How are Key Stage Three English teachers responding to shifting discourses on standards and standardisation in England and Wales?

by

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Abstract

Historically, the subject of 'English' has often been associated with progressive teaching styles; 'personal growth' as a pedagogical aim has been a strong thread running through accounts of English teaching in England and Wales from the 1920s to the 1970s. From 1988, the 'disciplinary technologies' of the 'standards agenda', including detailed tables of content standards, standardised assessments and prescriptive pedagogies, have played an important role in shaping the subject. However, in 2008 standardised tests in English at Key Stage Three were suddenly abolished in England, amid signs that the dominance of the logic of standards was receding.

This Research Project examines the work of Key Stage Three English teachers in England and explores their responses to shifting discourses on standards between October 2008 and March 2010. The experiences of English teachers in Wales (where standardised tests were purposefully abolished in 2005) are used as an illuminating comparator. Data was generated from semi-structured interviews with teachers, lecturers and civil servants; attendance at a subject association meeting for English teachers in London; and close readings of curriculum and assessment documents from England and Wales. Grounded Theory, supplemented by Situational Analysis (Clarke 2005), was used to analyse the data and to theorise about the links between practice, policy and discourse.

The study concludes that the removal of standardised testing at Key Stage Three, in both England and Wales, has widened teachers' pedagogical repertoires and has prompted a more active and holistic engagement with literature, especially Shakespeare texts. It also finds that in Wales, despite moves to grant teachers more autonomy to assess students, a persistently performative discourse is pressurizing teachers to inflate grades and to 'fabricate' assessment data. In England - in spite of the abolition of SATs and the National Strategies and an ostensibly less prescriptive curriculum - nationally generated standards continue in a variety of forms, including standardised assessment grids from the *Assessing Pupils' Progress* (APP) initiative. However, APP is non-statutory which means that practitioners have an opportunity to shape their own assessment practices, particularly if they develop the pedagogical connoisseurship to defend their choices.

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Statement of Objectives

This Research Project arose as a result of two 'critical incidents' (Tripp 1993) from my practice as a secondary school English teacher in England. The first incident was the abolition of Key Stage Three standardised tests in England in 2008. The second was the process of planning a 'best practice' scheme of work for Key Stage Three students.

The project *situates* these 'critical incidents', both of which concern the balance between teacher autonomy and external prescription, within a set of political and educational discourses. It then engages critically with the complexities and contradictions of working as an English teacher within the described *situation* by analysing data gathered from semi-structured interviews with teachers, lecturers and civil servants; attendance at a subject association meeting for English teachers in London; and close readings of curriculum and assessment documents from England and Wales. Using a blend of Grounded Theory and Situational Analysis (Clarke 2005) the project analyses the ways in which Key Stage Three English teachers are reacting to changes in curriculum and assessment policy.

The core objective of the research is to create new knowledge which richly captures the complex responses of teachers of Key Stage Three English to shifting levels of prescription in the diverging, political environments of England and Wales. As Menck (1995) states, the teacher is necessarily a key social actor who interprets multi-levelled contextual situations. The key questions are: in England and Wales, are Key Stage Three English teachers changing their pedagogical approaches in the absence of standardised tests? In Wales how are Key Stage Three English teachers reacting to the introduction of teacher assessment? In England, how are teachers of English engaging with the *Assessing Pupils' Progress* initiative? In both polities, how much scope do English teachers now have to plan and assess in the way that they choose? What are the implications for the subject of English? In attempting to answer these questions, the intention is to illuminate possible future paths for the English teaching profession.

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Glossary of Terms

ACACC	The Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales
AF	Assessment Focus
APP	*Assessing Pupils' Progress* – an initiative to facilitate teacher assessment in England
ATL	Association of Teachers and Lecturers (a trade union)
CCW	Curriculum Council for Wales
DARG	Daugherty Assessment Review Group (based in Wales)
DCELLS	Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills in Wales
DCSF	Department for Schools Children and Families in England
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
ECM	*Every Child Matters* – a policy initiative aimed to ensure that children's welfare is at the heart of the British education and welfare systems
EdD	Doctorate in Education
FFT	The Fischer Family Trust - an independent organisation which aims to support schools; often its focus is on helping schools to use data effectively
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education, examinations usually taken by sixteen year olds in England and Wales
GTC	The General Teaching Council
HMI	Her Majesty's Inspectorate
Key Stage	A term used to describe a stage of schooling, Key Stage Three runs from year seven to year nine (11-14 year olds)
LATE	The London Association for Teachers of English
LEA	Local Education Authority
NATE	The National Association for Teachers of English
NCSL	The National College of School Leadership
NLS	The National Literacy Strategy

NVivo	Software designed to facilitate qualitative data analysis
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
PDF	Portable Document Format
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PLTS	Personal Learning and Thinking Skills
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority in England
QCDA	Qualifications and Curriculum Development Authority (previously QCA)
SATs	Standard Attainment Tests
ROERCE	Roehampton Education Research Conference
RSC	The Royal Shakespeare Company
TDA	Training and Development Agency for Schools

Chapter 1 Rationale

1.1 Introduction

In keeping with the spirit of a professional doctorate, the rationale for this Research Project stems from fourteen years' experience of working as a teacher of English in a range of state secondary schools in England. It also arises from my profound sense that English teaching is a both a highly personal and a deeply political matter. Apple argues:

> ...a truly critical study of education needs to deal with more than the technical issues of how we teach efficiently and effectively - too often the dominant or only questions educators ask. It must think critically about education's relationship to economic, political and cultural power... (2004, p.vii).

Therefore, my study is not a classroom-based exploration of a certain teaching style to see if it 'works', but an attempt to place my work within a political, ideological and historical context in order to understand the practice of English teaching more fully. It is also an examination of the responses of English teachers in England and Wales to the complexities of working in an environment in which the discourse on standards and standardisation is shifting.

Bloomberg and Volpe state that:

> All qualitative research emerges from a perceived problem, some unsatisfactory situation, condition, or phenomenon that we want to confront...Basically, the problem statement is the discrepancy between what we already know and what we want to know (2008, p.34).

This opening chapter is a reflective account of what I 'already know', both from existing literature and from experience, about standards and standardisation in secondary school English teaching. This professional knowledge leads into the following, key research questions, the answers to which I 'want to know'. In England and Wales, are Key Stage Three English teachers changing their pedagogical approaches in the absence of standardised tests? In Wales how are Key Stage Three English teachers reacting to the introduction of teacher assessment? In England, how are teachers of English engaging with the *Assessing Pupils' Progress* initiative? In both polities, how much scope do English teachers now have to plan and assess in the way that they choose? What are the implications for the subject of English?

The account begins at the macro level, with an overview of the shifting construct of standards-based educational reform in England and the changing policy landscape in Wales (which is used throughout the project as an illuminating comparator). Next, at the meso level, it explores the peculiarly mercurial subject of 'English' and looks at why standards-based reforms may have been particularly problematic for English teachers, an issue which is explored at length in the literature review in Chapter Two. At the micro level, two 'critical incidents' (Tripp 1993) from my practice setting add a teacher's perspective to the picture which, as the work on teacher autonomy cited in section 1.9 illustrates, is vital to consider if a sophisticated understanding of education policy is to be reached. Finally, the above research questions, which arise from the interplay between the macro, the meso and the micro levels, are restated.

1.2 Standards-based educational reform

Between 1862 and 1897, teachers in England and Wales worked under a system, known as the Revised Code, in which all schools were required to prepare pupils to attain a certain 'standard' in reading, writing and arithmetic and were paid by results. Edmond Holmes, an Inspector of Elementary Schools, made a particularly coruscating attack on the Code:

> For a third of a century 'My Lords' required their inspectors to examine every child in every elementary school in England on a syllabus which was binding on all schools alike. In doing this, they put the bit into the mouth of the teacher and drove him, at their pleasure, in this direction and that. And what they did to him, they compelled him to do to the child (1911, p.7).

Holmes went on to claim that when the Revised Code was suddenly abolished, teachers did not know what to do with their new-found autonomy. He described the reaction of English teachers as follows:

> Having for thirty-three years deprived the teachers of almost every vestige of freedom, the Department suddenly reversed its policy and gave them in generous measure the boon which it had so long withheld...What is beyond dispute is that it was unwise to expect so great and so unexpected a gift to be used at once to full advantage. A man who had grown accustomed to semi-darkness would be dazzled to the verge of blindness if he were suddenly taken out into broad daylight (Holmes, 1911, p.90).

Hursh, writing nearly one hundred years later, is concerned that some teachers may have been permanently blinded by more recent, highly prescriptive education policies. In his

book entitled *High Stakes Testing and the Decline in Teaching and Learning: The Real Crisis in Education,* he suggests that:

> ...repealing the recent wave of reforms may be difficult because the emphasis on scripted curriculum and teaching to the test substantially deskills and de-professionalises teachers; we may soon have few teachers capable of developing and implementing their own lessons and units (Hursh, 2008, p.5).

The reforms to which Hursh refers have been implemented across the Western, industrialised world in the last three decades. They have had the stated aim of 'raising standards'. Politicians of all political parties in the United Kingdom continue to use the language of standards which, they argue, provide the key to maintaining a competitive edge in a globalized economy. Laugharne and Baird's analysis of three high-profile education policy documents from England, Wales and Scotland conclude that 'It can be seen that 'standards', representing the improvement agenda, overwhelmingly dominates the curriculum references' (2009, p.234).

It is hard to argue against politicians' desire to raise 'standards' in schools. The Collins dictionary (1992, p.1460), among its definitions of the word 'standard', includes: 'a principle of propriety, honesty and integrity' and 'a level of excellence or quality'. Yet the relentless political focus on educational standards that currently exists is not inevitable. From the 1940s to the mid 1970s, teachers in England and Wales were left to work in what Callaghan (1976) has described as a 'secret garden'. Grek contends that governments are now focusing more on their education systems because they are losing economic control:

> ...the power of national governments to control the outcome of economic competition has been weakened...Indeed the competitive advantage of nations is frequently redefined in terms of the quality of national education and training systems judged according to international *standards* [italics added] (2009, p. 25).

It is important to think carefully, to be, in Apple's words, 'truly critical' about some of the ways in which governments have deployed the term 'standards' within the framework of educational reform. Diane Ravitch, a former Assistant Secretary of Educational Research and Improvement at the United States Department of Education under George Bush, and a key proponent of standards in American education in the nineties, defines three types of standards: content standards, performance standards and opportunity-to-learn standards. It is the first two of these standards that are most relevant to this Research Project. Ravitch explains that:

> Content standards (or curriculum standards) describe what teachers are supposed to teach and students are expected to learn...A content standard should be measurable, so that students can demonstrate their mastery of the skills or knowledge; if mastery of the standard is neither measurable nor demonstrable, then it is probably so vague that it has little meaning or value for teachers and students (1995, p.12).

She goes on to state that 'Performance standards define degrees of mastery or levels of attainment' and to stress that the two are inextricably linked:

> Content standards without performance standards are meaningless. Content standards define what is to be taught and learned; performance standards describe how well it has been learned (ibid).

There is a neat simplicity to Ravitch's assertions that the core aim of schooling is to raise standards and to the line of argument that follows on from such an aim: standards must be made explicit to teachers, students and parents; teachers should systematically teach the content standards; students should be regularly tested to check their performance. There are studies which argue that without rigorously specified content standards, students and teachers drift into an acceptance of mediocrity. The authors of *Selling Students Short* contend that without externally set standards 'A bargain of sorts is struck that demands little academically of either teachers or students...the bargain's essential features include: relatively little concern for academic content...' (cited in Ravitch, 1995, p.119).

It can be argued that the Conservative politicians who drew up the National Curriculum in England and Wales in 1988 and initiated statutory testing in English, Mathematics and Science for seven, eleven and fourteen year olds, and the Labour politicians who implemented the National Strategies[1], accepted that the end of education is to raise standards and that the means to this end is the prescription of clear learning objectives (or content standards) and regular testing.

As a practising teacher, I have witnessed the increasing dominance of thinking which equates the imperative to raise standards with pedagogical approaches in which content standards are explicitly defined, taught and tested. In 2001, I was sent on a mandatory, five-day course led by National Strategy consultants to learn how to use 'objectives-led'

[1] The ' Secondary National Strategy' was a generously funded Government initiative which promoted objectives-led pedagogies in secondary schools during the first decade of the twenty first century.

teaching which unambiguously, indeed uncritically, trained practitioners to write a content standard on the board at the beginning of every lesson and then to check whether the content had been learned at the end of the lesson. The National Strategy consultants were disseminating what Apple (2004, p.175) would call 'technical administrative knowledge' which, he contends, 'enables the most powerful groups...neo-liberals and neo-conservatives, to tighten up the ship and to make us more accountable'. Since 2001, the use of clearly defined objectives at the start of the class has become *de rigueur* in every school that I have worked in. Mary Bousted, Director General of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers Union (ATL), bemoaned this situation in her 2009 conference speech:

> I have been sent a lesson observation drop in form used by the senior management team in a school as they go on 'learning walks' around the school. The SMT [Senior Management Team] is instructed to ensure, in their monitoring, that teachers 'meet and greet' students at the door. Learning objectives must be made clear within the first three minutes of the lesson...(2009, p.5).

Atkinson (2003, p.5) describes the situation as 'this nightmare surrealism...This day-in-day-out, government-driven, initiatives-led, inspection-accounted-for simulacrum of education in which we exist'. Exasperated by the dominance of the discourse on standards she exhorts educators to:

> Try talking about education itself outside the terms of Standards, Excellence and Improvement. Other ways of thinking and knowing, other languages for describing, other tongues for speaking have become so silent, so invisible, that we have almost forgotten their existence (Atkinson, 2003, p.6).

Atkinson uses the word 'forgotten' because, historically, other discourses have been dominant and the logic of standards has not seemed inescapable. The literature review in Chapter Two examines 'other ways of thinking and knowing'.

1.3 Critiques of externally prescribed content standards

Despite the apparent ubiquity of content standards in English schools, the use of explicit teaching objectives has, in the past, been rigorously challenged. Ravtich's leap from her assertion that 'a content standard should be measurable' to her conclusion that if it is not measurable, then it is 'probably so vague that it has little meaning or value for teachers and students' (1995, p.12) is clearly questionable. There are many lesson outcomes that are valuable but difficult to measure, for example: creativity; a tolerant personality; self-

expression. Harris (2007, p.52), in her work entitled *The Governance of Education: how neo-liberalism is transforming policy and practice,* contends that because of the need to gain control over the education system (see Grek above), governments define education reductively: 'Education is constrained and bounded to that which can be given expression, measured, standardised and quantified.'

Moore recognizes that conflating education with content standards is implicitly assuming that:

> What is knowable - or what 'needs to be known' is ultimately definable and susceptible to inventorisation and tidy assessment: it is underpinned by a tacit assumption that there is, under passing acknowledgement of the possibility of local variations, only one right way or set of ways of doing things (a view which, incidentally, underpins the current National Curriculum for England and Wales...) (2004, p.102).

K. Jones argues that this neatness ostensibly removes autonomy from the teacher as inventories are invariably drawn up by people outside the classroom:

> Policy has devised a new system of knowledge production, in which knowledge about teaching is, as it were, externalised: the strategies, frameworks, curricula, and programmes of teacher training which presently aim to supply teachers with the knowledge about English and the skills of teaching it, are designed to be, to a considerable extent, immune to teacher influence (2006, p.86).

Yet such an apparent shift in control from teachers to external agencies warrants careful examination and Jones' point is investigated further below. As Kress et al. (2005) demonstrate, within any classroom there are many discourses and communicative practices in evidence and the teacher is always a key agent.

Noddings makes an important point about the conflation of the term 'standard' and 'standardisation' which helps to explain the potential marginalisation of the teacher described by Jones. She claims that:

> Use of the word *standard* for topic, concept or skill is meant to convey a twin sense of uniformity and high quality, but the resulting masses of standards are really elaborate tables of contents...The underlying intent is to standardise (2007b, p.52).

Ball (2003) approaches the issue of standards from another angle. In an article entitled *The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity,* he argues that the more teachers are

externally measured and judged and the more they work with standardised scripts and prescribed systems of assessment, the more of their 'soul' they give up to the external agencies which judge them. Alexander, in a review of primary education in England, echoes Ball's concerns when he claims that:

> ...a picture of teachers and teaching hamstrung by recent policy dominated the submissions of almost every adult group consulted in the Review's soundings. The culprits were three...: an over-prescriptive national curriculum, high-stakes testing...and the national strategies (2009, p.280).

Moore, Jones, Noddings, Ball and Alexander are all concerned to emphasize that an over-reliance on pre-specified standards can crowd out other important pieces of the educational 'jigsaw'. The unique and personal qualities of a teacher cannot be standardised and the important aims of engendering tolerance or creativity are immeasurable.

1.4 Evidence that the dominance of the discourse on standards is receding

There is growing evidence that some of the above critiques of the standards agenda have been accepted by politicians and policy makers. Indeed, Ravitch's latest book is called *The Death and Life of the Great American School System, How Testing and Choice are Undermining Education* and it is a notable recantation of her earlier work which championed standards. In Britain, although the word 'standards' is still widely used by politicians, some academics are arguing that the hegemonic discursive grip that Atkinson felt so strangled by is loosening. It is the potential reversal of a dominant trend that is crucial to this study, as it enables a genuinely new contribution to debates on performativity and practice. Hatcher notes that 'There are now clear indications of a significant change in the dominant discourse... Labour education policy, based on a prescriptive "standards agenda", has run out of steam...' (2007, no page numbers) and K. Jones claims that:

> ...curriculum policies and...pedagogic interests are coloured by discontent with what the changes of the 1990s achieved. Highly specified programmes of study, emphasising the acquisition of official knowledge, and implemented in top-down fashion, are seen as to some extent unrewarding, and policy has made a partial turn towards other themes...(2006, p.89).

Gibbons states that:

> There seems to be a growing acknowledgement amongst policy makers that 'top down' solutions to educational concerns have failed to achieve their goals. After two decades of the National Curriculum, and a decade of the Literacy Strategy – the latter being particularly notable for its centrally driven nature – new policy documents at both primary and secondary level talk of returning greater power to schools and teachers, of giving more responsibility to teachers as 'curriculum innovators' (2009, p.12).

It seems that the standards agenda, exemplified by clear, national content standards and national checks on performance through regular, standardised tests, is starting to unravel. Science SATs tests for eleven year olds in England were abandoned in 2009 and the abolition of the SATs for fourteen year olds in England in 2008 - even though it came in the immediate aftermath of serious administrative errors and a marking 'fiasco' (Alexander, 2009, p.325) - can be seen as part of a move away from the 'inescapable logic of standards'. The English National Curriculum, re-launched in 2008 was designed to give schools more scope to customise provision and from 2011, the National Strategies will no longer be funded.

Gordon Brown, writing in the *Times Educational Supplement* on October 30th, 2009 justified the policy shift by arguing that the needs of the education system have moved on and that teachers can now be trusted:

> We can devolve more power to heads and liberate teachers to perform those daily minor miracles: opening children's eyes to the world, encouraging curiosity, building confidence and preparing them for the future...Trusting teachers is why we have thinned out the curriculum in secondary schools...

David Cameron, during the 2010 election campaign, made it very clear that he does not support the kind of centralizing and controlling tendencies that standards-based reform has generated:

> We need a government with the right values, a government that stops wasting money on the bureaucracy and the quangos and the form filling and the instructions ... We need a government that understands that for too long in our country we haven't actually trusted the teachers (Cameron, 2010).

Cameron's rhetoric contrasts starkly with Apple's (2004, p.175) description of neo-conservatives whom he characterizes as being 'deeply committed to establishing tighter mechanisms of control over knowledge, morals, and values through national or state curricula and national or state mandated (and very reductive) testing. This is based on a

very strong mistrust of teachers...'. It remains to be seen what kind of balance the Coalition Government will strike between giving schools autonomy and ensuring system-wide accountability and comparability.

In Wales, Key Stage Three English teachers have been working without standardised tests since 2005. In 2004, Jane Davidson (2004, p.46), the Welsh Minister for Education, made a clear and important policy pronouncement that she wanted to do things 'our way'. 'Our way' seems to be an overt rejection of the logic of standards. Testing for seven, eleven and fourteen year olds in the three 'core' subjects of Mathematics, English and Science has been completely abolished in Wales, so too have league tables which compare schools' results. Furthermore, early years teaching has been radically reformed to focus on play-based learning. Wales has moved away not only from standardised tests but from very detailed content standards. As Reynolds (2008b, p.754) notes, 'The left wing political history of Wales and the use of government to ensure enhanced social justice for Welsh citizens created a climate of greater trust in provider determined solutions'. Policy makers have opted for a looser, skills-based curriculum in which broad aims are set. Reynolds, an academic who has published widely on school effectiveness, is already concerned that 'standards' are slipping in Wales. He points out that PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) results are weaker in Wales than in England and argues that:

> Overall, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the legacy of devolution to Wales, and the policies that were followed after it, validate much of what can be called the New Labour educational paradigm of England (2008b, p.763).

However, ACCAC (the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales) put forward, as part of the rationale for the changes to curriculum and assessment, the argument that:

> In general, many of the learning opportunities provided for young people were seen to lack excitement, challenge, risk-taking, creativity and enjoyment. In part, this was seen to be the result of the restrictions in the Orders and assessment arrangements...(2004, p.21).

If the aims of the Welsh reforms were to encourage risk taking and enjoyment, PISA data will not provide a valid measure of whether such aims have been achieved. It will be important to monitor, as sensitively and as holistically as possible, the response of students and teachers to these changes. This research includes an investigation of the response of a

number of Key Stage Three English teachers in Wales to the changing policy arena, to shed further light on the way in which policy shapes practice.

1.5 The peculiarly mercurial nature of English

Having looked at the shifting sands of standards-based reform in England and Wales, it is important to acknowledge that, at the meso level, different school subjects are impacted in different ways by the same set of reforms. Ravitch (1995, p.124) claims unequivocally that 'English encounters problems different from those of any other school subject'. Why? Part of the problem is set out by Evans who argues that:

> English does not lay claim to a body of knowledge which can be circumscribed and quantified. In no sense is it a linear subject, emphatically not where the teaching of the 'basic skills' of reading, spelling and punctuation are concerned. The English teacher is thus in a more precarious and vulnerable position when it comes to deciding aims, objectives and the content of a lesson (1982, p.15).

Therefore, the explicit, neat, inventories which standards-based reform require are particularly problematic for English teachers. The idea of working in an environment of 'soulless standardisation' is also exceptionally difficult for some English teachers who, in the past, have clearly stated that the purpose of education in the English classroom is not to raise specific academic standards, but to engage with the 'soul' of individual students and to guide them towards 'personal growth' (Allen, 1980; Bousted, 1999). Bousted asks:

> ...where has the concept of pleasure gone? Where has the personal response to a book, or a poem, disappeared to? Where is the experience of children choosing what it is they want to write about? ...I don't want to get misty eyed about the past, but it is clear to me that something important has been lost – for both teachers and taught. And that is the heart of the subject – the subject which is dear to my heart – the subject of English (2009, p.6).

At this point in the chapter, the global discourse on standards has been placed as a macro – level backdrop against which the construct of the subject of English has been problematically positioned. At the micro level exist individuals who add more complexity to the situation, as the following section illustrates.

1.6 A critical incident: experiencing the abolition of Key Stage Three English SATs in England

I was teaching English in an eight-form entry, urban comprehensive in October 2008 when the Department for Schools, Children and Families, 'suddenly reversed its policy' and announced that with immediate effect there would be no more end of Key Stage tests in English, Mathematics and Science for all fourteen year olds in England. For a moment, it seemed that the cornerstone of standards-based reform had crumbled. As Ravitch (1995, p.12) points out 'Content standards without performance standards are meaningless' and the mechanism for testing performance standards was abruptly removed.

There was a sense of excitement, disbelief and trepidation amongst colleagues in the wake of the news. I was energised at the prospect of being able to choose texts and tasks that I thought would suit my students. Web-based forums in the weeks following Ed Balls' (then Secretary of State at the Department of Children, Schools and Families) announcement were full of questions asking what will change now that 'we can teach for love not targets'[2]. However, there were also reports that younger practitioners, who have been credentialed in the test culture, were at a loss. One teacher described her young head of department as having had his 'comfort blanket' ripped from him (ibid). In my English department when we began to discuss what and how we would teach in year nine in the absence of prescribed tests, I recall a young, newly qualified teacher saying: 'I don't want to sound radical, but could we read a book?'. Given the steady move towards discretely taught extracts which illuminate a particular content standard, her suggestion *was* quite radical. Some months later, a colleague from a different school admitted her relief at not having to do two Shakespeare scenes *ad nauseam* in order to prepare her students for the SATs; she lyrically described how she had taken an entire term to actually read *The Tempest* with her students who had thoroughly *enjoyed* the drama-based work that had evolved from the reading.

My observations in the field led me to believe that I was witnessing something educationally and politically significant in the wake of the withdrawal of standardised tests. I saw an opportunity to develop important new professional knowledge about the interplay between prescription, standardisation and practice with specific reference to the secondary English classroom. I was presented with a chance to find out whether secondary

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2 http://www.teachit.co.uk/index.asp?forum_action=show_message&ID=60347&CurrMenu=55&Forum_Page (Accessed 12/09/2008)

English teachers in England and Wales were, in the light of the withdrawal of certain elements of external control, changing their pedagogical approaches.

1.7 A second critical incident: experiencing the persistence of prescription

In the autumn term of 2008, in the aftermath of the abolition of the SATs and following the launch of a new National Curriculum, I started to plan the English programme of work for my class of fourteen year olds. I was working with many socially deprived students and I began to wonder how they might become engaged in themes that would seem relevant to their lives. In Bousted's words, I was contemplating taking as my starting point:

> ...the development of individual identity through the exploration of lived experience, effected in the classroom through the adoption of pedagogical practices in which personal experience is foregrounded, examined and used as the basis upon which new learning is built (1999, p.250).

As I was sketching out my ideas about thematic learning based around subjects which I judged would interest students in my particular school, the head of department showed me a completed scheme from another school - an example of 'best practice' (see Adams' 2008 investigation of this term). The scheme (see appendix A) was full of numerical references to various objectives from a range of documents, including: the key concepts from the English National Curriculum; key processes from the English National Curriculum; England-wide *Assessing Pupils' Progress* (APP) level descriptors; functional skills levels and highly specific references to a 'Personal Learning and Thinking Skills' chart (see appendix B) produced by Cambridge Education, which has two hundred and sixteen boxes each containing a description of a desirable behaviour. The scheme exemplifies the notion that neat 'inventorisation' facilitates learning.

However, the scheme was difficult to follow; the numerical references for the *Assessing Pupils' Progress* grids (which have come from the National Strategies) did not match the numerical references from the National Curriculum or the Secondary National Strategy. It seemed principally to be an exercise in mapping out a range of numbers, letters and roman numerals from an externally generated list. 'Soul-destroying' and 'ludicrous' were terms that came to mind as I read across the columns in the best practice example: 'Year 9 AFs: RAF7; RAF5; RAF3. Year 9 sub-strands: 2.2 – a, d, e, f, g, i; 2:3 – e, o, p, d; 2:1 – d, j, k, l' and so on. As I resignedly recognised that I needed to produce something similar for my

department, the importance of the personal interests of the students that I had wanted to take as my starting point became crowded out by 'strategies, frameworks, curricula' which were prompting me explicitly to teach and assess whether students can 'use a wider range of connectives; make sure paragraphs are integral to the meaning and purpose of your writing; use commas in lists; identify and explain a range of organisational features of a text...' (see appendix A).

1.8 Some pedagogical tensions between prescription and practice

Eisner (2004), writing in 1967, understood that pre-specifying content standards has a certain appeal: they provide goals for the learners; they facilitate both the organization of content and its evaluation. His summary is a re-presentation of the arguments of Popham (2004), a strong advocate of objectives, who, like Ravitch (1995) invokes clarity and measurability as reasons to adopt objectives-led pedagogy. However, Eisner goes on to argue that teachers rarely opt to set up their own detailed list of pre-specified standards and that they usually do it to conform to external expectations:

> Yet, despite these efforts, teachers seem not to take educational objectives seriously - at least as they are prescribed from above. And when teachers plan curriculum guides, their efforts first to identify over-all educational aims, then specify school objectives, then identify educational objectives for specific subject matters, appear to be more like exercises to be gone through than serious efforts to build tools for curriculum planning (2004, p.85).

Those words, 'an exercise to be gone through', have great resonance for me as a practitioner. In my experience, many teachers are spending significant amounts of time 'going through the motions' of writing complex schemes of work. They map out lists of often disparate content standards, not because they are convinced that teaching and learning will be enriched by such an activity, not even because they believe that they will follow them during the course of the year, but because they fear that they will be penalised in an inspection if they do not. The threads of the National Curriculum; *Assessing Pupils' Progress*; Personal Learning and Thinking Skills; Citizenship and Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning must all be somehow woven into a plan. Some might argue that teachers are unaccountable if they do not follow prescriptions from above. However, Eisner (2004, p.90) posits that 'imposing logical requirements upon the [planning] process because they are desirable for assessing the product is, to my mind, an error'. Some of Eisner's recommendations concerning planning and objectives will be explored below.

Where Eisner is coolly critical, nearly forty years later, Atkinson is angry. She says:

> Picture the scene... another trainee...wrestles with clusters and digraphs; a third marks off Standards 3biii and 5dvi...This is the regime of truth in which I exist...And I don't like it (2003, p.5).

Alexander has found that many teachers 'don't like it' either. He claims that, throughout the primary teaching community in England, there is widespread frustration with externally imposed constraints. He cites a submission from the Association for the Study of Primary Education and claims that it is representative of teachers across England:

> If prospective teachers embark on a training course in the belief that they are entering a profession dedicated to the development of young minds through innovative and child-centred ideas, only to discover that most of their teaching is constrained by external demands, it is little wonder that they become disillusioned (2009, p.21).

1.9 The 'discretionary space' between prescription and practice

If there is such widespread disaffection with external prescription, it is important to ask how teachers are engaging with government directives. Foucault (1978) states that 'where there is power there is resistance' (Mills, 2003, p.40) and Elizabeth Atkinson (2003, p.5) urges educators to resist when she asks: 'How can we pit the ludic – the playful, the ironic, the restless, shapeshifting dance of postmodernism – against the ludicrous?' She answers:

> ...laughing wouldn't be a bad start. How often have you laughed in recent staff meetings, as you've incorporated the latest government initiative into your own particular field of education? (ibid).

I have witnessed a great deal of laugher in English departments and seen many playfully subversive games which ridicule the 'latest government initiative'. When Jones (2006, p. 86) contends that certain policies are 'designed to be, to a considerable extent, immune to teacher influence' it is vital to stop and question the extent to which *teaching* can be immune to *teacher* influence. Although I was aware in the Autumn of 2008 that I had to *write* a scheme of work which incorporated all of the substrands from external documents, I knew that I did not have to *teach* a scheme like that. Helsby (1999) has coined the term 'discretionary space' to describe the opportunities that teachers have to interpret policy in their own way. Boag-Munroe (2005, p.147) suggests that there is a *de facto* autonomy being taken, if not enjoyed, by some practitioners who 'resent being forced into

mechanical box ticking'. Honan (2004, p.102), when investigating the ways in which teachers of English interact with policy texts, found that the 'array of packages' that flood classrooms and which 'describe teaching as a series of technical steps' are not immune to teacher influence. On the contrary, English teachers tend to generate their own practice from these texts in a way that is personally meaningful.

The work of Helsby, Boag-Munroe and Honan demonstrate the many ways in which policy is interpreted by those who are charged with implementation. Therefore, without in-depth, qualitative studies of how policy is being implemented, educational initiatives cannot be evaluated, nor their impact understood. Gale and Densmore (2003, p.46) explain how the Foucauldian turn has enabled students of education policy to get away from pure producer/ implementer notions of policy, but also suggest that this way of thinking does not go far enough: 'Teachers' policy interpretations remain secondary, disruptive, refractive, adjustive, even cannibalized but never quite or fully productive'. They go on to suggest that:

> there are at least three ways in which consumers can tactically engage with policy: one is to 'make do' with policy, to find creative ways to live with it (the inventiveness that de Certeau refers to as 'bricolage'), another is to try to 'put one over' policy, to 'wear away' at its weaknesses. And a third, Lankshear's addition, engages a meta-analysis of policy that enables consumers to recognize hegemony in order not to be 'tricked' themselves (ibid).

These analyses serve as potent reminders that policy analysis needs to be populated with empirical investigations of how teachers are working.

1.10 What needs researching and why does it matter?

To return to Bloomberg and Volpe's phrase, 'the problem statement is the discrepancy between what we already know and what we want to know' (2008, p.34). The following questions encapsulate that discrepancy. In England, in the wake of the apparent decline of some of the 'disciplinary technologies' associated with the standards agenda (the abolition of SATs in 2008; the decline of the Secondary National Strategy; the revision of the National Curriculum in 2008), are English teachers changing their pedagogical approaches? In Wales, given the earlier changes to both curriculum and assessment policies (the abolition of the SATs in 2005; the introduction of moderated teacher assessment; the move towards a skills based curriculum), how are Key Stage Three English

teachers responding? In England, how are teachers working with the *Assessing Pupils' Progress* initiative? In both polities, how much scope do English teachers now have to plan and assess in the way that they choose? What are the implications for the subject of English?

This Research Project has been designed to address these questions; to shed light on the way in which policy is shaping the practice of secondary school teachers of English. It is a detailed analysis of the response of Key Stage Three English teachers to *the situation* that they found themselves in when they set out to plan, teach and assess a scheme of work in England and Wales in 2009 and early 2010. The situation is firmly located in time and place. Therefore, the methodology that I have chosen for this study is Situational Analysis, a type of Grounded Theory developed by Adele E. Clarke (2005) which specifically takes account of both Foucault and the 'postmodern turn'. I will explain my methodological choices in Chapter Three, but for now it is important to establish that 'A situation is open, indeterminate, changing, unstable, unfixed, tenuous, temporary' (Clarke, 2005, p.296), and that what I am undertaking is an 'analytic snapshot in time and space' (ibid).

My *intention* when I began this project was to gather and interpret data about teachers' of English experience of working in the absence of Key Stage Three SATs and to understand the way in which teachers of English are engaging with current shifting discourses and policies, especially the different initiatives in England and Wales which are being implemented to fill the vacuum left by the removal of standardised tests. My *motivation* was based on a desire to develop the capacity to resist and challenge prescriptions which may result in reductive and mechanistic approaches to teaching English. Day and Sachs (2004, p.29) remind teachers not to become 'passive' and 'compliant'. Apple, when he invokes teachers to become more critically engaged, admits:

> One thing should be clear, this program requires a good deal of plain old hard 'intellectual' work, as well. It involves more than a modicum of reading, study, and honest debate in areas many of us have only a limited background in. We are unused to looking at educational activity ethically, politically, and economically, not to say critically, given the very difficult (and time-consuming and emotionally draining) nature of being a decent educator (2004, p.11).

Yet if practitioners do not take the time to examine their work through political and ideological lenses, if, as Bottery and Wright (2000, p.73) contend, 'teachers and schools

continued to lower their heads to pull their classroom or management carts, it should come as no surprise if they ended up at destinations they did not select.'

What follows is an account of my attempt to lift my head from my classroom cart and to engage critically with my practice. Chapter Two is a literature review which focuses on the forces and dominant discourses that have shaped the practice of English teachers historically. It begins with an exploration of the way in which 'progressive' English teachers made a case against content standards and standardised testing. It goes on to review the work of writers who, from the 1980s onwards, argued for tighter state control over curriculum and assessment in English classrooms. It then explores more current work which attempts to understand the shifting policy environment in which English teachers practise. Chapter Three deals with the methodology used in the Research Project. It explains the rationale for using Grounded Theory and Situational Analysis before discussing the decisions taken on data collection, sampling, analysis and synthesis. It also deals with ethical questions which have arisen during the course of the study. The fourth chapter is wholly concerned with data analysis and findings; it attempts to make sense of the way in which teachers in England and Wales are responding to both the abolition of standardised testing and ongoing changes to curriculum and assessment policies. The final chapter draws conclusions based on the findings and makes five suggestions for future research and debate.

Chapter Two The Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter critically reviews the literature that considers different 'ways of thinking and knowing' about the subject of English. It is a purposeful attempt to explore and explicate a range of discursive constructs of English teaching which inform my analysis of English teachers' responses to the present shifting policy agenda. I begin with an overview of the case that has been made against content standards and standardised assessment in English. I go on to consider and critique the pedagogical and political arguments in favour of pre-specified content and standardisation that brought about significant change to the way in which English was constructed and regulated in England. I then review the literature that charts the divergent paths of curriculum and assessment policy in England and Wales post-devolution in 1999, before exploring the literature that analyses the current tensions that are arising as a result of a partial turn from the logic of standards.

2.2 The progressive tradition – a critical review of the case against content standards and standardised assessment in the subject of secondary English

The first way of thinking and knowing arises from a long, progressive tradition which has woven together many disparate threads in different patterns at different times (Shayer, 1972; Allen, 1980; Jeffcoate, 1992; Protherough and King, 1995; Bousted, 1999). No single figure embodies this tradition and it is important to stress that under the umbrella of 'progressive' stand characters who, if all placed together in a room, would find cause for profound disagreement over, for example, the relative importance of language and literature or the place of regional dialect. Nevertheless, the following strands are clearly discernable within the tradition: all children are unique, developing spirits with creative potential; the teaching of English is a non-linear process which encourages the personal and moral growth of the child; there is little place in the subject of English for prescribed content (although that does not mean that a steadily increasing mastery of spoken and written English is considered unimportant); English does not lend itself to standardised assessment; English should be taught holistically and not atomised; English is creative and enjoyable; the English teacher therefore necessarily needs a degree of autonomy in curriculum design and assessment practices. This section of the literature review teases out the above strands.

Allen, in a book enitled *English Teaching Since 1965, How Much Growth?* examines the progressive tradition. He claims:

> One substantial argument developed over the late nineteenth century until today has offered to many teachers of English a coherence and a sense of priorities, and which defines English as essentially *the* educational subject. Such a tradition as that coming from Matthew Arnold, by way of E. Holmes, Caldwell Cook, George Sampson, F.R Leavis, through to Denys Thompson conceived of the subject English as held together by a number of central beliefs (1980, p.8).

These beliefs include the notion, firstly, that the aim of English in education is not to ensure that students progress through a specified academic curriculum in order to prepare them for a productive economic life, but to civilize them; secondly, that the reading of literature leads students to 'wisdom by way of enjoyment' (ibid).

For the first of those thinkers cited by Allen, the nineteenth century educationalist Matthew Arnold, this wisdom comes through 'culture' which 'moves by the force, not merely or primarily of the scientific passion for pure knowledge, but also of the moral and social passion for doing good'(Arnold, 2006, p.34). For Arnold therefore, teaching English was fundamentally a moral activity and as a result it was impossible to reduce it to a set of content standards. Arnold was an outspoken critic of what he saw as the reductive and instrumentalist nature of the Revised Code (which did set out explicit content standards). He played an important role in its demise and his legacy was to establish 'the concept of personal growth as an antidote to economic growth' (Bousted, 1999, p.62).

After Arnold, there is a rich array of writers who, in the twentieth century, took up the notion of personal growth through English. This part of the literature review does not aim to cover the entire field. My intention is to draw attention to a specific part of the ardently articulated progressive discourse which explicitly resists content standards and standardised assessments.

The Board of Education's first major official report on Secondary English teaching in 1910 entitled *The Teaching of English in Secondary Schools* does this. The report asserts that content standards are inappropriate in an English classroom. The writers claim that they are not trying to:

> ...frame a syllabus of instruction or to prescribe in detail the methods by which teachers should proceed. Any such attempt would be useless, if not actually harmful, for several reasons. In the first place, English is the last subject in which a teacher should be bound by hard and fast rules. No subject gives more scope for individuality of treatment or for varied experiment; in none is the personal quality of the teacher more important. In the second place, schools themselves differ materially from one another [and] these differences must be met by corresponding varieties of method (cited in Protherough and King, 1995, p.8).

As Protherough and King point out:

> A tacit convention was thus established between teachers on one side and those on the other side with statutory duties to ensure effective schooling...that...there would be no central prescription of curriculum or methodology (1995, p.8).

The authorities were comfortable with allowing teachers a high degree of professional autonomy over both curriculum and pedagogy. Teachers were trusted both to experiment and to use their unique 'personal qualities' in their classrooms.

Newbolt and Sampson took up the 'civilizing' crusade of Arnold, in particular Sampson argued: 'We are still a nation of Barbarians, Materialists and Philistines' (1921, p.17). Respectively, they published the Newbolt Report (1921), which is concerned with English at school and university level, and *English for the English* (1921) which focuses on English in the elementary classroom, 'together lay the basis of...theory and practice [of English teaching] at least until the 1960s' (Jeffcoate, 1992, p.34). The Newbolt Report was a further attempt to rid from the English classroom practices that were deemed to be a Dickensian 'grind', a 'stiffening process' or necessitate the 'gritting of teeth' (Newbolt 1921, p.20). The civilizing nature of books was emphasised and literature was given the elevated status of: 'one of the chief temples of the human spirit, in which all should worship' (Newbolt, 1921, p.20). Protherough and Atkinson credit the Newbolt report with bringing together four key defining concepts which form a solid platform on which the subject of English was developed and which fit clearly into a progressive tradition which emphasises the importance of 'personal growth', they are:

> ...the universal need for literacy as the core of the curriculum, the developmental importance of children's self-expression, a belief in the power of literature for moral and social improvement, and a concern for the "full development of mind and character" (1994, p.7).

Again, it is clear that specific content standards seem at odds with these broad aims which seek to develop largely immeasurable qualities such as morality and creativity; qualities which other giants of English teaching such as F.R. Leavis and I.A. Richards vigorously championed (Stevens and McGuinn, 2004).

Jeffcoate believes that:

> In the 1920s and 1930s the battle lines were drawn up, which have not shifted much since, between those who followed Sampson and the Newbolt report in their advocacy of a child-centred philosophy and more active and creative teaching methods, and those campaigning for teacher-directed and knowledge-based learning and a firm grounding in what are now known as the 'basic skills'(1992, p.36).

Whilst there is some value in this division, the idea of a 'battle' with proponents of basic skills on one side is misleading. Sampson (1911) was very keen for all students to be able to speak using received pronunciation and was adamant that every student should be able to write accurately. He certainly wanted students to have 'basic skills' and he stated clearly that 'whatever the nature of the livelihood that actually awaits them at fourteen or sixteen...they must all be able to speak, to read, to write'(Sampson, 1911, p.11). What he railed against was the idea that everything can be reduced to testable content:

> Our elementary school system is Ptolemaic. It has chosen the wrong centre. It has always been based, either overtly or tacitly, upon the inculcation of the kind of knowledge that has a producible result or 'answer', something that can be tested, examined, marked...Calling that education is like examining churches for their percentage of public conversions and calling that religion (ibid).

The importance of pleasure and play as an antidote to reductive teaching was clearly expressed by Sampson (1911, p.54), who argued that 'If literature in schools is not a delight, if it is not, in all senses, a 'recreation' an experience in creative reception, it is a failure'. On the teaching of Shakespeare he stated that 'Anything in our treatment that makes Shakespeare dull or distorted is a crime against his spirit it is "from the purpose of playing"' (Sampson, 1911, p.60).

Pleasure and play are, of course, very difficult to measure. Made nearly one hundred years ago, Sampson's arguments directly counter Ravitch's assertion, cited above, that 'if mastery of the standard is neither measurable nor demonstrable, then it is probably so vague that it has little meaning or value for teachers and students'. Delight cannot be

measured. Therefore, the fundamental fault line is not between those who advocate basic skills and those who do not (it is difficult to find any of the writers most closely associated with the progressive tradition arguing that basic skills are not important) but between those who think that the way to teach English is to pre-specify content into discrete obejctives and those who think such an activity is reductive; between those who think that teaching English can be neat, orderly and linear and those who think that working with children to develop their use of their mother tongue is necessarily organic and iterative and playful. Active and creative teaching methods do not preclude a very specific focus on a predetermined objective, but certain conceptualisations of English do and they have long been articulated. Eisner, an insightful commentator on the place of content standards or objectives, in a passage which seems highly relevant to today's English teachers, reminds us that:

> The Progressive spirit was not to be bridled by the formulation of hundreds of specific educational objectives because education as process and flux was a dynamic affair in which the teacher was to make educational capital out of the spontaneous developments emerging in the classroom. Furthermore, children did not progress in the neat systematic steps implied by...educational objectives (1985, p.22).

The argument against specified content and standardised assessment in English is taken up repeatedly by writers in the progressive tradition, one element of which Stevens and McGuinn (2004) have called the Romantic tradition. Jackson (1965), in *English versus Examinations,* argues against delineating the boundaries of the subject and examining prescribed content. He reinforces the idea that a key aim of English is to lead to wisdom through enjoyment, 'to draw in as much of the pupils' genuine joys, interests, fears and energies as possible'(Jackson, 1965, p.10). He was concerned that examinations could come to define content by default (the assessment tail could wag the curriculum dog) and suggests that any attempt to define English by reference to content will result in a reductive version of English that practitioners should guard against:

> Examinations necessarily are the terrain of the measurable, and our prime concern is with the play of the sensibility...Examinations produce a new sense of what English is. Their power, their concern for the markable is a chief reason for the continuance of that other version of 'English' whose constituent parts are grammar, precis, spelling, comprehension exercises, etc. It soons builds up into a self-sufficient subject with its own mechanical drive - its own techniques, texts, attendants, and its own minds, endorsed by and endorsing it (ibid).

Whitehead also fits into the progressive tradition. Writing *The Disappearing Dais* in 1966, he begins by citing Sampson's emotive statement that English 'includes and transcends all subjects' since it is 'for English people the whole means of expression the attainment of which makes them articulate human beings, able to inherit the past, to possess the present and to confront the future'. The invocation of psychology has been crucial to many of the proponents of the 'personal growth' model of English and Whitehead makes very explicit references to the insights of Vygotsky and Luria in an attempt to substantiate Sampson's lyrical prose:

> The work of certain Russian psychologists...provides interesting direct confirmation of the way in which the child's perception of reality takes its structure and patterning from language, as his acquisition of this enables him to sort out his impressions into generalised categories incorporating the accumulated experience of past generations (1966, p.13).

Whitehead then recounts that he has read a text by Professor I. A. Gordon which 'jettisoned firmly any lingering notion that English can be thought of as a "content subject", and made plain that the acquisition of information (knowledge *about* the English language, or knowledge *about* English books or English authors) can never be of more than marginal importance to it.' The mother tongue, so tied up with the development of thought and personality, Whitehead contends, must be given special treatment and cannot be contained within the confines of lists of objectives.

Medway offers some insight as to how such 'special treatment' of the mother tongue was reflected in classroom practice. He has suggested that:

> An approach based on personal experience and social issues did indeed motivate many pupils, with the result that impressive new achievements in writing and drama were recorded. Ordinary lives of ordinary children were dignified as worthy matter for the English lesson. English became more enjoyable and less redolent of a stuffy official culture (1990, p.25).

John Dixon developed these themes when he wrote *English for Growth* in 1967. This book documents the seminal Dartmouth conference at which both Jackson and Whitehead (cited above) and Holbrook (cited below) were present. English teachers gathered from the United Kingdom and the United States to discuss the future of the subject. This seems now to be a symbol of a profession taking control of its future, a sign of practitioners feeling sufficiently empowered to bother spending significant time and resource discussing

the nature and purpose of their subject and to engage intellectually with other disciplines such as sociology and psychology. It is important to reiterate that there were substantive disagreements within the progressive tradition and that the Dartmouth conference marked the point at which the London School (which foregrounded the individual's personal 'culture') came to dominate over the Cambridge School (which foregrounded growth through the reading of great literature) (Bousted, 1999; Allen, 1980; Nicholas and McGuinn, 2004). Nevertheless, such disagreements are of marginal importance here. What is highly pertinent is that during their discussions, the delegates at the Dartmouth conference openly debated the possibility of breaking English down into discrete parts and concluded that it was neither achievable, nor necessary:

> ...the attempt to derive a rational sequence for the teaching of English...seems open to three major objections. In the first place, there is no body of agreement as to the nature of this structure...Secondly, the search for this kind of 'structure' as a guiding principle leads to a retrogressive emphasis on 'knowledge' ...as opposed to 'ability to use'. And, thirdly, the desire for a step-by-step articulation leads...to a demand that the English teacher's field of activity be restricted to that which can be made incremental.' ...hopes for a definition in terms of 'the great and simple structuring ideas' are fed by the illusion that all subjects are akin to Mathematics (Dixon, 1967, p.84).

Eisner, also writing in 1967, sought to highlight the dangers of taking a uniform approach to the teaching of Mathematics and English:

> In some subject areas, such as Mathematics...it is possible to specify with great precision the particular operation or behaviour the student is to perform after instruction. In other subject areas, especially the arts, such specification is frequently not possible, and when possible may not be desirable...Here standards are unapplicable; here judgement is required (2004, p.87).

Marshall takes up this theme and invokes the work of Sadler (1989) to find 'ways forward' for English teachers who are faced with the difficulty of attending to students' 'progress' in a subject that does not lend itself to linear progression through specifiable content:

> For complex phenomena, use of a fixed set of criteria (and therefore the analytic approach) is potentially limiting (Sadler, 1989, p.132). His reasons for believing this are two fold. To begin with, he argues, any list that exhaustively mapped out all features of good writing would be far too long to be meaningful. Moreover, he believed, the features of good writing are not discrete. They overlap (2007, p.4).

Marhsall's (2007) view echoes Eisner's call for 'judgement'. She recommends that teachers use 'guild' knowledge to understand and assess progress in English. Guild

knowledge about English emerges through immersion in texts, not through the process of breaking something down into parts; the quality of a piece of writing is often greater than the sum of its parts due to the subtle and complex ways in which the parts interact.

Shayer (1972) contends that the idea that English can be neatly laid out in an inventory of objectives is the 'content myth'. He, like so many others whose work is steeped in the theory and practice of English teaching, asserts that English cannot be broken down into a body of factual knowledge; the subject simply does not lend itself naturally to syllabus planning, systematization and examination. In the early 1970s, the voices of Hewett and Lewis claiming the elusive nature of English seemed to adumbrate the battles to come in the next decade: 'However rigid a scheme may be in other subjects, in English it cannot possibly be an account of what will happen in class' (Hewett, 1970, p.271). 'A technical activity automatically absorbs every non-technical activity or transforms it into a technical activity. If this were to occur in English without considerable compensatory results the loss would be too great to contemplate with equanimity...' (Lewis, 1970, p. 300).

One of the strongest advocates of the organic, non-linear nature of English was David Holbrook. Shayer (1972, p.148), writing about Holbrook's *English for Maturity* (1961) and *English for the Rejected* (1964) credits Holbrook with being Sampson's successor and 'initiating the second major battle in the same war' against instrumentalism in English teaching. In *English for Meaning* (1979), the title of which is in itself thought-provoking for current practitioners, Holbrook echoes Arnold when he fulminates against any reductive tendencies in the teaching of English. He articulates a polarity between explicit and creative teaching:

> Every creative act, and every lesson, is a 'surrender to creative fate'. The other terminology – 'control' and 'competence' – avoids the complexities by implying that we can deal explicitly with entities. This is to falsify. We can only make these capacities seem more accessible and controllable if we implicitly reduce them thus to mechanistic and functional dimensions by our terminology (Holbrook, 1979, p. 40).

The idea of 'falsification' is an interesting one, it suggests that we can only *pretend* that the life in the English classroom is neat and linear. Holbrook's 'falsification' foreshadows Ball's use of the term 'fabrication' (Ball, 1997) which is a constructed version of the truth that schools seek to portray to inspectors who are unwilling to acknowledge the

paradoxical and messy nature of schooling. MacIntyre asserts: 'among the central moral fictions of our age we have to place the peculiarly managerial fiction embodied in the claim to possess systematic effectiveness in controlling certain aspects of social reality' (1985, p.74).

Of course, the fact that there were engaged practitioners theorising about the importance of a creative spirit within the English classroom does not mean that all English teachers were responding to such ideas. In 1972, Shayer wryly notes that:

> It seems that teachers as a group prefer to know exactly what they are supposed to be doing, and are less happy when left to find their own way, however beneficial such freedom can be to their pupils if put to thoughtful and imaginative use – an accusation which, in 1971 as in 1921, will not be so very far from the truth with regard to the less adventurous majority (1972, p.67).

Britton, Martin and Rosen, notable advocates of the personal growth model, contrast their conception of English with the 'popular view of the English teacher's job' which is 'to teach children to use the language correctly. Some might add, "to teach them something about our heritage of literature"' (1970, p.4). Britton et al go on to argue that:

> If these were his aims – and they certainly seem to have been so in the past – the content of the English curriculum would contain grammar, vocabulary exercises concerned with right and wrong usage, and selected works of literature. This begins to look very familiar (ibid).

In the early 1980s, it was unclear what exactly the 'less adventurous majority' were doing in their classrooms. In 1982, in her book *Teaching English*, Evans echoes the claim of a long line of progressive writers and practitioners when she asserts that content standards are not conducive to good English teaching: 'No list could do justice to the flux of objectives which form and re-form before, during and after each lesson and which change for one pupil within a single lesson'(1982, p.15). Significantly, she also notes that 'No extensive research has explored those objectives most commonly adopted by teachers of English', which underlines the importance of empirical research at the present time. Evans did cite one study, which was Malcolm Yorke's inquiry into the priorities of English teachers; he found that:

> "With only very minor variations these junior, middle, secondary, preparatory, comprehensive, and public school teachers share much the same priorities in much the same order of importance when they teach literature". His teacher-sample

> stressed the emotional pleasure to be gained from reading and hoped to encourage long-term reading habits (ibid).

Emotional pleasure and long-term reading habits are difficult outcomes to measure, but Yorke's study suggests that such aims were widely shared by English teachers working in very different settings with children of all ages.

In 1984, Barnes, Barnes and Clarke published an empirical investigation of English teaching in the 'fifth form' (currently called year eleven) and 'lower sixth'. They give an account of the different approaches that a range of English departments in England took towards framing a syllabus. Aware of the possibility of standardisation caused by assessment, they ask whether 'because of examination pressures there will only be one version' of English (Barnes, Barnes and Clarke, 1984, p.246). However, they find little evidence of standardisation; of the 18 classes observed, a 'bewildering' 14 different examinations were taken (ibid). They conclude that in the year of their study, teachers of fifth form students worked within five, broad 'versions of English': cultural tradition; personal growth; belles lettres; basic skills and public rationality (Barnes, Barnes and Clarke, 1984, p. 247). These versions intersected and shifted depending on the teacher and the ability group that students had been placed in.

More recently, Bousted (1999) and Marshall (2000) studied the allegiances that teachers have to different versions of English. Both Bousted and Marshall conclude that the majority of teachers in their samples favoured the personal growth model. Bousted contends:

> that the philosophy of personal growth through English has retained its power to provide, for the English educational establishment, an underlying theoretical rationale for the practice of the subject (1999, p.57).

Having acknowledged the range of writers who cluster, sometimes uneasily, under the umbrella of a progressive tradition, it is worth restating the elements of this tradition that are most pertinent to my research. They are as follows: children should be treated as unique and potentially creative individuals; English teaching is a non-linear *process* which should develop personal and moral growth; prescribed content has a limited place in the subject; English is difficult to assess in a standardised manner; it should be taught holistically and not atomised; English is enjoyable. Therefore, the English teacher needs

autonomy to devise appropriate lessons and freedom to assess the aesthetic and personal qualities of a child's work. In the same way that the standards agenda described in Chapter One seems to have a logic, many of these progressive threads seem logically intertwined. *If* English is about the personal growth of a unique individual, *then* it is very difficult to prescribe content centrally; *if* there is no prescribed content, *then* it is very difficult to engage in standardised assessment.

2.3 Raising standards – a review of the rationale for the introduction of curriculum content and standardised assessment in English

A review of the literature which gives voice to the progressive tradition includes mostly references to practitioners and academics writing specifically about English teaching. However, by the mid-1970s, the absence of prescription in the subject of English, which had been part of a 'tacit convention...between teachers on one side and those on the other side with statutory duties to ensure effective schooling' (Protherough and King, 1995, p.8) was beginning to dissolve and the subject specific debates about the nature of English were eclipsed by a wider debate about the problems of progressive teaching methods. Trust in the teaching profession, as the following section of the literature review highlights, was diminishing. Therefore, the second way of 'thinking and knowing' about English teaching emerges mainly from the top downwards and not, as was the case with the progressive tradition, from the profession outwards.

In the context of this study, 1975 was notable for two reasons. Firstly, it was the year in which the Bullock Report on English teaching acknowledged a specific role for knowledge about language in the English curriculum. Burgess and Hardcastle (2000) contend that the report reflects Britton's desire to use Vygotskian insights to give English teaching a unifying rationale. However, Harold Rosen immediately critiqued the report and noted the possible schisms that the report may create:

> It is not difficult to detect behind the report's fair and mostly dispassionate tones the fact that in matters of language and the teaching of English in particular the battle-lines have been drawn. However faint they may seem there is no doubt that the fiercest debates are between those who believe in carefully constructed linear programmes, buttressed by claims for sequence, system and structure, and those who believe that development in language can only be achieved by working in a much more flexible and open-ended way (cited in David and Parker, 1978, p.xii).

He was emphasising another battle in the war that Sampson and Holbrook had fought. Secondly, it was the year of the William Tyndale affair. Riley (1998) has given a detailed account of the micro-politics of this Islington primary school's much publicised conflict. In her book, provocatively entitled *Whose School is it Anyway?*, she describes the way in which the head teacher and deputy head had different views on 'progressive' pedagogy, which caused considerable tension within the school. She also fully investigates the position of the governors and the pupils' interaction with the press to give a holistic picture of one institution's problems, which became a symbol of all that was perceived to be wrong in English education: chaotic classrooms; unaccountable teachers; illiterate students. Given that the media ran stories on the school for almost four months (Riley 1998), some of which described junior school children throwing glass milk bottles onto the infant playground and many of which claimed that trendy, progressive teachers were out of control, the Tyndale affair opened up significant discursive space for arguments in favour of increased state prescription which had, as Bassey (2005) argues, been closed in the aftermath of the Second World War.

In 1976, one year after the Bullock report and the William Tyndale affair, the British Labour Prime Minister, Jim Callaghan, made a key speech about education. Philips and Harper-Jones (2002, p.298) believe that 'Scholars are generally in agreement that "the moment of 1976" (Batteson, 1997) was significant in the history of education policy and debate in England and in Wales'. Callaghan raised a number of sharp and provocative questions which disrupted a post-war consensus on curriculum, pedagogy and teacher autonomy and clearly signposted the way towards 'the strategies, frameworks, curricula' that we have in place today:

> Let me repeat some of the fields that need study because they cause concern. There are the methods and aims of informal instruction, the strong case for the so-called 'core curriculum' of basic knowledge; next, what is the proper way of monitoring the use of resources in order to maintain a proper national standard of performance; then there is the role of the inspectorate in relation to national standards...(Callaghan, 1976).

From Callaghan's words can be discerned the seeds in England of a National Curriculum, prescribed pedagogies, increased monitoring and accountability mechanisms and OFSTED.

What of Wales? G.E. Jones (2006, p.265) has bluntly stated that 'From 1543 to 1999 Wales was wholly integrated into the British state' which seems to suggest that teachers in Wales were experiencing the same policy shifts as England. But Philips (2003, p.7) points out that responsibility for education was given to the Welsh Office in 1970. Moreover, Jones (1992) has argued that the year of the Ruskin speech saw the start of a different 'great debate' in Wales. Philips and Harper Jones (2002, p.299) state that 'the main legacy of the Ruskin speech for Wales was a preoccupation with the apparent 'failure' of comprehensive schools' and subsequent stirrings to demand a more differentiated education system from that of England. Yet throughout the 1970s, these were still mere stirrings and the policy differences between England and Wales remained insignificant.

If the Tyndale incident came to become a symbol for the parlous state of the teaching profession in the 1970s, Bassey (2005, p.15) is keen to point out that there is little evidence to suggest that standards were falling. He cites an interview between the researcher Peter Ribbens and Mark Carlisle, Education Minister (1979–81):

> Clearly Carlisle in 1980 saw the idea of 'falling standards' as a myth. 'I got fed up with constantly hearing people talking about falling standards in education. The plain truth is that at the time standards were not falling...To claim that they were diminishing in real terms seemed to me to fly in the face of the available evidence' (Ribbens and Sharratt, 1997, p.70).

Despite this, in the early 1980s Sir Keith Joseph 'started to use the powers formally vested in him as Secretary of State to curtail discussion with professional groups and to formulate policy directly through legislation' (Protherough and King, 1995, p.9). In his introduction to the volume of *Curriculum Matters* which concerned the subject of English teaching, he clearly states that 'the development of agreed national objectives for English teaching is...a particularly important part of the government's policies for raising standards in schools' (ibid). Harvey (2005) places the move towards reducing teacher professionalism into a broader trend towards neoliberalism. His analysis supports Broadfoot's assertion that *control* was more of a driver than standards which, as the above quotation suggests, were not falling:

> ...the...increase in the power of teachers to determine their own curricula and try out new 'progressive' methods during the 1960s had the effect of making the education system appear increasingly autonomous of any external control...To the extent that teachers could decide what they wanted to teach, how they wanted to

> teach it and whether they had been successful, with little reference to any outside authority, the dominant interests of the state were losing control of their most powerful agency of social reproduction (1996, p.58).

The argument that the specification of content and performance standards is more to do with politics than pedagogy is important to consider. It may explain the fault line between those who believe that education is amenable to neat and tidy 'inventorisation', numerical assessment and therefore control and those who feel that education is necessarily messy, experimental and non-linear and therefore requires trust in qualified professionals who must skilfully navigate the changing currents of the classroom.

Given the resistance to content standards described above, it is not difficult to see why, in 1984 when the HMI (Her Majesty's Inspectorate) document *English from 5 to 16* spelled out the objectives that children should have achieved in English by a certain age and included in them specific knowledge about grammatical terms, there was a 'furore' and 'indignation' (Jeffcoate, 1992, p.35). The Kingman Committee was hastily set up to set out a programme for English but Kingman himself had reservations about the report's final conceptualisation of the subject. As Mittins notes:

> ...significant doubt [is] attributed to Professor Kingman...about whether the general implication from using attainment targets that subjects could be mastered "rung by rung" as in climbing a ladder was justified. In particular he added, "mastery of English is not like that at all". He thought "there will be difficulties". Many teachers and teacher trainers in English have for years expressed convictions that English is not acquired and mastered as a first language progressively. English is not really susceptible to "linear" teaching (1988, p.86).

Therefore, even those tasked with setting out a ladder of objectives for English did not seem to be convinced that the intellectual rationale for such a project was sound.

In 1987 John Marenbon wrote an influential pamphlet (Bousted, 1999) for a right wing think tank called the Centre for Policy Studies. Entitled *English our English,* the pamphlet examines certain aspects of progressive thought that Marenbon termed the 'New Orthodoxy'. In this short piece, he argues against the progressive views that 'English is not just a subject' and that 'English teaching should be child centred'. In challenging these ideas, he clears the way to make a case for *content* to be placed firmly back at the centre of the subject for the first time since the Revised Code:

> Time given to a vague and generalized attempt to gain such virtues [as emotional growth] is time lost to the specific and rigorous studies which alone will foster them, English could be one of these studies, were it to pursue the simple and well-defined aims of teaching children to write and speak standard English correctly, and of initiating their acquaintance with the literary heritage of their language (Marenbon, 1987, p.5).

Marenbon, unlike Eisner or Dixon who stress the differences between Mathematics and English, is keen to stress their similarities:

> The good Mathematics teacher...will base his or her teaching...on his or her own, informed, view of what they need to know in order gradually to achieve a mastery of mathematical techniques. So long as English, too, is recognised as a subject, with definite aims, the same principles should guide its teachers (1994, p.19).

Sheila Lawlor was another influential voice who was critiquing the subject of English. Like Marenbon, she was writing for the ideologically motivated Centre for Policy Studies. She sought to replace a mercurial conception of English with something more concrete:

> The teaching of English today - even more so than of other subjects - suffers from too many ambitious but vague aims, and from a neglect of the importance of basic skills and knowledge. That is why pupils leave school unable to read precisely and confidently and to write clear, correct English (Lawlor, 1988, p.6).

If the debates of the mid 1970s and early 1980s were signaling shifting political ground, the 1988 Education Reform Act was seismic. It introduced a mixture of direct state control in the form of the National Curriculum which prescribed, in detail, primary and secondary curricular provision at all levels. It can be argued that the end was an efficient state and that the means was tight control of the levers which the politicians perceived that they could pull. Gamble asserts that:

> The difficulty of engineering serious retrenchment in state spending caused neo-liberal governments to focus instead on how to make the public sector more efficient ...They embraced enthusiastically the techniques of the new public management, with its audits, targets, internal markets, performance indicators and emphasis on outputs (2009, p.83).

As Bousted observes:

> Intense pressure was exerted from outside the profession to shape English curriculum practice in certain ways appropriately described as consistent with "liberal-conservative" restoration, on the one hand, and with the emergence of a new corporate managerial and economic rationalist agenda, on the other. Although there was much resistance from within the profession, nonetheless it is a reasonable

> observation that control over subject definition decisively shifted from the profession (2003, p.71).

The subject-specific arguments against content standards and rational sequences in English were overwhelmed by the tide of National Curriculum and assessment reforms which were driven more by politics than by pedagogy. As Whitty has argued, 'standardizing the curriculum in this way was partly geared towards establishing performance criteria with which to facilitate school accountability and consumer choice' (Whitty, 2008, p.169).

Within the national reforms, working parties were established to advise on subject-specific matters. Brian Cox was commissioned by the Secretary of State for Education to lead the English Subject Working Group. His report (DES, 1989) clearly acknowledges the different models of English teaching that circulate, which he put under the broad titles of: English as Growth; Cultural Heritage; Skills (or adult needs); Cross Curricular and Cultural Analysis. There was a certain amount of relief in the English teaching community following the Cox Report. Cox believes that his work was greeted with enthusiasm. Indeed, NATE (the National Association for Teachers of English) welcomed 'the philosophy of English which underpins the report' which they felt was a 'distillation of current thinking and practice that is principled, coherent, realistic and imaginative' (Jones, 1992, p.10). Jones believes that the reasons for this acceptance is Cox's validation of 'some themes that have been closely associated with progressive traditions in English teaching: the importance of talking and listening; the centring of classroom reading on "response" rather than "comprehension"' (ibid).

Yet Jeffcoate's critique highlights the dissonance between the National Curriculum and previous progressive positions. He writes that :

> Much of what is amiss with English in the National Curriculum has nothing to do with the statutory provisions for English as such but is the result of adopting an almost wholly inappropriate model for curriculum development – that of American rational curriculum planning (Jeffcoate, 1992, p.60).

Other writers such as Noddings (2007b, 2003); Apple (2004) and Adey (2004), write about the dangers of objectives-led teaching and these critics echo so many of the voices critiqued above that have argued that English must be seen holistically. Jeffcoate (1992, p.61) contends that 'a more flexible and tentative model than that of pre-specified objectives is required which makes full allowances for individual creativity...the heart of

the subject, its very *raison d'etre* – the making and reading of literature – is simply not translatable into formulations of this kind.' However, the terms used by Jeffcoate: 'flexible'; 'tentative'; 'individual creativity', are difficult to accommodate within the managerialist culture described by Gamble which requires 'audits'; 'targets' and 'performance indicators'.

Meanwhile, in Wales, Philips and Harper Jones (2002, p.301) suggest that 1988 was 'a dual milestone in the history of education policy in England and Wales' because it 'established different linguistic, curricular and cultural provisions and, probably even more significantly, the establishment of the institutional apparatus (through bodies such as the Curriculum Council for Wales - CCW) to administer them'. Jones (1994); Daugherty et al. (2000) and Phillips (2003) trace the gradual differentiation of Welsh policy from that of England. The most obvious difference was the focus on bilingualism, but there were also significant changes made to the Geography and History curriculum although, notably, *not* to the English curriculum (Philips and Harper Jones, 2002).

The level of detailed prescription ushered in by the National Curriculum did not go unchallenged in either polity. In a highly cogent critique of National Curriculum assessment in English, Barrs points out that:

> Though the rhetoric of the National Curriculum depicts PoS [Programmes of Study] as the programme for the curriculum while presenting ATs [Attainment Targets] as the framework for assessment only, even a brief consideration of criterion-referenced assessment shows that this kind of assessment is designed to impact on curriculum, and is implicitly linked to educational objectives. *The ATs, therefore, constitute an alternative programme for the curriculum* - and the only one which will be subject to assessment (1990, p.15).

The problem here is that the attainment targets inevitably specify what is tangible, and potentially omit more important but more mercurial aims, such as personal growth, self-expression or the development of a unique and authentic voice.

In an article entitled 'Art made tongue-tied by authority' Griffiths (1994) explores the way in which creative and artistic practitioners can be silenced by audit-driven authorities. He argues that 'The school year 1992/3 was, to put it mildly, an interesting one for teachers of English in state maintained secondary schools in England and Wales' (Griffiths, 1994, p. 33). It was the year that the government introduced national Key Stage Three testing and

abandoned a version of the National Curriculum which had been reasonably favourably received. 'The combination of curriculum change by fiat and remarkably inept, and inapt, testing procedures provoked a strong backlash' (ibid). As Hughes (1997, p.193) notes, 'By the spring of 1993 [the National Curriculum], had produced a torrent of noisy opposition from an unprecedented alliance of parent groups, school governors, LEA chief executives, teacher unions and head-teachers...'. Ultimately, it was around the subject of assessment that English teaching professionals again became able to voice their concerns in the form of a boycott of the 1993 SATs. Coles suggests:

> The boycott was a symbolic rejection of all that had been imposed on education. The wider opposition to the tests embraced a rejection of the whole Conservative market model of education with its reliance on crude school by school comparisons in the form of league tables (1994, p.16).

The late 1980s to the mid 1990s were torrid times for many teachers as the disciplinary technologies of standardised curricula, standardised testing and league tables were imposed on the profession. Many teachers came to accept the National Curriculum, but as shown above, there was organised resistance to standardised tests, especially by secondary English teachers. However, the resistance did not result in the abolition of the tests and the controlling mechanisms of the standards agenda were firmly embedded when the Labour Party formed the government in 1997.

2.4 The Labour government implements the National Strategies in England; the devolved Welsh assembly begins to take its own path

When New Labour came into power in 1997, it did not publicly seek to reopen the curriculum debate or to abolish standardised tests (Davies and Edwards, 2001). Rather, the new government adopted much of the previous administration's policy and rhetoric of standards, testing and accountability. Ravitch reflects on a similar shift in America under Obama. She describes the way in which even the more liberal American press pushed the President to appoint to the role of Secretary of Education, not Darling-Hammond, an advocate of teacher professionalism, but a 'real' reformer who supported 'testing, accountability and choice':

> True reformers, said the pundits and editorialists, fought the teachers' unions and demanded merit pay based on student test scores. True reformers closed low-performing schools and fired administrators and teachers....Slogans long advocated

> by policy wonks on the right had migrated to and been embraced by policy wonks on the left (Ravitch, 2010, p.22).

New Labour and their 'policy wonks' such as Michael Barber, sought to demonstrate that under their 'command and control' strategy (Barber, 2007, p.3), 'standards', measured by national testing, would rise, failing schools would be put into 'special measures' and teachers would be paid on the basis of performance. The Labour government rolled out the well-funded, highly prescriptive content standards and prescribed pedagogy of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. Goodwyn and Findlay (2003, p.23) claim that 'The "New" Labour government was absolute about occupying the central political ground and thus drawing on what would previously have been perceived as right-wing thinking - the NLS [National Literacy Strategy] made a perfect educational vehicle for this ideological repositioning'. Moreover, although the detailed pedagogical prescriptions that were inherent in the Strategies documents were 'non-statutory', David Blunkett (then Secretary of State at the Department for Education and Employment) made a statement that reveals the powerful control that his Department and the Inspectorate had assumed over the classroom:

> The literacy hour came into being in September. Three hundred thousand framework documents have been issued, and training for co-ordinators in every school and training materials for every teacher have been provided...The chief inspector has a very clear role in assessing, through inspection, whether schools are providing the quality and meeting the standards that we have stipulated. His job, therefore, is to assess whether teaching methods are appropriate (Hansard,1998, Nov 19th).

Blunkett's approach meant that the Labour Party did not side with the old HMI arguments in favour of 'the broad curriculum, with its suspiciously progressive ideas about child-centred teaching, problem-solving, integrated studies and skills-building' (Taylor, 1999, p.37). Davies (2001, p.100) has argued that, on the contrary, the Strategies were the 'pedagogical equivalent of painting by numbers'. The literacy and numeracy hours were almost universally implemented (Goodwyn and Findlay, 2003) and the level of government micro-management which resulted from these initiatives has prompted some to ask whether or not there is now a 'state theory of learning' in English schools (Alexander, 2009). The Secondary English Strategy emphasized the importance of stating explicit objectives at the start of every lesson; it stipulated timings and stressed that plenary sessions must seek to find out whether the objectives set at the outset had been achieved by

the end of the lesson. There was a clear move from the prescription of 'mere' content to the prescription of a very specific pedagogy.

K. Jones has suggested that by the late 1980s there was:

> ...a lack self-awareness within progressive English teaching. In practice the range of what counted as progressive teaching was very wide...But this very diverse activity was not accompanied by parallel efforts to clarify and debate differences (1992, p.15).

Indeed, if the progressive strands had been more clearly separated (into, for example, positions on speaking and listening; the central nature of the child; the difficulties inherent in standardised assessment), the problems of introducing an objectives-led approach into the peculiarly mercurial subject may have been better articulated. Consequently, the National Strategy may have met with more resistance.

It was not just the power of central prescriptions that weakened the progressive defence of English. There was growing concern that progressive pedagogical approaches may have been the reason for troublingly high levels of adult illiteracy. In 1927, Treble raised questions about the 'new permissiveness' of progressive educators. He argued: 'From psychology we have progressed by easy steps to the *pleasant*, the *easy*, the *self-expressive*...Has it taught the child how to write a letter? How to speak in intelligible sentences? How to spell?...It is doubtful'(Shayer, 1972, p.87). Sixty five years later, officials were again wondering how best to teach people basic skills:

> It is staggering that over the years millions of children have been leaving school hardly able to read and write...Roughly 20% of adults – that is as many as 7 million people – have more or less severe problems with basic skills, in particular with what is generally called 'functional literacy' and 'functional numeracy' (DfEE, 1992, p.2).

Such statistics on illiteracy are not to be ignored, but if difficulties with basic skills are to be blamed on progressive teaching, the evidence needs to be strong. Holbrook's (1964) *English for the Rejected,* written by a reflective practitioner with a great deal of experience, was a thoughtful attempt to develop a pedagogy that specifically addresses ways, as the title clearly states, of 'training literacy for the lower streams'.

As well as external scrutiny of English teachers' practice coming from a government concerned about high levels of illiteracy, increasingly there were pertinent questions being asked from within the discipline. Medway (1989) and Kress (1994) were asking whether the Cambridge and London schools, which promoted cultural heritage and personal growth, disempowered young people by focusing on literary text types which they were unlikely to come across in adult life (Stevens and McGuinn, 2004, p.64). However, such critiques do not necessarily justify the introduction of the explicit pedagogies embodied in the National Strategy.

What are the intellectual arguments underlying the prescriptive approach to teaching advocated in the Strategy? What is the evidence base which justifies a move away from progressive teaching and towards a more scripted pedagogy? It is difficult to find literature that elucidates this. Adey (2004) notes that the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies 'were written by small teams and then imposed on the nation's schools... The government was in a hurry and was not to be deflected by academic niceties'. In 1999, an *ex-post facto* rationale of the Literacy Strategy was written by Roger Beard who admits that the Strategies were a response to performative pressures:

> The central purpose of the National Literacy Strategy is to raise standards substantially. The need to target standards in this way has been given priority in the light of research findings from comparisons of reading attainment in different countries...(1999, p.9).

In the opening pages of his short review, Beard (1999, p.7) cites the Bullock report and reiterates the claims that have been made for literature: '...that it helps to shape the personality, refine the sensibility, sharpen the critical intelligence...'. However, Beard does not show how the pedagogy of the Literacy Strategy supports many of the wider aims that English teaching has had historically. Rather, he takes research from the school effectiveness movement and bluntly applies their findings to the English classroom:

> In a meta-analysis of research from across the world, Jaap Scheerens (1992) provides a clear summary of these factors. Two characteristics of school effectiveness have 'multiple empirical research confirmation': 1 structured teaching i.e. making clear what has to be learnt, dividing material into manageable units, teaching in a well-considered sequence...2 effective learning time...(Beard, 1999, p.17).

Beard does not ask whether these schools are effectively teaching English or Mathematics or whether two such divergent subjects should be taught in the same way. He also uncritically cites Slavin's influential *Success for All.* Widely adopted in America and still highly influential, this programme requires 'explicit targets; detailed systematic and on-going profiles of pupil progress and systematic direct teaching...specific literary instruction'. However, Beard does not acknowledge that there is fierce opposition to Slavin's position in the United States. Matthew (2002) describes the strong antipathy that exists towards *Success For All,* not least, say its detractors, because it reduces students' capacity to think critically. Stanley Pogrow, an American academic, has challenged Slavin's claims that explicit teaching is the best way to improve the literacy of students. Pogrow (1999) contends that disadvantaged students fail largely because they do not have enough experience talking to adults about ideas. Consequently, they need help to develop the thinking skills to deal with abstractions, as opposed to tightly controlled, systematic teaching.

Another weakness of Beard's review, is that there is no reference to the extensive body of literature on English teaching which warns of the dangers of the explicit. Mittins states:

> The fact that text-books, examinations and linguistic theories promote excessive segmentation into bits and pieces called parts of speech, age-related objectives, spelling, punctuation, correct usage and so on tends to confuse categorization with explanation...The circumstance that English is catalogued as one 'subject' in a series of separable subjects making up a curriculum and that it is measured by examinations may involve 'inappropriate quantification' – J.S. Mill's term for 'an unlucky attempt to give numerical precision to things which do not permit of it.' (1988, p.7).

Beard (1999, p.19) cites research which 'suggests that schools which build on an externally developed programme (using an 'off the shelf' approach) experience greater success than schools which implement locally developed school-wide projects' . However, there are no examples in Beard's work of opposing positions taken by writers such as Mittins (cited above) or Evans who concludes that:

> It would be tempting to conclude with a 'check-list' of objectives. We could perhaps derive some comfort from ticking them off week by week, but we would soon find ourselves with a list as seductively linear as the Contents page of one of the many apparently fool-proof English course books. We would soon lose sight of the distinction between teaching and learning, between aim and achievement (1982, p.19).

Many professionals involved in English teaching and lecturing have attacked the Literacy Strategy. Marshall (2002, p.1) describes it as 'a half-baked set of reactionary prejudices overcooked by expensive PR'. Dymoke (2004, p.45) asks how those training secondary English teachers can stem the Strategy 'flood tide'. Bousted asserts:

> Reasoned argument, rooted in research evidence, has been expressed repeatedly and powerfully by critics of the Strategy. However the Strategy is supported by a power base, and by a funding base, which has meant that it has been able to operate, heretofore, with apparent impunity - hence its imposition upon the profession without consultation and, if this were not serious enough, without convincing research evidence...(2003, p.77).

If policy was being imposed without an uncontested evidence base in England, from 1999 onwards, the position in Wales began to shift significantly. The Welsh Assembly took charge of Welsh education policy. As previously noted, in 2004, Jane Davidson, the then Welsh Minister for Education was keen to do things 'our way' (Davidson, 2004, p.46). In 2004 ACCAC (the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales) and DARG (Daugherty Assessment Review Group) published reports which examined the role of standardised assessment tests. Both reports were based on Wales-wide consultation with practitioners and other stakeholder groups. Richard Daugherty, author of one of the influential reports claims:

> A consistent feature of the stance taken by Ministers in this new policy environment in Wales has been that policies should be 'evidence-informed'. Several high profile policy reviews in education have offered opportunities for those involved to explore the nature of the evidence that is potentially relevant to policy and to judge how that evidence should impact upon policy development. Academic research is one category of evidence that has informed those reviews and academic researchers, as individuals, have been given significant roles in the process of review in Wales (2008, p.73).

Indeed, Daugherty has played a major role in the development of assessment policy in Wales. The Daugherty Report (2004) recommended both the abolition of the SATs in Wales and the introduction of a new policy of teacher assessment across the Key Stages, supported by a funded programme of cross stage moderation. These policies have been implemented and many of Daugherty's 26 recommendations have been followed. Daugherty's Review Group (2004, p.25) 'came to the view that the... "twin track" approach [SATs and teacher assessment] to measuring pupil attainment in the core subjects...was wasteful of resources'. They also reported that 'preparing and practising

for written tests contributes little to the widely acknowledged educational goal of helping maturing young people to become more autonomous, self-directed learners' (2004, p.22) and stated their intention to design an 'assessment system which should be reflecting, rather than determining, priorities for learning and teaching' (2004, p.25).

In addition, there was a swift and important shift towards 'the broad curriculum, with its suspiciously progressive ideas about child-centred teaching, problem-solving, integrated studies and skills-building' (Taylor, 1999, p.37). The first three statements about the new curriculum in Wales, posted on the Welsh Assembly Government's website[3] are 'The school curriculum: focuses on the learner; ensures that appropriate skills development is woven through the curriculum; offers reduced subject content with an increased focus on skills'. Phillips and Harper Jones (2002, p.301) argue that in England New Labour remained committed to the Conservative priorities of 'standards', 'choice' and 'accountability', but that the discourse articulated in Wales, which is encompassed in the document *The Learning Country* (Welsh Assembly Government, 2001) is 'very different and therefore is extremely important in the contemporary history and politics of education in the English/Welsh context'. Such arguments reinforce the relevance of comparing the experiences of Welsh and English teachers since devolution, in order to understand the way in which policy discourses shape practice.

2.5 Emerging academic interpretations of a shifting policy environment

In England, unprecedented levels of prescription have been combined with a new pace of change. Tomlinson (2006, p.49) has noted that from the 'immediate post-war period to the Conservative election victory of 1979, there were no more than a handful of educational Acts passed in the UK parliament; since then more than 40 have been enacted'. Gillies (2008) attributes this in part to the expectation that if the Conservative administration legislated heavily in education, then the Labour Party could be accused of lacking interest or commitment if it failed to do the same, which seems to be a somewhat childish way of thinking about a national education system. Yet Smithers (2001, p.425) stated that New Labour 'desperately wanted to be seen to be doing good things...Every day without a new

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3 http://cymru.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/curriculumassessment/arevisedcurriculumforwales/;jsessionid=xvWpKSXSwN52ZbgKYfphtkgJ6yL2yf4z8x6hQJ0ZnL8F49BjtTht!-692465818?lang=en&ts=1 (Accessed 1/01/2010)

education headline was a day wasted'. Hodgson and Spours (2006) blame the policy maelstrom on 'the increased number of bodies, agencies, advisers and think tanks used by government in recent times' which 'necessarily increases the potential for more policy 'outputs' of whatever form' and suggests that policy is merely 'aimed at creating a positive spectacle' (cited in Gillies, 2008, p.422).

The shift from control to spectacle has implications for practitioners. Gewirtz, Dickson, and Power (2004) note that '"spin" is not something added to policy texts but has become constitutive of it. In other words, "spin" is embedded within policy' (cited in in Gillies, 2008, p.418). If this is the case, then it is unsurprising that current official conceptions of English are in line with what Britton, Rosen and Martin refer to as 'the *popular* view of the English teacher's job' (1970, p.4) because being *popular* is the government's core aim. Moreover, if education policy becomes a process of showing the electorate how standards have relentlessly improved, there is a risk that teaching becomes an exercise in showing politicians what they want to see. At this juncture, the postmodern critiques of the education system which acknowledge the 'fabrications' and simulacrums that teachers engage in (Ball, 1997; Atkinson, 2003) become highly relevant. Moreover, if the government's emphasis is merely on presenting a positive picture of neat, linear progress, as opposed to educating young people in the messy business of living, then why would teachers not collude in the reporting of numbers going in the right direction? The acclaimed children's author Phillip Pullman bluntly states that:

> Of course we have to cheat. In a system that has nothing to do with true education, nothing to do with a deep, liberal, wise, tentative, rich response to literature, but everything to do with meeting targets and measuring performance levels, then the only way for honest people to survive is to cheat, and do so with a clear conscience (cited in Fleming and Stevens, 2010, p.40).

Cheating is a theme which is developed in Chapter Four of this Research Project.

Barker (2008) argues that the government's focus on spin and the subsequent constant overlaying of new, centralised policies onto the education sector is causing a type of system failure and, from my perspective as a practitioner struggling to integrate and align the range of policy initiatives that come at me, his metaphor strikes me as particularly apt. He suggests that the:

> ... policy signal box that has emerged from years of reform legislation functions like one of those ICT networks that combine several generations of computer. Some national agencies (NCSL, [National College for School Leadership] TDA [Training and Development Agency for Schools]) advocate vision, leadership and teamwork but others (Ofsted, Standards and Effectiveness Unit) create a culture of compliance that discourages initiative and innovation...(Barker, 2008, p.679).

It is the practitioners who are left to navigate these very choppy policy waters and to attempt to second guess the priorities of the inspectorate. Deem, Hillyard and Reed note that:

> By attempting to combine competing, if not conflicting, logics of action and governance in the same institutional fields and forms (Richards and Smith, 2004), New Labour has intensified the inherent diversity and complexity of policymaking and implementation (Davis, 2000) to such an extent that the mediating and interpreting role of various occupational interest groups and organizational factions becomes even more critical to service outcomes (2007, p.16).

Yet it will be difficult for any party to replace the ageing policy signal box with something new and coherent when the conflicting aims of education are so difficult to reconcile and when *control* over the education system, despite attempts to lessen prescription and encourage creativity, remains politically pragmatic. The strictures of globalisation (sketched by Grek in Chapter One) which precipitated Western governments to take more control over their education systems have not gone away; neither has the pressure that Callaghan was under to ensure that large government departments give the public value for money.

In 2005, the QCA (the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority in England) decided to attempt to think coherently about education policy when it held a series of meetings to discuss the future of English. Five thousand people were involved and the participant list reads like a 'Who's Who?' in the world of English education policy, but the resulting publication is an uncontroversial summary of the participants' inputs. The booklet acknowledges the different views of contributors but prints them under shiny yellow headings and almost literally glosses over them. The following comments criticize plans to introduce a qualification in 'Functional English' and the tone is redolent of the progressive practitioners cited in the beginning of this chapter:

> ...but others fear it leads to reduction, limitation and loss of creativity: describing a particular form of English as functional and separating it from other forms of English makes it appear a discrete and arid entity and 'basic'to English is a mind

> that connects, interprets, questions, associates, values and imagines (QCA, 2005, p.30).

However, this potent critique is visually eclipsed by the following soundbite which appears in large, yellow speech bubbles in the margin of the same page:

> 'How can we possibly think that our children can be more progressive than we are if they are not taught the basics and taught them well?' Parent.

One subject on which the writers of the report claimed to hear a unified teaching voice was the SATs:

> There is a strong consensus among teachers that the current emphasis on high-stakes summative assessment should change...Many teachers report the focus on meeting the requirements of external examinations and tests reduces their willingness to take risks and introduce more creative, challenging texts and teaching approaches (QCA, 2005, p.42).

Indeed, the abolition of the SATs in England can be seen as part of an intentional, if earlier than planned, move away from a strict, performative 'straitjacket'. However, Hartley (2006, p.13) points out: 'Notwithstanding the references...to customising or co-producing ...Standardisation remains. What emerges is...a personalised pick-and-mix of pedagogy and curriculum, but only from the standard menu, which is drawn up by the government'. In England, The Children, Schools and Families Select Committee Report has attempted to articulate the shifts that are in progress:

> The centre, since the Education Reform Act 1988, has prescribed very substantially what schools should do and then has monitored whether there is compliance, through either Ofsted or tests. When we move to a period of less prescription from the centre and more innovation from the front line, which I think is the step we are now at, it means the centre has to do more than simply monitor; it has to look for intelligence. We need an intelligence system that says, "Where is the most interesting innovation occurring, and how can the centre assist to apply rigour and identify it as good?" (DCSF, 2009b, p.34).

What the committee fails to acknowledge is that what is 'good' is value laden. Pedagogical choices are ideological choices. They express a belief system. Objectives-led teaching in English is often based on *beliefs*: that the aim of education is to raise standards; that standards in English are raised by defining, through detailed plans, a series of explicit learning goals. 'Creative' teaching is often an expression of 'progressive' values which suggest that the aim of English teaching is not to raise standards but to educate a child's moral and aesthetic sensibilities. As Dennis argued in the 1960s, 'English work in schools

is based on literature, not in order to concentrate on some isolable 'literary content'...but for the lessons in life and in writing which it offers. It is not art for art's sake. It is art for life's sake'(cited in Allen, 1980, p.15).

There are a number of academics investigating the link between performativity and a lack of pleasure and creativity in the curriculum. Craft and Jeffrey (2008, p.579) have noted that the 'swing in policy' from performative initiatives which involve high levels of audit and low levels of trust in professional judgement to 'creativity/creative learning' may leave 'some practitioners frozen, as if blinded by headlights, unsure whether the changed values of empowerment, agency, engagement and generativity are real or imagined, to be short-lived or long-standing...'. Maisuria (2005, p.144) also appreciates this tension and argues passionately against the straitjacket of standardisation on the grounds that:

> A creative curriculum's postmodern epistemological perspective is 'non-linear ... and highly interpretive' rather than a prescripted process of learning (Freedman, 1996, p.48).

Lumby (2010) critiques the standards agenda on the grounds that it reduces autonomy and therefore enjoyment in learning. In an article entitled *Enjoyment and learning: policy and secondary school learners' experience in England,* Lumby (2010, p.9) states that 'The greater degree of enjoyment experienced in Year 12 was related by some to experiencing more control'. She concludes that:

> If enjoying learning is to be a priority, then the focus needs to move from attainment and its relationship with satisfaction, to learning and its connection to flow states. The latter do not sit comfortably with the current standards-driven and attainment focused element in policy (Lumby, 2010, p.17).

Hall (2004) also highlights the link between pedagogy and enjoyment; in an interview with Stephen Anwyll (Director of the National Literacy Strategy from 2001-2004) she asks: 'are you concerned about the marginalisation of enjoyment, bearing in mind, for example, the PIRLS [Progress in International Reading Literacy Study] finding that England emerged relatively low in terms of positive attitudes to reading, despite overall high achievement?' Anwyll gives a straight answer admitting:

> That is a real concern for us. It's interesting talking to other countries where there are similar issues – it's a very similar position in Holland for example, where you've got very high attainment but a low level of children reporting high levels of engagement, and enjoyment, or reading for pleasure (Hall, 2004, p.120).

Gradgrind may raise standards but students, once out of the classroom, may not be inclined to pick up a book.

It is important to acknowledge that the pedagogical is political and that in education choices based on values must be made. In English teaching, there are clearly established fault lines which have been elucidated above. Policy makers and the inspectorate can *either* advise teachers to script and follow schemes of work which track numerous objectives over the course of an entire year, *or* encourage both students and teachers to develop their sense of risk, autonomy and independence as teachers and learners. The latter path, as Lumby has claimed, may well lead to a more enjoyable educational experience. Fairclough (2000) believes that a denial of binaries, is a consistent feature of Blair's 'Third Way'. It is almost as if politicians want to wish away difficult choices, but the definition of what is 'good' is always going to be a choice. It is not coincidental that so many texts about English teaching use military metaphors, people *battle* to establish their philosophy of education. The remainder of this research will investigate whether and how current battles over English are being fought.

To restate the purpose of my study in the light of the reviewed literature, my research seeks firstly to understand how teachers in England and Wales are responding to the abolition of standardised testing at Key Stage Three and to build up a knowledge base about the ways in which English teachers are assessing students now that standardised tests are gone. Secondly, it aims to investigate the way in which practitioners are engaging with the shifting (and at times conflicting) English curriculum. The intention is to establish a sense of the positioning of English teachers in England and Wales in relation to the discourses that I have outlined above. Is the assessment of pre-specified, standardised content at the heart of what English teachers are doing, or are other, perhaps more progressive, ways of 'thinking and knowing' being foregrounded?

Chapter 3 Methodology

> Bacon spells out the thoroughly egalitarian implications of his ideas...The essential thing...is to possess a method: not the mere groping in the dark that is naive empiricism (Smith, 2006, p.158).

3.1 Introduction

The last two chapters have highlighted the performative work often done by the word 'standards' in education and there are clearly performative elements involved in the enterprise of setting 'standards' for a doctoral thesis. Just as explicit content standards in the subject of English are there ostensibly to drive up quality and ensure egalitarian assessment, so too an insistence on explicit methodological processes is a device for demonstrating rigour and transparency in the practice of research and fairness in the grading of it. Yet, much as an over-emphasis on standards in English may cause the more mercurial but valuable elements of reading and writing to be overlooked, placing too much emphasis on design and methodology as a guarantor of quality in an EdD project may obscure the fact that qualitative research inevitably calls upon the *judgement* of the writer.

Eisner (2004, p.88) warns of the dangers of failing to differentiate between applying a standard and making a judgement. Smith (2006, p.166), in an article entitled *As if by Machinery* is also aware of some of the pitfalls of what he has termed the Baconian 'exaltation of...technical or instrumental reason' and seeks to reclaim Aristotle's term 'phronesis' for educational researchers. Phronesis is a useful word to describe a person with good judgement 'characterised by sensitivity to situated particulars and concrete cases... it is a property of people of a certain character, who have relevant experience and know how to use it wisely'. Therefore, an important preface to this chapter is an acknowledgement of the importance not merely of a robust methodology but of a researcher's sound judgement.

Spencer, Ritchie, Lewis, and Dillon (2004) recently reviewed the existing literature relating to standards in qualitative research. Their report highlights four guiding principles: 'that research should be contributory, defensible in design, rigorous in conduct and credible in claim' (cited in Johnston, 2006, p.386). 'Rigour', 'credibility' and 'contributory' are all slippery concepts, open to a great deal of subjective interpretation.

Nevertheless, the aim of this chapter must be to make as transparent as possible the theoretical concepts and the methodological processes that underpin the claim to new knowledge in this thesis, to give an account of the strengths of these concepts and processes and to subject them to critique. The chapter begins with a brief rationale for and overview of the use of Grounded Theory and continues with an explanation of the decision to supplement this popular methodology with the less well known tool of Situational Analysis (Clarke 2005). There follows a discussion of data collection and sampling methods, an account of how data were recorded and safeguarded, a summary of the steps taken to preserve confidentiality and anonymity and a detailed description of how data analysis and synthesis were conducted. Ethical issues are then considered before the limitations of the data gathering processes are acknowledged.

3.2 Methodologies

Ragin (1994, p.191) simplifies the problem of methodology by stating: 'Research design is a plan for collecting and analyzing evidence that will make it possible for the investigator to answer whatever questions he or she has posed'. However, given the vast and dense literature available on an array of potential approaches, methodological choices are anything but simple. Smith observes:

> To the extent that research involves command of methods and techniques, it is perhaps implausible that any...teacher, busy with the demands of the classroom and every latest government directive, can find time to acquire such methods: ethnomethodology, participant observation, interviewing, discourse analysis and the rest (2006, p.162).

Implausible perhaps, but Smith's list 'and the rest' are taught as part of the EdD programme and, having successfully completed modules on 'The Philosophy of Educational Research' and 'Design and Method in Educational Research', it was from a wide range of methodological possibilities that I chose to use Clarke's (2005) *Situational Analysis, Grounded Theory After the Postmodern Turn* as my core text.

3.3 The Rationale for using Grounded Theory

Developed in the 1960s by Glaser and Strauss (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), Grounded Theory is a way of conducting qualitative research. It is a theory/methods package that 'presents a strategy for doing research which, while flexible, is systematic and coordinated'

(Robson, 2002, p.192). Atkinson, Coffey and Delamont (2003, p.150) clarify that 'Grounded theory is not a description of a kind of theory. Rather it represents...a way of having ideas on the basis of empirical research.' The researcher gathers data, often from a range of sources, and then engages in a systematic analysis of it through a process of open, axial and selective coding with a view to generating theory (Robson, 2002).

Glaser and Strauss' ideas emerged when positivism was widely accepted within the social sciences (Charmaz, 2006) and they purposively sought to mitigate the culture of positivism - with its tendency to seek validation for a pre-specified hypothesis - by developing a methodology which lets insights and theories come from the data. Their approach is appealing because of its iterative nature; it allows initial, tentative findings to shape future questions. It is a methodology which enables thoughts and ideas to grow organically, accepting that there may be some surprises in the data which would warrant a change of focus. At the outset of this enquiry, there was no *a priori* theoretical orientation, merely a situation that warranted further investigation, and a group of professional educators whose voices I sought to listen to and understand. Hence the suitability of a methodology which enables the perspectives of the people within the study to shape the findings, as opposed to those perspectives being placed into or thrown out of a pre-ordained possibility.

3.4 Supplementing Grounded Theory with Situational Analysis

Firstly, despite its challenge to positivism, traditional Grounded Theory has been criticized as being a methodology which is essentially an exercise in 'truth finding' and it is important to address this criticism. Gramsci (1971) urges caution against truth claims which may often be merely hegemonic discourses in disguise. McCarthy's (1996) *Knowledge as Culture, The New Sociology of Knowledge,* reviews feminist scholarship which challenges the legitimacy of 'scientific' findings by demonstrating the ways in which factors such as gender, intelligence and race are socially, not objectively, constructed. As a feminist, I have a strong affinity with the relativist notion that human sense-making is an act of construal and I am sympathetic to the postmodern turn which positions *all* knowledges as culturally situated. The switch from the certainties of a modernist paradigm which emphasizes stability, rationality, homogeneity and linear progress to the tentative claims, jarring perplexities and messy fragmentations of postmodernism appeals to my feminist suspicion of absolutes. Moreover, the notion of

'constructing/making' as opposed to 'discovering/finding' positions the researcher as an inevitable player in the making of meaning as opposed to an authoritative re-presenter of the 'truth'. Rather than pretend an impossibly fenced-off position, declaring the situated nature of knowledge and reflexively exploring the nature of the researcher's bias strikes me as an important position to take. Adele Clarke's (2005) text, which references McCarthy (Clarke, 2005, p.xxiv), seeks to renew the work of Glaser and Strauss by ensuring that it explicitly accommodates researchers who wish to acknowledge the move towards relativism and constructivism. As Clarke (2005, p.32) notes, from this perspective, researchers move towards the re-presentation of multiple 'voices, perspectives, intensities and reflexivities'.

Secondly, in traditional Grounded Theory the researcher should avoid relevant literature before embarking on coding activities, in order to ensure that existing theory does not influence the researcher's analysis. However, such an approach does not acknowledge that, as a social scientist, it is very difficult to be unaware of the literature surrounding an area of study. Although before framing my research question I did not have specific theories I wished to test, I certainly had an understanding of many of the concepts that I have subsequently engaged in my analysis, these include ideas on the nature of teacher autonomy, progressive teaching and neoliberal politics. Perhaps in the 1960s there were unexplored fields which a researcher could cast a fresh eye over and develop theory purely from the ground up, without any reference to existing work. However, most people involved in the process of research cannot avoid engagement with relevant literature and certainly doctoral study requires an understanding of a field prior to passing a research proposal. Clarke (2005, p.13) acknowledges the impossibility of being theoretically innocent and sees 'prior knowledge of the substantive field as valuable rather than hindering.'

A third justification for using Clarke (2005) is that she supplements the traditional coding of Grounded Theory with the use of mapping which encourages a multi-dimensional treatment of a subject. Her ideas are reminiscent of Clandinin and Connelly's ambition not to be caught up in the tentacles of the grand narrative that push people to 'think in a language of objectives, think in terms of observable behaviour, think numerically, think causally, think generally with a god's-eye view, think about the here and now'(2000, p.25), as the maps ensure an analysis which takes into account a vast range of variables including

the past and the present; the human and the non human; that which is audible and that which is silent. If Atkinson, Coffey and Delamont (2003, p.150) describe Grounded Theory as 'a way of having ideas on the basis of empirical research', Situational Analysis, with its clear instructions on how to use three kinds of maps to generate insight, is another, helpful thinking tool.

The first type of maps are 'situational'; they 'lay out the major human, non human, discursive, historical, symbolic, cultural, political and other elements in the research situation of concern and provoke analysis of relations among them' (Clarke, 2005, p.xxxv). The second are the 'social worlds/arenas maps' and these set out all of the '*collective* actors, key nonhuman elements, and the arena(s) of commitment within which they are engaged in ongoing discourse and negotiations' (Clarke, 2005, p xxxvi). The third are 'positional', they map out the major positions taken, and not taken in the data (ibid). The explicit use of these tools, in conjunction with the more conventional coding associated with Grounded Theory, in order to facilitate analysis, is set out in detail below.

A final appeal of Clarke (2005) is her clear attempt to include Foucault's ideas about the relevance of discourse and the web-like nature of power into her methodology. Foucault's writing on both power and 'disciplinary technologies', which set up norms and monitor the populace, are hugely relevant to my study. For Foucault, 'discipline is a set of strategies, procedures and ways of behaving which are associated with certain institutional contexts and which permeate ways of thinking and behaving in general' (Mills, 2003, p.44). I am concerned to engage critically with aspects of classroom practice (such as objectives-led teaching and the prevalence of 'content standards') which are permeating the education system. To understand these 'ways of thinking' as disciplinary technologies is a potent reminder that they are not unquestionable:

> Foucault argues that 'the relations of power are perhaps among the best hidden things in the social body...[our task is] to investigate what might be most hidden in the relations of power...to trace them not only in their governmental forms but also in the intra-governmental or para-governmental ones; to discover their material play' (Foucault 1988d: 119, cited in Mills 2003, p.36).

Clarke's three types of maps enable a representation of power that takes into account Foucault's theories and also prompts thinking about power that comes from non-human actants (the power of a curriculum or a league table for instance). As she says:

> Studying action is not enough. We need analytic maps to plot positions taken and their relative locations and power...We need cartographies of discursive positions... Situational analysis allows researchers to draw together studies of discourse and agency, action and structure, image, text and context, history and the present moment – to analyze complex situations of inquiry broadly conceived (Clarke, 2005, p.33).

As my intention was always to study the situation in which Key Stage Three teachers of English find themselves, Situational Analysis is an apt methodological choice, 'Here, *the situation of inquiry itself broadly conceived is the key unit of analysis*' Clarke (2005, p. xxxv). Situational Analysis enables claims which are messy and tentative not because of incompetence or naivety, but because the world is untidy and shifting and it is not possible to take a snapshot of the *truth.* What researchers can do is re-present positions within *a situation* in detail.

3.5 Data collection and sampling

In Situational Analysis, the researcher focuses on finding new data sources (persons or things – and not theories) that can best explicitly address specific theoretically interesting facets of the emergent analysis. Glaser (2002, no page numbers) says that 'All is data' and Clarke (2005, p.xxxiv) notes that 'A key feature of the postmodern turn has been an enhanced theoretical grasp of the analytic importance of the nonhuman in our complex situatedness.' Therefore, I have used a range of data sources: semi-structured interviews with other educators; transcripts from a subject association meeting; policy documents from England and Wales; and curriculum maps and schemes of work which were referred to during the course of the interviews. I considered the possibility of using websites to gather data as browsing through the online teacher forums in the immediate aftermath of the abolition of SATs was illuminating. However, there were too many intractable ethical issues such as whether internet chat rooms are considered as public or a private space, whether it was possible to obtain informed consent and whether confidentiality could be assured (see Eysenbach and Till, 2001).

As the majority of my data consists of transcripts of interviews, it is important to understand the basis on which the interviewees were chosen. Sampling in Situational Analysis is purposive or theoretical. The aim is not to seek:

> ...a representative sample for its own sake; there is certainly no notion of random sampling from a known population to achieve statistical generalizability. Sampling of people to interview or events to observe is undertaken so that additional information can be obtained to help in generating conceptual categories (Robson, 1992, p.193).

Consequently, throughout the course of this study, I have been engaged in an iterative process of analysis and purposeful targeting of participants who would facilitate a richer understanding of the complexities of the situation under scrutiny. As Cohen, Manion and Morrison explain:

> In purposive sampling, researchers handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgement...As its name suggests, the sample has been chosen for a specific purpose. Whilst it may satisfy the researcher's needs to take this type of sample, it does not pretend to represent the wider population...(2000, p.103).

I began my research by attending a subject association meeting at which over 100 English teachers met to discuss the implementation of the *Assessing Pupils' Progress* initiative in the wake of the abolition of the SATs. This gathering, a 'community of practice' in action (Wenger, 2006), sensitized me to some of the tensions that are apparent within the English teaching profession and enabled me to begin to understand further some of the power relations that are circulating. I went on to interview an experienced Key Stage Three English teacher in a secondary school in England and an experienced Key Stage Three English teacher in a secondary school in Wales who were part of my professional network. After transcribing these initial interviews, I sought to interview people who would shed light on themes and issues that were emerging from my coding of the data.

I relied on initial contacts to help generate more, willing participants who had experience of Key Stage Three teaching in large, state secondary schools as initial attempts to generate participants by sending letters and emails proved unproductive. There were also thematic leads which emerged from the data which I followed. In Wales, after an interrogation of my first transcription threw up the possibility of 'fabricated' assessments coming up from the primary sector, I deliberately sought to interview both a primary school teacher and a retired teacher who had taught before the introduction of the SATs and League Tables. As Clarke (2005, xxxiv) states 'Heterogeneous positions and relations can be explicitly sought out, pursued, analyzed, and discussed.' Furthermore, the positional maps helped me to see if there were positions that were not present in the data and caused me to question whether or not I could find examples of missing positions. Positivist social science uses various

'data homogenization and simplification strategies' (Clarke, 2005, xxxiv) but the methodology that I employ positions human respondents into a broader situation and acknowledges the emergent nature of findings that prevent researchers from being able to pre-specify participants at the outset. Again, the judgement of the researcher is important in such a process.

3.6 The interviews

Charmaz claims that:

> Intensive, qualitiative interviewing fits Grounded Theory methods particularly well. Both Grounded Theory methods and intensive interviewing are open-ended yet directed, shaped yet emergent, and paced yet unrestricted (2006, p.28).

In total, I conducted sixteen semi-structured interviews. On average, the interviews lasted for approximately an hour. Below are very brief character sketches of the participants, all of whom were selected as a result of their significant experience of English teaching and assessment in either England or Wales. The interviewees have been given a *nom de plume;* fuller biographical details and descriptions of practice settings have been omitted in order to protect anonymity.

3.6.1 Participants in Wales

Megan is the head of English in a large, mixed, generally middle-class comprehensive. She has been teaching English for between fifteen and twenty years and has been a head of department for the last five years.

Erin is the head of English in another large, mixed, largely middle class comprehensive, she has been teaching for between ten and fifteen years and has been a head of department for the past three years.

Rhiannon has been teaching for over twenty years and, for the past six years has been working as the head of English in a school in a socially deprived area. The large, mixed comprehensive school in which she teaches has, in the past, been graded as unsatisfactory by OFSTED and has historically had very poor exam results.

Gareth is an English teacher in a large, mixed comprehensive in a broadly middle class area. He has been a teacher for between five and ten years.

Alan is a primary school teacher. In his role as a union representative he works with teachers from a range of sectors and elicits their concerns. He works closely with secondary schools on primary/secondary transfer. He is on his school's management team and has been teaching for over fifteen years.

Arwena is a retired, Welsh head teacher who worked in the primary and secondary sector in England and Wales for over thirty years.

Jonathan is a senior Welsh Civil Servant from the Education Department who works with academics, educators and politicians on issues of curriculum and assessment. He has contact with a wide range of schools across Wales.

3.6.2 Participants in England

Peter is the head of English in a school which has exceptionally good exam results. He has been teaching for between fifteen and twenty years and has been head of department for the last eight years.

Ethan has been teaching English for between five and ten years and is currently on the senior management team of a large, mixed urban comprehensive school which has average exam results.

Emma has been teaching English for between five and ten years in a school which has a reputation for high academic standards. She is a full-time classroom teacher.

Sophie has been teaching English for between five and ten years. She works in a large, single-sex state school in a broadly middle class area.

Tom is the head of English in a single sex state school in a middle class area. He has been teaching for between ten and fifteen years and has been a head of department for the past five years.

Jim is a lecturer in English Education and is particularly knowledgeable about assessment in English. He teaches on a PGCE course and trains secondary English student teachers. He comes into contact with a wide range of English teachers and schools. He has been in post for approximately fifteen years.

Amy is a primary school teacher in England. She has been teaching for between five and ten years in a two form entry state school. She is responsible for training staff in the use of *Assessing Pupils' Progress* grids in her school.

Barbara is a former English teacher and English lecturer. She is still working in the field of education but not in a school. She has written extensively about English teaching in the secondary sector.

Richard is an advisory English teacher employed by a local council. He has been working in English education for over twenty years and liaises with a rich variety of English teaching practitioners across a range of schools.

3.6.3 The questions

My initial semi-structured interviews with secondary teachers in England and Wales centred on the following questions:

a) The SATs

- What did you teach your year nine classes after you found out that the SATs had been abolished?
- How has your teaching changed in the light of the abolition of the year nine SATs?
- How have the students reacted?

b) Documents and institutions which shape practice

- What documents do you use to inform your planning and assessment?
- Are these documents helpful?
- Whose opinions are you most mindful of when you consider your own accountability?

c) Tensions

- Do you feel that any aspect of your practice as an English teacher is at odds with your ideal notion of how English should be taught?
- If so, for how long has this been the case?
- How do you manage this tension?

When I interviewed lecturers or advisors, the interviews followed the shape of the questions above but they were worded differently. By the end of my study, I had narrowed the focus of my work and I no longer asked questions to do with the institutions to whom teachers felt accountable, as 'Grounded theory interviewing differs from much in-depth interviewing because we narrow the range of interview topics to gather specific data for developing our theoretical frameworks as we proceed with conducting the interviews' (Charmaz, 2006, p.23).

3.6.4 Interview technique

One of the strengths of my study comes from my understanding of the field. As an experienced English teacher, I brought a significant amount of knowledge and empathy to the interviews which was, hopefully, evident to the interviewees. Holstein and Gubrium (1995, p.119) have coined the term the 'creative interview' to describe an encounter in which there is 'a climate of mutual disclosure between interviewee and interviewer by allowing the latter to have a deep involvement in the conversational development'. Gibson and Brown suggest that in this kind of meeting:

> Interviewers may offer their own experiences of whatever it is that is being discussed, or provide evaluations of a particular issue. In these ways, the interviewer both removes the interactional barriers of the attitude of 'interviewer as an objective outsider' and creates discursive resources for the other participants to use in the course of their own formulation (2009, p.89).

This is an apt description of the way in which I worked as a researcher. In every interview I conducted, there was a clear understanding on the part of the interviewee that I was a teacher and therefore had experiential knowledge of their professional life. The following interaction illuminates this point:

Interviewee: I mean, when you're planning a scheme of work, what do *you* start with then?

Mari: Well, this is what I'm looking at really. Previously, I've looked at the National Strategies and curriculum and now I might look at APP or I might think a bit more holistically or differently and say I want to engage these um in their own personal empowerment of how persuasive they can be so I will start with... so it kind of depends...

As many of my respondents did approach very controversial subjects to do with trust, I had to ensure a high level of discretion around some of their disclosures which were often couched in euphemistic language. I also had to ensure that I put the interviewees at ease when they discussed what was, at times, an awkward admission of their 'unprofessional' practice. I believe that my credentials as a classroom practitioner increased the level of trust that the interviewees had in my ability to deal sensitively with their accounts of practice.

3.7 Transcribing, safeguarding and validating the data

I transcribed all of the interviews myself as 'Close and repeated listenings, coupled with methodical transcribing, often leads to insights' (Riessman, 1993, p.60). In all, I transcribed over 70,000 words. However, I am aware that, as Kress et al. (2005, p.10) have stated, 'Transcription is translation, and all translations are partial.' When I transcribed, I chose to engage in what Gibson and Brown (2009, p.116) have called 'unfocused transcription' which 'involves outlining the basic "intended meaning" of a recording of speech or action without attempting to represent its detailed contextual or interactional characteristics.' I included pauses, laughter and colloquialisms such as 'coz' which I thought captured the spirit of the speech, but I did not leave out every dropped consonant because this would lead me down the path of attempting to write in an interviewee's accent, which I decided was neither necessary nor possible. Inevitably, this leaves many nuances not captured on paper, which is why I made a very conscious effort to revisit the recordings of my interviews and not just rely on the typed transcripts.

Once the interviews were recorded, they were transcribed onto a computer which has up to date Norton Security Software. At no point did any of the transcriptions leave my study. On completing the transcripts, the interviewees were contacted and asked in what format they would like to receive their typed-up interviews. Some respondents chose to have the

transcripts sent in hard copy to their homes and were happy therefore to send me their home address. Other respondents explicitly stated that they did not wish to receive paper copies and asked for the transcripts to be sent to them via their home email addresses. I discussed issues of email security with my participants before sending them their copies.

All but one of the interviewees were happy to read over their interviews and none one of them came back with any changes to the transcripts. Ideally they would have reflected on their positions but they did not and, having felt that they had been generous with their time in allowing me to conduct the initial interview, I did not push this point.

3.8 Data analysis and synthesis

3.8.1 The use of NVivo software to conduct Grounded Theory coding and analysis

Johnston (2006) argues that doctoral students should ideally be taught to use software as a core part of their methodology courses as the use of software to analyse data is becoming a necessary part of a researcher's toolkit. However, Kelle (1995) is concerned that software 'has the potential to transform qualitative research into a rigid, automated analysis of text that, in actuality, requires human interpretation' (cited in Bringer et al, 2006, p.248). Johnston also warns that:

> Researchers...have found themselves coding in a somewhat mechanistic manner, often for excessively long periods of time, without using some of the in-built tools to help them to see the proverbial wood from the trees. This incessant desire to code every part of a document without taking time to think and reflect upon data can lead to an overly descriptive prosaic project (2006, p.383).

As I have argued above, the researcher's judgement must always remain in the foreground and I was troubled by the prospect of computer software reducing my capacity to rise above the prosaic. Glaser, one of the founders of Grounded Theory, dislikes computer assisted approaches (Glaser, 2003). Nevertheless, NVivo software has been designed specifically for the purposes of assisting researchers in the analysis and interpretation of data in Grounded Theory and, as I as sceptically investigated the product, certain distinct advantages emerged.

Firstly, the use of NVivo does facilitate the process of organizing and analysing data efficiently; the ease and speed with which I could travel through my data was greatly

enhanced by using software. Secondly, it makes possible complex searches that would be unwieldy and potentially impossibly complicated using manual methods (Bringer et al, 2006). Finally, the software enables the logging and sharing of progress in a very transparent way through the generation of reports. Therefore, I decided to use NVivo to store all my sources of data, including interview transcripts and PDFs of relevant documents such as the National Curriculum. I also used it to code the data, initially using en vivo coding (actual words from the transcripts) to pick out themes from the data and then to develop axial coding. Throughout this process, I wrote memos using the software to help me to store my ideas. Appendix C is a screenshot of my NVivo project which shows in detail the coding that I undertook. The entire, completed project is still available in this form.

3.8.2 The use of situational maps to supplement Grounded Theory

While NVivo certainly facilitated the physical process of organizing text, it was Clarke's thinking tools that generated moments of deepest insight. The situational maps that I have created and routinely amended during the course of analysing the situation of Key Stage Three teachers as they interact with government prescription on matters of curriculum and assessment (see appendix D) have been analytically fruitful; they have enabled me to link elements, such as the discursive construction of a child to a certain conceptualisation of the curriculum, and to lay bare some of the hidden implications of particular 'ways of thinking and knowing'. For example, if knowledge is constructed as 'inventorisable' and amenable to traceable, linear progress (as it is in the *Assessing Pupils' Progress* grids or the Personal Learning and Thinking Skills charts), then children's capacity for learning tends to be implicitly constructed as almost uniformly open to good teaching. Such thinking is certainly a feature of the American *No Child Left Behind* initiative which brooks 'no excuses' for those who fail to make 'adequate yearly progress' (Noddings, 2007b, p.4). If the chunking of knowledge often seems relatively uncontroversial in certain subjects, the less overt construction of children as empty vessels with similar capacities for standardised knowledge, is deeply problematic. As Noddings states:

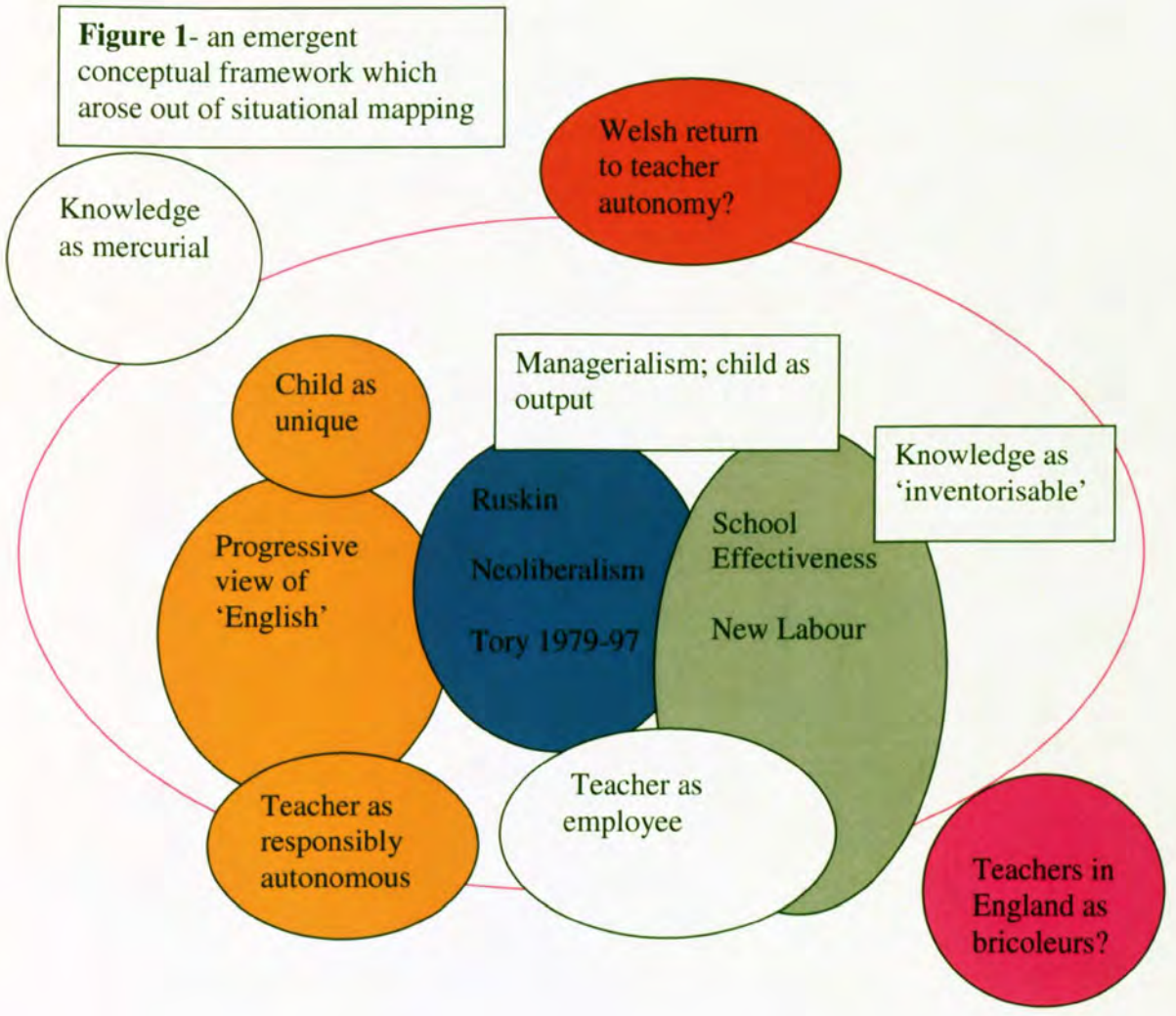
> Never mind that children are housed badly, that they need medical and dental attention, that they may live in fear of violence, that a parent may be imprisoned or abused. Never mind. No excuses. Just raise the test scores (2007b, p.4).

Clearly, if these discursive constructions of knowledge and children are unquestioned, then when students fail to make adequate progress, the teacher or the school is often positioned as being at fault. A converse construction: poor housing or parenting as a reasonable excuse for the underachievement of the working classes, was deemed ideologically unacceptable to many in New Labour. They sought to challenge that way of thinking by focusing on 'robust tracking systems' and catch-up classes. However, perhaps the unintended consequence of this is that in order to 'track' progress, knowledge necessarily needs to be constructed as 'inventorisable' and the child, a concern of any 'progressively' minded government, is inadvertently constructed as a uniform vessel. This kind of relational analysis has framed the questions that I have sought to answer such as: how do APP (*Assessing Pupils' Progress*) grids construct knowledge? Does such a construction implicitly construct the child in a certain way? Are there conflicting constructions of knowledge within different government policy initiatives (for example, within the *Every Child Matters* pronouncements and the National Curriculum)?

Wolcott (2009, p.24) suggests that '...analysis refers quite specifically and narrowly to systematic procedures in order to identify essential features and relationships...' and I undertook the very careful relational analysis of my situational maps by hand. I did experiment with using NVivo models to generate maps but I found the functionality limited. I also found that the process of thinking about links and relationships was easier for me to do with felt pens on paper. Clarke (2005, p.102) states that relational analysis of situational maps can sometimes feel 'tedious or silly - but at other times it can trigger breakthrough thinking, and this is, after all, the main analytic goal.' I did feel childish at first drawing coloured lines across my papers, but it was while I was fully engaged in this systematic process of thinking and linking that I began to develop insight into the connections between the complex range of institutions, individuals and ideologies present within my situation. During this work, I hand-wrote memos and stored them on dated sheets. I have included an example of a sheet (see appendix E) which facilitated my thinking about the relationships that I set out in my situational map, which were part of the ongoing process of generating new knowledge and theoretical possibilities from an array of messy data. The orange circles broadly represent what has emerged in my analysis as the progressive tradition, the blue circles represent the interventions into education made by the Conservative Party in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The grey areas represent New Labour's additions to the picture (one of my memos asked: are the grey areas the

'calculated invisibility of neoliberalism that work against our capacity to make a critique of it? (Davies and Bansel, 2007, p.254)). The pink stands for a postmodern perspective and the red circles, which contain the words 'functional illiteracy' and 'lazy teachers' are there to remind me not to romanticize the English teaching community. The yellow circles, in which I have placed parents and students, highlight the fact that certain actors are often silenced. As I worked with my interview data with teachers giving accounts of their response to the abolition of the SATs, I sought to establish to what extent the shift in policy had prompted them to redefine their rationale for the teaching of English.

The following map (figure 1) is a pictorial representation of some of the ideas that arose following the process of making situational maps. It is presented here as a synthesis of my ideas which, because of the non-linear nature of my work, informed the literature review, which then further informed the analysis and conclusions. It shows the emergent conceptual framework into which I placed my data.



If the use of NVivo and situational mapping helped the process of thinking and linking, the use of social worlds maps and positional maps yielded less fruit. I did undergo the procedure of working with social worlds maps and positional maps but these did not 'trigger breakthrough thinking' (Clarke, 2005, p.102) to the same extent. The making of social worlds maps did prompt a consideration of the relative size and power of the organisations that impact upon the secondary English teacher (see appendix F). The process highlighted the difficulty that professional bodies (such as the London Association of Teachers of English) are faced with when there are so many centrally funded governmental and quasi-governmental organisations in operation. Given the current Coalition government's decision to abolish the General Teaching Council, the QCDA and potentially other quasi-governmental organisations, it also drew into sharp relief the potential for teachers, through informal professional networks, to reclaim some of the

territory that has been ceded to large, state-run bodies that are now being abolished. This point is taken up in the conclusion. The drawing up of social worlds maps also enabled me to compare the pressures that English teachers faced historically (see appendix G) in comparison with the current crowded space that surrounds the department and reminded me that English teachers have always been subject to influence from head teachers, publishing companies and school cultures.

3.8.3 Reaching saturation

As a result of the purposive sampling in Grounded Theory (described above), it is up to the researcher to decide when to stop gathering more data. Likewise, the analyst has to decide when maps are complete. Robson (2002, p.192) has highlighted the fact that in Grounded Theory studies 'It may be difficult in practice to decide when categories are 'saturated' or when the theory is sufficiently developed' and this is an important consideration. Ultimately, this challenge to Grounded Theory can only be answered with reference to human judgement. Popper (1983, p.258) acknowledges 'the wish to see in science not the work of an inspiration or revelation of the human spirit, but a more or less mechanical compilation which in principle might be performed by machines' (cited in Rowbottom and Aiston, 2006, p.147). He also expresses concern that such thinking has the tendency to 'debunk man' (ibid). Throughout this chapter, I have sought to place the role of individual judgement clearly back into the frame and this is exactly what Clarke does when she explains her methodological processes:

> What is a good enough situational map and how do you know when you have one? The key word here is saturation – from classical grounded theory...You have worked with your map many, many times, tinkered, added, deleted, reorganized...You don't think you have missed anything (2005, p.108).

In my research, I necessarily reached a point at which I believed that I had gathered enough data and thought carefully enough about the analysis of it to warrant formally presenting my findings. Any study could be lengthened and broadened and deepened but all researchers have to reach a point at which they judge that a story worth telling has emerged.

3.9 An overview of ethical considerations

As discussed above, I avoided using data such as Internet chat-room transcripts which raised difficult ethical issues. Moreover, I did not interview teachers from my practice setting. At no point in the study were students interviewed. Therefore, certain ethical conundrums were avoided. My research proposal was approved by the appropriate Faculty Research Ethics Committee and, at all times, I complied with the University's guidance and procedures for undertaking research with human subjects. Throughout the project, I worked with consenting adults who were clearly informed of the nature of my study. As I have shown, I took care to safeguard their words and to seek their feedback on interview transcripts. As a result, the most prescient ethical issue is my position in the research.

3.9.1 Where am I in the research?

A key facet of research after the postmodern turn has been 'an intensive focus on the presence and consequences of the researcher in the research' (Clarke, 2005, p.12). Steier states:

> that we understand and become aware of our own research activities as telling ourselves a story about ourselves, parallel to what Turner (1981) refers to as a social reflexivity...But we must remind ourselves that we tell our stories through others. Further, our self-reflexive stories need not be trivial (1991, p.3).

At times, I see my work as anything but trivial. I envisage myself attempting to resist an international trend, interrupt dominant performative discourses, re-engage with lost voices and ultimately make life better for English teachers and students. Schostak and Schostak urge researchers to have an explicit agenda, they call upon researchers to 'make a difference' because:

> Globally, national governments, local public services and the major corporations are constructing the world so that it can be increasingly tightly administered for social control and the accumulation of wealth (2008, p.164).

These combined points are of fundamental importance to me and they are the key reason why I have funded my own doctoral studies in an attempt to generate an academic story about my own professional practice, specifically my experiences of encountering 'tight administration'. Furthermore, I have sought to understand my own work through attempting to listen to and re-tell the stories of others; I have sought to put my own experiences into perspective by contrasting my understanding of a situation with that of others'. I hope that my work has not been trivial; it has been driven by a strong suspicion

that throughout the education system, people are engaged in highly complex processes of planning and assessing which may actually be an enormous waste of time and energy (see Appendices A and B).

Is this what I have sought? *Are* those my motivations or have I just 'fabricated personae and unities?' (Schuerich, 1997, p.1). The words 'at times' in the above account are all important. Story tellers have a tendency to construct heroes. Real life is not so neat and my fragmented self acknowledges other, less heroic motives for engaging in doctoral research. As Sheurich (1997, p.124) has admitted: 'The best way, then, to succeed, that is, receive rewards, recognition, promotions, salary increases, material resources, and so forth, is to learn to reproduce the ways of the dominant group.' In our society the dominant group values certification and there is no certificate that carries quite as much symbolic weight as a doctorate. Steier (1991, p.5) differentiates between being 'reflective...in showing ourselves to ourselves' and 'reflexive (being conscious of ourselves as we see ourselves)'. It is difficult to talk openly in an academic text about the way in which I see myself as it may involve unseemly admissions. Consequently, I understand why the self stays hidden behind a veil of third person anonymity in so much academic writing. Fine (1994, p.17) calls such voiceless authority 'ventriloquy': 'The author tells Truth, has no gender, race, class, or stance'.

However, I am not attempting to tell an uncontested and tested Truth. I am seeking to re-present positions and, ethically, I must try as honestly as I can to position myself/s within my data. Bloomberg and Volpe (2008, p.77) urge doctoral students to 'Clarify up front the bias that you, as the researcher, bring to the study'. Therefore, what follows is a brief sketch of the elements of the facets of my identity which I believe to be pertinent to my research.

I am a teacher from a family of teachers; consequently I may have a tendency to take side of the educator. I am comfortable with the label 'feminist'. With roots in the mining communities of South Wales, I learned from an early age to critique Thatcherism and I continue to be intellectually wary of neo-liberalism. These biases, in a project which must seek to re-present more than my own point of view, could be problematic and I have continuously and conscientiously reminded myself to open up my thinking. I have kept a journal throughout my doctoral studies in which I have reflected both on the reading and

the research that I have done and I have regularly reread entries critically in order to better understand my own shifting positions and perspectives (see appendix H).

In terms of my theoretical bias, I am drawn towards theories which remind us of the non-linear nature of life such as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and Clarke (2005). I find some of Foucault's theories illuminating. I also identify with the work of Nel Noddings (2003, 2007b); Michael Apple (2004) and John Elliott (1996, 2007), all of whom have criticised the School Effectiveness movement. I am impressed by the insights of Eisner (1985, 2004) who critiques objectives-led teaching and I find Ball's (1997, 2003, 2009) descriptions of life in the education sector useful. I enjoy the work of hooks (1994) and Freire (2004) who remind me to think of people not data. In terms of work specifically to do with English teaching, I have been influenced by a range of work and would not pin my colours to one particular mast although I am a great admirer of Holbrook's *English for Meaning* (1979) and sympathise with much of what Jeffcoate (1992) writes. Finally, I am intrigued by postmodernism and writers such as Elizabeth Atkinson (2003).

3.10 Limitations of the methods of enquiry

I have not explicitly triangulated data, that is, I have not sought to supplement teachers' accounts of their practice by asking other people to describe their practice or by viewing them teach, although their accounts of how they plan and assess were supplemented by the schemes of work which they showed me during the course of the interviews. However, given the nature of Situational Analysis, which seeks to take the whole situation as the unit of analysis, this is not an insurmountable problem. In this instance, teachers' accounts are merely part of a bigger picture of a situation the drawing up of which has used multiple data sources including government documents. I have not had my coding verified by a colleague as I have been unable to find somebody who is a competent user of NVivo who would also be willing to give up their time to code data for me. To mitigate against this weakness, I have printed off multiple examples of my coding which I have discussed with my tutors throughout the process of analysis and writing up this thesis. I have also presented a paper on my work in progress at the 2010 ROERCE (Roehampton Education Research Conference) and elicited feedback from academic peers (see appendix I).

This chapter began with a justification of the use of Grounded Theory and Situational Analysis (Clarke, 2005). Details of data collection, sampling methods and ways of

safeguarding data and anonymity were discussed, before an explanation of how data analysis and synthesis were conducted was given. Ethical issues were then considered before the limitations of the study acknowledged. Chapter Four is an analysis of the data which leads into Chapter Five, the conclusions of the Research Project.

Chapter 4 Data Analysis and Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter consists of two main sections which report the findings that have arisen as a result of using Grounded Theory and Situational Analysis to analyse the data set described in Chapter Three. The first part (4.2) analyses the way in which educators involved in secondary English teaching reacted to the abolition of the SATs tests in England and Wales. It explores the attitudinal and pedagogical shifts which occurred following the removal of standardised tests (which happened in Wales in 2005; in England in 2008). The second part (4.3) is a critical analysis of the implementation of recent curriculum and assessment policies in the two increasingly divergent polities. It begins by focusing on the Welsh initiative to replace SATs at all Key Stages with teacher assessments. It then examines official curriculum and assessment documents which inform Key Stage Three teachers in England. The chapter ends with an analysis of the way in which teachers in England are engaging with *Assessing Pupils' Progress* materials, which are intended to facilitate standardised teacher assessments.

4. 2 An analysis of the responses of English teachers, lecturers and advisors to the abolition of SATs in England and Wales

A fundamental aim of this study is to understand the relationship between pedagogy and standardised testing in secondary English classrooms in England and Wales. The timing of the research has enabled participants to reflect on practice in the wake of a policy shift and to consider whether approaches to teaching have changed following the removal of a specific test. The first set of questions in the semi-structured interviews were designed to develop knowledge about the extent to which teachers amended their planning and assessment in the aftermath of the abolition of the Key Stage Three SATs. The first section of this chapter is an analysis of the data on this specific issue in both England and Wales.

4.2.1 Teachers in England and Wales are 'delighted'

Coding of the interviews highlighted a clear tendency on the part of the participants in England to use strong, positive adjectives to describe their reaction to the removal of the tests. Jim, a lecturer in English Education in England, described the policy shift away from a mode of assessment which, in his words, had 'cursed them for so long' as 'magnificent'. He felt that teachers 'couldn't believe their luck' and that they were feeling 'oddly liberated' now that there are 'no horrendous exams at the end'. Sophie, an English teacher in England, noted that the sudden removal of the tests 'made year nine special in some kind of way' and she described the sense of 'joy' in her English department. Other terms used by respondents include: 'delighted'; 'thrilled'; 'we were all delighted'; 'all the teachers were equally pleased'; 'we were quite delighted'. The strength of the language used by many of the interviewees in England, when talking about the change in testing policy, was unmatched in the rest of the data. This suggests that their personal constructs of English teaching may have been at odds with the construct of English teaching implied by standardised testing.

Amongst practitioners in Wales, there was also evidence that the abolition of SATs has been warmly welcomed. Erin, a head of department stated: 'most people at Key Stage Three thought it was a positive move, definitely'. Rhiannon, also a head of department, thought that the move away from Key Stage Three testing was a 'godsend'. In response to the question: 'Does your department believe that secondary English teachers have responded positively to the abolition of the SATs?' Jonathan, a civil servant in Wales replied:

> The short answer to your question is an emphatic 'Yes'!... Evidence from DCELLS' [Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills in Wales] ongoing monitoring and liaison with English teachers and literacy coordinators indicates that English departments have welcomed and embraced the changes of emphasis and focus, and the additional freedom of ownership.

In both countries it was the Shakespeare examination that teachers were most pleased to be rid of, which was seen by every one of them to construct pedagogy in a damaging way. Richard, an English advisor, was relieved that 'children aren't going to go through the sort of suffering they went through in SATs preparation particularly for the Shakespeare, which I think was very negative', Peter, a head of English, said: 'I think the thing that really skewed it was the Shakespeare, people tended to spend an inordinate amount of time on the Shakespeare play to prepare for that particular paper'. Sampson's call that 'Shakespeare

must not be made either unnaturally dull or unnaturally grotesque' was, in the wake of the abolition of SATs, more easily heeded, and teachers were more able to avoid making 'a discipline of what should be a delight'. Jim described a school in which:

> ...four different classes put on whatever Shakespeare play they liked best and then had a kind of festival of Shakespeare, where each put on acts from various plays that they had seen.

Richard, who, in his role as an advisor is involved with a number of schools stated:

> I think people are responding, they're fre*er*...in fact, we've got the RSC [Royal Shakespeare Company] coming down...to promote ways of making Shakespeare a live experience rather than a dead text, a fragmented text.

In Wales, Megan said that 'I think everyone was relieved to get rid of the Shakespeare test...because the Shakespeare test was quite hard work to teach to.' She explained that 'when you're doing Shakespeare you can do all sorts of nice things with it without teaching to the test...you're more likely to take them down to the hall and have a drama lesson...'. Gareth responded by integrating a media scheme into his teaching of Romeo and Juliet, which he 'wouldn't have been able to do' if he'd been 'teaching to the test'.

The above responses counter Holmes' (1911, p.90) concern that 'A man who had grown accustomed to semi-darkness would be dazzled to the verge of blindness if he were suddenly taken out into broad daylight' and Hursh's worry that 'teaching to the test substantially deskills and de-professionalises teachers'. They provide evidence that the removal of tests has energised some teachers and galvanized them into thinking about broadening their pedagogical repertoires, especially when teaching Shakespeare.

4.2.2 An exploration of the link between autonomy and enjoyment in the Key Stage Three English classroom

The data analysis also established a relationship between the notion of increased teacher autonomy and the idea of enjoyment, shedding light on why some participants felt so 'delighted' by the removal of the tests. 'Delight' and 'fun' were linked by several teachers in England to the increased scope that they felt they had in the aftermath of the removal of SATs. There was a clearly expressed view that more freedom meant that the experience of teaching and learning was more enjoyable for both the teacher and the student. Ethan

talked of being able to 'teach um Macbeth just for fun'. The relationship between autonomy and enjoyment was repeatedly established and made explicit. Emma said: 'I think freedom and fun definitely go together' and explained:

> Emma: You've got loads of scope at Key Stage Three actually, I think those are the most sort of fun times the kids...enjoy my lessons because I enjoy coming up with ideas and things for them to do like that, so they're good...
>
> Mari: So you're equating freedom to teach what you want with fun?
>
> Emma: Yeah, yeah that's it.

Similarly, Sophie believed that the absence of SATs made the learning experience more enjoyable for both her and her students: 'we had a really, really enjoyable year and I think their review of the year was that they really enjoyed it'. The link between freedom and fun was also made by Peter who articulated an autonomous approach to teaching and convincingly described the evidence that students find English lessons enjoyable:

> I teach the way I want to teach and ur I get away with it because, somehow, you know, my results stand up with anyone else's and I'm the head of department so I can't tell myself off (both laugh)...And I can say, hand on heart, there is evidence from talking to pupils, from pupil panel, school council, things like that, what they say about the English department is that they enjoy it, they look forward to it and they think it's fun, um, I mean and it is.

It is important to explore more deeply this relationship between teacher autonomy and student enjoyment and another piece of data is illuminating in this regard. Barbara, a former lecturer in English education, reflected on the progressive pedagogical tradition in English teaching and described the way in which 'English developed into a powerful pedagogy'; she expressed her belief that English classes used to be very popular because the lessons allowed 'the child to come through the text and to come through the language'. She corroborates Protherough and Atkinson's (1994, p.7) claim that the defining concepts on which the subject was developed included an acknowledgement of 'the developmental importance of children's self-expression'. A relationship is emerging between English lessons which are tailored to meet the specific needs of the children in that class; which position the learner at the centre of the learning experience and enjoyment. As Emma makes clear, 'I enjoy coming up with ideas and things *for them*...the kids enjoy my lessons'.

Coles' work on the SATs explores the converse of this relationship. She argues that the Shakespeare SATs paper prompted teachers to engage in a restrictive pedagogy:

> In fact, chart-filling, listing and logging information are recurring activities in two-thirds of the observed lessons. What this 'cataloguing' framework constructs is a procedural approach to the interpretation of literature (Bloome, 1994), one which positions the students ultimately as peripheral to the (re)production of meanings (Coles, 2009, p.44).

By 'procedural', Bloome means that a text is split up into its constituent parts, not in order to shed light on the meaning of the play as a whole, but to substitute the part for the whole. This kind of approach can make a complex text seem more manageable, but it is reductive. Coles goes on to state:

> The form the Shakespeare SATs take is likely to shape the particular model of reading constructed in the classroom: the 'set scene' regime encourages fragmentation, and SATs mark-schemes promote a narrowly formulaic approach to written responses...the only form of student response legitimized by the assessment regime (2009, p.44).

Coles' analysis is redolent of Moore's (2004) description of the 'inventorisation' of knowledge and it seems that the pedagogical result of breaking up a *play*, which could, as Sampson (1911) argues, evoke pleasure, suspense and emotional engagement, is particularly problematic.

A tentative knowledge claim arising from this analysis is that standardised tests have a tendency to fragment the experience of reading literature and to shift the focus away from the child's work of meaning-making, to the more reductive task of chopping up texts into assessable and standardised segments which can make learning less enjoyable for both teachers and students. In contrast, the *removal* of SATs allows teachers and students the scope for a more varied, more enjoyable and more meaningful experience of responding to a whole text. As Sophie says:

> I think we extended the amount of time we would have had for it and took away the key scenes and talked about the play as a whole and did lots of drama focused activity rather than just annotating the key scenes.

This claim corroborates recent work cited in the literature review by Lumby (2010) and Hall (2004) which links autonomy and enjoyment.

4.2.3 In the absence of tests, teachers perceive that there is time and space for varied pedagogy

Time is another important theme to arise from the data; there was significant evidence that the removal of a standardised test allows time for an increased pedagogical repertoire which includes more drama-based work, more focus on media and more scope to read a whole novel. This was often due to a sense on the part of the practitioners that there was no longer a 'race towards the SATs': Ethan stated 'I feel like we've been able to slow things down again over three years and inject a bit more depth into it' and Sophie described how:

> ...there used to be *a* scheme of work...about looking at TV media but last year we elongated it into a six week looking at film trailers, producing their own film trailers, marketing it like the apprentice, selling their film, producing the DVD box. I guess it was extending those things out that you would have loved to have the time for before but would have tried to squeeze into three lessons...giving them longer deadlines, giving them a bit more ownership of projects...

The latter testimony suggests a clear link between the possibility of students taking ownership and a perceived increase in time available. There was also evidence in the data that, in the absence of SATs, teachers felt that they had scope for the foregrounding of reading whole texts, as opposed to the extraction of linguistic techniques from excerpts.

I am claiming that in the immediate aftermath of the abolition of SATs some of the 'terrors of performativity' receded. In his article on that subject Ball (2003, p.220) claims that:

> As a number of commentators have pointed out, acquiring the performative information necessary for perfect control, 'consumes so much energy that it drastically reduces the energy available for making improvement inputs' (Elliot 1996: 15; see also Blackmore and Sachs,1997).

My work supports the above claims made by Ball. If monitoring activities such as testing reduce the energies of the teaching profession available for the creation of improved inputs, then the removal of a test releases energies which may well be spent on more creative and varied lessons.

It is not yet clear whether practitioners can sustain the sense of autonomy which released time and energy for creative pedagogy in the immediate aftermath of the SATs. Sophie captures this conundrum:

> Sophie: I guess [after the SATs were abolished] it was bringing it to fruition more and they responded really well to that, I think we did loads last year of um project work, group work...they did a lot of presenting.
>
> Mari: So does that mean that those outcomes are more difficult to record and to kind of grasp?
>
> Sophie: Yeah.
>
> Mari: But you were less worried about that?
>
> Sophie: We were less worried. I'm not sure we're *going* to be less worried I think last year, in the initial burst of freedom we were less worried about it and I think probably now we've taken a step back and thought: 'that's a bit worrying'.

The worry seems to stem from the fact that Sophie feels that no matter how well conceived the inputs may be or how well the students respond to them, pedagogies in which outcomes are not quantified are still not permitted within the dominant educational discourse in England. Noddings questions whether such worries should be replaced by other concerns:

> Should schools be accountable only for specific learning outcomes, or should they also be accountable for what is offered?...Should we try to document the valuable learning that has occurred even though it was not prespecified? Should we worry about the diminished curriculum that often results from concentration on prespecified standards? (2007b, p.5).

Perhaps it is the case that until richer constructs of accountability and assessment are in place, such as Marshall's (2007) account involving 'guild knowledge' as opposed to lists of content standards, there are strong reasons to believe that pedagogy will continue to be restricted. Richard described a meeting, the aim of which was to encourage teachers to make Key Stage Three English courses more varied and excited. His account reinforces Jones' (2006, p.89) claim that policy makers are attempting to make a 'partial turn' towards themes of creativity. He explained that Key Stage Three English teachers were asked, in a conference run by the 'Strategies':

> How do you make it more engaging? Global? Local concerns might be reflected through networking of some sort or another; more media; more multi-modal texts would be encountered; children would do projects that were cross-curricular...So all of those things were very much put in front of teachers at this conference. But I think they [teachers] were still quite puzzled about you know, why would you do this and why would you go through the business of planning something a little more engaging for the children if at the end of the day you still have senior management going to say, well actually, I want these small extracts judged, I want

> you to judge it in a paper based way entirely or I don't really consider whether children enjoy reading is really that significant, it's going to be whether they can climb up these skills ladders really, so, it's quite hard.

In this instance, a *lack* of freedom in assessment is equated with a *narrowing* choice of pedagogy, because until teachers are trusted to use their judgement to assess in more subtle and holistic ways, restrictive views of assessment will continue to shape the subject of English in potentially restrictive ways. The removal of highly specified, key scenes in Shakespeare have, according to every respondent in the sample, enabled teachers to diversify pedagogy, therefore the link between assessment and pedagogy is strongly established in this study.

4.2.4 Planning which starts with the interests of the individual students is rare

The data analysis revealed that in England and in Wales, despite the abolition of standardised tests, there are many possible starting points for teachers when planning lessons. These include: the teacher's interests; the resources available in the stock rooms (including existing schemes of work); the curriculum; assessment ladders; assessment data; and externally generated lists of objectives. As a result, it is often the case that teachers do not begin to plan with the interests of a specific class in mind.

In Wales, the ability to focus more on the individual child in the absence of an examination was referred to by two teachers. Gareth stated:

> What the abolition has done is give us more space in the curriculum to explore the individual child...

However, the references to the child in Wales were not redolent of the literature on child-centred pedagogy cited in Chapter Two. Harold Rosen, a key figure from the London School advised practitioners to:

> Keep sending them home - to mum, to dad, to the family; at meals, quarrelling, having a laugh, getting up, going out, buying something. Because they know and feel about these things they have language to write about them. The springs of life are being tapped (cited in Goodson and Medway, 1990, p.12).

The need to focus on the individual child for Rosen was crucial in order to generate high quality writing, inspired by the experiences of unique individuals. Yet the data from this

research frames references to 'focus on the individual pupils' within a more performative discourse. Gareth reported:

> What did I do differently? Well, since the abolition of the SATs, it seems to be much broader focus on key skill development and creating a much more balanced environment for the child to progress in, um, I feel it's a bit more equitable really, because the kids seem to be, there's more time to focus on the individual pupils and *to drag them to a decent skill level...*

Gareth articulated the conflict between the opportunity that English affords to engage with interests of the students and the obligations imposed by the curriculum and assessment requirements:

> I think there's tension between getting through everything and finding scope to talk and to be interesting and interested in the kids and that time's certainly getting compacted by everything else, but it doesn't mean it isn't there, it just means, it just seems to be a bit more structured.

He expressed his view that English can be about explorations of what it means to be a person, or as Rosen would say to tap the 'springs of life'. However, the pressures of prescribed curriculum and assessment do curtail this construct of the subject:

> Um, I think English teachers have got a much greater opportunity than other subjects to discuss the human condition. I think sometimes the obligations to the curriculum, obligations to assessment, can, and time constraints, can sometimes make teachers take their eye off the ball...there's that little voice all the time 'we have to get through this patch of work so that when this patch ends we can generate some evidence that this kid is at this level'.

Here, Dixon's (1967, p.84) warning that 'the English teacher's field of activity be restricted to that which can be made incremental' is prescient. Gareth has a strong sense of what English teaching could be about and he is clearly troubled by the trend towards tighter administration of lessons. He recalled:

> The best of the teachers that I had were the ones that were quite *loose*, they were more interesting, more interested in the world, in books, poems, but also broader than that, what the motivations were for why we did things, why we said things. Course that's gone. That's got less in the last ten years I think.

Gareth's unease confirms Harris' (2007, p.52) recent contention that 'Education is constrained and bounded to that which can be given expression, measured, standardised and quantified.' The *loose* approach of the teachers that he recalls is no longer an option when, as Gareth explained:

> Well, you know, within the planning, the first screen in any PowerPoint is the objectives: 'By the end of the lesson we will have covered this, this and this' and I tend to track the learning at the end of the session...

Rhiannon was the other Welsh teacher who directly emphasized the opportunities that the abolition of SATs afforded teachers to focus on the child. Like Gareth's her comments were framed within a performative discourse:

> I think the abolition has given us more space to say, hang on, *that particular child isn't good at that, and we can address that* more easily.

Rhiannon's personal construct of English includes the importance of pleasure and personal growth. However, she works in a school in which, historically, exam results have been well below the national average. Therefore, she admits to taking a mechanistic approach to her teaching, especially at Key Stage Four:

> They know where they are and they know what they have to do to move forward...it's almost like ticking a box, you know, if you do this, this, this and this, you will achieve this, this, this and this.

She states:

> I believe you should make English fantastic and magical and you should teach a love of books and teach them to become lively, engaged individuals and actually that's not what I do. I teach them how to get a C if they are on a level five and how to get an A, because I actually think that serves them better because it is, you know, if they've got the C or above in English language then they have a passport to doing whatever it is they want to. And whatever I might think about teaching loves of reading or whatever, what matters is that they achieve academically.

Rhiannon described the elation of her students in a socially deprived area when they found out that they had done well in their GCSEs and was confident that her approach was vindicated. She felt strongly that the standards agenda, with a focus on explicit teaching and constant monitoring, had been a success in her school 'because for us it is literally um, we've taken it and driven it and it has worked.'

However, at Key Stage Three, in the light of the 'godsend' that was the abolition of the SATs Rhiannon reported that:

> I think teachers were delighted because at the end of the day, what teachers had done was had taught to a test, so you would teach certain things, you'd teach how to answer short answer questions, how to track through questions...so what teachers could then do [after the tests were abolished] was to choose the books that

> they wanted to teach, choose interesting assignments that would switch on their kids.

It seems that Rhiannon is willing to accept the performative pressures to teach by 'ticking the box' at Key Stage Four because she feels that such an approach helps her students to get good examination results. However, she is also pleased that such pressures have been reduced in Key Stage Three and she now has more freedom to choose texts which appeal specifically to the students that she teaches.

Sophie reaffirms Rhiannon's belief that explicit, objectives-led teaching seems to generate good exam results at Key Stage Four. Her observations exemplify Ravitch's (1995) early writing on the importance of clear, content-standards linked to assessment foci:

> I think my teaching of GCSE English language is the most at odds with how I would like to teach, but it's the area where perhaps I'm most successful, so I think I've honed it down to: what's A03 [Assessment Objective 3] what's A02 [Assessment Objective 2]? And they can tell you and they can get an exam paper and they can identify criteria and I explicitly teach them sheets of presentation device vocabulary which identify things which I kind of know at core are a little bit meaningless.

In contrast, because of the absence of testing now at Key Stage Three, Sophie was pleased that at Key Stage Three she felt that her teaching style was more 'in line' with her construction of English:

> So right now, in my teaching of Key Stage Three I feel things are in line. How I want to teach, I'm teaching great literature, interesting, challenging literature, poems, in a way which gives me autonomy to teach them. That is completely in line.

Of all the teachers in both England and Wales, Peter most clearly articulated his preference for child-centred pedagogy. Moreover, he felt that he was able to teach in a child-centred way across the Key Stages. His views fit into a progressive model of English teaching which foregrounds fun and which diminishes the focus on content. Peter stated:

> Personally, I think that what's more important is how, is the student happy, are they comfortable, are they secure, do they feel happy coming into the class, are they happy in the class, do they feel that they can be themselves, that they can experiment, that they can, you know, take risks, ur and have fun? That's for me, and there is, obviously, that sounds a bit sort of I don't know, sixties pie in the sky bullshit, but there is quite sound research I guess that shows unless you create that sort of environment, learning isn't going to happen anyway, or meaningful

> learning. You can sort of rote learn, or, you know, parrot fashion sort of content, but English, as a skills-based subject you know, if you want those skills, you have to be able to fail and recognise failure as part of that process...

There is a striking contrast between Peter's process-based vision of English and the more content driven approach taken by Rhiannon and Sophie, described above. In addition, Peter could clearly critique the way in which the standards agenda has the tendency to construct progress as uniform and linear:

> I'm more interested in creating that sort of proper learning environment for learning to take place, whereas the whole sort of assessment now seems to be levelling everything out, everything has to be the same and everybody has to have the same experience at the same time and learn at the same rate and I think there needs to be...a greater understanding of the importance of an individual in learning, and who they are and where they're from and what they're about and, you know, rather, a less sort of mercenary approach as well.

Peter's testimony is redolent of Arnold's aim to replace the concept of economic growth with a focus on personal growth. He is also engaging in what Lankshear would term 'meta-analysis' in order to resist policy prescriptions that do not fit his model of education (Gale and Densmore, 2003, p.46). However, Peter is aware that he is only able to 'get away with' the way he approaches his classes because the English department's results are considered by the school's senior management team and by OFSTED to be outstanding. In addition, Peter believes that his views on teaching and learning are a barrier to promotion in a managerialist culture in which standardising pedagogical approaches and tracking student progress against a 'norm' is a key role of senior managers. He claims that any attempt to question the dominant culture is:

> ...sort of self defeating isn't it, because if you are that voice, then you don't rise up the greasy pole, because you don't buy into the things which you need to buy into, which you then need to go around propagating and telling other people to do...

In Wales, Gareth also bemoans a managerialist culture which does not allow characters such as Peter to flourish in education to the extent that they might have previously:

> Gareth: I seem to see less interesting personalities being attracted to teaching; they all seem to be of a type.
>
> Mari: Which is?
>
> Gareth: Ur, maybe trained, um, to the nth degree but removed, some of them, not all of them, but some of them seem to lose some of the human condition really,

> there seems to be, ur I just think there's a production line of teachers that appear to be the same.

The above analysis suggests that while there are some grounds to argue that pedagogy is broadening in the absence of SATs tests, there is also evidence that a managerialist culture in which objectives-led teaching has become the norm is shaping practice. The next part of this chapter examines the evidence from the data that English departments are continuing to administer SATs style tests.

4.2.5 The continuing pressure to test students at Key Stage Three

It is clear that many English departments in the summer of 2009 continued to test the students using official examination papers which were available. Much of the data suggests that English teachers were continuing with the tests as a result of direct pressure from senior management who were, in turn, feeling pressure from OFSTED. Richard recalled:

> There was one school that I was in only a few weeks ago where the senior management had dictated how English was going to be assessed rather than through APP, or the teachers' own judgements, it was going to be end of year tests in year seven, eight and nine and that way they were going to have, they thought were going to have better tracking.

Jim talked of another school in which:

> ...they wanted to see whether or not their exam results had improved from Key Stage Two and so they had all that kind of paraphernalia in place and so they couldn't do that if the SATs were abandoned...

Jim reported that only 50% of his partnership schools dropped the SATs in 2009 'and the other half, largely on the behest of the senior management, did the SATs tests even though they were officially abolished'. There was a strong sense that the SATs had become part of the machinery of assessment for 'system control' and therefore, it had to remain:

> But in the schools which we use, um, there were some people who were putting pressure on the English department to do the SATs and so they did them. And that was entirely to do with things like, you know Fischer Family Trust stuff and, you know, general accountability and, you know, what's the difference between Key Stage Three and Four.

As in England, when the tests were first abolished in Wales, many departments continued to use testing also, according to Jonathan:

> At Key Stage Three, not all schools and core subject departments were initially pleased or indeed fully prepared for the removal of the tests. In 2006, secondary schools were given the opportunity to continue using the Key Stage Three tests and the linked external marking service – 64% of English departments chose to do so.

Here, Broadfoot's concept of a 'technicist value orientation' has strong explanatory power:

> A technicist value orientation requires that those judgements which lie at the heart of any assessment procedure are transformed from being evaluations of an individual's qualities or achievements made against a more or less personal, value-laden set of chosen criteria into evaluations in which the criteria are apparently the absolute dictats of scientific efficiency (Broadfoot, 1996, p.21).

Broadfoot's commentary is aligned with Eisner's insight that to assess well in the arts sometimes the concept of a standard is misleading, sometimes a judgement is necessary. However, judgement requires a level of trust and standards are ostensibly more immune to the fallibility and subjectivity of practitioners.

Richard corroborated the idea that school managers have a technicist orientation which leaves little room for trusting the autonomous judgements of teachers:

> ...but I think there's not as much freedom, there's not as much freedom that departments enjoy as you might think. Sometimes I think the ur senior staff are so driven by OFSTED considerations to show progress... So some teachers are not free to assess in the way that they might wish to, um, and also when the SATs were abolished I think ur, at Key Stage Three, many senior managements had already ordered papers, um so those could be taken in their school, because they trusted I think more the exam scheme, the mark scheme in the back of the tests than they did the teachers' judgement...

Again, these testimonies which bemoan a teacher's lack of freedom to 'assess in the way that they might wish to', can be explained not by the imposition of a standardised test, but by the presence of more elusive 'disciplinary technologies' and discourses. The statutory standardised tests may have been removed, but there is a strong expectation that comes from school managers and the inspectorate to ensure that students are showing 'progress' and that a 'norm' is established against which students may be judged. As Foucault (1977, p.181) states: 'By assessing acts with precision, discipline judges individuals "in truth"'. Yet as Dixon (1967, p.84) argues, it is difficult to map out progression and assess with precision in English and many progressively minded practitioners have convincingly articulated their concerns that the subject does not lend itself to linear progress and warned

educators to resist 'the illusion that all subjects are akin to Mathematics'. Arguably, the 'dictats of scientific efficiency' have a harder impact on some subjects than on others[4]. Even if English teaching professionals resist (as they have so vociferously done in the past) the tendency towards technicist or mechanistic value orientations, the senior management and OFSTED, who oversee a range of subjects, may not be attuned to the particular difficulties that such value systems may cause for teachers of the mother tongue.

Despite the desire of certain management teams to continue with standardised assessments, what the removal of centralized prescription has done, is place the English department in a position in which they may be able to *negotiate* with individuals that they see on a daily basis in their institutions. They are no longer facing the non-negotiable directives from Whitehall, as the following extracts from Jim and Richard's accounts exemplify:

> Senior management wanted to do them and the English teachers protested, so English teachers said: 'no, I'm sorry, you know, I'm fed up with doing them, I don't want to do them any more and if you make me, there'll be trouble' and so they didn't do them.
>
> English teachers said, said: 'no we're not going to do them'. And they did maintain them in other subjects so, for example, in one school I know of, they didn't do the English ones but they did the Maths and Science.

Section 4.2 of this chapter analyzed the responses of Key Stage Three English teachers, in both Wales and England, to the abolition of standardised tests. The themes that emerged from the data analysis were similar in both polities. Section 4.3 will examine the different policy approaches that England and Wales have taken towards curriculum and assessment in the aftermath of the abolition of the SATs.

4.3 An analysis of the changes to Key Stage Three curricula and assessments after the abolition of SATs in England and Wales

A recurrent theme throughout this thesis is the peculiarly mercurial nature of English and the difficulty that assessment poses in a subject which is so difficult to 'atomise'. Peter, an English teacher with significant experience of externally examining SATs and GCSE papers, echoes the unease expressed by many writers cited in the literature review,

[4] It is important to acknowledge that there are teachers of Mathematics and Science who argue convincingly for pedagogies in their subjects to be less rigidly prescribed in order for students to develop higher order cognitive skills (see Adey 2004).

including Barrs (1990) and Mittins (1988), that standardisation in English is fraught with difficulties:

> With a subject like English...it's difficult for them [the students] to see what the measure of their learning is and to see, you know, how am I learning? Am I getting better? What do I know now that I didn't know before? Getting them to be self-reflective about it, as I say it's more difficult in English I think, because the perception is, and in some ways it's a correct perception that the subject is fiendishly difficult to assess, your ability in a subject is fiendishly difficult to assess in any meaningful way.

However, Peter understood that the requirement to report students' progress along a linear trajectory was not going to be removed and that the task of reporting a standardised level will, in the absence of the SATs, lie with the teacher. He was annoyed and his irritation arose from his very clear sense that although the SATs were not, in his words, 'educationally sound', at least an external body was responsible for providing unsound data. Under the new arrangements, Peter was frustrated at the prospect that *he* was now going to be in charge of reporting a level that he felt was almost impossible to generate meaningfully:

> It leaves a kind of annoying vacuum in a sense that we have to try and fill in some other way, because um you know, apart from, I mean they weren't educationally sound and all of those arguments have been gone through before about why they don't work and you know, what they don't tell us, how they're not useful in any sense and how teachers teach to the tests and how they skew the curriculum, all of that kind of stuff, right, I mean I agree with all of those arguments that say for those reasons they're a waste of time, but at least they did give an official measure, a level. You could put that and say, well there it is, it might be meaningless educationally speaking, um but at least it's there officially. Now, we still have to report something, but we have to now decide how we're going to, you know, report ur assessment, level of assessment? Is it going to be a level? Is it going to be a grade and how are we going to make that meaningful?

The next section of this chapter is an analysis of the way in which Wales and England are attempting, in their different ways, to assess English without standardised testing.

4.3.1 The Welsh initiative to replace SATs with teacher assessment

In Wales, official documentation unequivocally states the need for a reduction in the levels of prescription. The DCELLS (2008, p.7) document *Making the Most of Learning, Implementing the Revised Curriculum* states that 'One of the overall aims of the revised

curriculum is to reduce prescription and to give control and responsibility back to schools and to learners themselves'. A close reading of the Welsh National Curriculum document for English teachers does suggest that in Wales, the logic of the standards agenda is receding. The word 'standards' is not used in the English part of the Welsh National Curriculum which is more in tune with a progressive than a performative discourse:

> all children and young people must be provided with an education that develops their *personality* and talents to the full[5].

SATs tests and league tables have been purposively abandoned and there has been a clear move towards a skills-based curriculum which encourages a focus on process as well as on content. Jonathan, a Welsh civil servant, explained that the tests had been abolished because, amongst other things, they pushed teachers towards 'the over preparation of learners for the tests through drill and practice, and consequent time devoted to this', he also noted that the Welsh Department for Education was very aware of the 'Negative curriculum backwash effects, that is, teaching to the tests...' and that 'The opportunity to re-direct teaching and learning towards more productive work and pedagogy' would arise in the absence of testing.

However, Wales is situated within an international framework in which a technicist approach to assessment is still prevalent. As Daugherty (2004, p.32) acknowledges 'One part of the [Assessment Review] Group's remit has been to ensure that the information available about educational standards in Wales is capable of international comparison.' Therefore, despite the shift towards teacher assessment in Wales, the change is still occurring within the parameters of an education system which must come up to the 'standards' judged by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Within Welsh local authorities, there is also a system of 'benchmarking', which puts performative pressure on schools to ensure that their results are in line with expectations. As Rhiannon stated:

> We have to raise standards...there are targets set, you know, the county council will set targets for the school and those targets are based very much on past

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[5] (p.4 http://wales.gov.uk/dcells/publications/curriculum_and_assessment/arevisedcurriculumforwales/nationalcurriculum/englishnc/englishncoeng.pdf?lang=en)

> performance and prior data um and there is a set of formulae, if you come in with a level five you're expected to go up two levels, if you come in with a four, it's a level and a half and it's about a constant drive on standards.

The following analysis will focus on the way in which teacher assessment is open to manipulation in Wales and it will argue that increased teacher autonomy in a performative culture can result in teachers fabricating data and 'gaming the system' (Ravitch, 2010, p.156).

As official data at the end Key Stage Two in Wales is now generated wholly by teacher assessment (although there are measures in place to generate standardised 'skills profiles' in year five), questions are arising about the validity of these results. Rhiannon, who works in an urban comprehensive, gave me clear evidence that the data coming up to her secondary school from the feeder primary schools was 'at best suspect'. I was given a sheet which had year seven students' reading ages plotted against their Key Stage Two SATs attainment data and Rhiannon explained that the document showed that there was a huge disparity between the SATs results as reported by the teacher and the reading ages which had been generated by tests. She claimed:

> The problem we do have directly links to problems with transition, Key Stage Two to Key Stage Three, because students are coming in with level fours which means we need to get level five or level five and a half [at the end of Key Stage Three], and yet they had a reading age of about seven...

Rhiannon was cautious with language when discussing this issue, she was unwilling to accuse her primary colleagues of lying: 'untruths is probably too strong a word but um, ur, it's certainly not strictly kosher'. She empathised with the pressure that her colleagues were under:

> From our feeder primaries' point of view they're doing everything they can to raise standards, so they look as good as possible and I'm not doubting that, you know, this child achieved this grade. But the question you've got to ask is *how* did they achieve it and what support was given, because it's not actually in their interest to give an honest picture.

As Arnold (1867) observed:

> In the game of mechanical contrivances the teacher will in the end beat us; and as it is now found possible, by ingenious preparation, to get children through the Revised Code examination in reading, writing and ciphering, so it will with practice no doubt be found possible to get the three-fourths of the one-fifth of the children

> over six through the examination in grammar, geography and history, without their really knowing any one of these three matters (cited in Moore, 2004, p.44).

Alan, a primary school teacher who also has a wider role with a local teaching union, corroborated Rhiannon's concerns. He explained that the educational culture of benchmarking and target setting was putting pressure on staff to report higher levels than they would have, had they relied solely on their professional judgement:

> What happened was ur, teachers were assessing as they should assess, according to the level descriptors, but we were getting pushed to actually look at the children and go back and look at their papers, look at their work and try to move them into a higher level, because we were being put into benchmarking brackets.

He explained:

> Pressure was being put on us by the head teacher, by the advisors that came out from the county, to actually, you know 'you're being too hard on the children', the snapshot is when they're doing that piece of work if they're hitting that target at that moment, that's where you assess them, not going back and looking at their whole work and seeing if they're doing that consistently, if they're doing it at a particular time, that's it.

This directly contradicts the DCELLs (2008, p.18) advice on how to generate levels, which is very clear:

> A judgement is reached by a best-fit analysis, where each description is considered in conjunction with the descriptions for adjacent outcomes or levels, and the work of a learner is allocated the outcome or level which best fits. It is likely that the learner will exhibit some characteristics of the adjacent outcomes or levels but summative judgement must relate to the outcome or level that best fits the learner's overall attainment.

Alan elaborated on the situation in his school which was undergoing inspection and was receiving advice, prior to the inspectors' visit, from the head teacher of another school:

> We were asked to look very carefully at the Key Stage Two, end of Key Stage assessments. They went back five times to the teacher until we got the result that, you know we wanted to show the inspectors, that the school wanted to show the inspectors...The results went back to the year six teacher and the year two teacher five times.

Alan testified that this was not an isolated incident and that through his trade union work he had encountered numerous examples of head teachers placing teachers under pressure to inflate grades. His conclusions concerning current assessment practices are captured in the

following exchange which shows that teachers are keen to discuss the anomalies in the current assessment regime in Wales. Alan's language, like Rhiannon's, is cautious and tentative, suggesting a painful awareness that they are engaged in practice which is unprofessional:

> Alan: It's a paper-based exercise, there's not a great deal of thought and consideration of their own professional judgement being made, which was why we wanted the SATs to be removed in the first place, to get back to that, to allow teachers to assess children according to their own professional judgement without the pressures of external testing.
>
> Mari: But that hasn't worked, so the removal of the SATs hasn't really delivered what we wanted?
>
> Interviewee: Absolutely not, there are still political considerations driving our assessment of children.
>
> Mari: It seems to me that results are still driving practice.
>
> Interviewee: Absolutely, yeah,
>
> Mari: Or at least they're driving people to fabricate...
>
> Interviewee: I wouldn't disassociate myself from what you've just said, I think that is what is happening,

Foucault (1980, p.158) describes disciplinary power not as a hierarchical system, but as 'a machine working by a complex system of cogs and gears'. It seems that teachers are caught up in a performative machine and are turning the wheels sometimes against their better instincts. Alan can see that he is embroiled in something that his language suggests he is uncomfortable with. The use of two negative verbs 'wouldn't disassociate' means 'would associate' but the use of negatives serves to create linguistic space between the description of a problematic practice and the subject of the verbs; Alan is reluctant to admit positive engagement with grade inflation but he accepts that he is involved. Foucault states that where there is power there is resistance but it seems that rather than a vocal resistance, an ironic 'gaming of the system' is often a response, because 'the system' still seems to demand progress towards standards, as opposed to nuanced judgements of unique individuals.

Megan, like Atkinson (2003), laughed in the face of pressure from her manager to inflate grades, she stated:

> The trouble is, is that heads will put pressure on teachers to give a certain number of level fives, *because that's how the school is judged.* Particularly, my head came round and asked us to change our levels after we'd awarded them. And that happened the year before...
>
> The original um results we sent to the head were 76% level five and above and he said, 'well that's not enough, Maths and Science have got 80, you've got to get up to 80'. So I literally went back with my list to each teacher and said: 'Right, you've given him a level five, is there anyone on this list you could give a level five to? You've got five boys on a level four, is there any one of those...?' So I literally went round each classroom doing that and they said, 'Oh god, well at a push, well, not really but I suppose I could put him up', so I did that.
>
> Then the head came back to me and said 'Do you know what, I realized that the boys are underachieving compared to the girls, can you find another couple of boys?' So I didn't have time coz it was going off that afternoon to go round and ask people, so I just picked a couple (laughs), which is ridiculous isn't it, so I picked a couple of boys and then the ironic thing was that the inspector reported back on standards...and the one really positive thing that she said about our results, well I was struggling not to laugh, when she said, 'well it's really good that you've closed the gender gap in Key Stage Three' and it just shows what a sham it all is.

If teachers are able to critique the 'no excuses' (Noddings, 2007b, p.26) culture and honestly engage in discussions about why some of their students may not be 'performing', then there is the potential for a more nuanced, teacher-based assessment process to develop. As Noddings claims, 'It is just silly to say that all children can learn whatever the school prescribes. Anyone who has actually taught knows that this is untrue' (ibid). However, if the discursive construction of a child remains one which is uniformly capable of linear progress there will be perverse results and anomalies in various parts of the education system in Wales. The DCELLs (2008, p.18) document seeks to reassure teachers that there is an understanding amongst policy makers that progress is not always linear and uniform:

> Learners' progress will not necessarily be regular or linear – they might regress in some aspects of their work, might reach a plateau for a while or might progress significantly in one or more aspect.

Yet the very next line of the document then maps out the line of progress for the 'average' learner:

> However, the broad expectation remains that, in most subjects, an 'average' learner in Key Stages 2 and 3 will progress one level over two years.

It is important to note that although the data reveals that a system based entirely on teacher assessment is open to manipulation, some teachers in Wales do believe that these problems are being resolved. Gareth said:

> I think that there's still a little bit of discrepancy...anecdotally, a lot of the department will tell you that um they [the grades] are inflated because they're under pressure also, but I feel there has been a shift.

Erin stressed that teacher assessment required 'professionalism' on the part of the teachers if it is to work:

> You have to rely on the professionalism of the teachers as well, to a certain extent, which is more perhaps than you used to do when the exams were in place, but I think because there's now lots and lots of work with transition where levels are discussed, we have folders of exemplar work both the primaries and secondaries, um it's on the agenda for most people, I would imagine, at least once a term to look over work to check the levels are correct, so I think provided, you know, things are in place, and I'm not saying they're in place everywhere, but they certainly are in my school and in our primaries, then I think it's quite a good system.

When Erin was asked about any possible pressures in the system that may cause grade inflation, her response was:

> So there's pressure on us as well to hit targets but at the end of the day, you have to be professional and if people aren't performing at that level, you have to give them the level that they are at.

Part of the rationale for not inflating grades at Key Stage Three was explained by Erin with reference to the damaging knock-on effect that this would have at Key Stage Four. In a secondary school, if Key Stage Three marks are inflated by the English staff, the same staff will need to meet higher targets for those students at the end of the next Key Stage. Erin said:

> I think it is vitally important that you don't inflate certain levels in order to hit, you know, the benchmark data, because at GCSE then obviously they don't achieve either, possibly, and then it has a knock on effect throughout the school.

Erin also had the confidence to express the fact that certain students, irrespective of the quality of the teaching, do not progress 'normally':

> ...but sometimes, the levels, they're just never going to get to that level really, no matter what you do, so there might be lots of different reasons why they're not going to get there but...

Erin's notion of 'professionalism' seems to include an understanding of the child which allows for non-linear, non-uniform progress. As she says, 'there might be lots of different reasons why they're not going to get there'. However, there are numerous teachers and head teachers who do not feel that they are able to express the 'truth' that their students make non-linear, non-uniform progress. As the data shows, one head teacher felt that progress in English should match progress made in 'Science and Maths'. Primary teachers in Wales are reporting that their students are reaching level fours in English (the government's target standard for the age-group) when their reading ages would suggest that they are unable to access the secondary curriculum. It seems that in Wales, despite the abolition of testing and the reform of assessment based on wide-ranging consultation and input from experts within the academic community, a linear and uniform construct of progress, which is part of the international discourse on standards, puts pressure on teachers and managers to inflate grades.

Arwena, a retired teacher in Wales, was keen to point out the advantages of increased state intervention. She taught in Wales throughout the 1970s when Callaghan was seeking to understand what was happening in the 'secret garden' and claims that:

> you can't look back on the period before the National Curriculum and think that everything was fine because it wasn't...there were many poor teachers and they now can't get away with what they could years ago. They're far more accountable.

However, it is teacher's accountability for the standardised performance of their pupils that, as Ball (1997) argues, may ultimately make public sector institutions less not more transparent. Arwena, following an acknowledgement that teachers working today do fabricate data, stated that in the 1970s and 1980s:

> ...there was no reason for a teacher not to be honest, that was the thing. Why would the teacher not be honest, because it didn't make any difference to them? They weren't judged on how many children they had who could read with a reading age of thirteen or fourteen.

In Wales, the devolved government was quick to put some 'clear red water' between England and Wales when the decision was taken to abandon standardised tests across the Key Stages in 2005. The above analysis suggests that the results of this policy initiative have been mixed. While English at Key Stage Three, especially the teaching of Shakespeare, has benefitted from a broader range of pedagogical approaches, an

assessment system which is wholly dependent on teacher assessment is vulnerable to practices which are, in the words of an interviewee, not strictly 'kosher'. Teachers and managers succumb to performative pressures, as Alan explained:

> Obviously in Wales it's the movement back to, away from prescription, that's what's actually driving it, away from prescription and a return to child-centred learning, which is the way we taught when I first taught in 1980, a skills approach...it's not so content driven. So there is a great deal more freedom in what teachers teach; the content that was the National Curriculum has been largely removed. However, I think teachers are a bit reluctant to grasp that ur, to take that and run with it because there are still strictures upon them, they are still being asked to turn out results ur and they're reluctant to go away from what they know works to get those results, that's an issue for us.

Gareth, despite welcoming many of the initiatives brought in by the Welsh assembly government also recognizes the performative constraints and believes that it is time for the Welsh assembly government to award greater autonomy to the profession:

> I think the government has to meet us half way; it has to trust teachers to understand what's in front of them. Nobody comes into the profession to neglect their duties and there's enough mechanisms in place to make sure that a bad teacher is found out, at the same time, the good teachers, it feels as if they're under the kosh, you know because everything's quite prescriptive, there's the standards you have to hit and that's fine, nobody in their right mind would challenge the standards, we are all professionals, we realise that's the way we must go, but within that, it somehow, government and everything seem absorbed in figures and as you become senior management and beyond, gradually you get more and more removed from the actual day to day what we do in the classroom... You can feel that the gods on Mount Olympus you know, are moving us around sometimes but not necessarily listening to what we've got to say.

4.3.2 A textual analysis of the curriculum and assesment documents which inform practice in England

As the methodology chapter set out, the analysis in this thesis has been generated through the combined use of traditional Grounded Theory coding and situational maps. The situational maps have been the catalyst for an emerging theory which makes certain discursive constructions of both knowledge and the child crucial to specific conceptualisations of the work of Key Stage Three English teachers in England and in Wales (see Figure 1). Therefore, the following section of this chapter summarises the results of a piece of textual analysis that was undertaken on a series of English documents which currently inform English teaching in England. As Clarke (2005) states, 'If

knowledge is power in the Foucaultian sense, attending to the ways in which knowledges are produced, legitimated, and maintained through language/through discourses/through discursive practices becomes central in analysing power of all kinds' (Clarke, 2005, p.150). The textual analysis below attends specifically to the ways in which official documents are constructing the work of secondary English teachers in England.

4.3.2a) An analysis of the revised Secondary National Curriculum in England

ai) Contradictory curriculum documents

Chapter One situated the work of English teachers in England within a shifting policy environment. SATs were abolished in October 2008 and in the same year the (then) QCA launched a new curriculum for England (QCDA, 2010). A close reading of this document interrogates Gordon Brown's (2009) claims that teachers are being 'liberated...Trusting teachers is why we have thinned out the curriculum in secondary schools'.

Under the first headline 'About the Secondary Curriculum' are listed the six intended outcomes of secondary school, to:

> 1 achieve high standards and make better progress;
> 2 narrow the gap and enable those not achieving age-related expectations at age 11 to catch up with their peers;
> 3 have and be able to use high-quality personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS) and become independent learners;
> 4 have and be able to use high-quality functional skills;
> 5 be challenged and stretched to achieve their potential;
> 6 have increased commitment to and enjoyment of learning leading to participation to 19 and beyond.

Embodied within these outcomes are implicit constructions of knowledge and progress which may be at odds with each other. The first statement clearly signals a commitment to 'standards' and 'progress' which implies a neat view of the acquisition of specified knowledge along a linear trajectory. It fits in with Moore's (2004, p.102) description of knowledge as 'inventorisable'. The second statement also constructs learners as, to an extent, uniform in their potential and endorses the notion that there is a pathway through learning which can be mapped out for each age group. These statements work against the

claim that prescription is loosening as there is an assumption that teachers are working on a linear track that has already been laid out. However, the commitment to 'personal, learning and thinking skills' potentially requires an entirely different understanding of both knowledge and of progress. If learners are to become autonomous, it is problematic to have a trajectory and personal thought is, by definition, difficult to map out. This tension is explored further below.

Part of the new secondary National Curriculum document is entitled *What has Changed and Why?* (QCDA, 2010) which is particularly pertinent to this research which seeks to understand the shifting policy environment in which English teachers are working. It begins with a short paragraph written by Mick Waters, former Director of Curriculum at the QCDA. It contains four instances of the modal verb 'should'. This verb is ambiguous as it connotes both a tentative 'it would be optimal if' and a more authoritative 'obliged to, ought to'. Readers are told that 'The curriculum should be treasured' and that 'There should be real pride in our curriculum: the learning that the nation has decided to set before its young.' One possible reading is that we ('teachers, parents, employers, the media and the public') are *obliged* to accept graciously what the curriculum offers. The use of the word 'nation' implies that there has been an uncontentious consensus reached about the content of the curriculum and glosses over the possibility that its contents are contestable. Moreover, the use of the phrase 'set before its young' is evocative of an animal in a state of nature, and positions the curriculum as a natural offering.

The first part of the document after the foreword, begins with a clear signal that 'raising standards' is still strongly present in the discourse:

> This is an exciting moment in the development of secondary education. A new curriculum is being introduced that will enable schools to raise standards...

However, the statement is expanded upon and six aims of the revised curriculum are articulated, one of which is 'to gives schools the flexibility to personalise learning and design a curriculum that meets the needs of their learners'. This point is re-emphasised immediately: 'schools have a unique opportunity to build their own curriculum that reflects their local context and meets their learners' needs, capabilities and aspirations.'

The term 'unique opportunity' suggests a significant shift from the past and signals that the

tightly controlled national content standards are to be replaced with something more 'personalised' and 'local'. This can be read as a rolling back of the standards agenda as if something is personal and local it is difficult to standardise and assess in a way that can generate nationally comparable data. There is also an echo of progressive concerns from previous discourses redolent in the phrase 'Learners will experience a curriculum that is more relevant, provides the support and challenge they need, and better meets their interests and aspirations.' As Medway (1990, p.25) has stated, in the 1960s, 'An approach based on personal experience and social issues did indeed motivate many pupils...Ordinary lives of ordinary children were dignified as worthy matter for the English lesson.' However, the performative discourse reappears in the very next sentence of the QCDA document; the point of a relevant curriculum is not that learners enjoy school and retain their interest in learning for its own sake, the point is that relevance leads to higher standards:

> As a result, their engagement with learning will increase and they will make better progress and achieve higher standards.

As Fielding (2007, p.389) has noted 'Rather than the functional being for the sake of the personal the personal is, in fact, subservient to the functional.' Hatcher (2007, p.1) warns:

> But it is important to resist illusions that these curriculum reforms and the other associated changes can be the basis of a new and unambiguously progressive policy consensus. These reforms do not contradict the neo-liberal function of the school system. The underpinning rationale remains the production of an economically competitive workforce...

aii) The introduction of Functional Skills and Personal Learning and Thinking Skills (PLTS) contradicts claims that the curriculum is being simplified

The imperative of a competent workforce seems to underpin the introduction of 'Functional skills of English' into the curriculum. As highlighted in the literature review, in a QCA conference on the future of English, practitioners did raise the fear that calling an aspect the subject 'functional':

> ...leads to reduction, limitation and loss of creativity: describing a particular form of English as functional and separating it from other forms of English makes it appear a discrete and arid entity and 'basic' to English is a mind that connects, interprets, questions, associates, values and imagines (QCA, 2005, p.30).

However, these particular concerns were not taken into account. Therefore, whereas the opening statements within the curriculum seem to suggest a simplification of the curriculum and a reduction in prescription for teachers, for English teaching professionals, the introduction of functional English is another layer of requirements which must be considered during the planning process.

As is the requirement that curriculum planning now takes into account Personal Learning and Thinking Skills (PLTS):

> The new curriculum continues to recognise the importance of subjects while placing a strong emphasis on the development of skills for life and work. A framework for personal, learning and thinking skills – under the six headings of independent enquirers, creative thinkers, team workers, self-managers, effective participators and reflective learners – has been built into the curriculum.

Many of the aims of PLTS chime with previous progressive constructs of English teaching: creativity, group work, reflection. However, there is a clear possibility, if the inescapable logic of standards is applied to this aspect of the curriculum, that every element of a young person can be gripped by the tentacles of performativity.

aiii) The performative interpretation of PLTS by a private sector publisher

Cambridge Education have devised a chart (see appendix B) to facilitate the planning and assessing of PLTS, which was one of the catalysts for this study. It is the most complete expression of Moore's modernist paradigm in which everything is susceptible to 'inventorisation'. The chart reminds teachers that 'Learners must have evidence that they have acquired and improved skills in the above six skill areas'. Therefore, the company has created 'Skills Ladders' for each of the six groups of skills. This approach is based on a philosophy they call 'Personalisation by Pieces' (see www.camb-ed.net). Their approach aims to generate discrete content standards for twenty four aspects of human behaviour, all the teacher has to do is incorporate these skills neatly into lesson plans and assess whether students have made progress up the ladder. However, the results of their endeavour reinforces the concerns of English practitioners in the progressive tradition that the path towards personal growth is impossible to compartmentalize and made to fit onto a linear ladder.

For example, the skill of being a 'Self Manager' has been broken down into four boxes which are labelled 'Be organised'; 'Go for it, finish it'; 'Manage risk'; and 'Manage emotions'. For each skill, learners can make linear progress from level one to level nine. In order to get a level one for 'Manage emotions' students have to prove that 'I can say goodbye in the morning and am happy to be at school'. Does manage emotions then mean *repress* emotions? Is being able to say goodbye a sign of being able to manage emotions? If a child is unhappy at school for a range of potentially valid reasons, does that mean that they cannot progress from level one to level two? Level three on this part of the ladder requires that 'I always stay in control'. Is this possible? Does even the Dalai Lama *always* stay in control? Level seven on the same ladder seems to be more about time management than about emotional control, it requires that 'I have demands on my time from more than one commitment at the same time and have sucessfully managed the need and demands of both.' This does not seem to be about emotional control, it seems to be about efficiency. Such attempts to inventorise personal skills seem to be driven by the 'inescapable logic' that 'A content standard should be measurable, so that students can demonstrate their mastery of the skills or knowledge; if mastery of the standard is neither measurable nor demonstrable, then it is probably so vague that it has little meaning or value for teachers and students'. However, the result is, to paraphrase Atkinson (2003, p.5), a surrealist nightmare. Rowland states:

> Understandably, if we want to ensure value for money, we need to be able to predict and measure. The fact that learning - or at least the more imaginative or critical aspects of learning - does not so readily submit to prediction and measurement is unfortunate!...The need to provide objective, numerical assessments of the effectiveness of teaching and learning inevitably prioritises...looking at learning as a predictable and limited activity...This prioritising of conformity and predictability impacts upon how courses are planned, upon the way students are taught, and upon the way learning and teaching are evaluated (2003, p.20).

What are practitioners to do when faced with such charts? Holbrook's arguments against a reductive approach to the English curriculum are relevant here:

> We can only make these capacities seem more accessible and controllable if we implicitly reduce them thus to mechanistic and functional dimensions by our terminology (1979, p.40).

Noddings' differentiation between 'accountability' and 'responsibility' is also relevant, she argues that teachers:

> ...are rightly expected to promote not only intellectual development but also social, emotional, physical, ethical and aesthetic development...Most good teachers feel these responsibilities keenly. However, they do not expect to be held accountable for, say, emotional development unless they are guilty of some for of cruelty...Teachers may be *accountable* to administrators for certain outcomes, but they are *responsible* to their students for a host of outcomes. Many of these outomes are not easily measured (2007b, p.39).

It is important that teachers engage with the arguments presented by Noddings in order to understand some of the pressures that they face. The documentary analysis above goes some way to explaining the experience that I went through as a teacher in 2008, being told, on the one hand that I was being 'liberated' and given more autonomy, but on the other hand being presented with a best practice scheme of work which had to cover not only the National Curriculum content strand for English, but functional skills, Personal Learning and Thinking Skills and *Assessing Pupils' Progress* (APP) grids.

It is to the latter that this chapter now turns. Whereas Wales, on the advice of some experienced academics, introduced an assessment policy in the wake of the SATs that, while open to manipulation, is coherent in its aims; English policy makers and educators were less ready for the vacuum created by the removal of Key Stage Three SATs. Teacher assessment is replacing testing in some schools but the standardised APP assessment grids are non-statutory and the way in which they are being used varies widely. This Research Project places particular emphasis on analysing current responses to APP materials as they are, arguably, a manifestation of the 'disciplinary technologies' of the standards agenda.

aiv) A close reading of the documents relating to the *Assessing Pupils' Progress* initiative in England

The term *Assessing Pupils' Progress* (APP) refers to a set of assessment foci and guidelines on the standardisation of assessment, that have been devised and disseminated by the 'National Strategies'. Within the new National Curriculum in England, there is an ambiguous statement about APP:

> The assessing pupils' progress (APP) materials in the core subjects will continue to help teachers make judgements about their learners' progress.

In this phrase, APP is the subject of the verbs to continue and to help. The writers of this

document have avoided giving agency to teachers, they have not written: 'teachers will continue to use APP', perhaps because that would, in a statutory document, make it clear that the use of APP is being prescribed.

It is worth looking closely at the criteria within APP (see appendix J). The writing grids have eight AFs or assessment foci. Handwriting and presentation are also on the grid, but they are not given the label 'AF'. The grid, confusingly, starts with AF5 which is 'to vary sentences for clarity, purpose and effect', AF6 is 'to write with technical accuracy of syntax and punctuation in phrases, clauses and sentences'. These are wholly technical, as is AF3: 'organise and present whole texts effectively, sequencing and structuring information, ideas and events'. AF4 is a slightly differently worded version of AF3: 'construct paragraphs and use cohesion within and between paragraphs'. Given that teachers across England are being encouraged to use this resource to assess their students, it is alarming that two of the AFs seem to be judging almost exactly the same thing as the extract below shows:

	AF3	AF4
Level 5	Across a range of writing • material is structured clearly, with sentences organised into appropriate paragraphs • development of material is effectively managed across text, e.g. closings refer back to openings • overall direction of the text supported by clear links between paragraphs	Across a range of writing • paragraphs clearly structure main ideas across text to support purpose, e.g. clear chronological or logical links between paragraphs • within paragraphs/sections, a range of devices support cohesion, e.g. secure use of pronouns, connectives, references back to text • links between paragraphs/sections generally maintained across whole text

AF1 has a much broader focus: 'write imaginative, interesting and thoughtful texts', as does AF2 'produce texts which are appropriate to task, reader and purpose', but when the detail in the AF1 and AF2 grids are examined, the ways of meeting the broad criteria are sometimes borrowed from the narrower, more technical criteria. For example, AF7 is '*select* appropriate and effective *vocabulary*' but to get a level 2 for AF1 (which was about imaginative, interesting and thoughtful texts) pupils need to demonstrate 'some apt *word choices* [to] create interest.' If the content of the boxes overlap, what is the point of having boxes? As Barrs (1990, p.23) has argued:

> The problem with analytic approaches to assessment in language is that they usually rest on inadequate models of language...The Working Party set up by the Secondary Examinations Council on GCSE English Literature...considered that it was 'not possible to identify sub-sets of skills or content which could be perceived and assessed as separate elements ' and considered that any assessment system based on such a model might 'give rise to the fragmentation of this area of the curricular experience and to a narrow approach to teaching.'

If there are not pedagogical explanations for this kind of assessment, political explanations are more fitting. It is probably the case that the Labour government could not see its way to giving up what Broadfoot (1996) has described as 'assessment for system control' or for dropping a view of education which has explicit content standards at its core, as the following recent guidance for teachers on *Assessing Pupils' Progress* shows:

> The assessment criteria do, however, inform planning because teachers need to have an idea of the type of assessment evidence that any sequence of lessons will generate. For this reason, in the Framework for secondary English, the objectives are linked to APP AFs [*Assessing Pupils' Progress* Assessment Foci] and to a relevant range of criteria. This allows teachers to see, in advance, the areas and focuses for assessment their planned unit of work will allow...The Framework objectives are the principal reference point for planning full curriculum coverage of a subject (DCSF and QCA, 2008, p.11).

This document is clearly advising English teachers to plan on the basis of discrete objectives which will generate clear and pre-planned assessments. The starting point for planning should be assessment and in order to generate comparable assessments, the national framework must be used in England.

Such a need for control and an assumption of orderly progress in a neat world is also embodied in Sue Hackman's (Chief Adviser on School Standards) foreword to a publication on *Assessing Pupils' Progress* (DCSF, 2009c, p.1). She states 'We know that

schools which have robust tracking systems in place achieve the best rates of progress and are well placed to help pupils when they *fall off trajectory.*' The word 'trajectory' clearly constructs progress as linear and the idea that a child might 'fall off' constructs a norm. Notions that a child's writing might be assessed using personal judgement which takes into account the unique interests and capacity for personal expression of the child are closed down, as the following excerpt from the materials, produced jointly by The National Strategies, the QCA and the DCSF to support APP assessments in English, shows:

> There is evidence from these three pieces of work that this pupil can produce pieces of writing that have a sense of form (AF2) and that they are appropriately adapted to audience and purpose (AF2). Ideas and content are usually sequenced and organized in a reasonably logical way (AF3) and divided into sections, although these 'paragraphs' sometimes contain a number of points that could be better linked (AF4). There is some evidence of sentence elaboration and the use of a range of connectives, including adverbials (AF5), but in all these respects, the level 4 criteria are not securely fulfilled. Vocabulary is usually appropriately chosen for the task, although the range remains rather limited (AF7), and sentence demarcation is generally secure with some use of commas in lists and a range of punctuation for direct speech. Spelling fully meets the level 4 criteria and begins to address some of those for level 5 (DCSF, 2008a, p.6).

Perhaps the writers of these 'supporting' documents should think about the relevance of Lewis' warnings that '...a technical activity automatically absorbs every non-technical activity or transforms it into a technical activity. If this were to occur in English without considerable compensatory results the loss would be too great to contemplate with equanimity...'(Lewis,1970, p.300). They may also benefit from thinking about Noddings' reminder that educators should ask 'What has Johnny learned? And not simply, Has Johnny learned X?' (2007, p.44). The answer to the question to 'What has Johnny learned?' may well include ideas of Johnny's personal growth and moral maturity, they may be nuanced reports of Johnny's developing sensitivity to literature or accounts of the way in which Johnny has learned to cope with a recent bereavement through his engagement with poetry.

av) The *Every Child Matters* (ECM) agenda in England

The Labour government was not deaf to the critiques that the education system was becoming overly performative and in 2004 there was a much publicised attempt by the British government to refocus on the *aims* of education. The publication of the *Every Child Matters* agenda (DCSF, 2009a) listed five key aims of education: learning to be

healthy, learning to stay safe, learning to enjoy and achieve, learning to make a positive contribution and learning to achieve economic wellbeing. The QCA (2008d, p.2) document entitled *Every Child Matters at the heart of the curriculum* stresses that 'A curriculum underpinned by *Every Child Matters* requires passionate and committed teaching that offers opportunities for open-ended investigation, creativity, experimentation, teamwork and performance.' English teachers are directed towards: 'reading and writing for pleasure; exploring issues and expressing feelings through prose, poetry, drama and role play' (QCA, 2008d, p.6). This sounds like an acceptance of what Goodson and Walker (1991, p.xii) have called 'the messy complexity of the classroom' and its only 'partially apprehendable practice'. Moreover, such an approach does not put assessment at the centre of the curriculum, as Glaser argues:

> The aesthetic and moral aims of education...cannot be measured...Those personal qualities that we hold dear – resilience and courage in the face of stress, a sense of craft in our work, a commitment to justice and caring in our social relationships, a dedication to advancing the public good in our communal life – are exceedingly difficult to assess (cited in Ravitch, 2010, p.166).

However, at the same time as the ECM agenda is being promoted, different messages are coming through from different government agencies. A recent circular from the QCA (2009e, p.2) claims that 'The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) seeks to develop a modern world-class curriculum and assessment that will inspire and challenge all learners and prepare them for the future. *Assessment is at the heart of an effective curriculum...*'. Whilst putting the child at the heart of the curriculum implies an acceptance of an old progressive model of education, replete with its messy uncertainties; to put assessment at the heart of the curriculum implies a narrower and neater conceptualisation of what goes on in the classroom.

An initial conclusion based solely on a reading of the official curriculum documents on the QCA website, suggests that the levels of prescription over curriculum and assessment in the English Key Stage Three classroom are still signficant. Although Gordon Brown used the term 'liberate', the levels of detail over content standards and the statement that 'teachers will continue to use APP' help to explicate why the scheme of work described in the rationale was considered 'best practice'. It embodies all the aspects of the new 2008 curriculum: detailed references to the 115 objectives listed in the Key Stage Three English National Curriculum; a mapping of where some of the 125 descriptions of assessment

targets from the APP initiative might be covered (which did not include the speaking and listening descriptions as they had yet to be released); a clear signalling of where functional skills and Personal Learning and Thinking Skills would be covered and a statement of where, in each unit of work, the curriculum's 'Key Concepts' of creativity, competence, critical understanding and cultural understanding would be taught. While testing has been dropped, the disciplinary technologies of detailed content standards and assessment foci which continue to assume that knowledge is 'inventorisable', to use Moore's term, remain, despite the potentially contradictory policy move towards a more open style of pedagogy advocated in the *Every Child Matters* documents.

4.3.3 An analysis of English educators' responses to the replacement of SATs with the *Asssessing Pupils' Progress* (APP) initiative in England

4.3.3a) An account of a subject association meeting at which APP was discussed

As stated in the methodology chapter, as part of my Research Project, in Spring 2009 I attended a LATE (London Association for Teachers of English) conference for secondary English teachers which had been organised with the express aim of helping teachers to work with emerging, post-SATs, assessment arrangements. The conference provided a unique opportunity to understand how teachers, from the 'grassroots up', were responding to new assessment arrangements in England. Over a hundred English teachers gathered on a Saturday morning to listen to two speakers, an English advisor and ex Chair of NATE (National Association of Teachers of English) and a Lecturer in English Education, and to discuss the introduction of *Assessing Pupils' Progress*. Both speakers consented to being recorded for the purpose of this Research Project.

The first speaker began his talk by humorously setting out various things that APP could stand for including 'APPeasement', because teachers' opposition to the SATs had been appeased but also:

> APPropriation possibly, it's an appropriation of the teacher assessment process because it actually starts to define teacher assessment by grading pupils against particular key skills, so emphasis, greater emphasis than the tests had, on sentence level work, for example, you might think that's not the most important thing in English communication, but as far as they're concerned it's not important enough.

The speaker was asking his audience to reflect on what might be shaping their practice and to guard against accepting constructs of English formed by government officials which may be at odds with delegates' personal constructs of the subject. He encouraged the English teachers in the room to critique policies of standardisation and he reminded them of what Helsby would term their 'discretionary space':

> There's sort of a history of resistance to government interventions of one sort or another, especially standardisation policies, particularly often resisting in contexts such as our own and that's because in terms of language they tend to focus more on the real and the day to day than on the symbolic value of language as a mark of identity...which is why we want to be careful that we use any assessment system judiciously and remember that we have freedom, freedom, professional freedom in the curriculum to address the needs of our students and our pupils and look at things of value, attitudes that are hard to assess, but it doesn't mean they're not important.

The first speaker began his teaching career before the introduction of the National Curriculum and he is well versed in the progressive tradition, having worked with, among others, James Britton. However, during his speech a trainee teacher felt impelled to contribute. This young delegate too would clearly have fitted within the progressive tradition as she expressed a strong sense of unease when faced with the task of foregrounding linear progress over pleasure. However, she articulated a concern that many colleagues have adopted a more performative mindset associated with the standards agenda. She explained that she was troubled by the amount of emphasis that teachers were encouraged to place upon moving their students up levels rather than promoting enjoyment through the writing process. She said that she believed English teachers were 'losing sight' of what they were supposed to be doing.

Her comments are redolent of Gareth's analysis of the situation in Wales in which assessment procedures can sometimes cause teachers to 'take their eye off the ball'. She went on to express her concerns, which echo a long line of thought, that different assessment foci atomise the subject.

The speaker then encouraged her and the other delegates in the room to engage with some of the academic literature on assessment in English:

> Yes, absolutely, it atomises it. That's what Myra Barrs' *Words not Numbers* and other writers about assessment have talked about: the dangers of losing the bigger picture, the context, the context of the classroom as well as the context of society is

> being lost when focusing on reductive, identifiable, measurable things. I mean, things that are *im*measurable, not just what can't be measured but actually what's more important than what can be measured because that's what *im*measurable means.

At the end of the talk, the first speaker acknowledged that some of the teachers with whom he worked were reporting that APP was quite a useful tool as it helps them to report on levels of student progress that they are tasked with achieving:

> It has helped to raise expectations in certain areas across the curriculum for certain schools and they've found it useful in terms of planning and sharpening up plans in saying here are some markers of progression that I might be looking for in my class, when I'm teaching this particular aspect of it, it might be across the curriculum, so I wouldn't want to dis that, I'm really reporting back on what teachers have said to me, they've said, yes we've found it quite useful and after a while, you know, you give it some time and it's quite positive.

However, it was clear that he, with a high level of awareness of the progressive tradition in English teaching, was broadly unimpressed by the prospect of APP and was encouraging fellow professionals to knowingly take their 'discretionary space'.

The audience warmly applauded the first speaker, the conference then split up into working groups. I attended the session on the practical implementation of APP in the secondary classroom in which teachers were supposed to listen to a talk from a fellow practitioner on the implementation of APP. Yet many of the delegates had been energised by the speech they had just heard and the workshop, far from focusing on how pragmatically to adopt APP, turned into an outpouring of frustration at the reductive tendencies of the assessment tool. The inappropriate atomisation of a subject which should be taught holistically was the concern that was recurrently expressed. It seemed that few people wanted to listen to a talk about how APP can work but many were keen to express their fears about the way in which APP potentially constructs the subject of English in ways that they were clearly unhappy with.

After the working groups reconvened in the main hall, the second speaker mounted a blistering attack on the dangers inherent in *Assessing Pupils' Progress*. He began by recommending Edmond Holmes' *What is and What Might Be* to the conference. He summed up Holmes' concerns as follows:

> He's worried about assessment systems that drive the process of teaching and learning; he's worried about an assessment system that valorises the easily measurable; he's worried about an assessment system that turns learning into a measurable commodity...

Then he warned that 'none of those worries have gone away'. He went on to outline what he perceived to be myths about assessment and he urged the delegates to be mindful of them. They were: the myth of linearity; the myth of context independence ('that you can assess a learner like a soup can, the idea that you can asses an individual not taking account of their neighbour'); the myth of reliability and the myth of accountability.

Like the first speaker, the second contributor was trying to help the delegates who, certainly in the workshop, had articulated grave concerns, despite the abolition of the SATs, about the performative environment in which they working. He offered the following advice:

> The difficulty perhaps, and it's the difficulty perhaps with which we were wrestling in the workshop, is how one maintains a perspective on the problems of high stakes, formal processes of assessment, because we have to negotiate our way through a system in which they exist. All I can suggest is that we try to remember that they are myths, that they don't tell the whole story and that other bits of the story about what learning really looks like, and how complicated real learners are, need to be brought to the front of our minds sometimes, so that we can argue, continue to argue, against the worst excesses of systems, that if we let them, will be highly reductive as accounts of real learning.

Here were two cogent and very well received reminders of what English teachers should guard against straight out of the progressive tradition, which takes the business of education to be a messy, personal and not wholly explicable business. They both sit in stark contrast to the advice from Sue Hackman who makes the neat assertion in her introduction to the booklet *Getting to Grips with Assessing Pupils' Progress* (DCSF, 2009c, p.1) that:

> APP is a straightforward approach to making secure judgements about the standard of pupils' work and what they need to do next. It has been nationally developed and standardised so that you can have confidence in the judgements made of your pupils...The bottom line is that when you make a judgement, you use national criteria, and keep a note of the judgements made over time so that you can see how pupils progress. That's it.

However, here the funding disparity between LATE and Sue Hackman, the Chief Adviser on Schools Standards at the DCSF, becomes relevant. LATE is run by volunteers and does not charge subscriptions for membership. It is a loose coalition of London-based English teachers who communicate by email and who congregate, often during the weekends to avoid incurring cover costs to schools, to discuss elements of English teaching practice which *practitioners* deem to be important. In contrast, the Chief Adviser on Schools Standards was given a budget of £150 million and has the ability to produce and disseminate glossy leaflets and to produce short films on the benefits of APP to place on Teachers' TV. As Jones (2006, p.87) has observed, 'any potential training mechanism that might ...carry with it unwanted traces of collegial approaches to teacher development, is blocked... such moves avoid the difficulties presented to government by a more autonomous culture of curriculum development'.

Does the data set corroborate the progressive critiques of APP that were clearly apparent in the LATE conference?

4.3.3.b) Evidence of confusion over the aims and implementation of APP

Broadfoot argues that:

> as well as attesting competence, regulating competition and reducing the frustration of individuals, assessment procedures have a crucial role to play in providing for such systemic control. It is these themes of competence, competition and control, and the way they in turn influence the content of education, that arguably provide the analytical key to understanding the unique and characteristic role played by educational assessment procedures in industrial society (1996, p.10).

Key Stage Three SATs tests were never about competition, students were not competing for scarce places at the next level of education. Therefore, the tests played the dual role of providing systemic data and attesting to an individual's level of competence at the end of a Key Stage. However, the data from this Research Project clearly shows that there is a lack of clarity about both the purpose of APP and about how it should be used within schools. It is not clear whether or not, in keeping with a standards-driven system which sets out clear content standards then checks performance, APP is designed to do the same summative job as the SATs, or whether it is principally formative, more in line with the learner-centred goals of Assessment for Learning. Jim gave evidence that certain key

officials at the DCSF and the QCDA had different views about the purpose of APP with the former seeing APP as 'micro-summative' and the latter as 'formative'.

If the government is to have any systemic control over Key Stage Three, then they will require standardised data. As Jim stated:

> ...they [the DCSF] are pushing that [APP] because they want the minutiae of how children are doing. You know, I've seen some graphs where they are analysing down to the last detail how, for example, girls and boys are doing, you know, girls are really good on... and they're little heads, minute yellow heads and they're saying 'girls are better at this and boys are better at that'.

Yet the officials in Whitehall cannot process the performance data for every single child in the country. It can be argued that all that is needed for systems control is a sample of students' performance against nationally set standards, which explains why some local authorities are encouraging teachers to assess just six students in a class against the APP assessment criteria. However, sampling is a very odd strategy if the aim of APP is to give students formative feedback in order to improve their learning.

The data from this study suggests that many secondary schools are not using APP for a small sample of students, but that teachers are being encouraged by the local authorities to use APP grids to assess every child they teach. This means that the amount of information that needs to be collected and reviewed is enormous. Many secondary English teachers have between seven and nine classes and each class may have up to thirty students. If a teacher has four Key Stage Three classes, they will have 120 students. Consequently, three times a year they will look at approximately six hundred pieces of work and judge them against 'each assessment focus'; there are twenty four foci and each has eight levels. Such a task is almost impossible to perform. Jim raised this point with officials at the QCDA:

> They will give levels for very minute things, so you know, writing and reading are broken up into seven and eight levels and then each one of those assessment foci has a particular level attributed to it so you could be you know, a five on one level and a six on something else and a four on something else and I, I just don't think that actually anybody can be that clued up as to what their children are, especially if it is not moderated, which it isn't going to be moderated in England at all, but QCDA say 'oh, no, I'm very sure that they can have a very accurate sense of what level their children are at'.

It seems that officials at both QCDA and the DCSF in England have been calling for the creation of hard data from what could be perceived as 'messy complexities' and that certain policy makers are unwilling to engage with arguments about the difficulties, both practical and pedagogical, of amassing highly detailed information about children's progress through the component parts of English. Ethan's account of his English department's attempt to introduce APP is worth citing at length as it demonstrates both the confusion surrounding the processes of using APP in England and the potentially large amount of time that is being spent attempting to generate detailed data:

> ...we had a sort of grid where we had to plot...what level they were at and then what assessment focus the students achieved within that level. So, for example, they've got...level four assessment focus five which is 'vary sentences for clarity purpose and effect' so they have to show some clarity in length, structure or subject of sentences, but then it goes up to, obviously up to, level seven and there's all these substrata. We were asked to give them these grids and in this folder you've got each end of unit assessment, so we assess them at the end of every unit with a written test or a reading test and usually it's some sort of writing and we tell them what we're assessing them for and then we tick off, we give them the assessment focus, so it would be level four assessment focus five and then level six for assessment focus four for example. And they have to find on the grid where they got the mark and look at what it means to be assessment focus five, level four.
>
> But actually it's very confusing. If they're lower ability they find it very difficult to find what they're at and initially there was a lot of confusion where the head of Key Stage Three for English was asked, was *told,* that students had to use these grids and highlight where they were on it and actually it's impossible.
>
> And eventually there was all this confusion and then the local authority said 'oh no no you're not supposed to do that, they're for the teachers only'. So there was a lot of tooing and froing and obviously they didn't really know what they were doing, so anyway, we're not using those any more.

As the above account reveals, the lack of clarity in England over both the purpose and process of assessment at Key Stage Three is having troubling consequences in the classroom, where is it practitioners who are left to implement muddled and confusing directives from a range of external authorities and students who are expected to plot their progress in English through a complex series of discrete content standards.

4.3.3c) The continuing presence of progressive critiques

In the data, there was strong evidence that some members of the English teaching profession are critiquing APP in line with the progressive tradition. There was a very clear

articulation of the worry that APP prevents a holistic approach to English and these concerns chime with Harold Rosen's view that 'there is no doubt that the fiercest debates are between those who believe in carefully constructed linear programmes, buttressed by claims for sequence, system and structure, and those who believe that development in language can only be achieved by working in a much more flexible and open-ended way' (cited in David and Parker, 1978, p.xii). Jim expressed the idea that the detailed assessment criteria in the APP grids 'atomises' the subject and echoed concerns expressed by LATE delegates:

> I mean I don't like the APP because I think again that fragments it, I think APP is the assessment strand of the NLS only it doesn't quite map back at all, which is horrific really, but I do think that, so I don't think that you should start with a bitty curriculum.

He went on to elaborate issues which were reminiscent of Mittins' discussion of Kingman's anxiety that a 'rung by rung' approach in English will cause problems because progression through discrete aspects of English in a linear fashion is counter to the way in which children learn to read and write. Moreover, the attempt to build such a ladder was considered to be reductive:

> I think also that it's quite difficult because what APP concentrates on is very much the technical side of writing and the technical side in a way of reading. They don't, I mean there is one strand in writing for imagination, but actually you don't get towards that until you're level 7 and 8 and I think that, you know, children who are writing at a level five can be incredibly imaginative and it isn't just, you know, an exclusive zone of people who are much abler. I mean, I think it's a kind of universal thing and, you know, they are, they are technical and of course, when you mark stuff, you take into consideration the technical, but you take into consideration everything else and actually it's the everything else that's being abandoned by the APP.

Richard spoke in a similar vein:

> I'm loathe to criticize structures, it's just that they've been abused I think by people who have been deprofessionalised and I think they've been deprofessionalised by not having autonomy and not having as much negotiation about what would happen, too much prescription, which is either central bureaucrats declaring that these are the measurable things that we want um, or else it's terrorized management saying, we've got to show them that we can do these things....

His concerns echo Holbrook's (1979) fear that 'The other terminology – "control" and "competence" – avoids the complexities by implying that we can deal explicitly with

entities. This is to falsify.' There was also a fear that *meaning* (recall Holbrook's *English for Meaning*) could be lost, crowded out by externally crafted assessment grids which encourage a content-laden concept of English that has been repeatedly criticized by thinkers in the progressive tradition. Jim stated:

> No, I think meaning is [being lost]. If you were just saying, if you're approaching English from a kind of content driven, meaning-less position, so if you were doing say, the NLS and you are just constantly assessing whether or not they have got this particular facet of English literature, then what you are doing is totally devoid of meaning.

The above concern that the meaning of texts is being downgraded through both the National Literacy Strategy and the *Assessing Pupils' Progress* initiative can be corroborated with reference to an excerpt from a National Strategy document for secondary English teachers (2001, p.14) which emphasizes the importance of achieving content standards or objectives and downgrades the unique moral message or meaning of a text:

> In planning to deliver the range of texts required by the National Curriculum, teachers will choose and use texts to deliver the objectives. In this way, pupils in one school studying, for example, *Treasure Island* and *Animal Farm*, will, one way or another, have covered the same objectives by the end of the key stage as pupils in another school who have studied quite different texts.

Moreover, Richard clearly articulated that APP could block the personal growth model of English as the goal of marking using standardised assessment criteria can seem to be at odds with marking a piece of work on the basis of its capacity creatively or even consolingly to express something of the person, the unique, individual writer that Holbrook's (who was criticized for framing English as a therapeutic subject) examples of writing so evocatively highlight:

> What happens then is the markers retreat into an area of less contested language use which is the secretarial um business, so it doesn't really do its job, but I think in the range of writing which is variously *impersonal*, I think ur, people do avoid poetry for example. The children's writing of poetry I think, to a large extent, because they don't feel comfortable in responding to it within the standards, saying, this is this standard and that standard. They may feel comfortable in celebrating aspects of it but they can't grade them very easily.

The possibility that APP may begin to define the curriculum was expressed. Richard warned:

> Like all high status assessment, it begins to define the curriculum, and therefore, it's the things outside of that that aren't mentioned, like reading for pleasure, that doesn't really get foregrounded particularly, media texts, they're there implicitly but it has to be sort of picked out.

Ethan confirmed:

> We've been asked to make sure that in our planning that every lesson has a particular assessment focus and we're told to start with the focus rather than the subject matter of the lesson.

Peter, who had yet to introduce APP dismissed it as:

> A complete and utter waste of time and so I do think there is, um, you know, it was what's his name, the accelerated learning fellow, Alistair Smith that said years ago (phone rings) the whole assessment tail wagging the learning dog and it does seem to have gone completely bonkers that way and I am worried about that because all the assessment in the world and all the record keeping in the world doesn't mean a thing if what you're assessing is worthless and you know, then do we value what we assess or do we assess what we value? Clearly, in this climate, we value what we assess.

If APP does start to define the curriculum, it also begins to reduce teacher autonomy, Ethan stated:

> It's impossible. And also, it doesn't allow the teacher to have any sense of ownership over their subject. They're not given any autonomy in terms of 'right it's up to *you* to make sure your pupils can do all of these things, you go away and find a way of doing it whereas you're like, ok I've got to teach this particular foci so I'll plan my lesson around this...

It may also be in line with Coles' '"cataloguing" framework [which] constructs ... a procedural approach to the interpretation of literature (Bloome,1994), one which positions the students ultimately as peripheral to the (re)production of meanings.' A possibility which seems to be captured by the following statement from Ethan:

> ...so 'Framework for Secondary English overview and learning objectives' so um, there are these strands and substrands so there are four, eight, oh god how many are there? Hang on, ur there are ten strands so and in that strand, so speaking and listening you've got listening and responding, speaking and presenting, group discussion and interaction, drama role play and performance and then in reading, reading for meaning, understanding the author's craft, writing is another strand which has composition, generating ideas and then composition which is shaping and constructing language and then ur and then the ninth one for writing is conventions, drawing on conventions and structures, and then language is the last one, which is exploring and analysing language which actually is the thing that you

> think English literature and English is mostly about and yet it's only given one strand. But within each strand there are substrands which help, which again help you to do your planning. So you might say well in my lesson I'm going to be teaching ur strand ur strand two and I'm going to be focusing on substrand two point two so I'm going to be using and adapting the conventions and forms of spoken text and then you come up with a lesson that enables you to do that.

There is a strong probability that this approach to planning will, perhaps inadvertently, serve to make peripheral that which English teachers have, in the past, held as central such as: 'the development of individual identity through the exploration of lived experience, effected in the classroom through the adoption of pedagogical practices in which personal experience is foregrounded'(Bousted, 1999, p.250).

Barbara was able to offer another theoretical critique:

> ...because I'm a secondary school English teacher... I did quite a lot of the theoretical teaching around Vygotsky and development of language abilities and Voloshinov and all that so, I did the specialist theory around language development...Now the key thing that we were concerned about was that my conception of language is that it moves from the whole to the parts...So language moves from the whole to the part and you need to give children, particularly those children who are vulnerable and who have deprived language environments, you need to give them a rich language whole.

However, there is evidence that in socially deprived areas, as Richard testifies, the performative strictures are tighter than in affluent areas. This may well be to do with the 'no excuses' culture that is part of the standards agenda which does not regard poverty as an excuse for low attainment.

Of the schools involved in this research, the most successful in terms of results, operated with confident disregard for centralized prescriptions concerning APP:

> Mari: So you haven't had any pressures from say anybody in the borough council saying can you do APP, those grids, the APP grids *Assessing Pupils' Progress*, or anything like that?
>
> Emily: None that I'm aware of...AfL is the closest we've ever come I think as a department, as a school, where we've followed ideas that are sort of in vogue...I think inevitably those things come from above and once in a while they seem to sort of do it in a school like this, but most of the time you get this cynicism about it from old hands especially who've seen it all before...

> Mari: So you kind of protect yourself as a staff from having to go round these loops.
>
> Emily: Yeah, and you know when you're doing really good teaching and I just, I think a lot of the time that's just immune from ur initiatives that come down from the government.

There was, within the data, one lone example of a positive response to APP from within the profession. Tom, a head of department, was optimistic about the potential that APP had to gauge what students were doing well and to highlight gaps in their knowledge:

> So we used those [APP assessments] and produced what we thought were some really excellent, really interesting data on um, using the different assessment focuses, because whereas previously we were producing levels, just broad levels for reading or writing, we now had assessment criteria there that gave you different levels for assessment focus two, three, four, five, so you could look across the groups and across the year group at um strengths and weaknesses...So what we did then was try and use that data to inform our planning for later on in the year and build in to units later on in the year opportunities to address that, but that's the principle behind APP.

However, this respondent did express the view that a cyclical process of building in the results of assessment to planning was potentially difficult because the model implied by APP requires that planning is changed every year and to change the kind of detailed short, medium and long term planning that is often required by an inspector is highly time consuming:

> Um, what's difficult is...mapping it out in schemes of work and so on because it won't be the same every year, you know the data that you are producing is specific to that cohort, therefore you can't build in and anticipate that you know, certain amount of students in year seven are going to have a certain weakness which will be addressed later on that year.

It is very clear from the data that the requirements for ordered and detailed assessments of large numbers of students in what are often seen as organic and non-linear processes such as the development of critical reading or speaking and listening skills results in considerable tension. Barbara, Jim and Richard and the two speakers at the LATE conference have a profound personal knowledge of the progressive tradition in English teaching and are therefore consciously critiquing the shifting curriculum and assessment regime through a clear, historical lens. Some practitioners such as Peter and Emily manage to ignore central prescriptions because their results leave them less vulnerable to external

scrutiny. Ethan has struggled to implement APP within his department but the process has been confusing.

Chapter 5 Conclusions and next steps

5.1 Introduction

The final chapter summarizes the conclusions that can be drawn from this small scale study, which has sought to illuminate the pressures and predicaments faced by Key Stage Three English practitioners in England and Wales. Using Grounded Theory, supplemented by Situational Analysis, the Research Project has focused on the complexities of the situation in which Key Stage Three English teachers work and has analyzed the relationships between individual actors, communities, actions and discourses. The key conclusions that the research makes concern: the links between standardised testing and pedagogy; the problematic nature of teacher assessment in Wales, given a wider performative culture; and the place of discrete objectives and standardised assessment in the peculiarly mercurial subject of English. The chapter concludes with some ideas and insights which may inform future debate and invite further research.

5.2 The link between standardised testing and pedagogical choices

The interview data revealed very strong support within the English teaching profession for the removal of SATs testing in both Wales and England. The freedom to teach Shakespeare in year nine, without having to focus on the test, was universally seen as a welcome development. Documenting the strength of positive feeling amongst English teachers in the aftermath of the abolition of SATs has been a valuable undertaking. If future governments consider the reintroduction of these tests, evidence of practitioners' reactions to their removal will provide an informative contribution to any debate.

There was also confirmation in both countries that pedagogy shifted in the wake of the abolition of tests; the strictures of accountability that had kept students behind desks underlining fragments of language fell away and enabled teachers to use more dramatic and playful pedagogies. Pleasure, enjoyment and whole texts, which had been squeezed out by the tests, came to the fore as students were 'taken to the hall' and given the chance to experience a Shakespeare play as a living and artful text. My Research Project supports the work of Coles (2009), who established that the teaching of one or two set scenes for standardised tests prompts teachers to approach Shakespeare text in a fragmented way. I

am claiming that teaching Shakespeare *without* the constraints of set scenes and standardised tests allows for a holistic approach to a text.

In addition, the data revealed clear evidence that without SATs, teachers were engaging with a more expansive pedagogical repertoire; process, at times, was more important than product. I would categorize such a shift as a move towards progressive teaching (see Elliott, 1996), which rejects the belief that the aim of education is the acquisition of systematically organized knowledge. For Elliott, effective and worthwhile learning enables pupils to appropriate content in a form that is personally significant and there is evidence that the removal of tests has, in some classrooms, allowed teachers to make pedagogical choices which take into account the preferences and moods of the individuals in front of them. When teachers take their students into the hall and allow them to put on a Shakespeare play of their choice they are, to an extent, 'surrendering to creative fate' (Holbrook, 1979, p.40) and they are also allowing pupils to construct more fully the meanings of those Shakespeare texts for themselves.

The turn to more varied pedagogy was not universal in the immediate aftermath of the abolition of the tests. In England, some school managers put pressure on English departments to continue to generate data from standardised tests, in order to inform target setting. In Wales, a significant percentage of schools continued to administer standardised tests, despite their non-statutory status in the year after their abolition. However, as teacher assessment has become embedded in Wales, there are signs that teachers can work as a community of practitioners across Key Stages in order to generate meaningful markers of progress for students of English. Such an endeavor is not unproblematic though as the following section highlights.

5.3 Teacher assessment in Wales' persistently performative culture

As the literature review reveals, there have been powerfully articulated ways of thinking and knowing which attempt to spell out alternatives to reductive content standards and standardised testing and policy makers in Wales have taken a significant amount of advice from the academic community. For example, Richard Daugherty, a Welsh academic with specialist knowledge of assessment issues, has been an influential advocate of the abolition

of standardised testing and the setting up of the alternative system of standardising assessment via collaborative teacher moderation.

However, despite efforts to grant teachers more autonomy through the loosening up of curriculum and the abolition of standardised testing, performative pressure is still generated by the local authority's measurement of schools' results against benchmarks, *de facto* league tables which are published in the Welsh newspapers, and Wales' participation in PISA. A continued culture of judging teachers against externally scripted ideals of progress underlines Gale and Densmore's (2003, p.42) concern that 'Teachers' capital, - specifically their pedagogical knowledge...has a low exchange rate in contexts of policy text production'. This mirrors the point that Gareth made when he said he feels 'that the gods on Mount Olympus are, you know, moving us around sometimes but not necessarily listening to what we've got to say'.

Therefore, although there have been some purposeful moves away from league tables and standardised assessments, teachers of English in Wales still operate under the disciplinary technologies of standards as they have to report on the progress of their students against a narrow, externally generated 'norm'. Trust has not been wholly given to teachers and although there is some sign of a growing sense of responsibility, under increased licensed autonomy, there is also evidence of significant 'fabrications' as practitioners act under intense pressure to demonstrate their pupils have made linear and uniform progress.

Given the way in which teachers, middle managers and head teachers are all involved in fabricating data, the question arises as to whether teachers in Wales *deserve* greater autonomy. Yet Arwena, a retired teacher, made the point that when tests or assessment data are gathered purely for diagnostic purposes, the incentive to cheat is not there: 'there was no reason for a teacher not to be honest, that was the thing'. Ravitch (2010, p.154) has found evidence to suggest that teachers in America also fabricate data and believes that when the purpose of testing is accountability, teachers devise 'various ways of gaming the testing system'.

Here, the importance of analyzing a situation in its entirety becomes important as the removal of external assessment measures without the removal of a punitive accountability culture will leave professionals vulnerable to pressure to cheat. The euphemisms and

indirect language used by the Welsh respondents in this study reveal that involvement in such practices can make practitioners deeply uncomfortable. Jonathan, a Welsh civil servant, claimed that there 'are no central pressures on teachers to record teacher assessment that is either under or above teachers' true judgements'. However, this misses the subtleties of disciplinary technologies which are not necessarily explicitly endorsed by people at the top of a hierarchical apex. Therefore, it is incumbent on policy makers to think about the complexities of the situations in which they are making policy changes and to think through the relational links that may exist between disparate parts of a policy picture. If teachers are to be trusted, they must be trusted to explain why students may not have made 'normal' progress. There must be room not for excuses but for *explanations* as to why complicated and unique personalities develop as learners in different ways at different speeds. Moreover, schools and teachers should not be punished for 'failing' to ensure that all students learn at the same rate. While progress is constructed as linear and mandatory, teachers will be placed under unreasonable pressure to produce uniform results.

5.4 The place of content standards and standardised assessment in the subject of English

Much of this work has focused on the place of externally generated content standards in the secondary English classroom. Chapter Two critically evaluated the literature on this subject and showed that between the 1920s and the 1980s there were cogently articulated cases made against turning English into a 'content subject'; the peculiarly mercurial nature of English was well defended by arguments invoking the importance of the immeasurable and the necessarily holistic nature of mother-tongue teaching. However, from the 1980s onwards the introduction of the National Curriculum, followed by the implementation of the National Strategies which attempted more fully to atomise the subject, has meant that objectives-led teaching has become the 'norm' in many English classrooms across both England and Wales; assessment of English routinely involves the tracking of progress against content standards.

Moreover, despite policy pronouncements which signal a move away from high levels of prescription in curricula and towards greater teacher autonomy in assessment, the disciplinary technology of content standards and standardised assessment is diffuse and

widespread. The private company Cambridge Education has turned Personal Learning and Thinking Skills into an enormous set of discrete objectives (or content standards) which teachers in some schools in England are being told by management teams to teach and to track. English teachers in England and Wales continue to use objectives-led teaching as a matter of course, as Gareth said: 'Well, you know, within the planning, the first screen in any PowerPoint is the objectives.'

It is perhaps APP which is the most contentious current incarnation of the standards agenda in English teaching in England. APP grids can be read as content standards and there is a possibility that some practitioners will begin to treat APP as a curriculum to inform their planning. Ethan's description of his planning process exemplifies this: 'So you might say well in my lesson I'm going to be teaching ur strand ur strand two and I'm going to be focusing on substrand 2.2 so...then you come up with a lesson that enables you to do that'. Some policy makers are attempting to position APP as *Assessment for Learning* and there is evidence that teachers are trying to use APP formatively. However, although the implementation of APP is far from uniform across schools in England, there is evidence that teachers are coming under pressure from managers and local authority consultants both to plan with the APP assessments in mind and to systematise and standardise those assessments in order to provide information for 'system control' (Broadfoot 1996).

There is also evidence that English teachers are very sceptical about APP. The APP grids have been devised by staff from The National Strategies who have been immersed in highly prescriptive, objectives-led pedagogy. Jim said, 'I don't like the APP because I think again that fragments it [the subject], I think APP is the assessment strand of the NLS [National Literacy Strategy] only it doesn't quite map back at all, which is horrific really'. Broadfoot (1996, p.86) cites research which documents teachers' preferences for 'intuitive, idiosyncratic' assessment strategies and she contends that the more 'categoric' assessment requirements are perceived by teachers as producing only 'dead data' for reporting purposes. Moreover, models such as APP may actually serve students poorly by only expecting them to conform to the narrowly specified assessment criteria, as Barrs (1990, p.23) argues, when teachers are:

> required to analyse desired learning 'outcomes' into clear discrete objectives, and to use these as the focus of their teaching programmes, measuring the results at the end of the course...[they tend] to leave out some of the most subtle and important

> qualities that contributed to learning, and which were often unspecifiable and unmeasurable in the terms required.

During the LATE meeting on assessment described in Chapter Four, the two speakers engaged in a powerful meta-analysis of the APP initiative and drew on the progressive tradition within English during their presentations. The first speaker urged the delegates to read Barrs' *Words not Numbers*, cited above. Both speeches received a very warm reception from their audience of over 100 English teachers. However, LATE is a very small organization which is run by unpaid volunteers. As Jones (2006) notes there has been no funding from the government for organizations which seek to develop autonomous communities of practice for English teachers. This point was raised in the most recent OFSTED report on the future of English and it is to this publication that the chapter now turns.

5.5 The future of English teaching in England – in whose hands?

The OFSTED report (2009) is entitled *English at the Crossroads* which underlines the fact that there are a number of possible paths which could be chosen by (or for) the English teaching profession in the immediate future. Perhaps ironically the report also highlights (to extend its title's metaphor) the confusing signposts that continue to come from policy makers: on the one hand teachers are encouraged to plan and implement highly detailed pre-specified, objectives-led lessons and to measure progress against them; on the other hand there is a pressure to be more creative, to throw off the shackles of bureaucracy, to take control and to encourage student autonomy. At the beginning of the report the author states:

> *All* the teachers observed in the survey used learning objectives in their planning. The best examples provided a *clear purpose* for the lesson, determined *the teacher's choice* of activities and helped pupils to review their *progress*...[italics added].

There are several further highly explicit references to the benefits of clearly stated objectives within the report. Yet the author also bemoans the lack of creativity and vision on the part of some professionals who 'were implementing national policy changes unthinkingly, often because they had no deeply held views about the nature of English as a subject and how it might be taught' (OFSTED, 2009, p.19). The author does not explore the possible link between the inspectorate's unequivocal endorsement of explicit

objectives-led teaching in English and the fact that practitioners may not develop 'deeply held views about the nature of English'. Neither does he stop to ask whether another finding, that 'many pupils are reading less widely for pleasure than previously' (OFSTED 2009, p.23) might be relationally tied to the pedagogy that OFSTED so overtly promotes.

Chapter Two cites Lewis (1970) who wrote a book chapter entitled *What the Future Requires*. Forty years ago Lewis observed that teaching was becoming a more technical operation: 'What was previously tentative, unconscious and spontaneous in teaching tends now to be planned, consciously formulated, clear and precise.' He phlegmatically accepted the need for more standardisation and suggested that there were democratic benefits to such a shift, even if it would frustrate the more original personalities in the profession. Yet Lewis warned of the 'adverse possibilities' of such shifts and called on English teachers to be mindful of the fact that if the teaching of the mother tongue were wholly transformed into a technical activity 'the loss would be too great to contemplate with equanimity.' Bousted (2009) senses that there has been a great loss and Lewis' work now seems prophetic. His writing on the future of his subject displayed a level of knowledge and understanding that Eisner (1985) would term 'connoisseurship'. The OFSTED (2009) report asks where the connoisseurship in English teaching currently resides. Many local authorities no longer employ an English specialist, instead consultants, whose primary task is the implementation of the National Strategies and the pursuit of centrally agreed priorities, have taken their place. The report concludes:

> The need for clear subject leadership in English is particularly compelling at a time when the Key Stage 3 tests have been stopped and when teachers are being encouraged to exercise freedom and flexibility in developing the curriculum (OFSTED, 2009, p.51).

5.6 Possible paths for the profession

The case made above for clear subject leadership becomes even more compelling at a time of political change. The shift of power in May 2010 from Labour to the Conservative and Liberal Coalition government makes the need even more prescient. Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education has, within two months of taking office, abolished the English General Teaching Council and the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Authority. He has made some pronouncements on the National Curriculum in England and suggested that he wants to see it slimmed down. He has written to all schools asking

whether they wish to become Academies with subsequently increased freedom to design curricula and decide on assessment practices. However, Gove has also stated that 'All pupils, especially the most disadvantaged, need reliable assessments to ensure that they are making progress.'[6] This again highlights a tension between the desire to 'liberate' teachers and the need to ensure that progress is tracked; that there is accountability and systems control within a department that spends a significant amount of the nation's tax. The conundrums that faced Robert Lowe, who originated the Revised Code, and the dilemmas that faced James Callaghan, who felt compelled to open up the 'secret garden', have not gone away. Against the ever-present backdrop of tension between accountability and autonomy, it is important to continue to debate what it means to be a good English teacher. Such a debate may be enriched by the following five ideas and insights arising from the evidence base of this project.

Firstly, it is important to continue to capture the pedagogical choices that are being made in the absence of standardised testing as this will form a key evidence base which may inform future policy on assessment. More research in Wales may be able to capture whether or not teachers are continuing to come under pressure to inflate grades or whether trust is emerging in communities of practice. In England, there is an urgent need to keep examining what is happening with Key Stage Three assessment and there is scope for a debate about whether the Welsh model of cross-stage moderation should be adopted.

Secondly, understanding further the link between pedagogical choice and pleasure is vital. Lumby (2010, p.17) has challenged policy makers, school leaders and teachers to think more deeply about 'the issue of enjoyment and its connection to learning'. More research into this link in the English classroom would be timely. It is also crucial to think philosophically about the role of pleasure in education. Should pleasure in the English classroom be considered an aim in its own right regardless of learning outcomes? In the 1920s Sampson believed that if literature teaching in school was not a delight then it was a failure; in the 1960s Jackson contended that one of the key aims of English was 'to draw in as much of the pupils' genuine joys' as possible; Malcolm Yorke's study (see Evans) stressed that in the 1980s the primary goal of English teachers was to induct students into 'the emotional pleasure to be gained from reading'. What should the key aims for English

[6] http://www.michaelgove.com/content/school-assessment [Online] (Accessed: July 19 2010)

teaching be in the 2010s? Who should decide?

Thirdly, if the English teaching profession could use both Eisner's (1985, p.85) concept of an expressive objective and Sadler's (see Marshall, 2007, p.4) concept of guild knowledge, they may be able better to defend a richer pedagogical practice. It is worth restating Eisner's definition of an expressive objective which incorporates both curriculum and assessment:

> An expressive objective is evocative rather than prescriptive. In the expressive context the teacher hopes to provide a situation in which meanings become personalised and in which children produce products both theoretical and qualitative that are as diverse as themselves. Consequently the evaluative task in this situation is not one of applying a common standard to the products produced but one of reflecting upon what has been produced in order to reveal its uniqueness and significance.

Both expressive objectives and guild knowledge make space for the acknowledgement of qualities in students' work which have not been pre-specified. These concepts enable a fuller construction of pedagogy. Teachers may still choose to use explicit, objectives-led teaching when they judge it appropriate but, as Noddings (2007b, p.53) argues, 'the real pedagogical challenge' is to judge when to use objectives and when to use other approaches.

Fourthly, it is time to think critically about the way in which 'norms' of progress are being constructed and to engage in informed discussions about why children do not learn at a uniform rate. Dyslexia, social deprivation and bereavement are not excuses for poor teaching, neither are they an irrelevance. It is unhelpful and unfair for teachers, who encounter young people struggling to cope with a wide range of real challenges, to be told that there are 'no excuses' for pupils' failures and that, to use the American phrase, all students must make 'adequate yearly progress'. Such discourses position students as commodities and prompt teachers to 'game the system' which, as Holbrook (1979) understood, ignores the complexities of life.

Fifthly, English teachers have an opportunity, in these times of change, to shape their subject. In the absence of the National Strategies and the QCDA it may become easier for English subject associations in England to have a stronger voice. Engaging in this research has prompted me to become more involved in LATE (the London Association of Teachers

of English) and to make the effort to meet regularly with other English teachers. I have joined a LATE 'Teachers as Writers' group which has enabled me to experiment with the playful and therapeutic elements of English and to understand more fully Holbrook's use of the phrase 'a surrender to creative fate'. I feel that I am now involved in a genuine community of practice (Wenger, 2006), developing knowledge and understanding of English pedagogy from 'the grassroots'. Collectively, we are capturing our growing understanding of the writing process and reflecting on how we may use our knowledge with the students that we teach. If more practitioners do the same there is the chance once again to develop powerful pedagogies. English teaching in England is certainly at a crossroads, it remains to be seen who decides what path the subject will take.

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Appendix A An extract of a Key Stage Three scheme of work which embodies 'best practice'

KEY STAGE 3 CURRICULUM MAP

YEAR 7 - Unit	Year 7-AFs	Year 7-Sub-strands	Year 8 - Unit	Year - AFs	Year 8 – Sub-strands	Year 9 - Unit	Year 9 - AFs	Year 9 – Sub-strands
Transition Unit (3 weeks) Poetry & Love That Dog	• RAF2 • WAF7 • WAF1	2:1 – a,b,c,e,g, h, l, j, m 2:2 – i --- 2:2 – k, l, m 2:3 – a, c, p, q	Media – The Night of The Hunter (Review)	• WAF5 • WAF2 • WAF7	2:3 – b,d,f,g,h,n,q,r,p 2:2 – l, k	War – poetry/holcaust	• RAF7 • RAF5 • RAF3	2:2 – a,d,e,f,g,i 2:3 – e,o,p,d 2:1- d,j,k,l
The Novel	• RAF1 • RAF6 • RAF3 • WAF4,5,6,7,8	2:2 – a,c,f,j,o,p 2:3 – r,s,p,m,l,k l,g,e,a,c	The Novel	• RAF1 • RAF6 • RAF3 • WAF4,5,6,7	2:3 – r,s,p,m,l,k, l,g,e,a,c 2:2 – a,b,f,l,m,o	The Novel	• RAF1 • RAF6 • RAF3 • WAF4,5,6,7	2:3 – r,s,p,m,l,k, l,g,e,a,c 2:2 – a,b,f,l,m,o
Media	• RAF4 • RAF5 • WAF3 • WAF2	2:2 – d,e,g,h 2:3 – d,k,l,m,n,o,r,s,t, u,v,w	Gothic Writing	• WAF1 • WAF3 • WAF4,5,6,7	2:3 – b,c,f,j,q,r,u v	Romeo & Juliet	• SATs	2:2 – a,b,c,d,f,g, j,l,o,p
Play Text	• RAF3 • S&L to follow	2:1 – d,j,k,l 2:2 – b,f,j	Play Text	• RAF 3 • S&L to follow	2:1 – d,j,k,l 2:2 – b,j,f	APP/SATs prep	• SATs	2:2 –a ,b,c,d,e,f, g,h,l,j,k,l,m,n,o,p 2:3 – a,b,c,d,e,f, g,h,l,j,k,l,m,n,o,p, q,r,st,u,v,w
Creative Writing	• WAF1 • WAF3 • WAF4,5,6,7	2:2 – a,n 2:3 – b,e,f,g,h,l,j s	Ballads/Greek Myths	• WAF7 • WAF1 • S&L to follow	2:3 - q,p,j,f,b,w 2:1 – d, h,b,c,l	Play text	• RAF3 • S&L to follow	2:1 – d,j,f,l 2:2 – b,j,f
Shakespeare	• RAF7 • RAF2 • S&L to follow	2:1 – a,f,j 2:2 – b,j,p	Shakespeare	• RAF7 • RAF2 • S&L to follow	2:1 – a,f,j 2:2 – b,j,p	GCSE Media c/wk	• KS4	AQA Syllabus - GCSE

Appendix A An extract of a Key Stage Three scheme of work which embodies 'best practice'

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3">1:1 Medium Term Plan</td></tr>
<tr><td>Year: 7</td><td>Unit Title: Poetry</td><td>Duration: 3 weeks</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Overview of Unit:
Students will investigate different poems through a series of drama, research, discussion and reading activities. As well as encountering and exploring a range of poems from a variety of places, students will also explore specific examples of poetry descriptive writing in greater detail. Finally, students will write, design and create a personalised poetry anthology.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Assessing Learning Prior to this Unit:
• What experience of writing poetry have students had at their primary schools?
• What prior knowledge of poetry do the students have?
• What are students' current levels of attainment in writing poetry?</td></tr>
<tr><td>Key Concepts:

Creativity
d) Using creative approaches to answering questions, solving problems and developing ideas

Critical Understanding
b) assessing the validity and significance of information and ideas from different sources

c) exploring others' ideas and developing their own</td><td>Key Questions for this Unit:
- Can I explore language through a variety of poems?
- Can I develop my understanding of different poetic techniques through enquiry and research?
- Can I acknowledge and critically review the written contributions of others and respond accordingly?
- Can I use a variety of techniques to make my poetry interesting for other readers?
- Can I use multimodal techniques to explore poetic writing?</td><td>Key Words:
Poem
Stanza
Form
Imagery
Simile
Metaphor
Sound
Alliteration
Assonance
Enjambment
Vocabulary
Imagination
Creation
Haiku
Meaning
Symbolic
Descriptive</td></tr>
<tr><td>Cross-curricular skills:

Personal, learning and thinking skills:

Independent Enquirers - analyse and evaluate information, judging its relevance and value

Creative Thinkers - generate ideas and explore new possibilities

Self Managers - anticipate, take part and manage risks,
- work towards goals, showing initiative, commitment and perseverance</td><td>Functional Skills:

Reading (Level 1)

-understand texts in detail
-read and understand texts and take appropriate action

Writing (Level 1)

-write clearly and coherently including an
appropriate level of detail
-present information in a logical sequence
-use language, format and structure
suitable for purpose and audience</td><td>English Learning Focuses:

2.2
k) how writers structure and organise different texts, including non-linear and multimodal
l) how writers' uses of language and rhetorical, grammatical and literary features influence the reader
m) how writers present ideas and issues to have an impact on the reader

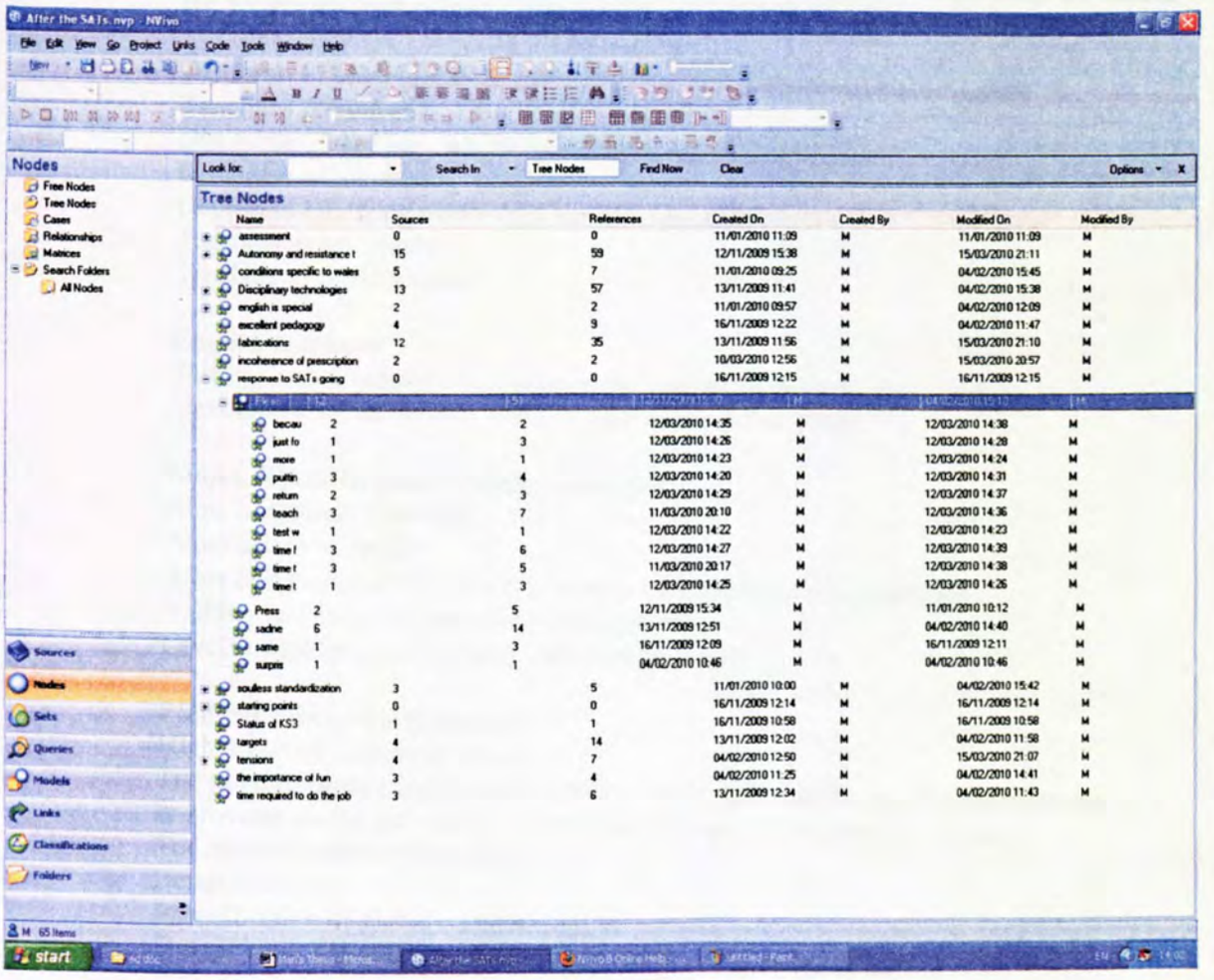
2.3
a) write clearly and coherently, including an appropriate level of detail
c) generate and harness new ideas and develop them in their writing
p) present material clearly, using appropriate layout, illustrations and organisation
q) use planning, drafting, editing, proofreading and self-evaluation to shape and craft their writing for maximum effect</td></tr>
</table>

Appendix B An extract from Cambridge Education's Personal Learning and Thinking Skills chart

Area	Skill Ladder	Overview	Level 1
Creative Thinkers	Imagine	**Imagine new ideas.** This skill area is around using your imagination to generate new ideas and new ways of looking at things. This helps you to be able to explore new possibilities. Creativity is often about seeing the world through fresh eyes and not just restricting yourself to ideas that seem good first time round. Seeing things in new ways often helps people understand each other better. How many times have people explained something to you one way and you just have not understood but then they try another alternative and it suddenly makes sense? This is the skill of coming up with these new ideas and possibilities.	I enjoy role-play, songs and making music. I ca use them to show how am feeling.
	Make links	**Make connections and links.** This area of skill is about making connections and links between ideas. Learning things as separate facts is much less powerful than learning how they all link together. For example, someone good at this skill was thinking about what happens when you go round a corner in the car and linked this with vacuum cleaners to end up inventing the Dyson. Nobody had thought of putting these ideas together before because it seems like there should be no link.	I can put things into groups that have something in common.
	Question assumptions	**Question assumptions - open minded.** When you develop these skills you will have the ability to look at things that all the rest of us take for granted and ask "Why do we do that?". Quite often there are lots of ideas you just accepted as a child and have not thought about since. Most of us accept things which are very wrong simply because we trust the person who told us they were even though they may be genuinely mistaken as well. People with this skill don't just accept ideas without thinking about them first. They question their own and others' assumptions.	I can ask 'why' question
	Take creative risks	**Take creative risks - positive.** There is never just one way of doing things. When you exercise this skill look for new ways of doing things and new ideas but then don't stop there. If creativity is about new ideas and innovation then you have to be able to use failure and mistakes in a positive way. If you look at failure in this way then you will be more able to try things that don't work first time but might give you useful ideas for later work.	I can make my work different from everyone else's.
Effective participators	Identify issues	**See injustice or practice which can improve.** When you have this skill you can identify improvements that would benefit others as well as yourself. You work out which things should change in your area, place of work or the world. People who are less skilled in this area may need people like you to be an advocate for them, to help them identify problems that could be solved to improve the community as a whole. You ask the questions that others may shy away from.	I know right from wron I can say why I think thi.
	Find solutions	**Can break a problem up into manageable chunks.** When you have developed this skill you will be able to break a problem up into smaller chunks so that a larger problem becomes manageable. You will be able to find practical ways in which people can get involved to move things forward. You would know that there is no such thing as an unsolvable problem just ones you can make less of a problem. This skill is also helpful in getting tasks done quickly as it allows you to break up a task into different jobs and organise the order in which the jobs need to be done.	I can answer questions with good ideas.
	Persuade others	**Make a persuasive yet open minded case.** When you have developed this skill you will be able to work out all the arguments for and against a particular idea. You will make sure you consider all these carefully and listen to all sides. When you have decided what you think should happen you can build arguments that can persuade others whilst remaining honest and fair.	I can give a reason for something I do.
	Get involved	**Get involved.** When you develop this skill you will understand you live in a community and everyone needs to help each other. There is a famous poem which says, "They came for the Jews and I didn't help because I was not a Jew ... then they came for me and there was nobody left to help". People with this skill can protest for a good cause and help people even if they don't have the same values or beliefs simply because they know we are all in a community together. You are part of the glue that holds communities together because you do the hard work behind the scenes that makes sure change happens.	I enjoy helping other people. I volunteer to help.
Independent Enquirers	Explore a question	**Engage with, devise, plan and carry out research.** When you have developed this skill you will have lots of research ideas you would like to follow. You will be able to take one of your research ideas and plan a fair and balanced piece of research and complete the research. Your research will be good enough quality to keep people informed and maybe even uncover new links.	I can find something o.. by myself. I sometimes make models to help m explore.
	Evaluate evidence	**Determine reliable and useful findings or sources.** Analyse and evaluate information, judging its relevance and value. When you are researching you will come across lots of information that is inaccurate or untrue. You may even come across material that has been designed to deceive you. When you are excellent at this skill you will be able to analyse all of your research evidence and decide which parts are useful, valid and accurate.	I can give reasons why something is true.
	Stay objective	**Look from different perspectives.** When you are researching and enquiring it is easy to assume that your own experiences are most important because you know most about these. When you have this skill you are able to put yourself in the shoes of others and really explore the issue you are researching from their position. You can take into account their culture and how life experiences and chances may have been different from your own. You will be able to explore issues, events or problems from different perspectives.	I know different people have different ideas.
	Reach	**Draw balanced and focussed conclusions.**	

Appendix B A photograph of Cambridge Education's Personal Learning and Thinking Skills chart

Appendix C An NVivo screen shot which shows the coding used in the analysis of data



Appendix D Examples of situational maps which were used as thinking tools

Situational Map Jan 11th 2009

Individual Human Elements/Actors
English teachers, English advisers, English teacher trainers (lecturers), politicians, civil servants, KS3 students, parents

Collective Human Elements/Actors
English teachers in England, English teachers in Wales, LATE, NATE, the unions, DCSF, QCA, OFSTED, Estyn, OFQUAL, TTA, DCELS (to be renamed), the media, the Strategies staff, private companies such as CAPITA, LEAs

Discursive construction of individual and/or collective human actors
Teachers in general
Discourse of derision, teachers as inefficient, unaccountable
Discourse of mistrust in 'progressive' teachers (William Tyndale)
Deprofessionalizing discourses: teachers as operatives
Teachers as bricoleurs
Teachers as professionals

English teachers
Shifting and contested constructions of English teachers: as civic leaders; as 'developers' of the human spirit; as guardians of the 'basics'

Major Issues/Debates (usually contested)
Aims of English Teaching
Atomisation of English
Aims of Assessment for system control, for learning, for competition
Validity/reliability of assessment in English
Levels of prescription of curriculum and pedagogy

Political/Economic Elements
High levels of functional illiteracy
The trend towards centralisation of education policy and the need to demonstrate improvements (hence system control) and subsequent reversal (?) of trend.
The marketisation of education
Destatilisation
Intensification of global competition
The different political histories of England and Wales two countries

Temporal Elements
Time needed to show progress in the classroom
Slow burn of learning as opposed to pace required by OFSTED
Pace of political announcements, need for regular Ministerial policy pronouncements

Nonhuman elements actants
The subject of English
The global economy
Assessment – especially international trend towards system control
Data base software
SATS Tests

APP grids (Assessing Pupil Progress)
League tables
The internet which enables easy access to information on schools

Implicated/silent actors/actants
Students
Parents

Discursive constructions of nonhuman actants
English as 'special' subject which helps a human being move from innocence to experience.
English as 'just a subject'
Cox's five types of English
English as a subject which can be broken down into discrete parts genres, text types, objectives
English as a subject which must be approached holistically

Tests as important accountability devices – system control
Tests as mechanisms which drive up standards
Tests as unpopular and unnecessary controls which distort pedagogy and narrow curriculum

Assessment as tail that wags the curriculum dog

APP as helpful tool to improve formative assessment
APP as controlling mechanisms which atomizes a subject which should be taught holistically

Global Economy as competition between nation states, the winners will have the most highly educated citizens (Implication: fail to teach English properly and economy will be ruined).

Related discourses (historical, narrative and or visual)
Neoliberalism
Discourse of performativity
A technicist value orientation (see Broadfoot 2006)
Postmodernism

Sociocultural/symbolic elements
English as replacement for religion
Literature as humanizing (and therefore a clear counter to technicist values)
'Clear red water'

Spatial Elements

Relative size of England and Wales

Appendix D Examples of situational maps which were used as thinking tools

Situational Map - May 5 2010

Individual Human Elements/Actors
English teachers, English advisers, English teacher trainers (lecturers), politicians, civil servants, KS3 students, parents

Collective Human Elements/Actors
English teachers in England, English teachers in Wales, LATE, NATE, the unions, DCSF, QCA, OFSTED, Estyn, TDA, DCELLS (to be renamed), the media, the Strategies staff, private companies such as CAPITA, LEAs

Discursive construction of individual and/or collective human actors
Teachers in general
Discourse of derision, teachers as inefficient, unaccountable
Discourse of mistrust in 'progressive' teachers (William Tyndale)
Deprofessionalizing discourses: teachers as operatives
Teachers as bricoleurs
Teachers as autonomous professionals
Children
Child as unique spirits
Child as empty vessel
English teachers
English teachers: as 'developers' of the human spirit
English teachers as guardians of the 'basics'

Major Issues/Debates (usually contested)
Aims of Education – (to raise standards/to educate the whole person)
Aims of Assessment (for system control, for learning, for competition)
Validity/reliability of assessment in English
The role of the state in the prescription of curriculum and pedagogy

Political/Economic Elements
High levels of functional illiteracy in England and Wales
The trend towards centralisation of education policy and the need to demonstrate improvements (hence system control) and subsequent reversal (?) of trend
The marketisation of education
Intensification of global competition
The different political histories of England and Wales

Temporal Elements
Time needed to show progress in the classroom
Slow burn of learning as opposed to pace required to demonstrate progress to OFSTED
Pace of political announcements, need for regular Ministerial policy pronouncements

Nonhuman elements actants
The subject of English
The global economy
Assessment – especially international trend towards system control

Data base software
SATS Tests
APP grids (Assessing Pupil Progress)
League tables - national and international
The internet which enables easy access to information on schools
The State

Implicated/silent actors/actants
Students
Parents

Discursive constructions of nonhuman actants
English as 'special' subject which helps a human being move from innocence to experience.
English as 'just a subject'
Cox's five types of English
English as a subject which can be broken down into discrete parts genres, text types, objectives
English as a subject which must be approached holistically
English as pleasurable
Tests as important accountability devices – system control
Tests as mechanisms which drive up standards
Tests as unpopular and unnecessary controls which distort pedagogy and narrow curriculum
Assessment as tail that wags the curriculum dog
Assessment as necessary tool to ensure that progression is captured
APP as helpful tool to improve formative assessment
APP as controlling mechanisms which atomizes a subject which should be taught holistically
Global Economy as competition between nation states, the winners will have the most highly educated citizens (Implication: fail to teach English properly and economy will be ruined).
The state as benign 'authoritarian' to be minimised
The state as inefficient
The state as 'egalitarian' to be utilised

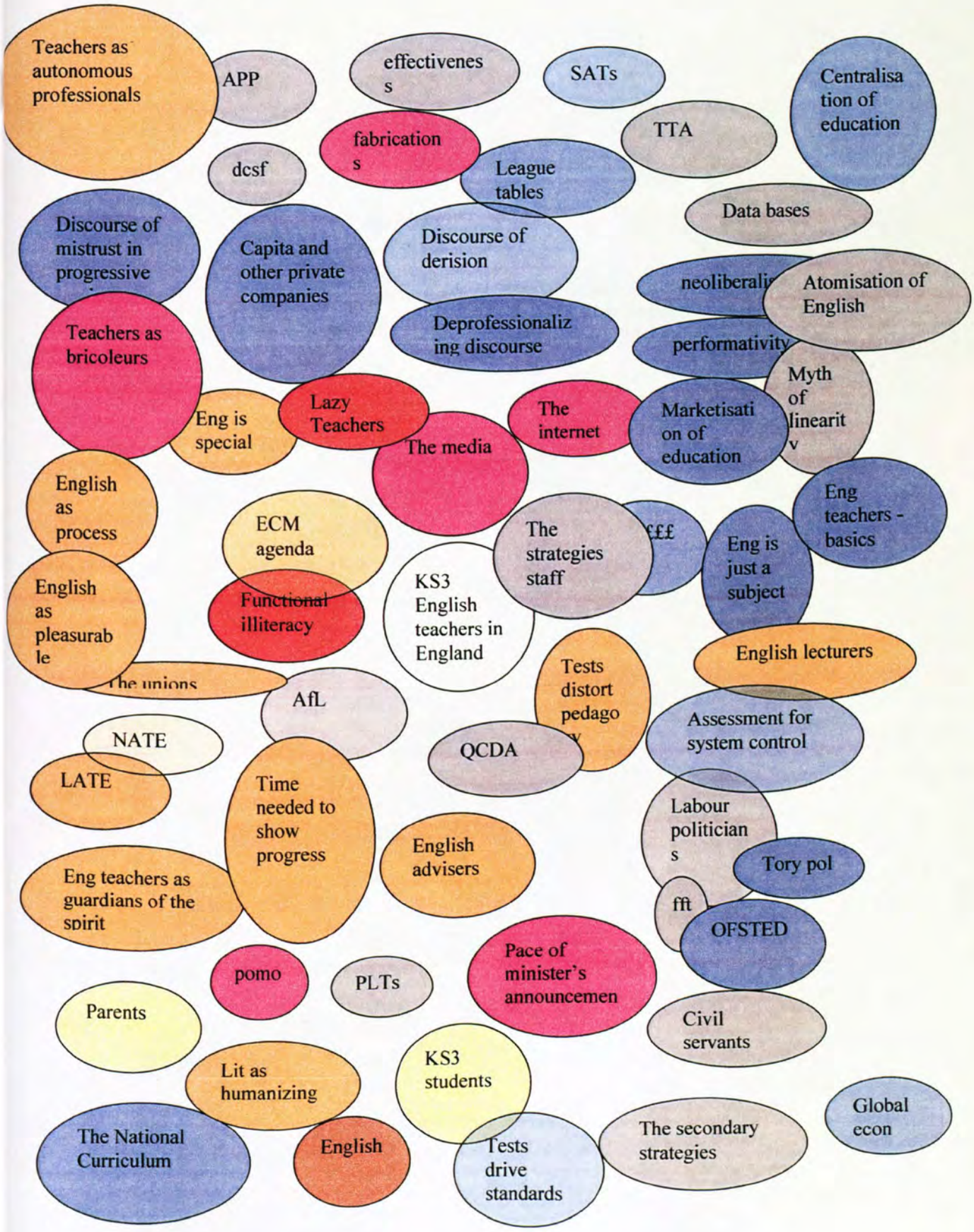
Related discourses (historical, narrative and or visual)
Progressive tradition
Neoliberalism
Managerialism
Discourse of performativity – the STANDARDs agenda
A technicist value orientation (see Broadfoot 2006)
Postmodernism – policy as display

Sociocultural/symbolic elements
English as replacement for religion
Literature as humanizing (and therefore a clear counter to technicist values)
'Clear red water'

Spatial Elements - Relative size of England and Wales

Appendix E An example of a 'messy' situational map which was used for relational analysis

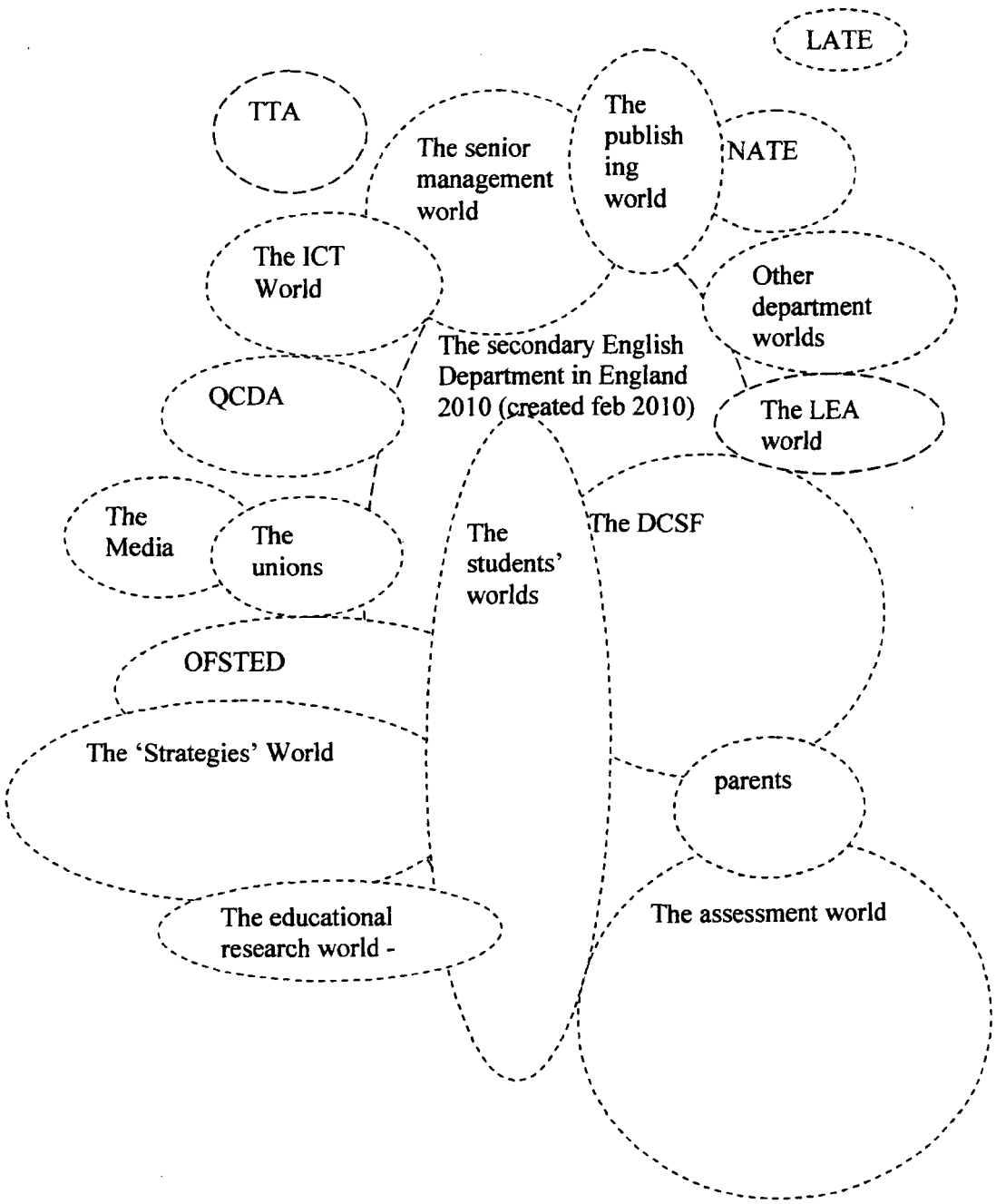
February 15 2010



For an explanation of this 'messy' situational map, see page 70.

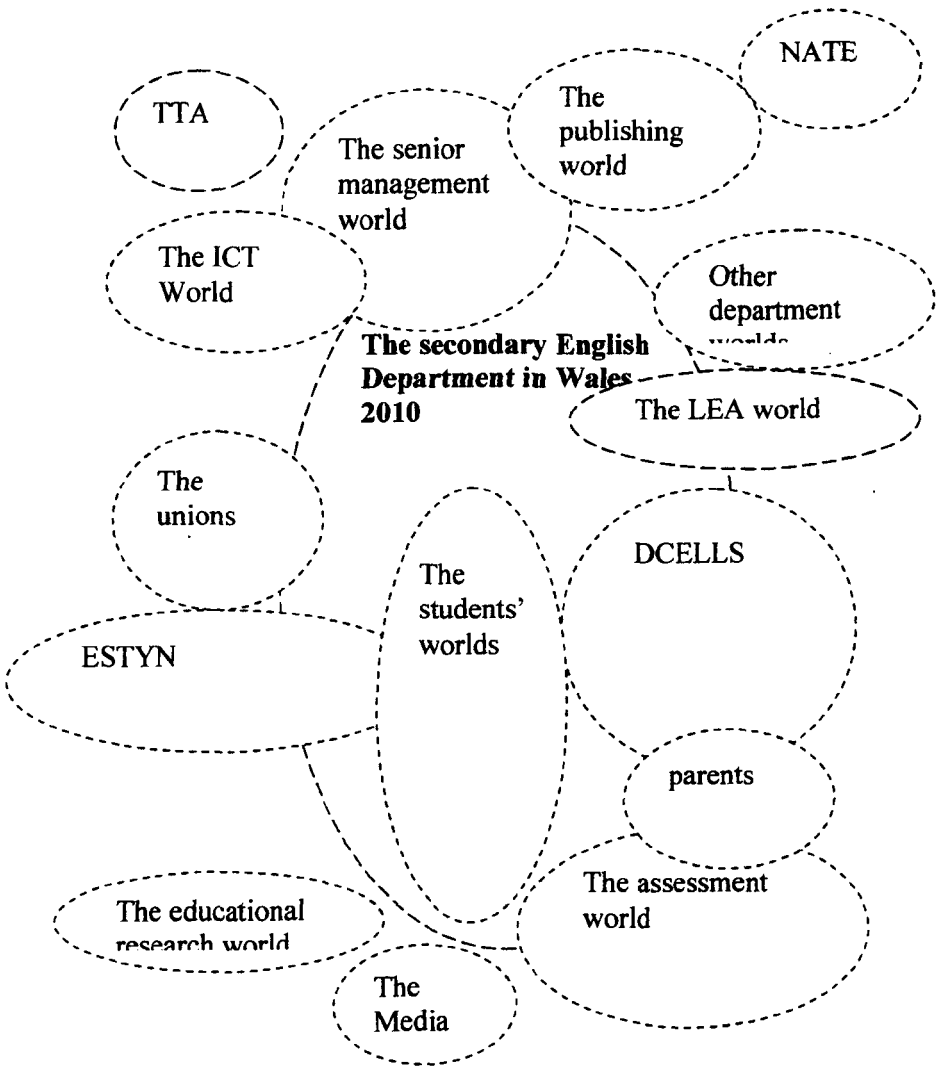
Appendix F Two examples of social worlds maps

Social Worlds Map showing the secondary English Department in England – February 2010



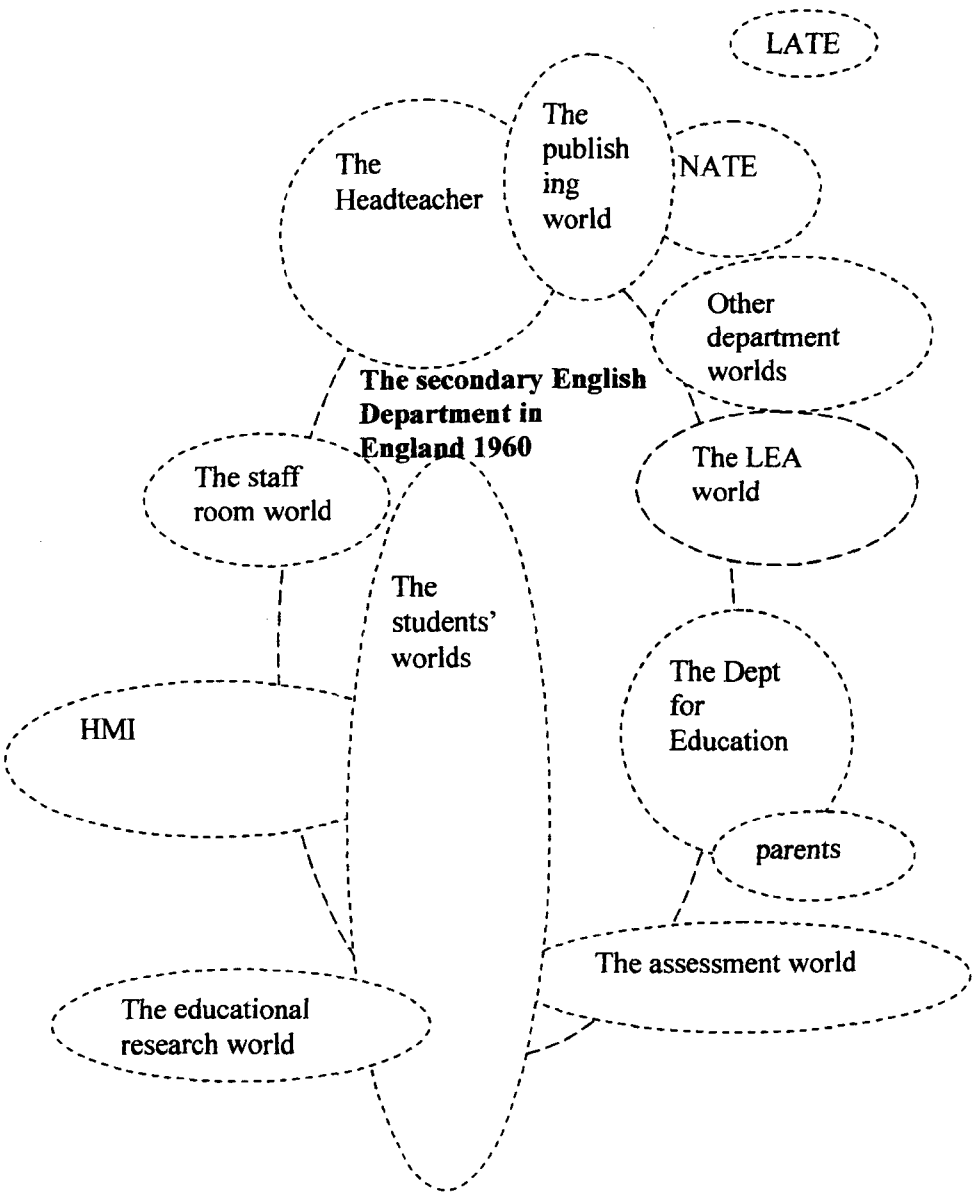
Appendix F Two examples of social worlds maps

Social Worlds Map showing the secondary English Department in Wales – March 2010



Appendix G A social worlds map which brings in a historical perspective

Social Worlds Map showing the secondary English Department in England in 1960 – created March 2010



It's Feb 9th 2007 and I'm reading my way into the philosophy of educational research module. I'm building up a clear picture of a discipline under fire, for its poor quality of research, for its fragmentation, for its lack of a theoretical framework. We should know what works say some voices, we should have built up a body of knowledge that teachers can be taught, they should not have to zero base everything. But I can't imagine what that would look like in this fluid world. I have 17 languages and 6 religions in my year nine group, I have 5 different models of what English teachers value in my mind, I have some understanding of the physiology of adolescent boys, I have a developing literary timeline in my head, I'm reading up on post-colonial literature, I've engaged with motivation theory recently, I've learned to project my voice and speak in stage whispers.

Didn't Vygotsky find out that in order to teach brilliantly we need to target individual students' zones of proximal development? Has anyone done any systematic research into how brilliant it would be if teachers had seven students in a class and only five classes? Perhaps teachers don't engage with educational research because they can intuit the answers from their experience: if I taught fewer students and had fewer classes, I could build better relationships and develop more thoughtful lessons. A full-time English teacher teaches 240 students. Marking each student's work for one minute per week would take four hours, for two minutes, eight hours, for three minutes... you do the maths.

Meanwhile, back in school, I find that I am talking about ideas in a different way. X and I have had some good discussions about the concept of performativity and Y too is engaged by chat which attempts to put our experiences of data collection and target setting into an intellectual framework. The Head of Science sees me in the photocopying room, copying an extract on Postmodernism for my A level students. He says that he is flailing. I tell him that I am enjoying studying and his eyes light up. He is a doctor of science and he wants to talk about Derrida with me over a drink one day. In the staffroom too, I'm drawn into a debate on 'the standards agenda' and find myself feeling more informed and optimistic about a pendulum swing following the lecture from Ivor Goodson.

April 2007

I've been skimming my way through books on professionalism on my Easter holiday in sunny Southwold. Read 'Taking Education Really Seriously – Four Hard Years' Labour' and it was good to read something by Barber to get a grip. It was the Standards agenda from the horse's mouth, followed by a book of searing critiques of it. Certain essences are crystallising as I read: managerialism is afoot and it is reductive, the audit culture is afoot and it is creating huge ironies. And yet, what do we do to prevent lazy teachers literally sleeping on the job? The desired end – better instruction - is a good one, but, as is so often the case, the means are causing unintended consequences.

I'm ploughing on with my professionalism assignment on CPD in secondary schools and I'm glad I've collected my thoughts on the philosophy of educational research first. What I am coming across is a bit of a rag bag of taxonomies and although I do understand that educational research may not lend itself to cumulative learning, it

seems to me that different academics are talking about some relatively uninspiring theories (with a couple of helpful exceptions) without developing each others' ideas at all. Perhaps there *does* have to be some taking of the material and sewing on to it after all. I will check out the eppi centre to see if accumulation is credible.

April 09

All this time for study is allowing me properly to synthesize my reading and I'm definitely developing a position. I now read researchers and my gut agrees or disagrees. Certain authors just speak to me so loudly. I've been reading Elliott again. I found a reference to a 1996 paper of his which argues against school effectiveness and I immediately searched it out (oh the MARVELS of digital technology!). And he, along with people like Apple and Noddings and Holbrook and hook are all saying the same thing. We've reduced. We've gone down an instrumentalist road. We've lost the person and something sacred in all of this. And I know that somehow it is tied up with the seizing of central control, Blair's 'sofa Government' in which dissent is irrelevant because decisions are made by an inner circle. Party conferences, cabinet discussion, union debates, where are they now?

May 09

The headlines on the news this morning were that science SATs for 11 year olds are being abolished. I can just sense the centre not holding. Jim Rose has been reported on the BBC website today (7/05/09) as saying: One, Jim Rose - author of last week's report on the primary curriculum - said: "If you had a situation where teacher assessment was so robust you were confident that the information it was delivering was as good as or better than national tests, my God wouldn't you go for it?"

Dec 2009

As an 'analyst' it's hard not to intuit a nub based purely on my personal experiences. It's hard not to listen to the data that confirms my experiences. Clarke says that it's nonsensical to claim to be a theoretical virgin, but I'm worried about how much my own experiences of teaching English are prompting me to think in certain ways.

Feb 2010

Feb 2010
OMG, I've read Atkinson's (2003) piece on postmodernism and the attempt to escape the ludicrous surreal government-led education system and it's said something. BIG ideas. We are trapped in a system and people respond in different ways. M subverts but internalises the stress. K takes discretionary space increasingly confidently. S subverts but feels little guilt because it is at the request of her superiors. Everybody's playing a game.

Bloomberg and Volpe say: p101 'Read the transcriptions of your interviews...What you are really doing is reading to get some feel for the 'storyline' including the major and minor stories that are being told within the data.

What is my story so far? That there is a whole bunch of prescription coming in not just from the state but from elsewhere, there is initiative overload and people are suspicious of it.
THAT THERE IS SYTEMS CONTROL and that there is subversion. That the contours of a holistic subject are being carved out in a ridiculous fashion. That meaning is being lost. That the individual is being overlooked.

Appendix I Abstract of a paper presented to a conference at Roehampton University (ROERCE 2010)

Pushing at the parameters or ticking the box? How are Key Stage Three English teachers responding to a shifting policy environment in England and in Wales?

Abstract

This paper explores the changing construct of "English" in the Key Stage Three classroom in both England and Wales. Historically, English has been a subject which has encouraged learners directly to explore both emotion and identity through texts. The 1921 Newbolt report suggests: "English connotes the discovery of the world...and the discovery of ourselves" (Newbolt 1921 p.20). However, since 1988, the subject has been under increasing pressure from a range of "disciplinary technologies" including external assessments and prescriptive pedagogies. Using situational analysis (Clarke, A.E. 2005) as an analytical tool, I will analyze the work of KS3 secondary English teachers in England and Wales and examine the forces that are currently shaping their practice, focusing specifically on key stage three assessment policies, which have diverged significantly in the two polities since 2005. If the Newbolt report pushed the frontiers of the subject to cover a "whole range of mental, emotional, imaginative, moral and spiritual goals" where are those frontiers now and what are the significant forces and discourses pushing at them?

Mari Cruice 2009 (4th Year EdD student)

Name .....

department for children, schools and families

Assessment criteria: Writing

The National Strategies

QCA Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

	AF5 – vary sentences for clarity, purpose and effect	AF6 – write with technical accuracy of syntax and punctuation in phrases, clauses and sentences	AF3 – organise and present whole texts effectively, sequencing and structuring information, ideas and events	AF4 – construct paragraphs and use cohesion within and between paragraphs	AF1 – write imaginative, interesting and thoughtful texts	AF2 – produce texts which are appropriate to task, reader and purpose	AF7 – select appropriate and effective vocabulary	AF8 – use correct spelling	Handwriting and presentation
Level 8	**Across a range of writing** ▪ sentence structure is imaginative, precise and accurate, matched to writer's purpose and intended effect on the reader		**Across a range of writing** ▪ imaginative, well controlled structuring of subject matter and management of paragraphing provide textual coherence and cohesion to position the reader appropriately in relation to the writer's purpose		**Across a range of writing** ▪ creative selection and adaptation of a wide range of forms and conventions to meet varied writing challenges with distinctive personal voice and style matched to intended effect		**Across a range of writing** ▪ wide ranging vocabulary used imaginatively and with precision	**Across a range of writing** ▪ correct spelling throughout	
Level 7	**Across a range of writing** ▪ variety of sentence types deployed judiciously across the text to achieve purpose and overall effect, with rare loss of control ▪ a range of features employed to shape/craft sentences that have individual merit and contribute to overall development of the text, *e.g. embedded phrases and clauses that support succinct explanation; secure control of complex verb forms; antithesis, repetition or balance in sentence structure*		**Across a range of writing** ▪ information, ideas and events skilfully managed and shaped to achieve intended purpose and effect, *e.g. introduction and development of character, plot, event, or the terms of an argument, are paced across the text* ▪ a variety of devices position the reader, *e.g. skilful control of information flow to reader; teasing the reader by drawing attention to how the narrative or argument is being handled*	**Across a range of writing** ▪ paragraphing across the text is integral to meaning and purpose, *e.g. paragraph length and complexity varied to match narrative pace or development of argument; varied devices to link or juxtapose paragraphs; paragraph structure repeated for effect* ▪ individual paragraphs shaped or crafted for imaginative or rhetorical effect, *e.g. last sentence echoing the first; lengthy single sentence paragraph to convey inner monologue*	**Across a range of writing** ▪ imaginative and generally successful adaptation of wide range of forms and conventions to suit variety of purposes and audiences, *e.g. deliberate reference to other texts or textual conventions for effect or emphasis* ▪ well judged, distinctive individual voice or point of view established and sustained throughout, *e.g. consistent handling of narrator's persona in fiction; well controlled use of original turns of phrase in formal discursive writing* ▪ generally successful and consistent control of appropriate level of formality and varied range of stylistic devices to achieve intended effect, *e.g. varying the level of formality within a piece for effect; direct address to the reader or taking the reader into their confidence*	**Across a range of writing** ▪ vocabulary consistently, often imaginatively, well matched to purpose and audience ▪ range of vocabulary generally varied and often ambitious, often judiciously chosen	**Across a range of writing** ▪ correct spelling throughout	
Level 6	**Across a range of writing** ▪ controlled use of a variety of simple and complex sentences to achieve purpose and contribute to overall effect ▪ confident use of a range of sentence features to clarify or emphasise meaning, *e.g. fronted adverbials ("Reluctantly, he..., Five days later, it..."), complex noun or prepositional phrases*	**Across a range of writing** ▪ syntax and full range of punctuation are consistently accurate in a variety of sentence structures, with occasional errors in ambitious structures, *e.g. only occasional comma splices, some use of semi-colons, not always accurate*	**Across a range of writing** ▪ material is clearly controlled and sequenced, taking account of the reader's likely reaction, *e.g. paragraphs of differing lengths, use of flashback in narrative, anticipating reader's questions* ▪ a range of features clearly signal overall direction of the text for the reader, *e.g. opening paragraphs that introduce themes clearly, paragraph markers, links between paragraphs*	**Across a range of writing** ▪ construction of paragraphs clearly supports meaning and purpose, *e.g. paragraph topic signalled and then developed, withholding of information for effect, thematic links between paragraphs* ▪ within paragraphs, cohesive devices contribute to emphasis and effect, *e.g. adverbials as sentence starters*	**Across a range of writing** ▪ imaginative treatment of appropriate materials, familiarity with conventions of a variety of forms, adapting them when needed to suit purpose and audience, not always successfully, *e.g. deliberate use of inappropriate register for humour, clear emphasis on narration rather than plot* ▪ convincing, individual voice or point of view established and mostly sustained throughout, *e.g. authoritative expert view, convincing characterisation, adopting a role* ▪ level of formality used for purpose and audience generally appropriate and a range of stylistic devices used to achieve effect, not always successfully, *e.g. controlled informality, generalisations or shifts between conversational style and more literary language*	**Across a range of writing** ▪ vocabulary chosen generally appropriate to purpose and audience ▪ range of vocabulary generally varied and often ambitious, even though choices not always apt	**Across a range of writing** ▪ generally correct spelling throughout, including some o ambitious, uncommon words o words with complex sound/symbol relationships o words with unstressed syllables o multiletter vowel and consonant symbols ▪ likely errors: o *occasionally in complex words such as outrageous, exaggerated, announcing, parallel*	
Level 5	**Across a range of writing** ▪ a variety of sentence lengths, structures and subjects provides clarity and emphasis ▪ wider range of connectives used to clarify relationship between ideas, *e.g. although, on the other hand, meanwhile* ▪ some features of sentence structure used to build up detail or convey shades of meaning, *e.g. variation in word order, expansions in verb phrases*	**Across a range of writing** ▪ full range of punctuation used accurately to demarcate sentences, including speech punctuation ▪ syntax and punctuation within the sentence generally accurate including commas to mark clauses, though some errors occur where ambitious structures are attempted	**Across a range of writing** ▪ material is structured clearly, with sentences organised into appropriate paragraphs ▪ development of material is effectively managed across text, *e.g. closings refer back to openings* ▪ overall direction of the text supported by clear links between paragraphs	**Across a range of writing** ▪ paragraphs clearly structure main ideas across text to support purpose, *e.g. clear chronological or logical links between paragraphs* ▪ within paragraphs / sections, a range of devices support cohesion, *e.g. secure use of pronouns, connectives, references back to text* ▪ links between paragraphs / sections generally maintained across whole text	**Across a range of writing** ▪ relevant ideas and material developed with some imaginative detail ▪ development of ideas and material appropriately shaped for selected form, *e.g. nominalization for succinctness* ▪ clear viewpoint established, generally consistent, with some elaboration, *e.g. some, uneven, development of individual voice or characterisation in role*	**Across a range of writing** ▪ main purpose of writing is clear and consistently maintained ▪ features of selected form clearly established with some adaptation to purpose ▪ appropriate style clearly established to maintain reader's interest throughout	**Across a range of writing** ▪ vocabulary chosen for effect ▪ reasonably wide vocabulary used, though not always appropriately	**Across a range of writing** ▪ correct spelling of o grammatical function words o almost all inflected words o most derivational suffixes and prefixes o most content/lexical words ▪ likely errors o *occasional phonetically plausible spelling of unstressed syllables in content words* o *double consonants in prefixes*	
Level 4	**Across a range of writing** ▪ some variety in length, structure or subject of sentences ▪ use of some subordinating connectives, *e.g. if, when, because* throughout the text ▪ some variation, generally accurate, in tense and verb forms	**Across a range of writing** ▪ sentences demarcated accurately throughout the text, including question marks ▪ speech marks to denote speech generally accurate, with some other speech punctuation ▪ commas used in lists and occasionally to mark clauses, although not always accurately	**Across a range of writing** ▪ ideas organised by clustering related points or by time sequence ▪ ideas are organised simply with a listing opening and closing, sometimes linked ▪ ideas or material generally in logical sequence but overall direction of writing not always clearly signalled	**Across a range of writing** ▪ paragraphs / sections help to organise content, *e.g. main idea usually supported or elaborated by following sentences* ▪ within paragraphs / sections, limited range of connections between sentences, *e.g. over-use of 'also' or pronouns* ▪ some attempts to establish simple links between paragraphs / sections not always maintained, *e.g. firstly, next*	**Across a range of writing** ▪ relevant ideas and content chosen ▪ some ideas and material developed in detail, *e.g. descriptions elaborated by adverbial and expanded noun phrases* ▪ straightforward viewpoint generally established and maintained, *e.g. writing in role or maintaining a consistent stance*	**Across a range of writing** ▪ main purpose of writing is clear but not always consistently maintained ▪ main features of selected form are clear and appropriate to purpose ▪ style generally appropriate to task, though awareness of reader not always sustained	**Across a range of writing** ▪ some evidence of deliberate vocabulary choices ▪ some expansion of general vocabulary to match topic	**Across a range of writing** ▪ correct spelling of o most common grammatical function words, including adverbs with *-ly* formation o regularly formed content/lexical words, including those with multiple morphemes o most past and present tense inflections, plurals ▪ likely errors o *homophones of some common grammatical function words* o *occasional phonetically plausible spelling in content/lexical words*	
Level 3	**In most writing** ▪ reliance mainly on simply structured sentences, variation with support, *e.g. some complex sentences* ▪ *and, but, so* are the most common connectives, subordination occasionally ▪ some limited variation in use of tense and verb forms, not always secure	**In most writing** ▪ straightforward sentences usually demarcated accurately with full stops, capital letters, question and exclamation marks ▪ some, limited, use of speech punctuation ▪ comma splicing evident, particularly in narrative	**In most writing** ▪ some attempt to organise ideas with related points placed next to each other ▪ openings and closings usually signalled ▪ some attempt to sequence ideas or material logically	**In most writing** ▪ some internal structure within sections of text *e.g. one-sentence paragraphs or ideas loosely organised* ▪ within paragraphs / sections, some links between sentences, *e.g. use of pronouns or of adverbials* ▪ movement between paragraphs / sections sometimes abrupt or disjointed	**In most writing** ▪ some appropriate ideas and content included ▪ some attempt to elaborate on basic information or events, *e.g. nouns expanded by simple adjectives* ▪ attempt to adopt viewpoint, though often not maintained or inconsistent, *e.g. attitude expressed, but with little elaboration*	**In most writing** ▪ purpose established at a general level ▪ main features of selected form sometimes signalled to the reader ▪ some attempts at appropriate style, with attention to reader	**In most writing** ▪ simple, generally appropriate vocabulary used, limited in range ▪ some words selected for effect or occasion	**In most writing** ▪ correct spelling of o some common grammatical function words o common content/lexical words with more than one morpheme, including compound words ▪ likely errors o *some inflected endings, e.g. past tense, comparatives, adverbs* o *some phonetically plausible attempts at content/lexical words*	**In most writing:** ▪ **legible style, shows accurate and consistent letter formation, sometimes joined**
Level 2	**In some forms of writing** ▪ some variation in sentence openings, *e.g. not always starting with name or pronoun* ▪ mainly simple sentences with *and* used to connect clauses ▪ past and present tense generally consistent	**In some forms of writing** ▪ clause structure mostly grammatically correct ▪ sentence demarcation with capital letters and full stops usually accurate ▪ some accurate use of question and exclamation marks, and commas in lists	**In some forms of writing** ▪ some basic sequencing of ideas or material, *e.g. time-related words or phrases, line breaks, headings, numbers* ▪ openings and/or closings sometimes signalled	**In some forms of writing** ▪ ideas in sections grouped by content, some linking by simple pronouns	**In some forms of writing** ▪ mostly relevant ideas and content, sometimes repetitive or sparse ▪ some apt word choices create interest ▪ brief comments, questions about events or actions suggest viewpoint	**In some forms of writing** ▪ some basic purpose established, *e.g. main features of story, report* ▪ some appropriate features of the given form used ▪ some attempts to adopt appropriate style	**In some forms of writing** ▪ simple, often speech-like vocabulary conveys relevant meanings ▪ some adventurous word choices, *e.g. opportune use of new vocabulary*	**In some forms of writing** ▪ usually correct spelling of o high frequency grammatical function words o common single morpheme content/lexical words ▪ likely errors o *inflected endings, e.g. past tense, plurals, adverbs* o *phonetic attempts at vowel digraphs*	**In some forms of writing:** ▪ **letters generally correctly shaped but inconsistencies in orientation, size and use of upper/lower case letters** ▪ **clear letter formation, with ascenders and descenders distinguished, generally upper and lower case letters not mixed within words**

Appendix J An example of an *Assessing Pupils' Progress* grid