

INVESTIGATING THE PHILOSOPHICAL POTENTIALITIES IN THE NEW SOUTH WALES HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE ENGLISH (ADVANCED) COURSE

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This is to certify that the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any other degree or purpose.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work, and that all assistance received in preparing this thesis and all sources have been acknowledged.

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Abstract

The teaching of literature in the English classroom can facilitate an exploration of the fundamental questions of human existence whilst developing critical interpretative skills in young people. However, just as literature is subject to the cultural, political, and social forces that shape its production and reception, so too is subject English. This can prove challenging for English teachers, especially when faced with the demands of high-stakes examinations. In New South Wales, the Higher School Certificate English Advanced course requires students to demonstrate sophisticated critical interpretative skills. However, in practice, the teaching of literature has become increasingly orthodox, shaped by examination pressures that encourage reliance on traditional pedagogical models.

This hermeneutic case study explores the potential for integrating skills and knowledge drawn from the discipline of philosophy to support teachers to deepen and expand students' textual interpretation. It focuses on one module of the English Advanced course, Module B, because of its sustained focus on critical engagement with a single prescribed literary text. Moreover, the Module demands a depth and precision of interpretation that makes it uniquely challenging for teachers and students.

Through a reflexive thematic analysis of the Module B syllabus and support documents, key philosophical affordances were identified. These include the confluence of literary and philosophical skills and knowledges. A philosophy-informed framework that distils these affordances into an accessible planning tool for teachers was developed. The application of this framework to an evergreen literary text - the poetry of W.B. Yeats - demonstrates how philosophical and literary confluences can be meaningfully enacted in classroom practice.

This study shows that whilst subject English may be a mercurial discipline, philosophy can serve as a productive lens for teaching literary textual analysis. The philosophy-informed framework enables the foregrounding of teacher agency and reflexivity and has the potential to reinvigorate the teaching of Module B, despite the HSC functioning as a technology of power.

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It's said, by whom I do not know, that loss can breed creation. When this study was still more of a hope than a reality, I lost my 14-year-old nephew, Cohen, to osteosarcoma. His death, so cruel and unfair, fuelled my determination to make something of this research. An attempt to make some meaning at a time when life felt meaningless. Supporting me through this was my supervisor, Professor Jaqueline Manuel, whose own experiences navigating loss made her the perfect person to pilot me through my grief. She was endless smiling sunshine, whether it was in person, via Zoom or in her emails. When I worried that my ideas were too wayward, or that my project was purposeless, Jackie was there to reassure me with her genuine passion and enthusiasm. Her kindness felt as limitless as her knowledge of the English curriculum. Jackie's sudden passing, just a week after I received her characteristically complementary and generous feedback on my draft thesis, continues to bewilder me. It is a blow to the education community, but especially to the English teaching community. Her loss, whilst inexplicable, spurred me to keep writing, to keep thinking, to keep holding true to who I am and what I believe. I am grateful to not simply have had a supervisor, but to have had a mentor.

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	3
Acknowledgements	4
Preface	9
Chapter 1 Introduction	12
Purpose of the research	12
Research questions	12
Significance of the research	13
Definitions of key terms	13
Chapter 2 Literature Review.....	15
Subject English.....	15
English Teaching Models	16
HSC English Advanced	18
Module B in the English (Advanced) Course	19
Philosophy in secondary schools	20
Philosophy and literature	21
Summary and implications	22
Chapter 3 Theoretical Framework	23
Introduction	23
Hermeneutics	23
Hermeneutics and research	23
Hermeneutic circle	24
Hermeneutics and literature.....	24
Hermeneutics and pedagogy.....	24
Conclusion	25
Chapter 4 Methodology.....	26
Introduction	26
Research design.....	27
Qualitative research.....	27
Role of the researcher	27
Case study	28
Assumptions and limitations of this study.....	28
Materials.....	29
Analytic approach	30
Document analysis	30
Textual analysis.....	31

Chapter 5 Analysis and interpretation	32
Introduction	32
Theme 1: Philosophical Affordances in Module B: Critical Study of Literature	32
Sub-theme 1: Confluence of Philosophical Thinking and Literary Thinking	32
Sub-theme 2: Confluence of Philosophical Knowledge and Literary Knowledge	38
A philosophy-informed framework for teaching English	41
Theme 2: Applying a philosophy-informed framework to texts and teaching	49
Sub-theme 1: Philosophy-Informed Textual Interpretation	49
Sub-theme 2: Philosophy-Informed Pedagogical Planning	50
Conclusion	51
Chapter 6 Applying the Philosophy-Informed Framework to the Poetry of W.B. Yeats.....	53
Introduction	53
‘The Wild Swans at Coole’	53
Analysis Using the Philosophy-Informed Framework.....	53
Pedagogical Application	57
‘The Second Coming’	60
Analysis Using the Philosophy-Informed Framework.....	60
Pedagogical Application	63
Conclusion	66
Chapter 7 Conclusions and Implications.....	67
Introduction	67
Addressing the research questions.....	67
Conclusions.....	70
Implications	71
References	73

List of Tables

Table 1 - Definition of key terms	14
Table 2 - Overview of relationship between research questions, data, and research methods..	26
Table 3 - Materials used in the study.....	30
Table 4 - Confluences of philosophical and literary skills within Module B	33
Table 5 - Context timeline illustrating confluences of literary and philosophical periods.....	39
Table 6 - Philosophical concepts identified through document analysis	40
Table 7 – The complete philosophy-informed framework for teaching HSC English, bringing together central elements to provide a coherent framework.....	48
Table 8 - Example of initial content selected from the philosophy-informed framework for teaching ‘The Wild Swans at Coole’	55
Table 9 - Example of initial skills selected from the philosophy-informed framework for teaching ‘The Wild Swans at Coole’	57
Table 10 - Example of initial content selected from the philosophy-informed framework for teaching ‘The Second Coming’	61
Table 11 - Example of initial skills selected from the philosophy-informed framework for teaching ‘The Second Coming’	64

Preface

I have been a teacher of English for almost 20 years, and I have taught the Higher School Certificate (HSC) in New South Wales (NSW) for 16 of those years. The HSC is the capstone credential for senior secondary English in NSW and includes a high-stakes external examination which is overseen and managed by the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA). NESA mandates that students complete at least one of four English courses: English Advanced, English Standard, English Studies, or English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D). The English Advanced course is designed for students to become ‘critical and sophisticated users of English and to develop their academic achievement through the study of complex texts’ (NESA, n.d.). Since its inception in 2001, the English Advanced course has consisted of four modules: one module common to all English courses, and three others (A, B and C) that require different types of textual study. These have included a comparative text study (Module A), a critical study of a single text (Module B), and, depending on syllabus iteration, either a focus on representation and text or on the craft of writing (Module C).

My experience teaching Module B for 16 years and having been an HSC marker of the Module for 10 years, inspired and influenced this study. This preface outlines this experience, focusing on how and why my approach to its teaching changed significantly over the course of my career. Module B, with its sustained focus on critical engagement with a single prescribed text, has always demanded a depth and precision of interpretation that makes it uniquely challenging for teachers and students. This vignette aims to capture the contested nature of the Module and illustrate how it provides fertile ground for a project concerned with broadening the ways literary interpretation is taught in the English classroom in the context of the HSC.

I first taught Module B in 2006. The Module itself had been introduced as part of the new HSC in 2001. As an early career teacher, I was encouraged to try to cover as many readings as I could when teaching the prescribed text - Shakespeare’s *King Lear*. By ‘readings’ it was meant the application of critical theory to the play. My students’ essays were constructed like patchwork quilts, starting out with a feminist reading, moving onto a Marxist reading, and then concluding with a little bit of Freud or postcolonialism, and whilst they did lack textual analysis and deep engagement with the actual prescribed text, I felt the learning in the classroom was vibrant, engaged, challenging, and varied. Having majored in Philosophy, I felt confident understanding and making accessible to my students the dense, complex theories concerned with the nature of knowing, the reproduction of the means of power, and the forces shaping subjectivity. As a young English teacher, I desired to cultivate a Foucauldian ‘philosophical ethos’ (in Foucault, 2019, p. 39) in my students, and I happily engaged them in (what I believed to be) the spirit of Module B. Unfortunately, my experience as an HSC marker of Module B revealed that many other English teachers relied on overly simplified understandings of the ‘isms’, and this ultimately hurt the broader perception of the Module. In response to such concerns during the early years following the introduction of the 2001 syllabus, the Board of Studies issued a support document in 2005 emphasising that Module B should prioritise an informed personal engagement with the prescribed text rather than the application of theoretical ‘readings’.

In this period, Module B: Critical Study of Texts became the focus of public criticism (McGraw, 2010), intensified by a conservative Prime Minister who framed both the module and its teachers as central adversaries in a wider cultural conflict. At the heart of the dispute was the HSC English Advanced prescribed text list, which featured works that English teachers described as ‘postmodern texts’ but which the Prime Minister condemned as ‘rubbish’ (Welch, 2006) –

including the ATSIIC website (later replaced by the Australian War Memorial website) and a collection of hypertexts by Deena Larsen (later removed entirely). When key ideological state apparatuses (governments and the media) explicitly interfere with the teaching of English, they are making ideological decisions which shape the experiences of students, and future society. Ideology avoids examination by characterising itself as natural, and this was evident in the rhetoric of conservative politicians and media who wished to silence marginalised narratives by referring to the classics or canon as being ‘high quality literature’ (Welsh, 2006) that has always been taught and should continue to be. Such texts – those of the canon – represent the material existence of ideology (Althusser, 2006, p. 102) in the classroom.

In response to concerns about overly theoretical responses in early examinations following the 2001 syllabus revision, the Board of Studies released a support document in 2005 emphasising the importance of an informed personal engagement with the prescribed text in Module B.

From 2010 to 2014, I was given greater independence as a teacher. At this time, what could be called the middle phase of my teaching career, I realised that my education philosophy aligned with constructivism – the position that all knowledge is a construct and created through power interactions, as Foucault (1984, p. 205) notes, ‘... power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth.’ I decided the best approach to teaching Module B was to support my students to construct their own understandings, especially of the texts set for them. Moreover, the experience of being an HSC marker, marking thousands of student responses, combined with the professional dialogue I had with my fellow markers, again (re)shaped how I approached teaching the Module. This was the era where students were expected to use quotes from literary critics in their essays. Due to the political and media pressure, teachers had moved away from the ‘isms’ of the early 2000s, and towards the supremacy of the critic. However, this diminished the agency of students as readers.

From 2015-2020, things shifted again. At this time, I noticed a trend amongst English teachers to ‘put all their heart and ingenuity into performing ... the work of the system’ (Althusser, 2006, p. 98). I’d like to think that the most effective English teachers go some way to making the system visible and knowable to their students. In this way, they move closer to being able to subvert, challenge or critique the system when it becomes oppressive. Yet it has become apparent that the power interactions between NESA, teachers and students have resulted ‘docile bodies’ (Foucault, 1984, p. 180). English teachers and their students (at least those who are willing and able to conform to the status quo of the education institution), can be seen as docile bodies produced by the education system, lorded over by NESA, which in turn is shaped and reshaped by political, social and historical forces. When English teachers bring into class exemplar responses to HSC questions, published by NESA in booklets bought from their website, they are establishing a norm for students through perpetual comparison. This standard of excellence and achievement, determined by NESA, acts as an effective form of discipline for both teacher and student as they seek to be seen themselves as excellent. The standardisation of student achievement, reinforced by a discourse of competition and comparison, is a dominant feature of contemporary schooling. Fearing marginalisation if deemed a *failure* in the HSC, students and teachers unquestioningly accept and adhere to unrealistic standards as *normal*.

In 2019, the HSC syllabus was revised, bringing with it a new set of prescribed texts, but more importantly a new name for the Module: Module B: Critical Study of *Literature*. That pesky little postmodern word ‘*text*’, so flexible, so loose, so threatening, had finally been replaced with the immutable ‘*literature*’. No dangerous margins here. As it turns out, I started teaching Module B with Shakespeare, and I finished teaching it with Shakespeare – this time his history play, *Henry*

IV, Part 1. Poor Shakespeare. One imagines that if it had been him, not Williams, walking in that Welsh landscape in 1958, he too might have observed that culture is ordinary and ‘the product of a man’s whole committed personal and social experience’ (Williams, 1989, p. 10). Having myself matured quite a bit as an educator by the time I got to teach Shakespeare those final times, I decided to draw on my own understanding of what teaching critical study should and could look like. I returned to my knowledge of philosophy and encouraged my students to consider Shakespeare’s *Henry IV, Part 1* not as a unified great work of literature that seeks to dramatise and answer a singular question, but as a vehicle for critical exploration of multiple questions we continue to grapple with today, and likely will for all time. In the context of teaching Module B, I introduced my students to the main tenets of existentialism – absurdity, alienation, anxiety, authenticity, death, passion, and responsibility. We spoke a lot about power relationships between individuals, classes and systems. We even touched on some of the old ‘isms’ to complement our main ism – existentialism. In doing so, my students were given an opportunity to hone their critical thinking skills, using a traditional work of literature as the vehicle for this development. Those final two years teaching Module B were easily my favourite, but I know my approach pushed me further to the margins into a ‘space of transgression and experiment’ (Ball, 2019, p. 133). I refused to tell my students what their essay theses should be: I encouraged them to think for themselves. I felt that I had liberated them from the tyranny of the answer by ‘refusing to assign a secret, an ultimate meaning to the text’ (Barthes, 1977, p. 147).

My experience of teaching Module B over my 16-year teaching career reinforced my conviction that we need English teachers who ‘teach against the ideology, the system and the practices in which they are trapped’ (Althusser, 2006, p. 98). It is a belief that prompted this current study into the philosophical potentialities of Module B, and a position that inevitably shaped my perspective as a researcher.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Purpose of the research

This research investigated the philosophical potentialities of the NSW HSC English course (NESA, n.d.). Specifically, the research focused on one module of the English Advanced course: Module B Critical Study of Literature, selected both because it is a single-text study that demands sustained, critical engagement with a work of literature, and because of its contested history as a site where questions of interpretation, ideology, and pedagogy intersect most visibly. The project consisted of a single case study of the philosophical affordances of this Module, including one prescribed text, to explore the potential to develop a philosophy-informed pedagogical model that could support teaching and learning in not only Module B, but across the English HSC course more broadly.

This research aimed to enrich and extend pedagogical approaches to literary study by opening up the philosophical potentialities of the texts. Over the course of my almost two-decade career as a secondary teacher of both English and Philosophy, I identified a professional knowledge gap for English teachers regarding philosophical ideas and ways of thinking. Despite the Syllabus' insistence that it enables 'teachers to draw on various theoretical perspectives and pedagogical models for the teaching of English' (NESA, n.d.), it was perceived that a gap in teachers' philosophical knowledge limited their pedagogical approaches to more traditional English teaching models principally the Cultural Heritage model (Sawyer, 2017).

Green et al. (2023) observe that subject English continues to do the intellectual heavy-lifting in secondary education, yet current pedagogical approaches to the teaching of HSC English remain orthodox because textual study is being driven by examination requirements. The current HSC examination requires students to develop 'a strong, sustained personal response' (NESA, n.d.) to prescribed texts, indicating the need for a pedagogical approach to the teaching of English which moves beyond the orthodox (Shay, 2021). It is this need that the study addresses. Informed by an appreciation for Freire's insistence that 'the authority of the critical teacher is dialectical' (Kincheloe et al, 2018, p.425), the research has focused on the authority of the teacher to engage with the potentialities within the Syllabus and prescribed texts for supporting students to become producers of their own knowledge.

Philosophy can be a liberator of subjectivity, rather than a conservative (re)producer of ideology, knowledge and power because, by its very nature, philosophy is an 'enterprise of trying to make sense of ourselves and our world in a way which asks what we should think and why' (Grayling, 2019, p.xxi). Currently, teachers and students may not be taking advantage of the potentialities of philosophical study to enrich and deepen their engagement with texts.

Research questions

Lead question

What are the potentialities for integrating philosophical study in teaching and learning in the NSW HSC English Advanced course, specifically Module B: Critical Study of Literature?

Sub-questions

1. What philosophical affordances exist in the HSC English syllabus, specifically Module B and its support documents?
2. What are the confluences between philosophical thinking and literary analysis that could support teachers' curriculum design when planning to teach Module B?
3. How might these confluences between philosophical thinking and literary analysis be applied when planning to teach the poetry of W.B. Yeats in the context of Module B?

Significance of the research

The HSC is, and will continue to be, a high-stakes crucible for teachers and students. This research involved a study of syllabus potential that focused on an important area of English teaching and learning for a significant cohort of senior secondary students in NSW, with just over 25,000 students enrolled in the English Advanced course in 2024 (NESA, n.d.). The research aimed to develop a more discriminating and nuanced understanding of the potential of English Advanced Module B by offering teachers an illustration of planning for the integrated teaching of literature and philosophy within the current instantiation of the Module. Such a need was identified by Kruse (2001) when the Module was first introduced: 'There is a basic need throughout the syllabus for more direct engagement with the broad tradition of twentieth-century intellectualism' (p. 11). Attention to theory and pedagogy in teaching this Module is clearly a critical area for ongoing research to refine, develop, enhance, and enrich the teaching of literary textual analysis.

Research on HSC English is thin, contributing to a significant dearth of knowledge for teachers. This is ironic considering the high-stakes nature of the examination for students and teachers, not to mention the significant media attention it garners, and the financial cost involved in its implementation. With the increasing pressure on secondary English teachers to improve student performance in the HSC, this research contributes to potential changes to practice as teachers see the value in integrating philosophical study with the study of literary texts as a means to better support their students when interrogating the conceptual concerns of the prescribed texts.

The conceptual nature of exemplary Module B responses in the HSC examination, referred to frequently in HSC marker notes (NESA, n.d.), requires the sorts of higher-order, critical thinking that a study of philosophical ideas tends to encourage. Yet currently, there are limited opportunities for students to study philosophy as part of secondary schooling (Philosophy in Schools Association, 2023) and this study has sought to identify opportunities to broaden engagement with philosophical ideas and ways of thinking through the teaching and learning of subject English. Whilst this research was limited to an investigation of a single module from the HSC English Advanced syllabus, the findings have broad implications for theory and pedagogy in senior secondary English, as well as other curriculum areas.

Definitions of key terms

Concept	Definition / explanation
pedagogy	Pedagogy is often, contentiously, defined as the art and science of teaching. Boomer describes pedagogy, specifically that of the English teacher, as 'one of infinite embeddedness.' (Boomer, 1988, p.89)
HSC English Advanced	The Higher School Certificate was introduced in 1967 and is the highest credential students can achieve in secondary schools, awarded for the completion of years 11 and 12. In 2022, 68,158 students were enrolled in one of the HSC English courses, with 24,774 enrolled in HSC English Advanced. The year 12 course consists of four modules:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Common Module: Texts and the Human Experience - Module A: Textual Conversations - Module B: Critical Study of Literature - Module C: Craft of Writing
subject English	Another contested term, subject English has been part of academic studies in the Anglophone world since the 19 th century and included as a core subject of school curriculum in Australia since 1911. The Australian Curriculum divides the subject into three strands – language, literature and literacy – and states that the subject ‘helps (students) become ethical, thoughtful, informed and active members of society’ (ACARA, n.d.). In NSW subject English in Years 11 and 12, ‘develops in students an understanding of literary expression and nurtures an appreciation of aesthetic values’ (NESA, n.d.).
Module B: Critical Study of Literature	This is one of the four mandatory modules for HSC English Advanced. The module requires students to ‘develop detailed analytical and critical knowledge, understanding and appreciation of a substantial literary text’ (NESA, n.d.). Teachers must select the literary text from a list of prescriptions provided by NESA.
literature	The NESA glossary for the HSC English syllabuses defines literature as ‘Literally means anything written, but the term is generally associated with works of imagination, fictional and non-fictional. It is often used to mean texts that are highly regarded examples of their forms and media.’ (NESA, n.d.) Dolin et al (2017) provide a more nuanced definition, ‘Literature does not name something stably knowable, but a continuous process: the coming-into-being of the literary within determinative but always changing structures of social and cultural relations that regulate the experiences
concept; conceptual response	A mercurial term difficult to define, especially in the context of English Advanced because it is often conflated with ‘textual concepts’ which are a distillation of required Syllabus content/knowledge (DoE, 2018) and ‘literary theme’, although the latter is closer in meaning than the former. In this study it refers to an abstract idea, or ideas, explored in a text, often framed as a concern, question or problem that is open to interpretation, contemplation, and re-imaginings. A concept is not the message of the text - which suggests some predefined, finite authorial entity - but rather it is an abstraction opened up by the literary imagination. Such concepts might include authenticity, alienation, purpose, and truth. The term conceptual response is used in the HSC marker notes to refer to a type of exemplary student response written during the HSC examination for Module B.
syllabus	According to NESA, syllabuses ‘describe the essential learning required in each subject, identify the knowledge and skills to be learnt, and provide opportunities for students to apply skills in each subject’ (n.d.). It is then the responsibility of schools and teachers to ‘use syllabuses to develop educational programs for students’ (n.d.).
philosophy	Philosophy refers to both the academic discipline and a way of being in the world. Philosophy as a discipline ‘formulates and explores questions of fundamental importance to us as human beings’ (University of Sydney, n.d.).
English teaching models	In Australia, the four recognised models of English teaching are Personal Growth, Cultural Heritage, Cultural Analysis and Skills. The Personal Growth model of English connects students’ personal life-worlds to language learning and the texts being studied. The Cultural Heritage model stems from the tradition of studying the literary canon, privileging close textual analysis. The Cultural Analysis model draws on Critical Theory to focus on students developing critical literacy skills. Finally, the Skills model focuses on practical participation and the mastery of specific literacy skills. According to Macken-Horarik (2014), whilst teachers of English in New South Wales may ‘operate from one or the other ‘model’ as a preference, most deploy a blend of Growth, Cultural Heritage, Skills, and Cultural Analysis pedagogies in classroom work’ (p.11).

Table 1 - Definition of key terms

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Subject English

Since its origins as a linguistic discipline, then later as a literary discipline, English has undergone a significant evolution, shaped by an array of shifting social, political and cultural forces. From the early 14th century during the reign of Richard II there was a move away from French towards English as the primary mode of communication, both oral and written. The valuing of the English language was furthered in the 16th century when the Puritans encouraged the reading of the Bible in English. However, by the 17th century the study of English was undermined as grammar schools privileged Latin over the ‘vulgar and inferior’ (Newbolt, 1921, p.39) English. This perception persisted into the 18th and early 19th centuries where a knowledge of the Classics in Greek and Latin was considered necessary for any social advantage. It was not until the late 19th century with the rise of mass education that the study of English was formalised. Even then the teaching focus was functional with little focus on critical analysis of literature.

There was a turning point in the early 20th century when every school in England was expected to teach English. However, as Eagleton argues, this was more than just educational reform, as subject English was ‘constructed as a subject to carry (the) ideological burden’ (1996, p.21) in a ‘socially turbulent class-society’ (p. 21) since religion no longer could fill that role. From this period comes one of the most enduring influences on subject English: Matthew Arnold. His concern that the superficiality, mechanisation and individualism of modern society may diminish humanity’s capacity for perfection led him to advocate for literature as a ‘supremely civilising pursuit’ (Eagleton, 1996, p.27) and a means for cultivating personal and national identity. His contention that literature is an arena where the fundamental questions of human existence can be explored – ‘what it meant to be a person, to engage in significant relationship with others, to live from the vital centre of the most essential values’ (Eagleton, 1996, p.27) – is echoed in the progressive conceptualisation of English in the landmark Newbolt Report: *The Teaching of English in England* (1921). In this report, Newbolt argues that ‘an education based upon the English language and literature would have important social, as well as personal, results’ (1921, p.21). The influence of the Newbolt Report, particularly its humanist conviction that a liberal education involves freeing the full powers of the human reason, can be seen in the writings of Dixon after the Dartmouth Conference of 1966 and later in the subsequent Cox Report of 1989 which outlines the various views of English, later to be known as the English models.

The shaping of English in Australia has long been influenced by the cultural and moral visions of figures such as Arnold and Newbolt, whose emphasis on canonical literature and moral formation has echoed across syllabuses since the early 1900s. As Manuel and Carter (2017) note in their historical study of NSW English syllabuses up to 1999, there has been a ‘virtually continuous positioning of canonical literature and literary study at the heart of the subject at senior secondary level in NSW’ (p. 2). Their work underscores how subject English has never been epistemologically fixed. Rather, it has evolved in response to shifting social, political, and institutional pressures. These shifts are particularly evident in the evolution of curriculum models, including the Australian Curriculum with its three-strand model of Language, Literature, and Literacy. In NSW, this model was adopted in a blended form that muted the distinctions between strands (Locke, 2015). More recently, efforts to define the disciplinary knowledge of English more explicitly have led to the development of the *English Textual Concepts*, a model

designed to stabilise and communicate the subject's core content. While this model offers greater clarity and consistency, some scholars argue that it risks flattening the interpretive and affective dimensions of literature by recasting English in the image of more content-driven disciplines (Doecke & Mead, 2018; Anson, 2019).

This brief history illustrates the mercurial nature of subject English. One of the complexities of the subject is that it is 'characterised by an unstable, and often invisible, epistemology' (Anson, 2019, p.65) where the kinds of knowledges and practices which are valued are ever-changing, context-dependent, and, at times, hidden. One attempt to concretise what is meant by subject English, not just pedagogically but also ideologically, is in the development or delineation of English teaching models.

English Teaching Models

This project is a case study of how literature can be taught through a philosophical approach aligned to existing pedagogical models. The term 'model' to describe what were initially called 'views of English' (Cox, 1989), has become commonplace even though it is 'perhaps too simplifying a term' (Goodwyn, 2016, p.3). In this study, the term *model* will be used when referring to a potential philosophy-informed model for the teaching of English, but it is always used with the understanding that it is a 'short and pithy rendition of what is a profoundly complex and dynamic conceptual framework' (Goodwyn, 2016, p.5).

Hodgson (1974) made an early attempt to list and describe what he identified to be the main models of English teaching evident in England in the early 1970s. His list of models allowed 'areas of cohering pedagogy to be made visible' (p.366) and included Cultural-heritage, Personal-expression, sociological, negotiations, linguistic-based, and synthesis/compromise models. His concern when outlining these models was less as a guidebook for teacher practice, and more of a study of the relationship between English and ideology. Hodgson's work can be seen as a precursor to the more widely known models identified in the Cox Report (1989).

The models – or views – listed by Cox (1989) are: Personal Growth; Cross-curricular; Adult Needs; Cultural Heritage; and Cultural Analysis. Aspects of these models have been part of English teaching in NSW in varying degrees and combinations since the first English syllabus of 1911 (Manuel & Carter, 2017), with the emphasis of certain models dominating at different times. Given that this is a study of the potential for a new English model, it is worth briefly outlining each of the existing models here.

- *Personal Growth* focuses on the development of the linguistic, cognitive, affective, imaginative and aesthetic lives of the individual child.
- *Cross-curricula* emphasises that all teachers are teachers of English, in all subjects across the curriculum.
- *Adult Needs* (commonly known as the *Skills* model following the work of Dixon [1975]) is concerned with ensuring students are prepared for the language demands of adult life and the workplace.
- *Cultural Heritage* emphasises the need to teach students to appreciate the works of literature widely regarded to be the finest in the language.
- *Cultural Analysis* emphasises developing an understanding of the world and the cultural environment that students live in, including developing a critical knowledge of how meaning is conveyed through language and texts.

Whilst included in Cox's initial list, Cross-curricula has since been rejected by English teachers as not technically a model of English teaching (Goodwyn, 2016), leaving just four dominant models of English – Personal Growth, Skills, Cultural Heritage, and Cultural Analysis. These models were seminal to my initial teacher education when studying at the University of New England in the early 2000s, influenced by the pioneering work of Dr Paul Brock (see *Telling the story of the NSW Secondary English Curriculum, 1950–1965* Brock, 1984; *W(h)ither the Place of Literature?* Manuel & Brock, 2002). As such, they can be seen as a conceptual framework that has informed both my thinking about subject English and my practice as a teacher.

Attempts have been made to introduce new models but mostly they have taken the form of a synthesis approach, such as the work of Howie, Goodwyn and Macken-Horarik. Howie (2014) sought to bring together elements of the four models of English in a proposed new model using the Visual Arts conceptual frames as a structural framework. Whilst Howie's Frames model was a transformative influence on my own teaching of Module B, the model was not widely adopted by English teachers in Australia. Following Howie, Macken-Horarik (2014) advocates a synthesis model for the teaching of English because most teachers 'deploy a blend of Growth, Cultural Heritage, Skills, and Cultural Analysis pedagogies in classroom work.' (p.5). Goodwyn (2016) proposed a model synthesising the existing four models, which he called the Social and Personal Agency model. Whilst a synthesis of existing models does reflect the real-world work of teachers in the classroom (Goodwyn, 1991, 2021), it does not present necessarily a new way of thinking about or approach to the teaching of English, which may diminish its value. This is a criticism that can be applied to the similar attempts by Howie (2015) and Macken-Horarik (2014).

Perhaps seeking to synthesise the models under an umbrella framework did not appeal more broadly to teachers because this synthesis is a practice they already engage in, albeit in a more eclectic, personalised way. Any new model must add something more distinctively new and fresh to English teachers' pedagogical and programming toolkit, beyond a synthesis of existing models. Of course, a philosophy-informed model of English would likely draw on fundamental features of existing models, including the dialogic student-centred approach of the Growth model, the social view of language and discourse of the Skills model, and the criticality of Cultural Analysis. Indeed, Reid's conjecture that the Cultural Heritage model of English 'is redeemable through a more politically aware understanding of culture and heritage' (Goodwyn, 2016, p.11) may be addressed by a philosophy-informed model, which foregrounds a critical study of both context and concepts in the study of literary texts (not simply canonical works either).

Interestingly, these English models remain primarily conceptual and ideological, rarely recorded or named officially in curriculum or syllabus documents which tend to be more preoccupied with discipline content rather than pedagogy. So, rather than concretising what is meant by subject English, the models in fact reveal the genuinely mercurial nature of subject English itself, ever changing its character, like a chameleon, dependent on context and need. This portrait of subject English as responsive to teacher agency illustrates the potential for a new model, one that moves beyond mere synthesis of existing models. Hence the focus of this study is an inquiry into potentialities and possibilities for a new model that brings together literary and philosophical ways of thinking and knowing, that privileges critical thinking, inquiry and examining literature 'in terms of the animating questions of metaphysics, epistemology, philosophical psychology, ethics, political theory, and aesthetics' (Carroll & Gibson, 2015, p. xxi). Such a model for teaching English would allow for a confluence of existing models, reflecting the need for 'literary epistemologies and pedagogies ... to be understood more expansively' (McLean Davies et al.,

2022, p. 48). This possible model for English teaching may then be taken up by a hoped-for future teacher and explored further in the real work of the classroom.

HSC English Advanced

The Higher School Certificate (HSC), introduced in 1967, is the externally examined credential awarded at the completion of senior secondary schooling in New South Wales and functions as a high-stakes gateway to university entrance through the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR). As a result, HSC results attract significant public, institutional and commercial attention, shaping teaching practices and curriculum interpretation in senior secondary classrooms. When pedagogy becomes closely aligned with the demands of this examination and broader accountability cultures, it can change how literature is experienced in secondary schools and impede ‘the development of literary meaning-making’ (McLean Davies, 2022, p.103). Textual study in secondary English has become orthodox as teachers seek to balance facilitating opportunities for students to develop personal responses to texts with the need to ensure they are prepared for the HSC examination, which acts as a ‘de facto syllabus’ (Sawyer, 2017, p.150). Manuel and Carter (2017) suggest that whilst the discourse of the rhetorical curriculum has long advocated for some element of ‘student choice, self-directed learning, creativity, growing independence and teacher flexibility in implementing the syllabus’ (p.10), this has been consistently undermined by HSC examination and the prescribing of texts to be studied for this exam.

Whilst English teaching in years 7-10 is given a broad range of textual possibilities, allowing ‘for personal interest and enjoyment’ (2023), this textual flexibility and freedom is significantly reduced in HSC English Advanced and Standard. A key feature of the HSC English Advanced syllabus is the mandating of text forms (including prose, poetry, multimedia or film, Shakespearean drama) and a list of prescribed texts from which teachers must select, aligned to specific modules. This document is known as *English Stage 6 Prescriptions*, and ‘provides essential information about texts prescribed for HSC study for all English courses’ (NESA).

This century-long practice of prescribing texts for senior English study reveals the overt (re)production of power in the continued dominance of canonical literature on the list of prescribed texts for the HSC. These lists continue to be influenced by the Cultural Heritage model derived from both the Newbolt Report (1921), with its assertion that literary study within the context of English shapes ‘human character’ (Newbolt, 1921, p.118), and the Cambridge School approach with its emphasis on the cultural superiority and textual unity of the classics (Dolin, 2020).

There is a need for a revitalising of English pedagogy that allows teachers to balance their professional interpretation of the rhetorical curriculum with the reality of the pressures of an enacted curriculum which continues to be informed by the HSC examination. English teachers have a profound conviction that their work be emancipatory (Goodwyn, 2016), a view that resonates with Rancière’s argument that education begins from the assumption of intellectual equality and has the potential to reveal intelligence to itself (Rancière, 1991). Whilst working within a system defined by examinations – of students, teachers and schools – has impeded this work and belief to some extent, there is the potential for teachers to expose and exploit ‘the power-knowledge nexus in language and text’ (Rosser, 2000, p.31) that is inherent to text prescriptions. Having been a feature of the English curriculum since 1911, it is unlikely that NESA will discontinue the practice of prescribing texts for the HSC. However, there remains an

opportunity to influence how these texts are taught, as pedagogy has always been – and hopefully always will be – the responsibility of the individual teacher.

Module B in the English (Advanced) Course

The NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) is an institution designed to standardise the learning experiences of young people. Unsurprisingly, this institution has its own discourse, the ‘meticulousness of regulation’ (Foucault, 1984, p.184) which ultimately determines the subjectivity of both teachers and students, but this is a discourse which changes, and has changed, over time. The discursive nature of NESA’s power is evident most profoundly in their syllabuses, and the sometimes subtle, sometimes dramatic changes to the content of those syllabuses as evidenced in the changes to Module B during the course of its over 20-year history. The 2017¹ syllabus was part of the first revision of the HSC in almost 20 years. This major revision aligned the Stage 6 syllabuses with the Australian Curriculum, and a key feature of this new English Advanced syllabus was the revision of the modules set for study in both Year 11 and Year 12.

Whilst Module B was retained, the notable revision was its change in the title. Concerns in the public domain ‘that traditional and canonical works were being devalued’ (Manuel & Carter, 2020, p.273) saw the name of the Module change from Critical Study of *Text* to Critical Study of *Literature*, a change reinstating the status quo of the Module as preferencing the Cultural Heritage model of English teaching. This replacing of the term ‘text’ with ‘literature’ can be interpreted as NESA’s capitulation to the political and media pressure to move away from a perceived postmodern underpinning of the Module (Welsh, 2006).

There is scant research on English Advanced Module B. What does exist is mostly embedded within broader analyses of the teaching of English, specifically HSC English, including the work of McGraw (2010), Ireland (2015) and Golsby-Smith (2007). Moreover, their research analyses the 1999 HSC English syllabus Module B: Critical Study of Texts, whereas this study focuses on the 2017 HSC Advanced English course and the renamed Module B: Critical Study of Literature. Ireland (2015) and Golsby-Smith (2007) focused on the teaching of Critical Theory from the perspective of teachers seeking to ensure HSC success and a sense of personal satisfaction and efficaciousness when teaching literature. McGraw (2010) examined the Module within her historiographic approach to HSC English curriculum development and reception.

McGraw’s (2010) analysis of the controversy surrounding Module B in the 1999 Syllabus found that the ‘various criticisms (and) direct attacks’ (McGraw, 2010, p.140) from the media and politicians shaped public perception of English Advanced, and Module B in particular. Moreover, she noted the ‘pressure felt by teachers to ‘cram in’ or ‘tack on’ a number of predefined literary theories’ (p.62). This concern was echoed by Ireland who found the Module was a site of contestation, specifically in relation to ‘whether to teach many, several or no literary theories’ (Ireland, 2015, p. 27). This professional nervousness or uncertainty regarding pedagogical approaches to the Module was again a feature of Golsby-Smith’s research into the practical impacts of Theory in the context of teaching the 1999 English Stage 6 Syllabus. She highlights how Module B has ‘received the most attention in the press because its emphasis on variations in

¹ Whilst referred to in this study as the 2017 Syllabus, in line with how it is referenced on the NESA website, the HSC English Advanced Syllabus was in fact taught to year 11 in 2018, taught to year 12 in 2018-2019, and students were examined on it for the first time in 2019.

interpretation has given rise to students investigating different literary traditions and their habits of interpretation' (Golsby-Smith, 2007, p.76) but concludes that the hermeneutic inflexibility of the Syllabus, coupled with its unrealistic developmental expectations for the cohort, results in students who have 'surrendered their fledgling readings to the authority' (p.79) of the literary critics read in class. Golsby-Smith's investigation into the use of rhetoric as a pedagogical model for teaching the Syllabus aligns with this project's aims as dialogue is central to philosophical ways of thinking.

Philosophy in secondary schools

Burgh and Thornton (2016) observe that philosophy is a 'discipline long ignored in (Australian) schools' (p.59) despite the championing efforts of the Australian arm of the Philosophy for Children project since the 1980s. There are limited opportunities for students to learn about philosophical ideas and philosophical thinking as part of secondary schooling in NSW public schools NSW. In 2022, the NSW Department of Education (DoE) (2023) published a 'Department approved elective' Philosophy course for Stage 5. The DoE couches their definition of philosophy in terms of philosophical thinking more broadly, 'Philosophical thought shapes what people think and how they engage with others. It seeks to explore life's big issues, like what it means to be human' (2023, para. 1). Currently there is no official NESA HSC Philosophy course. There is a Year 11 Philosophy Board Endorsed elective that has been offered since 2016, with 34 schools currently endorsed to teach the course including public, independent, and Catholic schools.

Brownlee et al.'s 2014 study of pre-service teachers' learning about and application of philosophy in the classroom found that 'direct experience of teaching philosophy during practicum had changed pre-service teachers' ideas about children's capacity to think, develop opinions and justify opinions' (p.184). Furthermore, after using philosophy-informed teaching and learning practices in the classroom, the pre-service teachers were more likely to preference student-centred perspectives of learning, which saw students 'learning through an inquiring community, being open to considering alternatives, being prepared to challenge ideas and having ideas challenged, as well as asking questions, exploring disagreements and making links between ideas' (Brownlee et al, 2014, p. X?). Whilst these findings indicate the potential for integrating philosophy into the curriculum, the study was conducted in a primary school setting, revealing an opportunity to focus on its application in the secondary school setting.

In the United States, some teacher practitioners are experimenting with the incorporation of philosophical study and the study of literature. This includes Language Arts teacher Sean Waters who shares resources online with the aim of supporting 'teachers to enrich their classrooms with philosophy and young adult literature' (Waters, n.d.). Goering (2013) illustrates how a teacher might 'spark a philosophical discussion that would enrich the students' thinking in relation to the literature' (p.209) with a focus on analysing the philosophical themes in two novels frequently set for American high school students. And Vladova (2013) found that teaching philosophy in the context of her high school film and literature course resonated with students because 'teenagers are cognitively sophisticated and are hungry to explore conceptual questions rather than passively receive instruction' (p.219) – a belief that speaks to the aim of this project.

The teaching of philosophical skills in the context of English might support students to develop more critical and personal interpretation of literary texts, affirming Sawyer's argument that 'dialogue is actually fundamental to (a) process of walking the line between individual response and close attention to the text' (Sawyer, 2017, p. 152). Such teaching may draw on the strategies for philosophising developed by Cam (2018, 2020) for use in Australian schools, including the

question quadrant, discussion maps and disagreement diagrams. This development of students' critical interpretive capacities may also be achieved through the explicit teaching of philosophical theories in the context of teaching literature. For example, teaching key tenets of existentialism including alienation, drawing on the ideas of philosophers including Nietzsche, Sartre, and de Beauvoir. Whilst some philosophical skills and ideas may currently be taught by some English teachers, this is likely done in an ad hoc or otherwise unsystematic manner.

Philosophy and literature

Literature and philosophy are coherent disciplines with their shared exploration of life's big questions about 'our broader conceptions of human nature and the world' (Carroll & Gibson, 2015, p. xxi). Literature has been the subject of inquiry since Aristotle's attempt to systematise literature and describe its social and ethical utility in his *Poetics* of 330 BCE. Since then, seminal works about the interconnections between the two disciplines have been published by Murdoch (1997) and Nussbaum (1990).

Murdoch's collection of essays *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature* (1997) illustrates not so much an interest in the philosophy of literature, nor philosophy in literature, but rather a conceptual relationship between the two in terms of how both reveal the impact of historical or cultural epochs on an understanding of human consciousness. As a philosopher and novelist, Murdoch argues that 'philosophy and literature are both truth-seeking and truth-revealing activities' (p.37) and involve 'thought emerging in language' (p. 32). Yet she remained wary of conflating the two disciplines, claiming that philosophy is 'abstract and discursive and direct' (p.38) with the work of philosophers often 'crystallis(ing) something which exists in a less coherent form in the general consciousness' (p.253). This is opposed to literature which is 'artful and indirect' (p.38) with novelists able to 'get away with a lot of 'idea play' in their work' (p.44).

Nussbaum in *Love's Knowledge* (1990) suggests that 'literary form is not separable from philosophical content' (p. 3) observing that a philosophical approach to literature, specifically novels, can help to answer the ethical question 'How should one live?' (p. 50). She enquires into the relationship between the ethical stance presented in novels and that of the '(ethical) stance of the author and the reader' (p. 50), finding 'the enterprise of moral philosophy requires (the study of) literary texts, and the experience of loving and attentive novel-reading, for its own completion.' (pp.26-27). Nussbaum concludes that the application of philosophical theories to works of literature, or what she refers to as 'examples of high literary excellence, in which the fit between content and form (are) particularly well-realised' (p.30), has the potential to further the 'pursuit of human self-understanding and of a society in which humanity can realise itself more fully' (p. 53), a sentiment that affirms the aims of this study.

Whilst philosophers like Murdoch and Nussbaum draw on literature to explore their philosophical ideas, literary theorists including Coleridge, Arnold, Schlegel, and Goethe have drawn upon philosophical ideas in their literary criticism (Culler, 2019), further illustrating the interplay between the disciplines. In his introduction to the *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Literature*, Elridge (2009) contends that human subjectivity 'occupies a position of transcendental homelessness that commits it to the seeking of orientation and clarification' (p.7) and that philosophy and literature both attend to the generalities and the particulars of human life. Thus, the bringing of philosophy into the teaching of English could support teachers, and their students, to engage in rich textual interpretation centred on this situation of the human being. Moreover, Dolin et al. (2017) contend that literature 'does not name something stably knowable, but a

continuous process' (p.8), an idea that resonates with philosophy as a discipline and its inquiries into epistemic certainty. In fact, epistemic certainty about literary knowledge – the very substance of English as a discipline and subject – 'remain(s) contested and problematic' (McLean Davies, 2022, p. 38). Whilst this has characterised English as 'an epistemologically unstable area of the curriculum' (p. 38) it can also be seen as an opportunity which opens a metaphorical door to a multidisciplinary pedagogical approach that integrates philosophy and literary studies. This is an opportunity that the current study has embraced.

Summary and implications

As identified above, there is very little scholarly research into senior English in NSW, although Carter (2012) provides an important historical analysis of the intellectual traditions shaping the Stage 6 English syllabus, and what does exist primarily analyses the 1999 HSC English syllabus. As such, this study focuses on the 2017 HSC English syllabus, specifically the Critical Study of Literature module set for students studying Advanced English. Existing literature about HSC English stresses the pressure placed on teachers by the HSC examination and the negative impact it has on their agency as professionals, reflected in the tendency to approach the teaching of English in orthodox ways. Moreover, there is minimal research into the teaching of philosophy in schools, specifically secondary schools. There is an evident gap in research regarding the integration of philosophical ideas and skills into the teaching of English, despite the existing research of thinkers like Nussbaum and Murdoch into the complementary nature of the two disciplines. Given these gaps, Module B: Critical Study of Literature offers a particularly valuable case. Its design as a single-text study encourages sustained, critical interpretation, while its history in the HSC reveals the broader ideological and pedagogical disputes that shape the subject.

Chapter 3

Theoretical Framework

Introduction

The theoretical lens for this study is hermeneutic. Hermeneutics, or interpretive inquiry, is the philosophy and practice of interpretation. It treats interpretation 'as its subject matter and not as an auxiliary to the study of something else' (George, 2024). This project draws broadly on elements of the philosophical hermeneutics of Heidegger (1996) and Gadamer (1976), with its emphasis on interpretation as consisting of both analysing texts and engaging in a dialogic process with texts, as well as the centring of subjectivity and reflexivity in the interpretive process. Essential to this study is the analysis and interpretation of texts – making hermeneutics a suitable theoretical frame for the project. Aligning with 'the deepest values of the researcher' (Collins & Stockton, 2018, p.2), this hermeneutic lens opened opportunities for reading Syllabus and related documents as disciplinary technologies of power (Foucault, 1995, p.25) and interpreting the prescribed literary texts as representing the material existence of ideology in the classroom (Althusser, 2006, p.102).

Further, hermeneutics is ontological rather than epistemological – it is not primarily concerned with questions of what can be known, but rather with the nature of being itself. For Heidegger (1996), this is expressed through the concept of *Da-sein*, or 'being-in-the-world' which recognises that our understanding is always shaped by our lived, historical situation. As Moules (2002) reminds us, 'we are historical' (p.2) and our interpretations are inseparable from that historical context. This view of interpretation as always situated resonates strongly with the teaching of subject English, where textual interpretation is inevitably shaped by teachers' and students' own contexts, experiences, and the institutional pressures of syllabus and examination.

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics and research

Much like the trickster god Hermes from which its name is derived, hermeneutics provides researchers with unlimited 'capacity to see things anew' (Moules, 2002, p.2). Moving beyond the purely descriptive, hermeneutic inquiry 'emphasises interpretation as opposed to just description' (Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015, p.2) and 'argues that experiences of something are not isolated but are eventful, ongoing, emergent, forming, and generative' (Moules, 2002, p.6). This hermeneutic philosophy was integral to the qualitative process, shaping essential aspects of the research process including the subjective and reflexive role of the researcher, the formulation of research questions that are open to interpretive inquiry, and the presentation of findings through rich, detailed narrative. The non-linear data analysis engaged in Heidegger's hermeneutic circle, moving iteratively between the parts and the whole of texts, facilitating 'a dynamic and recursive process of understanding, where interpretations are continuously revised and refined' (Stewart, n.d.). This theoretical framework enabled an approach to research that was generative and unconstrained, appropriate to the study's aim of exploring the potential to develop a new pedagogical model that liberates teachers' and students' thinking about literary textual analysis.

Hermeneutic circle

Put simply, the hermeneutic circle is the idea that our understanding of a phenomena as a whole can only be established by referring to its parts and conversely, our understanding of the parts is established by our reference to the whole. Introduced by St Augustine as a conceptual framework for biblical exegesis, the hermeneutic circle was later developed by philosophers Heidegger and Gadamer. It was central to Heidegger's ontological hermeneutics, describing how the whole of reality can only be understood in terms of everyday experiences – which constitute the parts of reality – and vice versa. Gadamer, intent on justifying language as 'the mode of knowledge of the humanities' (Grondin, 2017), applied the hermeneutic circle to interpreting texts, especially literary texts. Heidegger and Gadamer, 'placed emphasis on understanding people in their lifeworld rather than attempting to extract an essence or "truth" claim' (Moules, 2002, p.6) of phenomena, an orientation that stood in contrast to the dominant positivist paradigm. As such the hermeneutic circle is not meant to be a methodology or a system, but a way of thinking about how we come to understand phenomena. For the purposes of this study, the hermeneutic circle is a process of understanding that involves a 'constant back and forth between the whole and the parts' (Grondin, 2017) which was applied to data analysis and interpretation of the Syllabus and support documents as well during the application of those interpretations to the focus prescribed text.

Hermeneutics and literature

As the foundation of modern humanities, hermeneutics presents itself as a suitable theoretical framework for a study concerned with the teaching of literature, specifically the examination of language, meaning and the text-reader-context relationship. A key contribution of hermeneutics to the study of literature was the idea that the reader and context are essential to interpretation, for what one can know 'cannot be grasped independently of the framework of his own life-praxis' (Habermas in Forster & Gjesdal, 2019, p.245). The centrality of the text-reader-context relationship inherent to literary hermeneutics aligns theoretically with the approach to literature found in Module B as evident in the data analysis findings from the Syllabus and support documents (see Chapter 5).

Like literature, central to hermeneutics is the study of meaning and language. Gadamer saw language as being central to shaping our understanding of the world. We are born *into* language, just like we are born *into* history. Thus, language – whether it is spoken or written – is the medium through which the mind is connected to the world because language 'always pre-exists the individual subject, as the very realm in which he or she unfolds' (Eagleton, 1996, p.55). It is this language-mind-world connection which is at the heart of a philosophically-informed approach to teaching literary texts, where young people are given access to philosophical ways of thinking that may both broaden and refine their interpretive skills.

Hermeneutics and pedagogy

Subject English and hermeneutics are necessarily intertwined in their development stories (Forster & Gjesdal, 2019). The concurrent rise of modern hermeneutics helped to shape the ways in which English was conceptualised as an academic discipline and, much later, how it was taught in schools.

Hermeneutics seeks to be a liberator of subjective interpretation, not a systematic method for textual analysis. A hermeneutic lens frees English teachers to be more playful and less prescriptive in their approach to textual analysis. This shift is necessary to resist the increasingly

orthodox approaches produced by the disciplinary power of the HSC and the resulting 'pedagogical subjugation' (Shay, 2021, p. 31) it imposes on English teachers. Unlike positivist epistemologies, hermeneutics embraces rather than shuns relativism, making it a theory particularly applicable to a study of Module B, which despite being criticised in the past for encouraging Postmodern interpretations of literary texts, does require students to develop their own informed personal response to the selected prescribed text. Gadamer's reclamation of prejudice as an essential component of the hermeneutic process of interpretation – whether it is interpreted as a negative or positive influence on the text, responder, and/or composer – resonates with Althusser's concept of ideology, encouraging teachers to engage students in active dialogic critique of texts and textual interpretations, including consideration of how texts can (re)produce power relations. As such, the philosophy of hermeneutics aligns to the aims of this interpretive research, inquiring into the philosophical potentialities within the HSC, specifically where opportunities exist to reinvigorate pedagogical approaches to literary textual analysis in the context of Module B.

Conclusion

In summary, this study adopts a hermeneutic theoretical framework that foregrounds interpretation as dialogic, subjective, and historically situated. Drawing on Heidegger and Gadamer, it emphasises the hermeneutic circle and the continual movement between part and whole, text and context, language and meaning. It positions literature as inseparable from the conditions of its production and reception, and English pedagogy as inevitably entangled with questions of ideology and power. This orientation is particularly relevant to subject English, where teachers' interpretations are shaped not only by their values and experiences but also by institutional pressures such as syllabus prescriptions and the HSC examination. This theoretical lens provides the conceptual grounding for the project's subsequent analyses: reading the HSC English Advanced Syllabus and support documents as hermeneutic texts, and applying the same interpretive lens to the poetry of Yeats. In this way, the hermeneutic framework not only shapes how the research questions are approached but also clarifies how philosophical perspectives can be drawn on to explore the epistemological and pedagogical foundations of subject English.

Chapter 4

Methodology

Introduction

This research adopts a qualitative case study methodology to investigate the potential for integrating philosophical study into the teaching of literature in the NSW HSC English Advanced course, with a specific focus on Module B: Critical Study of Literature. The study draws on two main data sources: Stage 6 English Syllabus documents and support materials, and a selected prescribed text for Module B: the poetry of W.B. Yeats. Document analysis of the Syllabus and its support documents was undertaken using reflexive thematic analysis, enabling the identification of both explicit philosophical affordances and the underlying epistemic assumptions of the course. Finally, textual analysis of selected poems by Yeats applied these philosophical insights to demonstrate how confluences between philosophical thinking and literary analysis might support teachers' curriculum design and pedagogical choices. This multi-method approach supports the central aim of the study: to explore how philosophical thinking can enrich the interpretation and teaching of literature in Module B.

Yeats was chosen because of his long-standing presence in Module B. His poetry has been prescribed for Module B in nearly every syllabus prescription list since the course's inception in 2001 and will again appear on the new prescription list for 2027. Yeats's poetry also exemplifies the kind of conceptual and interpretive complexity that lends itself to philosophical inquiry, making it a productive case for exploring the affordances of the proposed framework. In addition, my own extended professional experience teaching and marking Yeats's poetry in Module B provides both practical insight and a grounded perspective for this study. Document analysis of the Syllabus and its support documents was undertaken using reflexive thematic analysis, enabling the identification of both explicit philosophical affordances and the underlying epistemic assumptions of the course. Finally, textual analysis of selected poems by Yeats applied these philosophical insights to demonstrate how confluences between philosophical thinking and literary analysis might support teachers' curriculum design and pedagogical choices. This multi-method approach supports the central aim of the study: to explore how philosophical thinking can enrich the interpretation and teaching of literature in Module B.

<i>What are the potentialities for integrating philosophical study in teaching and learning in the NSW HSC English Advanced course, specifically Module B: Critical Study of Literature?</i>		
Research sub-questions	Data to inform research question	Research method used to analyse data
What philosophical affordances exist in the HSC English Advanced syllabus, specifically Module B and its support documents?	HSC English Advanced Syllabus and support documents	DOCUMENT ANALYSIS • Reflexive thematic analysis
What are the confluences between philosophical thinking and literary analysis that could support teachers' curriculum design when planning to teach Module B?		
How might these confluences between philosophical thinking and literary analysis be applied when planning to teach the poetry of W.B. Yeats in the context of Module B?	Selected prescribed text for Module B	TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Table 2 - Overview of relationship between research questions, data, and research methods

Research design

Qualitative research

This study uses a qualitative methodology, embracing the tensions and contradictions that are inherent to this type of research and acknowledging that it necessitates ‘a set of complex interpretive practices’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p.47). One tension concerns the validity and reliability of qualitative research since qualitative research doesn’t have standardised methods of data analysis (Saldana, 2011). The primary instrument of data collection and analysis for this project is the researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) therefore a robust approach data collection and the documentation of the research procedure were required (Bowen, 2009). Hence, a reflexive account of approaches to data collection and data analysis is included.

As the primary aim of this study is to identify philosophical potentialities within the HSC English Advanced Syllabus documents, a qualitative design which is ‘emergent in design and inductive in analysis’ (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p.189) is the most appropriate choice. This project is qualitative in both philosophy and procedure and was conducted with an interpretive mindset resonating with the hermeneutic lens and the analytic approach taken. This approach allowed for an embracing of the ‘fun, play and creativity’ (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p.4) that is inherent to qualitative research.

Role of the researcher

It is impossible to separate a researcher from their research because ‘researchers cannot free themselves of their theoretical and epistemological commitments’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.9). With this in mind, it is pertinent to present a brief portrait of my positionality as a researcher, with a focus on how my interpretation flows from my personal experiences (Creswell, 2007), specifically those related to my career in education.

Discussion about data and evaluation did not feature early in my career as an educator. Only later as a Head Teacher Teaching and Learning, did I engage in data collection and data analysis, including the development and management of School Improvement Plans. I was not provided with explicit training in research methods or, importantly, the theory which underpins these methods. There were no discussions about ontology (ways of perceiving reality) and epistemology (ways of knowing and analysing reality), leaving myself and my colleagues unclear about the relationship between the methods used and the interpretive lens being applied. This failure to consider what we believed reality to be led to issues regarding the way we investigated reality (Hole, 2024). In hindsight, the ontological and epistemological underpinnings applied to this school-based analytic work, were largely positivist with a clear preference for quantitative rather than qualitative methods.

However, the work of Taylor and Usher (2001), Creswell (2007) and Braun and Clarke (2019) helped me to better understand my own interpretive framework. My ontological position is that reality is neither fixed nor singular. I do not seek ‘for a ‘singular, objective, empirically valid, universal truth, existing out there in the world’ (Taylor & Usher, 2001, p.3), waiting to be uncovered through the application of the scientific method’; instead I view truth as ‘multiple and subjective’ (Taylor & Usher, 2001, p.3). Further, I adopt an epistemological stance that views knowledge as a construction shaped by an individual’s context, values, and beliefs. I bring this relativist philosophy to my research, including to my selection of research methods – qualitative case study, reflexive thematic analysis, and textual analysis. Thus, I will endeavour to make

transparent, when relevant, how I have participated in and constructed the reality I represent in this study (Hole, 2024).

Case study

This study consists of a single case. A case study is a ‘noun, a thing, an entity’ (Stake, 2005, p.1). In this study, the case is the ‘bounded system’ (Stake, 2005, p. 45) of Module B, chosen because it is the only module with a single text study for English Advanced. The data corpus for this case consists of the 2017 Stage 6 English Syllabus, its support documents from NESAs, and one literary text previously prescribed for Module B, two poems by W.B. Yeats.

A case study of Module B was selected over other modules set for the HSC English Advanced course because it is a ‘complex entity located in its own situation’ (Stake, 2005, p.12), and the shift from a study of ‘texts’ to ‘literature’ for the Module, following the public scrutiny of the Module, makes it an intrinsic case of unique interest (Stake, 1995). Whilst Module B Critical Study of Literature is also set for Year 11 and could have been selected for inclusion in this case study, the core NESAs documents relate specifically to the HSC (Year 12) course, including the HSC examination papers and marker comments, making the HSC Module a richer source for this case study. Further, whilst it is hoped that the findings from this study may also be applied to the teaching of Year 11 English Advanced, the focus of the study is on the teaching of the Module to Year 12 students, chosen due to the value placed on the HSC examination, the subsequent pressure faced by teachers, and the need to rethink approaches to teaching English at this level. Finally, the concept of criticality is central to this module, aligning with the project’s aim of identifying opportunities for the integrated teaching of literature and philosophy. In this thesis, criticality refers to the capacity to engage with texts through reflective judgement, questioning and evaluative reasoning.

The findings from this case may be extrapolated to other HSC English Advanced modules and even other HSC English courses.

Assumptions and limitations of this study

This study is necessarily bounded by its focus on Module B of the NSW English Stage 6 Syllabus and the application of a hermeneutic lens to this context. It does not aim for generalisability, rather its contribution lies in generating situated interpretations that may resonate with, or be adapted to, other curriculum contexts. By examining Module B through conceptual analysis and hermeneutic interpretation, the study offers insights into the potentialities for integrating philosophical study into the teaching of literature. This distinguishes it from earlier research in the field (Nay-Brock, 1984; Golsby-Smith, 2007; Ireland, 2022; Manuel, 2002; McGraw, 2010; Rosser, 2000; Sawyer, 2017), which often approached the English syllabus from different methodological traditions. Consistent with the hermeneutic view that ‘all observers view an object of inquiry from their own vantage points in the web of reality’ (Kincheloe et al., 2018, p.436), this study recognises its interpretations as partial and situated, while also seeking to open up new possibilities for teachers and curriculum designers.

Ultimately, the praxis of this study requires collaboration with an imagined, or hoped for, critical practitioner who will put the findings of this research into practice in their own classroom. This hypothetical teacher was kept in mind throughout the project as an essential audience, shaping the work in all aspects. This required a sense of comfort with ambiguity for this type of hermeneutic research, as it was – and remains – uncertain how teachers may engage with the findings, and what impact it may have on their teaching and their students’ learning.

Materials

The data for this study are derived from the purposively selected documents that constitute this case, outlined below in Table 4.2. These materials are suitable for the limited scope of this study with its focus on the philosophical affordances within Module B. These documents were all produced by NESA and collected from the NESA website. This is the location where all educators access NSW curriculum materials including syllabuses and their support documents. In the NSW curriculum system, the syllabus functions as the authoritative curriculum document outlining outcomes, content and assessment requirements, while accompanying support materials and official notices provide interpretive guidance to assist teachers in implementing syllabus expectations in practice. These documents are therefore intended to be read together rather than as independent prescriptions for teaching. The collecting of documents directly from the NESA site ensures their authenticity, credibility and accuracy (Bowen, 2009). However, in line with the interpretive lens of this research, it is to be noted that the discursive interactions between the institution NESA and the teacher, and then the teacher and the student, are constructive and productive in nature – producing knowledges that present a certain reality, and often a reality that is normative. In saying this, the documents purposively selected from those available on the NESA website were selected for their representiveness and meaning for the case (Morgan, 2022) as outlined in the description of each data item below.

Item	Explanation
2017 HSC English Advanced syllabus Year 12 Module B rubric	The module rubric outlines what students are expected to do and learn when studying this module. Due to this study’s specific focus on Module B set for the English Advanced HSC course, I chose to only include the module rubric for Module B. In addition to the 2017 HSC English Advanced syllabus Module B rubric, I also included the Module B rubric from the 1999 HSC English Advanced syllabus (which was first examined in 2001) to identify the shift in language and intention in the module description, as well as student expectations regarding what they must do and learn.
2017 HSC English Advanced syllabus Year 12 outcomes	The outcomes selected for this study were identified by looking at the HSC English Advanced Paper 2 mapping grids which can be found in the HSC English Advanced Paper 2 marking guidelines documents that are included in the HSC exam packs. Analysis focused on the four outcomes (EA-12-1, EA12-3, EA12-5, EA12-7) which recurred across all HSC examinations for 2019-2023. I tabulated these syllabus outcomes for ease of analysis.
2001-2026 HSC English Advanced syllabuses – Module B prescriptions rubrics	In the HSC prescriptions list, each module is outlined. These outlines are typically more detailed and specific than the module description included in the actual syllabus itself. Collected for this study were the Module B prescriptions rubrics from the 2001-2023 English Stage 6 Prescriptions documents. There were six separate prescriptions documents over this period of time. Whilst there are minimal differences between the prescription rubrics for years 2001-2009, they were included separately.
2019-2024 HSC English Advanced examination Module B rubrics	The HSC English Advanced exam rubrics outline broadly to students what they will be assessed on in the HSC examination question. The Module B exam rubrics for 2001-2024 were included in the analysis.
2019-2024 HSC English Advanced	Marking guidelines for the top two bands for all HSC examination questions for Module B from 2019-2024 were collected. These were chosen because they are

examination Module B marking guidelines	the most informative regarding what is required in a successful examination response for Module B.
2019-2024 HSC English Advanced examination Module B questions	All the HSC questions set for Module B between 2019-2024 were collected. Each year, the HSC exam includes questions on anywhere up to twelve different texts. For 2019-2024, the prescribed text selections have remained unchanged, allowing for consistency across the exam questions included for analysis in this project.
2019-2024 HSC English Advanced examination marker feedback	The HSC marking feedback for the HSC examinations in 2019-2024 was collected from the NESA website for analysis. According to NESA, this includes 'feedback about how students performed in (that) year's examination' and can be used to 'guide preparation for future examinations'.

Table 3 - Materials used in the study

Analytic approach

Document analysis

The document analysis of the Syllabus and support documents (listed above at Table 4.2) was conducted guided by two research questions:

- *What philosophical affordances exist in the HSC English Advanced syllabus, specifically Module B and its support documents?*
- *What are the confluences between philosophical thinking and literary analysis that could support teachers' curriculum design when planning to teach Module B?*

A recursive process of reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) was used to examine the Syllabus and support documents, consistent with a hermeneutic lens and its iterative movement between part and whole. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019) six phases, the analysis began with familiarisation, moved through coding and theme development, and culminated in refining and writing up themes.

Familiarisation is the crucial first step in Braun and Clarke's six-phase process. During this phase, key words, phrases, and sentences from the Syllabus and support documents were highlighted. The decision to highlight specific data extracts as being 'key' was informed by my research questions and the review of relevant literature. This initial engagement with the data was interpretive rather than neutral, reflecting the hermeneutic orientation of the study, and provided the grounding for subsequent coding.

Coding then involved reading and systematically analysing the full document set. A hybrid coding approach was adopted, including descriptive coding (assigning labels to data, e.g. 'knowledge of context and values'), in vivo coding (using words from documents verbatim as codes, e.g. 'textual integrity'), and theoretical coding (reinterpreting content thematically, e.g. 'thoughtful argumentation'). This broad analysis generated two preliminary thematic directions – 'philosophical and literary skills' and 'philosophical and literary knowledge'.

For the first thematic direction, coding led to the construction of three descriptive categories with representative data extracts: *responding personally*, *conceptual exploration*, and *questioning and reasoning*. These reflected recurring emphases on philosophical and literary ways of thinking

across the Syllabus and support documents (see Appendix 1 for coding framework). The second thematic direction required deeper analysis of HSC marker feedback documents, extending the coding to focus on philosophical and literary *concepts* (e.g. ‘duty’, ‘maturation’) and *contexts* (e.g. ‘Elizabethan England’, ‘Postmodernism’) central to Module B (see Appendix 2 and Appendix 3). These iterative cycles reflect the recursive nature of RTA, where themes are progressively constructed and refined in dialogue with the data.

The categories constructed through these phases formed the basis for final theme generation. At this stage, the data extracts and categories were interpreted through a hermeneutic lens to generate a final set of themes, which are presented in Chapter 5. Reflexive thematic analysis is particularly suited to this study as it does not adhere to a prescribed epistemological or ontological framework (Morgan, 2022), allowing researcher subjectivity to be treated as a valuable resource during interpretation. The act of writing itself became part of the analytic process, clarifying and communicating the interpretive claims of the study.

Textual analysis

The document analysis of the Syllabus and supporting documents derived essential themes that helped to conceptualise the philosophical affordances of Module B. These learnings were then applied to the textual analysis. Textual analysis is ‘a staple of English studies’ (Griffin, p.12, 2013) and involves ‘a close encounter with the work itself (and) an examination of the details’ (Belsey, p.160, 2013), a research method that complements document analysis. The textual analysis conducted as part of this study served two purposes. First, it functioned analytically to identify how literary texts such as Yeats poetry explore philosophical concepts and invite philosophical inquiry. Second, the interpretive insights generated through this analysis informed the design of teaching strategies illustrated in the Yeats chapter (Chapter 6), which demonstrates the application of the emergent philosophy-informed model of English teaching.

The philosophy-informed framework (see Table 7) for this textual analysis was derived from the categories generated through the analysis of the syllabus and support documents. These categories – for example, philosophical skills, concepts and contexts – were used to guide close readings of the two Yeats poems. This approach enabled a consistent interpretive lens across data sets and supported the investigation of how knowledges and skills from the discipline of philosophy can be used as pedagogical resources when teaching Module B.

The textual analysis, employing the metaphor of the hermeneutic circle, required constant consideration of the relationship between the text and the reader as well as an understanding of how meaning works because ‘meaning intervenes in the world, defining our understanding of values ... (but) meaning is never fixed, single or final’ (Griffin, 2013). The hermeneutic circle – the seesawing movement between the parts and the whole of a text – was applied not as ‘a method for uncovering meaning (but as) a metaphorical way of conceptualising understanding and the process of interpretation’ (Moules, 2002.p.15).

This research aims to contribute new pedagogical ideas about the teaching of English, using Yeats’s poetry as an illustration within the case study of Module B. As such, the textual analysis didn’t seek a new interpretation of Yeats’s poetry: rather the hope was to identify ways in which deepened textual inquiries by teachers and their students could be facilitated through engagement with philosophy-informed teaching and learning.

Chapter 5

Analysis and interpretation

Introduction

Reflexive thematic analysis of the Syllabus and support documents generated two overarching themes that guide the structure of this chapter. The analysis acknowledges the constructed and situated nature of meaning and reflects the active role of the researcher in interpreting the data (Gadamer, 1975). The themes generated are:

- Theme 1: philosophical affordances within Module B
- Theme 2: applying a philosophy-informed framework to texts and teaching

The first theme, 'philosophical affordances within Module B', captures the confluences between philosophical and literary thinking and the conceptual and contextual knowledge identified within the document analysis. This theme is elaborated through two sub-themes: (1) philosophical and literary skills and (2) philosophical and literary knowledge. The second theme, 'applying a philosophy-informed framework to texts and teaching', emerged from extending these affordances into the textual analysis of Yeats's poetry and subsequent pedagogical illustration. This second theme is elaborated through two sub-themes: (1) philosophy-informed textual interpretation and (2) philosophy-informed pedagogical planning. Together, these themes provide a coherent response to the first two research questions:

- *What philosophical affordances exist in the HSC English Advanced syllabus, specifically Module B and its support documents?*
- *What are the confluences between philosophical thinking and literary analysis that could support teachers' curriculum design when planning to teach Module B?*

Theme 1: Philosophical Affordances in Module B: Critical Study of Literature

Drawing on the hermeneutic framework and analysis of the Syllabus and support documents, this section presents interpretive themes related to the philosophical affordances within Module B: Critical Study of Literature.

The two key interpretive sub-themes generated through reflexive thematic analysis are:

- Sub-theme 1: The confluence of philosophical thinking and literary thinking
- Sub-theme 2: The confluence of philosophical knowledge and literary knowledge

Sub-theme 1: Confluence of Philosophical Thinking and Literary Thinking

Central to the study of Module B is the concept of criticality, and by extension, the development of critical thinking skills. The value of critical thinking has been widely acknowledged in educational discourse over the past two decades (ACARA, 2012). Yet, the interpretation of 'critical' in the context of Module B may be limited to the incorporation of secondary literary criticism.

Analysis of the Syllabus and supporting documents revealed a complex set of intellectual practices underpinning the term ‘critical’ as used in Module B. It involves a broader and deeper engagement with thinking, requiring students not only to engage with texts analytically, but to cultivate and apply distinct intellectual skills. Four skill groups emerged through the analytic process, each with a set of distinct subskills, generating a more nuanced understanding of the complex cognitive demands of the Module. Table 4 presents the four philosophic-literary skills and their related subskills that emerged from the interpretive analysis of the syllabus and support documents.

The delineation of these four skill categories makes visible the shared ground between literary and philosophical thinking. In doing so, it offers teachers a clearer picture of the cognitive demands and expectations of Module B that may be cultivated through philosophy-informed teaching strategies, thus supporting students’ critical engagement with literary texts. Each of the identified subskills is explored in more detail below, with close reference to how they are represented in the data.

Conceptual Exploration	Questioning	Reasoning	Responding Personally
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conceptual understanding • Conceptual expression 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking questions • Answering questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical analysis • Evaluative thinking • Thoughtful argumentation • Considering diverse perspectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal engagement • Intellectual engagement • Developing personal voice • Expressing personal voice • Informed personal understanding

Table 4 - Confluences of philosophical and literary skills within Module B

Conceptual Exploration

Through the process of reflexive thematic interpretation, *conceptual exploration* emerged as a key skill within the confluence of philosophical and literary thinking in Module B. For example, the Syllabus states that students should ‘express increasingly complex ideas’ (NESA, 2017, p.52). Similarly, support documents emphasise the need for students to ‘develop a conceptual discussion’ and ‘demonstrate a conceptual understanding of question(s)’.

Codes including ‘conceptual understanding,’ ‘express and understand complex ideas’ and ‘textual integrity’ were grouped into the ‘conceptual exploration’ category, which ultimately generated the subthemes of ‘conceptual understanding’ and ‘conceptual expression.’ Informed by the work of Cam (2018, 2020), this study defines conceptual exploration as the skill of thinking deeply about the ideas at the heart of literature, such as freewill, beauty, and responsibility. It includes recognising and explaining the factors that influence how and why concepts are presented.

The subskills for conceptual exploration are:

- *Conceptual understanding*, which requires the capacity to recognise and explain key concepts being explored in literature and how readers are invited to understand or question those ideas. It involves defining and classifying complex concepts and considering how they are represented, questioned, or developed in texts.
- *Conceptual expression*, which requires the skill of clearly and precisely articulating complex ideas in response to literature. It involves using appropriate language and

reasoning to communicate how texts explore concepts and how those concepts can be interpreted. It includes formulating and applying criteria to concepts to support the development of a personal interpretation of a text.

While recent NSW curriculum developments such as, for example, the English Textual Concepts (2023) present concepts as relatively stable disciplinary ideas (e.g. character, theme), the philosophical tradition foregrounds concepts as contestable and open-ended, aligning more closely with the epistemic openness demanded by Module B. The *English Stage 6 Syllabus* provides limited clarity on conceptual expectations, but HSC marker feedback consistently emphasises the need for students to demonstrate conceptual understanding and expression. The marker feedback makes explicit reference to concepts, for example ‘conceptual thesis’, ‘conceptual ideas’, ‘conceptual understanding’. However, the Syllabus and Prescriptions are less explicit. Instead they refer to ‘author’s ideas’, ‘complex ideas’, ‘representations of human experience’, ‘universal themes’ (NESA, p.52). Examination questions and related marking criteria make implied rather than explicit references to concepts, such as ‘concerns’, ‘ideas’ and naming specific concepts relevant to individual texts like ‘dishonour’.

A critical study of literature requires deep conceptual engagement, and the data analyses and interpretation of this study indicate that students are required not only to develop a conceptual understanding of a literary text but also to express this understanding confidently in extended analytical responses. The value placed on conceptual expression is evident in the Syllabus outline for Module B, which states that students should be able to ‘express increasingly complex ideas’ (NESA, 2017, p.52). This is echoed in the marker feedback which makes frequent references to students being able to respond to examination questions conceptually. For example, top achieving responses are described as ‘answering all elements of the question conceptually and holistically by developing an insightful thesis, embedded throughout the response’. In contrast, weaker responses are noted as needing to be ‘less literal in nature by developing a conceptual discussion that moves beyond an evaluation of events within the text’. Similarly, the value of conceptual understanding as a foundation for textual analysis is evident in the examination rubric’s consistent reference to students being able to ‘demonstrate (informed) understanding of the ideas expressed in the text’ and in the marker feedback which states that students need to ‘demonstrate a conceptual understanding of the text in relation to the question’.

These two subskills – *conceptual understanding* and *conceptual expression* – represent distinct but complementary dimensions of *conceptual exploration* identified in the data. Each requires targeted teaching strategies. For example, to support conceptual understanding, students might engage in a concept sorting task, working collaboratively to categorise terms under opposing conceptual headings, thereby practising classification and distinction-making. To develop conceptual expression, students can practise clarification by participating in discussions where they identify and revise ambiguous or vague statements in response to inquiry questions. These strategies can help students to refine their thinking and communicate their conceptual interpretation of a text with greater precision. A detailed outline of these approaches is provided in Appendix 4 and practical illustrations are included in the Yeats teaching sequence in Chapter 6. Integrating these philosophy-informed strategies offers a framework for supporting students’ deep conceptual engagement and enhancing their critical responses to literary texts.

Questioning

Questioning is central to the discipline of philosophy. Philosophical questions are wide-ranging, substantial, likely to remain intellectually open, not answerable by empirical methods, and can

be addressed through reasoning and analysis (Cam, 2020). Moreover, these questions can be framed using one or more of the key branches of philosophy – metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, and political philosophy. Philosophical questioning invites students to undertake complex cognitive work that fosters epistemic openness, deepens their engagement with the text, and enables the development of nuanced, personal interpretations.

Through document analysis, questioning was interpreted as a key skill within the confluence of philosophical and literary thinking in Module B. Initially the data extracts coded for questioning were grouped under the category of ‘reasoning and questioning’. However, during thematic analysis and following engagement with Cam’s (2020) strategies for teaching philosophy in school, it was determined that reasoning and questioning were discrete skills. The marker feedback makes frequent reference to students needing to improve their capacity to answer questions, specifically essay questions under examination conditions. For example, stronger students were described as ‘clearly engag(ing) with each element of the question’, engaging with ‘the question in a genuine way’ and ‘genuinely address(ing) the question’. Whereas weaker students were warned to ‘avoid pre-prepared responses that do not engage properly with the question’ and to make more of an attempt to ‘specifically address all parts of the question’.

Thematic analysis of the data led to the emergence of two distinct but related sub-skills: *asking questions* and *answering questions*. These reflect the dual demands placed on students in both classroom dialogue and formal written responses in Module B. Based on Cam’s (2020) work, this study defines *asking questions* as involving the identification and formulation of a range of question types (including factual, evaluative and conceptual questions) in both individual reflection and collaborative dialogue. It defines the skill of *answering questions* as relating to both verbal responses to questions such as during class discussions, and in written responses to questions, such as in analytical essays.

Developing students’ capacity to both ask and answer questions requires explicit, targeted strategies. For example, question-answering skills can be developed using procedural questioning where students are encouraged to make or identify particular moves in their thinking as inquiry proceeds. To support question-asking, students can be introduced to the ‘Question Quadrant’ which is a scaffold that supports them to generate questions about a text and then categorise them as either closed or open textual questions, or open or closed intellectual questions. Both skills can be developed through active engagement in collaborative classroom dialogue, particularly within structured ‘Communities of Inquiry’ (discussed further in Chapter 6, building their questioning capacities by allowing them to practise asking and responding to questions. These activities cultivate an internalised habit of inquiry that supports deeper, more independent engagement with texts. For a detailed outline of these approaches, see Appendix 4 and the illustrations in the Yeats teaching sequence (see Chapter 6).

The explicit teaching of philosophical questioning – both the formulation of, and response to, questions – is integral to success in Module B. By integrating philosophy-informed questioning strategies into the English classroom, teachers can support students in making important thinking moves as they respond to the questions of teachers, peers, and ultimately in the HSC examination.

Reasoning

In the philosophical tradition, reasoning is understood not simply as logical deduction, but as a complex and cultivated capacity involving analysis, evaluation, justification, and engagement with multiple perspectives. Despite its important role in learning, the capacity to reason (and the

many interrelated skills that contribute to it) is often taken for granted in educational settings. In the context of HSC English, effective reasoning is a hallmark of high-performing students.

Initial document analysis of the Syllabus and support documents surfaced a range of reasoning behaviours, which were synthesised into six distinct skills under the category of reasoning. These were ‘critical thinking’, ‘evaluative thinking’, ‘making judgements’, ‘interpretive thinking’, ‘thoughtful argumentation’, and ‘considering diverse perspectives’. Engagement with Cam’s (2020) work on philosophy in schools prompted a refinement of this group of subskills. This reflexive thematic interpretation, grounded in a hermeneutic lens, ultimately generated four refined reasoning subskills that align with both the critical study of literature and the philosophic tradition. All of these reasoning subskills, outlined below, were evident in explicit or implied expectations articulated across the Syllabus, support documents, and marker feedback. The reasoning subskills are:

- *Critical analysis*, which is the ability to closely examine how a text is constructed and what it communicates. It involves using interpretive thinking to explore the relationships between a text’s form, language, and meaning. There are frequent references to ‘critical analysis’ and the need to ‘critically analyse’ in the Syllabus and support documents. For example, the Syllabus states that in Module B, ‘students develop detailed analytical and critical knowledge, understanding and appreciation of a substantial literary text’ (NESA, 2017, p.54).
- *Evaluative thinking*, which is the disciplined process of making informed judgments about a literary text. It involves weighing evidence, considering the influence of contexts, and analysing the values and assumptions embedded in a text. The Syllabus and support documents make frequent reference to the need for students to ‘skilfully’ evaluate, notably in reference to ‘the perspectives of others’, the ‘language, content and construction’ of texts, and the ‘effect of context on shaping social, moral and ethical perspectives in texts’ (NESA, 2017, p.49).
- *Thoughtful argumentation*, which is the skill of developing and expressing well-reasoned, sustained, and clearly structured arguments about literary texts, grounded in evidence and conceptual understanding. Module B expects students to demonstrate ‘sustained’, ‘thoughtful’, and ‘well-informed’ arguments, as highlighted in HSC marker feedback. Students are also expected to craft ‘meaningful’ and ‘clear’ theses (NESA, n.d.).
- *Considering diverse perspectives*, which is the capacity to recognise, explore, and respond to different interpretations and viewpoints. It involves engaging in dialogic thinking to reflect on how meaning is shaped by context, values, and reader experience. The Syllabus outline for Module B, as well as the Prescriptions support document reference students’ need to investigate and research ‘the perspectives of others’ when studying literary texts, including exploring ‘different readings of the text’ (NESA, 2017, p.54).

While students are expected to demonstrate these reasoning behaviours in their engagement with the prescribed literary text, the Syllabus and support documents provide limited guidance on how to develop them. English teachers may lack the conceptual tools and pedagogical repertoire needed to foster these capabilities. Strategies drawn from philosophical traditions can support teachers in broadening their understanding and improving their practice in teaching reasoning. For example, students could be introduced to the concepts of justification and inference, conditionals, deductive and inductive reasoning, and the function of discussion maps. For a detailed outline of strategies that support the development of students’ reasoning in the

context of Module B, see Appendix 4 and the illustrations of application in the Yeats chapter (Chapter 6).

Responding Personally

In the philosophical tradition, developing a personal response to enduring human concerns is central to humanity's effort to understand itself and its place in the universe (Grayling, 2019). Likewise, responding personally to literature is not simply an expression of preference or emotion, but a complex act of ethical and intellectual engagement. Literature's significance comes not simply from an appreciation of its forms and features, but in the personal and ethical experience it evokes in the reader (Eagleton, 2012). A philosophy-informed approach to Module B could deepen and structure students' personal responses to literary texts, particularly by cultivating personal engagement, interpretive understanding, and an authentic voice.

During document analysis, codes including 'personal and intellectual engagement', 'personal voice', and 'informed personal understanding' were grouped into the 'responding personally' category. It was interpreted that each of these codes represents a discrete skill that underpins the overarching expectation for Module B regarding students responding personally to literature. Both the Syllabus and Prescriptions emphasise the need for students to engage deeply with the text as both responder and composer enable students to *develop personal and intellectual connections*, allowing them to express a considered, informed view of its meaning and value. In terms of students' need to develop a *personal voice*, the marker feedback uses a range of adjectives to specify the quality or type of personal voice, including 'strong', 'consistently strong', 'vigorous', 'authentic', 'informed', 'articulate', 'sustained', and 'clear' (NESA, n.d.). The requirement for students to develop an *informed personal response* emerged from the data, reflective of the interpretive nature of literary studies. The Syllabus outline references students need to develop an 'increasingly informed personal response to the text', 'their own interpretation of the text' (NESA, 2017 p.41), and the marker feedback indicates that stronger student responses demonstrate a 'strong, sustained personal response' (NESA, n.d.) to the prescribed literary text.

Through the process of interpretive hermeneutic analysis, considering both the data analysis deductively and inductively, the three initial codes grouped under the category of 'responding personally' were delineated further into five discrete skills that contribute to the overarching capacity to respond personally to literary texts. This resulted in the five subskills, outlined below.

- *Personal engagement*, which is the capacity to engage with a literary text with curiosity, identifying ideas, moments, or questions that resonate personally. It involves noticing one's own emotional and intuitive responses, and using these as starting points for inquiry rather than endpoints.
- *Intellectual engagement*, which is the ability to use reasoning to extend or refine one's initial responses to a literary text. It involves interrogating assumptions, questioning interpretations, and drawing conceptual connections.
- *Developing a personal voice*, which involves experimenting with ideas and language to articulate emerging interpretations of literature. This may include taking interpretive risks and considering complex conceptual questions.
- *Expressing a personal voice*, which is the ability to articulate an interpretation with increasing clarity, coherence, and confidence. It involves presenting personal insight using structured argumentation.
- *Informed personal understanding*, which is the synthesising of textual evidence, conceptual reasoning, and personal insight while remaining attentive to diverse

perspectives. It involves demonstrating awareness of how one's interpretation sits alongside, differs from, or is strengthened by the views of others.

Each of these subskills can be developed using philosophy-informed teaching strategies. To support *personal engagement*, students might respond to philosophical provocations related to the text's core concepts, grounding their answers in their own personal beliefs, values or experiences. To foster *intellectual engagement*, students could participate in Socratic dialogue using a short extract from the prescribed text or a passage of literary criticism. To develop students' *personal voice*, teachers might ask students to keep a weekly journal where they reflect on the concepts being explored in the prescribed text. Encouraging students to express their personal voices in relation to literary texts could involve writing short argumentative essays that follow the structure of a philosophical argument – thesis, counterargument, conclusion. Finally, *informed personal understanding* can be deepened through argument mapping, where students visually organise and evaluate a range of interpretations and critical perspectives of the prescribed text, helping them to clarify their own informed personal response. For a detailed outline of strategies that support the development of students' capacity to respond personally, see Appendix 4 and the illustrations of application in the Yeats chapter (Chapter 6).

These five interrelated subskills illuminate the depth and complexity of what it means to respond personally to literature and point to the value of a philosophy-informed approach in supporting students to find meaning, voice, and agency in their critical engagement with texts.

Sub-theme 2: Confluence of Philosophical Knowledge and Literary Knowledge

Just as thinking skills can align across philosophy and literature, knowledge too operates in converging ways, particularly in the domains of contextual and conceptual knowledge. While the Syllabus does not provide explicit guidance on how to develop these forms of literary understanding, the document analysis revealed the HSC marker feedback to be a rich source of data on the kinds of contextual and conceptual knowledge that may be required in Module B. This interpretive analysis indicated a clear need for a coherent framework to guide the deepening of students' contextual and conceptual knowledge to support literary analysis.

Broadening and Deepening Contextual Knowledge

One of the key themes to emerge from the interpretive analysis was the importance of broadening and deepening students' contextual knowledge. Module B requires teachers and students to engage with texts in relation to their literary, historical, and cultural contexts. However, the Syllabus offers only general guidance and as a result engagement with the historical, cultural, and social contexts of literature is often reduced to shallow knowledge transmission. For example, it states that 'Students appreciate, analyse and respond imaginatively and critically to literary texts drawn from a range of personal, social, historical and cultural contexts' (NESA, 2017, p.10). In practice, this often leaves teachers with limited specific guidance on what contextual knowledge to teach.

To foster deeper interpretive insight, students need a richer, philosophy-informed understanding of contextual knowledge. Table 5 (next page) provides a condensed version of the context timeline developed through the analytic–interpretive process, which serves as a framing device for the discussion that follows.

Context timeline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ancient period (646BCE-270CE) • Medieval period / Middle Ages (400CE-1400CE) • Renaissance / Reformation (1400-1600CE) • Enlightenment / Neoclassical / Early Modern era (1660-1830CE) • Romantic period (1790-1830CE) • Victorian era / 19th century (1832-1901CE) • Edwardian era (1901-1914) • Georgian era (1910-1936) • Modern era – WWI/WWII (1914-1945CE) • Postmodern era / Contemporary period (after 1945CE)

Table 5 - Context timeline illustrating confluences of literary and philosophical periods

The HSC marker feedback occasionally refers to contextual knowledge, but in inconsistent and fragmentary ways, typically linked to specific prescribed texts. For example, ‘make thoughtful statements about elements of Renaissance humanism’, and ‘skilfully explores the values and historical context of Georgian England’ (NESA, n.d.). These comments offer glimpses into the contextual knowledge students may need, but they fall short of providing a coherent framework for teachers. Of course, this highlights an ongoing and much broader issue in the enacted curriculum: the uneven translation of policy into pedagogical practice.

Philosophy, like literature, is both shaped by and shapes its context. It has influenced literature not only through the ideas it introduces, but also by shaping the broader intellectual and cultural environments in which literary works are written and interpreted. Integrating philosophical perspectives into contextual study can help students understand not only what ideas influenced a text, but how those ideas emerged, evolved, and were contested over time.

A timeline of key philosophical, literary, and historical moments emerged from, and in support of, the interpretive analysis of Syllabus and support documents (see Table 5). Analytically, this timeline affirmed the integral role that contextual knowledge plays in enabling students to form informed personal interpretations of prescribed texts. Pedagogically, it offered a way to support teachers in embedding such knowledge meaningfully in their programming for Module B. A more detailed version, aligning specific philosophers, philosophical theories, and key texts with each historical period, is included in Table 7 as a practical resource for teachers when programming for Module B.

The initial version of the timeline was constructed by grouping extracts coded as ‘context’ into categories such as ‘literary movements’, ‘historical events’, and ‘philosophical movements’ (See Appendix 3). These were then ordered chronologically to create a draft timeline. The sub-categories included: Medieval Era, Renaissance, Elizabethan Era, Regency Era, Victorian Era, Georgian Era, Romanticism, 19th-century Europe, WWI, WWII, post-industrialised world, Modernism, Postmodernism, the 1980s, and post-9/11. The resulting list was broad yet patchy, reflecting the uneven and fragmentary nature of contextual information in the HSC marker feedback.

The incompleteness of the timeline points to an opportunity for further resource development to support teachers and students. Expanding this timeline to include major philosophical theories, thinkers, and texts for each contextual period would help illustrate the confluence of philosophical and literary knowledge. While the creation of a comprehensive contextual framework is beyond the scope of this thesis, a partial contribution has been made, with an extended version included in Table 7. Moreover, an illustration of how this timeline may be used

to support programming is included in the Yeats chapter below, demonstrating the potential of a philosophy-informed approach to teaching Module B (Chapter 6).

Broadening and Deepening Conceptual Knowledge

Module B requires teachers and students to engage with complex concepts. As mentioned in the section above on conceptual exploration, the Syllabus offers no explicit definition or guidance on what constitutes a ‘concept’. Yet, references to conceptual engagement appear frequently in the HSC marker feedback, where conceptual discussion is consistently cited as a hallmark of exemplary student responses. For example, students are expected to ‘shape a conceptual argument’, ‘fully develop a conceptual thesis’ and ‘respond to the question in a conceptual fashion’ (NESA, n.d.). This suggests that while conceptual understanding is highly valued in student writing, teachers are expected to infer what counts as conceptual as part of the support documents, primarily the marker feedback, rather than from the Syllabus itself.

This reliance reinforces the distinction between the rhetorical and enacted curriculum and highlights the implied nature of knowledge expectations in Module B. The rhetorical curriculum refers to the intentions and principles expressed in official curriculum documents, while the enacted curriculum describes how these intentions are interpreted and realised in classroom practice. In this high-stakes context, the marker feedback becomes an interpretive tool through which teachers derive more specific instructional content.

The interpretive analysis of the HSC marker feedback identified a significant number of extracts that referred to conceptual knowledge. For example ‘critically demonstrate the subjective nature of truth’, ‘identify Malouf’s deep philosophical, metaphysical and spiritual concerns’ and ‘perceptively explore the ideas of reformation and redemption’ (NESA, n.d.). These were grouped into five sub-categories, derived from the primary branches of philosophy: epistemology, ethics, metaphysics, aesthetics, and political philosophy. These categories reflect foundational areas of philosophical inquiry, with three (epistemology, ethics, and metaphysics) already present in the NSW Philosophy Stage 6 Syllabus. The Stage 6 Philosophy course referred to here is a Board Endorsed Course rather than a Board Developed Course and therefore operates outside the externally examined HSC structure. It is offered at the discretion of schools and assessed internally. The remaining two areas (aesthetics and political philosophy) form part of standard first-year university philosophy curricula.

Table 6 below presents the concepts identified through document analysis, grouped according to the five selected branches of philosophy. This categorisation shows how philosophical knowledge (including key thinkers and their works, major questions and problems, and central ideas and theories) can provide a coherent structure for deepening students’ conceptual engagement with literary texts in Module B.

BRANCH OF PHILOSOPHY	CONCEPTS
Metaphysics	perception, subjectivity, existence, identity, memory, human nature, relativism, reality, spirituality
Epistemology	freewill, knowledge, truth, responsibility, subjectivity, scepticism, reason
Ethics	honour, responsibility, gender rights, justice, morality, rebellion
Aesthetics	beauty, happiness, ordinary, harmony, sensitivity
Political Philosophy	public vs private, institutional power, class, justice, gendered power, inequality, rebellion, social responsibility

Table 6 - Philosophical concepts identified through document analysis

When combined with the strategies for teaching conceptual understanding and conceptual expression outlined earlier, this approach can offer students a structured way to analyse literature through a more conceptually rigorous interpretive lens. Without such a structure, the list of concepts students are expected to know becomes diffuse and potentially overwhelming. Teachers naturally focus on concepts mentioned in the HSC marker feedback for their selected texts, but this narrow focus may limit students' broader interpretive development. Given that Advanced English students study at least four prescribed texts (and often more if they study multiple English courses) a philosophy-informed framework offers a way to scaffold conceptual engagement across the entire English curriculum, encouraging more robust and transferable knowledge-building practices.

A philosophy-informed framework for teaching English

Bringing together these philosophical affordances resulted in the production of a manageable and pedagogically useful framework which will be referred to as the philosophy-informed framework (see Table 7 below). Such a framework provides a way to approach philosophical skills and philosophical contextual and conceptual knowledge more systematically, supporting teachers in planning and delivering lessons.

Each component of the framework was developed directly from the reflexive thematic analysis of the Syllabus and support documents. The four philosophical–literary skills emerged from recurring emphases on reasoning, questioning, conceptual engagement, and personal interpretation across the data set. Similarly, the contextual and conceptual knowledge components reflect the coded references to the historical, intellectual, and disciplinary content that underpin sophisticated textual interpretation in Module B. By consolidating these patterns, the framework serves as a bridge between the document analysis and the subsequent applied analysis.

For each component of the framework, suggested or example content has been included. Teachers may wish to draw upon this when analysing the prescribed text or when planning to teach Module B. This content was derived from the initial review of literature as well as my own knowledge and experience having taught Module B and Stage 6 Philosophy. An extended version of the framework (which includes detailed strategies with prescribed-text focused examples for teaching the identified philosophy-literary skills) can be found at Appendix 4.

Below is the philosophy-informed framework, representing the philosophical affordances of Module B. The section following the table illustrates how such a framework might be applied through an analysis of two poems by W. B. Yeats.

Confluences between philosophical thinking and literary thinking	
Conceptual exploration is the skill of thinking deeply about the ideas at the heart of literature, such as freewill, beauty, and responsibility. It includes recognising and explaining the factors that influence how and why concepts are presented. It involves the skills of conceptual understanding and conceptual expression.	
Conceptual understanding	The skill of recognising and explaining key concepts being explored in literature and how readers are invited to understand or question those ideas. It involves defining and classifying complex concepts and considering how they are represented, questioned, or developed in texts.
Conceptual expression	The skill of clearly and precisely articulating complex ideas in response to literature. It involves using appropriate language and reasoning to communicate how texts explore concepts and how those concepts can be

	interpreted. It includes formulating and applying criteria to concepts to support the development of a personal interpretation of a text.
Questioning is the skill of formulating and responding to open, conceptually rich questions that deepen students' engagement with literature. It involves the skills of asking questions and answering questions.	
Asking questions	The skill of generating and categorising a variety of question types to support deep conceptual engagement with literature. It involves reflective and critical interrogation of texts, both individually and through collaborative dialogue.
Answering questions	The ability to recognise and make specific thinking moves in both written and verbal responses. It involves responding thoughtfully and logically, fostering deeper and more independent engagement with literature.
Reasoning is the complex and cultivated capacity to think coherently, logically, and interpretively to make sense of texts and concepts, construct meaning, and reach justified conclusions. It involves the skills of critical analysis, evaluative thinking, thoughtful argumentation, and considering diverse perspectives.	
Critical analysis	The ability to closely examine how a text is constructed and what it communicates. It involves using interpretive thinking to explore the relationships between a text's form, language, and meaning.
Evaluative thinking	The disciplined process of making informed judgments about a literary text. It involves weighing evidence, considering the influence of contexts, and analysing the values and assumptions embedded in a text.
Thoughtful argumentation	The skill of developing and expressing well-reasoned, sustained, and clearly structured arguments about literary texts, grounded in evidence and conceptual understanding.
Considering diverse perspectives	The capacity to recognise, explore, and respond to different interpretations and viewpoints. It involves engaging in dialogic thinking to reflect on how meaning is shaped by context, values, and reader experience.
Responding personally is the reflective and interpretive capacity to connect deeply with literature, drawing on thought, emotion, and experience to construct meaning. This capacity encompasses engaging critically and imaginatively with ideas, recognising the interplay between self and text, and articulating original insights shaped by personal perspective and contextual awareness. It involves the skills of personal and intellectual engagement, developing and expressing a personal voice, and informed personal understanding.	
Personal engagement	The capacity to engage with a literary text with curiosity, identifying ideas, moments, or questions that resonate personally. It involves noticing one's own emotional and intuitive responses, and using these as starting points for inquiry rather than endpoints.
Intellectual engagement	The ability to use reasoning to extend or refine one's initial responses to a literary text. It involves interrogating assumptions, questioning interpretations, and drawing conceptual connections.
Developing a personal voice	This involves experimenting with ideas and language to articulate emerging interpretations of literature. This may include taking interpretive risks and considering complex conceptual questions.
Expressing a personal voice	The ability to articulate an interpretation with increasing clarity, coherence, and confidence. It involves presenting personal insight using structured argumentation.
Informed personal understanding	The synthesising of textual evidence, conceptual reasoning, and personal insight while remaining attentive to diverse perspectives. It involves demonstrating awareness of how one's interpretation sits alongside, differs from, or is strengthened by the views of others.

Confluences between philosophical knowledge and literary knowledge	
Context timeline	Content – philosophers, theories, and key texts
<p>646BCE-270CE: Ancient period [Characterised by foundational inquiries into nature, ethics, logic, and metaphysics; emergence of Western philosophical traditions in Greece and Rome.]</p>	<p>Thales (c.624-c.546BCE): First recorded philosopher. Introduced rational explanation of nature. Anaximander (c.610-c.546BCE): Cosmology. Cartography. Anaximenes (c.586-c.526BCE): Fundamental principles of nature. Heraclitus (c.535-c.475BCE): Nature. Unity of opposites. Order of the cosmos. Parmenides (c.515-c.450BCE): Nature. Metaphysics. Socrates (c.470-399BCE): Socratic method. Ethics. Epistemology. Democritus (c.460-c.370BCE): Atom theory. Determinism. Plato (c.427-c.347BCE): <i>The Republic; Phaedo</i>. Idealism. Ethics. Theory of forms. Political philosophy. Epistemology. Metaphysics. Aristotle (384-322BCE): <i>Nicomachean Ethics; Metaphysics; Poetics</i>. Empiricism. Logic. Ethics. Metaphysics. Epicurus (341-270BCE): <i>Letter to Menoeceus</i>. Epicureanism. Atomism.</p>
<p>400-1400: Medieval period / Middle Ages [Characterised by synthesis of classical philosophy with Christian theology; focus on faith, reason, divine order, and scholastic method.]</p>	<p>Augustine (354-430): <i>Confessions</i>. Integration of Christian theology and Neoplatonism. Anselm (1033-1109): <i>Proslogion</i>. Ontological arguments about God’s existence. Aquinas (1225-1274): <i>Summa Theologiae</i>. Integration of Christian theology with Aristotelian philosophy. Boethius (480-525): <i>The Consolation of Philosophy</i>. Free will. Ockham (1287-1347): <i>Summa Logicae</i>. Ockham’s Razor. Metaphysics.</p>
<p>1400-1600: Renaissance / Reformation [Characterised by renewed humanism, classical revival, individual inquiry, and challenges to religious authority and tradition.]</p>	<p>Mirandola (1463-1494): <i>Oration on the Dignity of Man</i>. Humanism. Freewill. Erasmus (1466-1536): <i>In Praise of Folly</i>. Christian humanism. Machiavelli (1469-1527): <i>The Prince</i>. Ethics and politics. Thomas More (1478-1535) <i>Utopia</i>. Political philosophy. Montaigne (1533-1592): <i>Essays</i>. Scepticism. Pioneered the essay as a philosophical form. Bruno (1548-1600): <i>On the Infinite Universe and Worlds</i>. Heliocentrism. Galilei (1564-1642): <i>Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems</i>. Heliocentrism. Scientific method. Hobbes (1588-1679): <i>Leviathan</i>. Social contract theory. Political philosophy. Descartes (1596-1650): <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i>. Cartesian doubt. Mind-body dualism. Cogito ergo sum (‘I think therefore I am’). Bacon (1561-1626): <i>Novum Organum</i>. Empirical method. Inductive reasoning. Scientific revolution.</p>
<p>1660-1830: Enlightenment / Neoclassical / Early Modern era</p>	<p>Pascal (1623-1662): <i>Pensées</i>. Reconciliation between faith and reason. Locke (1632-1704): <i>An Essay Concerning Human Understanding</i>. Empiricism. Tabular rasa (‘blank slate’).</p>

<p>[Characterised by rationalism, empiricism, scientific discovery, and political philosophy grounded in reason and human rights.]</p>	<p>Spinoza (1632-1677): <i>Ethics</i>. Pantheism. Monism. Rationalism. Newton (1643-1727): <i>Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy</i>. Laws of motion and gravity. Classical mechanics. Leibniz (1646-1716) <i>Monadology</i>. Pre-established harmony. Metaphysics. Berkley (1685-1753): <i>A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge</i>. Idealism. Esse est percipi ('To be is to be perceived'). Hume (1723-1790): <i>A Treatise of Human Nature</i>. Empiricism. Induction. Causality. Scepticism. Smith (1723-1790): <i>The Wealth of Nations</i>. Free-market economics. Moral philosophy. Kant (1724-1804): <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i>. Transcendental idealism. Deontological ethics. Bentham (1748-1832): <i>An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation</i>. Utilitarianism. Principle of greatest happiness. Moral philosophy. Hegel (1770-1831): <i>Phenomenology of Spirit</i>. Dialectical idealism. Absolute spirit.</p>
<p>1790-1830: Romantic period [Characterised by emotion, individualism, critique of Enlightenment rationalism, and return to nature or inner truth.]</p>	<p>Rousseau (1712-1778): <i>The Social Contract</i>. General will. Critique of civilisation. Natural human goodness. Schopenhauer (1788-1860): <i>The World as Will and Representation</i>. Will as the fundamental force. Pessimism. Aesthetics. Kierkegaard (1813-1855): <i>Fear and Trembling</i>. Christian existentialism. Faith and the individual. Nietzsche (1844-1900) <i>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</i>. Will to power. Eternal recurrence. Death of God. Existentialism.</p>
<p>1837-1901: Victorian era / 19th century [Characterised by moral seriousness, social reform, empiricism, and philosophical liberalism in Britain; in Europe, it overlaps with late Romantic and early Modern thought.]</p>	<p>Stuart Mill (1806-1873): <i>On Liberty</i>. Utilitarianism. Liberty. Harm principle. Social progress. Peirce (1839-1914): <i>Collected Papers</i>. Pragmatism. Semiotics. Fallibilism. Empiricism. James (1842-1910): <i>The Varieties of Religious Experience</i>. Pragmatism. Stream of consciousness. Psychology.</p>
<p>1901-1914: Edwardian era [Short period characterised by transitions: lingering Victorian moralism alongside rising scepticism, secularism, and formalism.]</p>	<p>Husserl (1859-1938): <i>Logical Investigations</i>. Phenomenology. Intentionality. Idealism. Russell (1872-1970): <i>Principia Mathematica</i>. Analytic philosophy. Logic. Analytic philosophy. Moore (1873-1958): <i>Principia Ethica</i>. Ethics. Analytic philosophy.</p>
<p>1910-1936: Georgian era</p>	<p>Wittgenstein (1889-1951): <i>Philosophical Investigations</i>. Language.</p>

[Characterised by deep cultural change; post-Victorian disillusionment, Modernist innovation, and philosophical fragmentation.]	Heidegger (1889-1976): <i>Being and Time</i> . Existentialism. Phenomenology. Ontology. Dasein ('being-in-the-world').
1914-1945: Modern era (WWI/WWII) [Characterised by global crisis; war, disillusionment, and philosophical responses to meaning, freedom, and logic.]	Sartre (1905-1980): <i>Being and Nothingness</i> . Existentialism. Radical freedom. Bad faith. Goodman (1906-1998): <i>Ways of Worldmaking</i> . Constructivism. Induction. de Beauvoir (1908-1986): <i>The Second Sex</i> . Power. Knowledge. Discourse. Ayer (1910-1989): <i>Language, Truth, Logic</i> . Logical positivism. Foot (1920-2010): <i>Natural Goodness</i> . Ethics. Rawls (1921-2002): <i>A Theory of Justice</i> . Justice.
1945-present: Postmodern era / Contemporary period [Characterised by deep cultural change; postwar scepticism, social critique, identity politics, and pluralism.]	Foucault (1926-1984): <i>Discipline and Punish</i> . Power. Knowledge. Discourse. Nagel (b.1937): <i>What Is It Like to be a Bat?</i> Consciousness. Subjectivity.

Confluences between philosophical knowledge and literary knowledge

Branches of philosophy	Concepts	Content
Metaphysics: Metaphysics explores the fundamental nature of reality including existence, being, time, and the relationship between mind and matter. It asks what is ultimately real, how we can know it, and what it means to be.	perception, subjectivity, existence, identity, memory, human nature, relativism, reality, spirituality	Major ideas, theories, problems: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theory of Forms (Plato) • Dualism and Monism • Idealism and Materialism • Mind-body problem • Free will vs Determinism • Solipsism • Personal identity
		Key questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is real? • Do we have free will? • What is a person? • What is the difference between appearance and reality? • Does anything exist independently of our perception?
		Key thinkers and works: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plato – <i>The Republic, Phaedo</i> • Descartes – <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i> • Hume – <i>A Treatise of Human Nature</i> • Locke – <i>An Essay Concerning Human Understanding</i>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Berkeley – <i>Principles of Human Knowledge</i> • Armstrong – <i>A Materialist Theory of the Mind</i> • Dennett – <i>Consciousness Explained</i>
<p>Epistemology: Epistemology asks what knowledge is, how we come to know things, how we justify what we believe, and how knowledge is used across different contexts.</p>	<p>freewill, knowledge, truth, responsibility, subjectivity, scepticism, reason</p>	<p>Major ideas, theories, problems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empiricism • Rationalism • Foundationalism • Constructivism • Pragmatism • Gettier cases • Meno’s paradox (Plato) • Justified True Belief • Deductive and inductive reasoning • Scepticism <p>Key questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is knowledge? • How do we know something is true? • Can knowledge be certain, or is it always fallible? • How is knowledge justified across different fields? • How do reason and experience contribute to knowledge? <p>Key thinkers and works:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socrates (see works of Plato) • Plato – <i>Meno; Theaetetus</i> • Descartes – <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i> • Locke – <i>Essay Concerning Human Understanding</i> • Hume – <i>Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i> • Berkeley – <i>Principles of Human Knowledge</i> • Chomsky – <i>Syntactic Structures</i> • Leibniz – <i>New Essays on Human Understanding</i>
<p>Ethics: Ethics invites us to explore different ways of thinking about morality, including what it means for something to be good or right. This includes looking at ideas that focus on outcomes (teleological), those that emphasise</p>	<p>honour, responsibility, rights, justice, morality, rebellion</p>	<p>Major ideas, theories, problems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teleology / Consequentialism • Deontology • Virtue ethics • Utilitarianism • Epicureanism • Ethical egoism • Divine command theory • Euthyphro problem • The categorical imperative • Greatest Happiness Principle • metaethics <p>Key questions:</p>

<p>duties or rules (deontological), and others that are more concerned with the kind of person we are (virtue ethics). It also raises important questions about where our moral standards come from, how we know what's right or wrong, and under what conditions we can be held morally responsible for our actions.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What makes an action right or wrong? • Are moral values objective or subjective? • Do the consequences of an action determine its moral worth? • Is it more important to follow rules or to cultivate good character? • Can morality exist without religion? • What is metaethics, and how does it differ from normative ethics? • Should we prioritise the happiness of the many over the individual? • Are we ever morally obligated to break the law?
<p>Aesthetics: Aesthetics is the branch of philosophy that explores the nature of beauty, art, and taste, as well as the creation and interpretation of artistic and aesthetic experience.</p>	<p>beauty, happiness, ordinariness, harmony, sensitivity, imagination, creativity</p>	<p>Key thinkers and works:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bentham – <i>An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation</i> • Kant – <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> • Stuart-Mill – <i>Utilitarianism, On Liberty</i> • Singer – <i>Practical Ethics</i> • Epicurus – <i>Letter to Menoeceus</i> • Aristotle – <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> • Aquinas – <i>Summa Theologiae</i> • Foot – <i>Natural Goodness</i> • Hume – <i>A Treatise of Human Nature</i> <p>Major ideas, theories, problems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tragedy • Catharsis • Form • The sublime • Aesthetic judgement • Apollonian vs Dionysian • Meaning <p>Key questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is art? • What makes something beautiful or aesthetically valuable? • Is beauty subjective or objective? • Can art express truth or moral insight? • What is the role of the artist? • What is the role of the audience? • How do we distinguish art from non-art? • Is there such a thing as good or bad taste? <p>Key thinkers and works:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plato – <i>The Republic</i> • Aristotle – <i>Poetics</i> • Immanuel Kant – <i>Critique of Judgment</i> • David Hume – <i>Of the Standard of Taste</i> • Friedrich Nietzsche – <i>The Birth of Tragedy</i>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arthur Danto – <i>The Transfiguration of the Commonplace</i> • Clive Bell – <i>Art</i> • Susan Sontag – <i>Against Interpretation</i>
<p>Political Philosophy: Political philosophy investigates how societies should be organised, what justice requires, and the rights and responsibilities of individuals and groups. It explores the nature and legitimacy of power, the tension between public and private life, and the ethical foundations of political action.</p>	<p>public vs private, power, class, justice, inequality, rebellion, responsibility</p>	<p>Major ideas and theories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideal state • Natural rights • The legitimacy of political authority • The problem of political obligation • Distribution of resources • Civil disobedience • Class struggle • Power as productive and embedded in discourse • Social Contract Theory • Liberalism • Marxism • Justice as Fairness • Anarchism • Feminist Political Theory • Harm principle <p>Key questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What makes political power legitimate? • What is the difference between public and private life, and why does it matter? • What is justice, and how should it be realised in society? • Is inequality always unjust? • What responsibilities do citizens have to one another and to the state? • When, if ever, is rebellion justified? • How do class and power shape political structures and outcomes?
		<p>Key thinkers and works:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plato – <i>The Republic</i> • Aristotle – <i>Politics</i> • Hobbes – <i>Leviathan</i> • Locke – <i>Two Treatises of Government</i> • Rousseau – <i>The Social Contract</i> • Marx – <i>The Communist Manifesto; The Capital</i> • Mill – <i>On Liberty</i> • Rawls – <i>A Theory of Justice</i> • Arendt – <i>The Human Condition</i>

Table 7 – The complete philosophy-informed framework for teaching HSC English, bringing together central elements to provide a coherent framework

Theme 2: Applying a philosophy-informed framework to texts and teaching

The second theme to emerge from the data analysis – ‘applying a philosophy-informed framework to texts and teaching’ – explores how insights generated through the interpretive document analysis might be practically applied to support teacher programming and pedagogy. This theme emerged as a response to the philosophical affordances identified in Theme 1, shifting the focus from identifying philosophical potentialities in curriculum documents to illustrating how these affordances might be applied by teachers in both textual interpretation and lesson planning. It considers how these affordances might translate into practical strategies for lesson design, recognising the need for teachers to be supported with integrating philosophical thinking into their English classrooms. This interpretation draws on the application of the philosophy-informed framework developed through the document analysis. It shows how the framework can help teachers identify the skills, conceptual knowledge, and contextual understanding needed to support students’ active engagement in developing rich, personal interpretations of literary texts.

The two sub-themes generated through this phase of analysis were:

- Sub-theme 1: Philosophy-informed textual interpretation
- Sub-theme 2: Philosophy-informed pedagogical planning

Sub-theme 1: Philosophy-Informed Textual Interpretation

This sub-theme explores how a philosophy-informed framework can be used to interpret prescribed literary texts (e.g. Yeats’s poetry), deepening teachers’ understanding of conceptual and contextual dimensions prior to planning for Module B. In doing so, teachers are supported to read literary texts philosophically.

Since this research aims to contribute new pedagogical ideas about the teaching of English, using Yeats’s poetry as an illustration within the case study of Module B, the textual analysis did not seek a new interpretation of Yeats’s poetry. Rather, the hope was to identify ways in which deepened textual inquiries by teachers and their students could be facilitated through engagement with philosophy-informed teaching and learning. The textual analysis of the two poems purposively selected for the study – ‘The Wild Swans at Coole’ and ‘The Second Coming’ – served two purposes. Firstly, to interpret how literary texts such as Yeats’s poetry explore philosophical concepts and invite philosophical inquiry. Secondly, to explore how an emergent philosophy-informed model of English teaching might inform the programming of Module B.

The philosophy-informed framework (see Table 7) derived from the document analysis was used to guide close readings of the two Yeats poems. The process was iterative, guided by the metaphor of the hermeneutic circle, and moved between textual details and broader curricular or pedagogical frames. The following hermeneutic questions guided my interpretation of the philosophical and pedagogical utility of the framework for teachers:

1. How does each part relate to the whole and vice versa? (e.g. part of a poem, whole poem, pair of poems, collection of poems)
2. What text-reader-context relationship is being explored?
3. How are the texts (re)producing power relations?

This application of the framework to the poems sought to illustrate its pedagogic utility. It is worth noting, however, that it assumes some general prior knowledge of the selected texts. In this case, I drew on my experience teaching the two Yeats poems in Module B over several years. For beginning teachers, or those without the flexibility to select texts they know well, it is assumed that some preliminary reading of and around the text and its composer would precede the application of the framework.

The complete philosophy-informed framework – as seen in the Table 7 – consists of three main components derived from the document analysis: philosophical skills, conceptual knowledge and contextual knowledge. Following the initial close reading of the poem, each framework component was considered and relevant content selected, beginning with the contextual knowledge, then conceptual knowledge, and finally the philosophical skills. This structured approach aligns with the dominant model of literary analysis, including Howie’s (2005) approach to teaching Module B, in which knowledge of the text’s context and the composer’s background informs how and why meaning is shaped within the text. The selected content from each framework component was then added to a table to provide a visual overview of the specific philosophical skills, conceptual knowledge and contextual knowledge to be considered when analysing the poem. This process was followed by the interpretive application of the philosophy-informed framework to each poem, enabling the opportunity to consider the relationship between the poems and the identified philosophical affordances.

While the philosophy-informed framework offers a range of conceptual, contextual, and philosophical content aligned with Module B, it is intentionally broad. Its purpose is to serve as a springboard for teacher inquiry and professional judgement. Teachers using the framework would need to undertake further reading about selected content, before moving into applying this to their critical interpretive reading of the poem, thus aligning with how teachers analyse texts for the purpose of teaching them. The process of applying the framework to textual analysis of the Yeats poems deepened insights into how philosophical knowledge and skills can serve as pedagogical resources. Each poem revealed distinctive philosophical affordances, which are explored further in the Yeats chapter (Chapter 6).

Sub-theme 2: Philosophy-Informed Pedagogical Planning

This sub-theme explores how the same framework (Table 7) can then be used when planning to teach Module B. This includes identifying opportunities to integrate the teaching of philosophical content and skills in ways that support deeper student engagement and interpretive autonomy. In doing so, teachers are supported to teach philosophically.

Teachers find planning for and teaching Module B cognitively demanding and pedagogically challenging (Goldby-Smith, 2007; Ireland, 2022; McGraw, 2010). This is a reflection of the discrepancy between the rhetorical and enacted curriculum, the pressure of the HSC examination, and the contentious history of the Module. As such, teachers will need support to embed philosophical thinking intentionally into curriculum design for Module B. This includes integrating teaching and learning activities that foster philosophical inquiry alongside literary analysis.

This phase of the research constituted a form of applied textual analysis, in which the philosophy-informed framework was used not solely to interpret the literary text, but to inform decisions related to curriculum design and pedagogical planning. In this way, teachers’ critical reading

practices and their pedagogical decisions are conceived as recursively related practices. To maintain a consistent analytic lens across both text interpretation and curriculum design, the same hermeneutic questions used during the textual analysis were applied to the planning process (see p.39).

Following the application of selected framework content to the textual analysis of the prescribed text, the next step involved exploring how this could inform pedagogical planning. This involved a recursive process of interpretive decision-making, in which philosophical affordances were aligned with existing learning sequences. The framework was applied to an existing teaching program that I wrote when I taught the poetry of W.B. Yeats for Module B in 2011, with the purpose of investigating how philosophical content and skills could be embedded within familiar teaching contexts. An excerpt of this revised program can be found at Appendix 5. This process of updating or repurposing an existing teaching program for a new syllabus is reflective of typical teacher practice in schools.

After re-familiarising myself with the program's sequence and intent, I undertook a close reading of the unit with the philosophy-informed framework in mind, identifying potential opportunities to integrate philosophical skills, conceptual knowledge, and contextual knowledge. This revealed not only that such integration was possible, but that it could deepen the intellectual rigour expected of students. A coding system supported this analytical process, allowing for efficient cross-referencing of framework components with specific lessons. One example involved revising a lesson that previously featured a debate on critical interpretations of a Yeats poem. This was reframed as a structured Community of Inquiry, underpinned by explicit teaching about collaborative philosophical dialogue. Such a shift reflects the framework's pedagogical emphasis on dialogic learning and acknowledges that students require scaffolded opportunities to practise philosophical ways of thinking. These kinds of revisions also highlight the importance of sequencing. For example, ensuring that questioning strategies are introduced and rehearsed before engaging in interpretive discussion. As this planning process unfolded, it became clear that the framework offers a flexible yet conceptually rich tool for teacher programming. It not only suggests what to teach but prompts reflective consideration of *how* and *why* particular content or skills are taught.

Conclusion

Document and textual analysis suggest that there are clear philosophical affordances within the Syllabus and support documents. These affordances can be distilled into a practical framework to support teachers' engagement with the philosophical skills and conceptual and contextual knowledge. Insights drawn from the interpretive analysis suggest that there are implications for the types of programming decisions that teachers must make when engaging with the philosophy-informed approach to Module B. This includes the ways in which they approach lesson planning, selecting conceptual foci for texts, and the teaching of contextual details. Such an approach to the teaching of Module B allows for teacher agency, as the interpretive framework acts as a suggestive guide for aspects of philosophical skills and content that can be selectively taught to enhance students' textual engagement. Moreover, this philosophy-informed approach has the potential to deepen engagement in the text and encourage student-directed textual interpretation.

The confluences of philosophical thinking and knowledge with literary thinking and knowledge identified in Theme 1 can be leveraged to design richer learning experiences for students. Ideally this integrated approach will not only benefit students' understanding of the text but also their confidence in communicating this understanding in analytic responses under examination conditions. Furthermore, teaching philosophical thinking in the context of Module B can support broader Syllabus aims including the development of critical thinking, interpretive autonomy, and conceptual understanding. Moreover, teachers can feel confident knowing that this philosophy-informed approach to teaching Module B is aligned with the Syllabus intent.

Ultimately, interpretive engagement with the selected Yeats poems suggests there are opportunities for further development of this philosophy-informed model for teaching English, including adaptation across other prescribed texts, other Stage 6 English Advanced modules, and even other English Stage 6 courses including English Standard, English Extension 1 and English Extension 2. There is also the possibility of the model being applied in earlier stages – including Stages 4 and 5. However, this would require teacher professional learning. These opportunities are beyond the scope of this current research but may be something to consider for future research and development.

This reflexive thematic analysis and applied textual analysis suggest that a philosophy-informed framework can function not only as an interpretive tool but as a pedagogical scaffold, guiding teachers to design and deliver intellectually rich and conceptually coherent learning experiences in Module B.

Chapter 6

Applying the Philosophy-Informed Framework to the Poetry of W.B. Yeats

Introduction

This chapter illustrates how a philosophy-informed model for teaching Module B might look in practice. In doing so, it answers the third research question:

- *How might these confluences between philosophical thinking and literary analysis be applied when planning to teach the poetry of W.B. Yeats in the context of Module B?*

This chapter reflects on the application of the philosophy-informed framework (which was developed through document analysis of the Syllabus and support document) to a prescribed text and uses this as the basis for designing a series of lessons tailored to Module B.

As outlined in Chapter 5, the framework comprises three components that reflect the philosophical affordances of Module B: philosophical skills, philosophical contextual knowledge, and philosophical conceptual knowledge. The framework aims to capture the complexity and cognitive demands of the Module while offering teachers an accessible tool for identifying teachable philosophical content and skills that can help prepare students to meet these demands. Engaging with a broadened contextual base, including key philosophers, theories, and texts, can enrich students' personal interpretation of the prescribed literary text. Thinking critically about the concepts explored within specific branches of philosophy can deepen students' conceptual understanding of literary texts. And explicit teaching of philosophical skills within the context of literary study can enable students to develop the critical capacities needed for informed, personal interpretation.

Structurally, this chapter acts as a case study for applying the framework. It begins by describing and reflecting on the framework's application to the focus prescribed text - two selected poems by W.B. Yeats ('The Wild Swans at Coole' and 'The Second Coming'). This textual analysis is followed by a critical reflection on how an existing teaching program was revised in response to the framework. This includes an explanation of the philosophical content and skills selected, and an analysis of how their integration into teaching may support both teacher and student learning.

Critical pedagogical reflection is central to both textual analysis and program design in English teaching. As in Chapter 5, this work is informed by a hermeneutic orientation, using the same guiding questions to reinforce the interpretive and philosophical nature of reading and teaching decisions.

'The Wild Swans at Coole'

Analysis Using the Philosophy-Informed Framework

The lyric poem 'The Wild Swans at Coole' was published in 1916 and captures a moment of reflection as a persona, presumably Yeats, visits Coole Park, the home of Lady Gregory in Northwest Ireland. It is autumn. As he watches the fifty-nine swans gliding on the still waters he is reminded of a time 19 years earlier when he first visited. He recalls how during that visit the swans flew off into the sky before he finished counting them. Returning to the present, he reflects how much he has changed since that first visit and ponders a future time when he may visit to

discover the swans have flown away for good, choosing another lake for their home. Dominant readings of the poem focus on its sombre yet reflective mood and the themes of loss, ageing, change, and yearning. These readings are shaped by knowledge of Yeats’s personal life (having failed to win the hand of his lifelong love Maud Gonne) and the broader historical and political context: specifically the failed Irish uprising of 1916 where a number of men known to Yeats were executed for their involvement. The purpose of the proposed philosophy-informed teaching of Module B is to move beyond these contextual influences and dominant readings which are already easily accessible to teachers and students.

Critical contextual considerations

The first step of the philosophy-informed approach was to select philosophical contextual factors relevant to the poem, derived from the contextual knowledge component of the framework. Such reflective practice engages directly with the text-reader-context relationship central to hermeneutic textual interpretation. I considered the era before Yeats was born due to its likely influence on him as young writer. He was born in 1865, so I focused on Romanticism and its concern with emotions, individualism, nature and inner truth. From this era, Rousseau was selected from the list of philosophers for his critique of civilisation and his love of freedom and nature, resonating with Yeats’s idealised descriptions of the natural world in the poem. Further, the emerging existentialism of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche was selected because of the bleak undertones of the poem.

My resistance to the resonance of the Victorian Era and its related philosophical content due to my concern that it did not align with the poem reinforced how we are always and already shaping interpretations through the see-sawing between the part and the whole. In this instance the parts of context, including my own prior knowledge and understandings, influenced the whole of the textual interpretation. This is a pertinent reminder also that composers often resist the dominant ways of thinking of an era and the philosophy-informed framework has the potential to incite important critical reflective thinking. Teachers could encourage student inquiry into how composers resist and conform to the dominant paradigm, and why this may come about. Thus, applying the framework in this way shifted my thinking away from a superficial or simplistic understanding of context – such as historical events and personal biography – towards a deeper consideration of the influence of ideas. This forced a new way of thinking about Yeats and his poems conceptually – considering how, as a poet, he existed in a tide of shifting influences.

The flexibility of the philosophy-informed framework allows teachers to think critically about listed philosophical content before purposefully and strategically selecting what might support their own and their students’ textual interpretations. What this looked like prior to my analysis of Yeats’s poetry is illustrated in Table 8 (on next page). The table captures the philosophical content I initially highlighted as applicable to the poems, drawn from the contextual knowledge and conceptual knowledge components of the framework. From this table of possibilities, a much smaller number of philosophers, theories and concepts were then selected for teaching, illustrating the important process of distillation of information central to pedagogical decision making. This reflects common practice of teachers who tend to work like bowerbirds, picking content and teaching strategies at will, influenced by myriad factors, creating a unique, personal approach to teaching their syllabus.

Contextual knowledge
Romantic period: Rousseau, Kirkegaard, Nietzsche
Conceptual knowledge

<p>Metaphysics: existence, memory, spirituality, free will vs determinism, personal identity, Do we have free will?</p> <p>Aesthetics: beauty, harmony, imagination, Apollonian vs Dionysian, What makes something beautiful or aesthetically valuable?, Is beauty subjective or objective?, Can art express truth or moral insight?, Aristotle</p>

Table 8 - Example of initial content selected from the philosophy-informed framework for teaching 'The Wild Swans at Coole'

Critical conceptual considerations

The conceptual knowledge selection process involved reading through the concepts listed under each branch of philosophy and selecting those interpreted as being most relevant to the poem. Choosing concepts first, before reading the philosophy branch descriptions, kept the focus narrow, avoiding the temptation to select too much philosophical content, which might prove overwhelming for both teachers and students. The concept lists prompted reflection on how concepts can be associated with parts of the poem and the poem as a whole. For example, the concept 'identify' resonates with references to Yeats's younger self, whereas the concepts of 'existence' and 'spirituality' capture the poem more holistically. Some sets of concepts were skipped entirely as being irrelevant to the poem's concerns (for example, the concepts listed under the branches of ethics and political philosophy) and some sets resonated strongly, creating genuine excitement at the interpretive possibilities of the conceptual exploration.

Prior to the applied textual analysis, I deepened my understanding of the selected philosophical branches, thinkers, theories and problems using a range of published sources. This helped to refine the choices made by ensuring the selections were relevant to the text and the students, further evidence of the recursive nature of teacher reflective practice. It is also again illustrative of the reader-text-context relationship, whereby the reader of the prescribed text is both the teacher and the students. As such, the students' needs and capabilities as well as the teacher's own personal context must always be kept in mind. Moreover the teachers' own experiences of reading and teaching the prescribed text influence their interpretations of it as well as their selection of support materials, further shaping the ways in which the students are given access to the text.

The key questions listed under each selected branch of philosophy acted as a stimulus for possible lesson ideas. For example, under metaphysics, the question 'Do we have free will?' could be connected to Yeats's rumination about the swans who appear to have the freedom to traverse the bounds of both the physical and spiritual realms, symbolised by the water and sky. This philosophical inquiry question could stimulate class discussion about the concepts of freedom and free will, inviting consideration of the philosophical problems of free will and determinism. This would move textual conversation beyond literal description of the poet envying the swans' freedom, to a more substantial conceptual consideration of free will as an enduring human concern.

Applied textual analysis

The legacy of the Romantic period, characterised by emotion, individualism, a desire to return to nature and a critique of Enlightenment rationalism is evident in Yeats's poetry, especially his early and middle works. Influential philosophers in this period were Rousseau, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, and the ideas of each can not only be traced in Yeats's poems, but also in the works of artists who directly influenced him including William Blake and Percy Bysshe Shelley. A critical analysis of both poems could draw upon the works, theories and questions explored by these

philosophers to enrich and broaden students' personal interpretations. An illustration of this potential is briefly outlined below in relation to 'The Wild Swans at Coole'.

The poem's tone can be read as one of Romantic longing that reflects an idealising of the natural world (evidenced in the visual and olfactory imagery 'brimming water', 'autumn beauty', 'bell-beat of their wings'), with the persona possibly seeking a return to the natural state characterised by a more organic unity and an inner harmony. Alternatively, the reader can infer from the poem that the persona is lonely ('my heart is sore'), growing older ('The nineteenth autumn has come upon me'), feeling weary (the swans, unlike the persona are 'unwearied still'), and uncertain about the future ('when I awake some day/To find they have flown away?'), a state of being that echoes Rousseau's portrait of civilised man, 'The more he reflects, the more he alienates himself' (Rousseau, 1755).

The persona's somewhat bleak acknowledgement that 'All's changed' since he first saw the swans 19 years earlier may be interpreted as resonating with Kierkegaard's concern with the inner struggle of the individual and the subjective experience of 'becoming'. The inevitability of change and transience is suggested by the past tense image of a younger man who once 'trod with a lighter tread', reminding readers of the existential burden associated with the human capacity to reflect on being and becoming.

Nietzsche's dual artistic drives – Apollonian and Dionysian – can be applied to the poem, with the swans being read symbolically as encompassing a balance between the two forces. The swans upon the water can be seen to symbolise Apollonian order, reason and form ('the water / Mirrors a still sky', 'cold companionable streams', 'drift on the still water'), which contrast to their Dionysian passion, chaos and instinct in the sky ('All suddenly mount / And scatter wheeling in great broken rings / Upon their clamorous wings'). For Nietzsche, great art balances these twin drives which represent the competing forces within human nature. This duality further symbolises how life is in a constant state of flux: an idea central to the poem's concerns with change, ageing and spiritual yearning. These dualities offer students a lens through which to consider human nature's internal conflicts, the nature of artistic creation, or how meaning arises from tension and contrast. Furthermore, such an interpretation picks up Yeats's well-documented pursuit of artistic and philosophical coherence, captured evocatively in his declaration 'Hammer your thoughts into a unity' (Yeats, 1919).

'The Wild Swans at Coole' is a conceptually rich poem, exploring concepts ranging from the metaphysical – existence, memory, spirituality – to the aesthetic – beauty, harmony, imagination. Below is an illustration of how a philosophical lens could be applied to an analysis of these concepts as they are explored in the poem, focusing on the ideas of Aristotle and the Neoplatonists, specifically Porphyry.

The poem's narrative as a whole can be read as a moment of Aristotelean catharsis as the persona, presumably Yeats himself, conveys poetically his existential suffering prompted by his comparison between his lonely mortal state and that of the seemingly immutable, immortal swan pairs. The final stanza, with its references to inevitable loss, encapsulates a form of cathartic acceptance, indicating that the poem is both an emotional purging and a purification for the poet. The solitary poet who admits to being heart-sore and likely identifying with the single mate-less swan that makes up the 'nine-and-fifty', can be imagined as a tragic hero who 'arouses pity' (Poetics, 1449b) in the reader, yet who facilitates catharsis through his contemplation of his mortality.

Yeats was an avid reader of ancient Greek texts, particularly the Neoplatonist writer Porphyry. In his essay on ‘The Cave of the Nymphs’ (1917), Porphyry allegorises the cave of Ithaca from Homer’s *Odyssey*, describing it as a kind of half-way house for all souls about to be born or about to ascend to heaven. He interprets it as the source of all life, symbolised by water perpetually flowing and where one of the gates from the cave leads to earth and the other leads to heaven. It is possibly to interpret ‘The Wild Swans at Coole’ through this lens. The ‘cold/Companionable stream’ can be read as the gates through which a soul descends into matter, whereas when the swan’s ‘climb the air’ this is their ascent to the divine. This interpretation gives explanation to Yeats’s inclusion of his gyres since the ascent into the divine, according to Yeats, is preceded by gyres – ‘great broken rings’. If the poem is interpreted from a Neoplatonist perspective, then it can be considered as less about ageing and more about a longing for the divine.

It is evident that this framework of philosophical potentialities has the capacity to open up not only the interpretive possibilities of prescribed texts, moving teachers and students beyond dominant readings: it can also support the design of enriching learning experiences that encourage deeper engagement with literature.

Pedagogical Application

Having access to a list of strategies designed to develop the specific thinking skills that are required of students for success with Module B proved beneficial when planning to teach ‘The Wild Swans at Coole’. The philosophical skills component of the framework acted as an accessible reminder of the range of thinking skills required of students (conceptual exploration, questioning, reasoning and responding personally) and facilitated efficient selection of classroom strategies to target those skills. Again, selectivity is integral to this stage of planning, with teachers needing to be realistic and thoughtful about:

- which skills will be relevant to their students’ needs (for example, some strategies lend themselves more to the end of a unit as students move towards analytic writing);
- their own confidence level with the skill or strategy (for example, teaching deductive reasoning may prove challenging for some teachers); and
- the existing content in lesson plans and programs being modified (if applicable).

I created a short list of activities based on the skill sets in the philosophical skills component before making my final selection. Table 9 below provides an overview of the skill, sub-skill and related activity that were chosen as having potential for inclusion in the revised teaching program. This list again illustrates the important role of selectivity in pedagogical decision-making. To keep the teaching of philosophical skills manageable and realistic, I selected just three activities to embed into the teaching of ‘The Wild Swans at Coole.’

Skill	Sub-skill	Strategy
Conceptual Exploration	Conceptual Understanding	Making Distinctions
Questioning	Asking Questions	Question Categories
Responding Personally	Personal and Intellectual Engagement	Community of Inquiry

Table 9 - Example of initial skills selected from the philosophy-informed framework for teaching ‘The Wild Swans at Coole’

Applying the framework to an existing lesson sequence

The existing sequence of lessons designed to teach ‘The Wild Swans at Coole’ followed a common approach for teaching Module B. Firstly, students recorded their own initial response to

the poem guided by some general questions and then completed an activity identifying elements of the poem that reflect Yeats's context. A teacher-led deconstruction of the poem followed, with students taking notes on their own copy. Finally, students engaged in a debate based on a range of critical interpretations of the poem. Below is a description of how this lesson sequence could be refined, using the philosophy-informed framework, considering how such decisions can promote deeper engagement and interpretive autonomy for students when studying literature.

To complement the content of the existing context-focused lesson, the teacher could introduce students briefly to Rousseau, Aristotle, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard. This would anticipate students considering how their philosophies might inform an interpretation of the poem during the following lesson. The teacher could frame the model deconstruction of the poem in this next lesson as an illustration of interpretive possibilities, applying the four philosophy-informed readings as lenses, rather than as definitive interpretations. This would facilitate critical discussion about the ways in which texts and their interpretations foregrounded in the classroom can (re)produce power relations, including reflective comment on the teacher's own positionality within the classroom.

Following the teacher-led modelled analysis, students could engage in the 'Making Distinctions' activity (see Appendix 4) to further their conceptual understanding of the poem. In this activity students explore a list of opposing actions or behaviours that relate to a focus concept explored in the poem. For example, one pair of students might be given the concept harmony and three sets of actions: stillness and movement, companionship and solitude, and constancy and change. Working with a partner, students explain how the two actions in each pair are similar and how they are different, citing evidence from the poem to support their positions. An activity like this requires critical engagement with the concepts central to the poem and encourages students to identify their own evidence-based conceptual interpretations and elaborations.

The existing lesson sequence did not provide any meaningful transition between analysis of the poem and critical response. To support students' critical interrogation of the poem, the teacher could introduce an activity based on the skill of question asking. Success in Module B requires students to engage directly and conceptually with questions, and the 'Question Categories' activity can aid in developing this skill. Students must sort a list of questions based on the poem into three categories: factual questions, evaluative questions and conceptual questions.

For example:

Factual questions:

- What season is it in the poem?
- When did the speaker first count the swans?
- What poetic devices are used in the first stanza?

Evaluative questions:

- How successful is the imagery in creating a mood of melancholy or nostalgia?
- Is the speaker's attitude toward ageing presented with resignation or hope?
- To what extent does the structure of the poem enhance its emotional impact?

Conceptual questions:

- In what ways might beauty function as a source of solace or sorrow?
- Is personal identity tied to external surroundings, like nature, or to internal states?
- What is the relationship between memory and meaning in this poem?

Whilst having strong factual and evaluative understanding of the poem is important, HSC marker feedback consistently references the need for students to be able to ask and answer conceptually rich questions about literature. Once students have sorted the questions, they should be encouraged to explain their reasoning, possibly to a peer or to the whole class. To extend this activity, students can be asked to write two to three of their own conceptual questions about the poem. This type of task can be viewed as a bridging between the textual analysis and the textual interpretation stages of a critical study of literature.

After the teacher-led analysis of the poem, the original program has students participating in a debate based on given critical interpretations of the poem. However, there is no instruction – either in the program or in the teaching materials – to explicitly teach students the thinking skills required for engaging in this type of dialogic analytic activity. Referring to the framework, teachers might identify the potential to replace the unstructured debate with a ‘Community of Inquiry’, requiring students to engage intellectually and personally with the poem and to express their personal interpretations of it. A Community of Inquiry refers to a dialogic learning environment in which participants collaboratively explore concepts through questioning, reasoning and reflection, helping students develop deep personal responses to a focus text while building on the ideas of others. The conceptual questions generated by students in the previous ‘Question Categories’ activity could form the basis of the collaborative dialogue. Groups of six to eight students would take turns speaking to the focus question, using a range of thinking moves such as giving reasons, identifying assumptions, and making connections. Students not involved in the dialogue would take notes and track the development of arguments, focusing on suggestions, justifications, evidence and objections presented during the dialogue. These notes may be recorded individually in workbooks or in a collaborative online document such as a Google doc. In the next lesson, these notes could be used to construct an argument map as a means of planning for writing an analytic essay based on one of the questions discussed in the Community of Inquiry.

By engaging students in this collaborative dialogic process, the teacher is facilitating their application of reasoning to deepen connection-making with the poem integral to developing their own personal response. Moreover, students are being given a low stakes opportunity to express their personal insights and conceptual interpretation of the poem well before the formal act of essay writing. This experience would ideally strengthen their ability to respond to unseen exam questions with greater skill and confidence, a need identified by the HSC marker feedback.

The philosophy-informed framework can not only deepen the textual interpretation of ‘The Wild Swans at Coole’: it can also support thoughtful, strategic revisions to its teaching. By embedding philosophical concepts and skills into existing lessons, and refining classroom practices to promote interpretive autonomy, the revised program invites students to engage more meaningfully with both the poem and their own responses to it. These pedagogical modifications offer one illustration of how the framework can support richer literary inquiry.

To further illustrate the potential value of the philosophy-informed approach to teaching Module B, the following section applies the same model to analysing and teaching ‘The Second Coming’. While the interpretive focus necessarily shifts with the concerns of the poem, the process of contextual, conceptual, and philosophical engagement remains consistent, demonstrating the adaptability of the framework for teaching literature.

‘The Second Coming’

Analysis Using the Philosophy-Informed Framework

The sonnet-like free verse poem ‘The Second Coming’ was written in 1919. The poem’s first stanza opens with a disconcerting image of a falcon having escaped the tether of its falconer, turning in ever-widening unstable circles. This is followed by a series of abstract present-tense images of war and anarchy and concludes with a bitter comment about human failings in this time of impending chaos. The much longer second stanza introduces the concept of an apocalyptic second coming, with the speaker entering a trance-like state and describing the ominous emergence of a sphinx-like beast moving through a desert. The poem concludes with the speaker awakening from the trance with a warning that this unrelenting, unfeeling beast will come and bring with it an end to the current cycle of history. Dominant readings of the poem focus on its bleak mood and the themes of loss of order, moral uncertainty, the inevitability of change, and spiritual crisis. These readings are shaped by knowledge of Yeats’s historical context, specifically the Easter Rising of 1916, the Russian Revolution of 1917, and the Great War (World War I) of 1914-1918. The application of the philosophy-informed approach to the poem illustrates one way of moving beyond dominant readings of the poem based on commonly considered contextual influences.

Critical contextual considerations

My previous experiences teaching ‘The Second Coming’ influenced my selections from the context component of the framework, a reminder of the impossibility of remaining objective and unbiased during literary analysis. During my application of the framework to ‘The Wild Swans at Coole’, I chose not to select philosophers from the Victorian and Edwardian eras yet when considering the same lists for ‘The Second Coming’, I could see the value in teaching them to students. This change was informed by an interpretation that Yeats challenged the paradigms of those eras. I decided there was value in considering the moral seriousness and empiricism of the Victorian era as well as the analytic ideals of the Edwardian era as potential antitheses to the individualism and existentialism of the Romantic and Georgian eras as well as the disillusionment of the modern era. All are contextual factors that can be read as shaping the concerns and style of ‘The Second Coming’. Using the framework in such a way broadened the scope of contextual factors introduced to students, illustrating the utility of the philosophy informed approach.

Critical conceptual considerations

As with the experience of applying the framework to ‘The Wild Swans at Coole’, this application encouraged critical reflection on the poem and the concepts it explores. This was particularly evident when considering the conceptual component of the framework and choosing which, if any, of the listed concepts resonated most with the poem.

Metaphysics, with its focus on an exploration of the fundamental nature of reality, including existence, time and being was a natural fit for a poem concerned with a disillusionment with mankind and a prophetic imagining of the imminent collapse of civilisation. More specifically, the concepts of existence, human nature, reality, and spirituality could easily frame students’ interpretations of the poem, prompting the possibility of introducing them to the ideas of idealism, materialism and solipsism.

The concepts of imagination and creativity, listed under aesthetics, could prompt fruitful discussions about the aesthetic and artistic experience of writing a poem that has such enduring

power. Indeed it is a poem that continues to convey an overwhelming sense of impending and uncontrolled change and potential chaos, which can be associated with many historical moments since its composition and no doubt will into the future. This interpretive exploration could centre on how the poem itself is more of an aesthetic expression of an artistic individual's passionate response to a historic moment of turmoil, rather than as a prophecy or warning about the actual collapse of civilisation.

For the illustration of practice, these aesthetic interpretive possibilities were sidelined in favour of a focus on the concepts of power, rebellion and responsibility, listed under the branch of political philosophy. Engagement with political philosophy has the potential to move textual interpretation beyond the aesthetic and metaphysical, obvious domains for such a profound and spiritually ambiguous poem, into a more concrete examination of its political dimensions.

Table 10 below summarises the selections made using the philosophy-informed framework, and that were considered when analysing the poem and planning to teach it.

Contextual knowledge
Romantic period: Rousseau, Kirkegaard, Nietzsche
Victorian period: Peirce
Edwardian period: Russell
Modern period: Sartre
Conceptual knowledge
Metaphysics: existence human nature, reality, idealism and materialism, solipsism, Plato (Theory of Forms)
Political philosophy: power, rebellion, anarchism, Hobbes

Table 10 - Example of initial content selected from the philosophy-informed framework for teaching 'The Second Coming'

Applied textual analysis

What follows is a series of interpretive possibilities generated by applying selected philosophical content from the contextual knowledge and conceptual knowledge components of the framework to Yeats's 'The Second Coming'. These readings model how the framework can support deeper and more autonomous textual engagement.

Jean Jacques Rousseau's arguments about civilisation as a corrupting and alienating force can be applied to an interpretation of 'The Second Coming'. In this reading the 'rough beast' whose 'hour has come around at last' is interpreted less as a threat and more of a welcome remedy to the spiritual decline man has suffered as a result of the past pursuit of material, scientific and economic progress. The poem's compelling portrait of civilisation unravelling could be seen as a vision of man being unshackled from civilisation, reminiscent of Rousseau's famous refrain 'Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains' (Rousseau, 1762, p.3).

The spiritual turmoil articulated in 'The Second Coming', whilst often taken as a condemnation of the state of humankind, could also be read through the lens of Kierkegaardian existential struggle. With its complex weaving of symbols drawn from Yeats's cyclical vision of history ('the widening gyre', 'Spiritus Mundi', 'twenty centuries of stony sleep'), the poem can be read as a personal attempt to process, poetically, his feelings of disillusionment with life. Through this poem, Yeats can be seen as both forging and communicating faith in his own vision of a ceaseless cyclical existence, capturing Kierkegaard's position that 'Subjectivity is truth' (Kierkegaard, 1846, p. 189).

Nietzsche's dramatic declaration that 'God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.' (Nietzsche, 1882, p. 167), powerfully captured the moral and religious decline of the late 19th

century and evocatively prefigures the modern disillusionment that permeates Yeats's poem. Nietzsche's Übermensch can be compared to the rough beast of Yeats's poem, symbolising the emergence of a new non-Christian force that necessitates or facilitates the creation of new values and a new morality. Nietzsche's work anticipated the nihilism of modernity which can be found in both the foreboding images of the poem's opening stanza, including 'the blood-dimmed tide', 'the ceremony of innocence is drowned', and the confronting description of the beast with its 'gaze blank and pitiless as the sun'.

The poem can also be read as reflecting the Nietzschean concepts of will to power and eternal recurrence. The will to power is the fundamental drive human beings have to grow, overcome, and shape the world/their life, which, when repressed or denied, can result in human suffering and cultural decline. It is easy to see how the opening stanza, with its tone of bewildered chaos – 'the falcon cannot hear the falconer' – can be read in this light. Similarly, the concept of eternal recurrence which is the idea that the universe as it is - and all events within it - recurs infinitely for all eternity, can be applied to an analysis of the poem. This reading complements Yeats's conception of historical cycles - with humanity doomed to a constant cycle of chaos and rebirth – 'Turning and turning in the widening gyre'. With such an awareness, the poet and the philosopher can be seen as advocating for an acceptance of responsibility for one's life, and a call to authenticity.

Where Nietzsche embraced the poetic and prophetic, Charles Sanders Peirce urged philosophy toward the empirical and practical. Peirce advocated for a move away from abstract metaphysics in favour of pragmatism, which was an understanding of philosophy grounded in empirical science. His concern with the practical effects and outcomes of philosophising can be read as antithetical to the ideas of Yeats and indeed may represent the 'ones who are full of passionate intensity' in 'The Second Coming'. Yeats argued in his work 'A Vision' (1937) that the new epoch to emerge – the new gyre - would see an end to the current 'scientific, democratic, fact-accumulating, heterogeneous civilization' (p.254). Perhaps the 'second coming' being prophesied in the second stanza could be interpreted as a challenge to the pragmatism advocated by Peirce, leaving open to interpretation if this revelation that 'is at hand' is to be feared or embraced.

Following on from the pragmatism of Peirce, is the analytic philosophy of Bertrand Russell, who similarly critiqued the vagueness and ambiguity of metaphysical concepts. For Russell, it is power that must be analysed when considering the human experience within societal structures. Thus, a reading of 'The Second Coming' from this lens would consider the power dynamics alluded to in the poem, notably the inability of man to exert authority over the natural world ('the falcon cannot hear the falconer') and the transference of power to those who are 'full of passionate intensity' because 'the best lack all conviction'. Russell's analytic approach allows a reader of 'The Second Coming' to question what real-world forms of power are being referred to symbolically in the poem, such as the collapse of traditional religious, political and intellectual structures. This can prompt a consideration of the efficacy of Yeats masking or cloaking his critique of failing power structures in the mysticism and prophecy of the poem. Finally, the poem's 'rough beast' on this reading may be less of a metaphysical force, and more of a real-world warning about the return of authoritarianism. In this light, applying Russell's analytic lens can open up interpretations of the poem focused on how the evocation of apocalyptic and mythical rhetoric can both reveal and conceal mechanisms of power.

The existential themes of 'The Second Coming' anticipate the concerns explored by Sartre in the early 20th century, specifically the collapse of grand narratives and the crisis of meaning. The

moral ambiguity of the world envisioned by Yeats - 'things fall apart, the centre cannot hold' - and the disillusionment at humanity's loss of innocence are made more poignant when informed by Sartre's position that 'Existence precedes essence' (Sartre, 1946, p. 22) and that each individual must bear full responsibility for who they are. Sartre's concepts of radical freedom – that we are always free to choose and bad faith, the self-deception and denial of this freedom – offer both a challenge to and resonance within the poem. This interpretation might explore how the poem begins with a type of chaotic anarchic freedom as a result of being released from the burden of grand narratives (for example religion or imperialism) but how this seems to resolve itself in an act of bad faith as a dependence on a new force – be it good or evil – is foreshadowed.

One of the poem's central forces is the 'Spiritus Mundi', or universal spirit which is similar to Jung's collective unconscious, which is the source of the beast image that 'troubles my sight'. This concept closely aligns with Plato's Theory of Forms which held that the physical world is not the true reality, but a shadow of an immaterial realm of perfect forms. In a reading of the poem informed by knowledge of Plato's theory, the beast image represents a shared archetype emerging from a realm of eternal meaning, reinforcing its symbolic significance as an inevitability. Such a reading could also consider Yeats's image of the shadows of the 'indignant desert birds' that 'reel' around the beast with the shadows reminding one of Plato's Allegory of the Cave, again representing the movement between material imperfection and immaterial truth.

Finally, a reading of the poem focused on the concepts of power, anarchy and rebellion could be enhanced by considering the ideas of Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes' (1651) famous claim that the life of man [*sic*] in the state of nature is 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short' (p. 186) illustrates a deep fear of anarchy and precedes his argument for the creation of a sovereign power, which he refers to as the Leviathan. Such sovereign rule necessitates people to engage in a tacit social contract where they forego some freedoms in exchange for order and protection. When applied to an interpretation of 'The Second Coming' it is clear to see that the opening stanza compellingly captures an image of the state of nature described by Hobbes – 'mere anarchy is loosed upon the world' – indicating a moment of collapse. The anarchy, loss of innocence, and dominance of the brutish, reflect Hobbes' fears regarding the chaos that ensues without submission to a political order. This is furthered by the image of the beast 'slouching towards Bethlehem' which could symbolise the rising of a new power to fill the void, warning of the tyranny that follows rebellion. This reading, informed by knowledge of Hobbesian themes, foregrounds the poem's tone of anxiety and focuses on its depiction of the consequences of a loss of legitimate power, be it cultural, political or spiritual.

These interpretive possibilities demonstrate the value of a philosophy-informed approach, not only for deepening understanding of the poem, but for shaping pedagogical choices that support critical, reflective, and autonomous student engagement with literature, which will be illustrated in the forthcoming section.

Pedagogical Application

Teachers using this framework to support the development of a new teaching program would benefit from first reading through the descriptions of each philosophical skill and subskill, keeping in mind the specific needs and strengths of their students. This will help guide the selection of a manageable number of skills to focus on, before choosing the strategies most appropriate for their particular classroom context.

Because this illustration of pedagogical application is theoretical rather than empirical, the strategies selected were informed by the existing teaching and learning plan and shaped by insights from the document analysis of HSC marker feedback. The aim was to show how the framework might be used to strengthen an existing program, particularly by building students' reasoning skills.

'The Second Coming' is taught towards the end of the program, after students have already studied four other poems. As such, the lesson sequence includes a number of opportunities for students to plan and write analytical responses. However, there was room to embed tasks that explicitly support the development of reasoning before students move into extended analytical writing. The framework was used to identify relevant strategies to help extend students' thinking at this point in the unit, specifically their reasoning skills.

This narrower focus on just the skill of reasoning confirmed the importance of treating the four philosophical skills (conceptual exploration, questioning, reasoning and personal response) as flexible components rather than as a fixed sequence. The framework offers a list of possible skills that teachers may choose to prioritise at different points in a unit, depending on the needs of their students and related learning goals. This is an important caveat when using the framework for planning: some strategies will naturally lend themselves more to the later stages of a sequence, when students are preparing to consolidate and express their interpretations in extended responses.

With this in mind, what follows is an outline of the selected skills, subskills, and strategies chosen for teaching 'The Second Coming', and how these might be embedded in a revised teaching sequence for Module B. Table 11 below provides a brief overview of the pedagogical decision made using the framework.

Skill	Sub-skill	Strategy
Reasoning	Critical Analysis	Giving Reasons and Drawing Conclusions
	Evaluative Thinking	Constructing an Interpretive Argument

Table 11 - Example of initial skills selected from the philosophy-informed framework for teaching 'The Second Coming'

Applying the framework to an existing lesson sequence

The original lesson sequence began with students exploring connections between Yeats's context and 'The Second Coming'. This could be enhanced by explicitly introducing and discussing relevant philosophers from different historical periods: Romantic Era thinkers such as Rousseau, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche; the Victorian philosopher Peirce; Edwardian-era Russell; and Modern-era Sartre. Brief engagement with the influence of these philosophical perspectives could expand students' interpretive perspectives and deepen their understanding of how ways of thinking shape readings of the poem.

In the next lesson of the sequence, students completed a Technique/Example/Effect table as a means of demonstrating close analysis, which is a key aim of the Syllabus. However, an activity like this that prioritises an analysis of poetic devices can sometimes result in analysis that is disconnected from interpretation. Introducing a reasoning strategy here might better support students' ability to engage in critical analysis, especially through the use of interpretive thinking to explore how the poem's form, language, and meaning interact.

The 'Giving Reasons and Drawing Conclusions' strategy may serve this purpose by introducing students to syllogistic reasoning and using it to scaffold the relationship between the poem's

construction and possible interpretations. Students are provided with a pair of statements (premises) related to concepts explored in the poem and are asked to draw a logical conclusion from them, supported by a written justification that explains how the conclusion connects to the premises and the concerns of the poem. This activity offers a practical and accessible scaffold for interpretation, grounded in logical reasoning. For example:

Premise 1: Yeats draws on esoteric symbols like ‘Spiritus Mundi’ and the ‘gyres’.

Premise 2: Symbolism drawn from mythology and mysticism is often used to convey metaphysical ideas or spiritual truths.

Conclusion: The symbolic imagery in ‘The Second Coming’ suggests that the poem is grappling with metaphysical questions about the fate of humanity and spiritual renewal.

Explanation/justification: Since the poem uses symbolic images from myth and mysticism, and those types of symbols are often used to express abstract or spiritual ideas, it can be concluded that Yeats is using them to explore metaphysical questions about humanity and spiritual change.

This kind of structured activity encourages students to move beyond surface-level analysis of technique and instead practise their reasoning and interpretive autonomy, particularly by drawing meaningful connections between poetic construction, concepts, and interpretation.

Later in the original sequence, students were tasked with planning an analytical essay on ‘The Second Coming’ and one other poem. To extend the reasoning skills developed in the previous activity, students could now strengthen their evaluative thinking through the ‘Constructing an Interpretive Argument’ strategy. This further develops students’ understanding of inductive reasoning, taking them through a structured reasoning process to build more nuanced arguments.

After revisiting the inductive argument structure (evidence → reasoning → conclusion), students use evidence (textual claims) from the poem to develop a well-supported interpretation focused on a specific concept. To enrich the conceptual depth of these arguments, the teacher might introduce some philosophical readings of the poem (such as those informed by Plato and Hobbes) as well as a reminder of the philosophy-informed interpretations already engaged with earlier in the context-focused lesson. A student’s argument plan might look like this:

Concept: Power

1. Evidence (Textual Claims):

The poem opens with the line ‘Turning and turning in the widening gyre / The falcon cannot hear the falconer’, suggesting a loss of control and disintegration of established order.

Later, Yeats writes, ‘The best lack all conviction, while the worst / Are full of passionate intensity’, implying a dangerous shift in who holds influence.

2. Reasoning:

These lines depict a world where traditional structures of power (like reason, morality, or leadership) have collapsed, and new, more chaotic forces are rising. Given the post-World War I context and Yeats’s cyclical theory of history, the poem reflects anxiety about the breakdown of old hierarchies and the violent emergence of new powers that are not grounded in wisdom or virtue.

3. Conclusion (Interpretation):

‘The Second Coming’ presents a bleak vision of power in transition, suggesting that when legitimate authority collapses, it creates a vacuum filled by dangerous and irrational forces.

This inductive reasoning scaffold helps students to outline and articulate their own interpretation of the poem – captured in the conclusion – which can then form the thesis for their essay. Following this, students could be supported to plan a full analytical essay using the teacher’s preferred structure.

Conclusion

Taken together, these strategies demonstrate how a philosophy-informed framework can be practically applied to strengthen students’ critical and conceptual engagement with poetry in Module B. By foregrounding the skill of reasoning which is central to textual interpretation, as well as the application of philosophical context, this approach empowers students to construct meaning independently within the constraints of exam-oriented programming.

Through critical reflection on the existing Module B program, it becomes apparent that the HSC examination functions as a key technology of power within a broader regime of disciplinary power enacted by NESA. The teleology of the existing lesson sequence, which culminates in the composing of an extended response modelled on the HSC examination, exemplifies how such technologies regulate the behaviours of both teachers and students. This constraint shapes not only the teacher’s relationship with the literary text and their pedagogical choices but also profoundly influences how students relate to both the learning process and the prescribed text. Yet, it is precisely within this constrained context that this philosophy-informed framework may offer value. The framework has the potential to create space for intellectual autonomy, even within a tightly governed syllabus. It enables teachers to invite students into more authentic dialogue with texts, resisting the exam’s standardising pull without disregarding its practical demands.

Ultimately, this chapter demonstrates the potential of philosophy-informed English teaching to provide opportunities to deepen student engagement with literature, foster interpretive autonomy, and align English pedagogy more closely with the intellectual aims of Module B.

Chapter 7

Conclusions and Implications

Introduction

The purpose of this hermeneutic case study was to investigate the philosophical potentialities of Module B: Critical Study of Literature in the NSW HSC English (Advanced) course. Drawing on document analysis of the Syllabus and its support materials alongside textual analysis of selected poems by W.B. Yeats, the study examined how philosophical perspectives might expand interpretive practice in the English classroom. Module B was chosen for its distinctive focus on sustained engagement with a single literary text, and Yeats was chosen for the conceptual depth and interpretive richness of his poetry, as well as his longstanding presence on the prescribed text list. The findings indicate that there are clear philosophical affordances within the Syllabus that can support teachers to foster deeper and more independent textual interpretation, despite the pressures imposed by the HSC exam and the narrowing effect of text prescriptions. This chapter draws together those findings to answer the research questions, highlighting the confluences between philosophical thinking and literary analysis, and demonstrating how the proposed framework makes visible the epistemic and pedagogical potential of Module B. The chapter concludes with a summary of key implications for teachers.

Addressing the research questions

What philosophical affordances exist in the HSC English syllabus, specifically Module B and its support documents?

In this study, philosophical affordances were understood as the curricular, textual and pedagogical possibilities that enable English teachers and students to engage with philosophical skills and knowledge, thereby enriching literary interpretation while fostering intellectual autonomy. Document analysis demonstrated that such affordances do exist within Module B, even though they are not explicitly named in the Syllabus. These affordances arise in the overlap between philosophical and literary study, particularly where students are invited to reason, question, evaluate, and respond personally to texts. The repeated emphasis in Syllabus outcomes and support documents on 'informed personal response', 'critical evaluation', and 'textual integrity' illustrates an implicit recognition that interpretation is not simply about identifying techniques, but about engaging with concepts, values, and perspectives.

This finding aligns with the work of thinkers such as Murdoch and Nussbaum, who have long argued that philosophy and literature are complementary disciplines. Their work suggests that when students approach literature philosophically, they are not merely practising skills of close analysis but also participating in broader ethical and conceptual dialogues. In this way, philosophical affordances in Module B open possibilities for interpretation that go beyond orthodox or reductive readings and invite students into dialogue with enduring questions of existence, value, and human experience. Importantly, such a pursuit is not simply directed towards a fixed or ultimate truth, but towards an unending process of meaning-making that reflects the very nature of hermeneutic engagement.

This study affirms that philosophical affordances are embedded in Module B and can serve as a foundation for less orthodox pedagogical practice.

What are the confluences between philosophical thinking and literary analysis that could support teachers' curriculum design when planning to teach Module B?

The broad confluences between philosophical thinking and literary analysis (specifically in the domains of skills, concepts, and contexts) reveal a complex set of intellectual practices and forms of knowledge that can inform teachers' curriculum design for Module B. The specific confluences between philosophical thinking and literary analysis identified in the Syllabus are the skills of conceptual exploration, questioning, reasoning, and responding personally, alongside conceptual and contextual knowledge. These confluences provide the basis for the philosophy-informed framework developed and applied in this project.

There is shared ground between philosophical and literary thinking through four interrelated skill categories: conceptual exploration, questioning, reasoning, and responding personally. Each skill comprises a range of subskills, demonstrating the sophisticated cognitive demands of Module B. Drawing on the work of Cam (2018, 2020), corresponding classroom strategies were developed for each skill, connecting philosophical thinking to practical approaches for teaching literary texts. By making explicit the thinking skills required for student success in Module B, teachers can better understand and address them, using philosophy-informed strategies to foster deeper and more independent engagement with literary texts.

The analysis also identified confluences between philosophical and literary knowledge, particularly in relation to conceptual and contextual knowledge. Both the Syllabus and the marker feedback indicate a need for conceptual and contextual knowledge to support literary analysis and interpretation. Yet, the Syllabus provides limited guidance on the specific knowledge required, and the marker feedback, while more detailed, remains uneven across texts and years.

To address this gap, the study developed a timeline of key philosophical, literary, and historical movements, which served as the foundation for the contextual knowledge component of the philosophy-informed framework. This was expanded to include major philosophers, their texts, and associated ideas for each period, providing a coherent structure for embedding philosophical perspectives within contextual study.

The conceptual knowledge component of the framework was similarly designed to make visible the intersection between literary and philosophical ways of knowing. By categorising key literary concepts under the five branches of philosophy and providing concise definitions, key thinkers, and guiding questions, the framework offers teachers a practical way to plan for conceptual depth. It supports them in moving away from superficial thematic discussions and reliance on dominant readings towards more intellectually rigorous, idea-driven interpretations. Moreover, this structure broadens students' access to complex philosophical ideas, offering opportunities that may otherwise be limited by teacher familiarity or equity constraints.

How might these confluences between philosophical thinking and literary analysis be applied when planning to teach the poetry of W.B. Yeats in the context of Module B?

This convergence between philosophical thinking and literary analysis formed the foundations of the philosophy-informed framework, which distils complex disciplinary ideas into an accessible planning tool. The application of the philosophy-informed framework to the poetry of W.B. Yeats demonstrates how philosophical and literary confluences can be meaningfully enacted in

classroom practice. For teachers, Yeats offers a rich site for exploring the interpretive possibilities of philosophical integration into their teaching of Module B.

The first stage of applying the framework involved reading the poems philosophically, using the selected philosophical contexts and concepts to frame close textual analysis. For 'The Wild Swans at Coole', the framework directed attention to ideas drawn from Aristotle, Rousseau, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche, illuminating tensions between order and chaos, the profane and the divine, and the individual's pursuit of unity. For 'The Second Coming', concepts from Nietzsche, Hobbes, and Sartre informed the exploration of history, power, and the disintegration of order. In both cases, the philosophical perspectives deepened interpretive possibilities by situating Yeats's work within broader metaphysical and existential inquiries.

To translate these insights into pedagogy, the philosophy-informed framework guided the design of lesson sequences that explicitly taught the philosophical skills identified through the analysis: reasoning, questioning, conceptual exploration, and responding personally. One such example, the 'Giving Reasons and Drawing Conclusions' strategy, introduced students to syllogistic reasoning through the use of premises derived from the poem's ideas and imagery. For instance, analysing 'The Second Coming', students explored how symbolic language reflects metaphysical concerns, constructing reasoned interpretive claims supported by textual evidence. Another activity, 'Constructing and Interpretive Argument', invited students to use inductive reasoning to develop conceptual arguments about Yeats's representation of power. These structured reasoning activities modelled how philosophical inquiry can complement literary interpretation, helping students to move beyond simply identifying literary techniques to constructing defensible interpretations grounded in conceptual understanding.

Through this application, the framework proved effective in supporting both teachers' pedagogical design and students' interpretive autonomy. It provided teachers with a clear yet flexible scaffold for integrating philosophical perspectives without reducing the poetry to abstract theorising. It also offered students opportunities to practise the intellectual behaviours central to both philosophy and literature. For example, interrogating ideas, reasoning through evidence, and forming personal responses to enduring human questions. Importantly, these approaches align with the intent of Module B, which asks students to develop and articulate an informed personal, critical interpretation of a literary text.

The Yeats case study thus illustrates the framework's practical potential to enrich the teaching of literature in senior English. By bringing philosophical and literary inquiry together, it re-positions textual interpretation as an active, reflective, and dialogic process that foregrounds thinking rather than formulaic textual analysis. This synthesis not only enhances students' engagement with literature but also offers teachers a renewed sense of agency within the constraints of the HSC examination.

Taken together, these findings provide the basis for the following conclusions, which synthesise the implications of the study for understanding Module B, its philosophical potentialities, and their significance for English pedagogy.

Conclusions

- **Subject English is an epistemologically fluid discipline.** The history of English teaching, from the cultural and moral visions of Arnold (1997) and Newbolt (1921) through to the curriculum research of Manuel & Carter (2017), shows how the subject has been continually reshaped by cultural, political, and institutional pressures. Attempts to stabilise its knowledges and practices (whether through models of English or, more recently, the English Textual Concepts) have not erased its mercurial character. While this instability makes the subject vulnerable to narrowing when framed as mere content delivery or exam preparation, it also leaves it uniquely open to new integrations, including philosophy.
- **Philosophy can serve as a productive lens for Module B.** Within the Syllabus exist philosophical affordances including skills such as reasoning, questioning, conceptual exploration, and personal response, alongside contextual and conceptual knowledge. Embedding these affordances using the philosophy-informed framework opens richer interpretive possibilities, moving students and teachers beyond dominant or reductive readings of literature. Applied to the poetry of Yeats and accompanying lesson design, it shows how teachers might scaffold reasoning, integrate philosophical perspectives into contextual study, and create dialogic spaces for inquiry.
- **The philosophy-informed framework foregrounds teacher agency and reflexivity.** It enables teachers to make strategic choices about which content and skills to foreground, guided by textual opportunities, syllabus outcomes, student needs, and their own professional confidence. By selecting which philosophical affordances to emphasise, teachers can recognise their own positionality and its influence on students' interpretations. This reflexive practice highlights how pedagogical choices inevitably shape the (re)production of meaning and power relations in the classroom.
- **The philosophy-informed approach holds potential to reinvigorate the teaching of Module B, despite the HSC functioning as a technology of power.** The exam teleology of HSC English narrows lesson sequences and interpretive priorities, often reinforced by the authority of marker feedback. This approach to teaching critical study of literature within senior English carves out a space where teachers can resist the standardising pull of the HSC exam yet still prepare students to meet syllabus expectations and the demands of the exam. By foregrounding philosophical skills and knowledge, teachers can foster students' conceptual understanding, interpretive autonomy, and dialogic engagement with literature.

Building on these conclusions, there are some practical and pedagogical implications for teachers of HSC English.

Implications

The following are offered to support English teachers in applying the insights of this study to their practice. Consistent with the hermeneutic orientation of this study, these implications are not prescriptive but are presented as an invitation for teachers to reflect, adapt, and enact them within their own contexts.

- **Teachers could embed philosophical concepts and context into the teaching of Module B not as extra content but as enrichment.** The proposed philosophy-informed approach holds potential to move teachers beyond orthodox pedagogical practices, such as an over-reliance on the Cultural Heritage model (see discussion on p. 16), and avoids recent attempts to reduce subject English to a content-driven discipline. This proposed approach draws on aspects of existing models of English but also adds a distinctively new dimension to English teaching - the explicit influence of philosophy both epistemologically and pedagogically. Integrating philosophical concepts and contextual content allows for richer engagement with a text's ideas and cultural resonances as students come to appreciate how ideas traverse time and disciplines, supporting their interpretive capabilities.
- **Teachers could teach philosophical thinking skills alongside literary study to model and scaffold critical and interpretive skills.** Strategies drawn from the philosophic tradition can help students to become producers of their own knowledge instead of relying on the ideas or arguments of others. Teachers can engage students in structured learning activities that build their capacity to question, reason, explore complex concepts, and respond personally when engaged in critical dialogue with and about literature. Such skills may be transferred to other English Advanced modules, other English courses and even other subjects.
- **Teachers are encouraged to view the philosophy-informed framework as a guide and not a mandate.** Whilst the framework systematises teachers' engagement with philosophical skills and content, and thus limits ad hoc or ill-informed approaches to teaching theory, the intent is for it to be viewed as a list of possibilities not prescriptions. Teachers are encouraged to apply the framework judiciously and in a way appropriate to themselves and their students. In doing so teachers can embrace the practice of reflexivity and recognise their own positionality when selecting content and skills to embed into their teaching programs. Adopting a flexible approach will prevent overloading students or teachers with unnecessary complexity while simultaneously preserving teacher agency and creativity. It is hoped that teachers will use the framework iteratively by adapting it to new texts and contexts.
- **Teachers may require support to realise the philosophical potentialities within the Syllabus.** The presence of philosophical affordances does not guarantee that they will be taken up in practice. Teachers' capacity to draw on these possibilities will be influenced by a range of pressures including the constraints imposed by the HSC examination, the narrowing influence of prescribed text lists, equity concerns relating to prior knowledge of philosophy, as well as students' interest and capacity to engage with philosophy. For many teachers, these pressures may obscure or constrain opportunities to explore the Syllabus's deeper interpretive possibilities. Marker feedback highlights that only the highest-achieving students tend to demonstrate conceptual depth and independence in their responses, suggesting that provision for supporting teachers to engage with the

philosophical potential of Module B will be needed to ensure the findings are not unevenly realised.

Subject English has historically been a contested discipline, shaped by and reflecting shifting social, political and cultural contexts. From its pragmatic origins as a primarily linguistic discipline through to its more progressive conceptualisation as a site for freeing the full powers of human reason, the purposes of the subject have long been debated. This pursuit to pin down the purpose and nature of English has given rise to various models and approaches over the years, including those that preference moral cultivation, cultural heritage, personal growth, skills training, cultural literacy and the more recent turn towards disciplinary knowledge. Yet, despite these noble attempts, English has remained aloof, retaining its mercurial character. The findings of this study support this epistemic slipperiness, reinforcing an understanding that English, like the literature, language and texts that it seeks to teach, is inseparable from context and thus always mediated by it. This study contributes to these debates about English by offering a new way to conceptualise what English can do. Subject English can facilitate philosophical inquiry alongside literary analysis and, in doing so, can reframe itself as a subject not only concerned with textual analysis, but also with dialogue about ideas. The proposed philosophy-informed approach to teaching English can be positioned within the lineage of English models, not as a replacement but as an evolution, responding to existing and emerging pressures. It is an interdisciplinary approach that enriches English by honouring the interpretive and dialogic traditions of both disciplines. As humanistic, inquiry-based disciplines, this hybrid approach supports a vision of English that cultivates reasoning, conceptual thinking, and personal and ethical engagement.

Such a vision does not deny or refute the existent realities faced by English teachers in NSW. English has always been, and will no doubt continue to be, shaped by its assessment structures. Such pressures necessarily create tension between disciplinary ideals and the everyday experiences of classroom teachers. Module B sits at the nexus of this tension. It demands deep, personal, conceptual interpretation of literature, yet it is constrained by the exam teleology and marker feedback. Whilst this study exposes the potentially narrowing effects of the HSC on how English is taught, the philosophy-informed approach offers a way for teachers to reclaim interpretive autonomy. It can offer a way to restore English to a discipline of inquiry rather than compliance by making visible to teachers the epistemic richness of the HSC English course which is often obscured by exam pressures. The contributions of this study to existing debates in the field are twofold. It makes a theoretical contribution to debate about what English is, and it makes a practical contribution by offering a pedagogical model that can help teachers liberate themselves in their students from the tyranny of a single answer or interpretation.

This study affirms the enduring value of subject English as an arena where the fundamental questions of human existence can be explored, helping young people to make sense of themselves and their world. While this study was theoretical in design, it does lay the groundwork for potential future research into how this philosophy informed approach may be enacted in classrooms. This might involve investigations into student and teacher perspectives of the approach, or application of the philosophy-informed framework to other prescribed texts or HSC English modules or courses.

In keeping with the hermeneutic ethos of this study, these conclusions and recommendations are offered as possibilities rather than prescriptions. They may be read as a hopeful invitation for English teachers to bring these findings to life in their classroom and continue the important dialogue between philosophy, literature, and pedagogy.

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