self-scrutiny and self-direction. This ‘autonomous’ self grows within a social process which radically influences it, but the degree of gained autonomy makes possible the observed next stage, in which the individual can help to change or modify the social process that has influenced and is influencing him. (p. 83)

The class are collectively negotiating, establishing and re-establishing the norms of the classroom—what language and knowledge are valued, how students interact and negotiate knowledge and understanding together, what behaviour is appropriate. The rules of interaction within the classroom do not therefore just apply to the students, but to the teacher and to teacher practice as well. Teacher identity and practice therefore both constructs and is constructed by the social interactions of the classroom. To further explore this, I would now like to move the discussion from classroom spaces isolated from the wider context, to an account of Rebecca’s English Language classroom where the “ways of saying, doing and being” (Gee, 2011, p. 15) are also mediated by school leadership and some changes to the rules of interaction within the classroom space. In my conversations with Rebecca beyond her classroom, she showed that she was acutely aware of the wider context in which her classroom sits, and how this wider context mediates her practice, her pedagogy, as well as the interactional rules of her classroom (see Breen et al., 2018).

6.5 Struggling with tensions in teacher practice (Rebecca’s Year 12 English Language class)

Rebecca was an experienced teacher of VCE English language¹⁵ and literacy support. I was visiting her classroom just 18 months after she had returned from maternity leave, and she gave every impression that she was working to re-establish herself in the school after this time out of the classroom. In our first interview, she told me she was feeling somewhat despondent about coming back to teaching after her leave. The school, under the previous principal, had begun increasing the emphasis on accountability and data. In addition, this time away from the school meant that she no longer had a reputation amongst the students; she was perceived as a new teacher, despite her experience. Rebecca had also, to a degree and by her own admission, moderated the passion and enthusiasm she brought to her

¹⁵ English Language is one of the senior English subjects students can elect to take that focuses on theories of language acquisition and linguistics.

teaching, but not her care for teaching (although under the new pressure, even that was waning, she confided). Her more moderate approach was due to new priorities—her family and a new business—outside of school and the desire to establish a better life/work balance.

Rebecca had invited me to observe her Year 12 English Language class, explaining that:

My 12s will probably be a bit more interesting ... they have [had] that many people walk through the doors this year that another person's not going to be an issue.

Unlike Steve's and Anne's classes who had only been together for a short amount of time, Rebecca's English Language class had been together for 18 months. Rebecca had taught the same students in Year 11 English Language in the year prior. The scheduled class, which is the basis of Scene 6.3, took place during the last lesson on a Friday afternoon. I have presented a segment from this observation, during which the students were engaged in a linguistic analysis of song lyrics in order to discuss how form affects language choices, focusing on phonological patterning, syntax and semantics. The students completed the analysis in small friendship groups, drawing on a handout of meta-language that Rebecca referred to as a "ready reference".

Scene 6.3—"An ellipsis by any other name ..."

By the time Rebecca and I arrive at class, the majority of the students are already seated. The classroom is long and the tables are arranged in a horseshoe, as close to the walls as possible. There is an empty space in the middle that Rebecca teaches from. Students occupy only two sides of the horseshoe, the side closest to the door, which has no spare seats, and along the back row. There are several seats along the back of the horseshoe that separate a couple of the students, Drew and James, from the rest of the class. As students are becoming quiet, Rebecca calls out.

Rebecca: Sally's still away?

Blake: Yep, I like your shoes miss.

Rebecca: (Rebecca grins and moves her feet around showing off her silver-vegan lace-ups as she walks to the middle of the horseshoe.) Thanks, they're vegan.

You know that the English Language curriculum is quite fluid, so I thought we'd spend some time going back through some analysis of text, specifically focusing on the phonological patterning, syntax and semantics. I have some song lyrics for you to analyse.

(She hands around the lyrics, Angus and Julia Stone's *Hollywood* and Josh Pyke's *The Summer*. See Appendices I and J.)

You need to spend five minutes on each.

Wendy: I don't know these.

Blake: I know the names.

(Rebecca sets the timer on her I-Pad, flipped so the students can see the countdown. The students settle into their analysis, including Drew and James who have been having their own conversation throughout the lesson thus far.)

Zach: Is the “cos” in line 5 of “Hollywood” an elision or ellipsis?

Drew: An ellipsis!?! (Both Drew and James laugh). It’s an elision.

(Rebecca, who is roaming around the empty space in the middle of the horseshoe, speaking to the different small groups, stops and responds.)

Rebecca: It is an elision, but remember sometimes words and phrases might have more than one function, depending on the context.

(The students continue to work, annotating their handouts and clarifying their understanding mostly with their peers in their immediate surrounds, sometimes waving Rebecca over to confirm their analyses.)

Okay, time’s up! What did you notice in *Hollywood*?

Blake: There are inferences to Disney throughout, line 13, 19, Cinderella.

Wendy: And line 15.

Rebecca: Okay, what’s the reference to Johnny and June in ‘Hollywood’ that’s repeated?

(No response from the class.)

Johnny Cash? The ‘original’ bad boy?

(The students respond by annotating in their workbooks this part of the lyrics and then continuing to offer other examples of analysis.)

How does form affect the language?

Zach: It’s quite poetic but you can’t put your finger on where?

Rebecca: That’s interesting. Can you tell me more?

Zach: Not sure.

(No-one else responds.)

(The class draws to a close with Rebecca reminding the class again about the preparation for their expository response. Drew and James exit the room just before the bell.)

James: (Yelling as he disappears into the corridor) Thanks Miss.

Blake: (Before leaving the room) Have a nice weekend, Miss.

Rebecca: (As we are leaving the room, directed to me.) Was that okay? It wasn’t very creative. If you need to come to another class, let me know.

6.5.1 Struggling with identities and spaces

The interviews and observation took place at a particularly precarious moment in the school year for Rebecca. At the end of Term 1, she had been called into the Assistant Principal's office to meet with both the Assistant Principal and the Head of Senior School. During the meeting she was informed that several anonymous students had provided a list of issues they had with Rebecca's teaching. They also provided Rebecca with the list and asked her to address it, justifying her teaching practices. Drawing from Connelly and Clandinin's (1995) work, Apostolos-Thermos (2014) explains how:

The landscape outside the classroom is described ... as one that tries to dominate what goes on in the classroom. The knowledge that features in this landscape is not open to debate, and takes the form of policy and curriculum that are simply handed down from above. (p. 190)

This was certainly the case when Rebecca was asked to explain and justify teaching practices. But it was not just the "landscape outside the classroom" that Rebecca was contending with. At the time, Rebecca had identified at least two of the students as Drew and James (sometime after the complaint James had approached Rebecca and apologised to her) and when I interviewed her, she was still highly conscious of the dynamic of her Year 12 classroom, commenting on the difficulties of the class in various conversations with me. In one interview, she noted:

There's something that I've missed with my 12's, because they are a bit of a strange bunch. And there is a weird vibe in class, like there's just something a bit off about them.

The work the students are doing in the scene is familiar—it is skills-based work, analysing parts of language, leading to some discussion of the form and purpose of the song lyrics. There is something familiar in the relational work of interactions between Rebecca and her students; Rebecca asks who is missing, discusses her shoes with Blake, engages with the students to answer questions while they work, and facilitates the whole group discussion.

Yet there is palpable friction in the class. This is evident when contrasting the way the students work in their small groups compared with the discussion as a whole class. Drew's and James' mocking of Zach's question—"Is the "cos" in line 5 of "Hollywood" an elision or ellipsis?"—is perhaps evidence of this, or at the very least evidence that Rebecca's classroom has not established the strong sense of community that she is used to.

Throughout both of Rebecca's interviews she talks about needing to find ways to navigate the relationships, prompting her to think "a bit more broadly about how to do things in the classroom differently". Part of this rethink for the classroom was to consider in her planning how to work with the classroom dynamic. Introducing more small group work was part of a deliberate strategy to reposition herself in the classroom. Rebecca explained:

He [Drew] can only have the voice in that one [small] group. And the other students then get to have more of a say, which is so important. But it's dis-empowering him on one level, and empowering other students to speak up and feel like they can speak and be heard.

And this strategy, given the flow of discussion in the small group work, seemed to be working in terms of giving opportunities for multiple voices in the class that I observed. Rebecca's emphasis on the other students having an opportunity to "have more of a say" and "empowering other students to speak up" indicates the value she places on creating a collaborative classroom.

During the observation it was possible to see how the small group strategy was working to redistribute the power in the class and to enable students to work together to co-construct knowledge. But this pedagogical strategy had not resolved the tension for Rebecca. Ellis (2007) notes that what constitutes subject knowledge happens within a dynamic and complex social system, and therefore:

The conditions for knowledge and the grounds for its verification exist within the particular social system, but the system itself—and the conditions and rules for evaluation—changes over time and across contexts. (p. 456).

While the subject content knowledge of the English Language had not particularly changed in the time that Rebecca was on maternity leave, the context in which she was teaching had. Lingard (2011) argues that education policy has moved to "policy of/as numbers" (as education moves to a governance model with strong accountability measures (see also Ozga, 2009). Given Ridgemont Secondary College's emphasis on data (see 5.2)—such as effect sizes (Hattie, 2009), Guttman Charts (DET, 2017), and reporting of student outcomes on *My School* website (ACARA, n.d.-j)—Rebecca's struggle was not just about Drew's behaviour. The struggle was about a combination of experiences that were challenging how Rebecca saw herself as a teacher and the work of subject English that she saw as important.

Rebecca's experience at the end of Term 1, and the anonymous letter listing all the perceived problems with Rebecca's teaching, was something that she was still coming to terms with. It was especially shaping her teaching:

It's interesting because we talk about giving students voice and negotiate in the classroom with them. But ultimately, it's kind of a, well it is a dictatorship in the end for a whole range of reasons. Legal reasons. But I think the students ended up being the dictator and that was the issue. The issue is that the other students did not feel safe with their opinions because he [one of the students] is so strong in his. And, I did not know what to do with that. So it really stifled me actually and I suppose going back to the idea of creativity ... I felt like I can't do anything with this class now ... Anything I say is going to be construed or judged and I just have to wear that now, because it's not worth it for the rest of them.

Rebecca's account of her class highlights more than her struggle to manage one student's behaviour, it also highlights her struggle to create a community within her classroom. Cremin and Chappell (2021) refer to the sense of community that Rebecca has attempted to build as the "social identity", that is the "community of practice characterised by students and teachers relating as peers" (pp. 317-318). This social identity, Cremin and Chappell (2021) argue, is essential in "the co-construction element of creative pedagogies because identifying with the co-constructed activities [as it] affords a sense of belonging" (p. 317). Without a strong sense of belonging in her classroom, Rebecca struggles to maintain her professional sense of self—her professional identity and agency. Rebecca knows her content, and has a strong sense of why English Language is important and the connections this is making to the world outside the classroom. She is comfortable, and freely admits to the students and to me, that the subject is "quite fluid". This approach affords her opportunities to deviate to include discussions of current events, such as the Manchester bombing. This is partly because, as Rebecca explains, "if we don't talk about them [current world events and issues] in English, class, where do they talk about it, apart from Googling it?", and partly because these deviations are real-world illustrations of the English Language curriculum. But the need to prepare students for the Year 12 exams, and do so in particular ways, is one of the drivers of Rebecca's teaching style that the students had deemed 'inappropriate' according to the students who submitted the complaint, who, according to Rebecca, were wanting classwork and feedback that were focused on the end of year exam, that was still approximately seven months away. Her class perhaps is not "a dictatorship", but one where the negotiation of how Rebecca sees herself as teacher and therefore her pedagogical approach to the classroom is always being negotiated, mediated by how others (the students and the school leadership) perceive her as a teacher and her teaching practices.

Although the depiction of the culture of Rebecca's classroom might be considered fraught, especially in comparison to Steve's and Anne's, the classroom space was still one that was socially constructed, where "members connect with each other, and ... generate new identities, spaces and forms of ... culture" (Glass, 2012, p. 698). But the scene from Rebecca's classroom, as well as the accompanying narratives shared throughout the interviews, contests the assumption that social accomplishment is always positive. Rebecca's account acknowledges the wider education environment where students, and parents, are increasingly positioned as customers and teachers as providing a professional service (Poole, 2017). Rebecca's whole class, not just a teacher and a student (Rebecca and Drew), have negotiated their roles, their ways of doing and their ways of being within the context of this space that Rebecca describes as "a bit off". The 'dysfunction' of the space of

Rebecca's classroom is a dimension of social accomplishment although quite different from the social accomplishment of Steve's and Anne's classrooms. From Rebecca's accounts, and in the friction in the classroom, that the class is still attempting to establish practices that are built on students and teacher relating as peers. These classroom accounts recognise that the negotiation within the classroom is not separate from the school or the wider discourses of education beyond the school, such as those found in a marketised education environment (Spies-Butcher, 2014).

6.6 Social accomplishment of the classroom

There are a number of assumptions associated with creativity, but the discussion throughout this chapter has raised questions about the assumption in some literature that a creative environment is extraordinary or special (Davies et al., 2013). The discussion and analysis show that the everyday environment of creative classrooms should be seen as spaces that are socially constructed (Glass, 2012), not as the creative act of an individual but through the social interactions of the classroom. In Steve's and Anne's classes, these social interactions are integral to the dialogic practices that help the class to co-construct knowledge and ways of 'being' in subject English. The teachers and students negotiate responses to texts and draw upon their knowledge outside of the classroom to make sense of what they are reading (Yandell, 2006). Rebecca's class might be perceived as less successful, an example where the accomplishment of the space is diminished. However, from the scene 6.3, there is evidence that Rebecca is still attempting to find ways to co-constructing knowledge of texts with her students within the classroom. Rebecca's attempts to find a way through the struggles she is experiencing in the class are compounded by, but are also in spite of, her feeling accountable to students' and colleagues' perceptions of her teaching practice—especially those practices linked to high-stakes examinations—and the less cohesive nature of the classroom. Rebecca's account demonstrates that “within real pressures and limits, such [creative teaching] practice is always difficult and often uneven” (Williams, 1977, p. 212). Her accounts also demonstrates that social accomplishment is shaped, or obstructed, by other factors—such as an emphasis on student achievement, high-stakes assessment and a marketised education system (Spies-Butcher, 2014)—some of which exist beyond the boundaries of the classroom.

The classroom space is then more than the descriptions offered in 6.2. These spaces signify ways of being in subject English, spaces that are also mediated by the relationships, the time

and the nature of the work. These spaces are also not separate or special to the everyday, and yet they are sites of rich everyday creative practices as students and teachers construct knowledge and negotiate identities, as well as ways of “saying and doing” (Gee, 2011, p. 151) subject English. But these spaces, as Rebecca’s narrative shows, do not happen in a vacuum; they are also mediated by the world outside the classroom such as the school leadership and priorities. As Curwood (2014) argues:

The individual and the social environment are inextricably linked and continually shape one another.

In terms of education, this implies that ongoing experiences, both inside and outside the classroom, constantly influence teacher identity. (p. 158)

For Steve and Anne the outside influences are less evident than those mediating Rebecca’s teacher practice. This does not mean, however, that Steve’s and Anne’s classes are static, but rather they are “something that is created each day, as people come together to talk with one another, share their experiences, and generally learn how to get on” (Doecke et al., 2014, p. 13). The social accomplishment of the classroom is therefore not just how an individual develops creativity—as in human capital understandings of creativity (see Chapter 2)—or how the class co-construct knowledge and negotiate roles, but also how these interactions inform and are informed by the spaces and contexts in which they happen.

In Chapter 7, I explore in more detail how the discourses of the wider educational landscape mediate teacher creative practice. The chapter explores how standards-based reforms, using a high-stakes writing assessment, shape teachers’ understandings of writing and student achievement. In doing so, it considers how teachers draw on their professional knowledge to work through and beyond the tensions between their classroom and high-stakes assessment practices, and in some instances, find ways to ‘speak back’ to the standards-based reforms.

CHAPTER 7 Creativity, standards-based reforms and subject English

7.1 Introduction

I have discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 how standards-based reforms such as embodied in school strategic plans, teacher accountability measures and the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APSTs) (AITSL, 2017), mediate teachers' practice, both in terms of their planning for teaching and their actual work within classrooms. Given that assessment practices are a key aspect of English teachers' planning and work, standards-based reforms can be seen also to shape English teachers' assessment practices. This chapter focuses on the complex relationship between creativity and subject English through the lens of standards-based reforms and assessment. In doing so, it explores how the participating teachers negotiate these tensions: between the dialogic classroom practices discussed in earlier chapters and a range of practices mediated by high-stakes assessments.

One analytical approach I take in this chapter is to critically investigate how high-stakes assessment mediates teacher practices and shapes understandings about subject English, specifically in relationship to student writing. To do this, in the first section of the chapter, I explore the responses of two English teachers, Steve and Anne (introduced in Chapter 6), to a provocation used during the semi-structured interviews. The provocation was introduced during the second interview, after I had observed their classroom teaching, at an opportune point in the discussion; this was about the time that Steve and Anne began discussing the ways students' approaches to tasks were either vastly different or limited. I choose to report on these participants' responses because of their diverse teaching experiences, diverse contexts and the fact that their responses are generally representative of the different comments made by many of the participants to the provocations. The responses indicate the similar ways in which high-stakes assessment and standards-based reforms have in shape participants' views of subject knowledge.

The second section of the chapter draws predominantly from Laura's response. Laura is an academic and is teaching literature and writing in a supplementary education setting, Brightside Education. Her response to the provocation is far more focused on the function of student creative writing, than Steve's or Anne's, who both focus on the structure and formal

features of student writing. I provide a detailed exploration of Laura's account and how her professional experiences have provided opportunities for a range of creative practices. To support the discussion of Laura's account, I also draw on excerpts from interviews with Catherine, the Head of English faculty at Lowood Girls' College. I draw on Catherine's interviews to make comparisons between the different teaching contexts and how these contexts shape teachers' assessment practices.

7.2 High-stakes assessment and the shaping of English teachers' understanding of creativity

Throughout this section, I discuss the influence standards-based reforms have on Steve's and Anne's professional subject knowledge, and subsequently how these standards-based reforms shape their sense of the subject itself. In order to do this, I focus predominantly on NAPLAN and how the writing tasks in these tests shape English teachers' understanding of successful writing. In discussing the prolific nature of standards-based reform, Comber (2011) notes:

Now more than ever in Australia, we are witnessing the federal government's insistence on measuring the individual in terms of traditional print literacies as tested in NAPLAN as a form of public accountability ... [E]ducators have long voiced concerns about the impact of high-stakes testing and its potential dangers—narrowing the curriculum, curtailing teachers' discretionary judgement. (p. 9)

The narrowing of the curriculum is a concern that has been noted by others (Madaus & Russell, 2010/2011; Sellar & Lingard, 2013) who also consider high-stakes assessment to be a monologic 'text' that is "not open to questions or alternative perspectives ... resist[ing] dialogue" (Wells, 1999, p. 169). There is then a tension between the potentially dialogic practices of classroom English teaching (as conceptualised and illustrated in Chapter 6) and the monologic discourses of standards-based reforms that "narrow the curriculum, curtailing teachers' discretionary judgement" (Comber, 2011, p. 9).

An example of such monologic discourse is the narrowing of teacher assessment practices, where a teacher's ability to make consistent judgements when assessing against curriculum and standards frameworks is considered paramount, largely driven by arguments of objectivity and the perception that standardised assessment practices are essential for quality assessment (Lucas et al., 2013; Meiers et al., 2007; Meissel et al., 2017). This drive for standardised assessment practices is a hallmark of many contemporary assessment regimes—for instance: PISA 'creative problem solving' assessment (de Bortoli & Macaskill,

2014; see 2.4.2), and writing assessments such as those found in the NAPLAN, the annual national testing regime in Australia for students in Grades 3, 5, 7, and 9, discussed in Chapter 3 (see 3.2, also Rosenkvist, 2010). High-stakes assessments such as these have a strong focus on tangible outcomes—products and artefacts—and the ability to evaluate these in ways that are more easily measurable. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) characterises this position as: “we believe that things that can be measured are real, and we ignore those that we don’t know how to measure” (p. 40). Therefore, within a context of schooling and assessment, teacher judgements are based on tangible and quantifiable or evidence-based outcomes; and as a result, assessment tools, such as rubrics and benchmarking, are used as a way of operationalising teacher assessment practices (Popp et al., 2003; Wollenschläger et al., 2016). Kohn (2006) critiques the use of rubrics, arguing that their use in assessing writing involves two common scenarios: either the pedagogy (teaching of writing) and the assessment (the rubric) do not match, or the pedagogy becomes reductive in order to match the rubric. Locke (2015) sees these tensions between writing practice and writing assessment as an inevitability given the duality in assessment purposes. On the one hand, assessment must address the needs of external stakeholders, and on the other it must also address the intrinsic motivations of the teacher to know where different students are at in their learning. This is further complicated by the fact that creativity “is notably instigated and characterized by the rather fundamental novelty of what results from creative processes” (Lenk, 2009, p. 74). Therefore, the ability of teachers to make consistent judgements based on what is ‘novel’ or creative, is often questioned (Smith & Smith, 2010). This further exacerbates the tension between high-stakes assessment practices and classroom practices in subject English, such as the teaching and assessment of creative writing¹⁶.

In order to explore the lived experience of teachers negotiating tensions between high-stakes assessment and classroom teaching practice I begin by focusing on the experiences of two English teacher participants, Steve and Anne. In particular, I examine their responses during one-to-one interviews to a provocation I gave to them in the form of a sample piece of writing by Peter, an 11 year-old English student in the first year of high school. After reading Peter’s

¹⁶ Creative writing is commonly referred to as imaginative writing in the *Australian* and *Victorian Curriculum* (ACARA & VCAA respectively) and NAPLAN (ACARA) documents. Gannon (2011) notes that in early iterations of the *Australian curriculum: English* that “student creativity ... seems to be limited to selection from a repertoire of pre-existing models and language devices” (p. 191) and this consistent with Frawley’s (2014) findings that teachers of subject English tend to equate creative writing with particular forms of writing.

work, I asked Steve and Anne to comment on how they would respond if a student had submitted the piece of writing as a NAPLAN persuasive response. The writing, referred to below as “Mr Henton”, was written during one of my own Year 7 English classes at Ridgemont Secondary College some 12 years ago. At that time, the class was preparing for the NAPLAN test by completing practice writing tasks under NAPLAN-like conditions. As part of NAPLAN, students are required to respond to a writing prompt within 30 minutes in a designated style, usually either a narrative—sometimes colloquially referred to as ‘creative’ due to the assumption that there are endless possibilities (Frawley, 2014)—or a persuasive style. Prior to the official NAPLAN assessment, students in my classes would typically complete at least one practice test, in order to familiarise themselves with the requirements of the writing task. In this particular year, our Year 7 teaching team had decided that students should write a persuasive task, responding to the prompt “Dreams do come true?”. Peter’s response (Appendix G) was different from the other students’ in that he did not write in one of the strongly recommended persuasive forms: a speech, newspaper editorial, opinion piece or letter to the editor. When the Year 7 team met together to discuss our approaches to assessing some sample pieces of writing by our students, Peter’s piece was one that was chosen for discussion. After a rich staffroom conversation, my English teacher colleagues at the time categorised the piece as a creative response to a persuasive prompt, arguing that Peter had chosen to represent his ideas in a narrative form.

I decided to use Peter’s response as a provocation in my semi-structured interviews as both his writing and the diverse discussions in our English staffroom later about how to assess such a piece had remained with me more than a decade later. The assessment of the work from teachers in the staffroom 12 years ago revealed something about what the different teachers valued in student writing and the role of creativity in any writing. At the time, that was indeed a revelation for me, prompting me to think anew about the complexities of assessing student writing in an English classroom. School-based participants’ response to the provocation in this study resulted in similarly complex perspectives on writing and creativity, some of which are examined below.

7.2.1 Steve’s response to the provocation

Steve, as discussed in Chapter 6, was an early career teacher at an independent girls’ school, Lowood Girls’ College, in the northern suburbs of Melbourne. During my first interview with Steve, he comments:

I think the [conversations] about assessment tasks being important and things not directly linked to assessment potentially being a waste of time or a distraction from the main game, I think that's quite widespread and mostly unchallenged.

Steve's comment suggests his awareness of the pervasiveness of his school's focus on assessment and the way it shapes teaching and learning at Lowood. He proceeds to share stories throughout both the interviews as to how teachers, parents and students question the value of work not directly linked to achievement on the high-stakes assessments, especially at the senior level. These conversations about assessment that Steve was able to identify were also evident in his response to the written provocation. When asked how he might respond to a student who submitted a piece such as "Mr Henton", Steve comments:

We have very limited NAPLAN preparation at our school, but part of what students need in preparing for NAPLAN is an understanding of the two types of writing they might be asked to do for the writing tasks and the differences between them; one is persuasive and one is creative. And I see this piece of writing as formally incorrect, despite some of its fantastic content. ... I think it's great, playful thinking and a wonderfully realistic character that shows us something. ... I would wish that, you know, we were less preoccupied by form. But because the context is about NAPLAN, and I think the NAPLAN examiners are interested in form, otherwise they wouldn't specify whether it is a persuasive or creative task. ... Of course this piece of writing persuades me of something. It shows me something and makes me believe it. But that is not what's required in a persuasive writing task, because persuasive refers to formal elements as well as effect. So this succeeds in persuading me. But, the student needs re-training to persuade differently within the format of persuasive writing, or one of the formats of persuasive writing, which this isn't in. And I'm trying to answer honestly rather than idealistically, I'm trying to describe realistically, what would happen at my school with me in the role as teacher. And we do have a very strong focus on the subject on structures of writing, forms of writing.

Steve's response is filled with the tensions between what he refers to as a "realistic" versus "idealistic[]" way to respond to Peter's writing. On one hand, his response is shaped by the context of the NAPLAN that is identified as part of the provocation, as well as the prevalence of conversations around assessment practices at Lowood Girls' College that Steve has already identified. These discourses focus on student achievement, and as such mediate what constitutes a successful piece of writing (Hines & Appleman, 2000; Kohn, 2006). These goals or expectations help to shape Steve's perceptions of what a successful piece of writing is, and what "retraining" Peter needs to achieve this. On the other hand, Steve also acknowledges the "fantastic content" with "great, playful thinking and a wonderfully realistic character that shows us something" and "persuades me of something". In these moments, Steve's response seems to be as a reader, engaging with the piece as an authentic audience of Peter's writing. Steve is cognisant of the tensions between his response as an "articulate reader" and his response as an evaluator of writing (Johnston, 1999, p. 48)—evaluations informed by high-stakes assessment such as NAPLAN that focuses on the form or structure of the writing (Perelman, 2018) and the "formal elements" that he identifies are missing from

the piece. Steve's focus on the "structures of writing, forms of writing" is reflected in the wider school approach to writing. In his explanation above, we see Steve managing the tension identified by Locke (2015) as the duality of assessment purposes: distinguishing between his personal enjoyment of the piece—the "idealistic[]"—and the response that he sees "would happen at [his] school".

7.2.1.1 Creativity and the focus on form and genre

Steve's distinction between the persuasive and narrative or "creative" response is indicative of his, and some of the other participants', understandings of writing within the classroom context. This is student writing governed by certain imperatives of structure or form and the genre rules that are assumed to tightly govern or constrain these forms of writing. These structural and grammatical features provide a classification system, much like that of the taxonomic systems I discussed in Chapter 2, and represent an isomorphic understanding of writing: that writing can be systematically classified into particular genres based on shared easily classifiable features (see Martin & Rose, 2008). Steve has drawn on his understanding of how NAPLAN categorises and constructs narrow forms of writing and has used such a classification system to make a clear distinction between the narrative/creative and persuasive responses, referencing the "missing formal elements" that renders Peter's response "formally incorrect". But as Locke (2015) points out, "in most genres, language functions such as narrate, describe and argue frequently overlap" (p. 91). Christie (2013), an advocate of the genre theory approach to writing, also agrees, stating:

As students become proficient, they learn to play with and adapt the various genres, sometimes evolving new variations, elsewhere employing known ones to make new meanings, thereby demonstrating the infinite flexibility of such genres for making meaning. In fact, genres are not static, but capable of constant adaptation and shift, under the pressure of social change in which individual creativity plays an important part. (p. 12)

However, Steve's understanding of genre in this instance is mediated by the NAPLAN's construction of genre, on that is not one that is so 'flexible', and there is seemingly little room for students to "play with and adapt various genres" or for each individual to demonstrate the way they might work flexibly within a given genre. Despite recognising the narrative/creative elements of Peter's response and that the "Mr Henton" piece has "great, playful thinking and a wonderfully realistic character that shows us something", he also believes that for the purpose of NAPLAN this style of writing does not fulfil the task. In this instance, Steve equates the 'NAPLAN genre' of persuasive writing with "fixed, pure and distinct categories" rather than forms of writing which "continue to be alive and vibrant" (Pope, 2005, p. 101). His

emphasis on particular writing conventions and text structures indicates the NAPLAN's static view of genre, and overrides his appreciation of Peter's self-expression that is often associated with creative writing (Frawley, 2014). Frawley's (2014) study on teacher perceptions of creative writing notes that English teachers felt there were seemingly endless possibilities within the narrative genre that rendered it too difficult, too time-consuming and too risky to teach in the context of high-stakes assessments; such a view is perhaps understandable given the expansive nature of narrative genres and "their capacity to absorb one another" (Rosen, 1994, p. 182) to form new genres. Frawley argues (2014) that:

One of the perceived benefits of expository and persuasive writing is that they offer reliable formulas that students both need and respond well to. Although these responses are often perceived to be quite bland, in the high-stakes nature of VCE [Victorian Certificate of Education], teachers believe these responses can at least lead to 'respectable marks'. (p. 21)

Therefore, in assessing the work "realistically", Steve focuses on his understandings of the constraints, the features that he, and arguably his colleagues and the examiners, have identified as those that would lead to a respectable mark.

7.2.1.2 High-stakes assessment as a mediator of teacher creative practice

In our first interview, Steve refers to how his colleagues in his school shape the creative task specifications in "slightly twisted ways" in order to guide students towards more analytical types of writing. The VCAA school-based assessment report in response to the current senior English study design (VCAA, n.d.-e) found that schools tightly framed student responses stating that "a 'one size fits all' approach ... denies students the opportunity to explore the richness of this text" (p. 5). In the case of Steve's school, this approach had encouraged teachers to find ways of developing students' analytical writing in the form of persuasive or expository styles that are emphasised as part of the final, end of school exam. At the same time, teachers were urged to provide students with sample responses in preferred forms that would facilitate the teachers' ability to make assessments that they could justify as consistent, objective, and standardised.

Understandings such as Steve's, of what successful writing looks like on high-stakes assessment tasks such as NAPLAN tests, do not emerge in isolation. According to Madaus and Russell (2010/2011): "State and federal testing policies are intended to focus instruction and learning on the important content and skills that form state curriculum—and they do" (p. 26). I have mentioned above that in Australia, as elsewhere, researchers have drawn attention to the potential danger of high-stakes testing to narrow the curriculum, and to curtail

teachers' discretionary judgement (Comber, 2011). The emphasis on genre and form, that Steve suggests preoccupies the NAPLAN examiners, and his own response to Peter's writing, is evident throughout the various curriculum documents and resources that govern subject English, including the *Victorian curriculum* and the senior English study design (VCAA, 2014b). For instance, throughout the *Victorian curriculum: English*, from foundation to year ten, students are asked to "plan, draft and publish imaginative, informative and persuasive texts" (VCAA, n.d.-h). Particular text types are repeatedly recommended, such as "narratives, procedures, performances, reports and discussions" (VCAA, n.d.-i, para 4), and previous iterations of the senior English study design (VCAA, 2006, 2011) required students to produce a response to a text in imaginative, expository or persuasive style. While these genres are not mutually exclusive (Rosen, 1988; see 3.3.2.1), the importance of these genres, as separate considerations, is further reiterated through documents such as the VCE examination reports. These reports—written by the chief examiner and released several months after the senior school exam—typically cover a range of areas of student achievement needing improvement; the reports from 2011 to 2016 point to some of the specific issues with creative or imaginative responses. The comments range from narratives needing to "do more than tell a story", to students and teachers needing to "discourage 'petty' personal stories that offer little depth to the piece of writing" (VCAA, 2012, p. 6). These examination reports have also stated that "imaginative essays must explore ideas and/or arguments" (VCAA, 2012, p. 12), and that students should "aim to develop greater sophistication with creative pieces" (VCAA, 2015, p. 7). These comments help shape, or perhaps reinforce, for teachers that there are particular acceptable forms of writing in high-stakes assessment, or at least that particular forms of writing are more favourable and successful than others. This is further supported by Frawley's (2014) research, where teachers were often concerned with creative pieces not "adher[ing] to the task specifications and assessment criteria" (p. 22).

In assessing the provocation, Steve is focused on Peter's ability to produce particular types of persuasive writing. In this instance, the combination of Steve's teaching and assessment practices and his professional knowledge are shaped by the complex interactions of his school's focus on student achievement, the structure of high-stakes assessment and the nature of the writing tasks, and the chief examiner's interpretations of student achievement and areas needing improvement. These all suggest that successful writing must be *structured* in particular ways (see also Burdick, 2011). And indeed some researchers have observed that successful writing on NAPLAN appears "extremely restrictive and formulaic" (Perelman, 2018, p. 8). As Ryan and Barton (2014) argue:

The increased focus on standardization within the new national curriculum¹⁷, along with the regulatory and contracted spaces of testing regimes, sits uneasily beside the protracted and individualized process that teachers have traditionally maintained for quality writing outcomes. (p. 303)

Steve's un-ease with the contrasts between his teaching practices and his knowledge of writing, and how standards-based reforms such as NAPLAN shape knowledge in particular ways is evident in his acknowledgment that the writing is "formally incorrect, despite some of its fantastic content". There is a tension between the practices of teaching writing that encourage student voice and the co-construction of knowledge—or student creativity—and teaching writing for the purpose of NAPLAN and high-stakes assessment. In the classroom, the teacher may encourage exploration of writing from a variety of writing discourses, including language skills, creativity, writing processes or genre (Ivanič, 2004). Steve's classroom teaching therefore may draw on all four of Locke's (2015) orientations of English: skills-based, cultural heritage, growth paradigm and critical literacy (see Chapter 3). Steve believes the high-stakes test of NAPLAN, however, focuses on genre (in the particular way that NAPLAN understands the concept) and students' ability to emulate the formal and structural features of the "grading scheme [which] emphasises and virtually requires the five-paragraph essay form" (Perelman, 2018, p. 37). This seems distinct from Steve's classroom practice, discussed in Chapter 6, where "effort [was] made to help participants share and build meaning collaboratively" (Lyle, 2008, p. 225). His assessment of Year 7 student Peter's ability to recreate particular types of persuasive writing is predominantly evidence of the skills-based and cultural heritage paradigms of subject English (see Chapter 3). For instance, within these two paradigms students are learning "canonical ways of constructing meaning and achieving significant goals" (Christie, 2013, p. 13) rather than find "alternate modes of existence" (Craft, 2003, p. 123) or develop personal responses through self-expression (Pope, 2005; see 3.3.2.2). Christie's notion of "canonical ways of constructing meaning" are often associated with testing regimes (Perelman, 2018) and are seldom associated with student creativity, which is often more closely linked to the growth paradigm, where students are encouraged to learn through the process of writing (Frawley, 2014). While Steve acknowledges the persuasive element of Peter's writing, he is also cognisant of the expectations of NAPLAN, and the expectations of student success. Steve's response to the

¹⁷ The authors refer to a *Queensland Curriculum* initiative called *Curriculum into the classroom*, a lesson-by-lesson guide to teaching each unit of work in order to outline what should be taught. These lessons were to be aligned to the (at the time) new *Australian Curriculum*, the initiative considered one way of consistently addressing the content tested on NAPLAN.

provocation acknowledges his preoccupation with form, and it is for this reason, rather than the persuasive qualities of Peter's piece, that Steve suggests that Peter needs "re-training".

7.2.2 Anne's response to the provocation

Anne, who was introduced in Chapter 6, had multiple roles within her school, Rydell Secondary College. She was Head of VCE, acting Head of English faculty, and as an experienced teacher, all her English classes were in the senior school. Despite differences in experience and teaching contexts, my interviews with Steve and Anne revealed similar responses to the "Mr Henton" provocation. Like Steve, Anne acknowledges the strength of Peter's writing and the ideas, but questioned whether or not these strengths would be recognised by the external assessment regimes:

I'm loving it, I mean wow. As an obvious response, as an English teacher and someone who loves reading and writing, that's amazing. What an outside-the-box personal response! And then you go, but that isn't a persuasive essay, because it does not fit, you know, what would be an expected structure for a persuasive response. It's a creative response that is clearly persuasive in its purpose. It should [fulfil the task], but clearly it wouldn't, because it says, um, it would still achieve ... some marks for some elements where the persuasive nature of it is not included in the criteria. But it won't, because it's a creative response. And that's the whole thing, isn't it? That this does not have an introductory paragraph ... Yeah, so it's what we generally teach the students to have those general ... three body, three key points, three body paragraphs, topic sentences, da, da, da, da, da. It just doesn't have it. So against the NAPLAN criteria it would not fulfil the task.

When I asked Anne whether her response to Peter's writing would change if this wasn't a piece written for the NAPLAN, she responds:

Would it change my approach? I wish it would change my approach, but it wouldn't change my approach ultimately, because, sadly, we have ... kids are on a pathway. This student in Year 7 does need to know what will be expected because, at the end of the day, when they reach the very end of the line and they still have to write persuasively, they need to know what is expected, because, they do have to play the exam game. And they have to know how to win the exam game. However, I would do some one-to-one work with this student, because clearly they are ... This student is a great writer, they're a great thinker, they're a lateral thinker. And what you wouldn't want to do is to really squash that. You want to, you really want to draw this out of them. And I would be ... I'm quite clear with students about what is expected and teaching them, and I do actually teach them this is what is expected for this. This is how you will be assessed for this. ... I think it's because of the nature of the times that we live in. What is expected and what students need to do in order to be 'successful' [emphasising this with visual gesture indicating 'in inverted commas'].

Similarly to Steve, Anne infers that Peter needs re-training in persuasive writing although her language is less direct: "I would do some one-to-one work with this student". Both school-based English teachers acknowledge that students need to play the "exam game" if they are to be successful writers in the "times we live in". However, Anne deliberately makes the point during the interview that "successful" was in inverted commas, acknowledging that there is

perhaps some discrepancy between how high-stakes assessment constructs successful writing and the way a successful piece of writing may be viewed in other contexts. Anne is cognisant of the irony in the different ways Peter's writing might be received. Elsewhere in the interview she summarises her position: "it's a good persuasive piece" but it will only "pick up some marks for some elements where the persuasive nature of it is not included in the criteria".

7.2.2.1 Assessing consistently

It might be argued that one of the benefits of teaching writing through knowledge of generic structures and forms of writing is that students are presented with a finite number of structural options. This argument suggests a teacher merely needs to identify the required language features or structures of particular genres to enable students to emulate them, and it assumes an ease and consistency of teaching and assessing writing. A report from the Australian Council of Educational Research (ACER) *Improving consistency in teacher judgements* (Meiers et al., 2007) argues that curriculum standards:

Constitute clear maps of the levels of achievement in areas of learning and provide a means of planning teaching and learning activities, and also of monitoring students' progresses ... [T]here is great value in judging this evidence [students' work] against standards and reporting these judgements. Consequently, there is increasing recognition of the need for approaches that will lead to improved consistency of the teachers' judgements against the standards. (p. 65)

The emphasis on standardisation of curriculum, practice and assessment in the last decade in Australia has significantly increased with the implementation of national initiatives such as the *Australian Curriculum*, NAPLAN and the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. Standards are considered to provide a reliable framework that is essential to "improving the quality of teaching [which] is the most effective way to achieve better educational outcomes for individual students" (Dinham et al., 2008, p. 2). Standardising student responses through a focus on particular accepted structures appears to be one way English teachers—who believe that creative writing has "such a big range of things to choose from" (Frawley, 2014, p. 21)—can potentially reduce the number of variables in students' writing, and thus increase the likelihood of consistency in teacher assessments of student work. The *Persuasive writing marking guide*¹⁸ for the NAPLAN assessment (ACARA, 2012b) details, for example, a five

¹⁸ The marking guides for both the persuasive and narrative writing prompts have remained unchanged since 2013 and 2010 respectively (ACARA, 2016).

point scale for 'Text structure'. In both the marking guide and the additional notes, this *Marking guide* clearly states that the skill focus is on

the organisation of the structural components of a persuasive text (introduction, body and conclusion) into an appropriate and effective text structure. (p. 9)

Furthermore, it explains that:

A text may comprise some or all components. The development of the components increases with the sophistication of the text. (p. 84).

The *Marking guide* also includes explanations of the different point levels, annotated work samples and a glossary that clearly outlines acceptable persuasive devices, vocabulary, cohesive devices, sentence structures and punctuation. While the authenticity of this approach to writing has been questioned (see Perelman, 2018), as Anne points out, students who fulfil these requirements are rewarded; there is no scope in the assessment criteria for students who represent their ideas in a different format, even if those ideas are arguably persuasive. Anne's response suggests that the standardisation of writing mediates how she both responds to her students' work and how she teaches, even if she is also able to recognise a tension between this approach and an approach that might provide more creative scope for both teachers and students.

7.2.2.2 Assessment as mediator of subject English and teacher knowledge

Teaching students to play the 'exam game' appears to be a priority when teaching English in Anne's work as a teacher of writing in her school. This means teaching students to produce "an introductory paragraph ... three key points, three body paragraphs, topic sentences, da, da, da, da, da". These standardised approaches to writing assessment (the "unspoken rules") have been critiqued as inauthentic, or having little connection with writing as it is enacted outside of schools. For instance, in a review of NAPLAN writing assessments, Perelman (2018) states:

In summary, the NAPLAN essay fails to be a valid measure of any serious formulation of writing ability, especially with the context of its current uses. Indeed, NAPLAN's focus on low-level mechanical skills, trivialisation of thought, and its overall disjunction from authentic constructs of writing may be partially responsible for declining scores in international tests. (p. 8)

This assessment of the writing task within NAPLAN is consistent with arguments that "subjects such as writing were reduced to the production of formulaic and procedural five-paragraph essays" (Au, 2007, p. 261; see also Johnson et al., 2003). As well as the disjunction between writing for NAPLAN and writing for authentic purposes, the NAPLAN

tests and other high-stakes assessment shape how both teachers respond to student writing. As Au and Gourd (2013) argue, the “instruction encouraged by high-stakes tests contradicts decades of research on teaching of writing and literature” (p. 17), whereby teachers are teaching to the narrow constructions of writing on high-stakes tests. This has “result[ed] in less student voice ... integration of writing with other content [and] less time for students to explore diverse genres” (Au & Gourd, pp. 17-18).

Anne’s response is to teach her students what is expected in standardised tests: the five-paragraph essay consisting of the introduction, body paragraphs, topic sentences. Steve’s focus is also on structure and the formal elements he assumes exam assessors will be looking for. The focus is therefore less about the process of writing through idea generation and organisation, translating ideas to words and sentences, and editing to effectively reflect ideas in line with audience and purpose (Locke, 2015). Instead, the focus is more about developing Peter’s ability to adhere to the “rules” of the task. In such instances, what each of the teachers might understand as good writing, indicated by their individual and professional responses to Peter’s “Mr Henton” piece, is secondary to the ways NAPLAN and related initiatives and discourses shape understandings of writing.

As the discussion above explores, the nature of high-stakes assessment mediates how teachers assess their students’ writing. It diminishes the potential for an assessor to respond to ideas, creative or otherwise, in a piece of writing. It limits the scope of any personal engagement. And in the process it contributes to a narrowing of the teacher’s understanding of subject English and the place of creativity. This is not surprising given that standardised tests have been strongly linked to teacher accountability, through school improvement plans (see 5.2) and by the ways the results are reported in league tables and the like.

The OECD claims that ACARA’s reporting of literacy and numeracy results on the website *My School* (ACARA, n.d.-j) is designed to “increase transparency and accountability in the Australian school system” (Rosenkvist, 2010, p. 36). However, in the same report the OECD acknowledges that the results published on *My School* (ACARA, n.d.-j) are used by various media outlets and private organisations to generate school rankings, and that there is “evidence of performance tables influencing the behaviour of schools, teachers and parents” (Rosenkvist, 2010, p. 20). As such, a potentially disturbing implication of the primacy of the ‘exam game’ is that high-stakes exams in Year 12 come to shape the curriculum not only during the senior years of schooling but in the lower year levels as well. Despite the encouragement in the study design—and the curriculum at lower levels (see VCAA, 2014b;

VCAA n.d.-l)—for students to write across a variety of styles and genres, Steve reflects on the influence of the Year 12 high-stakes exams and the ways it mediates the teaching of writing in earlier years:

The [Senior English] study design VCE subject has a major impact on how we teach things in the junior years. So the creative tasks before ... there was this new creative requirement ... could be quite flexible and open. But now because of [how] we've decided to interpret the study design at Year 11 and 12, that will happen at Year 9 and 10. And in fact it is happening. So we're doing a creative task at Year 9 where students need to really show their understanding of Steinbeck's writing style and create a parable like *The Pearl*, to show that they know that type of literary genre ... and the feature of the new study design's creep is constraining creativity ... or at least limiting [its] generic range or messiness.

This form of creative writing 'in the style of an author' (as discussed in 6.4.1) appears to be a partial remedy to the limitless potential and openness some English teachers associate with creative writing, especially in the junior years of school (Frawley, 2014). This uncomfortable relationship with creative writing may also explain Steve's observation that there is a disjunction between the senior English study design in Victoria (VCAA, 2014b) and the types of writing that students are doing in the classrooms at his school:

We've decided that VCAA wants analysis when they say 'creativity'. And we might be projecting that. I think we probably are, because if you actually look at the senior English study design cold, and you're trying to see outside your school context and the competitiveness of VCE, you actually see all these proposals about that school assessed coursework that are varied and multi-modal and flexible and student driven. None of that is happening.

Steve's insightful comments perhaps point to the wide-ranging impact of high-stakes assessment and standards-based reforms on subject English. Steve's and Anne's teaching and assessment practices, as well as their knowledge of subject English, have, in part, been shaped by these reforms and the way these reforms are used as accountability measures for teachers within the context of classrooms and schools, as well as part of the wider discourse on education. Laura's response to the provocation, discussed below, also acknowledges the limitations of the high-stakes assessment, yet her focus is not on looking for consistency. Rather, she focuses on the function of the writing and how Peter's argument is structured. Both Steve and Anne, whilst using a dialogic approach to their classes (cf. Chapter 6), arguably their assessment practices, mediated by standards-based reforms, have become "independent of individual knowers" (Wells, 1999, p. 171); the teaching goals have been largely determined by high-stakes assessment. This clearly demonstrates how high-stakes assessment mediates and narrows understandings of writing and how it is taught, at least according to the experience of these English teachers.

7.3 Speaking back to standards-based reforms

In this next section, I draw on the interviews with Laura and Catherine and observations of their teaching. While they teach in contrasting curriculum contexts—Laura in a supplementary setting at Brightside Education and Catherine at Lowood Girls' College, the same school that Steve teaches in—they both engage in teaching practices that provide them opportunities to speak back to, or resist the potentially limiting discourses of high-stakes assessments. These high-stakes assessments still mediate how Laura and Catherine teach and assess, but they are part of many shaping influences on their practices, rather than directing or limiting their teaching practice.

7.3.1 Laura's response to the "Mr Henton" provocation

First, I consider Laura's response to the written provocation, "Mr Henton", during an interview. Unlike Steve and Anne, Laura has no formal teacher education credential, and her teaching took place in what this study classifies as a 'supplementary education setting' (Myers & Grosvenor, 2011). Laura has a background as a writer, an actor and has a PhD in literature. At the time of our interview, she had been working as a workshop educator for Brightside Education for ten years, predominantly running writing workshops for primary students. In recent years, she had worked with Brightside Education to expand her writing and literature programs to include secondary students. Despite Laura's different experiences and her very different professional context, her response to Peter's writing piece was similar to Steve and Anne in many ways:

Wow, I would love a student to hand in something like this. Clumsy writing and there's trouble with the plot and this kind of attempt at metaphors that are quite ... But I adore it as an idea and as a creative response. I guess the question would be about this for NAPLAN ... I'm not sure this is something [that] would be appreciated. And whether you can call it persuasive and give it some kind of mark. I would argue it is wonderfully on topic. What I would argue is a very persuasive argument for saving the day and facing your dream, it's lovely. Yeah, it just doesn't quite get it together, does it? The dreams turning into reality ... And then by the end there's little ambiguity about whether he is still in reality or in a new dream; it's an interesting take on a persuasive response. I think you could certainly argue that it has a persuasive effect on the reader. The effect is that you are encouraged by his experiences, and that even at the moment of death or possible death, it has a constructive argument. It is working through, establishing and then pursuing. I feel [the persuasiveness] was there, that the student understood what they are being asked to do and they have taken a creative turn with it.

While Laura does not teach in the secondary schooling sector, she is aware of government assessment regimes and the ways they mediate teachers' practices in schools, and more specifically whether this response "would be appreciated" for NAPLAN. She argues,

however, for the “persuasive effect on the reader” of Peter’s writing. She is not pre-occupied by the “formal elements” or the structure of an introduction, body paragraphs and topic sentences. Instead, she focuses on how Peter constructs his argument over the whole piece of writing. And because of this, she doesn’t interpret Peter’s response as a misunderstanding of the task, rather that he has deliberately chosen to form an argument in a different style than is expected. This view of Peter’s writing is congruent with how Laura teaches and assesses writing; both are dialogic in nature.

Laura’s teaching and assessment practices would seem to be, as with Anne and Steve, mediated by the context in which she teaches and her understanding as to how the supplementary setting sits alongside the students’ experience of schooling. Brightside Education has different constraints from those generally experienced in a school. Elsewhere across both the interviews, Laura shows in a variety of ways that she is accountable in the ways in which she conducts her classes and how she reports on student work throughout the two and a half hour a week, four-week program. In explaining the different programs Brightside Education offers, Laura explains that teachers have nominated students for this writing program, for which the parents pay. With this particular 4-week program the students receive a report although Laura is able to set her own criteria for that report. Students are encouraged to discuss the reports with their parents and teachers. In addition to the formal feedback, Laura discusses with students their writing throughout the program, as well as comments and questions on any work they submit. There are also a number of different influences over her assessment, including her knowledge of the purposes of teaching writing to students in the secondary years. Laura is less concerned with the operational (Green, 2012) or secretarial (Mackenzie et al., 2013; DET, 2021) aspects of writing, stating “you can learn how to spell, the grammar and text analysis later”, and is more concerned with showing students the functions of text or the rules and then ways in which they can bend or break them. This approach to teaching and assessing writing in the context of a supplementary education setting is the focus of the following section.

7.3.2 Defining creativity in the context of Laura’s practices

In order to more fully understand the context from which Laura responded to the “Mr Henton” provocation during our interview, I first present and reflect upon a small ‘window’ into Laura’s classroom. The particular program that Laura was teaching was based on the world of *Harry Potter*, where students are asked to build their own fantasy world, to draw on aspects of the

text, and to ‘inhabit’ the world with their own characters and adventures. The episode that I present below occurred in the third lesson of a four-lesson program, delivered one lesson per week. When I entered the classroom, students were part way through writing their stories and were exploring the concept of ‘traversing liminal spaces’. Laura was working with the students to explore binaries and the idea of ‘space’ using an activity she called a “vocabulary wizards’ duel”. The vocabulary wizards’ duel is an activity Laura had created to help students build their vocabulary to use in their writing, as well as build their understanding of binaries¹⁹. During the duel, Laura and I busily wrote all the students’ responses on the board.

Scene 7.1–“Wands at the ready ...”

It is a Tuesday morning. Twenty Grade 3 and Grade 4 students are squashed on the floor in amongst bags, tables and note-books. A stationery tray, topped with Smaug [the dragon from *The Hobbit*] and a couple of wands, occupies one corner. On the whiteboard, Laura has written the following words: ‘liminal’, ‘binaries’ ‘kinetic’, ‘catalyst’, ‘anthropomorphic’, ‘paradox’, ‘hindrances’, and ‘traverse’. It is clear from the initial discussions below that students have previously discussed the definitions of some of these words.

Laura: (Prompting student responses to liminal spaces in *Harry Potter*) Okay, what about spaces in between, or hidden spaces?

Students: Room of Requirement, Platform 9 ¾, Hogwarts, Ministry of Magic ...

Ben: The dorms.

Debra: They’re not hidden.

Ben: They are [hidden] to students not from those houses and the boys can’t go into the girls’ dorms. It’s unfair that girls can go into the boys’ dorms though. They’re hidden but not from everyone.

Laura: Are there any other hidden spaces or spaces in between? We can call these liminal spaces. So the Room of Requirement is a liminal space. They are not hidden from everyone, but they are hidden?

Hillary: Dumbledore’s office?

Ben: Oh, Grimmauld Place, where the Order of Phoenix have their headquarters.

Laura: Okay, so when you read over your work today, have you included any liminal spaces? What would a liminal space allow your character to do?

Debra: Hide. Be safe.

¹⁹ Two students, wands in hand, take turns in responding to a word prompt by yelling antonyms at each other. Once a student can no longer respond, the wand is given to someone else to continue the duel.

Laura: Yes, but what else might it allow the characters to do? And hide and be safe from who or what?

(These appear to be more rhetorical questions for the students to consider. A few students do offer answers before Laura moves the group on to a new activity.)

Okay, so we're going to do an activity, but first let's think about ... how does Hogwarts and *Harry Potter* set up binaries?

Students: New and old... Good and evil ... Magic and non-magic.

Debra: They're muggles; non-magics are muggles.

Ben: Pure bloods and um ...

Debra: Mudbloods.

Hillary: What about upstairs and downstairs?

Laura: Good, can you tell me a little more?

Hillary: (Responds hesitantly) Well, Gryffindor is upstairs and Slytherin and Professor Snape are downstairs, aren't they? Or is that just in the movie?

Debra: I think you're right.

Hillary: There are a lot.

Laura: Okay, so I'm going to split you into two groups. Leave some space in the middle. We're going to have a wizards' duel with words. First person in each group, take a wand. I'm going to give you a word and the first person comes up with a word that's related, the other person needs to come up with an antonym to make a binary. If the word that I said was good, the opposite ...

Students: (Interrupting) Evil.

Laura: Right, you need to respond quickly and if you're stuck you're out and it's the next person in your group's turn. Narelle and I are going to write the words on the board so that you can use them in your writing. The word is 'playground'.

Students: Inside – outside

Safe – unsafe

Fun – not fun

(Laura allows the students to keep duelling as the number of 'un', 'not' and 'non' responses continue to rise. She eventually interjects with a new rule –)

Laura: No more prefixes of the 'un', 'not' and 'non' kind.

(The duelling slows and it is not long before the students are stumped with where to go next. Laura looks forlorn.)

Students: That was fun. Can we do it again next week?

As part of her practice, in Scene 7.1, Laura explores with her students how texts are constructed and how they work. Deeper knowledge of the text, while facilitated by Laura, is generated from the students, as has been the case in the other scenes presented thus far. There are a number of times Laura offers an evaluation of the students' responses, such as her questions to Debra ("Hide and be safe—from what and who?") and to Hillary ("Good, can you tell me a little more?"). Like Rosa, Steve and Anne, the feedback Laura offers is dialogic (Lyle, 2008; Wells, 1999, 2000) in that her purpose in responding is not to correct, but rather to deepen their thinking. Laura is showing that student dialogue is at the centre of constructing meaning in her classroom. Laura's approach is similar to Sawyer's (2004) concept of collaborative emergence evident in teacher improvisation in the classroom in that:

The students propose different answers throughout the discussion; the teacher does not evaluate any given answer, but instead facilitates a collaborative improvisation among the students, with the goal of guiding them toward the social construction of their own knowledge. (p. 15)

This does not mean that Laura's practices don't sometimes direct the students' responses, such as when she adds the "No more prefixes of the 'un', 'not' and 'non' kind" rule to the wizard's duel. The emphasis, however, is on encouraging student dialogue through questions: for instance, "Yes, but what else might it allow the characters to do?" "And hide and be safe from who or what?" that extend student responses. The class is working together to identify liminal spaces in the text, how the characters interact with these spaces, and what these spaces allow the characters to do.

The program is built around exploration of different aspects of the texts across the Harry Potter series. Each week of the program has a different focus and then students are given time to write, working with the concepts they've covered. Laura refers to this as 'dismantling' the text:

I'm really interested in showing the students the structure of things so they can dismantle it. So I find it's really important to show them what's already there, what's being put together, what's already been thought about, what a text is already doing with the concept so that they can see the paths that lead away from that and so that they can diversify from that central theme ...

Rather than identifying a structure that has been given to them, the students are *investigating* the structure, both dismantling it as well as rebuilding. Laura facilitates a discussion about liminal spaces that builds students' thinking about the world of *Harry Potter*, providing them with vocabulary and concepts that are in the novels, but then moving students outside the novels to explore ways they may include these ideas in their own writing. The students are engaged in a process of "combination, separation, projection" that open opportunities for

students to move from “the bare production of characters” to something ‘creative’ (Williams, 1977, p. 208). Locke (2015) considers this process as important in students learning how to write—as they proceed to generate ideas and then translate these ideas into words and sentences (see also Myhill et al., 2008). In doing so, students are also exploring the fantasy genre and are both working *within* the constraints of the genre and the task (and the rules) that Laura has set for them, as well as investigating the possibilities *outside* of these constraints.

7.3.2.1 Creative and critical work

The approach to teaching described above—breaking down a text, drawing on student knowledge before writing—is the approach that Laura uses in most of her text studies programs. For her,

There’s a lot of reassurance in it, I think, that the rules are there to be broken. So if you understand how it works then you can start unpacking it and rebuilding it into other things.

During my first interview with Laura a couple of weeks prior to the classroom observation represented above, she discusses another lesson in the *Harry Potter* program where the focus was on different ways of transporting characters in and out of the spaces and worlds of *Harry Potter*. In the quote below, she describes the ways she works with students and the text, and how this might then be evident in their writing:

Part of their writing was getting their character to Hogwarts and so we read extracts from the book of several ways to get there: you can get there by train, you can get there by floo powder, you can get there by flying car. And then I invited the kids to come up with their own possibilities ... and [I] gave them some examples saying you could arrive by air, you could by underground, or below things, you could arrive by [or] with creatures or on objects. So generating a few ideas and then the kids that would normally just use the examples from the book have another possibility to think about, so they might go a little further than that. And having given multiple suggestions, then the really dynamic kids are going to go write this idea I have about flying in on an alien spaceship. [That] is fine. I try to show them the obvious ones and suggestions of directions to take and then let them go wherever they like. Always with the reiteration though that nothing is wrong if it’s meeting the task requirements and in the style of the text. In this case, then, take it any way you like.

The exploration of texts that Laura is discussing above is similar to Pope’s (2005) concept of ‘*re ... creation*’—that is, an “ongoing process of making afresh” (p. 84), and a contrast to the fixed view of particular writing genres associated with standardised assessment (Perelman, 2018). The act of “re...creation” according to Pope (2005) involves “some transformation of form or function, however slight or apparently accidental” (p. 84). Pope’s (2005) deliberate use of the ellipsis acts as an invitation to bridge the gap, and leaves the reader to decide, or in the example above it leaves Laura to decide when reading a student’s work, whether it is

evidence of "merely verbal tinkering or the promise of a genuinely fresh concept" (p. 85). The process of "re...creation" is evident in Laura's valuing of students' play and dialogue, as well as how knowledge is co-constructed, extended, and at times contested. The students in Scene 7.1, who have only known each other for a short amount of time, don't just respond to Laura's questions about binaries and spaces in *Harry Potter*. They argue with each other and justify their positions. We see this in Ben's offering of the dormitories as hidden spaces, his explanations when Debra challenges his answer, and his assertion that "It's unfair that girls can go into the boys' dorms though". But this discussion is not without structure or constraint. Similar to Steve and Anne (see Chapter 6), Laura interjects when she wants the discussion—in this case the vocabulary building exercise—to move in a different direction. She adds boundaries as she sees fit to guide the discussion, and thus she continues to shape the dialogue with, and in response to, her students.

7.3.2.2 Creative teaching as dialogic practice

Laura's teaching practice is responsive. This was evident in my observation of her teaching, where she acted as an intermediary between the students' world and the world of the text, guiding their exploration of ideas. This was reflected, also, in how she talks about assessing her students' work. Laura clearly values this exploration of different ideas in student work:

When students are writing there's certainly lots of generic material and lots of familiar tropes and familiar characters and you can see where they've drawn ideas from. And then you get the ones that are really out of the box and have twists and turns that you really wouldn't expect and outrageous ideas ... I try very hard not to reject ideas wherever possible. If I can see something is a little generic or has been drawn from elsewhere, I encourage them to make it their own and try and change or add or augment it to make it unique. But I wouldn't say 'Don't do that' if I could possibly avoid it because I think part of finding your own creative path is you have to meander through that kind of dull generic material to find something different yourself.

Laura's assessment of student's creative writing seems to fall on a continuum—somewhere between tinkering and a fresh remaking. But there is also an acknowledgement that this is not a straightforward process, that the students are working through a process of writing "familiar tropes and familiar characters" and finding ways, to varying degrees of success, to make these narrative elements their own. The students' writing is therefore not just about the form, structure or expected elements of writing, but a combination of ideas and execution. This is an option that is perhaps more open to Laura given that her teaching is taking place in a supplementary education context, where there is no expectation of consistent assessment practices such as rubrics. Her high valuing of creativity—in the way students both work within the constraints of a task or genre and find ways of incorporating new ideas, breaking rules or subverting expectations—is evident in providing students the opportunity to make mistakes

and experiment with the narrative concepts and language that they are exploring. Of this process, she says:

I'll let them know what the requirements of the task are and then make it very clear. Usually in the task itself if it's written down but verbally as well, that they have absolutely free range to take that in any way they like or they want. They can twist it in any way they like ... And make it clear that there are no mistakes or errors to exploring whatever direction they like ... I think it's something about empowering [students] ... Maybe it's the drama background and the improv[isation] thing. You don't want to say 'no'. Just accept everything. That's the ultimate mark of creativity in improv. You can't turn it down because that stops the creativity. So you say 'yes' ... And I try and implement that with the kids.

Laura reiterated frequently through her interviews that for her there are no mistakes in the writing classroom. She credited her improvisation background for her willingness to “just accept everything” or at the very least work to find a way to make everything work within the constraints, proposing other possibilities, changes or alterations to make the ideas work (see 6.4.1 & 6.3.2).

Although, as mentioned above, Laura's assessment of student writing is not yoked to standardised assessment measures (Kohn, 2006), and therefore seemingly free from the influence of NAPLAN, she is still aware of how the expectations on teachers mediate their assessment practices. She explained:

[There can be a] reluctance to celebrate that kind of outrageousness because it demands attention; it demands a different way of thinking and marking. And teachers are underpaid and marking at a million miles an hour. And you do glory in the moments of the great piece but if it's a problematic piece, you don't have the time to decide how to best deal with it. You just have to look at your requirements and criteria and say, 'Well, no, it doesn't tick boxes. I can't give the marks.' As opposed to saying, 'How can I get around the requirements to give this the mark it deserves because it's achieving the right things in different ways?'

Laura not only acknowledges the ways that consistent and perhaps formulaic responses may save teachers some time, but she also notes that “outrageous” writing “demands attention”, a “different way of thinking and marking it”. The consideration, therefore, of “outrageous” responses may require teachers to draw on knowledge beyond that which is shaped by current assessment practices. This seemed to be the case for Peter's “Mr Henton” response, which does not respond to the prompt in standardised ways, and therefore perhaps, as Laura asserts, demands more attention. Part of the limitation that Steve, Anne and Laura identify in student writing is how student responses need to be comparable, in order to make fair and equitable assessments. Laura, who acknowledges she has more time in her teaching of writing than teachers in mainstream schools, is able to draw on her knowledge of deconstructing-reconstructing texts, as well as her improvisation background, to assess the degree to which the student has worked within the constraints of the task and the degree to which they have expanded their work beyond these constraints. This assessment of the

constraints and possibilities of a task (see 5.3.4 & 5.4) is also evident in Laura's reflection on the success of 'wizards duel', as Laura seeks to clarify for herself the structures that might facilitate students developing a stronger understanding of binaries (see 7.3.2). In considering the writing task, Laura chooses to emphasise the function of the text, rather than the operational (Green, 2012) aspects of the text, such as spelling, grammar, paragraphing and structure, which Perelman (2018) argues is overemphasised on NAPLAN at the "expense of higher order writing issues" (p. 7). While conceding these skills are important, he states that, "the essential function of writing is the communication of information and ideas" (p. 7). As a result, the students are encouraged to explore the possibility of different ideas—the "twists" and "outrageousness" of students taking advantage of the "absolutely free range to take [the task] in any way they like or they want—developing an understanding of aspects of text, such as liminal spaces, that may not necessarily be developed within an operational understanding of text.

Some may wish to rationalise Laura's dialogic assessment as only possible because of the adjacent-to-school context of the supplementary setting, and the lack of high-stakes assessment within the Brightside Education programs. Laura identifies clear affordances in her teaching, such as allowing students to experiment with their writing and time to find a "different way of thinking and marking" unexpected responses. While Laura recognises the influences of high-stakes assessment she does not feel bound by the criteria set by high-stakes assessment in the same way that Steve and Anne do. And yet, there are many parallels between Laura's approach to teaching and assessment practices and that of Catherine, the Head of English faculty at Lowood Girls' College, as I have noted, the school where Steve also teaches English. In order to illustrate how high-stakes assessment practices can shape, but do not have to dictate or limit, assessment practices, the next section focuses on how Catherine engages in creative practice to navigate the tensions inherent in the discourses of high-stakes assessment and the dialogic practice of her work.

7.3.3 Defining creativity in the context of Catherine's teaching practice.

Catherine was an experienced English and English literature teacher at Lowood Girls' College and is Head of the English faculty. She also had experience of working in supplementary settings. Like the English teachers' practices I have captured earlier in this chapter, as well as in Chapter 5 and 6, there was strong evidence of dialogic practice during my one observation of Catherine's teaching. The Year 11 Literature students spent most of

the class exploring how Virginia Woolf uses language and punctuation, through writing a pastiche of a passage from Virginia Woolf's, *A room of one's own*. Catherine did very little talking, apart from posing guiding and clarifying questions, as students shared some of their writing and their insights. There was even evidence of the dialogue between Catherine's literature class and a senior history class that also made use of the particular space of the room. In one of our informal conversations, Catherine jokingly explained that the senior history teacher had "made a move for territory" by plastering the walls of the classroom with black and white displays of 'great' historical figures alongside some famous quotations. A striking portrait of young Benito Mussolini was last in the line of mostly male figures, accompanied by the quote, "War is to men what maternity is to women". Much to Catherine's, delight one of her students had responded by colouring in Mussolini's lips and tie with pink highlighter.

7.3.3.1 Understanding creativity in Catherine's classroom

In my interview with Catherine before I observed her classroom, she explains that her approach to teaching was informed by her understanding of creativity—that students "are makers of meaning", that creativity is not "necessarily coming up with something new, but involves a kind of awareness, and ways of looking at the world". She believes this understanding of creativity was informed by her work as a post-graduate student, as well as a variety of experiences outside of the classroom, such as her supplementary teaching experiences and her engagement in professional development activities. This understanding of creativity was evident throughout Catherine's interviews, as she commented on how she worked with students to make connections with the texts, both personally and to the world outside the text, facilitating their ability to develop individual interpretations. To illustrate this, Catherine draws upon a variety of external sources to support student understanding of some of the key ideas her classes were exploring. In reference to teaching Bertolt Brecht's *The life of Galileo* with her Year 11 mainstream English students (i.e., not her literature class), Catherine explained:

We've talked about Stonewall, we've talked about Pussy Riot. We've talked about the Manhattan project, both in terms of Jerry Oppenheimer and also Einstein's changing views of the role and the purpose of the atomic weapon ... we expand that notion of what it means to study English. So you remove that context [of just studying for the exam].

As such, the teaching of text for Catherine was about recognising how texts represent the world. This had resulted in some changes that her English faculty were exploring in their approaches to the teaching of writing and responding to texts from Year 7:

We're actually focusing on, well, what is the text endorsing? What is it challenging?—those kinds of classic works. Teasing out how context plays a role ... comparing how audiences of that time would interpret a text, as opposed to how our students might respond to something. So we're finding that [approach] more interesting to teach, rather than teaching ... in a formulaic model that doesn't actually support them either in Year 12, but more importantly later on in life.

Catherine's re-defining of what it “means” to study English at Lowood can predominantly be seen as a shift from formulaic structures, to the function of a text and the way the function changes in relation to the context. This new focus is not entirely new. Rather, it draws upon different aspects of the four orientations of English—skills acquisition, cultural heritage, growth paradigm and specifically critical literacy (Locke, 2015; see also Doecke & McClenaghan, 2005; Macken-Horarik, 2014; Thomson, 2019)—rather than predominantly focusing on the cultural heritage and more-so skills acquisition orientations that are evident in Steve and Anne's responses to the “Mr Henton” provocation.

7.3.3.2 Speaking back to formulaic writing

Catherine noted that many students are “often predominantly conditioned” to “worry when you say to them [that] the assessment or the task is a creative response”, and that many of the students and teachers find reassurance in knowing what structure the writing will take. However, students who might be described as “whimsical” for thinking beyond the constraints of the task, can enjoy finding ways of playing with the rules and this can be generative in terms of their developing their writing and responses to texts. Catherine describes one of her students, Siobhan, as an “unconventional thinker”, who was eager to play with the formulaic model of expository writing in response to the text *The life of Galileo*:

She's the one who's most likely to raise her hand [and say] I really want to use one of those [jingles at the beginning of most scenes]. I want to write an expository essay. We want to have a jingle between each paragraph ... It's just a great idea, so they can have a jingle instead of a topic sentence.

In this, we can see an adherence to some of the expected structures that inhabit the high-stakes assessment, particularly with regard to the paragraphs of an expository essay with central ideas or thesis. However, Siobhan and Catherine have negotiated a way in which to work within the conventions of an expository essay that draws upon the features of the text they are studying. Catherine sees it as “kind of [her] job to point out the structures” but also to open students up to reading and writing a variety of texts that “we're [Catherine and her students] coming across in everyday life ... and [it] breaks down the idea also that a persuasive text works one particular way, and needs a rhetorical question in every [paragraph]”.

Working in similar ways to Laura, Catherine and Siobhan have envisaged a way of fulfilling the requirements of the task through a process of dismantling the text in order to build Siobhan's response. This also draws on the idea of Pope's (2005) continuum, with students navigating the continuum somewhere between "tinkering and re-making". Catherine draws on Coulombe's (2014) work to explain her experiences of teaching 'context':

It is possible that, when students engage with literature within a set curriculum, consciously using that curriculum to shape their written work and deliberately testing the boundaries of tasks set by the curriculum, individual 'commitment and ability' may be revealed. (p. 121)

Catherine's experience of this is for students to explore their ideas through writing. She explains:

I do a lot of writing in my classroom; small little pieces of writing, sentences, even just dot points, even just questions ... I'm just fascinated by that experience of writing and that they're in a room and they're together ... writing is not an individual activity. It's contributing towards shared communal discovery ... [but it can be] really difficult to examine and that it's kind of messy. But I love that as a teacher. I think that English is taught in such a careful prescribed way. And even when we tell kids, 'Hey, we're gonna do a creative story now', we still really limit the way that they are able to respond. And as a result, they don't get a chance to be messy. They don't get a chance to just explore where their writing will lead them. They don't get a chance to walk out into the world, see what kind of pieces of writing are there, and then bring them back into the classroom.

The opportunities to write as a community, be messy and explore the world through writing that Catherine is discussing here confirms Perelman's (2018) critique of the NAPLAN, but is in stark contrast to the advice he offers for success on the high-stakes test; namely to "master the five-paragraph form", "memorise the list of *Difficult and Challenging Spelling Words* and sprinkle them throughout the paper" (p. 39). Perelman (2018) acknowledges the irony in this advice as he also advises students to "never write like this except for essay tests like the NAPLAN" (p. 39). Catherine's approach to writing draws on the authenticity of student writing when they seek to connect with and represent the world outside of the classroom, rather than focusing solely on writing to fulfil a high-stakes assessment. Catherine's view of writing is informed by how she sees herself in the classroom: not only as a teacher, but also as a scholar, one who is "creatively involved with writing". These identities are not separate to, but integral to, her teaching, and this is what she draws upon, to open up students' writing to possibilities beyond the classroom.

7.4 Creativity, identity and subject knowledge.

Part of the discourse of standards-based reform and teacher accountability is the understanding that "what teachers understand about the content and subjects they are

expected to teach” is a fundamental aspect of student learning (Dinham, et al., 2008, pp. 11-12). In this chapter I have shown how teachers’ knowledge of “content and subject”, however, is substantively shaped by a range of high-stakes assessments. In teaching subject English, despite their different teaching contexts, Steve’s and Anne’s assessment practices—what they value in writing—are mediated by the tensions between their views on writing and those drawn from the structures and language devices privileged as part of the NAPLAN and subject English VCE examinations for students in senior years. While high-stakes tests such as NAPLAN attempt to codify knowledge, skills and understandings of, in this instance, writing, professional content knowledge of writing is more complex and nuanced (see Comber, 2011; Doecke, 2004; Parr & Bulfin, 2015; see also 3.3.3). Locke (2015) explains this through the metaphor that the teaching of writing is “serving two masters”. The first is students’ ability to perform successfully on high-stakes tests that are “extrinsically oriented discourses” (p. 204). The second is an “intrinsically oriented discourse, relate[d] to professional content knowledge of the teacher who understands the nature of writing and how it is best evaluated for the good of individual students” (p. 204). Steve and Anne in their responses to the “Mr Henton” provocation can be seen grappling with and attempting to fulfil these two purposes, but the extrinsic discourse is clearly privileged. In privileging the extrinsic discourse, a boundary is created between their knowledge of writing and their response as readers to Peter’s writing, and their understandings of how a piece such as “Mr Henton” would be viewed in a NAPLAN assessment context. This is a way of working through and beyond the tensions created between their dialogic teaching practices and the narrow understandings of writing represent. They are ‘playing the game’ of high-stakes assessment, and providing students access to the rules of the game as well. In finding a way to work through the tensions between ‘good writing’ and ‘good writing for NAPLAN’ further tensions are created between the teaching practices in the classroom where teachers work with students to co-construct meaning, and their assessment practices where the high-stakes assessment mediates their feedback to students.

In contrast, Laura and Catherine have found different ways to negotiate the boundaries between their sophisticated subject knowledge—informed by their identities as readers and writers—and the subject knowledge shaped by high-stakes assessment. There is a body of literature discussing projects such as STELLA and stella2.0 (see 3.3.3; Doecke & Parr, 2005; Parr & Bulfin, 2015), as well as other projects such as the National Writing Projects in New Zealand (Locke, 2015), the United States (Lieberman & Wood, 2002; Wood & Lieberman, 2000) and the United Kingdom (Andrews, 2008), which has long recognised teacher writing and teacher writing identities as an important aspect of English teacher professional

development and English teacher identity. Laura and Catherine are able to draw on these teacher writing identities to find different ways to negotiate the tensions between teaching and assessment practices; they have developed a strong sense of the purpose of writing that extends beyond the school environment and how it connects to and represents the world around them. This is perhaps an easier option in many ways for Laura given the nature of her teaching of writing in the supplementary setting, where that teaching is related to but separate from mainstream school classrooms. Laura is not compelled to compartmentalise students' creative writing to particular parts of the curriculum, or particular year levels (Frawley, 2014); rather, within each writing act students are able to engage both critically and creatively. Just as important, though, are the ways in which Laura and Catherine are able to draw on their subject knowledge to maintain their identities as writers and teachers of writing, which enables them to "try to stay in touch with the values that brought [them] into teaching in the first place" (Shann, 2015, p. xi). Laura and Catherine are able to draw on their subject knowledge to speak back to the discourses of high-stakes assessment that underpin so much of standards-based reforms.

Even though all four teachers have found ways to work within, and for Laura and Catherine to speak back to, the standards-based reforms of high stakes assessment, this does not mean that these tensions or the struggle of negotiating these tensions have disappeared. Rather, their practices illustrate the unfinalizability (Bakhtin, 1984) of their ongoing negotiation of these tensions, as they continue within their contexts to creatively grapple with what they can and cannot do. As this chapter shows, along with Chapters 5 and 6, the context of the classroom, as well as the school and wider educational landscape, is not static, and therefore creative work within these spaces involves constant negotiation (Doecke et al., 2014).

In the following chapter, I bring together the insights and analysis from Chapters 5, 6 and 7, and present a discussion of the overarching themes and threads of my argument about creativity and teacher practice in the context of secondary school subject English. I offer an account of how the participating English teachers use professional subject knowledge to negotiate the tensions of the everyday practices, and in doing so find ways to maintain their professional identities and sense of agency in their work.

CHAPTER 8 *Discussion*

8.1 Introduction

The analysis across Chapters 5, 6 and 7 has highlighted how everyday creativity is integral to the participating English teachers' practices, whether in planning lessons, working in the classroom, or navigating the tensions between standards-based reforms, school-wide policies, students' needs, and dialogic teaching practices. The everyday creativity within these practices afforded the teachers opportunities to negotiate and maintain a sense of professional identity and agency, against an educational landscape increasingly focused on standards-based reforms.

In framing the discussion, I begin this chapter by restating the 'problem' that underpins this study, before exploring how creativity in contemporary education policy discourse is synonymous with particular aspects of education, such as 21st century skills, individualised accomplishment, and particular assessment practices. The purpose of this discussion is to address some of the common myths and assumptions about creativity in education before considering in more detail teacher creative practices. In my analysis of the data, these creative practices, such as dialogic teaching and negotiating the tensions within teacher practice, was shown to have strong links to teachers' professional subject knowledge, especially in an era of increasing standards-based reforms. Viewing teacher practice through the lens of everyday creativity enabled a shift in focus from teachers developing student creativity, to the participating English teachers finding ways to maintain their professional identities and a sense of agency as they navigated the tensions in their work. This discussion chapter develops the idea that teachers work to maintain creativity in their practice as a way of forming and maintaining a professional identity.

8.2 Restating the 'problem': Understanding creativity

Many of the arguments for creativity as a necessary skill for the 21st century invoke anxiety about economic sustainability and unforeseeable futures. Innovation—in the context of rapid changes in technology, globalisation and economic disparities (Livingstone & Sefton-Green, 2016)—is proposed as the key to addressing these anxieties (Lucas et al., 2013). This has resulted in many different initiatives to promote young people's creativity, such as the European Commission funded project CLEAR (European Commission, 2012) and Britain's

Creative Partnerships programs (Dillon et al., 2007), as well as the development of national policies, where creativity is considered a key skill. For example, creativity is considered a core skill in: the USA's education goals in the new millennium (Binkley et al., 2010); Finland's *National Core Curriculum* (see Vahtivouri-Hänninen et al., 2014); and in education policies from the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC). In Australia, creativity was a key aspect of the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA, 2008) and the more recent *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration* (Council of Australian Governments (COAG), Education Council, 2019) and is one of the general capabilities identified in the *Australian curriculum* (ACARA, n.d.-g).

Underpinning the programs, policies and curriculum initiatives discussed above is an understanding of creativity as a thinking skill, an understanding that privileges innovation and problem-solving, especially in individual actions or capability where the outcomes and products have economic benefits (Hall, 2010). Creativity as problem-solving and innovation is strongly associated with human capital (Lee et al., 2010) and the desire to develop 'nimble' and 'agile' capabilities "in order to be effective workers and citizens in the knowledge society of the 21st century" (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009, p. 8). There are several frameworks for teaching creativity within schools (Smith & Smith, 2010), many of which offer straightforward ways of understanding and developing student creativity. These frameworks, such as de Bono's lateral thinking (2014) or Bloom's taxonomy (1956), are designed to teach creativity as a transferrable skill, and therefore reinforce understandings of creativity as something separate from the social environment.

While human capital understandings of creativity—as individualistic, problem-solving and innovation—have been used to construct the *Australian* and *Victorian curriculums'* understandings of critical and creative thinking, the understanding of creativity associated with subject English is largely connected to student imaginative writing (Frawley, 2014). Christie (2013) and Derewianka (2015) consider the opportunities for student creativity to lie within a structured genre approach to writing, where students innovate on a theme or play with a character's response to a situation. Critics of genre approaches (Rosen, 2013) consider this too inflexible, ignoring the rich experiences and language resources students bring to their writing. Rosen's view is more in keeping with the growth paradigm of subject English where writing begins with students' "ways of talking and writing" (Macken-Horarik, 2014, p. 9). Within the growth paradigm of subject English, there is a much stronger focus on the process of writing as students find ways to make sense of their experiences drawing on the "semiotic resources available to them" (Doecke & Yandell, 2018, p. 159).

Human capital and imaginative forms of creativity may be understood through Bakhtin's (1981) theory of language—in particular, his theory that all language is heteroglossic in nature, that there are centripetal and centrifugal forces that both constrain and expand, respectively, the use and meanings of words (see Chapter 1). However, while human capital and imaginative understandings of creativity may be the most prevalent within education and subject English discourses, a heteroglossic understanding of language provides space to draw on other understandings such as Raymond Williams' (1977) concept of everyday creativity. Using Williams' understanding of everyday creativity provides opportunities to explore not just the creativity of students, but also the creativity of teachers within their everyday practices. Williams also helps us to appreciate how these understandings of everyday creativity add to and provide different understandings of teacher practice within an educational landscape driven by standards-based reforms.

The study draws on this concept of everyday creativity to explore the struggles of teacher practice as they find ways to negotiate the tensions of their practice. The struggle, as Williams' (1961) conceives it, is a process of “remaking” oneself, “a creative change in [the teacher's] personal organization, to include and control the experience” (p. 26). Bakhtin's description of a metaphor of centripetal and centrifugal forces has been evoked throughout the discussion to describe the tensions between the constraints on teachers' practice—professional standards, accountability measures, and high-stakes assessments—and the ability of teachers, as a collegial group, to see or use the affordances, opportunities or possibilities in their practice. A teacher's ability to work through and beyond such tensions, I have argued, is central to teacher creative practice, and a teacher's subject knowledge—in this case the participants' knowledge of subject English—is an important part of this. It enabled the participating teachers to move beyond the tensions and consider what else might be possible.

Teacher creative practice was not initially the focus of this study. Like many of the study's participants I interviewed, I began this PhD focused on how teachers were building creativity in their students or providing students with opportunities to be creative. Most of the English teachers in the initial interviews offered definitions of creativity focused on students producing new or interesting ideas. However, as I conducted more and more interviews and observed more and more teachers in action in classrooms, I began to see a change in the focus of their talk about creativity. They began to discuss the tensions that were evident in their practice: school implementation plans and data agendas that shaped the ways knowledge was constructed and valued in the classroom; a senior curriculum with a classroom-based

creative assessment task, but a high stakes external exam that was totally focused on analytical writing; and a high-stakes assessment regime that powerfully shaped the understanding of what a successful piece of writing looked like. There were many more examples not represented here, which are indicative of the complex creative practices that teachers were engaging in. The nature of these practices is not explicitly represented in the APSTs (AITSL, 2017) but it comes through clearly in the stories these English teachers shared, and from my hours of observation. Over the course of the data gathering and analysis, it became apparent to me that creative practice was often an integral part of teacher practice, even when teachers did not name it as creative. An important part of this study is finding ways to acknowledge the everyday creative practices of teachers, and to show how this contributes to understandings of teacher professional knowledge and teacher identities that are complex and constantly, and creatively (cf Williams, 1977), being negotiated.

8.2.1 Summary of the findings

Teacher creative practice was evident across a variety of aspects of the English teachers' work I observed in this study. It was evident in: their planning and curriculum implementation (Chapter 5); their teaching in the classroom using dialogic practices to establish a sense of social accomplishment (Chapter 6); and in their assessment practices (Chapter 7). Those three chapters illustrate and analyse how the participating English teachers engaged in dialogic practices, how they co-constructed meaning with their students, and how they found ways of assessing students in meaningful and creative ways, in spite of the education environment they operate in which was pre-occupied with achieving clear and quantitatively measurable outcomes.

In Chapter 5, I described how Sarah's and Rosa's practices were shaped by the priorities of the school in which they teach, with the focus on data collection and the use of ICT in the classroom. For instance, Rosa discussed how she has embraced the school's emphasis on data collection and uses it to inform her teaching, while she struggled with the implementation of ICT in her classroom 'for the sake of it'; for Rosa, the use of ICT must be meaningfully connected to the work of the subject and to the students' learning. Rosa's struggle to embed ICT in meaningful ways in her classroom also serves to challenge the myth that the use of ICT is 'naturally' or automatically facilitative of creativity. Her attitude suggests a questioning of the idea that creativity is synonymous with 'something new'. In the course of my observations and our interviews, Rosa was coming to terms with her own

struggles and understandings of ICT and how she saw herself in relation to technology; she saw herself as one of the “oldies” rather than one of the young teachers who might be considered “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001). Rosa’s struggle to find meaningful ways to work required her to find new ways of explaining her experience (Williams, 1961). It was her ability to draw on her professional knowledge—both of subject English and her students who are learners of English as an Additional Language (Ellis, 2007)—that enabled her to find new ways of ‘saying and doing’ (Gee, 2011) subject English. She all but acknowledged that working through the tensions she encountered in her practice required “a shift” in her professional identity, from being someone she wasn’t to “grow[ing] into it [the new ways of working]” and bringing “Rosa into it”.

In Chapter 6, I challenged the understanding that creativity is solely an individual attribute by exploring how the participating English teachers, their practices and their students, co-construct knowledge and meaning within subject English. In this way creativity becomes the social accomplishment of the class, and not only the work of individual students. To do this I focused on the teachers’ role in the classroom, showing how they co-constructed meaning with their students, again drawing on professional subject knowledge (Ellis, 2007) to facilitate students’ understandings of subject English, and how the knowledge they construct as part of subject English connects to the world outside the classroom. Through this exploration I critically scrutinised, not just the uni-directional or transmission approach to teaching, but also typical classroom discourse and interaction patterns such as Initiate, Respond and Evaluate (IRE) as a means to facilitate classroom discussions (Mehan, 1979; see also Cazden, 1988). I drew on work from Yandell (2006, 2013b) and Sawyer (2004) and others (see also Lyle, 2008; Wells, 1999) who propose that dialogic teaching practices enable teachers and students to co-construct knowledge and negotiate the ‘sayings and doings’ (Gee, 2011) of subject English together. This construction of knowledge, of “new descriptions and new meanings” is according to Williams’ (1961) part of the “ordinary social process” (p. 24). Furthermore, Steve and Anne’s classrooms demonstrate that the construction of knowledge in “an improvisational classroom” requires “a high degree of *pedagogical content knowledge*—to respond creatively to unexpected student queries” (p. 15). Thus, Chapter 6 can be seen to focus on how English teachers Steve and Anne were able to negotiate their classroom spaces to accomplish a range of outcomes—meeting the requirements of the curriculum, the students’ diverse needs, the priorities of the school, and the construction of knowledge and meaning. Their practices demonstrated the importance of subject knowledge, and the different dimensions of subject knowledge (Ellis, 2007), as part of teaching subject English. This did not happen separately from the classroom, the nature of subject English,

the students, or the school, or even the wider educational landscape. Rather, the teacher and students worked together to collaboratively learn, to negotiate what was acceptable and how to make meaning, and to forge individual and group identities in what Cremin and Chappell (2021) refer to the social identity of the classroom (see 6.5.1). Rebecca's attempts to negotiate the expectations of her teaching practice from a combination of the students' needs and the priorities of the school leadership were a contrast to the collaborative learning that was happening in Steve's and Anne's classes, and demonstrate more visibly the struggle of teacher creative practice. The scrutiny of Rebecca's teaching by both the students and the school's leadership challenged Rebecca's desire to use dialogic teaching practices as a way of establishing a "community of practice characterised by students and teachers relating as peers" (Cremin & Chappell, 2021, p. 318) and therefore her professional identity as a teacher. Rebecca's experiences are indicative not only of the struggle of creative practice, to find new ways to describe and make sense of these experiences (Williams, 1961). These new experiences can be attributed to a changing educational landscape, one that is perhaps more driven by data than Rebecca had previously been used to (Lingard, 2011; see also Ozga, 2009). Rebecca's pedagogical approaches, which were based on large group collaboration and fluid approaches to curriculum, had been challenged, demonstrating that creativity practice always happens "within real pressures and limits" (Williams, 1977, p. 212). These challenges to her practices and identity may explain why Rebecca struggles to maintain a sense of agency within her classroom.

In Chapter 7, I examined how the participating teachers' practices were mediated by standards-based reforms. In particular, I focused on how these reforms, for example high-stakes assessment, shaped the teachers' understanding of writing, and teacher perceptions of what successful writing does. Steve and Anne, whose practices in the classroom I described as 'dialogic', largely because of the ways they co-constructed meaning with their students, find that high-stakes assessment mediate how students write in the classroom through potentially limiting their possibilities for practice. There was a struggle for some of the participating English teachers when their personal responses to student work, such as in their responses as readers and writers themselves, were set aside in favour of the government and system mandated success criteria, and a perception of what was rewarded in the context of writing for high-stakes assessment (Perelman, 2018). The criteria used in these high-stakes testing regimes have been criticised for their "lack of transparency", using scales that "are too many and too confusing" and that have been assigned seemingly arbitrary weightings (Perelman, 2018, p. 36). And yet, the same criteria have the potential to strongly mediate how English teachers recognise the elements of 'good' writing. For

instance, Steve and Anne found conflicts between their subject understanding of what good writing is and the way high-stakes assessment constructs good writing. Their teaching and assessment practices were also in tension and they found themselves in an ideological struggle between intrinsic standards of writing derived from subject expertise, and extrinsic standards derived from external authorities. As Locke (2015) describes it:

The extrinsically oriented discourse is ‘framed’ or ‘constructed’ by high-stakes testing or standards regimes that have been government mandated ... [and] intrinsically oriented discourse, relat[ing] to the professional content knowledge of the teacher who understands the nature of writing and how it is best evaluated for the good of individual students. (p. 204)

Steve and Anne attempted to resolve this ideological struggle by aligning their understanding of successful student writing with the criteria provided by NAPLAN, attempting to set aside their professional knowledge of writing. In this instance, NAPLAN, as a prominent instrument of standards-based reforms, appeared to function as a “massive ideological apparatus that constructs people as subject to anonymous structures over which they have no control” (Doecke et al., 2019, p. 218). Steve and Anne’s subscription to the high-stakes assessment regimes—through teaching particular understandings of persuasive writing—supported a particular understanding of teacher professionalism, which is consistent with attempts to standardise the teaching profession through accountability measures such as the APSTs (AITSL, 2017) and the need for standardised assessment regimes even within schools (Meiers et al., 2007). There exists, therefore, tensions between subject English understandings of creativity in writing and external definitions of ‘successful’ writing constructed by standardised tests.

Laura and Catherine, on the other hand, found other ways to work with the tensions of their practice, namely through drawing on a wide range of professional experiences, such as further study, writing and drama. This enabled them to work productively with the tensions between high-stakes assessment and their own professional knowledge and experience as writers. While Laura worked in a supplementary setting, Brightside Education, her response to the provocation—that NAPLAN examiners may not appreciate Peter’s “Mr Henton” response (Appendix G)—showed that such ‘external’ settings are not beyond the influence of these high-stakes assessment discourses and regimes. Laura’s approach to writing drew from her drama background in improvisation and focused on the function of the text, how students can break down rules of genre, repurpose tropes and rebuild texts for their own purposes. While her teaching context in supplementary setting wasn’t directly influenced by standards-based reforms in the same ways that participating teachers in a school may have experience, Laura clearly notes that was evidence that these high-stakes assessments had

mediated some of the students' understanding of 'good' writing (see 7.3.2.2). Catherine had a similar approach, drawing connections between the texts and the writing that the students were doing, and the world beyond the classroom by drawing on real world examples and, as Catherine explained, "expand[ing] the notion of what it means to study English". In doing so, Laura and Catherine were not only resisting the ways standards-based reforms shape their work and identities as English teachers, they were also resisting the way in which the creative and critical modes can be pitted against each other by standards-based reforms and tests such as NAPLAN.

Throughout Chapters 5, 6 and 7 I have discussed how the myths of creativity have been supported or contested by the various narratives and observations from the participating English teachers in conversation and through their work. In particular, I have outlined how standards-based reforms and a neo-liberal agenda have mythologised particular understandings of creativity—particularly understandings of creativity that are congruent with visions of people as enterprising, individualist and flexible workers in an uncertain economy. I have also outlined how some of the English teacher participants' creative practices have found methods of resistance and found ways of speaking back to these reforms and norms. In this next section, I tease out how these creativity myths are constructed by policy and curriculum documents and contested by subject English teacher accounts of their practices and understandings of everyday creativity.

8.3 Reconsidering of the myths of creativity

This study has illustrated how many of the understandings of creativity in the literature, policy and curriculum frame creativity as something new and a 'value-add' for teachers' work. These understandings of creativity have achieved ascendancy in the discourses of education reform and are broadly compatible with neo-liberal constructs of the individual most adapted to current and future economic conditions. These understandings of creativity as something new, innovative or as problem-solving, were present in many of the ways in which the English teacher participants accounted for creativity in their teaching practice. In the section below, I return to the question of the 'mythologies' of creativity, first raised in Chapter 1, and explore how the analysis of teachers' accounts of creativity have supported the argument that 'creativity' can be considered a mythology (Barthes, 2009) signifying a necessary, assessable, individualised skill for the 21st century. I also discuss how these mythologies and common assumptions about creativity have been contested and to some extent deconstructed by some teachers in the study. In teasing out these illustrations of practice, I

propose an alternative understanding of creativity, one that shifts the emphasis from developing student creativity through teaching creativity or creatively teaching (Craft, 2003; Jeffrey & Craft, 2004)—through, for instance frameworks for creativity (see 2.2.2.2) or by modelling creativity through using new activities (see 2.5; Craft, 2003; Jeffrey & Craft, 2004)—to include teacher creative practice. I posit that creativity in English teachers’ practice provides opportunities to maintain a sense of professional identity and agency, especially in an era of standards-based reforms. And, more significantly, I argue that these creative practices can be a fundamental part of the everyday, and ordinary (Williams, 1977) work of English teachers’ practices. And, in focusing on teacher everyday creativity practices, there are opportunities for teachers, school leadership and policymakers to develop more nuanced understandings of teacher practice than those afforded by teacher professional standards as the APSTs (AITSL, 2017)—an understanding that acknowledges the role of professional subject knowledge (Ellis, 2007) and the largely invisible work of teachers in working through the tensions of their practice (Connell, 1985; see also Doecke et al., 2007; Doecke et al., 2019). However, given the strong focus of teaching for creativity and creatively teaching throughout the teacher narratives, the section below also considers how these understandings were accounted for throughout this study.

I begin by discussing creativity as a 21st century skill, and explore how this understanding was evident in my observations in this study. In the second section I contrast the focus on individual creativity with an idea of the social accomplishment of creativity. Finally, I discuss how creativity can be seen as contesting standardised assessment practices, and how drawing on professional subject knowledge enabled the participating teachers to work within this tension.

8.3.1 Creativity as a 21st century skill

As the English teacher participants shared accounts of their practice with me, they frequently focused on how their students demonstrated creativity and how they created opportunities for their students to be creative in their work. Each teacher shared examples of students’ work they saw as creative—such as Catherine’s example of a student’s expository essay with jingles as topic sentences—or student work that was judged as attempting to be creative but was perhaps not successful in some way—such as Laura’s accounts of students producing ‘dull, generic’ material. Consistent across these accounts were how the participating teachers’ understandings of creativity linked to expressive skills, often associated with more

artistic forms of creativity, and in this instance particular forms of writing. This is congruent with Pope's (2012; see also Pope, 2005) argument, that creativity in subject English "tends to concentrate on *one's own writing* ... typically, this takes the form of poems, stories and scripts prepared alone" (p. 11). Frawley (2014) also found that English teachers associated creativity with these particular forms of writing, seeing them as distinct from the analytical and critical work often associated with text studies and writing tasks on high-stakes assessment such as NAPLAN and senior or final year exams. This is reinforced by the *Victorian curriculum* (VCAA, n.d.-I), which delineates between particular forms of writing, separating different writing styles into expository, persuasive and imaginative—commonly referred to as creative—writing. Largely, the views of these teachers, much research literature, and the design of high-stakes curriculum and assessment underscores the understanding of creativity within subject English as restricted to the domain of particular forms of writing.

How the participating English teachers connected particular writing tasks to creativity supports the bifurcated view of creativity that separates imaginative and expressive forms or creativity from creativity as problem-solving (Moran, 2010; Craft 2003). They strongly associated specific genres with imaginative forms of creativity, such as narrative, mirroring how the curriculum documents had constructed writing tasks. There is a large body of policy literature (MEETYA, 2008; see also ACARA, DET & VCAA) that identifies creativity as problem-solving as one of the necessary skills for individual students to develop in the 21st century (see Ananiadou & Claro, 2009; Banaji et al., 2010; Sawyer, 2011; Lee et al., 2010; & Moran, 2010). And yet the study found, in line with Gale (2006), that policy and curriculum documents that emphasised creativity as problem-solving had little direct influence over the participating English teachers' understandings of creativity. These policies and curriculum documents did, however, mediate teacher practice when implemented as part of a school-based priority, especially if the priority was linked to accountability measures such as teacher professional development. At Ridgmont Secondary College, for instance, the school's priority of 21st century skills didn't necessarily influence how Sarah accounted for creativity in her practice; by her own admission she was 'happy to jump on the bandwagon'. However, she also acknowledged that newer teachers perhaps felt the pressures of the school's policies and priorities in different ways. This is consistent with Hayes et al.'s (2017) findings that "early-career teachers needed to learn how to teach against the grain" (p. 92) and do so within both the education system more generally and their school context more specifically (see also Cochran-Smith, 1991). Sarah, for instance argued that newer teachers were "not as jaded by the system" and had "that ability to be creative" but "didn't have the confidence to be creative for that fear ... [of] something not working". The newer teachers' caution towards

creativity and trying out new ideas is a result of the precarious status of the contract work usually experienced by graduate teachers (Mayer et al., 2017). There is an irony therefore in developing 21st century skills to provide a workforce that is ‘nimble’, ‘flexible’ and ‘agile’ while simultaneously linking teacher registration, employability and progression to a teaching standards framework that is not so nimble, flexible or agile in its recognition of teacher practice or the precarious nature of teacher employability (Bess, 1998).

The only example of creativity as a 21st century skill throughout the study was Rosa’s experience with integrating technology into the classroom. In this instance, the understanding of creativity as innovation was through the school’s use of Microsoft’s metric linked to their cross-faculty professional development goals. The school’s technology priority and their use of the metric didn’t directly influence how Rosa accounted for creativity in her practice, but it did involve a shift in her teaching practices in the ways she worked with technology in the classroom, something she, at least initially, found restrictive. This was largely due to the lack of nuance or space around the possible meanings of ‘innovation’ on the metric and the various ways this might be accounted for in the classroom. It was telling that Rosa’s creative practice, especially the ways she drew on her subject knowledge and her knowledge of her students to integrate technology in meaningful ways, remained unacknowledged in a formal process of feedback from a colleague. Viewing teacher practice through the lens of everyday creativity, as Williams (1971) conceptualises it, provides more opportunities for not only more nuanced understandings for creativity but also more nuanced understandings of teacher practice, that at least in Rosa’s case went unacknowledged (see also Cremin & Chappell, 2021).

8.3.2 Creativity and the individual

There is a strong tendency in the literature to focus on the relationship between the individual and creativity. Many of the English teacher participants argued that everyone had the ability to be creative. For Steve, Sarah and Laura, the ability for students to be creative depended on their confidence and their willingness to take risks. For Laura this was an important part of her teaching practices as she sought to “make it clear [to the students] that there are no mistakes or errors to exploring whatever direction they like”. The distinction between non-creative and creative students was therefore not based on whether the English teacher identified creative potential, but on which students were demonstrating creativity, often in overt ways. These students were described by Steve as ‘flamboyant’ and by Catherine as

‘whimsical’, which is reminiscent of the association of artistic and imaginative forms of creativity (Craft, 2010), and associated with personal, or small c creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). These associations focus on the creative person or student as one with different or extraordinary abilities, similar to arguments made by authors who link creativity with giftedness (Gingell, 2001). Beghetto et al. (2017) attributes these distinctions and attributes to a continuum of creativity. At one pole of this continuum are people whose creativity is considered extraordinary and at the other pole are people who are ordinarily creative, or where everyone is considered potentially creative (cf. Williams, 1961) given the right conditions and support.

There were moments where individual students, such as Fei in Steve’s class, demonstrated creative use of language. Fei’s description of the idyllic pond, which “sounds like the pond from *The Little Mermaid*”, can be seen as a result of how her peers have shared their stories, as well as how Steve and the class have negotiated the space of subject English. This was not just the physical space of the classroom, but also the ways of doing subject English in a particular time and space, with particular players (Glass, 2012). Fei’s creative accomplishment was acknowledged as individual creativity, however, the social setting—the interactions with Steve and other members of the class—had contributed to the response. The contribution of the social setting to individual responses is consistent with Sawyer’s (2004) argument of collaborative emergence, whereby all participants contribute to the emerging discussion, resulting in dialogue that is both improvisational and responsive (p. 13). Despite the social accomplishment of creativity, there was still a privileging of the individual, both in problem-solving and artistic understandings of creativity. As Kuhn (1996) argues, accomplishment—whether scientific or creative—is a complex process that cannot be separated for context. Acknowledging the social accomplishment of creativity in Fei’s response provided potential opportunities to acknowledge as creative the contribution students make to the classroom, such as the negotiation of language in Rosa’s EAL classroom as students constructed understandings of gestures or the students in Anne’s class sharing what they knew about Robert Walton in the first few chapters of *Frankenstein*. In each of the observations the students and their teachers were co-constructing and negotiating knowledge of texts and language, as well as their roles in the classroom—such as Bree establishing she can’t ‘do creative’ (see 6.4) or Laura and the class constructing knowledge of synonyms (see 7.3). In this sense, creativity was a social accomplishment, rather than simply an individual achievement. The students in Rosa’s classroom worked together to interpret materials presented in English into their first language, and vice versa. In some of the other classes the students were able to build on each other’s understandings of

the text, sharing their interpretations with each other. Even when knowledge was contested—such as when Ben and Debra deliberated over the liminal spaces at Hogwarts, and in Drew’s and James’ somewhat mocking responses to Zach’s question of whether ‘...’ functions as an ellipsis or an elision—these students can be seen as still negotiating knowledge and the various ways of doing subject English. These examples of student creativity are not just about constructing new knowledge. They are also about negotiating what knowledge is appropriate and relevant for subject English within their class and school contexts (see Ellis, 2007; Rex et al., 2010).

There were a number of times throughout the observations when students engaged in social aspects of the classroom, where their interactions might be considered creative, but could also be considered inappropriate. These were usually evident in individual ‘cheekiness’, such as when Rosa’s student Ji told Rosa she was bad teacher, or when Billy inquired as to whether he could write a letter to his ‘crush’. Considering these as individual acts, they may be attributed to humorous, subversive or disruptive behaviour (Baker-Sennet & Matusov, 1997). These moments from Ji and Billy could easily be attributed to mild misbehaviour, where students might be seen as detracting from the serious business of learning (see 6.4.2). But these moments of playfulness—considered by some as necessary for creativity (Banaji et al., 2010; Cremin & Chappell, 2021)—and creativity can also be appreciated as important in establishing relationships between the students, the teacher and their peers, as well as marking out and challenging social boundaries within the classroom (Gee, 2011; Glass, 2012).

Although mild misbehaviour may be considered a playful form of individual creativity, it is usually not recognised as desirable within conventional schooling (Smith & Smith, 2010), and is perhaps not the understanding of “confident and creative individual” used to inform the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA, 2008) or the *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* (COAG, Education Council, 2019). Nor do either of these declarations of education goals take into account social understandings of creativity. As a result, the *Australian* and *Victorian curriculums* (ACARA, n.d.-a & VCAA, n.d.-g), which used the *Melbourne Declaration* as their foundation, incorporate very little reference to group creativity (see Doecke et al., 2014). Each of the examples I have discussed above—such as Fei, Ben, Debra, Drew, James and Zach—cannot be decontextualised from the situation and circumstances in which they occur, affirming Doecke and McClenaghan’s (2011) claim that “the creativity of these students is a function of the social relationships in

which they are operating” (p. 43), their identities both shaping and being shaped by their social contexts (Williams, 1961).

8.3.3 Assessing creativity

One of the initial concerns in this project was a focus on how teachers might assess the creativity of students. Assessing creativity was also a concern for the participating English teachers, who defined creativity as subjective in nature, and therefore too hard to assess consistently—a concern that was perhaps reinforced in Victorian schools by the absence of any creative task on the end of school high-stakes examination. Laura acknowledged that the ‘time saving’ benefits of consistent approaches to writing, such as a 5-body paragraph approach, were encouraged by high-stakes assessments such as end of school exams. On the one hand, Meiers et al. (2007) contend, “it is essential that there is consistency in these judgements between teachers in the same school, across different schools, and over time” (p. 1). On the other hand, government policies and curriculum also argue that creativity, often defined as “things that exist outside of the realm of the ordinary” (Smith & Smith, 2010, p. 255), is also important (see MEETYA, 2008; ACARA, n.d.-g; VCAA, n.d.-f). In response to the developments in the global knowledge economy, and current social and economic conditions, the *Melbourne Declaration* (MEETYA, 2008) articulated the need for creative citizens, where creativity was framed as an asset to future economies (see 2.3). However, discourses of improving educational outcomes through improving teacher quality—a product of those same economic and social conditions—have resulted in governments implementing stronger accountability measures through policies, such as the APSTs and standardised testing regimes (see Parr et al., 2015). These accountability measures mediate teachers’ practices in ways that limit how knowledge is constructed and represented; while creativity may be officially encouraged in students, compliance is considered a more desirable trait for teachers. Many of the English teacher participants’ narratives acknowledge this incongruity, accounting for tensions between the priorities of teaching creativity, and the imperative for consistency in evaluations of student work. This tension was raised by Steve and Anne as they searched for ways to evaluate Peter’s writing, which did not conform to expected genre conventions. The concern was not necessarily about ways to assess creativity, but rather how to assess creativity in an era focused on standardisation and measurability.

A common method for standardisation of assessment is the use of rubrics (Marzano, 2010). Locke (2015) raises the concern in the use of rubrics for assessing student writing, in that

rubrics offer standardised ways of approaching assessment that leave little room for students to construct pieces that sit outside of what the rubric dictates. This study validates Locke's concerns with most participants acknowledging that they found it difficult to reward creative student work or they identified that it was not as valued as it should have been. This was certainly the case when assessing Peter's "Mr Henton" piece, but it was also the case for Simon in assessing Rosa's use of ICT in the classroom. The use of rubrics, where 'success' was defined as tangible evidence against a set of descriptors (Marzano, 2010), is widely considered to result in an objective evaluation. Rubrics, Locke (2015) argues, "*can be conscripted to serve the extrinsic master*" (p. 217, see also Spence, 2010; & Kohn, 2006) and "*all rubrics in some ways construct the object assessed*" (p. 217), potentially "*blind[ing] you to the qualities of a student's writing because of the way it focuses your attention*" (p. 217). This seemed to be the case for the rubric Simon used and the way the NAPLAN rubric mediated Steve's and Anne's evaluation of Peter's writing. It prompted them to focus their attention on narrowly defined criteria, at the expense of what they otherwise might have described as creative work in the classroom and in the writing (see Sefton-Green 2001, 2011; Lehrer & Schauble, 2012; Thomson & Sefton-Green, 2010). However, as Laura and Catherine demonstrated, it is possible to look beyond the limitations of the rubrics and acknowledge how students' writing can work within constraints and still make use of the possibilities of particular genres. The analysis shows that by considering the constraints and possibilities of a writing task, a flexible framework for assessing creative work of students can provide teachers with possible ways of working through and beyond the tensions of assessing creativity—similar to considering how teachers draw on everyday creativity to work through and beyond tensions within their practice.

The accounts of teacher creative practice through Chapters 5, 6 and 7 have provided an opportunity to deconstruct some of the mythologies around creativity, and consider how the use of some understandings of creativity, such as creative problem-solving, have been accepted as natural (Barthes, 2009). As evident in the discussion throughout this section, understandings of creativity are complex and nuanced, encompassing understandings of problem-solving and innovation as 21st century skills, as well as subject-specific and social understandings of creativity. Even within subject English understandings of creativity are complex, and often in tension with accountability measures such as assessment practices that value standardisation. The heteroglossic nature of language (Bakhtin, 1981) provides opportunities to foreground the lesser-privileged definitions of creativity, such as co-construction of knowledge and everyday creativity, and in doing so provide a different lens in which to consider teacher practice.

8.4 Teacher creative practice

The discussion so far has focused on how the participating English teachers accounted for creativity in their students and their students' work. This focus on student creativity is well represented in the literature, whereby the relationship between teacher, creativity and students has been constructed as mainly, or even exclusively, for the benefit for the student (Jeffrey & Craft, 2004; Soh, 2017). However, as Hall and Thomson (2005) acknowledge, "standardised teaching, ruled by standardised outcome measures ... are unlikely to be the optimal conditions for promoting creativity in schools" (p. 15). The concept then of teaching creativity is seemingly at odds with a school system that is usually built around conformity, and increasing standardisation and accountability measures (see also Smith & Smith, 2010). The tension between creativity and conformity may explain why curriculum documents such as the *Australian Curriculum: general capabilities* (ACARA, 2012a) are informed by approaches to creativity that offer a structured approach for understanding and teaching creativity (e.g. Bloom's taxonomy and de Bono's lateral thinking, see Chapter 2). There is therefore an argument to be made that the current dominant accounts of creativity, which focus on the student reinforce particular understandings of creativity as problem-solving, innovation and individual achievements. In doing so, the social character of creativity, one where the teacher is a co-constructer of knowledge, is diminished in favour of developing the 'nimble' and 'agile' person.

Just as human capital understandings of teaching creativity constructs students as nimble and agile individuals (see Chapter 2), so too these understandings of teaching creatively tend to construct accounts of the ideal teacher as creatively different, flamboyant and whimsical, someone who is constantly able to use "imaginative approaches to make learning more interesting, engaging, exciting and effective" (Morris, 2006, p. 4). While Soh (2017) claims teachers like these are hard to find, there were elements of these 'creative characteristics' among some of the participating teachers. Steve, for example, self-identified as 'creatively flamboyant' and demonstrated this when he dramatically threw himself to the floor at the end of his Tanka (see 6.3). And in Sarah's account of her teaching practice she noted the need to find new and interesting ways—through the use of playing cards or the selection of a different text—to teach and engage with the students (see 5.3.2).

The concept of the creative teacher that I have drawn attention to in my analysis though, is one whose creativity is based in their everyday and regular actions, and the concept of everyday creativity (Williams, 1977). Williams (1977) proposes that creative practice is

ideological struggle, one which is “not casting off an ideology, or learning phrases about it, but confronting a hegemony in the fibres of the self and in the hard practical substance of effective and continuing relationships” (p. 212). Everyday creativity, within teacher practice, may encompass extroverted or inspirational acts of teacher creativity (Soh, 2017), and it can also be inclusive of a range of teacher practices, including but not limited to little-c creativity (Beghetto et al., 2017)—such as the work Steve did with *The Pillow Book* and the song lyrics Rebecca used with her students—that is, personal acts that were more easily recognised as creativity by other people. Importantly though everyday creativity also encompasses the everyday practice of teachers, practice that occurs “within real pressures and limits, such practice is always difficult and often uneven” as teachers engage in an “active struggle for new consciousness” (Williams, 1977, p. 212). This struggle, and the tensions that cause this struggle, have been seen as ideological work (Bakhtin, 1981; Doecke et al., 2007; Doecke et al., 2019). However, within this study, these ideological struggles, how teachers negotiate the tensions of their work, has been reconceptualised as teacher creative practice. The sections below explore these struggles and the difficulties and unevenness of them as a way of making visible the creativity that may not be recognisable or readily apparent from the point of view of official discourses of creativity in education.

8.4.1 Accounting for the everyday creativity of teacher practice

In the interviews conducted for this study, it was rare that English teacher participants viewed their practice as creative. At the conclusion of my observation of a lesson, most of the teachers asked, “Was that okay?” and offered other opportunities to observe classes they thought would be ‘more creative’. This was especially the case if the class had not engaged in any activities that the teacher felt were innovative or engaging for students. This is understandable as student activities are perhaps a more visible part of teaching practice. Much of teacher creative practice, the less visible parts of teachers’ work—planning, interpreting curriculum, and negotiating challenges and tensions that requires drawing on both innovations and imaginative forms of creativity (see Connell, 1985)—generally happen outside of the classroom or in unobservable moments. Alternatively, they are the instances that O’Mara (2006) describes as “thinking on our feet” (p. 42), wherein teachers respond to students or circumstances in the moment.

Connell (1985) argues that much of teacher practice is not visible; this is clearly the case with teacher creative practice (see 5.2.1). The struggles of ideology between meeting the

demands of, for example, high-stakes assessments, immediate student needs and altruistic teacher motivations, are not readily observable. However, these struggles in the participating English teachers' practice were made visible through discussion in interviews as they shared stories of the problems and tensions in their practice. One might say that Rosa's struggle to integrate ICT into her EAL classroom was not 'visible' in the observations; and one might say that Laura's evaluation that the wizards' duel did not quite work the way she had anticipated was not visible evidence of creative practice. When I discussed such 'invisible' moments of creative practice with the participating teachers, the teachers often normalised them alongside other behaviours associated with creativity, such as flexibility (O'Quinn & Derks, 1997; Sternberg & O'Hara, 1999), or dismissed the examples as 'just what teachers do'. With understandings of Big-C creativity often privileged and rewarded in creativity discourses (Beghetto, et al., 2017), the recognition of everyday creativity can be lost, or at best, diminished. Because practices, as Gee (2011) argues, are "socially recognized and institutionally or culturally supported" (p. 27), the lack of recognition of everyday creative practices has the potential to reinforce ways of saying, doing and being in subject English that demonstrate or celebrate particular kinds of creativity, such as creativity that is seen as personally beneficial—as in little-c creativity—or creativity that is associated with creative genius—as in Big-C creativity. Therefore everyday teaching practices may be construed as 'not creative enough'. This notion that teachers may be unaware of their creative practice is in keeping with findings from Hayes et al. (2107) who found that:

standout teachers [those with 'uncommon' or creative pedagogies] appeared to be unaware of how unusual and exemplary their practices were compared to their colleagues. They were generally under the impression that others were working in similar ways. (p. 116)

These descriptions of everyday creativity within practice may help to facilitate not just "standout teachers" but policy-makers may come to recognise creativity within subject English teachers' ordinary practice. While these examples are difficult to codify in tangible and quantifiable ways (Shulman, 1987; see also 1.3.4), creativity—and in the context of this study everyday creative practice—appears to be a key aspect of developing subject specific teaching expertise (Hayes et al., 2017). A more nuanced understanding of creativity—one that encompasses everyday creativity, alongside instances of more visible examples of little-c and Big-C creativity—provides opportunities for teachers to describe their experiences of practice, including how professional knowledge is used to navigate tensions in practice, in meaningful ways.

This discussion supports Connell's (1985) assertion that even "experienced and successful teachers ... often find it difficult to say how [teaching] is done, or even what, precisely, they

are doing” (p. 70). The less visible qualities in teacher practice, creative or otherwise, may be a challenge to reflect upon, because it is difficult “to validate this approach in a school where emphasis [is] placed on explicit teaching in order to produce explicit learning” (Apostolos-Thermos, 2014, p. 192). This is an ‘evidence-based’ approach to education widely supported by education initiatives such as “Visible Learning” (Hattie, 2009) and other work that draws on a standards-based approach (see also Marzano, 2010; & Beghetto et al., 2017). There are places where creative teaching practices—especially through the use of narrative-based accounts—may be made visible in the professional teaching standards, such as within Standard 2 “know the content and how to teach it” (AITSL, 2017). However, within APSTs (AITSL, 2017) the concept of ‘knowledge’ is decontextualised, separated from all subject areas including subject English and therefore ‘knowledge’ as content for any subject appears to be static. Wells (1999) argues that when knowledge is decontextualised in this way it becomes separate from the individual and from the social, as opposed to an understanding of knowledge that is “situated in a particular time and place” (p. 172). This is despite the fact that for many of the participating English teachers, connecting the ‘content’ of the English classroom to the world was considered an important aspect of their role.

The desire to make connections between the work of subject English and the outside world may explain why all of the participating teachers considered it important to have structure and flexibility in their classroom practices, albeit in different ways. For Anne, these opportunities for flexibility came within a highly structured class, where she leveraged moments to connect student writing and experiences to their study of *Frankenstein*. For others there was more flexibility, but not completely without structure. As Rebecca discussed with her students, her curriculum and teaching were “fluid”, as she navigated between what the curriculum required, what her students needed, as well as where her classes fell during the week’s schedule. This sometimes meant taking time out of teaching ‘content’ and working with students on their understanding of world events, such as the Manchester bombings (see 6.5.1). Rebecca regarded these moments as an important part of the work of teaching English, recognising the position that subject English has in helping students to understand and make sense of their world beyond school. For Laura and Catherine, for instance, these connections between the classroom and the outside world were foregrounded in their accounts of practice, as well as being essential to students’ interpretations of text, their writing, and how the students made sense of themselves, and the worlds outside the classroom (Hines & Appleman, 2000). These moments can be seen to demonstrate that “disciplinary knowledge is not static, but socially constructed through language, interaction, and cultural practices” (Rex et al., 2010, p.103, see also Hines & Appleman, 2000). However,

there is no acknowledgement in the APSTs of how teachers might navigate the complexities of teaching within their specific subject area, or the social and cultural context of their classes. This is despite Cremin and Chappell's (2021) arguments that there is a "strong[] interplay between subject knowledge and creative pedagogy" (p. 323) and creativity being "grounded in disciplinary knowledge" (p. 321; see also Boden, 2001). In each of the narrative accounts, the participating subject English teachers drew on their subject-specific knowledge to make sense of—or attempt to make sense of—their practice and the tensions within their practice. Even though there is an accepted connection between creativity and subject-specific knowledge, the APSTs operate as a set of "generic professional standards [which] were written by bureaucrats and imposed on all teachers, irrespective of their discipline and regardless of their context" (Parr & Bulfin, 2015, p. 158).

8.4.2 Dialogic practice

Throughout this study, specifically in the classroom observations, English teachers were shown to be engaged in constructing knowledge with their students, not only in developing interpretations of the text, but also in developing shared understandings of the way subject English works. Sarah acknowledged that one of the tensions in subject English works was between an understanding of subject English where writing is a more privileged form of communication (Peel et al., 2000) and classroom practice in subject English where much of the work "floats on a sea of talk" (Barnes, 1976, as cited in Locke, 2015, p. 149). Through this talk, the participating English teachers and their students constructed and negotiated knowledge together; determining what different gestures meant, the different intentions of an author, why and how an author might use liminal spaces. In this way the accounts of creativity presented through Chapters 5 to 7 have drawn attention to the social accomplishment where the teacher and student play an active role in the classroom. However, as I have already discussed, this social accomplishment is rarely recognised by the teachers, who tended to focus instead on individual outcomes. While these discussions may inform how students write, the dialogic practice—both in co-constructing meaning and negotiating identities within the classroom (see 6.3 & 6.4.2) potentially goes unrecognised. In more dialogic understandings of teacher practice, teachers are central to co-constructing knowledge and facilitating this 'sea of talk'. An understanding of creativity that encompasses dialogic teaching practices extends more traditional conceptions that focus on the individual and on creativity confined to particular forms of writing to consider how creativity is a social accomplishment in everyday practice.

In this study's accounts of the participating English teachers' classrooms, the teacher was often positioned at the front of the room and there was a lot of teacher talk; this is perhaps consistent with teacher centred classrooms where teachers ask closed-questions and only validate student responses that are deemed correct (Wells, 1999). In such classrooms, teaching is typically considered unidirectional and transactional, and teachers are seen as knowledgeable experts transmitting knowledge to students (Lyle, 2008, see also Bakhtin, 1981). This is a particular view of education, one that also supports a particular view of subject English, one where students are engaged in learning the "best that has been thought and said" (Arnold, 1869, p. iii), as well as a rhetorical and textual competence which focuses on skills acquisition (Locke, 2015). However, my observations of the participating English teachers found little evidence to support an understanding of effective teaching based on the transmission of knowledge to students. Frequently the English teachers drew on dialogic strategies to support student meaning-making and the construction of knowledge. Dialogue in their classrooms was based on questions that were open ended, seeking student interpretations and thinking, and

promot[ing] communication through authentic exchanges. There [was] genuine concern for the views of the talk partners and effort [was] made to help participants share and build meaning collaboratively. (Lyle, 2008, p. 225)

There were occasions where classroom talk was more monologic, for instance Rosa explaining the 'gesture' "'G' is pronounced 'J' and the 't' like 'ch'". While Rosa offers a definition that she writes on the board, students consult their dictionaries and discuss in their first languages to make sense of the word and its meaning, in authentic and collaborative ways. The more that the dynamic was investigated, the more that the teacher's positionality in this classroom was not just front and centre, directing the learning. Rather, they were promoting and supporting the dialogic potential of talk in the classroom (Wells, 1999; Lotman et al., 1994).

Such examples of dialogue from the classroom are not the only dialogic practices in this study. The provocations also provide micro-examples of conversations where teachers were engaging in reflexive practice as part of their professional learning. The purpose of these conversations was not to arrive at agreed understandings of what constitutes a successful piece of creative writing or how to assess creativity writing. An important part of these conversations was to engage in a professional dialogue. Throughout Steve's, Anne's and Laura's responses to the provocation they were grappling with the tensions in their practice, representing the different 'voices' of 'stakeholders' in their classroom: the students', the school's, the government's (represented through reporting on high-stakes assessment), the

parents' and community's, as well as their own. In this sense, as each of the teachers talked through their response, they were engaging in dialogue (Parr, 2010) as they attempted to understand and explain how and why they were reacting in particular ways. Rebecca, at one point in the first interview, referred to our interview as "therapy for teaching", the interview process providing her an opportunity to talk about her practice in ways that she felt she no longer could in her school context. The opportunity to talk about her work, as Doecke et al. (2019) explain, is one possible way to make visible and represent the ideological work of teachers. Doecke et al. (2019) argue that:

The representations of our experience that we create through language and the other semiotic resources available to us, along with the everyday communication in which we participate, can be seen as always in some sense a response to the world in which we find ourselves and the practices in which we engage. It thus becomes possible to take a standpoint vis-à-vis the ideological apparatuses that are arrayed against us. Williams' point, however, is that this does not involve a transcendence of ideology, but a reflexive awareness of our thoughts and feelings, our beliefs and values, in response to the world around us. (p. 218)

In an era of particular forms of high teacher accountability in which teachers are constrained to account for their practice against a narrow range of indicators, these professional dialogues resist the call for clear definitions and consistency in language (Lucas et al. 2013). Instead, they provide a framework that values the dialogic and unfinalizable quality of teaching practices, that teachers can speak into, where dialogue is an important part of understanding practice and concepts such as creativity (see Parr & Bulfin, 2015). In these conversations, teachers in this study were able to make sense of, at or at least begin to make sense of, creativity and their classroom practice, in much the same way their students were co-constructing knowledge and making-meaning in their dialogic classrooms.

8.4.3 Teacher's creative practice: Negotiating tensions

The ways that teachers navigate the tensions in their practice is not how teacher creative practice is typically constructed in the creativity-as-human-capital literature, which prefers to focus on teachers' innovative pedagogy or how teachers teach for creativity (Smith & Smith, 2010). And yet, throughout the semi-structured interviews, the participating English teachers repeatedly shared narratives about tensions in their practice and how they worked through them. These accounts were not just about assessing creativity and issues of subjectivity and consistency, but also explored these tensions. The conversations located teacher practice as it is mediated by school contexts, such as school priorities, subject knowledge and the needs of their students. The competing demands or tensions were often context specific and can be understood in relation to their specific frame of reference (Gee, 2011). Chapter 5 for instance

considers teacher practice in the planning and negotiation of the classroom structure. For Rosa, this highlighted how she navigated the competing priorities from the school and the subject, with the needs of her students and her professional identity as an English teacher. In this instance, the Ridgmont Secondary College's commitment to 21st century skills (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009) mediated how Rosa integrated ICT into her classroom, and her need to do so in meaningful ways for the curriculum, her students and herself. Similarly, Sarah also discussed the tensions between the school priorities of Ridgmont, namely the needs of the subject, exploring the tensions between the school's need for written evidence of student work and the tendency for subject English to be a discussion-based subject. Rebecca, who also worked at Ridgmont, was attempting to find ways to navigate the expectations of school leadership, her students and her own teaching practice and identity.

Among the struggles Rebecca was attempting to dialogically navigate were the social interactions within her classroom, and the struggle to accomplish this is perhaps more visible than the nuanced interactions within other participants' classrooms, such as Steve's and Anne's. It may then be easy to dismiss Rebecca's practices as lacking creativity. As Williams (1977) notes in relation to the arts, "we need to resist the shortcut" to "describe any and every kind of practice" as creative (p. 206). However, it is not that Rebecca's practice is not creative, it is that she is still struggling to make sense of her experiences in class and find a way of working through the tensions that—like Rosa did with the integration of technology in her classroom (see 5.3.3)—could offer her a way of maintaining her professional identity, of finding a way to 'put a bit of Rebecca' into, or back into, her teaching practices. Steve and Anne were also navigating the social interactions of the classroom, but they did not raise this as something they felt constrained their practice, at least not at the time the research was conducted. Within their classrooms the social interactions and relationships were both formed by, and contributed to, the dialogic co-construction of knowledge and meaning. Despite teaching across two different contexts—Lowood Girls' College, an independent non-government school in the northern suburbs of Melbourne, and Rydell Secondary College, a co-educational government school in the south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne respectively—there were commonalities to their teaching that were, in part, a result of the shared context and understanding of subject English.

Such dialogic teaching practices, which some research associates with subject English (Yandell, 2006, 2013b), are challenged by the narrow structures of standards-based reforms (Comber, 2011). These challenges produce a tension between the teaching practices and knowledge of the classroom and the knowledge privileged on the high-stakes assessment

associated with standards-based reform (Perelman, 2018). These tensions were evident through contrasting the dialogic teaching practices in Chapter 6 with how standards-based reforms and high-stakes assessments, such as NAPLAN, mediated teacher practice and professional subject knowledge in Chapter 7. The accounts of Steve's and Anne's responses to the provocation "Mr Henton" (Appendix G) highlighted how standards-based reforms mediated teacher practice and teacher professional knowledge. Bickmore et al. (2005) argue that tensions within the work of subject English are to be expected, as "many observers of schools have noted that teachers work within multiple and seemingly contradictory pedagogical traditions" (p. 23) and that some of these tensions are as a result of schools "impos[ing] conflicting demands that make a consistent response difficult" (p. 25). For many of the participating English teachers, the tensions remained unresolved; instead they found ways to work through or beyond these competing demands. Integral to this negotiation was the everyday creative practices of teachers (see Sawyer, 2004). In finding ways to navigate this tension, both Steve and Anne compartmentalised their knowledge of writing; what they both considered good writing to be became separate from what good writing is for NAPLAN. This way of organizing or re-organizing their reality helped Steve and Anne to understand their teaching environment (Williams, 1961), and in doing so provided them a way to work through the tension of teaching writing that Locke (2014) refers to as serving two masters. Even Laura—who was teaching in the supplementary setting of Brightside Education, and therefore did not have the same curriculum or assessment constraints as school contexts—acknowledged how high-stakes assessment had influenced her students' understanding of what good writing might be. In this instance, Laura needed to be able to navigate between the opportunities to explore writing and the genres and structures students were learning in the classroom. Regardless of the teaching context, standards-based reforms mediated teacher practice and subject knowledge, creating tensions between the knowledge and meaning constructed in the classroom and that which is valued on high-stakes assessment.

8.4.4 The importance of subject knowledge to teacher creative practice

A common theme when the participating teachers were discussing the various tensions in their practice was the use of subject knowledge to try and make sense of, and therefore find ways to work through and beyond, the tensions. There are examples from each of the participating teachers of drawing on their knowledge of literature, writing or language. Steve used his knowledge of the poetic form of *The Pillow Book* to connect the text to students' lives; and Rebecca's reminder to her class that language "might have more than one

function, depending on the context” was evidence of her knowledge of language that she had developed over her time teaching English Language. The knowledge of literature, writing or language, can be sometimes considered as ‘content knowledge’ that is “conceptualized as entirely context-free ‘content’: stable, prior and universally agreed” (Ellis, 2007, p. 450). But the accounts of teacher practice throughout the analysis show a much more “dynamic” understanding of subject knowledge that is “accessed and developed” in complex social systems” (Ellis, 2007, p. 455). Rosa, for example, drew on her knowledge of the curriculum and of her students to find meaningful ways to integrate technology into her classroom. But this knowledge was not separate from her knowledge of her school context and its accountability measures, nor her relationship with her colleagues, especially Simon who was evaluating her teaching. It was through drawing on these different dimensions of her professional knowledge that Rosa was able to make or ‘re-make’ sense of her practice (Williams, 1961).

Offering another perspective, Locke (2015) argues that there are two broad categories of subject knowledge: “what should be taught and what practices enable the teaching to occur effectively” (p. 80). Rebecca’s teaching practice, for instance, had been evaluated as ineffective; she felt “stifled” and like she couldn’t “do anything” with the class. Rebecca’s experiences left her questioning her subject knowledge—her knowledge of her students, her pedagogy, and her relationships with her colleagues—acknowledging that felt like anything she said was “going to be construed or judged”. As a result, Rebecca had very little agency to make decisions about what to teach—other than what was on the exam—and how to teach it. In Rebecca’s case, her teaching practice and confidence to draw on her subject knowledge was mediated by discourses of effective teaching and accountability (Hattie, 2009).

In recent years, teacher accountability has intensified through increased use of data for tracking student outcomes and for teacher effectiveness, as demonstrated through Rosa’s, Sarah’s and Rebecca’s data driven experiences at Ridgemont Secondary College. While Steve’s and Anne’s teaching practices were not regulated through evaluation in the same overt ways as Rebecca’s or even Rosa’s and Sarah’s—at least not in the accounts generated for this study—their professional knowledge was still shaped by what is perceived as ‘successful’ writing on high-stakes assessment. Steve and Anne were both cognisant of the expectations and importance of student achievement on high-stakes assessment, and they both articulated a strong sense of responsibility for their students’ achievements. The feelings of responsibility which Steve and Anne both felt for their students’ achievements may

be reinforced by their teaching contexts and leadership positions within the school, and for Steve even further reinforced by the strong parent presence at Lowood Girls' College. The high-stakes nature of some assessment in secondary schools, especially subject English, has narrowed what should be taught and has regulated teaching practices in their schools (Comber, 2011). Parr et al. (2015) argue that this is the result of professional standards for teaching, such as APSTs (AITSL, 2017) that focus on what teachers should know and be able to do without taking into account the uniqueness of the teacher and the teaching context. Yet despite the narrowing of understandings of teacher practice and writing associated with high-stakes assessment, Steve and Anne were still drawing from different dimensions of their subject knowledge, including their understandings of school context and "subject politics and policies" (Ellis, 2007, p. 456). In doing so, they are finding a way to work through and beyond the tensions of practice afforded by the high-stakes assessment.

As Ellis (2007) argues, the development of knowledge is not "straightforwardly linear in that the more bits one possesses, the more knowledgeable one is" (p. 451). The accounts of teacher creative practice presented in Chapters 5 to 7 demonstrate not only how the participating teachers draw on their professional subject knowledge, but also the varying dimensions and uses of this subject knowledge to imagine ways of working through and beyond the tensions of their practice.

8.4.5 Professional identity, agency and responsibility

The participating English teachers did not just feel responsible to the students. Teachers also felt various levels of responsibility to navigate competing priorities and tensions between the policy and curriculum priorities, subject priorities, school priorities, as well as their own altruistic motivations for teaching (Locke, 2015). By considering these moments of tension in teacher practice as opportunities for creative practice the analysis in the preceding chapters demonstrates that it is possible to make visible how these English teachers engage in problem solving and imagination to find ways of working through and beyond these tensions. The altruistic motivations (Locke, 2015) of the English teacher participants often meant mediating the tensions that might occur between their understandings of the purpose of subject English, their professional subject knowledge and accountability requirements—such as professional development requirements or the use of particular teaching strategies such as HITS (DET, 2017).

The accounts offered in the preceding chapters show each of the participating teachers working in different ways to meet accountability requirements—working within various constraints—while also finding or creating possibilities in their practice. Some of the teachers embodied what Craft (2002) calls ‘possibility thinking’:

Possibility thinking encompasses an attitude, which refuses to be stumped by circumstances, but uses imagination, with intention, to find a way around a problem. It involves the posing of questions, whether or not these are actually conscious, formulated or voiced. The posing of questions may range from wondering about the world, which may lead to both finding and solving problems; and from formulated questions at one end of the spectrum, through nagging puzzles and to a general sensitivity at the other. (p. 110)

This possibility thinking is indicative of professional subject knowledge as teachers drew on different dimensions of their professional knowledge to “to amend old descriptions [of teaching practices] or accommodate new ones” (Williams, 1961, p. 24) and made sense of their practice.

Ultimately, when the English teachers in this study were able to engage in creative practices they felt able to maintain some sense of agency in their work. Craft (2003) acknowledges the relationship between creativity and agency by arguing everyday creativity, the type of creativity that Rebecca is seeking but is feeling is distant from, enables personal fulfilment and “the capacity to take control and make something of it” (Craft, 2003, p. 114; see also Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Unlike the other teachers, Rebecca did not feel she *could* take control. Locke (2015) suggests that:

As professionals, it is incumbent on us to develop an awareness of the discourses we ourselves subscribe to and the powerful discourses that shape what it means to be a teacher (and teacher of writing) in our own educational settings. (p. 83)

The ability to see and speak about the discourses that shape the work as English teachers provides opportunities to speak-back to standards-based reforms. An integral part of this is the varied dimensions of professional subject knowledge that English teachers use to inform their teaching and negotiate tensions in their practice by imaging new ways of saying and doing, and therefore new ways of being in subject English. Recognising and making visible teacher creative practice can provide ways for teachers to maintain a sense of professional identity and agency in an era of high teacher accountability and standards-based reforms.

CHAPTER 9 *What place does creativity have in English teachers' practice?*

9.1 Introduction

This thesis has provided an account of the everyday creative practices of a range of secondary English teachers in school-based and supplementary settings. It has focused on how the participating English teachers account for creativity in their everyday practice, through negotiating the tensions between the needs of students, the subject and curriculum, school priorities, and the wider education policy landscape. Through analysing narrative accounts of their teaching, I have highlighted the need for nuanced understanding of creativity, and in doing so further developed understandings of everyday creativity in the English teachers' practices and the implications of this creativity for their professional knowledge, agency and identity. The study explored the following research questions:

- *Research question 1:* What understandings do subject English teachers have of creativity in secondary school classrooms and supplementary education spaces?
- *Research question 2:* How does context mediate teacher practice that is thought to be creative?

These questions provided a broad framework to analyse the range of narrative-based accounts from the 11 participating English teachers' practices. The analysis considered the stories told by the teachers about their practices within the semi-structured interviews, the field notes from my observations of the teachers' classroom practice, and the subsequent narrative accounts constructed from these observations. It drew substantively on Williams' (1977) concept of everyday creativity, that is the way teachers make and remake sense of their everyday practices of teaching English, moving 'from the known to the unknown'. Through analysing the interview transcripts and field notes data, I found that the participants were mostly focused on how students demonstrated creativity in particular genres of writing. However, it also emerged that the participating English teachers were engaging in creativity in multifarious ways within their everyday practices, as they moved from the known to the unknown (Williams, 1977), negotiating the tensions between the priorities of policy and school contexts, subject knowledge and student needs.

Throughout this study I have argued that many definitions of creativity in the research literature and in education policy are based on assumptions or ‘myths’. These assumptions signify particular understandings of creativity that are often constructed as ‘truths’ (cf. Barthes, 2009) and range from creativity as innovation to creativity as imagination, often separated into their own ‘domains’ through policy and curriculum. Further arguments have been explored that only certain people, or people in certain circumstances and environments, can exhibit creativity (see Davies et al., 2013; Gingell, 2001). Bakhtin’s (1984) concept of the heteroglossic nature of language offers an explanation for these various understandings, arguing, “alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification [should] go forward” (p. 272). This study has shown that, for the participating secondary English teachers, while various understandings of creativity exist alongside one another and are mediated by current education policy and curriculum documents, other understandings derived from subject English and the teachers’ personal/professional experiences are also in play.

While a range of education policy and curriculum documents examined in this study predominantly draw on a human capital view of creativity, associated with innovation and problem-solving (Chapter 2), within subject English this view of creativity is often linked to artistic understandings, personal growth and expression (Chapter 3). All of these understandings have a tendency to focus on the creativity of individual students. In terms of the relationship between teachers and creativity, there is a range of literature focused on innovative teaching (teaching creatively) and/or teaching for creativity (for instance Davies et al., 2013; Coulombe, 2014; Craft, 2003; Parr & Bulfin, 2014). However, in exploring how the participating English teachers account for creativity in their practice, this study has noted that there has been very little acknowledgement in the research and policy literature and policy of *teacher creative practices*, namely the everyday creative practices that teachers engage in as they work through and beyond the tensions of their practice.

The study has found that a key aspect of these teacher creative practices is the dialogic nature of teachers’ interactions with their students. These dialogic practices are also evident between teachers and the curriculum and policy priorities of the school. Exploring the data generated from the interviews and observation field notes, I have shown that these creative practices occur where teachers draw on their professional knowledge—including their knowledge of their teaching contexts, student needs, and subject knowledge—to navigate the constraints of their particular contexts. This involved the participating English teachers problem-solving and imagining other possibilities for their practice. As such, the study has

shown how the participating English teachers often engaged in a range of creative ways of thinking about the work of English teaching. Therefore, this study calls for a heteroglossic understanding of creativity that encompasses innovative, artistic, individual and social views of creativity. The call to broaden understandings of creativity and teacher practice contrasts with many aspects of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST) (AITSL, 2017). In doing so these understandings create opportunities to speak back to standards-based reforms (Parr, 2010).

In concluding this whole thesis, I want to begin by briefly addressing directly each of the research questions as a way of drawing together the key findings I have presented in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 and discussed in Chapter 8. The research questions consider how the participants understand creativity in terms of their students' work and how creativity was evident in the participants' everyday teaching practices. I then consider how teaching practices that might be considered creative are mediated by the context of teaching practice, including the settings where the participants teach, as well as the wider educational landscape. Finally, in reviewing the findings in relation to the research questions, I outline implications and recommendations for policy makers, school leadership, English teachers and further research, before offering some concluding remarks.

9.2 What understandings do English teachers have of creativity in secondary classrooms and supplementary education spaces?

The participating English teachers' accounts of their practice demonstrate the various ways they engaged in everyday creativity. While the teachers' descriptions of their practice often focused on student work commonly thought of as 'creative', my analysis of the data from Chapters 5, 6 and 7 suggests that creative teaching practices were also evident in participants' navigation of tensions in their practice. This navigation shows them adopting and adapting a range of dialogic approaches to teaching English in their different classrooms. I begin by summarising how the teachers discussed creativity in terms of their student work, before addressing how English teaching practices within the classroom can be interpreted in ways that contest individualist or human capital understandings of creativity. The third section highlights how everyday creativity was evident in the teachers' practices.

9.2.1 Students and creative/imaginative writing

While student creativity was not a focus of this study, as might be expected, many of the participating teachers referred to examples of student work when invited to discuss their views and experiences of creativity. Participants often equated creativity with something that ‘stood out’ from the ordinary, a new or unique idea in particular forms of writing (see 5.3.2). Most accounts of student creativity were associated with student writing, as teachers discussed how students, to varying degrees of success, attempted to produce what the various curriculum documents categorise as ‘imaginative writing’ (see VCAA, n.d.-I, para 11; VCAA, 2014b). This is in keeping with the growth paradigm perspective on subject English (see Dixon, 1969), which is most strongly associated with creative writing given its links to process writing, and reading as interpretation and meaning making (e.g. Dixon, 1969). This association was especially evident in the junior years of secondary schooling, while in the senior year levels there appear to be fewer opportunities for the “unbridled” creative writing (see 6.4; Frawley, 2014, p. 22). Despite the differences in the junior and senior levels’ approaches to creativity writing and whether students’ experiences were considered central to the writing, the study found that students were strongly encouraged to focus on the skill of writing vis-à-vis predetermined structures or forms. The creative or imaginative writing was therefore not unbridled but rather crafted within particular constraints.

There was, amongst the participating teachers, a strong association of creativity with particular forms of writing, and this was supported by understandings of writing in curriculum documents and in high-stakes assessments (see 7.2). This is consistent with research into English classroom writing practices (see Comber, 2011; Perelman, 2018), which has found that high-stakes assessments narrow teacher and student understandings of writing and emphasise particular writing genres in English classrooms and assessments. Participants tended to see creative writing as a task that was difficult for students to complete successfully (see Frawley, 2014), and difficult to mark, especially if students’ writing represented a range of genres and writing structures (see Chapter 7). For many participants, there was a clearer demarcation between ‘school knowledge’ and outside-school knowledge, and in these cases the participants foregrounded stories of achievement in high-stakes assessments.

However, there was also an understanding of creative writing where students were ‘playing with’ and ‘challenging’ writing conventions, where the goal was, for instance, to successfully subvert genre rules (see 7.3). The teachers who talked about ‘subversive’ writing in

accounting for creativity in their classrooms were also the English teachers who: (i) had engaged in some post-graduate work—specifically on writing or creativity; (ii) considered themselves to be writers; and/or (iii) were teaching or had previously taught in a supplementary setting. It was not just that these teachers had engaged in outside experiences relevant to subject English that was necessarily important. It was that these English teachers were disposed to discuss with colleagues alternative ways in which these outside experiences were relevant to, and might inform, their classroom practice (Coulombe & Parr, 2011). In turn, they encouraged their students to see how their English work inside the classroom was relevant to their lives and the world beyond school (Locke, 2015).

9.2.2 Individual and social understandings of creativity

One significant point of alignment between the findings of this study and much of the existing literature policy and curriculum documents (see Council of Australian Governments (COAG), Education Council, 2019; ACARA, n.d.-a; VCAA, n.d.-f) was a focus on the creative individual rather than on more social understandings of creativity (see Doecke & McClenaghan, 2011). The participating English teachers initially drew on examples of creative writing, and individual students who were deemed successful as creative writers to demonstrate their understandings of creativity. This is consistent with studies on student creative writing that focus on individual student achievement (Frawley, 2014) as separate from the context of their work and distinct from the knowledge co-constructed socially between students and teachers in the classroom (Barnes, 1976).

The participating English teachers' accounts of their practices also acknowledged the social accomplishments of creativity within their classrooms. This was largely evident in the choices they made to use dialogic approaches in their teaching, where students and teachers were co-constructing knowledge about the texts studied drawing on their own knowledge and experiences to do so (see 5.3, 6.3 & 7.3). These dialogic interactions were partly about co-constructing knowledge, the social dynamic of the classroom providing a space to negotiate the saying and doing of English (Gee, 2011) and illustrating how students created identities for themselves within the social space of the English classroom (Glass, 2012; see 6.4.2). Reconceptualising creativity from an individual to a social accomplishment recognises the dialogic nature of the classroom and social construction of knowledge and identity. It also appreciates the importance of context in meaning-making, and thus offers a compelling alternative to human capital understandings of creativity.

9.2.3 Everyday creativity for subject English teachers

The discourses of creativity that emerged through the participants' accounts of their own work often reflected understandings of creativity as something 'other' than the ordinary, evident in some students' work or particular types of work, or under exceptional circumstances. This is representative of how some research literature often links creativity with inspiration and imagination (Craft & Jeffrey, 2008), specific environmental conditions (Davies et al., 2013), and individuals that exhibit creativity with a capital 'C' (Beghetto et al., 2017; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). The everyday creative practices of teachers and of their classrooms, such as how Williams (1977) conceptualises them, have seldom been recognised by the literature, the professional teaching standards (AITSL, 2017), or by the participating teachers. Rather, these creative practices of negotiating competing constraints have been normalised to, as Sarah noted, "just what teachers do", their ability to "adapt" and be "flexible" as part of the mundane and everyday work of teaching. This adaptability or flexibility, often referred to in the literature as responsiveness (Sawyer, 2011), was regularly in tension with accountability measures encouraging compliance, and was one tension that the participating English teachers needed to work through.

It was clear throughout the study, though, that navigating the tension between responsiveness and compliance was only one of a number of tensions in the participating English teachers' practice. Some of the tensions in teacher practice were specific to particular individuals (see 6.5) or to particular contexts linked to the priorities of one of the educational settings (see 5.2). Other tensions, however, were evident across sites, including the supplementary settings, such as the influence of high-stakes testing on the participating English teachers' assessment practices (see Chapter 7). Drawing on a Bakhtinian (1981) metaphor to explain the heteroglossic nature of language, I have described these tensions as the centripetal and centrifugal forces of teaching practice; these are the visible and implicit constraints that act as boundaries or restrictions of teacher practice and the possibilities that teachers imagine for their practice to work through and beyond these constraints (see Chapter 5). In working through and beyond these tensions, the participating teachers found new ways to describe and understand their experiences (Williams, 1961). Teacher creative practice, therefore, can be seen to involve an ideological struggle to make and remake sense of their everyday practices (Bakhtin, 1981) and find new ways of being in relation to subject English, the classroom, and the wider educational landscape (Gee, 2011).

This understanding of everyday creativity in teacher practice contests understandings that creativity is reserved for particular spaces or times (Davies et al., 2013) or that it is the result of teaching strategies specifically designed to develop students' creative thinking (Smith & Smith, 2010). Instead, I argue that creative practice was evident in the accounts of the dialogic practices of the participating English teachers and their everyday work in interpreting and/or developing the curriculum, planning classes, and enacting these plans in the classroom along with their students. This is not a straightforward or linear process and not every aspect of these practices is visible (see Connell, 1985).

The narrative-based accounts of participants' teaching practice in this study provided insights into the iterative nature of English teachers' work and teachers' engagement in creative practice in the classroom. Therefore, understandings of creativity should not be limited to how teachers develop student creativity or teach in explicitly 'innovative' ways but should also acknowledge, as this study does, teacher creative practices in the everyday work that teachers do.

9.3 How does context mediate understandings of creative practice?

I have consistently argued that in any consideration of English teacher creative practice an understanding of context is crucial. There are several different ways context has been considered within the study, such as the classroom, school, subject area, and the wider educational landscape, including policies and curriculum frameworks. I have drawn on Gee's (2011) understanding of context—that is, how the researcher frames the context—to explore teacher practice in relation to the school or supplementary setting, the classroom and the wider educational policy landscape. These contexts, however, do not exist in isolation from each other. Rather, this study found that English teachers' practices, in similar ways to Connell's (1985) work, demonstrated a complex relationship between school priorities, subject knowledge, and policy. An essential part of participants' creative practices was their negotiation of ways to work within these complex and competing tensions. In order to account for this, the discussion below first considers the constraints in relation to each of the school sectors—government and independent schools, as well as supplementary settings. The second and third sections focus on how subject English and high-stakes assessment mediate teacher creative practice across sectors.

9.3.1 School settings and creativity

Despite the differences in educational settings, there were many similarities in how the participating teachers approached the teaching of English, how they understood creativity, and how they assessed student writing. All participants found themselves needing to grapple with various government and institutional priorities, and they experienced and grappled with these priorities in different ways. For each teacher, the tension that was most prevalent at the particular time of the research was related to the specific context that she/he was teaching in, including not just the schooling sector, but also their classroom, their roles at the school, and their relationships. That being said, differences in sector may also account for how priorities were articulated and teachers were made accountable to these priorities, as shown below.

9.3.1.1 Government settings

In the government school settings, the priorities of the schools were discussed by each of the participants, identifying how they were adding new strategies to their classrooms or structuring their lessons in particular ways. In both government schools, Ridgemont and Rydell Secondary Colleges, initiatives such as learning intentions and success criteria, formative feedback, and technology were implemented as a way of improving student achievement data. At Rydell, the implementation of Visible Learning (Hattie, 2009)—i.e., the use of learning intentions and success criteria to direct teaching practices (see 7.4.1)—was part of the school's improvement plan to raise student achievement through setting high expectations for staff and students. As such, identifying learning intentions and success criteria was an approach implemented in every lesson across that school.

As part of Ridgemont's plan to improve student achievement, they had implemented a number of evaluation measures in line with the school priorities. For instance, through measuring the quantity of written work completed in the classroom (see 5.2.2), evaluating the implementation of technology (see 6.3), and teaching in ways perceived by students and school leadership as for appropriate exam preparation (see 6.5). In each of the narrative accounts from Ridgemont, there were tensions in teaching practice between pedagogical approaches and perceptions of what might be considered good teaching or good English teaching (e.g., Sawyer et al., 2001). These tensions were further reflected in approaches to evaluating written work, but for Sarah and Rosa, they had found creative ways to use the evaluations based on school policy as opportunities to reflect upon and inform their practice in a way that provided them with agency. However, the evaluation of Rebecca's teaching had

not been based on any explicit school policy. Therefore, at the time of the interviews, Rebecca was still working through the impact of a student complaint, and was therefore still trying to establish or re-establish agency within her teaching practice (see 6.5).

In each of the government schools, the evaluation measures were driven by an imperative to improve student academic achievement. This imperative had been imposed by leadership within the school and had formed the basis of professional learning and data collection for the year. These initiatives had been informed by Education Department policies, where schools—school leadership and more importantly teachers—were held accountable for the productivity and efficiency of the school through the reporting of student outcomes via student reports, the schools’ Annual Implementation and Strategic Plans, and *My School* website (ACARA, n.d.-j).

9.3.1.2 Independent settings

For participating teachers working in independent schools, the priorities were addressed in terms of school leadership directives, and student and community expectations. These expectations were linked to student achievement on NAPLAN and VCE subject English exams²⁰, and as is the case for government schools, this data was reported on the *My School* website (ACARA, n.d.-j). Given the independent status of Lowood Girls’ College and Welton Boys’ College there was no reference to particular Department of Education policies, however, frameworks promising improvements in teacher efficiency and therefore student achievement, such as Visible Learning (Hattie, 2009), were still evident at Welton. At Lowood, these accountability measures were ‘visible’ in how the VCE teachers’ creatively “twisted” the student activities in ways to more closely mirror the writing the students were required to do on the exam (see 7.3).

9.3.1.3 Supplementary settings

The constraints on the supplementary settings were different, given the nature of the different educational programs on offer (e.g., cost, content, timing and location). For instance, there were fewer constraints in terms of adhering to a formal, mandated curriculum, or educators demonstrating the APSTs (AITSL, 2017). Instead, the constraints came from the fact that

²⁰ Reported as “senior secondary certificate awarded”, and “completed senior secondary school”, as well as post-school destination data (ACARA, n.d.-j).

educators were required to develop programs that: could be transferred between school sites; fitted within short time frames (90 minutes or 8 hours depending on the program); and could cater to unknown cohorts of students, where the majority of students would be unlikely to know more than two other students in the program.

9.3.2 Professional subject knowledge and creativity

Of the accounts presented of English teachers' practice, none should be considered separately from their subject English context or the teachers' professional knowledge (Ellis, 2007). Throughout most of the accounts the participating teachers' focus on creativity in relation to subject English was specifically in terms of creative writing. The association is consistent with the understandings of creativity through writing that is associated with the growth paradigm (Dixon, 1969; see 3.3.2). The participating English teachers' focus on particular forms of writing, i.e. imaginative writing, as creative, echoes how this work is represented within traditional understandings of subject English in the various curriculum documents from ACARA and VCAA (see ACARA, n.d.-a; VCAA, n.d.-f, 2014b). The focus on writing forms in the curriculum, in the mandated national testing and end of final year subject English exam further reinforced the idea that creativity in subject English was something 'other' to the critical and analytical work of working with texts. And yet there is plenty of existing literature arguing that creative and critical work are essential to both analysis of texts—construction of meaning (e.g. Yandell, 2013b)—and the act of writing (e.g. Pope, 2005).

Subject knowledge was also reflected in the dialogic classroom practices of the participating teachers as they drew from, for example, their knowledge of literature to co-construct with students analyses of the texts they were studying (see 7.5). This co-construction within the social nature of the classroom is important in the creative act of meaning-making and in these examples, the participating teachers were working with and negotiating knowledge across the various paradigms of subject English (Dixon, 1969; see 3.3.2). In doing so, these accounts of English teacher practice support other research that highlights the importance of dialogic practices and the co-construction of knowledge as ways of doing subject English (e.g. Barnes, 1976; Bellis et al., 2009; Doecke et al., 2014).

The varied subject knowledge the participating teachers drew from (Ellis, 2007) is in contrast to how teaching is conceptualised in the APSTs (AITSL, 2017). Within the APSTs, there is very little reference to creativity in relation to teaching practice. The use of APSTs for

professional accountability, and the ways these standards-based reforms mediate the professional conversations among teachers, may partially explain why participating English teachers didn't acknowledge the everyday creativity of their teaching practices. The study argues, therefore, that there exists within the APSTs an opportunity to acknowledge the importance of subject knowledge, not just as curriculum knowledge to be taught to students, but the importance of disciplinary ways of knowing in relation to teacher creative practice. It was this subject knowledge that often enabled the participating English teachers to find possibilities, and therefore navigate tensions and find agency in their teaching practices. In this way, the participants were able to find new ways of being (Gee, 2011) and therefore maintain their professional identities as subject English teachers as they made sense of their teaching and its purpose (Curwood, 2014; Williams, 1961).

9.3.3 The wider educational landscape, standards-based reform and creativity

Some of the tensions the participating English teachers were working through or beyond were relevant to the whole education sector. Standards-based reforms were significantly mediating teachers' practice across all three sectors represented in this study. Each of the participating English teachers spoke about high-stakes assessments and how these standards-based assessment regimes shaped teachers', parents' and students' perceptions of writing, predominantly through narrowing the genres taught. Steve had noted how that the lack of tasks on high-stakes assessment that might be considered creative had meant that students and parents had on occasion met 'creative' tasks with suspicion. Several other participants had commented on this suspicion that creative tasks had little relevance in the assessment regimes within which the teachers worked. The suspicion and questions of relevance had resulted in the favouring of predominantly narrow, usually analytical forms of writing instead. This finding is congruent with other studies (see Frawley, 2014; Perelman, 2018), which also found that it was a common practice for English teachers to focus on the writing genres tested in high-stakes assessment.

The analysis in Chapter 7 suggested that high-stakes assessments—such as national testing and end of secondary school exams—and their relationship to subject English mediated how many of the English teacher participants thought about creative work. The study found that when teachers focused on student achievement in high-stakes assessments there was often a contrast in their approach in the classroom and their teaching practices for assessment.

Their classroom approaches could normally be categorised as having a strong focus on discussion and dialogue, with teachers co-constructing knowledge with their students. However, the teaching practices associated with high-stakes assessment often focused on standardised approaches to writing and narrow interpretations of genres, and therefore ‘training’ students to do well, for instance, in the final, year exam.

The influence of high-stakes assessments in the school sector was also evident in the supplementary settings through the narrow understandings of writing and valuing the ‘secretarial’ aspects of writing over the authorial ones (Mackenzie et al., 2013). However, while Laura noted high-stakes assessment on student writing, it did not mediate her understanding of writing or her teaching practices. As such, Laura, as did Catherine in her school-based teaching, found ways to ‘speak back’ to the high-stakes assessments by working to broaden students’ understandings of writing, and as such, considered the persuasive and analytical writing favoured on high-stakes assessments as just two of many different genres for student writing (see 7.3). In doing so, they recognised the tension between students needing to write for high-stakes assessment and the affordances of writing beyond assessment, such as the possibility for student agency in exploring the relationship between the creative and analytical aspects of writing (e.g. Locke, 2015; Graves, 1983; Pope, 2005).

The participating English teachers navigated the constraints of their education sector, subject English and standards-based reforms differently, depending on their teaching contexts and out-of-school experiences. However, regardless of teaching context, each of the English teachers struggled to work through and beyond some of the tensions inherent in their teaching practice. For some, this resulted in finding ways to work through and beyond the tensions, such as speaking back to standards-based reforms, and for others this meant working with the tensions, focusing on some constraints, such as writing forms, while exploring possibilities in student ideas. And, in some cases, this meant continuing to struggle, to find ways of negotiating the tensions in their teaching practice. Therefore, for each participant the everyday creativity was not just about finding ways to resolve the tensions, but also the struggle to make and remake sense of their practice.

9.4 Implications

This study found that the English teacher participants did not always recognise their practice as creative. However, in exploring their everyday practices, through the narrative accounts

constructed from interviews and observations, it was evident that the teachers' practices were often distinctly creative, especially in how they regularly problem-solved, drawing on professional knowledge to imagine ways of working through or beyond tensions of their practice. Navigating these tensions, I argue, is teacher creative practice. This understanding of teacher creative practice contests the idea that teachers must create special spaces—whether time or physical space—for creativity. Instead, it is the everyday practices of negotiating tensions that are a fundamental characteristic of teacher creative practice, and this has implications for how English teachers conceptualise their teaching practices and subject English, and the ways policy and curriculum seek to define concepts such as creativity.

Two intended outcomes of this study were: firstly, to establish a framework for recognising teachers' practice as creative; and secondly, to recognise the important role of professional subject knowledge in creative practice. The English teachers who were interviewed and observed for this study frequently identified tensions in their practice; drawing on and developing their knowledge of subject English enabled them to find possible ways of working through or beyond these tensions. The creative practice enabled participating teachers to work flexibly with the curriculum and use dialogic pedagogical strategies in the classroom, drawing connections between the classroom space and the outside world, and in some cases working with students to find an increased sense of autonomy and agency in their work. These creative practices were sometimes a struggle (Williams, 1977)—challenged by school priorities, classroom dynamics, and/or wider policy reforms—and required participants to find new ways of working and therefore new ways of being (Gee, 2011). Finding ways to work through and beyond the tensions has strong implications for English teachers' professional identities and their "active contribution to shaping their work and its conditions" (Biesta et al., 2015, p. 625), especially in the ways that it may enable English teachers to develop student writing beyond the constraints of high-stakes testing such as NAPLAN.

For many of the English teachers in this study, an important part of fulfilling their altruistic motivations for teaching was having a strong sense of purpose for subject English and the subject's connections to the world beyond the classroom. Maintaining the belief in the work they did appeared for each of the participating English teachers to be an important part of maintaining their identities as a teacher of English. It is interesting that since this PhD study began, six out of the 11 participating teachers have left the education settings they were working in at the time. One has left the teaching profession altogether. In conversations with each of them after the conclusion of the data gathering, five of them explained that there had

been leadership changes in their institution/system, and they no longer felt that their priorities in teaching matched that of the education setting. The teacher who had left the profession altogether had decided it was time to retire, wanting to leave before the passion for her role “disappeared” (as she termed it); although she still enjoyed teaching, she couldn’t envisage continuing to develop programs in the future.

These English teachers felt they could no longer find ways to do the work that they saw as important in the classroom, often due to feeling constrained by leadership or shifts in priorities of the educational setting. Valuing and supporting the vast experiences and knowledge that English teachers bring to the classroom, and encouraging connections between the subject English classroom and the outside school context with support of school leadership, afford English teachers agency and autonomy to make decisions about their students’ learning (Locke, 2015).

9.5 Recommendations

There are a number of recommendations that follow from this research, which pertain to policymakers, (school) leadership, English teachers and further research.

9.5.1 Recommendations for policymakers

- Broaden descriptions of creativity represented in current policy and curriculum documents, specifically to include concepts of everyday creativity and creativity as a social accomplishment. These understandings should be represented in such a way as to encourage dialogue about professional practice and the everyday creativity of teachers’ work.
- Recognise the importance of subject specific knowledge in teacher practice. This would provide teachers with the opportunity to draw from a range of experiences to inform their practice. As this study has demonstrated, recognition of English teachers’ everyday creative practices and their professional subject knowledge can help develop teachers’ agency and professional identity.
- Expand what is considered evidence of teacher practice within the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2017). The use of narrative, for instance, provides teachers with an opportunity to demonstrate and talk to the complexities in their teaching practice that are less easily observed or measured. This, coupled with an

understanding of creativity in the everyday, provides a framework for dialogue and reflection that acknowledges the constraints and affordances of practice.

- Reframe writing within subject English as an activity that is both critical and creative. This framework would provide English teachers and students a way to plan for, and reflect upon, the constraints. For example, the curriculum could re-envision genre conventions, not as strict or formulaic rules for approaching writing, but as opportunities to take into consideration the possibilities or affordances of the particular task.
- Implement a new framework for assessing writing tasks on high-stakes assessments. This assessment could consider both how a student has fulfilled the requirements of the task—such as considerations of structure and form—as well as how they have envisaged possibilities to account for audience, purpose and writer’s voice. Subsequently, both the student’s ideas and the form or structure of the writing would be assessed, the framework providing consistency in assessment but also encouraging student agency in their writing.

9.5.2 Recommendations for (school) leaders

The above-mentioned recognition of a wider range of evidence for teacher practice, specifically teacher creative practice, also has implications for school leaders. These include:

- Recognise narrative reflective writing as a form of evidence that might demonstrate teacher creative practice. As discussed above, narrative accounts have the potential to capture complexities of teacher practice less visible through other forms of evidence. Within a school, the use of narratives can generate a rich source of data, which can capture the context specific constraints and affordances of teacher practice. This in turn provides opportunities to:
 - Share teacher creative practices within, and potentially across faculties, whereby the narratives are used for critical reflection or as provocations that promote dialogue and professional learning about creativity and creative practice. This provides an opportunity for professional development that is context specific, supports teacher agency, draws on teacher professional knowledge, and is generated from the teachers in dialogue with school leadership.
 - Mentor new teaching staff, not just beginning teachers, through using such narratives to demonstrate some of the implicit tensions that may be specific to the particular school context.

- Provide opportunities for English teachers and leadership to work together to find ways to work through and beyond the tensions of a particular context, such as the need to address the policy, curriculum and student needs, as well as parent expectations. This is important for the traditional schooling sector for teacher retention and professional identity, where teachers have agency in their interpretations and enactment of the curriculum. This is also important for teachers working in supplementary spaces where the constraints and possibilities in their practice may be shaped by additional or different set of expectations and needs.

9.5.3 Recommendations for subject English teachers

- Recognise and invest time in writing narrative accounts of English teachers' practice, especially accounts with a focus on creative practice. Narrative accounts can support and encourage teacher dialogue and help to articulate some of the tensions unique to subject English and particular contexts. They also provide a way of capturing and reflecting upon the often dialogue-based work of the English classroom, specifically how the class can co-construct knowledge. These narratives provide a perspective of the English classroom that acknowledges the importance of relationships and the social accomplishment of creativity.
- Provide opportunities for English teachers to discuss the tensions in their practice. Identifying the competing priorities enables teachers to know where they "stand in relation to the range of discourse[s]" (Locke, 2015, p. 117). These discussions increase teacher agency as teachers make decisions as to how they respond to the discourses, and how their work is represented and evaluated.
- Recognise professional subject knowledge acquired both within institutions and beyond as an important contributor to teacher professional identity. This professional subject knowledge supports teachers' motivations for teaching, and is important for creative practice and agency.
- Appreciate the creative accomplishment of the English classroom to reinforce for English teachers the importance of dialogue in their practice, and the ways it supports students' learning.

9.5.4 Recommendations for further research

These recommendations open up possibilities for further research into the everyday creative practices of teachers, including how different contexts—constraints and affordances—mediate teacher practice. Areas for further research may therefore include:

- The relationship between creativity, teaching practice and knowledge in other discipline areas. For example, there is much debate about the place of the arts in relation to science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM); considering everyday creativity may result in more nuanced understandings of creativity in relation to, not just subject English but also, the STEM subjects.
- Exploring how teachers who have either change schools or left traditional teaching draw on their professional knowledge and creative teaching practices to make sense of their new experiences.
- Extending the study from the everyday creativity of teacher practices to explore the everyday creative practices of students, especially in relation to student writing and how students navigate the constraints and affordances of different writing activities.

9.6 Final words

The subject-English teachers' narrative-based accounts presented in the PhD study have provided insights into the everyday creativity of their teaching practices, as they draw on their disciplinary knowledge to maintain their professional agency and identity. In doing so, the study provides an understanding of creativity that contests the view often presented in the literature of creativity as problem-solving, innovation or imagination, a view that is reinforced by policy and curriculum documents such as those from the OECD, Australian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, and the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority. Instead, it advocates for a more heteroglossic (Bakhtin, 1984) conceptualisation of creativity. This conceptualisation makes space to include additional understandings of creativity—such as everyday creativity and creativity as a social accomplishment—as well as providing a framework for teacher dialogue and reflection that acknowledges the constraints and affordances of practice. Additionally, this understanding of creativity can contribute to reframing writing within subject English as an activity that is both creative and critical.

At the end of this eight-year PhD journey, it has been salutary to reflect back on my initial research questions, which sought to explore subject English teachers accounts of creativity within the context of post-primary classrooms, and how these contexts may mediate their practice. Increasingly through this journey, I have been reminded how important it is to recognise the multiple and complex understandings of creativity, and the complex relationships between teachers, students, schools and wider policy and curriculum initiatives that underpin these understandings. Narrative-based accounts have provided crucial insights into these complexities, and in doing so, as Rosa importantly notes, it is possible to see teaching as more than an “abstract 2-dimensional job”, and to make visible the everyday creativity of teacher practice. The participating teachers’ narrative-based accounts demonstrate there remains an important place for everyday creativity within teacher practice. It is a place that provides opportunities to co-construct ways of doing subject English, and to maintain a sense of professional agency and identity, within and against an educational landscape increasingly focused on standards-based reforms.

I commented in Chapter 1 that trying to pinpoint or trace back to the moment this study came into being was difficult to chronicle. So too it is difficult to demarcate the various paths of inquiry through and within this study. What started out as an opportunity to explore the creativity of students, ended in considering the everyday creativity of teachers. The exact moment this shift in focus happened, I couldn’t say, but there are threads of conversations and thinking evident in my now extensive pile of notes and sketchpads. My earlier thoughts of creativity’s connection to identity remain circled and annotated with question marks.

Just as this study has not ended where it began, neither has my own career. The move I made from teaching in secondary schools to higher education and to supplementary settings seems logical now, if not actually expected. But I certainly never expected to find myself, in the final year of this PhD candidature, no longer working in an educational institution. For over 12 months now, I have been working for Parliament of Victoria in a role that intersects community engagement, education and civics and citizenship. This ‘unexpected’ shift has raised new questions for me. Some of these questions relate to my professional knowledge of subject English and how I might draw on this knowledge to make sense of my new experiences. Some questions are about my identity as a teacher and whether I can still call myself an English teacher, and what that means in terms of me as a ‘creative teacher’. And there are other questions about how I find ways to creatively work through and beyond the tensions of my practice working in an education role in an institution whose core business is the processes and procedures of law-making. There are no ‘neat’ or finalizable resolutions of

these tensions, just as there were not for any of the English teachers who participated in this study. The English teacher in me still sees this as an ongoing process of making and re-making sense of these new experiences as I move from the 'known' into the 'unknown' (Williams, 1977).

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APPENDICES

Appendix A *We didn't start the fire, Billy Joel*

Harry Truman, Doris Day, Red China, Johnnie Ray
South Pacific, Walter Winchell, Joe DiMaggio
Joe McCarthy, Richard Nixon, Studebaker, television
North Korea, South Korea, Marilyn Monroe

Rosenbergs, H-bomb, Sugar Ray, Panmunjom
Brando, "The King and I", and "The Catcher in the Rye"
Eisenhower, Vaccine, England's got a new queen
Marciano, Liberace, Santayana, goodbye

We didn't start the fire
It was always burning, since the world's been turning
We didn't start the fire
No, we didn't light it, but we tried to fight it

Joseph Stalin, Malenkov, Nasser and Prokofiev
Rockefeller, Campanella, Communist Bloc
Roy Cohn, Juan Peron, Toscanini, Dacron
Dien Bien Phu falls, "Rock Around the Clock"

Einstein, James Dean, Brooklyn's got a winning team
Davy Crockett, Peter Pan, Elvis Presley, Disneyland
Bardot, Budapest, Alabama, Krushchev
Princess Grace, Peyton Place, Trouble in the Suez

We didn't start the fire
It was always burning, since the world's been turning
We didn't start the fire
No, we didn't light it, but we tried to fight it

Little Rock, Pasternak, Mickey Mantle, Kerouac
Sputnik, Chou En-Lai, "Bridge on the River Kwai"
Lebanon, Charles de Gaulle, California baseball
Starkweather homicide, children of thalidomide

Buddy Holly, Ben Hur, space monkey, mafia
Hula hoops, Castro, Edsel is a no-go
U2, Syngman Rhee, Payola and Kennedy
Chubby Checker, Psycho, Belgians in the Congo

We didn't start the fire
It was always burning, since the world's been turning
We didn't start the fire
No, we didn't light it, but we tried to fight it

Hemingway, Eichmann, "Stranger in a Strange Land"
Dylan, Berlin, Bay of Pigs invasion
"Lawrence of Arabia", British Beatlemania

Ole Miss, John Glenn, Liston beats Patterson
Pope Paul, Malcolm X, British politician sex
JFK—blown away, what else do I have to say?

We didn't start the fire
It was always burning, since the world's been turning
We didn't start the fire
No, we didn't light it, but we tried to fight it

Birth control, Ho Chi Minh, Richard Nixon back again
Moonshot, Woodstock, Watergate, punk rock
Begin, Reagan, Palestine, terror on the airline
Ayatollah's in Iran, Russians in Afghanistan

"Wheel of Fortune", Sally Ride, heavy metal suicide
Foreign debts, homeless vets, AIDS, crack, Bernie Goetz
Hypodermics on the shore, China's under martial law
Rock and roller, cola wars, I can't take it anymore

We didn't start the fire
It was always burning, since the world's been turning
We didn't start the fire
But when we are gone
It will still burn on, and on, and on, and on, and on, and on, and on

We didn't start the fire
It was always burning, since the world's been turning
We didn't start the fire
No, we didn't light it, but we tried to fight it

We didn't start the fire
It was always burning, since the world's been turning
We didn't start the fire
No, we didn't light it, but we tried to fight it

We didn't start the fire
It was always burning, since the world's been turning
We didn't start the fire
No, we didn't light it, but we tried to fight it

Appendix B approval

Monash University Human Ethics and Research Committee



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: CF15/3598 - 2015001555

Project Title: Teaching and accounting for creativity: Australian secondary English teachers' understandings and practices in traditional and supplementary education settings.

Chief Investigator: Dr Graham Parr

Approved: **From:** 13 October 2015 **To:** 13 October 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: Dr Scott Bulfin, Ms Narelle Wood

Monash University, Room 111, Chancellery Building E
24 Sports Walk, Clayton Campus, Wellington Rd
Clayton VIC 3800, Australia
Telephone: +61 3 9905 5490 Facsimile: +61 3 9905 3831
Email: muhrec@monash.edu <http://intranet.monash.edu.au/researchadmin/human/index.php>
ABN 12 377 614 012 CRICOS Provider #00008C



Department of
Education & Training
Strategy & Review Group

2 Treasury Place
East Melbourne Victoria 3002
Telephone: 03 9637 2000
DX210083

2015_002893

Miss Narelle Wood

Dear Miss Wood

Thank you for your application of 21 October 2015 in which you request permission to conduct research in Victorian government schools titled *Teaching and accounting for creativity: Australian secondary English teachers' understandings and practices in traditional and supplementary education settings*.

I am pleased to advise that on the basis of the information you have provided your research proposal is approved in principle subject to the conditions detailed below.

1. The research is conducted in accordance with the final documentation you provided to the Department of Education and Training.
2. Separate approval for the research needs to be sought from school principals. This is to be supported by the Department of Education and Training approved documentation and, if applicable, the letter of approval from a relevant and formally constituted Human Research Ethics Committee.
3. The project is commenced within 12 months of this approval letter and any extensions or variations to your study, including those requested by an ethics committee must be submitted to the Department of Education and Training for its consideration before you proceed.
4. As a matter of courtesy, you advise the relevant Regional Director of the schools or governing body of the early childhood settings that you intend to approach. An outline of your research and a copy of this letter should be provided to the Regional Director or governing body.
5. You acknowledge the support of the Department of Education Training in any publications arising from the research.
6. The Research Agreement conditions, which include the reporting requirements at the conclusion of your study, are upheld. A reminder will be sent for reports not submitted by the study's indicative completion date.

Your details will be dealt with in accordance with the Public Records Act 1973 and the Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014. Should you have any queries or wish to gain access to your personal information held by this department please contact our Privacy Officer at the above address.



I wish you well with your research. Should you have further questions on this matter, please contact Youla Michaels, Project Support Officer, Insights and Evidence Branch, by telephone on (03) 9637 2707 or by email at michaels.youla.y@edumail.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

Joyce Cleary
Director
Insights and Evidence

18/03/2016

Appendix D Sample recruitment email, explanatory statement and consent form

Sample recruitment email

Recruitment email text from school principal to subject English teaching staff

Title of email: Invitation to participate in PhD research project: Teaching and accounting for creativity: Australian secondary English teachers' understandings and practices in traditional and supplementary education settings.

Dear [insert teacher's name]

I'm emailing to let you know that our school has agreed to participate in a PhD research project exploring secondary English teachers' understandings of creativity.

The project is called 'Teaching and accounting for creativity: Australian secondary English teachers' understandings and practices in traditional and supplementary education settings'. It is part of a PhD research project from the Faculty of Education at Monash University, supervised by Dr Graham Parr and Dr Scott Bulfin.

You are invited to take part in this study. If you are interested in participating you can read more in the attached explanatory statement and consent form. You can also return these directly to the researchers. Of course, you do not have to participate in the project and are not under any obligation to do so.

If you would like further information regarding any aspect of this project, I encourage you to contact the researchers via the phone numbers or email addresses below. I anticipate that the project will yield some important findings that will be useful for our school community.

Sincerely

Principal of school

[Insert researcher contacts details]

Explanatory statement




MONASH University

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Supplementary English Teachers

Project: Teaching and accounting for creativity: Australian secondary English teachers' understandings and practices in traditional and supplementary education settings.

Narelle Wood Phone :  email: narelle.wood@monash.edu	Associate Professor Graham Parr Faculty of Education Phone: 03 9905 2854 email: graham.parr@monash.edu
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You are invited to take part in this study investigating secondary English teachers' understandings of creativity and how these understandings are evident in the classroom. 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?

This research aims to explore secondary English teachers' understandings and perceptions of creativity and how this is evident in the classroom. The study will also investigate if and how the context of the classroom, for example the school setting, curriculum and ethos, influences teachers' understandings of creativity and their classroom practices. The research will include two semi-structured interviews, an observation of your teaching and an invitation to write or describe a short narrative reflection. The first interview will be 30 minutes in duration prior to the classroom observation. The other interview, no more than 30-45 minutes in duration, will be soon after the observation and include an opportunity, if wished, to write a short narrative reflection. The particular focus for the classroom observation and the class to be observed will be negotiated with the researcher in the first interview. The observation will not exceed 30 minutes of class time. The classroom observation will form the basis for the post observation interview.

Why were you chosen for this research?

You have been invited to participate in this research as an English teacher in a secondary school or a supplementary education setting. This invitation and explanatory statement has been forwarded to you from your principal/director, who have agreed to the research being conducted at your school/setting. If you wish to participate in this research, please contact Narelle Wood on 0425 725 239 or email narelle.wood@monash.edu.

Consenting to participate in the project and withdrawing from the research

By signing and returning the consent form, you are consenting to participating in this research project. You have the right to withdraw from the research at any stage, without any implications; any data generated from your participation will be destroyed at the completion of the research.

Possible benefits and risks to participants

This research will provide you with a professional development opportunity through guided critical reflection on your teaching practice. I do not anticipate any inconvenience or discomfort to yourself, other than the potential discomfort associated with self reflection. With the exception of logistics, for example scheduling interviews and classroom observations, your participation in the research is confidential. No information regarding your teaching practice will be reported to your school or organisation, including the principal or head of faculty or director. The

report to the school at the conclusion of the research project will be a summary of research findings across multiple sites and any identifying information for schools and individuals will not be included.

Confidentiality

Personal contact information will not be recorded for any purpose other than to deliver and receive consent for participation, and to organise logistics of participation, for example interview times and locations. Pseudonyms for both participants and schools will be used in both the storage of data and in publication. The results of this research will be published in a thesis and potentially through publication in a relevant professional journal or at an educational conference.

Storage of data

The data collected for this research project will not be made available to other researchers. The data will be stored in a secure location. All electronic copies will be deleted and hard copies shredded once the data is no longer required.

Results

The results of this research will be published in a thesis and potentially through publication in a relevant professional journal or at an educational conference. A summary of the research findings will also be forwarded to participating schools and participants.

Complaints

Should you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Monash University Human Research Ethics (MUHREC):

Executive Officer
Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC)
Room 111, Building 3e
Research Office
Monash University VIC 3800

Tel: +61 3 9905 2052 Email: muhrec@monash.edu Fax: +61 3 9905 3831

If you would like to contact the researchers about any aspect of this study, please contact the Chief Investigator:

Associate Professor Graham Parr
Faculty of Education
Room 347, Building 6
Monash University
Clayton VIC 3800
graham.parr@monash.edu
+61 3 9905 2854

Thank you,



Associate Professor Graham Parr

Consent form



MONASH University

CONSENT FORM

English Teachers

Project: Teaching and accounting for creativity: Australian secondary English teachers' understandings and practices in traditional and supplementary education settings.

Chief Investigators: Ms Narelle Wood, Associate Professor Graham Parr and Dr Scott Bulfin

I have been asked to take part in the Monash University 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
Participating in interviews and classroom observations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Audio recording of the interviews for transcription purposes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Negotiating a focus for the classroom observation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The generation of observation field notes by the researcher relevant to the focus of the observation, including, where relevant, observations regarding my interactions with students and assessment of their work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Writing or describe a brief narrative account regarding if and how my understandings of creativity have changed throughout the project	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name of Participant _____

Participant Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix E Transcript: Excerpt from Caroline's interview

Excerpt from Interview 1 with Caroline (pseudonym).

NW: So what do you perceive creativity to mean? What's your take on creativity?

C: My take on creativity? Um, it's such a broad [pause] it's a word that encompasses so many different concepts that I can't answer it in one sentence.

It means everything, everything. Creativity is everything. Without creativity there is nothing. It's sounding really, really profound but a lot of people see creativity as the thing you create. Yer. Okay, so I am creative because I have produced this thing, whether it is knitted object or a cake or whatever.

But I see those acts as less creative than coming up with original ideas, which is really arrogant because there is no such things as an original idea.

NW: Yes

C: So, I don't like the people saying I'm being creative because I'm knitting this jumper because, while that's a skill, you are following some instructions.

I would say a creative act, in terms of knitting anyway, as been experimenting with the yarn and trying out new patterns and figuring out something new to you. Even if someone else made that scarf before, it's new to you and your creativity, it's not simply following a set of instructions or recipe.

NW: Yes

C: In terms of more 'academicy' thinking I see creativity as the bringing together of two ideas that don't necessarily or naturally go together.

NW: Okay. Have you got an example of that?

Um, every time I open my mouth [laugh]. Joke telling is my favourite. Um, when you come up with a funny pun, a one- liner. I was sitting next to [a colleague] the other day and she was talking about alcohol and. No, we were talking about strange names for children, we had a kid named Diesel.

NW: Yes, I've meet Diesel.

Diesel, so we started laughing about the kid named petroleum, the kids named metho, and I said, "oh he's got a lot of spirit". That's my idea of creativity, bringing, going off sideways and bringing the idea back again in weird new format.

NW: Yes, why I love [staffroom conversations]

C: Yes

NW: You obviously see yourself as a creative person. Do you think, how do you think that translates into your classroom?

C: Um. I [pause] I don't know how to answer that question 'cause I'm not a trained teacher, so everything I do is by trial and error. And I get bored really easily as well. I don't like doing the same thing twice.

Appendix F Observation protocols

Pre-observation conversation, during first semi-structured interview

At the end of the first semi-structured interview, each participating teacher was asked:

- In which class would they like the observation to take place?
- What contextual information—for example, the focus for the class, timing in terms of key assessment (where applicable), or any class dynamics—might be useful to know?
- Was there any particular focus that they would prefer for the observation?

Classroom observation

During the classroom observation, notes were taken on the following:

- Co-construction of knowledge
- Dialogic Interaction
- Everyday creativity as defined by Williams (1977)
- Potential tensions
- Descriptions of the physical space, teacher instructions, student activities
- Interactions between the members of the class, focusing on how the teacher negotiated these moments with the class
- The structure of the class, and how the teacher and students worked within these structures
- Questions and responses, as well as silences.

The notes were used shortly after the observation to construct draft scenes, highlighting key moments and interactions.

Post-classroom conversation, during second semi-structured interview

The second semi-structured interview began with opportunities to discuss and reflect on the observation. This discussion was guided by, but not limited to, the following questions:

Participating teachers were asked questions such as:

- Were there particular moments that stood out for you in the class?
- Were there differences between what was planned and what happened?

Appendix G “Mr Henton” provocation

Student

The Year 7's had been participating in an integrated program has been running for several years. The school had recently identified a need to address NAPLAN results and have brought in a policy of practice NAPLAN tests. Students were asked to write a persuasive response on the topic “dreams can turn into reality”. Below is one students' response.

MR HENTON

Mr Henton was 35 years old. Sitting in a blank office, with a blank computer, a blank sheet of paper and even a blank look on his face. Henton felt his life was a complete waste of time.

Thirty Five years of mistakes and missed chances. Thirty-five years of dullness and ordinary events. It was like his life was in a loop.

Well, he thought, I'm going to do something about it.

One thought, one simple thought caused him to quit his job, get out and do something extraordinary. This was how he ended up taking a month of snowboarding lessons, and was in a helicopter with a man telling him to jump out, for he was no longer content with taking the chairlift. A fraction of a second before he jumped, he thought, Am I crazy? Then inches from the ground he thought again, Yes, and that makes it all the better.

He landed clumsily, but kept on going. Ripping through the mountainside, the world at his mercy. Slipping and sliding within the barest inch of his control. Trees ran up to greet him. Left. Right. Left, left, right.

He ran up an overlarge bump, 'caught some air' but as he landed the ground beneath him gave way. He thought, If I die here at least I die ... happy doesn't quite describe it. A mix of fear, adrenaline and sorrow at his death.

But as he wrote himself off he felt something hard hit his rump. He rubbed it sorely. At least his legs weren't broken. As he looked up he gasped. Then fell onto his side. He really did want to go out in style. He hadn't landed in any old crevasse. He had landed in an ice cave.

Icicles hung from the roof. Powder snow, softer than any pillow, had cushioned his landing. Holes perforated the roof letting sunshine in. He lay there for hours. This was what he had come for. Adventure. Action. Discovery. He had found more in the last day than he had found in the past 35 years. He wondered what his next birthday party would have been like. No more corporate functions, that was for sure.

He walked to the point of the ice cave furthest from where he had landed; a small hole, not very big. He crawled through it. He stood up. He was at another ski trail. He picked up his board and prepared to do it all again.

[10] *Mountains*—Ogura Mountain. Mount Kase. Mount Mikasa. Mount Konokure. Mount Iritachi. Mount Wasurezu. Sue no Matsu Mountain. Mount Katasari—I wonder how it stands aside? Mount Itsuhata. Mount Kaeru. Mount Nochise. Asakura Mountain—I like the line ‘now looks askance at me’. Mount Ōhire is special too. It must be because it reminds me of the dancers at the Kamo and Yahata Provisional Festivals.

Mount Miwa has great appeal. So do Tamuke Mountain, Mount Machikane, Tamasaka Mountain and Mount Miminashi.

[14] *River pools*—Kashiko Pool. I wonder what hidden depths someone saw in its heart, to give it such a name. And Nairiso Pool—who told whom not to enter, I wonder? Green Pool is interesting too. You could use it to make the Chamberlain’s special green clothes. There is also Kakure Pool and Ina Pool.

[15] *Bodies of water*—Lake Biwa is special. Also Yosa Bay and Kawafuchi Bay.

[35] *Ponds*—Katsumata Pond. Iware Pond.

Nieno Pond—it was marvellous to see seemingly endless flocks of water birds rising noisily from this pond, when we passed it our pilgrimage to Hase.

Waterless Pond—this is a strange one. When I asked someone why it was given such an odd name, they said it was because all the water dries up in years when unusually heavy rains can be expected in the fifth month, while it fills with water in spring when the year promises to be very dry. I wanted to point out that the name is all very well when you consider how it dries up, but surely it also fills with water at other times, so it seems a very one-sided name to give it.

Sarusawa Pond is a very special place, because the Emperor paid it a formal visit when he heard how one of the Palace Maidens had drowned herself there. Thinking of Hitomaro’s marvellous words ‘her hair tangled as in sleep’ there is really nothing I can add.

One also wonders what was in the mind of the person who gave the place ‘Divine Presence Pond’ that name.

Then there’s God Pond. And in the case of Sayama Pond, one naturally thinks of the interesting association of the water plant known as burr reed, because of the poem.

There’s also Koinuma Pond. And Hara Pond is interesting because of the song about it which goes ‘Oh do not cut the jewelled weeds.’

Appendix I ***Hollywood, Angus and Julia Stone***

Blame you Hollywood,
For showing me things you never should
Show a young girl,
In a cruel world.

Because life's not a happy ending,
I'm sure there is some,
Like Johnny and June,
And maybe other people too.

They all would have been killed
In the sound of music,
They would have found out that
Pinocchio could never tell the truth.

She never would have made it to shore,
The little mermaid. He would have married a whore
From a wealthy family, after all he was royalty.

Cinderella would have scrubbed those floors
Till her hands grew old and tired,
And nobody would look away,
That's the way it goes today.

I blame you Hollywood,
For showing me things you never should
Show a young girl,
In this cruel world.

Because life's not a happy ending,
I'm sure there is some
Like Johnny and June,
And maybe other people too.

And maybe other people too
And maybe other people too
And maybe other people too
And maybe other people too
And maybe other people too
Like me and you.

Appendix J

The Summer, Josh Pyke

If I could bottle up the sea breeze I would take it over to your house
And pour it loose through your garden
So the hinges on your windows would rust and colour
Like the boats pulled up on the sand for the summer
And your sweet clean clothes would go stiff on the line
And there'd be sand in your pockets and nothing on your mind

But every year it gets a little bit harder
To get back to the feeling of when we were fifteen
And we could jump in the river upstream
And let the current carry us to the beginning where
The river met the sea again
And all our days were a sun-drenched haze
While the salt spray crusted on the window panes

We should be living like we lived that summer
I wanna live like we live in the summer

And I'll remember that summer as the right one
The storms made the pavement steam like a kettle
And our first goodbye always seemed like hours
In the car park in between my house and yours
And if the summer holds a song we might sing forever
Then the winter holds a bite we'd never felt before

But time is like the ocean
You can only hold a little in your hands
So swim before we're broken
Before our bones become
Black coral on the sand