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ENGLISH TEACHERS AND ENGLISH TEACHING

Phil Rigby

This chapter considers:

- the nature of the English curriculum and the way it is viewed, both by society at large and by English teachers themselves
- external pressures on the English curriculum
- internal conflicts about the nature of English as a subject
- the development of the National Curriculum, its style, content and structure
- the Framework for secondary English
- the teaching of grammar and the standards debate
- Shakespeare and the literary canon
- frequently encountered texts within English lessons.

Finally, in focusing upon a discussion between four experienced teachers around the topic of planning to deliver an aspect of a GCSE set text, the chapter reflects upon different ways of presenting material, according to the particular needs of the pupils in a class.

INTRODUCTION

English is vital for communicating with others in school and in the wider world, and is fundamental to learning in all curriculum subjects. (QCA, 2007: 1)

Literature in English is rich and influential. (QCA, 2007: 1)

This is it: your opportunity to train as an English teacher; your chance to play your own unique role in the development and evolution of the English curriculum! This opening chapter deliberately begins with two key quotations from the English National Curriculum programme of study (2007), each emphasizing the importance and centrality of the subject to all pupils. The very nature of English is 'vital' because it is in a constant state of change: it moves and breathes in the same way as the English language itself. It is 'influential' because of the way that it impacts not only on every subject area,

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but also on pupils' lives beyond school. Equally, English is 'rich' because of its unlimited diversity. In essence, these two quotations encapsulate the significance and the enjoyment of English teaching.

As a successful practitioner you will need to develop the skills to discuss, explore and evaluate the learning and teaching within your classroom in an informed manner. Equally, you will need to develop the reflective, evaluative and critical thinking skills which are a crucial part of developing Master's-level professional practice. This opening chapter is deliberately designed to be thought-provoking, raising issues and asking the kinds of questions that you will encounter not only during the course of your English training, but also throughout your teaching career.

THE NATURE OF THE ENGLISH CURRICULUM

In order to begin to explore the centrality of English as a subject, it is first important to understand its position within the school curriculum as a whole. Just as, within the early years of primary education, reading impacts disproportionately upon every other area of the curriculum with the result that the good reader is at an advantage over other children in a whole range of subjects, so in the secondary age-phase English has a unique relationship with every other subject area. As an English teacher, that places you in a rather special position, a member of a key department in the school, one that links with every other subject and whose influence is felt across the whole school. However, like many of life's benefits, such privilege also has its drawbacks. For instance, your colleagues will think nothing of berating you for their pupils' poor spelling in their lessons; worse still, as native speakers of English, many will consider themselves experts on the subject, and consider it their duty to explain to you what and how they feel you should be teaching, in ways that you would never even consider doing with them.

Similarly, on a wider and more public stage, the more vocal elements among the press will relish every opportunity to comment on what they perceive to be poor levels of spoken and, particularly, written English among school leavers (it makes no difference when you point to pupils' consistently rising examination performance; to them this is merely another manifestation of falling standards and further serves to fuel their argument). They salivate over spelling errors on public signs, incorrect word choice and – the worst sin of all – misplaced apostrophes! Such lapses in public standards are again clearly the fault of – you have guessed it – English teachers. The English teacher is singled out by society at large in ways that simply do not happen to, for example, the geography teacher, the biology teacher or the information and communications technology (ICT) teacher.

The two viewpoints mentioned above are linked to the 'anyone can teach English' discourse that has been in existence almost as long as the subject itself. Everyone has been to school, so the logic goes, everyone can speak English; therefore everyone must be an expert on English teaching. However, if you are anything like me, that is at least part of the attraction of wanting to be an English teacher: to be involved in teaching such a crucial subject, one that has such a profound and lasting impact on pupils, affecting them and staying with them in ways that other subjects do not. When you chance to meet former pupils,

sometimes many years after they have left your class, they will often tell you how English was not only the subject that they enjoyed most at the time but that its relevance has become increasingly apparent with the passage of the years.

Point for reflection

The Spanish teacher tells you in the classroom that the pupils in his class do not understand what a verb is; how do you react? The geography teacher tells you that her pupils cannot spell the simplest of geographical terms; what do you say? The science teacher tells you that she never corrects grammatical errors in her pupils' work because, as far as she is concerned, it is science that she is teaching, not English; does she have a point? On passing the notice board outside the head's office you notice an absolutely howling error (surely you can't be the only one to have noticed it); what do you do?

Points for
reflection

As you begin to explore others' views, both of English as a subject and of English teaching itself, it is important that you consider what English really means to you. How do you view the subject? What kind of English teacher will you be? Perhaps these are questions you have never considered up to this point; however, they are valid questions that you ought to be aware of and consider at this early stage in your career. It is important that you reflect upon and develop an opinion about English teaching and what it means to you, otherwise you will find yourself buffeted by the vagaries of public opinion or by circumstances as they change.

EXTERNAL PRESSURES

Because English is such a crucial subject, so central to pupils' educational, cultural and social development, it can become subject to significant external pressures, often of an overtly political nature. In a sense, this is simply a manifestation of its importance: people have strong and diverse opinions about it and want to influence the way it is taught precisely because it matters so much. Such pressures on the content and structure of the English curriculum derive, broadly, from two sources: first, from other groups and individuals within education and, second, from society in general, often in the form of comment in the press or statements by politicians.

English, after all, is the subject at the heart of our definition of national cultural identity. Since English teachers are the chief custodians of that identity we should not be surprised to find that revolutionaries intent on using the subject to transform society have gained a powerful foothold, attempting to redefine the very meaning of reading itself. (Phillips, 1997: 69)

As a member of the English teaching community, it is important both that you engage in the debate and that you are prepared to be flexible, but it is also important that you remain resilient in order to stand up to the pressures, the questions and, at times, the criticism that you will face as a member of the profession.

I have already hinted at some of the types of comments that you will face from your colleagues in school. This may seem an obvious point, but experience shows that it is worth making: it is important that your colleagues do not see English simply as a service subject, as a content-free, skills-based curriculum shell whose only justification for existence is to benefit other subject areas. That is not to say, of course, that there can be no carry-over from English into other subjects: the best learning is one that is deeply contextualized; one that actively seeks to create links between different facets of the curriculum; where subjects (and here I mean subjects, not just teachers) do actually talk to each other and benefit from such dialogue. Because of its position in the curriculum, English is almost uniquely placed to involve itself in cross-curricular initiatives; to develop skills and understanding; to explore through literature the human aspects of social or historical situations in ways that will certainly benefit other subject areas. Yet it certainly does not exist simply to service the particular demands and needs of other curriculum areas; indeed, if you were to follow such a route through to its natural conclusion, you would find yourself in a situation where other curriculum subjects totally dominated and controlled the shape and structure of the English curriculum, and where English as a subject was left without a core, intellectually, emotionally or morally.

In recent years, attitudes such as these from among the teaching profession have become less widespread, as the National Strategies have become embedded, with their clear emphasis on the development of cross-curricular literacy and of the particular literacies of each different subject area. It has now become more widely recognized and accepted that pupils' progress in individual subject areas is inextricably tied up with the development of the particular literacy of that subject. So the Spanish teacher wanting his pupils to understand verb formation will be expected to find ways to teach it so that pupils can see its importance in context; similarly, the geography teacher wanting her pupils to develop sound strategies for knowing how to spell key geographical terms cannot simply pass the responsibility for the pupils' prowess at spelling to their English teacher.

Over 30 years ago a seminal report on English teaching entitled *A Language for Life* (DES, 1975), more commonly known as the Bullock Report after its author Lord Bullock, advocated the development of language across the curriculum and put forward the view that every teacher is a teacher of language. However, in the years between the report's publication and the launch of the National Literacy Strategy in 1998, language across the curriculum became seen almost as the Holy Grail in language development, an almost unattainable target. Responding to the Bullock Report's recommendations, individual schools and local authorities adopted a number of creative schemes in an attempt to develop a cross-curricular approach to language teaching; however, by and large, such small-scale and individual approaches had failed to achieve a breakthrough at a national level, until the advent of the National Literacy Strategy with its focus on every teacher's responsibility to develop the literacy of their own subject.

If the pressure upon the English curriculum from within schools could be identified as being driven by debate over standards and the accuracy of spoken and written expression, the pressure from outside the educational community tends to come from the same direction. There are a number of contentious issues within the field of English that could attract such comment: the importance of the literary canon, the role of new media in textual study, the teaching of Shakespeare, to name but three. All these do attract comment from politicians and the press from time to time, usually as a part of the 'dumbing down' discourse. However, as in schools, the main area for comment is in terms of standards and accuracy. In terms of vitriol and vehemence, the days leading up to the introduction of the first National Curriculum document in 1988 probably saw the most outspoken comments on what was wrong with English teaching.

Typical of the criticism were the remarks of Norman Tebbit, then Chairman of the Conservative Party, who pointed out the causal link between the decline in the teaching of grammar and the rise in street crime:

If you allow standards to slip to the stage where good English is no better than bad English, where people turn up filthy at school ... all these things tend to cause people to have no standards at all, and once you lose standards then there's no imperative to stay out of crime. (Cameron, 1995: 94)

In similar vein, Prince Charles raged about standards of English teaching:

We've got to produce people who can write proper English. It's a fundamental problem. All the people I have in my office, they can't speak English properly; they can't write English properly. All the letters sent from my office I have to correct myself, and that is because English is taught so bloody badly ... The whole way schools are operating is not right. I do not believe that English is being taught properly. You cannot teach people properly unless you do it on a basic framework and drilling system. (28 June 1989, cited in Cater, R., 1997, p.7)

This is not the place to start to unpick and explore the underlying message of such remarks. However, hopefully they serve as useful examples of the type of comment and criticism that English teaching attracts. Recent years have seen a decrease in both the vehemence and the frequency of such views, yet from time to time they do still emerge, placing English teachers at the heart of the debate about standards, not just in classrooms but in society as a whole.

INTERNAL CONFLICTS

In looking at the external pressures on the English curriculum, you begin to understand some of the key influences in shaping the current state of English teaching and how English teachers feel about their subject. However, there are similar internal conflicts among the English teaching fraternity about what English is and what it should be. Depending on their own particular personal beliefs, social background, life experience

and area of interest within the subject, teachers will adopt a particular standpoint and view English in a particular way. This describes a healthy situation – the fact that there is such a wide range of views is not a reason for criticism – it is reflective of the breadth, the depth and, indeed, the strength of the subject. People have such wide-ranging views on English teaching, expressing and defending them so vehemently, because it actually matters to them.

In discussing the first English National Curriculum in 1991, Professor Brian Cox identified a number of different views of English teaching:

- A *'personal growth'* view focuses on the child; it emphasizes the relationship between language and learning in the individual child, and the role of literature in developing children's imaginative and aesthetic lives.
- A *'cross-curricular'* view focuses on the school: it emphasizes that all teachers (of English and other subjects) have a responsibility to help children with the language demands of different subjects on the school curriculum, otherwise areas of the curriculum, may be closed to them.
- An *'adult needs'* view focuses on communication outside the school: it emphasizes the responsibility of English teachers to prepare children for the language demands of adult life, including the work place, in a fast-changing world. Children need to learn to deal with the day-to-day demands of spoken language and of print; they also need to be able to write clearly, appropriately and effectively.
- A *'cultural heritage'* view emphasizes the responsibility of schools to lead children to an appreciation of those works of literature that have been widely regarded as among the finest in the language.
- A *'cultural analysis'* view emphasizes the role of English in helping children towards a critical understanding of the world and cultural environment in which they live. Children should know about the processes by which meanings are conveyed, and about the ways in which print and other media carry values.

Here, we begin to see some of the philosophical standpoints underlying particular epistemologies of English teaching. Often, teachers will have adopted such viewpoints instinctively, without entering into an inner debate on the relative merits of particular cases. Positions taken will be intimately tied up with individual teachers' personalities and areas of interest; indeed, some teachers may be unaware of their own natural inclination, never having questioned the rationale behind their own particular approach.

The teacher taking a 'personal growth' view considers the transforming power of literature, of pupils seeing their world in new and different ways as a result of explorations inside the English classroom. The teacher who adopts a 'cross-curricular' view might consider the overlap between English and literacy, asking where one ends and the other begins and seeking to identify links between the literacies of individual subjects across the curriculum, perhaps looking for opportunities to design and implement integrated arts projects across a number of subjects. The teacher with an 'adult needs' view sees English very much as a transactional subject, one that prepares pupils for the particular demands of the work place and of adult life in general, keeping an eye on

changing technologies and seeking opportunities to utilize these within the English classroom, with life skills such as letter and report writing being paramount. In the 'cultural heritage' view, literature is at the heart of the curriculum, with classic poetry, prose and drama being studied in order to gain an understanding of our nationhood and as an exemplification of our national heritage. For the teacher with a 'cultural analysis' view, new media – television, film, the press, the Internet, text messaging and blogging – are explored, both as texts for study and as vehicles for writing, alongside newer literary texts, often from non-English settings.

Of course, such distinctions are artificial; there is scope for overlap. They are certainly not mutually exclusive, nor is there an implied hierarchy with one particular viewpoint seen as the 'norm' or the most preferred. However, they are useful in summarizing the different standpoints within English teaching, and the majority of teachers will probably find themselves instinctively drawn towards a particular standpoint. In a sense, these artificial divisions are less evident in teachers' everyday practice now than they were at the time of writing, certainly since the establishment of, the National Curriculum and the embedding of the Framework for secondary English. Today, English teaching is far less polarized. However, pre-National Curriculum, such distinctions were crucial, as teachers had the freedom to follow their own areas of interest almost to the exclusion of other areas.

In a recent straw poll survey with the Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) English trainees at Edge Hill University, by far the largest contingent (over 65 per cent) identified themselves most strongly with the 'personal growth' viewpoint. Of the remainder, the trainee group was split almost evenly between 'cross-curricular' and 'cultural analysis' viewpoints, with 'cultural analysis' just shading second place. Significantly, not one of the trainees felt particularly attracted to either the 'adult needs' or 'cultural heritage' viewpoints. Interesting though these figures are, it must be stressed that this was a relatively small sample (57 trainees) in a room together on one particular afternoon, and as such should not be seen as particularly representative of a wider group.

Point for reflection

Relate these views to your own memories of learning English at school. To what extent they might apply today. Where do your own educational priorities lie?

Points for reflection

THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

After a debate over the future of education that had started with Prime Minister James Callaghan's speech at Ruskin College, Oxford, in 1976 and had lasted for over a decade, the National Curriculum was eventually introduced in 1990. It seems almost unthinkable now that, prior to this point, apart from the examination syllabuses for

16- and 18-year-old pupils, there was no real agreement as to what the English curriculum should comprise. At individual local authority, school and department levels teachers did discuss and debate the curriculum but by and large this was principally a matter for individual choice. Within the bounds of reason, teachers were free to teach not only how they wanted but also what they wanted. With such a lack of structure, either agreed or imposed, it was little wonder that many teachers simply followed their own interests: poetry, media, spoken English, drama – each could easily fill a teacher's curriculum planning if left unchecked. This was not out of a lack of professionalism or ambition for their pupils: it was simply that teachers were operating in a virtual void. At this time it was taken for granted that particular teachers had particular interests, and heads of department frequently took the view that pupils who experienced a mix of teachers from across the department would receive a relatively broad and balanced curriculum spread over a period of five years.

Since its introduction in 1990, the National Curriculum for English has been through four different iterations. The original document, presented like all the other subjects in a hefty A4 ring-binder, introduced the three attainment targets of Speaking and Listening (EN1), Reading (EN2) and Writing (EN3); it provided detailed assessment criteria on levels of attainment within each; it introduced the notion of 'expected' levels of achievement, and it provided both statutory and non-statutory guidance on curriculum planning – perhaps the most useful yet least used aspect of the document. Other notable features of the 1988 version were the status given to speaking and listening alongside reading and writing and the inclusion of media texts within the reading section.

Its 1995 revision, more commonly known as the Dearing National Curriculum (DfE, 1995), saw few really major structural or philosophical changes, yet there were some real differences from the earlier document, mostly political in nature and not always for the better. It was a significantly slimmed down document; this time the non-statutory guidance had been removed; at the forefront were the level descriptors for each of the attainment targets, which resulted in several years of largely assessment-driven curriculum planning within English departments. Instead of starting from the programme of study and planning to ensure coverage of the breadth of the curriculum, teachers found themselves starting from the attainment targets and working backwards to try and reach a suitable starting point. The result was a well-intentioned but ultimately unproductive period in which teachers, in trying to adapt to the new curriculum were attempting to fit their teaching to the attainment targets rather than vice versa. Perhaps the two most controversial features of the revision were the relegation of the role of media within the English curriculum and the strengthened emphasis on the English literary heritage and on works 'of high quality by contemporary writers'.

The third version, introduced as part of the 'Curriculum 2000' revisions, though similar in size to the 1995 version was very different in tone and presentation (DfEE, 1999). The major changes were at primary level, where the programme of study was revised to ensure alignment with the National Literacy Strategy. Reflecting the mood and values of the early years of the New Labour government, this document included 12 pages on inclusion, which will be explored in fuller detail in Chapter 6. Interestingly, though, the document retained its compulsory lists of classic authors and poets, included for the first time guidance on non-fiction writing, and reinstated media as a key element of the curriculum.

This section is certainly not intended as a detailed historical trawl through the intricacies of the National Curriculum. If, however, you do want to read more, there are numerous texts dealing in depth with the introduction and development of the National Curriculum. The further reading section at the end of this chapter provides details of some of these. However, before going on to consider the structure and demands of the most recent iteration of the National Curriculum for English, there are two key points that do need to be made. First, the National Curriculum is statutory in nature: it is a legal document, set up by Act of Parliament and can be amended only by Act of Parliament. What this means in simple terms and in practice is that the National Curriculum is compulsory if you are teaching within the maintained sector in England and Wales. Second, although it comes with the full weight of statute behind it, remember, too, that this is an entitlement document. It exists to establish a common curriculum that all pupils must follow in English over the course of their 11 years of compulsory education. However, it is not the entire English curriculum; it does not build a fence around English teaching and say to teachers, 'You must not pass beyond this point'. This means that teachers are still free to enrich the English curriculum using their own interests and professional judgements, providing that they first ensure that the National Curriculum is being fully covered.

Any introduction of the revised National Curriculum for English (2007 www.qca.org.uk) needs to begin in 2005, when the QCA initiated a national discussion, 'English 21', with the aim of exploring future directions for English over the next 10 years. The project focused on four principal areas:

- how changes in society, work and knowledge would change the skills pupils need
- choice and flexibility in 14–19 qualifications
- the impact of new technologies on the nature of texts and on assessment
- how assessment should develop.

Over 5000 individuals and organizations participated in the exercise, which was eventually summarized in *Taking English Forward*, the QCA's response to the consultation (QCA, 2005). This document, together with the comments of those who had contributed to the discussion, informed the revision to the programme of study for key stages 3 and 4, which was eventually published in 2007.

The revised National Curriculum for English (2007) signals a move towards greater professional independence for English teachers and constitutes an explicit acknowledgement of the importance of creativity, personalized learning, functional skills, cultural awareness and criticality. Links to the new programme of study can be found on the companion website www.sagepub.co.uk/secondary. The actual documents are structured and expressed with genuine clarity (see Figure 1.1).

The fact that all subjects in the new National Curriculum are presented in the same format is particularly helpful for teachers. This means that cross-curricular and interdisciplinary links are made explicit, and the role that each subject has to play in the holistic development of pupils is emphasized. Looking at the National Curriculum for English (2007), it is evident that this version has tried to provide teachers with the opportunity to personalize learning according to the particular needs of the individuals they teach.



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<i>Main sections of the National Curriculum for English</i>	
Statement of the Curriculum Aims	
Statement of the Importance of English	
1. Key Concepts:	competence creativity cultural understanding critical understanding
2. Key Processes:	the essential skills and processes that pupils need to learn to make progress in terms of speaking and listening, reading and writing are detailed
3. Range & Content:	outlining the breadth of the skills and processes that teachers should address, in terms of speaking and listening, reading and writing
4. Curriculum Opportunities:	detailing the contexts and kinds of activities pupils should explore to develop their skills in speaking and listening, reading and writing.

Figure 1.1 Structure of the National Curriculum for English

Hence we find less prescription in the range of texts for reading (QCA, 2007: 70–1) and teachers being explicitly encouraged to select reading matter that will engage their pupils.

The 2007 National Curriculum for English has been built around the development of the ‘four Cs’ key concepts of competence, creativity, critical understanding and cultural awareness (Figure 1.2), which first appeared during the ‘English 21’ consultations. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there remain here distinct traces of the viewpoints that Professor Brian Cox noted within the first National Curriculum for English in 1991, although now labelled differently.

The 2007 National Curriculum has also been written to take account of the five requirements of the *Every Child Matters* agenda (DfES, 2004). Within the curriculum, all children should:

- be healthy
- stay safe
- enjoy and achieve
- make a positive contribution
- achieve economic well-being.

English, like every other National Curriculum subject area, is expected to provide contextualized opportunities to ensure that these five key requirements are addressed.

In summary, the revision of the National Curriculum for English (2007) offers opportunities for schools to:

- personalize the curriculum
- provide focused support and challenge

<p>Competence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ability to communicate effectively and adapt to different situations • Being clear, coherent and accurate in spoken and written communication • Reading and understanding a range of texts, and responding appropriately • Demonstrating a secure understanding of the conventions of written language including grammar, spelling and punctuation • Being adaptable in a widening range of familiar and unfamiliar contexts within the classroom and beyond • Making informed choices about effective ways to communicate formally and informally 	<p>Creativity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drawing on a rich experience of language and literature to make fresh connections between ideas, experiences, texts and words • Using inventive approaches to making meaning, taking risks, playing with language and using it to make new effects • Using imagination to convey themes, ideas and arguments, and create settings, moods and characters • Cultural understanding: the appreciation of the best achievements of our literature and language, and new ways that culture develops • Critical skills: being able to evaluate all forms of media and communication
<p>Cultural awareness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaining a sense of the English literary heritage and engaging with important texts in it • Exploring how ideas, experiences and values are portrayed differently in texts from a range of cultures and traditions • Understanding how English varies locally and globally, and how these variations relate to identity and cultural diversity 	<p>Critical understanding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging with ideas and texts, understanding and responding to the main issues and developing their own views • Analysing and evaluating spoken and written language to appreciate how meaning is shaped

Figure 1.2 The four Cs

- ensure coherent learning experiences
- embrace more creative teaching/learning
- choose how learning is organized
- effectively utilize Assessment for Learning (AFL).

Point for reflection

Now take a few minutes to consider your immediate reactions to the four Cs and the *Every Child Matters* agenda. Is anything missing that you now think should be in the National Curriculum? Given that you have a statutory responsibility to 'deliver' the National Curriculum, how might you make it accommodate all these requirements and what purpose do you think a secondary English curriculum should serve?

Points for reflection

THE FRAMEWORK FOR SECONDARY ENGLISH

In 1996 the government's taskforce on literacy produced the blueprint for the National Literacy Project, seen as fundamental in continuing the drive on standards and improvement that had categorized discussions over the shape of the English curriculum since the launch of the National Curriculum (NC) almost 10 years earlier. Its major product was the *National Literacy Strategy Framework*, introduced in all primary schools in September 1998. The Framework had clear content, clearly prescribed ways of operating and a rigid structure, designed to maximize the time teachers spent directly teaching their class. Its intention was to shift the balance of teaching away from individualized work, especially in the teaching of reading, and towards more whole-class and group teaching.

The National Literacy Strategy was designed to operate principally through the Literacy Hour, which would run each day in primary schools. The structure of the hour was clearly set out: the lesson would begin with 15 minutes of shared text work led by the teacher, a balance of reading and writing. This would then lead to a further 15 minutes of focused word or sentence work, again led by the teacher, covering spelling and vocabulary work, together with the teaching of grammar and punctuation from the sentence-level objectives. From here, pupils would go into 20 minutes of guided group work; all pupils grouped according to ability, the teacher working closely with one group and circulating through the course of the week to ensure full coverage. The hour would then conclude with a 10-minute plenary, often remarked upon as potentially the most effective yet in practice the least likely to be covered properly, in which the teacher and pupils would reflect together on key aspects of the learning, with particular points emphasized and reinforced.

Three years later in 2001, the National Literacy Strategy was introduced into secondary schools, this time in the form of the *Framework for Teaching English: Years 7, 8 and 9* (DfEE, 2001), which took many of the more recognizable features of the primary strategy and reworked them for a secondary setting. For those interested in such things, the nomenclature was deliberate. Whereas, in the primary phase this was the National Literacy Strategy, at Key Stage 3 it was quite pointedly the Framework for Teaching English. This illustrates a key distinction: the question of where literacy starts and finishes and how much overlap there is with English. Clearly there is much common ground between the two, but they are not synonymous. Literacy points to a set of skills, concerned with accuracy, appropriateness, clarity of expression. English, as we have already seen, is significantly broader than this.

When the Framework for teaching English was introduced observers noted that a number of key features of the literacy hour had vanished (not every secondary school operated a 60-minute lesson timetable; it was impractical to expect English to be taught each day), yet a number of the established ways of working were retained. There were also key changes in focus: there was an emphasis on Speaking and Listening that was missing from the primary Framework; equally, there was a clear expectation that it would be supported by cross-curricular work across all other subject areas. However, starter activities and plenaries, the focus on shared text work, teachers working to support ability groupings of pupils, a phonic approach to the teaching of spelling, transferability of skills and

a fast pace of learning were all to be seen in the Key Stage 3 Framework. However, just as the headline feature of the National Literacy Strategy within the primary phase was the Literacy Hour, so in secondary schools the major innovation was the way that it objectivized the National Curriculum, in order to provide an outline curriculum planning framework covering the three Key Stage 3 years.

In 2008, a secondary National Strategy for school improvement was launched, with the key strategic aim of raising 'standards of achievement for young people in all phases and settings'. The secondary National Strategy for school improvement forms the spine of the government's reform programme for transforming secondary education in order to enable children and young people to attend and enjoy school, achieve personal and social development and raise educational standards in line with the *Every Child Matters* agenda.

Alongside mathematics, science and ICT, central to the secondary National Strategy was a revised and updated Framework for secondary English, based on the programme of study for the new secondary curriculum and designed to build upon the success of the previous Framework document. A key change here was the inclusion of Key Stage 4 in the Framework. The Framework identifies yearly learning objectives that encourage ambition and provide challenge for all pupils, showing progression in the subject. The objectives have been designed to ensure coverage of the programme of study at both Key Stages 3 and 4 and to establish a minimum expectation for the progression of most pupils. The new objectives for English build on the previous Framework and are now:

- expressed as objectives for pupils' learning
- set on the new programme of study
- extended to Key Stage 4 (and include a number of higher-level extension objectives related to more complex and challenging learning)
- organized by the three language modes of Speaking and Listening, Reading and Writing plus a fourth section, Language.

Speaking and listening

The objectives for speaking and listening are arranged under similar headings to those in the original Framework (listening and responding, speaking and presenting, group discussion and interaction, and drama, role-play and performance). The new speaking and listening section begins with listening and responding (Figure 1.3) in order to give more emphasis to this strand.

Reading

The reading objectives reflect the format used by the new programme of study, with just two main headings: 'Reading for meaning' and 'Understanding the author's craft' (Figure 1.4). However, a notable change is the introduction of a separate sub-strand concerned with Reading and engaging with a wide variety of texts, which links to the need for a wide repertoire of opportunities, including the need to develop wide independent

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Speaking and Listening	
Pupils will explore, develop and respond to a range of skills and strategies, in a variety of contexts, adapting language according to task, audience and purpose.	
Strands	Substrands
1 Listening and responding	1.1 Developing active listening skills and strategies
	1.2 Understanding and responding to what speakers say in formal and informal contexts
2 Speaking and presenting	2.1 Developing and adapting speaking skills and strategies in formal and informal contexts
	2.2 Using and adapting the conventions and forms of spoken texts
3 Group discussion and interaction	3.1 Developing and adapting discussion skills and strategies in formal and informal contexts
	3.2 Taking roles in group discussion
4 Drama, role play and performance	4.1 Using different dramatic approaches to explore ideas, texts and issues
	4.2 Developing, adapting and responding to dramatic techniques, conventions and styles

Figure 1.3 Speaking and listening

reading, as suggested by the range and content and curriculum opportunities sections of the Programme of study.

Writing

The renewed Framework describes writing in three strands (Figure 1.5).

- Composition: generating ideas, planning and drafting
- Composition: shaping and constructing language for expression and effect
- Conventions: drawing on conventions and structures.

Language

The exploration of language change and variation, and the development of a meta-language (the terminology we use to comment on and analyse language) are included in this area (Figure 1.6).

Reading	
<i>Pupils will engage with, and respond to, a rich variety of print, electronic and multi-modal texts, developing analysis and awareness of the forms and purposes of writing, and the contexts and cultures within which they were written.</i>	
Strands	Substrands
5 Reading for meaning: understanding and responding to print, electronic and multi-modal texts	5.1 Developing and adapting active reading skills and strategies
	5.2 Understanding and responding to ideas, viewpoints, themes and purposes in texts
	5.3 Reading and engaging with a wide and varied range of texts
6 Understanding the author's craft	6.1 Relating texts to the social, historical and cultural contexts in which they were written
	6.2 Analysing how writers' use of linguistic and literary features shapes and influences meaning
	6.3 Analysing writers' use of organization, structure, layout and presentation

Figure 1.4 Reading

Before moving on, a key point does need to be made about the Framework for secondary English (2008) www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/secondary/framework/english. Unlike the National Curriculum, the Framework is not statutory in nature; its status is 'Recommended'. However, so closely does it align with the National Curriculum that English teachers find it invaluable as a curriculum planning tool, allowing an overview over half a term, a year, even a key stage, and thus ensuring a balanced coverage of the National Curriculum.

Point for reflection

Look closely at the Framework for secondary English (2008), at its content and implied structure. To what extent do you think it allows for a flexible and open-minded English classroom to be developed?

Points for reflection

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Writing	
<i>Pupils will write a wide range of texts on paper and on screen for different purposes and audiences, adapting features and techniques to create a range of effects and impact.</i>	
Strands	Substrands
7 Composition: generating ideas, planning and drafting	7.1 Generating ideas, planning and drafting
	7.2 Using and adapting the conventions and forms of texts on paper and on screen
8 Composition: shaping and constructing language for expression and effect	8.1 Developing viewpoint, voice and ideas
	8.2 Varying sentences and punctuation for clarity and effect
	8.3 Improving vocabulary for precision and impact
	8.4 Developing varied linguistic and literary techniques
	8.5 Structuring, organizing and presenting texts in a variety of forms on paper and on screen
	8.6 Developing and using editing and proofreading skills on paper and on screen
9 Conventions: drawing on conventions and structures	9.1 Using the conventions of standard English
	9.2 Using grammar accurately and appropriately
	9.3 Reviewing spelling and increasing knowledge of word derivations, patterns and families

Figure 1.5 Writing

Language	
<i>Pupils will explore the significance of English and the variations in its use and development, and comment on how language is used across a variety of contexts and situations.</i>	
Strands	Substrands
10 Exploring and analysing language	10.1 Exploring language variation and development according to time, place, culture, society and technology
	10.2 Commenting on language use

Figure 1.6 Language

GRAMMAR AND STANDARD ENGLISH

One of the most acrimonious battles in the debate over English teaching has been that over the role of Standard English in the curriculum. Closely aligned with concerns over standards, both professional and among the wider public, it has raged both outside the profession and among English teachers themselves. Some have said it is symptomatic of cultural colonialism, others that it is the only form of English that should be studied as it is that which is 'correct'; some have said that it is one of a number of forms of English worthy of sustained study; others that it is the only fair way to present pupils with the skills to equip them to perform well in later life. In one sense such different approaches bring to life the different epistemologies of English teaching explored earlier in the chapter under 'Internal conflicts' and it could be said that there is at least some reason in all of them.

Part of the problem with Standard English, of course, is its cultural dominance – a feature that English teachers have tried to counter in other areas. The National Curriculum has stated that: 'the phrase Standard English refers to the grammatically correct language used in formal communication throughout the world. To become competent users of Standard English, pupils need to be taught to recognise its characteristics and the rules which govern its usage' (DES, 1989: 51).

The Standard English debate perhaps reached its height in the battle over the Language in the National Curriculum (LINC) project. Set up in the early 1990s in response to the Kingman Report into the teaching of English language (DES, 1988), the LINC project had actively promoted an investigative, descriptive approach to language study, rather than the more formalized, prescriptive approach favoured by ministers and members of the government. It had encouraged pupils to enjoy language study, to see it as relevant and to base it upon their own experience of language use. However, its lack of prescription, together with its refusal to endorse Standard English as the desired model, ultimately resulted in the government's withdrawal of all the materials developed and circulated, and retaining Crown Copyright over them in an attempt to block their further dissemination and use. In a sense, though, this was a futile gesture and many English department stockrooms still contain copies of the materials developed, with teachers continuing to use them today in order to explore and develop children's understanding of language in use.

Point for reflection

Is there a 'Standard' English and, if so, (how) should it be taught?

Points for reflection

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The debate over Standard English is not a new one, as the following comments show. Do you feel that any of these have a particular resonance or relevance for English teachers today?

A poor intelligent boy who is compelled to come to school has a clear right to have his language cleansed and purified, and we must accept the burden of the effort. (Sampson, 1921: 27)

One of the disadvantages of the prescriptive approach to language teaching is its negative aspect ... This kind of teaching has often inhibited a child's utterance without strengthening the fabric of his language. (DES, 1975: 170)

The great divide is not between those who can read and write and those who have not learned how to. It is between those who have discovered what kinds of literacy society values and how to demonstrate their competencies in ways that earn recognition. (Meek, 1992 : 9)

Standard English demands great sensitivity from the teacher. It is dangerous to tell a five year-old boy or girl that his or her mother uses language incorrectly. Adolescents are going to be embarrassed and ashamed if a teacher suggests that their dialect, which is a part of their identity must be radically changed. How to teach spoken Standard English needs continual discussion among teachers. (DES, 1989: 58)

We should aim to correct what is wrong because it is ugly, unclear or not conforming to accepted standards. The terminology of grammar should be subservient to our need to help pupils with their expression, and not an end in itself. Be flexible on common usage, warning pupils of the possible consequences of errors like 'it's me', while accepting that it is a commonly spoken form. (1980, Unpublished secondary school English department policy document)

The desired uniformity could be achieved by adopting the forms used by the underprivileged, but it never is – they are the ones who must demote their own language and learn a new one, replacing the threads that join their minds and feelings to reality – like the operation of reconnecting the flesh and nerves of a severed limb. (Bolinger, 1980: 52)

competence in language is not seen as very much to do with an ability to write correct Standard English. Bullock does not accept the concept of correctness in English, but prefers to talk about 'appropriateness'. Prescriptive approaches to grammar, spelling and punctuation are dismissed by the report, not so much with contempt as with amusement. (Marenbon, 1987: 8)

Ultimately, we should continue to focus our energies on teaching children to learn language accurately and appropriately, in ways that are responsive both to – rather than prescriptive about – the realities of how language is used, and how young people learn to use it ... To be literate in the twenty-first century will involve interacting with Information and Communications Technology in ways that we are now only beginning to think about ... this technology will relieve us of many of our worries about correctness (for example, spell and grammar checks) and will also increasingly offer us predetermined forms of appropriateness. Our freedom as communicators in general and as writers in particular, will be both more extensive and less autonomous. We need to start thinking about how we want to use these possibilities and about how we want to teach young people to use them, right now. (Davison and Moss, 2000: 117)

Point for reflection

- Compose three statements about whether/why you think Standard English does or does not have a place in the secondary English curriculum.
- Devise three 'shoulds' and 'should nots' that you think English teachers should bear in mind when approaching spoken language.
- What place do you think dialects other than Standard English should have in the English classroom?

Points for
reflection

SHAKESPEARE AND THE LITERARY CANON

One of the more controversial elements of the National Curriculum since 1995 has been the inclusion of a canonical list of 'approved' authors for compulsory study. Situated firmly within the 'cultural heritage' camp, the list has been praised by traditionalists as a sign of standards being upheld and the great tradition of English literature being passed on to future generations. Simultaneously, it has been vilified by modernizers within the profession, who see it as backward-facing, designed almost as an aversion therapy to deter young people from engaging with literature.

Point for reflection

What is the literary 'canon'? Who chose it and why is it taught?

Points for
reflection

Within the National Curriculum for English (2007), at Key Stage 3 the range of literature identified for study includes:

- stories, poetry and drama drawn from different historical times, including contemporary writers
- texts that enable pupils to understand the appeal and importance over time of texts from the English literary heritage, including works by the following pre-twentieth-century writers: Jane Austen, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, William Blake, Charlotte Brönte, Robert Burns, Geoffrey Chaucer, Kate Chopin, John Clare, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Charles Dickens, Arthur Conan Doyle, George Eliot, Thomas Gray, Thomas Hardy, John Keats, John Masefield, Alexander Pope, Christina Rossetti, William Shakespeare (*Sonnets*), Mary Shelley, Robert Louis Stevenson, Jonathan Swift, Alfred Lord Tennyson, H.G. Wells, Oscar Wilde, Dorothy Wordsworth and William Wordsworth

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- texts that enable pupils to appreciate the qualities and distinctiveness of texts from different cultures and traditions
- at least one play by Shakespeare
- forms such as journalism, travel writing, essays, reportage, literary non-fiction and multimodal texts, including film.

Points for reflection

Point for reflection

'A dead white men's curriculum': how relevant is the National Curriculum's list of prescribed authors for a twenty-first century, multicultural, British population?

A similar list exists at Key Stage 4, with a revised and expanded list of pre-twentieth-century authors.

In practice, however, the effect of this list has not been to swamp the English curriculum with classic works of literature, but to make English teachers selective and judicious in their choice of texts. Narrative poems and the Sherlock Holmes stories have grown in popularity, as have works of fiction by authors such as Robert Louis Stevenson and H.G. Wells. The importance of studying whole texts rather than extracts has led to a rise in the popularity of the short story as a way of maintaining pupils' interest in and engagement with the text.

At Key Stage 3, the compulsory study of at least one play by Shakespeare has usually tended to result in pupils studying a Shakespeare play during the second half of Year 9, in readiness for their Key Stage 3 standard assessment tasks (SATs) (a number, of course, will have been introduced to Shakespeare in earlier years). Since the inception of the Key Stage 3 SATs in the mid-1990s, the following texts have been selected for study on a rolling programme, with teachers able to choose from among the three plays offered each year: *As You Like It*, *Henry V*, *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Tempest*, *Twelfth Night* and *Richard III*. As a representative list of the plays by Shakespeare that any English teacher involved in teaching up to GCSE level might be expected to know, this is fairly comprehensive. Remember, though, that you will not be expected to know all of them immediately; once selected for SAT study, each play will remain on the list for at least three years. Alongside your Key Stage 3 Shakespeare play, you will then need to select another for study at GCSE level. In that way, as a teacher you can build up your knowledge of the plays over a number of years. Remember, too, that one of the principal influences on what you will be studying with your classes is what is available in departmental stockrooms!

Point for reflection

Read the following comments on the literary canon. Written some years ago, to what extent do you consider that they still apply to the current National Curriculum?

Point for reflection

The so-called 'literary canon', the unquestioned 'great tradition' of the 'national literature', has to be recognised as a *construct*, fashioned by particular people for particular reasons at a certain time. There is no such thing as a literary work or tradition which is valuable in itself, regardless of what anyone might have said or come to say about it. (Eagleton, 1983: 11)

The 1995 NC was criticised as elitist, 'elevating writing produced by and about a particular Anglo-Saxon class and gender, so that the 'universal meanings' it embodies are only universal for those who define the world from that perspective. Raymond Williams (1973) ... argued that a truly popular culture representing the voices and interests of the working class should be supported and valued. Critics have complained that people from cultures outside Britain are presented in the Leavisite canonical texts (if at all) as alien and inferior, women are represented as the objects of male desire and defined in their relation to men, and the working classes are depicted as pitiful or quaint. The existence of this canon as a whole may be experienced as a form of oppression, and a denial of everyday personal experience (J. Maybin, Davison and Moss, 2000: 186-7)

STANDARD TEXTS

So what are the standard texts that you might expect to find within departmental stock cupboards? Some will say that class sets of novels are less ubiquitous than was the case, maybe, 10 or more years ago. The introduction and establishment of the Framework for secondary English might be cited as a part of the reason behind this – indeed a criticism that is sometimes made of the Strategy is that, in seeking to ensure adequate coverage of a range of genres, pupils only ever get to read extracts, that they no longer study complete texts and that this is just another manifestation of children and young people becoming unable to sustain their attention over a period of time, preferring instead to focus on extracts and sound bites.

However, many would argue that the shared class text remains as central and vital a part of the English curriculum as it ever did. Certainly, an exploratory visit to departmental stock cupboards around the country would corroborate such a statement. The following is a necessarily brief sample of some of the novels for children currently in use in secondary schools. You should, from the outset, become familiar with as many children's authors as possible.

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A brief introductory list, aimed at Key Stage 3 classes, might include the following texts:

Vivienne Alcock	<i>The Trial of Anna Cotman</i>
David Almond	<i>Skellig</i>
Nina Bawden	<i>Carrie's War</i>
Malorie Blackman	<i>Noughts and Crosses</i>
Frank Gardner Boyce	<i>Millions</i>
Roald Dahl	<i>Boy</i>
Anne Fine	<i>Goggle Eyes</i>
Nicholas Fisk	<i>Grinny</i>
Janni Howker	<i>The Nature of the Beast</i>
Elizabeth Laird	<i>Red Sky in the Morning</i>
Michelle Magorian	<i>Goodnight, Mr Tom</i>
Michael Morpurgo	<i>Kensuke's Kingdom</i>
Michael Morpurgo	<i>Private Peaceful</i>
Michael Morpugo	<i>War Horse</i>
William Nicholson	<i>The Wind Singer</i>
Philip Pullmann	<i>Northern Lights</i>
Philip Reeve	<i>Mortal Engines</i>
Louis Sachar	<i>Holes</i>
Robert Swindells	<i>Abomination</i>
Rosemary Sutcliff	<i>Eagle of the Ninth</i>
Jean Ure	<i>Tea-leaf on the Roof</i>
Robert Westall	<i>The Kingdom By The Sea</i>
Robert Westall	<i>The Machine Gunners</i>
Benjamin Zephaniah	<i>Refugee Boy</i>

This is a very small selection from a vast number. A few, such as *Carrie's War*, *The Machine Gunners* or *Goodnight, Mr Tom* have already attained 'classic' status; other, more recently published works, such as *Kensuke's Kingdom*, *Private Peaceful* or *Holes* look certain to follow suit. Many of the authors mentioned above are prolific writers, and you should try to read other books by them. You should read as widely as possible in the field of children's literature, and especially those books used most frequently as shared class texts – look out for what is in use when out on teaching placements.

Points for
reflection

Point for reflection

Select a shortlist of authors or works that you consider should be included in a twenty-first century National Curriculum for English.

At Key Stage 4, the stock cupboard is ordered according to the demands of the examination syllabus, with examiners tending to be rather conservative in their tastes. Next summer, my younger son sits his GCSE English Literature examination. The text chosen

for detailed study is *To Kill a Mockingbird* – the same novel I studied for O level English Literature, over 30 years ago. *Of Mice and Men*, *Lord of the Flies* and *A Kestrel for a Knave* are similarly widespread. In the Drama stakes, Shakespeare still dominates, with Arthur Miller in second place in what is virtually a two-horse race. In spite of such cultural conservatism, there are newer texts that have been introduced over recent years: for instance, poems by Simon Armitage and Carol Ann Duffy; poetry from other cultures and traditions and an engaging study of current non-fiction and media texts.

Point for reflection

What are the particular challenges that you as a teacher might face in teaching some of the books on the list above. Might any classroom situations prevent you from studying a particular text?

Points for reflection

PLANNING TO DELIVER A GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE TEXT

Finally, let us consider some of the different possible approaches to planning to teach a GCSE English Literature text. The examination texts available for study will depend upon the particular examination board that your department has chosen to follow. There are currently five examination boards offering GCSEs: Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA), Oxford, Cambridge and RSA (OCR), Edexcel, the Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC) and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA). Regardless of which examination board is selected, all pupils must demonstrate evidence of assessment in the following six categories of literature:

- prose published before 1914
- prose published after 1914
- poetry published before 1914
- poetry published after 1914
- drama published before 1914
- drama published after 1914.

Each board differs slightly in terms of the texts selected for study and the categories of literature selected for assessment by coursework or examination.

For instance, in AQA English Literature Specification A, all candidates compile a coursework folder worth 30 per cent of the total available marks and comprising three pieces: pre-1914 drama, pre-1914 prose and post-1914 drama. In addition, there is one examination paper worth 70 per cent of the total available marks; this is divided into two sections: Section A (post-1914 prose) and Section B (pre-1914 poetry and post-1914 poetry). In 2009, the following texts have been selected for the post-1914 prose section of the examination:

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- *Green Days by the River* by Michael Anthony
- *Heroes* by Robert Cormier
- *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding
- *I'm the King of the Castle* by Susan Hill
- *A Kestrel for a Knave* by Barry Hines
- *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee
- *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger
- *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck
- Short stories included in the *AQA Anthology*.

Four teachers, Steve, Jan, Angela and Ann have agreed to meet to discuss possible ways in which they might approach the teaching of the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* to a GCSE class. The outcome of the conversation will hopefully illustrate the range of different approaches to one text: in planning an approach to a text, you are not looking for the 'right answer'; instead, you need to consider the approach that you feel will engage your pupils and elicit the best response from them.

- JAN I always set the novel as a reading task over the summer holidays between Year 10 and Year 11. That way, hopefully most of the class will have a fair idea of what the novel is about before we actually come to study it in detail.
- ANN Yes, I'll always try to get them to read it before we come to study it in detail in class. For me, the key is to get the pupils to understand the characters and the setting right from the outset. It's such a wonderful book; I don't want them to miss any of the details, so I'll get them to focus on small details throughout Part One. For instance, towards the end of Part One I'll get them to draw a map of the street where Jem and Scout live, not because they especially need to know where all the different houses are but because by doing that it makes them go back to the text and read it closely – you can actually do it quite accurately.
- STEVE That's interesting because, for me, I just want the class to enjoy Part One and to get a sense of the characters, but to get through it quickly. For me, Part One is like a collection of short stories about the characters in Maycomb, but in a sense, it's just there to create a sense of background detail about the place where the main action is going to take place in Part Two.
- ANN I know what you mean but I just prefer to take some time over the details of Part One; for instance without being aware of some of the more peripheral characters like young Walter Cunningham and Burris Ewell, I think that the pupils might not make the link properly when other members of their families come to the fore during Part Two. I think that you also need an understanding of Boo Radley and the Radley family too, so that you're not left in the lurch at the end of the novel – it needs to be a surprise without being completely unexpected.
- JAN Yes – I agree totally about the importance of Part One. Get the pupils to find the briefest of quotations from the text to describe each of the characters: Dill was 'a pocket Merlin', Miss Stephanie Crawford was 'a neighbourhood scold', Boo Radley was 'a malevolent phantom', Mrs Dubose was 'pure hell'. That way, the pupils have at least some details to hang their hats on.
- ANGELA And don't forget the mockingbird motif. You need to draw the pupils' attention to the mentions of mockingbirds throughout Part One, even if you don't actually do

- anything substantial with them until towards the end of the novel, when Scout begins to understand what it's about for herself.
- ANN That's the thing – for me time spent on the first part of the novel building up the pupils' knowledge of the characters and the small town setting is time well invested. Really, I want to take my time over this part of the novel, so that in Part Two we can pick the pace up. You're right about Part One being like a collection of short stories – for that reason, I think that Part Two merits a faster paced reading, which I think you can do once you've got that knowledge of the characters and the setting.
- STEVE And alongside the mockingbirds, there is also scope for work on courage too, when you think of Atticus' words after Mrs Dubose dies, particularly after the children have not long before seen him shoot the mad dog. That then means that further on, towards the end, you can discuss the different ways that courage is shown in the novel, and look back to incidents such as Scout's fighting at the start of the book and the lynch mob before the start of the court case.
- JAN Do you do anything with the part on the first page about Jem breaking his arm? I'm always in two minds about that: part of me wants to say 'Just remember that, line – it'll all make sense at the end of the book' and part of me thinks that that will spoil it for the pupils.
- ANGELA I know what you mean. I never point that out myself, but then at the very end I will go back to the very beginning to point out the link. It's surprising though, how many pupils have remembered the opening and made the connection.
- JAN What you said earlier about the small town setting, that's really important to me, that sense of everybody knowing everybody else's business, so that it the characters know how the people round them will act and react, and the whole small-mindedness that goes with it.
- STEVE But how do you first start teaching the book – what do you do during the first lesson?
- ANN Start with basic work on the characters and the setting. Read Chapter One, then look at Jem, Scout, Dill, Atticus, Calpurnia, Boo Radley and what we find out about each of them. Discuss what we've worked out so far about where the novel is set and why.
- JAN Discuss the title and the book cover, get the pupils to speculate about what they think the book might be about.
- ANGELA A lot of the pupils who are doing History GCSE are studying the Depression, so that gives a useful background too. If you talk nicely to the History Department, they usually have some useful resources to lend you. I think it's always worthwhile showing the pupils something to give a sense of time and place, otherwise they think it was set just around the corner.
- STEVE Do you make much use of the film?
- JAN It's a great film, but it's not a patch on the book. It's confusing too, the way it mixes up the characters. It's useful once you've got to the end of the novel and the pupils are really comfortable and confident with it. Then you can use it as a way of reinforcing some of the bigger themes and plot lines.
- ANN Is it book that you feel you could teach to any groups of pupils?
- ANGELA I've usually taught it with middle and upper sets. It's not that it's too complicated or difficult for lower ability classes; I just think there are other set texts that are more appropriate.
- STEVE I know what you mean. It's a great book, and the plot line is relatively straightforward, but it's fairly long and quite detailed. With middle to lower groups, I prefer to work on *Of Mice and Men*.

Point for reflection

Discuss with your mentor potential approaches to this or another of the set texts for GCSE English Literature examination study. Select another of the books from list of set texts: how might you approach the teaching of this with a class?

WHAT THE RESEARCH SUGGESTS

In approaching the research underpinning current developments within the English curriculum, a practical starting point is Roger Beard's (1998) *National Literacy Strategy: Review of Research and other Related Evidence*. Published to coincide with the National Literacy Strategy's (NLS's) launch in primary schools in 1998, the review explores the extent to which the rationale and pedagogy principally associated with the Strategy were underpinned by findings from then current research into literacy development from Britain, Australia and the USA. Although situated squarely within the primary years, this review provides a thorough introduction to key research studies pertaining to school improvement; to teaching quality; to the NLS model itself and to each of the individual generic teaching areas associated with the literacy strategy. The review was useful in demonstrating how the key approaches associated with the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy were grounded in and guided by both current and ongoing research.

In terms of a useful summary of research based on the development of the Framework for secondary English, the most thorough and comprehensive review is probably Colin Harrison's *Key Stage 3 Strategy: Roots & Research* (2002). This time specifically focused upon the secondary age-phase, the document synthesizes research findings from Britain and the USA in order to explore the development of literacy skills among pupils aged 11–14. Adopting a scholarly but readable approach and providing individual chapters on reading, writing and spelling, Speaking and Listening, together with critical summaries of what research shows about the teaching sequence, about supporting pupils who have fallen behind and about the challenge of staff development, this is an excellent introductory review.



Also worthy of note and in keeping with current developments designed to encourage teachers to become more critically reflective is the recently established What Works Well website, on which teachers are able to share case studies which have improved learning and teaching. Although lower key in nature by design, these are the kinds of practitioner-based research that all teachers can become involved in, and which will prove invaluable when moving towards Master's-level study.

The intention in this opening chapter has been to raise some of the broader, more wide-reaching issues in order to give a general overview of the subject and of English teaching, in order to answer the question, 'What it is that actually makes this subject and the teaching of so different English from others?'

In subsequent chapters, you will move on to consider particular aspects of English teaching in greater depth and finer detail. However, it is important that, throughout, you remember and bear in mind the broader questions in this first chapter, as they raise issues, both philosophical and practical, that have implications for every aspect of English teaching.

Key points from this chapter

This chapter has asked you to consider:

- what English means as a subject
- the key issues facing English teachers
- what it actually means to be an English teacher.

Further reading

Any of the texts mentioned in this chapter will help develop your understanding of the issues involved in teaching pupils with individual abilities, aptitudes, interests and needs. You might find the texts below particularly helpful, in terms of further reading.

Clarke, S., Dickinson, P. and Westbrook, J. (2004) *The Complete Guide to Becoming an English Teacher*. London: Sage.

Links educational theory, historical perspectives and current practice in a way that encourages the reader to engage with the issues and critique approaches. Chapters 1 and 2, on the National Curriculum and the Framework for teaching English, are both comprehensive and encourage a reflective approach.

Davison, J. and Dowson, J. (2003) *Learning to Teach English in the Secondary School: A Companion to School Experience*. 2nd edn. London: Routledge.

Provides a range of advice, planning ideas and templates for schemes of work and lessons. Chapters 1–4 explore the background, philosophies and influences upon English teaching, together with the battles that have raged around the subject., before going to examine the National Curriculum and the Framework for teaching English in some depth.

Fleming, J. and Stevens, D. (2004) *English Teaching in the Secondary School: Linking Theory and Practice*. 2nd edn. London: David Fulton.

Adopts a topic-based approach to English teaching, with chapters on, for example, speaking and listening, reading, writing, teaching poetry, drama, ICT. The approach is scholarly but practical; Chapters 1 and 2, on the National Curriculum and the Key Stage 3 Strategy are detailed and thought-provoking.

Marshall, B. (2000) *English Teachers: The Unofficial Guide: Researching the Philosophies of English Teachers*. London: Routledge.

Traces the competing traditions of English teaching and considers their relevance to the current debate through an analysis of English teachers' views about themselves and their subject.

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Pike, M. (2004) *Teaching Secondary English*. London: Paul Chapman.

Takes a thematic approach to English teaching. Chapter 1, 'The Art of Teaching English' explores the philosophical background to English as a curriculum subject .

Williamson, J. (2001) *Meeting the Standards in Secondary English: A Guide to the ITT NC*. London: Taylor & Francis.

Provides detailed subject and pedagogical knowledge needed to teach English in secondary schools, together with support activities for work in schools.

Wright, T. (2005) *How to be a Brilliant English Teacher*. Oxford: Routledge.

A lively and realistic approach, which combines practical strategies for implementing the statutory curriculum and is as entertaining as it is stimulating. Chapter 7, entitled 'The Framework', offers a practical, realistic introduction to the demands of working with the Framework for teaching English.



Useful websites

Live links to these websites can be found on the companion website www.sagepub.co.uk/secondary.

www.curriculumonline.gov.uk

www.literacytrust.org.uk/index.html

www.qca.org.uk/qca_5600.aspx

www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/secondary/framework/english/

<http://whatworkswell.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/>