CULTURAL POLITICS AND THE ENGLISH CURRICULUM

A description and critical examination of the subject English as a site of ideological struggle

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This thesis comprises a description and critical examination of the school curriculum subject, English, as a site of ideological struggle. Its main premise is that the struggle for 'ownership' of the subject is not a new one but has spanned over a century. The argument endeavours to explore the idea that English is unlike any other curriculum area in that it has, since the mid to late nineteenth century, been regarded as a subject which has the potential to effect social transformation. This issue of social transformation or 'social engineering' is at the heart of much of the current criticism which surrounds English pedagogy. The thesis shows how the framework for the arguments associated with social engineering or social transformation can change depending upon certain social, political and historical variables.

Because I am a feminist educator I have set my arguments against a background of the personal locations which I believe have contributed to my interest in the topic. Next, I place my ideas in a theoretical and political framework and look at some of the current attitudes to English and its teachers. Following this I explore the history of the subject in order to show how criticism and struggle are typical of the subject's development. Finally, I examine contemporary approaches to English teaching in order to demonstrate how and why the ideological struggles which English has wrestled with have reached a new stage of intensity in the 1990's.
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*It would be pleasant to chart a straightforward and progressive course:
from error to truth, from uncertainty to clarity from confusion to complex simplicity .... Instead I tell a more ambiguous story...*
*(Jane Flax, 1993)*

**INTRODUCTION**

The nature of the curriculum subject, English, is not easy to define. It might seem just a trifle old hat to begin an introduction with an attempt at a definition, but it is perhaps necessary in this case. When I began work on trying to tease out what I meant by English I felt quite overwhelmed by the untidiness of the task. It seemed to have no edges and refused to be patted into a shape I could easily work with. How could I ever write about what English was if I was unable even to define it? It occurred to me then that this awkward task was central to any discussion I intended to have in the thesis about the nature of English. Indeed, its abstruse and plural nature as a curriculum subject is perhaps one of the key factors in the controversy which English has trailed in its wake for over 100 years.

A key point in opening up a discussion on the nature of English seems to be that its definition changes depending on who it is being perceived by and what level and type of interest they have in it. Many groups from employers to social critics, and even to royals, have defined English variously as the arena in which the skills of functional literacy are (or are not) taught, to the educational arena which is best suited to the transmission of cultural values. These groups, who are outside education and yet who have the power to shape and determine educational practices and policies, are classified by Bill Green (1993) as ‘external publics’.

However, at its most simplistic level, English can perhaps best be regarded rather like the English language itself - something of a mongrel in origin, con-
sisting of a variety of ‘strands’ of learning which are related to literacy, art and culture; three enormous social concepts which are themselves not without plurality and complexity. Herein lies perhaps the first issue which points to the tangle of forces which pull upon this ‘least straightforward’ of all curriculum subjects.

My interest in what English is and why I perceive it as a site of ideological struggle emerges from my professional location as an English teacher, and therefore as a regular ‘recipient’ of commentary and criticism on my profession from a range of ‘external publics’. I explore further my personal locations, my interest in the topic and how these are related in Chapter 1 - The Personal Context.

Vitriolic attacks on the teaching of English in newspapers in both Britain and New Zealand led me to want to explore what it was about English as a subject which prompted firstly, such anger from critics and secondly, defensive exasperation from teachers. It is probably the only school subject which has been singled out by Charles, the Prince of Wales, for a public flogging:

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, (Prince Charles, 28 June 1989, speech reported in The Times).

Is this true, I wondered? Is English taught so badly? And it is not just in Britain that such vitriol occurs. Recent attacks on English teachers by university academics in New Zealand (The Press, Nov 2, 1994) and the ensuing flurry of letters to the editor confirm that the issues surrounding the teaching of English are not confined to one country. Although the newspaper criticism I have cited here relates particularly to the skill of writing, I could equally cite those criticisms which accuse English teachers of being ‘social engineers’, of pushing particular self-interested political bandwagons. I examine the issues of social engineering and public criticism of English teachers in Chapter 2 - Neutrality, Culture and English.

Thus, English, its related skills and the teaching of it, appears to be more hotly debated than any other area of study in the school and university curriculum. The very terms of this debate are rooted in history, which I explore in Chapter 3 - The Historical Context, and in ideologies, in the relationship between lan-
guage and power and, in particular, in the different understandings of what English is supposed to be and do; I explore this theme in Chapter 4 - New English Pedagogies.

Ultimately, through weaving the personal and the historical with the political into a kind of meta-narrative I hope to show that the current 'contemporary crisis' of English teaching is illusory. By this I mean that a) I do not believe it is a contemporary crisis. Its status as a contested area of the curriculum reaches back to both its introduction to the university canon and the institution of mass literacy in the mid to late nineteenth century and b) the current sense of 'crisis' has been engineered by those who see that their 'ownership' of the English curriculum is under threat from those who have been located at its margins.

It is also perhaps important to assert here that I am not intending to look specifically at the English scenes of Britain and New Zealand in order to make comparisons between government policies on English teaching (although this does occur in some instances), rather I use examples from both countries, and in particular Britain, where most of the work on the politics of English teaching has been done, to highlight points on the relationship, as I see it, between English and the transmission of culture as it relates to the maintenance of the social order.

Through this work I am seeking to further inform my position as an English teacher because I believe that it is only by understanding the historical, political and ideological contexts of what we do that we can speak with any authority and credibility.

As a feminist educator who has some interest in post-structuralism I have tried to approach the organisation of this thesis in a slightly unconventional way. My aim has been to maintain a personal 'presence' as the subject of the work; this can be seen through my use of the personal pronoun and through references to relevant personal experiences which are intended to illuminate some points. I do not think I have always been successful in this endeavour. There are times when I found it hard to weave my voice in, for example in the historical chapter, and times when my voice, in an attempt to be reflective, perhaps intrudes. I make no particular apologies for this except to say that I have tried to experiment with an academic style of writing which is becoming increasingly accepted among feminist and post-structural scholars.

I began this introduction with a quotation from the American feminist scholar,
Jane Flax, because I started this work expecting to tell the ‘story’ of English as a curriculum subject and ended the work knowing that the story I was trying to tell is still in a state of becoming, because stories like this will always be ‘in process’ and unfinished in the eyes of the teller.

Note: During the English winter of 1993 I was able to spend some time in London at the Institute of Education Library seeking out some of the references which are detailed at the end of this work.
CHAPTER 1

THE PERSONAL CONTEXT

A LOCATION IN SAMENESS AND OTHERNESS

In attempting to tell the 'story' of English, and my engagement with this story, my narration will inevitably be partial. The readings and reflections which I offer in the text have been shaped by the particular 'window' through which I look as an educator. No doubt I have missed or omitted important points which did not 'suit' my argument. The view from this window too has shifted and changed over the years and will, I am sure, continue to do so. The thesis I write this year may be different from the one I might write next year. This having been said, although my opinions and thoughts may change, there are locations from which I write which are not so unstable (though I have no doubt that most post-modern theorists would disagree!) These 'essential' locations form the frame of my window. In this chapter I hope to show how these locations have influenced where I stand as an educator and the thoughts in this, my 'current', narrative.

My interest in this thesis topic stems from the particular set of constructions that have combined to form my lived experience and my perception of the world. By particular set of constructions I am referring to my gender, my sexual self, my intellectual and social backgrounds, and my professional self. I see that my gender, sexual self, and social history are 'essential' locations - by this I mean locations which are immutable. My intellectual and professional selves are constructions which emerge from the three essential locations, but which change and shift. For example, my thoughts and opinions can be transformed; I can cease to see the world through the window of a teacher, but I will always be a woman.

Like many professional women I seem to straddle a line which is paradoxical in that it both supports a status quo and resists it. My life contains both sameness and otherness. By sameness I mean I live a life which simultaneously concurs and colludes with a dominant ideology which is middleclass, patriarchal and heterosexual; by otherness I mean I also live a life which is marginalised in terms of this dominant ideology.
At the time of writing I locate myself in a way which attempts to take account of this tension. Firstly, and most importantly in terms of my material, I write from three marginalised locations as someone from a working class background, as a woman, and as a lesbian. Secondly, I write as a white, middle class, educated professional - these are the locations which have given me access to the world in which I am able to reflect on this topic. It is my ‘marginalised’ voices which are responsible for my involvement with and interest in the theory of English pedagogy, as I trace the transformational potential of the English curriculum. It is my ‘dominant’ locations which allow me to do so.

**Working Class Girl Makes ‘Good’**

The apparent tension between sameness and otherness in my life is highlighted by my social history and my educational background, which I will briefly outline here. My primary and secondary schooling occurred during the 1960’s and 70’s in Sheffield, a large industrial city in the North of England. I was a product of free school milk and the 11+ examination. These were pre-Thatcher days, when Harold Wilson led a Labour government which eventually gave way to the Tories under Edward Heath.

My family, who were Roman Catholics of Irish descent, lived on a huge post-war council housing estate. My father, a pipe-layer, earned approximately £19 a week in the 1960’s as an unskilled labourer. He was the sole income earner for a family of five. We had no car, no telephone, and no fridge. Neither of my parents had any secondary schooling. My older brother and sister both left school when they were 15, with no qualifications. There were no books in my house, but I was brought up with a strong Socialist sense of ‘justice for the poor’. Both of my parents were supporters of unionism.

Oddly, I passed my 11+ to attend an elite girls’ school which was a two hour bus journey from my house. My parents did not understand the nature of secondary schooling, but they encouraged me to take the opportunity, and saved hard to pay for my expensive uniform. The school was in a leafy, middle-class part of Sheffield which flanked the Peak District. At this school I met daughters of business people who had holidays abroad and I went home every night to ponder the cultural dissonance I was experiencing. I excelled at English. At this school I also learned to modify my accent, to despise my home and to mock the intellectual impoverishment of my loving family as I ‘assimilated’ into the middle class. My gift with English was my passport out.
Because I was a ‘clever girl’ I was encouraged by people, in particular English teachers, who were able to chart a course through the mystifying journey which involved examinations and College applications. Ability and opportunity intersected favourably for me during my adolescence, and I was eligible for a full university grant.

Even more oddly (for a girl on my street), after secondary schooling my next educational move was to college in London and then on to finish my undergraduate degree in English and Education at Cambridge University. The cultural dissonance I had experienced at school was exacerbated and the yawning gulf between where my family stood and where I stood in my early twenties seemed unbridgeable. My emerging middle class Self battled with my firmly rooted working class Self. This latter Self would not be denied - no matter how hard I tried to ignore it, and a sense of uneasy friction was created for me which has still not been resolved today. Both of my parents died before I was 21. That mutual inarticulated lack of understanding remains suspended in history, to my lasting regret.

I stand outside both social cultures not really belonging to either, and yet paradoxically belonging to both. This, of course, also gives me a unique stance from which I am able to reflect and to question. Rather than seeing my traditional academic education as something I had a ‘right’ to, I wonder how, given the odds, I got one at all. I wonder too why, in order to feel at ease in the school and university I went to, I snubbed the home I came from and modified my accent expunging, for one thing, all dialect words from my vocabulary. And I wonder how much directly, and indirectly, English as a curriculum subject has had to play in all of this. I have no doubt that English, whilst it might have been my ‘saviour’ both added to and encouraged my sense of dislocation.

**Sleeping in England**

I secured my first job as an English teacher in 1980 at a large comprehensive school just outside Cambridge. I taught English in the way I had been taught: Chaucer, Dickens and Shakespeare in the 5th year (fifth form), Shakespeare, Coleridge and Hardy in the 6th. However, as a student of 60’s English I was also careful to include a sprinkling of classroom drama, discussion and creative fun - but not too much, because I had been taught that the only learning that really counted was that which was examined in the O’ and A’ Level examinations. I taught Oxford Examination Board English with its notoriously conservative prescription. My students took copious notes.
Whilst I was conscious of the working class children in my classes and had quiet hopes that they might do 'well', I had no understanding or methodology which focused on how this might be achieved, or how I might tailor my teaching to them. After all, I had managed it. Although I was vaguely aware of class issues in my English lessons (I also taught literature from the 'Northern School' like Kes or A Taste of Honey - but mainly because I liked 'doing the accents' rather than from any sense of engendering inclusiveness), I was completely ignorant about issues of race and gender and how what I was doing at the front of the classroom successfully reinforced racial and gender stereotyping, not to mention passive attention, as my students sat in regimented rows. It did not occur to me that the West Indian and Pakistani children in my junior classes might feel excluded. Nor did I question why it was so hard to get them to speak, nor did I wonder why so few appeared in any of my O' and A' Level English classes. Reflecting, I think I believed, in the good liberal humanist tradition, that I was offering the gateway to a 'new world' to the children who were 'other' in my classes, through an unsophisticated Arnoldian sense that I was a sort of 'cultural missionary'. That the culture I was preaching might be that of the dominant social order in terms of race, gender and class did not enter my head. Whilst the English I had been taught offered me windows on other worlds, I had no sense that my 'council house world' was permissible. How much less permissible to them must have seemed the worlds of those students of mine who were Jamaican, Moslem, Jewish.

That alongside Chaucer and Dickens I also taught Austen and Eliot was a complete fluke. I never made anything of the fact that these writers were women, and in fact taught them as honorary men. The boys in my classes, I am sure, succeeded in gaining 90% of my attention. My senior classes of white, middle-class students always achieved excellent examination results.

I did not see my role as a teacher in political terms, or at least not explicitly so. At Cambridge I had studied the place of politics in Education; had read, among other things, Lawton's newly published Class, Culture and the Curriculum (1975), knew about social reproduction and saw my own story reflected there, but my interest was that of an anthropologist. Amazingly, once I had got my degree and my academic books were closed, I never thought any more about the politics of education; this is despite the fact that I found the material compelling. I could not, however, have taught in a political vacuum because I know that such a thing does not exist. The English that I taught was not, though I would not have said so, or indeed realised it at the time, politically neutral. My English implic-
itly supported a particular world picture - it was not even a world picture I recognised as a ‘working class’ woman. It was a world picture in which I was not reflected and from which I was largely excluded. And yet I supported it through my teaching.

When I left the English school at which I had taught for several years, helping students to achieve excellent results and generally working myself into the ground for my department, the Headmaster, a portly Oxford graduate who everyday wore an embroidered waistcoat, a bow tie and a fob watch, commented at my farewell that I would best be remembered for my beautiful smile. I did not understand why I felt so incensed.

**WAKING UP IN AOTEAROA**

The politicising of myself as an English teacher did not occur until I left England and had emigrated to New Zealand in 1982. After my arrival here I had early and rapid promotion. I taught in two North Island girls’ schools and became the head of a large English department in a co-ed, inner city school in the South Island, when I was 30 years old.

Teaching English in New Zealand was completely different from anything I had encountered in England. I was confused by the emphasis on creativity, on internal assessment, and on New Zealand writers, about whom I knew nothing. I landed here in the wake of sweeping changes which had occurred in the early 80's with the rewriting of a new English prescription - the National English Syllabus Committee (NESC) prescription which valued creative and personal writing, media, and the expression of ideas in ways other than written. I had to rethink myself as an English teacher if I was going to make it here, and try to understand why my version of what English was, was inappropriate in the South Pacific. Crucially, I started to see that ‘my English’ was just a *version*, and that other versions were available. English ceased to be the inviolable tabernacle I had taken it to be.

In my early years here I modified aspects of my teaching content whilst retaining old methods of delivery and interaction. There were still brown faces in my classes, but I saw them as white. Teaching girls meant that I was now more conscious of gender issues in the classroom, partly due, also, to my growing interest in feminism as a political movement. However, I believed, as I had been told, that there was no class system in New Zealand.

It was something of a surprise to me when I was offered a position at what was
then the most radically ‘different’ school in New Zealand, Hagley High School in Christchurch. The Principal, and philosophical leader, was a woman, an ‘out’ lesbian and a strong feminist; most of the staff seemed to be politically left (even more left-wing than most teachers are); a third of the intake consisted of adult, second-chance students; there was no uniform, no school bells and the rest of the student body was largely students who had not succeeded in a regular school environment, or who had parents supportive of an alternative kind of education.

My old methods of delivery and interactions were totally hopeless with the kinds of students I was faced with everyday. I had to rethink myself again. This time it was in a climate where many teachers discussed the nature of the student body; how ‘different’ everyone was, how we had to offer a curriculum and style that was not offered anywhere else, how we had to meet individual needs, how we could not expect a class with a large percentage of Maori and Pacific Island students to feel included if we, as teachers, did not recognise their cultures. I learned quickly how political my job as an English teacher really was and felt the loss of it having taken so long for me to realise how politically and pedagogically naive I had been in my practice.

Teaching in a working class, multicultural school made me more aware of how class and race differences could be seen as central determinants in the oppression of students. I felt indignant enough at that time about issues of access and equity to begin pursuing answers and to seek change in my teaching methodology. Those who were previously invisible in my classes began to find voices as I changed.

Three significant events at the end of the 1980’s helped me to make these changes to my practice. Firstly, I encountered two visiting American Fulbright scholars, a year apart, whose work on the teaching of writing made a significant shift in the way I understood the process of teaching and learning. After watching me teach one was to leave me, as a gift, a book, Plain Talk (1987), which profoundly influenced my methodology. The other was to provide a way for me to spend some time in the United States undertaking a Master’s paper on writing theory. It was during this time in North Carolina that I first came across the work of literacy theorists, Janet Emig and Paulo Friere.

Then in 1990 I attended an international conference held in Auckland that made explicit to me new ideas on the teaching of English. The conference, held every
four years, brought together English educators from all over the English speaking world to examine the theme, Different Voices - Language, Culture and Identity. For the first time I recognised that there was a vigorous and contemporary struggle with the nature of the subject English and the role of its teachers. Here began my introduction to notions of critical literacy, cultural dominance and difference, and my realisation that English is the most politically critical subject in the curriculum with the power to transform or maintain the status quo.

In 1992 I won a PPTA award to pursue post-graduate studies in Education, of which this thesis is the final element. That initial year also allowed me to spend time pursuing feminist issues in relation to Education and was my first coherent introduction to aspects of post-modern thought.

**SELF AS EDUCATOR**

I know that every classroom practice represents a theory and my current practice, more finely tuned than in the past and informed by my personal locations, whilst taking account of the requirements of working within a system (the pragmatic, but not always comfortable support of the dominant ideology to which I referred earlier), attempts to model one which is radical and liberatory. By radical pedagogy I am referring to politicising the classroom by raising to the consciousness of my students the ways cultural practices articulate, race, class, gender, nationality, sexual orientation and so on to mark and legitimate differences in an unequal social order. By liberatory I mean that I recognise that it is through new approaches to teaching English that the silenced can find their voices. My hope is that when the ‘silenced’ students discover their voices in the safe space of an English classroom their clamour to be heard will continue long after they have left school. I would like to reiterate the phrase attempt to model; I am not always successful.

My practice is strongly underpinned by feminism, aspects of post-structuralism and is student-centred, though it is certainly also imperfect in these respects. I think too that I have developed a more reflexive practice through my engagement with post-modern ideas and as part of this I attempt to make my locations explicit to my students. I elucidate on how these aspects emerge in my practice, and in particular how they relate to my interest in and engagement with the difference issue, in Chapter 4 - New English Pedagogies.

As a teacher I am passionately attached to certain beliefs about justice and how
people should be treated. I believe that being an English teacher has afforded me the best position from which to act as an agent for democracy.

**Being Marginal**

I have alluded several times to the fact that my marginalised or ‘silenced’ voices are integral to my interest in the theory of English pedagogy. This perhaps needs further elucidation in terms of the premise on which I have based my study.

I show in the following chapters how crucial the power of social transformation has been in constructing the *point* of English studies, and how this power has been harnessed by different groups at different times for particular social and/or educational ends: to transmit ‘culture; to allow students to ‘find their voices’; to keep students ‘out’ (in terms of defining acceptable language use); to let students ‘in’ (in terms of exploring issues which examine diversity and difference). However English is taught it will either change, challenge or maintain.

I do not excuse the fact that I teach my senior English classes in a politically explicit way (there are no junior classes in my school), though I do not believe that I am didactic. My students know that I am a feminist – the evidence is all around my walls, and that I come from a working class background. I have an idea that my students are comfortable and that those who are young women and those who are working class can see themselves represented in the kind of work we do. Those who are of colour in my classes do, I hope, feel included, represented and have equal ‘air space’. I think my ‘missionary zeal’ for English means that I teach it in a way that is challenging, but never unsafe.

One marginalised location which I do not make explicit, although most of my students are aware of it (I think) is my lesbian location. While I am able to work, through literature and methodology, at being explicitly gender, class and ethically inclusive, I find addressing gay issues in the classroom (and they often emerge from the kind of literature that I teach, or because ‘broad readings’ are permissible in my room) extremely difficult. Because of my own anxieties about being ‘out’ in the classroom (being out in the community is less of a problem) I avoid, with some shame, directly addressing issues of sexuality in literature. Ironically, when I lived as a heterosexual, discussing gay issues was never a problem.

That I feel unsafe about discussing something so fundamentally personal gives me a more acute insight into how those of my students who experience extreme
marginalisation - those of colour, those who are gay, those who belong to religious sects - might feel. I wrestle with this irony. How can English, which I see as a vehicle of liberation and democracy, work for my students and me in this kind of situation? As a feminist English teacher I seek to give 'voice' to those who have been silenced and alienated by traditional pedagogical practices that privilege hierarchy, authority, 'rigour' and exclusivity. Yet how can I make explicit the silenced if I silence myself? I can offer no answers yet, and can only direct the reader to the opening quotation from Jane Flax in my Introduction. My ambivalence is not, fortunately, shared by all gay and lesbian educators. I can direct those who wish to read about good practical strategies for dealing with these issues in the English classroom to a teaching text by Simon Harris (1990) and an excellent article by Wendy Greenbaum (1994).

In making explicit my personal, professional and political locations I hope I have successfully set out the background against which I intend the following chapters to be read.
CHAPTER 2

NEUTRALITY, CULTURE AND ENGLISH

English teachers are attacked by the media more than any other group of educators. The public often seems united in its cry against how reading and writing are taught in our schools. Why? Given that recent local research shows the measurable outcomes of English teaching in the form of literacy levels are, in fact, not declining (Elley, 1991) and that large-scale studies such as *Writing Performance in New Zealand Schools* (1987) show that students are not spelling more poorly than they used to or handling writing in a particularly deficient manner (in fact, if anything, today’s students are holding their own, and may even be doing better than students from earlier decades). Against this background the worries and concerns expressed by many over the standard of English teaching seem curious to me. I am not intending to act as an apologist for the teaching profession here (I have long believed that teaching literacy skills is the domain of all teachers, not just those who teach English), I am merely pointing out that broad empirical studies paint a different picture from the one the media likes to support.

Nor am I aiming to question or deny the particular concerns of some critics (for example, university teachers) who compare how some students write letters or essays today with how some students wrote essays and letters in the past. I wonder if this can be accounted for a) by an imperfect recollection of how students actually wrote in the past and b) by failing to acknowledge that the overall literacy rate of children is higher today than it has ever been, and that more students are undertaking university studies than ever before which will inevitably produce a range of variable competencies in writing. Rather, I am interested in proposing that these explicit criticisms are the contemporary manifestations of a very long argument which is only superficially about how well our children write and read. More fundamentally, the criticisms are often implicit or ‘unread’ comments about the struggle for the ownership of English and all that English has come to represent.
'ENGLISH WAS NEVER POLITICAL IN MY DAY'

'Social engineering' has become a pejorative term often aligned to 'current' issues-based approaches in English teaching. It is meant to imply that the content of English is manipulated by the teacher (or syllabus developers) in such a way that it influences students to think in a particular way, especially on social issues. It is also meant to imply that teachers are being 'partial' in their practice rather than the preferred 'neutral'.

Contemporary commentators on the teaching of English often argue that English is a 'neutral' school subject. That somehow its body of knowledge and skills should be taught in some kind of social and ideological vacuum. Students are seen as patients who exist in a bug-free oxygen tent. English is presented by these commentators as a subject which has been 'captured' and contaminated by those who have a social agenda and who are hell-bent upon 'political correctness'. I find this argument uninformed and simplistic. A subject which has a 'cultural arm' and which tackles contemporary issues as well as thoughts, feelings and ideas cannot, by its nature, be taught in isolation from the society which has constructed those thoughts, feelings and ideas. Here I am thinking about the 'tools of the trade' which are used in the classroom: novels, short stories, newspaper and magazine articles, TV programmes and films. The only way a teacher could teach 'neutrally' would be by never offering an opinion and never offering guidance in class discussions. Rather than representing neutrality which, as I illustrate shortly, is an impossibility for a teacher anyway, I see this as an abnegation of responsibility.

In this kind of 'neutral' classroom a teacher would never be able to defend or protect. Thus, a student who read an article in class about the oppression of blacks in South Africa and verbally expressed a support for that oppression would be able to remain unchallenged by the teacher. The English classroom would become an unsafe space for students who were not members of the dominant culture. Assuming that a teacher was working hard at being neutral, it is hard to imagine how some stance could not be conveyed to students through a stray comment, a voice inflection or even the lift of an eyebrow.

In addition, the 'neutrality' argument does not take account of recent critical work (Paulo Freire in Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 1972, Henry Giroux in Ideology, Culture and the Process of Schooling, 1982, and Colin Lankshear in Literacy, Schooling and Revolution, 1987) which aims to demonstrate how politically-loaded the activities of speaking, reading and writing actually are, and how levels of access
to these skills has benefited some whilst oppressing others. Those who argue for the neutrality of English are merely regarding their idea of what the subject English should comprise as ‘neutral’, which of course, it is not. What I, or another, might teach in English will always be political, because we have to make choices from available material. Whose literature and history are to be taught and whose ignored?

Which groups are included and which left out of the reading list or text? From whose point of view is the past and present examined? Which themes are emphasised and which not? Is the curriculum balanced and multicultural, giving equal attention to men, women, minorities, and non-elite groups, or is it traditionally male-oriented and Eurocentric? (Shor, 1992, p.18)

Even the ‘seemingly neutral’ elements of English like teaching the basic literacy skills of writing and reading can be seen as involving political choices, a theme which I will examine shortly.

More broadly speaking the ‘neutrality’ argument also fails to recognise that, quite aside from English, no subject in the school curriculum is neutral. Each one represents somebody’s version of what constitutes important knowledge, and explicitly or implicitly legitimates a particular world view.

Recent research in New Zealand (Alton-Lee and Nuthall, 1991) revealed that rather than being politically and culturally neutral, the curriculum of one school legitimated the world view of middle class white men. This important work reveals evidence of a powerful ideology ‘at work’ in our classrooms. It is an ideology in which culture is presented in monolithic terms. This culture is common, fixed, clearly defined by national boundaries and, perhaps not surprisingly, resistant to change. It is an ideology that most of us absorbed at school, and which many teachers are still bound to. Because it is monolithic and immutable it is difficult to see around or beyond. It is so there that it is difficult to recognise or teach in opposition to. It is easier to ‘yield’ since most available material reflects it, and one risks criticism if one challenges it.

Perceptions of culture in these terms, at least in New Zealand, are beginning to change. I was interested to read recently in the introduction to the new draft syllabus for Social Studies for New Zealand (1994) a clear reference to the research undertaken by Alton-Lee and Nuthall which exalts teachers of Social Studies to recognise the gender and ethnic imbalances which have been so much a part of resource material and attitudes in the subject in the past, and to act against them.
Quoting Paulo Friere, Ira Shor (1992) explores how this idea of monolithic culture is transmitted. He refers to Friere’s ‘central bank of knowledge’ from which material is drawn to deposit in students and expands the idea by reframing the central bank as a metaphoric repository of ‘official knowledge’. As a store of cultural capital he sees that the repository is comprised of the standard syllabus in schools and universities: traditional canons in academic disciplines; established scientific and technical knowledge; ‘correct usage’ considered to be standard for writing and speaking; and works of art canonised as models of aesthetic excellence. This material is selected by those ‘external publics’ with the power to set standards (E.D. Hirsch’s text, Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know (1987) is a good example of this ideology at work). At its root, the central bank underlying the standard curriculum is a deficit model for most students. It represents them as deficient, devoid of culture and language. The transfer of this knowledge to students acts as a validation of the status quo which downplays non-traditional student culture and the problem of social inequality. This kind of knowledge is not presented as the historical choices of some groups - but as a common culture belonging to everyone, even though not everyone has had an equal right to add to it, take from it, critique it or become part of it.

**Neutrality = Avoidance**

A curriculum that avoids asking uncomfortable questions of school and society is not politically neutral, it supports the dominant ideology. It cuts off students’ development as critical thinkers in the world. If the students’ task is to memorise rules and existing knowledge, without questioning the subject matter or the learning process, their potential for critical thought and action will be restricted. Thus students who emerge from this kind of system are not educated for democracy but for passivity. Of course, democracy is an ideology too - it is not natural or neutral either, but it is an ideology which aims to foster citizens who are active and questioning and who are able to live with differences of language, culture, opinion and experiences. How can this kind of ‘social engineering’ be bad for society?

Similarly, a curriculum that does not challenge the standard syllabus and conditions in society informs students that knowledge and the world are fixed and are fine the way they are, with no role for students to play in transforming them. As Raymond Williams argues:
The content of education, which is subject to great historical variation, again expresses, both consciously and unconsciously, certain basic elements of culture, what is thought of as “an education” being in fact a particular selection, a set of emphases and omissions. (1962)

**READING AND WRITING - POWERFUL DISCOURSES**

Because English deals with texts, both written and spoken, and because texts deal with powerful symbolic representations of the world and of society, the transmission of these representations through English to school students is one way of conferring legitimacy on the dominant status of particular social groups. Moves to introduce different kinds of texts which challenge the monolithic view of culture and present an opposing view - one which is pluralist and embraces cultural contributions from a multiplicity of sources, is at the heart of the ‘social engineering’ argument. For example, attempts in the late 1980’s by New Zealand English syllabus developers (in a rather small way) to incorporate the knowledge and perspectives of the less powerful, in this case women and Maori, led to ‘backlash’ articles like *Te English?* (Metro Magazine, June 1989). The initial draft syllabus of the Sixth and Seventh Form English syllabus (1990) opened with a five line Maori proverb about language, thus metaphorically affording the Maori language a position of prestige in the document. The proverb was subsequently removed with approval from the Minister of Education, and sentences in the text which accorded status to studying the writing of women as well as that of men were subsumed into general statements about the need to read ‘balanced’ texts.

The critics who levelled charges of social engineering at these syllabus developers were clearly not aware that it was the socially transforming potential of reading which underpinned the development of English studies in the first place.

English is a subject of major political significance in that it is central to the ideological maintenance of political and social order and national culture. Changing English or stopping it changing has often been a matter in which the state has been interested, although the state’s explicit interest in English has been largely with the functional arm of the subject - the economy demands a literate labour force. Once, being able to correctly parse a sentence and recite *The Charge of the Light Brigade* were considered to be measurable outcomes of being literate. Today, notions of what literacy is are more complex and problematic.
To be educated in Western society means having access to the linguistic resources of the culture. In this respect language is at the heart of education as the medium where most knowledge is represented and the means whereby people learn and teach. English in particular teaches the literacy on which the practice of other subjects is based. By concentrating on cultivating the processes of reading and writing through which education itself is conducted, English confirms their legitimacy.

Having access to language is also about having access to a powerful weapon which has been used against groups in society and by groups in society to keep others, particularly women, silent and powerless. An English curriculum that emphasises standard forms of spoken language as intrinsically superior serves to make students who do not have access to these spoken forms feel marginalised, undervalued and responsible for their own social failure. I can recall as a 12 year old at secondary school actively seeking out elocution lessons that were offered as an ‘extra’ because I was made aware that my accent had rough edges. Similarly, I have vivid memories of an essay being returned to me with two dialect words that I had used, heavily underlined with question marks by the side (my English teacher was not a local), and the feeling of utter stupidity that I had when I realised that these were not ‘real words’. I never used those words again.

Pointing out to students why certain dominant linguistic practices carry status, while others do not, is an important way of demonstrating how societal attitudes to language can affect and determine their identities and expectations. The wide belief that contemporary English teachers ‘permit’ non-standard forms of English to be used in writing at the expense of standard forms is misguided. Most of us now recognise the social importance of valuing the language brought to the classroom by our students, but we also teach the components of the variety known as Standard English; we know that our students need to use this form appropriately if they are to function usefully in society. As Katharine Perera (1990) has pointed out, students have the right to choose never to use the standard form if they feel it undermines their own social and cultural identity, but if they are not taught it then they do not have that choice. Giving students access to status varieties of written and spoken English is as important as validating their own variety. Thus rather than forsaking the teaching and accepting of ‘proper English’ for non-standard forms, it is much more likely today that a teacher would simply make explicit to a student what power or lack of power these variable discourses have.
Common access to the linguistic resources of reading and writing is, in historical terms, a comparatively recent educational phenomenon, as I demonstrate in the following chapter. This is perhaps not surprising given what Paulo Freire has termed their ‘liberatory’ power. The denial of access to literacy for working people in previous centuries, and even today in third world countries, has been shown to be one of the single most significant factors in maintaining past and existing relations of domination and exploitation, (Lankshear, 1987). However it is also now acknowledged that literacy itself is neither a neutral nor a unitary term. Apple (1991) points to what he calls literacy’s ‘dual sense of power’ where reading and writing can be, at one and the same time, forms of regulation and exploitation and also a potential mode of resistance. He reflects firstly on the liberal humanist attitude to the ‘beneficial’ effects of creating a literate working population by showing how this civilising process has been used to make dominated groups more moral, more obedient and more influenced by ‘real culture’. Nevertheless reading, he argues, also leads to critical literacy which has been part of a larger movement for a more democratic society; as I show in Chapter 3, free access to print can lead to ‘insurrection’ - why else have moves towards totalitarianism in some societies been associated with book burning on a grand scale? More specifically, even the achievement of ‘functional’ literacy to which Prince Charles referred in my introduction and which is defined by Colin Lankshear as:

(equipping) the person to respond to outside demands and standards, to understand and follow. There is no suggestion here of leading commanding, mastering or controlling. It is, moreover, passive. (p.64)

can be seen as not without its political ends. Teaching students to fill out forms, write ‘the business letter’, and read newspaper job advertisements, which are stock language exercises in ‘alternative’ English classes at fifth form level, might be seen as methods of training seemingly less able students to make the transition into jobs (if there are any) for which form filling is the highest skill required. That English ‘knowledge’ is still stratified in this way in many schools, as I witnessed as an adviser, is evidence of a particular kind of social engineering that is rarely acknowledged. In this way aspects of English which are specifically related to the reproduction of culture, for example certain kinds of literature: Shakespeare, the Leavis ‘Greats’, and poetry, have often been reserved for ‘top classes’ or those taking Bursary.

Bill Green (1993) notes that most English teachers have been ‘principally
schooled in the practices and perspectives of 'literary study' and 'much of their classroom time is spent in teaching literature in one form or another.' (p.137). According to Green, this focus on literature in the classroom brings together two arenas of ideological struggle - 'literature' and 'education' as both are recognised as 'social mechanisms for the mobilisation, authorisation and dissemination of certain specific discourses and, in varying ways, the refusal or the marginalisation of others' (ibid. p.138). These two arenas, he sees, are sites concerned specifically with the regulation of the social production of meaning.

The state also has an (implicit) interest in this 'cultural arm' because the teaching of literature is an activity which plays an important role in maintaining bourgeois ideology (Hart, 1988). In a view that sees English as some kind of state-sponsored cultural apparatus, Hart argues that 'great literature' conventionally taught surpasses other literature in its ability to transmit ideology without appearing to do anything of the kind. And it is precisely this apparent lack of political activity in the teaching of literature that makes it such a potent means of enforcing dominant ideologies, (ibid.).

**ENGLISH TEACHERS - IDEALISTS OR IDEOLOGUES?**

And what of those agents of the 'external publics' - English teachers? In my experience those who go into English teaching do so with a sense that they have access to something, the codes and practices of English teaching, that will change lives. Few enter the classroom with a verve to teach spelling or the subjunctive case, most are there because they love literature and value the 'personal' element of the discipline. English teachers tend to know their students better than other teachers; they are also likely to reveal more about themselves to students than other teachers. Many see themselves simply as education professionals who are aiming to help produce confident, literate young people with linguistic skills which mean they become thoughtful, independent, democratic, employable citizens.

However, as in any profession there are good and bad examples of English teaching. I use these terms to suggest my stance on pedagogical practice, not on the success or otherwise of the teaching in terms of outcomes.

My experiences both as an adviser to schools on English, as a commentator on English teaching, and as an HOD mean that I am specially placed as a long-time *observer* of the profession to offer thoughts what the particular differences might be. Of course, these observations have been constructed with my particular
political window on the English teaching profession.

It seems to me that 'bad' English teaching does not take account of the political nature of the job and is naive in its practice. Bad practice places the syllabus in a position of primacy and sees it as a policy document which is non-negotiable. It is used as an authoritative text rather than as a document to interpret through mediating and if necessary contesting its meaning in order to support the development of students' thinking and literacy skills. External criticism of the profession is something bad practice responds to without thought. In this situation English, and indeed education, is something done to students, not something that students do. Bad practice places the English teacher at the centre of the English lesson, rather than developing lessons around the contexts and participation of particular students. In these undemocratic classrooms English is a passive, dead subject involving the authoritarian transfer of official words; this might be in the form of isolated and decontextualised 'exercises' (the kind of drill-based grammar lessons many remember with curious fondness ('Well .. they didn't require any thinking') ..... or loathing,) or the dreary plod through 'the plot summary' (Next Macbeth said to his wife...). This is not to suggest that in a class where 'bad' practices are employed, a student might not develop literacy or indeed enjoy classes - it is the 'confined' nature of the subject, and the defined boundaries which have been predetermined that bother me. As I point out in Chapter 4 many teachers in this 'camp' are working, usually unconsciously, within a particular theoretical framework, one which is underpinned by official knowledge, rules and skills drills - and which legitimates official canons.

A teacher who employs 'good' practices, in my experience is one who thinks, questions and challenges authoritative readings of policy documents like a syllabus, not for the sake of it but to read for the underlying political framework. Such a teacher might ask what ideology is being supported in the document - one to be followed, or one to subvert. This teacher is not 'an innocent', recognising the essentially political nature of the job and works to ensure that all teaching which takes place is explicit ('There are many ways in which we can look at this poem - let's try and work out what some of them might be' ...) A teacher who employs 'good' practices is one who places the student at the centre of the learning experience, and who also recognises the heterogeneity of the classroom. Students are encouraged to 'think critically' about material - I am aware that this is a loaded term and I explore why in Chapter 4. Knowledge becomes a site for mutual enquiry between students and teachers (Shor, ibid.). For example, I begin my academic year in the classroom with each of my classes
(many of whom are returning adults) by finding out what they think English is. I need to discover if we have a mutual ground from which to start the year. In this way I start my teaching by constructing a process for the democratic, ‘critical’ and feminist pedagogy upon which I want to base the rest of the year. While the syllabus demands the meeting of certain requirements, as I have implied, it is possible to work with and around these requirements to co-develop the direction of the course. Thus (often anxious) students begin by owning the process of learning and the focus of the classes will be on trying to serve all students equitably. This is not to suggest that I absolve myself of responsibility as teacher, I have no problem with taking the authority in the classroom when it is required (critical/ feminist pedagogy is not about trying to get students to teach themselves!), but I do emphasise the participatory nature of the class. It is in this kind of climate that I believe students are able to work effectively and confidently with reading, writing and speaking. And it is in this way that students learn one of the most important ‘lessons’ of English - to question, challenge and seek justice for themselves and for others. While students might have an opportunity to find their own voices in an English classroom, they will also learn in the classroom which is based on ‘good’ practices, to question that voice and see how it is constructed in relation to other voices in the classroom.

**Can the ‘Good’ be Autonomous?**

Some who comment thoughtfully on the nature of English teaching (Goodson and Medway, 1990) believe that (despite my best efforts and attempts to ‘interpret’ policy texts) it is not always possible to function autonomously in the classroom as a teacher. They comment that the significance of a practice (such as group discussion or poetry writing) is a matter not only of its intrinsic character and pedagogical effectiveness but also of whether it ‘counts’; whether for instance, it is endorsed or disregarded by certification procedures, teacher education programmes, resourcing, timetabling, and so on. The structuring of this legitimacy is largely the work of ‘external publics’. Goodson and Medway see that the influence of professionals like teachers is limited, and believe that only forms and activities which have significance for external publics will survive. The powerful influences which originate outside school are pervasive enough to be internal. They influence the consciousness of teachers. Thus when curricular practice strays too far and too visibly from the category as understood by ‘interested publics’ the result is loss of support, student alienation and failure, and the collapse of efforts to sustain the legitimacy of the activity. This is an interesting argument for English because it stands against my experience, at
least in New Zealand.

External publics do have an influence here, (for example the restructuring of the way we assess our students and moves to package our learning into discrete units which can be completed quickly and 'built on' seems to be in response to industry requirements that students demonstrate that they possess units of skills) but the influence is considerably less on issues about what actually happens in the classroom than our British or American counterparts. One might argue that I have been fortunate in being responsible for leading the development of my particular 'brand' of English teaching with a group of like-minded teachers in a school atmosphere of experimentation and progressiveness. I have heard the 'external' conservative arguments, worked hard to understand them and have developed my own philosophy regardless. No one in my school hierarchy has ever pressured me to follow a particular path - believing, I like to assume, that as a professional I know what I am doing. Nevertheless, this is a subjective perception and open to reinterpretation. However, I am able to cite a more objective example of enormous pressure that was brought to bear by 'external publics' (which included the media, parents and the Opposition Spokesman for Education) on a school far less progressive than mine.

This particular attempt to influence classroom practice manifested in a 'text book controversy', over the teaching of Alice Walker's Pulitzer Prize winning novel The Color Purple (1982) at Nayland College, Nelson, where in 1989 a small group of conservative parents demanded the removal of the novel as a senior English study. Hugh Scott, HOD English at the time, recently gave me access to a range of literature: official letters to and from the then Opposition Spokesman for Education, letters from parents, leader articles in newspapers and English department policy documents, that were generated over the issue.

The controversy stemmed from a written response on the novel from one parent who claimed that it was:

'feminist propaganda,' and that the, 'scenes which deal specifically with incest and lesbianism ... have no place in the syllabus and, further, that requiring our youngsters to discuss such subjects in class and write about them in detail amounts to mental abuse, to say nothing of the absolute waste of their valuable time' (letter to school dated 15/3/89).

There were also comments which referred pejoratively to the language in which the book was written, which is colloquial, black American English (one of its most interesting features as far as study goes).
The concerned parent’s case was taken up by Dr Smith whose comments in the newspaper described the novel as depicting ‘distorted and kinky behaviour,’ (The Nelson Mail, 28/3/89). I had expected to read letters from the Principal which attempted to smooth over the controversy, to offer reassurances to the parents and to the public that he was unaware that such a novel was taught and that the matter would be looked into. However, in press releases, the Acting Principal at the time was quick to defend the English department and the work they were doing. Whilst also reassuring parents that their views were important and setting up a system for a review of the novel’s teaching, he strongly refuted claims that the novel was unsuitable and criticised the approach taken by the parent who had originally complained. “Her reported imputations of the motives behind the staff use of the novel are not worthy of comment, indeed some border on being slanderous.”

I was pleased to read the Acting Principal’s considered defence of the work and felt that this example of how external criticism did not have the school jumping to censure the English department’s choice of text was a positive demonstration of how our schools have yet to be really infiltrated by the weight of those beyond its doors.

**Whose English?**

According to Michael Apple (1991) text book controversies generated by those outside education usually result in a withdrawal of the text and a reviewing of policy. In New Zealand external criticism seems to have a less obvious effect on internal practices (though this may change as schools compete more vigorously for students). Apple also notes that such controversies often reflect struggles over what counts as official or legitimate knowledge. All too often ‘legitimate knowledge’ does not include the historical experiences and cultural expressions of labour, women, people of colour, and others who have been denied power. Interestingly, *The Color Purple*, perhaps more than any other work of fiction to come out of the 1980’s, sought to give a voice to working class, black women, is it any wonder then that it was attacked by conservative parents on the grounds that it was not ‘real literature’?

The controversy which occurred at Nayland College serves to illuminate some of the contemporary political issues and discourses which form the framework for English as a site of ideological struggle. Firstly it is possible to see in the challenges brought by those outside the school the strong belief there is a particular canon to be taught, a canon into which *The Color Purple* did not fit. Sec-
ondly, the issue of teaching standard English is also raised; this text is written in dialect and not ‘good’ English. Thirdly the text’s content which explores child abuse, sexual identity, and violence, is cited as unsuitable because this kind of issues-based teaching is aligned to that stick consistently used to beat English teachers with - social engineering. Thus we have a clear local example of the struggle for the ownership of English that I alluded to earlier, and the recurring questions, who should define English and what should its content comprise?

I hope to show in the following chapter that this ownership has been contested and these questions asked for at least one hundred and fifty years.
CHAPTER 3

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

I have already suggested that the controversies which currently pursue English and its teachers are not new. Since English entered the universities and then schools a century ago it has been a site of struggle, each succeeding generation seeing the 'current debate' as its own. Although the particular emphases of the struggle have changed over time, many of the broad arguments remain the same. In this chapter I hope to demonstrate how consistent some of those elements of similarity are.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The history of the subject English can be isolated into three distinct phases (Grace, 1990). In the first phase, which has been referred to as the 'historical mission' of English, both the subject and its agents constituted dominant voices. Teachers of English were expected to be, according to Matthew Arnold, 'preachers of culture'.

The second historical phase for English and its teachers is much shorter and covers the period from the 1950's until the 1980's. In this phase some teachers of English and some professional English associations began a process of radical revision of the subject and of its teaching (in New Zealand this occurred in the development of the NESC syllabus, in Britain, the Newsome Report). This phase was the first to take account of and address 'oppositional voices' in the classroom and one in which the development of a more explicitly political form of English teaching which engaged more directly with the language/power relation occurred. The second phase took place in a social, economic and political context in which various forms of educational progressivism were able to flourish. This is the period in which I was both a 'recipient' of classroom English as a school student, and underwent my training as a teacher of English. The counterattack to the progressiveness of English teaching in the 1960's, 70's and 80's began in the 1970's and it has gathered force since that time.

Now we are in the third phase, the 1990's, where the external conditions, and especially the ideological and political conditions are less favourable in many
societies than those of the last 30 years. Free market economics, New Right social and moral doctrines are underpinning the functioning of many English speaking societies. There are oppositional voices who are taken account of in the third phase of English teaching, but they are the voices who oppose cultural emancipation and liberation, as well as those who support such projects.

**ENGLISH IN NEW ZEALAND**

The development of English studies in New Zealand closely mirrors that of Great Britain, and that is largely because similar political climates in both countries, until recently, have shaped the development of school curricula. Indeed, until the beginning of the 1980’s methods of pedagogical approach and content in English were almost indistinguishable between the two countries; *Plain Sailing* and its equivalents enjoyed popularity on both sides of the globe. We have, of course, our colonial past to ‘thank’ for that. Students who were taught before this time grew up unaware that New Zealand had a literature of its own, and were dependent upon texts written in the Mother Country for serious study. English students at university followed the old Leavisian path, the study of New Zealand literature being a relatively recent addition to the canon of courses in university English departments.

Novelist Patricia Grace in the documentary directed by Barbara Cairns, *Ruia Taitea* (1990) speaks of the writing she did as a child being peppered with references to ‘the seaside, woods and copses’, it never occurring to her to write about the beach and the bush because these aspects of her life were never referred to in the English-based texts she was given to read and therefore, to her mind, were not ‘permissible’ in her writing.

In terms of language development British vowel sounds still seem to be preferred by television news readers (the notable and curious exceptions being sports and weather reporting). Numerous letters to the editors of daily newspapers complaining about our ‘slack-jawed pronunciation’ (The Dominion, p.10, November 30, 1994) serve as testimony to the fact that there are still those who deplore the ‘decline’ in the way we speak and lay the blame firmly at the feet of current English pedagogy. Colin Mc George (1984) has ably demonstrated that this ‘decline’ has been occurring since New Zealanders first began to develop their own variety of the language in the late nineteenth century. What this concern simply reveals is the old colonial attitude that standard British English (the only ‘correct’ variety of English) should constitute the linguistic currency of these shores.
Thankfully, the NESC curriculum document (1982) and the new blueprint for English in New Zealand schools *English in New Zealand* (1994) have set us on a new path which celebrates and supports our own variety of English.

**So What’s New?**

I like the way Professor Terry Eagleton opened his inaugural lecture when he became the Warton Professor of English at Oxford University:

> The presumed decline in cultural standards can be traced back at least as far as Samuel Johnson, and perhaps to the book of Exodus. No doubt the Assyrians worried about the brevity of their adolescents attention span, and the Phoenicians lost sleep over poor spelling. (1992)

A collection of articles in *Proper English*, edited by Tony Crowley (1991), echoes Eagleton’s point. The collection contains a series of documents from the seventeenth century to the present day. One, Jonathan Swift’s essay, *A Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue* (1712) is of particular interest since in it he argues for a standardisation of the English language which he sees as being corrupted by perpetual change. In his essay he addresses the Earl of Oxford, the Lord Treasurer of England:

> My Lord, I do here, in the name of all the learned and Polite Persons of the Nation, complain to Your Lordship as First Minister, that our language is extremely imperfect; that its daily Improvements are by no means in proportion to its daily Corruptions; that the pretenders to polish and refine it, have chiefly multiplied Abuses and Absurdities; and that in many instances it offends against every Part of Grammar.

Crowley’s collection finishes with the document *English, Our English* (1987) written by John Marenbon, on behalf of the conservative British Centre for Policy Studies, which attacks current theory and practice in the field of English teaching. What is clear is that debates about the state and status of English and its teaching, and in particular the language strand, are not new. In a review of the collection, Ronald Carter (1993) notes that over three hundred years the debates cover remarkably similar ground; the place of a standard language in relation to non-standard forms; the place of absolute rules of correctness in grammar and punctuation; the perception of a degeneracy in standards of language use. As I have just suggested it is easy to find popular and contemporary articles and letters in newspapers and magazines everyday which attest to the fact that this is also the case in New Zealand (Carruthers et al, pp78-
However, these debates were and are rarely about language alone and often allude to some ‘golden past’ when ‘things’ were better, or at least different. Carter notes that such perceptions are most prominent when issues of nationhood and threats to national identity and to the established social order are to the fore (though I suspect it is merely coincidence that Swift’s comments were made against the background of the Luddite riots!). He quotes Antonio Gramsci (1985) who neatly conflates these two ideas:

Everytime the question of language surfaces, in one way or another, it means that a series of other problems are coming to the fore: the formation and enlargement of the governing class, the need to establish more intimate and secure relationships between the governing groups and the national-popular mass, in other words to reorganise the cultural hegemony.

Often complaints about language use are mentioned in the same breath as societal ills. Carter cites a comment by Norman Tebbit, the former Chairman of the Conservative Party which aptly demonstrates this:

....we’ve allowed so many standards to slip ... teachers weren’t bothering to teach kids to spell and punctuate properly ... 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 those things cause people to have no standards at all, and once you lose standards then there’s no imperative to stay out of crime. (Radio 4 interview, 1985)

Similarly, Swift also uses emotive words like ‘abuse’ and ‘offence’ when he refers to language change, terms which are usually associated with breaking the law. The implication here is that language is sacrosanct and those who defile it no better than criminals.

If this analysis seems to stretch credibility, similar use of terms with ‘criminal’ connotations can be found in a contemporary criticism of those ‘guardians of the English language’, English teachers, by that guardian of New Zealand’s linguistic sanctity, Agnes-Mary Brooke:

A lot of the English work now done in schools is really a... complicated way of doing nothing at all... the outright refusal to teach... the construction of language, is an offence against society (1991).

Swift makes his complaint to the Lord Treasurer thus also creating a curious
alliance between economics and language. Brooke makes her complaint to the
general public in the pages of a national daily newspaper. It seems that the
perceived connection between politics and English, and the State’s and the
public’s interest in this relationship is a very old connection indeed.

PHASE ONE:

The Poor Man’s Classics

Because much of my interest in this topic stems from a perception that contem-
porary English, as a school subject, is often seen to exclude the ‘other’ in order
to maintain and protect its ‘content’ within closely defined boundaries, it came
as a surprise to learn that English began its own life as an ‘otherness’ at the
heart of the academic Establishment. Seen as the ‘poor man’s’ (sic) Classics the
study of English literature had, for years, enjoyed popularity with ordinary men
and women who filled the extra-mural classes of people’s academies up and
down the country. This in itself was enough to ensure its marginalised status
when it was first begrudgingly accepted into the Academy.

In the history of the curriculum, English is a relatively new subject. Even newer
is its current high status as a curriculum subject. The first university chairs at
Cambridge and Oxford were not created until 1878 and 1883 respectively and
English did not appear as an identifiable school subject in either elementary or
secondary schools until the turn of the century. This ‘legitimation’ by the Acad-
emy was not without controversy. Chris Baldick (1983) quotes one early oppo-
nent of English at Oxford as saying, ‘An English school will grow up, nourish-
ing our language, not from the humanity of the Greeks and Romans but from
the savagery of the Goths and Anglo Saxons. We are about to reverse the Ren-
naissance, (p.74). English, as it was first constructed, was perceived by the Acad-
emy as a subject area for uncultured philistines who had not the brains nor the
background to tackle Classics. As if to underscore the point Charles Ryder’s
cousin Jasper in Evelyn Waugh’s Brideshead Revisited (1945) warns him thus in
Ryder’s first term at Oxford, ‘You’re reading History? A perfectly respectable
school. The very worst is English literature and the next worst is Modern
Greats.’

As I pointed out in my introduction, contemporary English as a study is diverse
and complex in its makeup. Definitions of its early genesis are less complex but
still not tidy. English did not enter the Academy, or people’s colleges or schools
in the form by which we recognise it today. We recognise now an intermingling
of the two strands - literature and language - in the studies which occur in schools. But these had developed in separate, though parallel ways. My reading of these initial separate beginnings needs to be clarified here.

When I discuss English studies undertaken by working people from approximately 1850 onwards I see a difference between the study of written texts, and the desire to learn how to produce written texts. In the former I see those without the means to a formal Classical education undertaking the study of written texts (novels, poetry, pamphlets) because it was seen as a method of ‘improving’ the mind, or as Bourdieu has termed it, increasing their level of ‘cultural capital’. I see that the latter study, which is product focussed, is concerned more with achieving a level of competence in producing and interpreting written texts in the form of writing (composition) and elementary reading.

Although both areas come under the umbrella of English Studies, the political discourses of both areas, then and now, contain different agendas which also make it possible to perceive them in different ways. The study of literature might be seen as the ‘cultural’ arm of the subject. By culture I mean here that literature has often been seen as the gatekeeper of the nation’s culture containing all that the ‘best minds’ have thought and said about that culture. Matthew Arnold’s transformational vision of culture in Culture and Anarchy (1869) perhaps best describes some of the motivation for the desire to have access to ‘culture’:

Culture seeks to do away with classes, to make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere. To make all men (sic) live in an atmosphere of sweetness and light.

The study of language (the drive for competence in reading and composition) might perhaps be seen as the ‘mechanistic’ or functional arm of the subject. I use the term mechanistic advisedly here, in referring to the drilling methods used historically to confer basic literacy skills on children who needed only to be literate enough to be given the vote in an increasingly mechanistic society (as I show later the functional arm is enjoying renewed support).

Both of these discourses - the cultural and the mechanistic/functional - are confusingly amalgamated in the contemporary political controversies related to English studies.

The drive for functional literacy began long before the institution of mass public
schooling. The working class struggle for parliamentary representation and reform was the genesis for a growing interest in the power of print. If anything, the dull drilling of grammatical rules suffered by the children of the poor in nineteenth century elementary schools when the move towards mass literacy was instituted was the ‘price paid’ by the ‘celebration of print’ which occurred around the time of the Reform Act of 1832. This was a time when, according to John Willinsky, ‘literacy was at the forefront of the battle for democracy’ (1993, p.59), ‘If England was occupied at this time by two nations, rich and poor, then they met on literacy’s playing fields as conservative and radical forces fought for the minds and the future of British Society;’ (ibid. p.60).

The early interest in reading and writing related to the writing and printing of pamphlets, newspapers and leaflets (which represented an otherwise \textit{unwritten} working class) was ‘disciplined’ by the law of 1870 which brought state-sponsored education into Great Britain. This disciplining involved the teaching of large numbers of children in parsing sentences and correcting faulty ones. What better way to keep order, quiet and to rein in any future potential radical energy whilst also ensuring that the nation’s future workforce was being upskilled? Curiously, this kind of Victorian drilling was advocated by Prince Charles in one of his public outbursts about English teaching when he said, ‘I do not believe English is being taught properly. You cannot educate people properly unless you do it on a basic framework and \textit{drilling system},’ (\textit{The Times}, 1989). He might be keen to turn the clock back to a time when people knew their places, but Ira Shor (1992) offers that rote learning and drills do little more than bore, miseducate and inhibit the civic and social development of children, (p.18). Drilling work in Victorian classrooms was preparing students for life in undemocratic institutions, to advocate this kind of school work today as the path towards literacy is inexcusable.

Spoken language did not flourish in the rigid classrooms of the late nineteenth century and performance in writing became the measure by which progress was determined (very little seems to have changed in this respect). Rhetoric, previously nurtured in those students fortunate enough to have a classical education, was dropped as a study because it was considered unsuitable to encourage children of the poor to become independent and capable of developing and sustaining arguments and opinions of their own, (Christie, 1993, p.84). The literacy skills taught at this time were minimal and not calculated to produce other than compliant, ‘functional’ workers.
Before the introduction of the Education Reform Act, increases in literacy levels among workers seems to have been sporadic. One of the legacies of the Industrial Revolution was that children in manufacturing centres had little chance and even less need of learning their letters. Young agile factory hands were required only to know how to work the new machinery. Punishing work schedules of up to sixteen hours a day precluded most children from attending school anyway, especially if their parents needed the extra money and could not afford school fees.

Figures show that in Lancashire alone there were 30,000 children in 1836 who, instead of attending school, headed off to work at the cotton mills each day (Willinsky, p.63). However, it would be a mistake to imply that the working classes trudged through dark Satanic mills blinkered against the knowledge that access to education in general and print in particular might be of use to them. As I suggested earlier, a growing interest in reform had ensured that people did recognise the importance of reading and writing long before the Reform Act.

‘Alternative’ forms of education had flourished in Britain for the two hundred years preceding the nineteenth century. By alternative I mean methods of educating that did not subscribe to the elite classical education undertaken by usually male children of the wealthy. Frances Christie describes the influence on general education from 1600-1800 of the Non-conformist movement which, she points out, was active in running academies that taught non-classical subjects in the vernacular. She sees this as a bold and radical move since there was no status accorded to the English language during this period, this being held by the study of classical languages. The Movement also had a number of academies devoted to the education of girls (ibid. p. 83).

Later though there were more systematic moves by the working classes to educate their own. This can be seen in the ‘dame schools’ of the time, the regularised ‘education’ that reading the Bible at Sunday schools provided, and in the proliferation of progressive independent learning institutions like the Chartist run People’s College in Sheffield, my home town, established in 1842. Later, of course, a kind of legitimation occurred with the founding of Ruskin College at Oxford. However, if the education of the masses was becoming more organised, it was generally thanks to their own efforts rather than those of philanthropists. These efforts did not go unnoticed. The moves for societal and educational reform were chronicled by many fiction writers- cum- social commentators of
the era, most notably Charlotte Bronte in *Shirley* (1849), Mrs Gaskell in *North and South* (1855) and George Eliot in *Middlemarch* (1871).

In addition to these sporadic forms of education, people undertook to teach themselves as a way of ‘improving’ their prospects and their minds, perhaps most famously immortalised by Thomas Hardy’s Jude Fawley who labours over books in a dark cottage in order to prepare himself for Oxford (*Jude the Obscure*, 1896).

Later, methods of ‘self improvement’ beyond formal schooling can be seen in the rise of the Workers Educational Association in the early part of this century, and locally in the 1925 ‘Box Scheme’ instituted by Professor of Education at Canterbury College, James Shelley.

The underpinning feature of all of these ‘education schemes’ is that those who undertook them believed that they had the power to transform lives. Perhaps the most significant thread which links the early development of English to the present day is that from the beginning English has been regarded as the central discipline with the potential to effect social change - be it in the form of having access to reading and writing skills in order to take a more active role in understanding reform, or in the form of studying literature to ‘improve’ oneself. Increasingly the skills of literacy became identified not simply with the mechanisms of language but also with the values and morality that studying literature was seemingly able to transmit.

From the first, then, English has always been *more than a subject*; it has been a means and a method of change and transformation.

**Preachers of Culture**

Sir Arthur Quiller Couch, first Professor of English at Cambridge University, would open his lectures to halls largely filled by women with the words, Gentlemen.’ (Balick, p.69)

The potential to harness and use English as an agency of social transformation was first recognised by Victorian poet, educationist, social critic and one of the key figures in the construction of the subject we now recognise as English, Matthew Arnold, whose call in the 1860’s to ‘civilise the neighbourhood’ advocated the use of literature as a means of humanising the (inhuman?) masses. Arnold’s motive was not, however, entirely egalitarian. Stephen Ball (1990) comments that in Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy* the culture of England to be preached was that of the dominant social order in class and gender terms.
English was expected to be contributory towards the enhancement of morality and internal social order through the refining effects of great literature, to contribute towards the hegemony of the English race through the spread of language throughout the globe, to contribute towards a general notion of disciplined schooling and scholarship through an emphasis on correctness of speech, grammar and syntactical detail. In this point we can see how the two ‘arms’ or strands of the subject merge into one encompassing and unifying whole, and how English literature and language came to represent the foundation stones of all that is ‘moral and good’.

Arnold’s ideas were underpinned by a fear that unless this new discourse was firmly established, the social fabric would be wrecked by the restless working classes and what was seen as their growing industrial disquiet. It seems then that English as a school subject was partly ‘developed’ as a response to anxieties that were generated by the development of the city and the emergence of an urban working class population:

In the experiences and imaginations of the landed ruling class and the newly emerging industrial middle classes the city was a focus and a source of political unrest, social disorder, crime and disease. (Ball, p.48)

The consequence was that culture was to be transmitted to the masses. One of the main tenets of this culture would be that Reason and the Will of God would prevail; another, that the spirit of tolerance and generosity would be nurtured. Schooling the working class would ensure the preservation of internal peace. Other literary men like John Ruskin who also disliked the ‘mechanical’ aspects of nineteenth century England and feared the threat to cultural standards represented by the cheap press, similarly supported the study of literature in desperate tones, (Mathieson, 1975). All art that aims to amuse, Ruskin tells us in The Cestus of Aglaia (1865-6) is inferior and probably harmful. Genuine art, he believed, springs from a ‘right’ moral state and can exert a ‘right’ moral effect on the peripient.

In his essay, The Rise of English Studies (1983), Terry Eagleton describes the growth of English studies since the turn of the century as an ideological project begun in part by liberal humanists like Arnold, and aimed at the newly literate working people who were beyond the charmed circles of public schools, Oxford and Classics. English literature was to be the subject that unified the nation and which would provide an effective vehicle to replace the traditional
roles of moral training held by family and church. Arnold saw literature as an agent of social enlightenment and a way of expanding what he saw as the narrow lives of the masses. Handing out literature, like patriotic poetry, was also seen as one way of instilling national pride and as old religious ideologies lost their force, a way of transmitting moral values. Since literature and ‘standard’ language both reflected the best of the nation, it seemed clearly desirable, and in the interests of all, to use English in an active programme of cultural intervention. It was a strategy which aimed to produce individuals as subjects of the nation. As Eagleton sardonically points out:

Since literature, as we know, deals in universal human values rather than in such historical trivia as civil wars, the oppression of women, or the dispossession of the English peasantry, it could serve to place in cosmic perspective the petty demands of working people for decent living conditions or greater control over their own lives, and might even with luck come to render them oblivious of such issues in their high minded contemplation of eternal truths and beauties.(p.25)

Gerald Grace (1990) also makes reference to the high-handed assumptions of humanists like Arnold who imagined that the working classes were devoid of their own cultural and educational agencies, when in fact, as I have already pointed out, this was not the case. However, because there was virtually no widely available writings which reflected their own situation, Arnold believed that the ‘humanising influence’ for working people would only be achieved through contact with the writings of higher classes. Arnold’s approach to spreading ‘civilisation’ implies that there is no need to redistribute money and power; his social control is achieved through the transmission of culture.

Not only was the subject of English seen by Victorian liberal humanists as an appropriate agent for the social control of the working classes, it was seen particularly as an appropriate agent for the social control of the women who were being gradually and grudgingly admitted to places of higher education. Chris Baldick (1983) shows that the major reason for introducing English literature to the universities was to guide women away from the professional subjects they were demanding entry to, and towards an apparently gentler and less threatening subject. Women’s exclusion from scientific training and from the professions, for which Latin and Greek were required, left them almost entirely restricted to English history, literature or modern languages, of which literature was the most popular. However, these areas of study were not intended to emancipate, but to confirm women in their established roles. Knowing English literature was seen
as another ‘accomplishment’ alongside French conversation and playing the piano. Not only this but literary appreciation was considered useful in helping to train a wife in her duties of sympathy and understanding, again demonstrating the use (or in this case explicit manipulation) of its social potential:

Charles Kingsley expressed the hope that through literature ‘women should be initiated into the thoughts and feelings of her countrymen in every age .... that knowing the hearts of many, she would in afterlife be able to comfort the hearts of all. (Baldick, p.69)

This attitude also ensured the rapid establishment of English as a ‘women’s subject’ because it lacked both status and usefulness. Thus English, as it entered the early part of this century, was emerging as anything but a ‘neutral’ subject.

In the aftermath of the first World War the British called for the first enquiry into English with *The Teaching of English in England* (the Newbolt Report, 1921). The report shows that Newbolt commissioners regretted the preoccupation with teaching the rules of English grammar in primary schools at the expense of more imaginative activities. The group was very much committed to the idea of the value of teaching English to children. The following observation from the report, cited by Frances Christie (1993), seems redolent of Arnold’s beliefs on the civilising effects of literature:

We claim that no personality can be complete, can see life steadily and see it whole, without that unifying influence, that purifying of the emotions which art and literature can alone bestow. It follows then from what we have said above that the bulk of our people, of whatever class, are unconsciously living starved existences, that one of the richest fields of our spiritual being is left uncultivated - if not indeed barren. (p.92)

The report of the Newbolt Committee was one of the first attempts to discipline and police the development of English teaching. It established a central place for English in the curriculum, displacing classics and upholding the merit of competence in the native tongue, on the basis that culture could remedy national ills. For Newbolt, education, and English in particular, could begin to eradicate class boundaries and encourage a sense of moral propriety. The nation’s children, especially those who were working class, could receive a moral education and a sense of national identity through access to the nation’s cultural heritage (Myhill, 1993). By adopting only one view of culture and by considering culture only in middle class terms, the Newbolt Report approved
principles and methods for cultural intervention .... with the overall purposes of
generating a subjective attachment to a particular sense of national identity.’
(Doyle, 1990, p. 54)

George Sampson’s English for the English which was published in the same year
(1921) also echoes the missionary passion of the Newbolt document. The thesis
of each document is that a new patriotism could be fostered through a knowl-
edge of a ‘cultural heritage’ and a disinterested pursuit of literary culture. The
missionary passion for English revealed in the writings of Sampson and
Newbolt was echoed and developed by FR Leavis and his Cambridge School
and Ivor Richards in the 1920’s and 1930’s. The grand social mission of English
continued.

A NEW CRITICISM AND A GRAND SOCIAL MISSION

Between the two world wars the teaching of English at tertiary level and the
practice of literary criticism underwent a revolutionary change. The impact of
this change has subsequently influenced generations of school and university
teachers in both Britain and New Zealand. Appropriated by two Cambridge
academics, English was transformed into the humanities subject. Both men
sought, perhaps unconsciously, to give it high ‘male’ status in terms of where it
stood in the academy. F.R. Leavis, and later Ivor Richards, revolutionised not so
much what had been seen as the social function of the subject, which they in-
tended to be upheld, but the way it was approached and taught. Believing that
English studies could be advanced not only as a conscious ideology for recon-
structing the social order in the crisis years following The Great War, but also,
like Arnold and Ruskin, as an antidote to what they believed was the dehuman-
is' effects of modern industrial society, they developed critical approaches
that would rid the discipline of its ‘gendered’ amateurishness and its ‘woolly
generalities and vague mysticism,’ (Baldrick, p.135). Leavis believed that English
trained the intelligence and sensitivity together in a way no other discipline
could. For someone who intended to appropriate the subject for men, this seems
to me curiously, and ironically, like training a ‘feminine sensibility’.

One of the ways Leavis sought to achieve this ‘blend’ was through constructing
methods of textual analysis using a new critical approach which put texts,
rather than their authors, in a position of absolute primacy. Echoing Ruskin’s
view of art to some degree, Leavis propounded that studied in the ‘correct way’
certain texts would transmit a centrally important kind of knowledge. These
texts illuminated issues about the human condition and as a consequence were
thought to be morally ‘improving’. According to Kim Thomas (1991, p.120) Leavis and his followers were reluctant either to define moral standards or to define the standards by which literature could be judged. This vagueness, she sees, is the key to the Leavisian enterprise. Whilst denying the partiality of his own judgements, Leavis also ‘knew’ which texts were any good. To his mind the ‘great tradition’ consisted of only five writers: Austen, Eliot, James, Conrad and Lawrence. Others like Shelley and Defoe were derided as ‘trivial’ in his eponymous text, *The Great Tradition* (1948). Thus we have one of the first unsubstantiated canonical lists provided for teachers of what was ‘worth’ teaching. By unsubstantiated I mean a list of texts which are offered as the best simply because one person defines this as the case. We also see a paradox at the heart of the Leavisian or liberal humanist view of English.

On the one hand, it stresses the subjectivity of the individual’s response to the text, resolutely resisting attempts to make the discipline objective; on the other hand, it insists on the rightness of its own judgements and the supremacy of the ‘canon’. (Thomas, ibid. p.121)

Leavis introduced ‘rigour’ into the subject (as a counter to the ‘woolliness’ criticism) through the development of what has come to be known as ‘close reading’. This is still seen by many as the only legitimate critical procedure. Close reading in part meant recognising the ‘autonomy’ of a piece of literature, and not regarding it, as contemporary exponents of deconstruction do, as an artefact of its sociological, psychological or historical background; all that mattered were the words on the page. To read sensitively, intelligently, and presumably ‘correctly’, was to become a better person.

Ivor Richards also sought to raise the status and ‘seriousness’ of English studies by redefining its critical strategies on what I perceive to be male terms. He devised a ‘scientific’ approach to literature which meant that it should be possible to determine the quality of a piece against a set of objective criteria. Through ‘practical criticism’ texts were judged according to how well they synthesised, among other things, words, symbols and images. Once its value or worth was determined the poem, essay or novel might be embraced as a work of great literature or dismissed. Critical approaches of this kind were also being simultaneously developed by the eponymous New Critics in the United States.

Richards, as well as Leavis, believed that moral sensibilities could be developed if one read a text in a particular way. (ibid p.121).
It is perhaps difficult to understand from any position other than an Essentialist one (see Chapter 4, p.59), how such a grand imperialist scheme, like the safeguarding of cultural order and moral thought, could be seen as being achieved through the study of literature. Especially since this critical theory was developed by so few men in the United States and the tiny cultural elite who attended Downing College, Cambridge, in the 1930’s. Given this, it might be surprising to learn that Leavisian/ New Critical Theory has been the core critical and pedagogical approach for English academics ever since. Its crusading influence has been felt by millions of schoolchildren in dozens of English speaking countries. Although modified, the impassioned Leavis approaches are still those most often employed by English teachers who came up through the university system, in both Britain and New Zealand, during the 1950’s, 60’s and 70’s. It could be said still to be the established voice in secondary schools today:

not because of the coherence of truths of its underlying philosophy but because what (it)proposed was a practical-cultural educational project, concerned with what should be taught and how it should be taught. (Batsleeer, 1985)

In other words it also offered a method for teaching English. Something which until this time was seen to have been lacking.

It is this Leavisian belief in the canon which underpins much of the current criticism by a variety of ‘external publics’ about what sort literature should be taught. There is a genuine belief among many that only some writers are worth teaching. This, of course, is a point worth debating at some length. That most of these preferred writers are male, white, British and (now) dead is testimony to the enormous potency of Leavis’ argument. Even though I understand this argument it was with a renewed sense of exasperation that I read the following newspaper comment on the literature section of the new (1994) curriculum statement for English in New Zealand schools: made by Mrs Brooke at her morally indignant best:

The section on reading fails to offer a list of recommended reading, by which the quality of texts could be checked ... Again strong emphasis is laid on New Zealand, particularly Maori writing being given prominence when the criterion should not be the origin, but the quality of the writing. The only acknowledgment of this is in the stipulation that reading texts should include ‘literary texts with established critical reputation’ which would rule out the bone people and other preposterous contemporary texts. (A-M. Brooke, The Press, January 5, 1995)
The Leavisite vision for English teaching with its highly selective and partial literary canon, provided (and provides, it seems) its supporters with a complete dogma of political, moral and psychological rationales. Although not without its critics (Thomas, 1991, p.120), this ‘Cambridge’ position comprised a group of teachers in England large enough to sustain a quarterly journal *The Use of English*.

Ball (1990) sees that through his compelling combination of energy, sensitivity and rigour, Leavis effectively rounded off the policing of English begun by Arnold and Newbolt and ensured that its adherent teachers were to become custodians of a pedagogical *method* or ‘discourse of orthodoxy’. In this light it is perhaps easier to see where the belief that there is a ‘proper’ way to teach English comes from.

English then, as an area of study, began life as perhaps one of the most highly engineered bodies of knowledge in the curriculum. Consciously constructed on both social and moral foundations it sought, through the study of literature, to influence large groups of people through the transmission of certain cultural attitudes which would serve to maintain, not challenge, the status quo. Its liberal humanistic beginnings worked also to ensure that its popularity with women did not ‘undermine’ its validity as a subject worthy of study. The unequivocal methodology for textual analysis developed by Richards and the other new critics meant too that there was no room, need, or opportunity for dissent.

Subsequent critical theories from structuralism to Marxism, and from feminism to post-structuralism have, in comparison to the theories of Leavis and the New Critics, been marginalised as responses. There is a sense that these latter approaches represent the ‘neutral’ norm from which all others deviate. Even today, university courses in English might be labelled as having a ‘post structural’ approach, or a ‘feminist’ approach to literature whilst the ‘New Critical’ approach, so often found in courses on Shakespeare or the Victorian novel, is never explicitly acknowledged. This is simply the ‘normal’ way (and presumably neutral way) of looking at and theorising about literature.

**PHASE TWO**

**Growth Through English**

A much shorter historical phase in the development of English as a subject occurred from 1950 to 1980. In this phase some British teachers of English, most
notably Jimmy Britton, Douglas Barnes, Harold Rosen, John Dixon and Nancy Martin and professional associations like NATE (the National Association for the Teaching of English) began a process of radical revision of the subject and its teaching. This is also the period in which New Zealand began its own radical revision under the guidance of Russell Aitken, and over a period of 15 years (from approximately 1968 to 1982) developed a syllabus which was less centred on its British counterpart and more responsive to the needs of its own children. Thus the ‘oppositional’ culture of English teaching was formed in both countries.

The role of the teacher as the Leavisian preacher of culture and agent of the dominant voice was rejected in curriculum statements, teacher training institutions and in the resources developed at the time (though most hung onto Levisian practices without much question). There was seen to be a need to eradicate the cultural politics of the literary canon and the Great Tradition (though, of course one set of cultural politics was merely being replaced by another). The English teacher was no longer a missionary disseminating the values of civilisation but an, ‘anthropologist mapping and collecting the values and culture of subordinated groups - initially the working class, later girls and blacks’ (Ball, p.57). Over these years the cultural heritage (transmission/Essentialist) versus the cultural relevance (participation/cultural studies) models of English pedagogy met head on for the first time.

These revisions did not occur in a neat linear fashion. In his analysis of the English scene in 1950’s Britain, Peter Medway (1990) notes that the Leavisian tradition was only one of at least three coherent ‘positions’ on the teaching of the subject at the time. The first ‘position’, he points out, is coherent but implicit. Here English covers the ‘normalcies’ of English teaching as they occurred within the prevailing grammar school and secondary modern discourses of English teaching. English was simply the sum of its well established parts: literature, composition, instruction and exercises in written language, and in some schools, speech training. Interestingly though there was an implicit difference in the teaching of the subject in these two institutions. The secondary modern school seems clearly to have supported the ‘functional’ preparation of its students for subordinate roles in life:

... the skills and values taught were to be such as would produce a useful, responsible and inoffensive citizen with a respect, based on a slight acquaintance, for literary culture. (p.5)
Whilst the grammar school seems to have favoured the liberal humanist idea that the study of English, and literature in particular contributed to the cultivation of intelligence, rational thinking and a lively mind.

The third coherent position on the subject at the time was advocated by Percival Gurrey in his book *Teaching the Mother Tongue in Secondary Schools* (1958). Gurrey took an oppositional view to Leavis without being explicitly critical. His position on English teaching placed language rather than literature at its centre. Although, according to Medway, Gurrey still valued the place of literature in the classroom but saw that its moral significance related to how literature teaches ‘lessons’ and provides knowledge of human nature and the ways of the world unlike the Leavisians who regarded engaging with a text to be a formative moral act in itself.

Gurrey’s stance on language though is an important one historically for contemporary English teachers. He was one of this first theorists to recognise the part language or ‘communication’ had to play in the English classroom. Here, Medway quotes him as saying in 1958:

> It is by using language to express his (sic) experience, even when the language used is imperfect and incomplete, that the child is able to form concepts related to his experience, and so to perceive and understand it. (ibid p.13)

Interestingly the functional importance of English here seems not to contain any ideas of ‘good’ or ‘bad’. There seems to be a genuine recognition that the language brought to the classroom is to be valued. There are hints here too of the idea that English teaching can be linked in with the student’s own culture and the part that language study can play in this.

During the 1950’s, 60’s and 70’s there was a gradual decline in the overall influence of the more dominant Leavisite literary critical tradition, especially in the latter two decades, though the decline seems to have been relative rather than absolute. The critique of Leavis’s position was fuelled by the theories and research of James Britton at the London Institute of Education. His view was based on an alternative conception of experience and its relation to meaning which was rooted in language rather than literature. In a development of the stance which was first mooted by Gurrey, Britton sought, ‘to replace the emphasis on second-hand meaning in the text, with first-hand meaning in the daily life and authentic culture of the child’ (Ball p.58). It has been noted by some recent commentators, however, that aspects of these ‘liberal changes’ to the notion of
English pedagogy were really elements of Leavisism which had been reworked and adapted. These were, most notably, ideas about individualism and concerns with ‘authentic culture’ and personal growth. At the heart of the dispute between literature based and language based theories are, it seems, two opposed knowledge bases: elite knowledge and knowledge of the masses. These both have implications for the nature of citizenship and what constitutes a ‘good society’.

**Dartmouth and Dixon**

During the second historical phase a positive commitment had been made by many English teachers (especially those who were working in state co-educational/comprehensive schools) to be the facilitators of different voices in class, racial and gender terms. This took place in a social and political context in which educational progressivism and respect for teachers were able to flourish.

The Dartmouth (USA) seminar of 1966 is described by Christie (1993) as marking this new shift in thinking - as representing a ‘new English’ (p.94). Whilst this is true, many of the ideas discussed at that seminar had also been presented in one of the seminal texts of this period, John Dixon’s *Growth Through English* (1967), which stands as the eponymous work on which the Growth Model of English is founded. This work signalled the shift (with Gurrey’s work as a theoretical link) in pedagogical emphasis from the text to the student, and in particular to the personal experiences of students.

Following Dartmouth, Dixon’s Growth Model attracted a great deal of favourable support in Britain and New Zealand during the 1970’s and the 1980’s. In a recent telephone call to Russell Aitken (the curriculum developer centrally responsible for the restructuring of English teaching in New Zealand in the 1970’s) I learned that the work of the committee had been totally influenced by the work that Dixon had done. Dixon’s view held that English was about the ordering, through language, of significant personal experience in the interests of the development of the student as a person. Whilst literature was not neglected, the emphasis was clearly on the spoken and written language generated by the student.

The Growth Model, with its greater emphasis on encouraging the individuality of students provided much of the framework for my experiences as a classroom student of English. Certainly I recall that many of my teachers encouraged my personal writing and that my opinion in classroom discussions was always
carefully listened to. Interestingly, this focus on developing the individual 'voice' might be considered to be not too far from some of the older traditions of the subject, particularly the Leavisian model, which saw English as a context for promoting personal and moral development. Though perhaps a key shift is the emphasis on the individual rather than the personal, on the language learner as creator rather than as a passive receiver.

Perhaps the most controversial element of 'growth' was its seeming disinclination to develop a serious, coherent method of teaching about the mechanics of the English language. There was a strong belief (argued I believe incorrectly, by some critics, to still prevail) that overt teaching about language (this might include teaching about the writing system, spelling system, features of spoken and written language and so on) would intrude upon or, 'diminish the capacity of the romantically-conceived individual child to come to terms with experience in his or her 'own' language'. (Christie, p.97)

It is this aspect of the Growth Model which is cited as the basis for the 'sorry state' of current English language teaching. Some argue that because teachers (of my generation) were not subjected to rigorous grammar teaching we are not inclined to teach grammar to our students. Although I was not subjected to formal grammar lessons I know that I was taught grammar, because I know grammar and this is not simply because I studied French. The kind of grammar I was taught was contextualised and relevant to my own writing. It seems apt at this point to briefly examine the 'grammar' argument which I regard not as a recent phenomenon but as a continuation of the same argument about declining standards. Firstly, it is perhaps necessary to make explicit my own position on the matter.

I have taught grammar all my professional life, but certainly not in the tedious decontextualised drilling way that many older than me were taught. I do not give 'grammar lessons' with a view to improving the writing and speaking of my students however, there has been enough research to show that these are not necessarily connected (Harris, 1965; Elley, 1969,) but as an end in itself. I ascribe to the view of Canterbury linguist, Elizabeth Gordon (1991), when she writes, 'It seems to me that there is a good case for the teaching of grammar, based on its effect on children's language performance, but rather as a subject worthy of study in its own right.' Students of mine are likely to know the mechanics of how a sentence works (preferably one that they have written themselves) - in much the same way as a mechanic might show someone the
workings of a car engine. However, they may not write or speak more effectively - nor would the student of the mechanic be able to drive the car more successfully from knowing how the engine worked. If something goes wrong (in either case) the student might, however, be better equipped to spot what it is.

Students become good writers by being taught how to write well, not through knowing if what they are writing has the label ‘noun’ or ‘verb’.

The grammar argument really takes us back to the ways in which larger discourses in society bear on English. On the face of it, the desirability of the teaching of grammar is a technical matter, to be decided in the light of considerations about how students best acquire proficiency and command of the conventions. The argument, though has never been merely technical. The teaching of grammar has consistently been a plank of social and political programmes of a particular colour, and its aims have gone far beyond the promotion of grammatical knowledge or even of linguistic competence in the population. According to Deborah Cameron (1989) in a quotation cited by Goodson and Medway (1993), grammar is only secondarily about language at all, which takes us back to the point I made at the start of this chapter:

> Historically and synchronically, ‘authority’ is the significance grammar usually had whenever the subject has erupted into public consciousness. Grammar is meant not as a tool of reflection on one’s language but as a means to restore order in place of chaos. And it is not always linguistic chaos which is most relevant. Extraordinary as it may seem, grammar has become a symbol for order and discipline in all spheres of life; it stands for all the traditional rules of conduct which are perceived as being in decline (p. xi).

Because Dixon and Dartmouth heralded a new era in English teaching which meant that there were changes in the way English, and in particular English language were taught, this is the time popularly cited as the one when standards in language seemingly began to fall. I hope I have shown, to some degree, that this argument about declining standards is a cyclical one, though with its own time-related variables.

In retrospect I consider that the Growth Model teaching I did in the 1980’s which was designed to ‘nurture the individual’ was not necessarily a bad pedagogical approach; though I recognise its theoretical links to the elements of liberal humanism which underpin New Right ideologies. However, it was the
only framework I had access to at that time which was different from a transmission mode of teaching. I saw my students as people with unique opinions and 'ways of being' and who, with some guidance on my part, might 'develop themselves' as good, sceptical, democratic, 'thinking' citizens. I hoped that my students would grow through their English studies and find their unique 'voice'; find an 'essence' that was centrally their own.

This was the approach that many of my own post-Dartmouth English teachers took when I was a school student in the sixties and seventies, and as a progressive model of English teaching I do not think that it was an unsound pedagogical framework to work within. Many of the most useful 'post-growth' teaching strategies like writer-response and reader-response have the Growth Model to thank for work on the importance of a students' affective involvement in English classes. At worst it was perhaps politically a little naive and incomplete as a model. What the Growth Model failed (and fails - this approach still underpins the work of some progressive English teachers) to take account of, and this is hardly surprising considering that the massive shifts in philosophical thought which have occurred in the last ten years are only just beginning to be taken account of in a variety of academic disciplines, is the notion of difference.

TOWARDS THE 70'S AND 80'S

The heady days of 'growth' and progressivism did not go unchallenged for long. The first of the British Black Papers in 1969 contained a defence of elitist, liberal curriculum and an attack on what was seen as the destabilising effects of 'progressivism'. These papers linked education explicitly with traditional values and social order in a contemporary setting. It might be seen that it was this kind of discourse held in the public arena that laid the groundwork for Thatcherism in the United Kingdom. The Black Papers reiterated three main themes:

- that academic standards were in decline;
- that the curriculum was in the hands of dangerous, politically motivated teachers (teachers of English were particularly indicted on this count);
- that there was a general decline in standards of behaviour.

Highlighting declines in literacy and decency like this in an education document strikes a note of major political and ideological significance - the future of the nation is at stake.
The Bullock Report (A Language for Life, 1975) was set up by the then Secretary of State for Education, Margaret Thatcher, to review the state of English teaching from pre-school to the end of secondary school education. The report specifically reasserts the economic and political role of English teaching in relation to capitalist society. The emphasis given to ‘basic skills’ and ‘language across the curriculum’ underlined the role of English in preparing pupils for work and the need for a literate labour force. This takes us back to the initial ‘functional’ role of the subject.

Ball et al (p.69) suggest that the Bullock Report served as a vehicle for restructuring English in opposition to the restructuring that had occurred as a result of the Dartmouth seminar. They note that the role of the Report was symbolic in giving public censure to significant aspects of the ‘new wave’ English and in creating space for the insertion of alternative concepts of the role and purpose, and form and content, of English teaching. It gave credibility to those voices which claimed things had ‘gone too far’. However, for many educationists of the ‘new right’ the Report still did not go far enough. Those voices have now had their wish in the most recent restructuring of English in England.

The dominant role of English teaching that emerged in the 1980’s in both Britain and New Zealand was, and to a certain extent still is, an articulation of the vocationalist and standards arguments. In Britain the sweeping reforms of the 1988 Education Reform Act brought about bitter conflict between teachers and the government over not only the labour processes of teaching, but also what was to count as valid educational knowledge and how it was to be taught and assessed. In England the drive was for a ‘back to ‘basics’ approach. In a recent trip back to the U.K. I was able to see how stultifying, despite the best attempts of Brian Cox and his committee, aspects of the Key Stages have been in relation to the teaching of English with its overemphasis on the decontextualised assessment of material and the push for improvement in, among other things, spelling and handwriting.

The skills emphasis in New Zealand English teaching has certainly been highlighted in recent years (although to a lesser degree than in the UK where metaphorical pitched battles have been waged with the architects of the National Curriculum) and this can be seen in phrases like the following from the new English syllabus, ‘Communication skills are integral to the English curriculum ... competence in using information and communication technologies, essential for full participation in society and the world of work (1994, English in the New
Zealand Curriculum p.7) According to Ball the new emphasis on ‘skills’ teaching in Great Britain is linked firmly to the current dominance of ‘new right’ ideology. He notes:

as has been the case in previous periods of crisis the notions of standards and functional English (functional for industry, for the economy) have become linked to grammar, ‘correct’ English. The educational clock is being wound backwards. The dual orthodoxies on English teaching in the 1920’s, of the Newbolt report and the classical tradition are being re-established; on the one hand, a standard canon of literature, the great works that must be read, linked to the literary and cultural heritage of Great Britain; on the other hand, a standard language, fixed in grammatical structure, spelling and punctuation, defined from above and ignoring all cultural variations and widely-used non-standard forms (ibid p.70).

Despite some moves in the direction of the vocational/ ‘functional arm’ of English in New Zealand, our English teaching here has still managed to preserve the best of Growth and is embracing new approaches to the subject with more vigour than anywhere else that I have read about. Even in the face of criticism from Mrs Brooke, Metro Magazine, and countless newspaper letters and editorials, the new English document is an excellent extension of the work begun by the progressive teachers who were behind NESC.

PHASE THREE

THE CONTEMPORARY STRUGGLE

The counter-attack to the progressiveness (in particular the advocates of the Growth Model) of English teaching in the 1960’s, 70’s and 80’s began in the 1970’s with the Bullock Report and has gathered force since then. Interestingly, attacks have come from several opposing quarters. Firstly, we can see the influence of the ‘external publics’ in the ‘back to basics’ argument - this argument is based on the old belief that the literacy of the population is in decline, that this is bad for the economy, and that reintroducing old style grammar lessons might go some way towards redressing this balance.

Secondly, we can see the influence of the old-style cultural heritage traditionalists who are demanding that we teach fewer texts which are indigenous (in the case of New Zealand) and contemporary and more ‘classics’ which supposedly contain the eternal truths our children need to know. Both of these positions are explicit counters to making English accessible to all groups.
Thirdly, and for me more interestingly, is the counter-attack from radical commentators who see that aspects of recent liberal progressiveness have their roots in the eighteenth century individualism which underpins New Right policies. Indeed, Brian Doyle (1990) suggests that since Newbolt, literature in schools has been designed (though I feel, unwittingly) to institute individualism and thereby head off any threat to the establishment through popular collective political action.

Seen in this light the exponents of an English pedagogy which advocates ‘discovery’ and ‘finding one’s personal voice’ (I counted myself among this group until recently) look highly unsound. I explore some of these contemporary paradoxes in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 4

NEW ENGLISH PEDAGOGIES

We must allow ourselves to be vulnerable enough to allow our world to turn upside down in order to allow the realities of others to edge themselves into our consciousness (Linda Delpit, 1988)

When I was locating my Self as an educator in Chapter One of this work I mentioned how I attended what was, in terms of my approach to teaching practice, a pivotal conference in 1990 - the Different Voices conference of the International Federation for the Teaching of English (IFTE). In this chapter I intend to describe how the ideas I came across during that conference and later explored in post-graduate work, helped me to more clearly recognise the liberatory theoretical framework I had been developing as an English teacher since about 1988. Related to this I will incorporate into the chapter a discussion of how English teaching seems to have developed since the mid-nineteen eighties in both a climate of rightest resurgence in education and a parallel climate in which the democratisation of culture has provided access for some groups which have been previously excluded or marginalised (Graff, 1992).

I have called this chapter New English Pedagogies to emphasise the point that contemporary English teaching has grown from the more or less linear development of the subject that I described in the previous chapter, into a subject which is more plural in nature. This plurality, I suggest, stems from the greater range of theoretical models now available for application to the study of language and literature, and also from the current acknowledgment among most teachers of the desirability of working with a range of practices which meet the needs of diversity and difference in the classroom. Currently, plurality in English teaching stands in opposition to the monolithic notion of English supported by advocates of the Right. It is this conflict which gives rise to much of the contemporary ideological struggle over the ‘ownership’ of English as a subject.

DISCOVERING DIFFÉRENCE

When I first came across the conference theme for the 1990 IFTE gathering, it did not make much sense to me. Différence in its Derridian/post-modern sense
was quite a new idea. At that time difference, if I had considered its meaning at all, had liberal humanist overtones; what Elody Rathgen (1993) has argued as, ‘used to emphasise individuality...an exclusive distinctness, uniqueness, in fact, conveying the idea that there is nobody else like me.’ (p.15)

Although my own emerging radicalism as an English teacher in the mid to late eighties had meant that I was developing a teaching style which tried to take account of Freirian ideals, the influence of post-modernism and feminist pedagogical theory had not yet worked their way into my classroom practice. Therefore as a student of the Growth Model, I worked hard to encourage unique and individual voices in my students. Opinions mattered in discussions, personal narratives were shared and everyone seemingly had a chance to speak. My classroom was filled with voices. However, until relatively recently I had not recognised the differences on which those voices were constructed.

By ‘difference’ I mean acknowledging a student in terms of the variety of othernesses on which the Self is constructed (this might include any combination of Maori, gay, female, disabled, poor, second language speaker, gifted and so on ) and developing inclusive learning and teaching strategies through which these differences can be both explicitly legitimated and affirmed, and which recognise the contribution such diversity brings to classroom life.

I need to also express here that I have internal tussles with the notions of individualism and difference. My tussles emerge from trying to explain clearly, accessibly, and convincingly that I see a strong differentiation between the two notions as they relate to the English classroom. When I think of ‘fostering the individual’ in teaching I am immediately swamped with mental images of Margaret Thatcher. As she does not fit into my panoply of ‘women to emulate’ I can only assume these images are meant to put me on ‘red alert’. I can recall Mrs Thatcher once pronouncing that there was no such thing as society, there are only individuals. What better way to discourage popular collective action against government policies?

Teaching which fosters notions that the only responsibility students have is to themselves stands as diametrically opposed to teaching which fosters notions of difference. Teaching styles which are underpinned by Thatcher’s philosophy of individualism do not prepare students for democracy, they prepare students for a neo-liberal society where inequality between people and between groups is promoted and valued. Teaching styles which are underpinned by a philosophy of recognising difference is teaching which prepare students to become mem-
bers of a democratic society; tolerance and justice are promoted by exhorting people to recognise and value variety in others.

It is perhaps worth exploring the broader notion of difference here in more detail. Understanding it is, I think, a useful framework in which to examine the clash between the 'old' pre-1960's English beloved of conservative critics and 'new' English pedagogies which have developed since that time. I do not offer a definitive analysis of difference, but intend only to raise some issues. In the following exploration I also try to address a problem that I have encountered in my new-found enthusiasm for recognising difference in the classroom.

**Being Different**

For my purposes, there are perhaps two ways of looking at the issue of difference in its post-modern sense. The first is one to which I have already alluded. This is the idea of students (and teachers) being different from each other. I do not mean in some monolithic modernist sense (I am a gay woman, therefore I must be this kind of person); rather it is an idea that recognises our multifarious diversities and argues that it is impossible to generalise about or categorise them. Thus I can live a life in which I can sometimes represent the oppressor, sometimes the oppressed, and sometimes neither (I am white, I am gay, I have a musical talent).

Kathleen Weiler (1991) has explored this particular notion in pedagogical terms. For her both students and teachers are seen as subjects shaped by their experiences of race, gender, class, and the level of 'oppressions' they might or might not experience in these locations at any one time. For example, as the black feminist theorist, bell hooks (1990) points out, being black does not necessarily mean being inherently oppositional.

The second kind of difference I will look at here is one which seems to have more of a psychoanalytical basis, and it is the one I personally have the most problem with. In this notion of difference both teachers and students are seen as consisting of 'unstable selves'; it posits that as individuals we are 'negotiated' and 'constructed', and that our identities are contradictory and always in process, (Morgan, 1994). Here our differences are almost mercurial, shifting and reshaping according to particular sets of interactions and circumstances. This one seems to rely less on the notion of individual locations, and more on the, 'ambiguity of identity, in which the individual can no longer be viewed as an undifferentiated, whole, stable and autonomous self.' (Giroux,1993, p.71)
My problem with the latter notion of difference is that it seems not to allow me to act. If I try to work with this latter issue of difference in the classroom, acknowledging that the subject is not static, that by our natures we shift and reconstruct our position depending on our experiences and interactions, I am put into an almost impossible position as an educator. How can I teach if my students are seemingly wallowing about being different kinds of people every nano second? How could I ever mark their work or ask them a question if I can never be sure who they are? Of course I am being flippant here, but I think this highlights the point that these current shifts in philosophical thought present challenges for us as teachers in the 1990’s.

Both of these notions also present particular challenges for teachers like myself who have supported classical liberatory pedagogies like Friere’s. As an English teacher I have sought to promote social justice and transformation through my teaching, but I also know that this practice has been rooted in a liberatory pedagogy which is based on a structuralist view of power being systematic. Having ‘systems’ or structures mean that in any classroom ‘power’, in its various forms, is explicit. The post-structural idea that power is not systematic means that it becomes more difficult to feel effective as an educator. Certainly it is less complex to actively work with explicit binary power systems like female / male; Tangata Whenua, Tangata Pasifika / pakeha; working class / middle class; teacher / student, especially if one wants to make clear these binary opposites to the students as part of a liberatory practice.

However, in comparing these two broad interpretations of difference I feel strongly that the first notion that I outlined offers a framework for teaching that is more liberating and ultimately more democratic for all students (and I will outline its applications in terms of teaching methodology shortly) than models which rely on binary oppositions as an organising principle. An approach to this ‘potential framework’ is offered by Elizabeth Ellsworth (1989) when she argues the case for difference as a tool of empowerment, not paralysis:

Right now, the classroom practice that seems most capable of accomplishing this (empowerment) is one that facilitates a kind of communication across differences that is best represented by this statement: ‘If you can talk to me in ways that show you understand that your knowledge of me, the world, and ‘the Right thing to do’ will always be partial, interested, and potentially oppressive to others, and if I can do the same, then we can work together on shaping and reshaping alliances for constructing circumstances in which students of difference can thrive.
This seems to allow for a classroom in which participation and negotiation are encouraged to flourish between students and between teachers and students. Students and teachers aim to recognise the points at which they merge and the points where they differ in an atmosphere of understanding and tolerance. It is from this kind of classroom that strong, independent and democratic thinkers emerge. This kind of classroom seems to be supported by Cheryl Lacattiva (1994) who argues that it is important for our schools to prepare students for what she calls *global citizenship*. I take this to mean developing in students a recognition that the future for us all is based on a notion of societies as multi-not mono-cultural organisms, and that it is this notion that should underpin our approach to teaching methodology.

**ENGLISH - SINGULAR AND PLURAL**

New approaches to English teaching (the *New English Pedagogies* of my title) attempt to foster this kind of atmosphere of participation and critical exploration, where students are able to look at their own ‘differences’ in relation to those of others. Although English is not the only curriculum subject in which participation and negotiation occurs, it is perhaps only in English that anything like a potential forum is provided for a recognition of cultural, sexual, and ethnic diversity, and any combinations thereof. Historically, it is in the *nature* of the subject - I am thinking of engagements with particular kinds of texts, varieties of language and classroom interactions, and the simple fact that more talk about human issues occurs in English because texts (written, spoken and visual) are usually about people, in particular human nature.

At this point I would like to further explore how an English teacher today might deal *practically* with the variety of theoretical positions available to her, and how a validation of difference can be woven into some of these positions. In order to make the positions more explicit I have divided them into two broad camps though in reality it is unlikely that an English teacher would align herself with either position completely.

**ESSENTIALISM**

The first position I have defined as the Essentialist one. I have explored many of these ideas earlier, but for the sake of comparison, I will summarise them again here. Essentialism is a view which regards English as representing a neutral and objective body of knowledge which can be ‘learned’. For example, literary texts are seen as containing essential truths about the human condition. It is seen as the English teacher’s role to teach texts in such a way that these truths are re-
vealed to students. This approach is also linguistically conservative and has a prescriptive attitude to written and spoken English, seeing Standard English as the only variety of English which has worth, value and acceptability. (This aspect is particularly supported by conservative ‘external publics’ who recognise that the forging of a national language is an important strategy in the secur-
ing of a general cultural hegemony. Historically this is demonstrated through the spread of the English language throughout the world as a tool of colonisation. In local and contemporary terms it can be seen in the attitude of many New Zealanders towards the teaching of Maori language in our school - see Frank Hayden’s article on Te Reo in the Sunday Star Times, January 15, 1995 ). Essentialists also place a strong emphasis (despite considerable evidence to the contrary) on the teaching of grammar as the way to best achieve ‘mastery’ of Standard written English.

Also known as the Cultural Heritage model, those who defend its basic tenets regard one of the most important roles of the English teacher as the transmis-
sion of the ‘best’ of Western culture and values to students through the study of English. In a classroom which uses strategies from the Essentialist model student difference would rarely be acknowledged. There would be no attempt to validate differences which did not reflect Western culture or Standard English. The aim would be to promote official canonical ideas as a way of offering students a clear path to academic and social success. ‘Old selves’ would need to be left at the door and cultural experiences which differed from those of the majority would have no place. The kind of effect this approach might actually have on a non-white student in an English class has been explored by Bernardo Ferdman (1990):

When a person loses the capability to derive and create meaning in a culturally significant way, he or she becomes less not more literate. To the extent that successful learning, as defined from the school’s point of view, forces the ethnic minority child to become disconnected from what is personally significant, his or her ability to construct a positive and coherent cultural identity will be weakened. (p.181)

Thus the dominant position is maintained by an effective silencing of otherness. Although I was not an ethnic minority child, my social class as a secondary student played a similar role. The effect of the dominant voice was not to silence me, however, but to lead me to internalise it and come to ‘speak’ in its vocabulary.
CULTURAL STUDIES
The second, ‘pluralist’ position consists of a group of radical critiques which challenge the idea that English is a neutral, objective body of knowledge. A recent article by Bronwyn Mellor and Annette Patterson (1994) names this position as Cultural Studies English. In other writing I have referred to this position as a ‘deconstructivist’ position (Scanlan, 1992) meaning that this is type of English pedagogy which deconstructs earlier ‘pre-theoretical’ versions of English like the ‘Functional Skills’, ‘Essentialist or Cultural Heritage’, ‘New Critical’ and ‘Personal Growth’ models.

Cultural Studies English is underpinned by an eclectic range of theoretical positions such as various forms of feminism, Marxism, structuralism and post-structuralism (in particular deconstruction). To give a brief practical example of how a Cultural Studies approach might inform practice, the following principles (here about readers and texts) are offered by Mellor and Patterson:

- meaning is not fixed in or by the text;
- texts are cultural artefacts and can be studied in relation to their socio-logical, historical and political locations and those of the author;
- texts are sites for the production of multiple meanings;
- texts offer readers particular positions from which to read;
- it is possible for readers to produce multiple interpretations or readings, although it will be acknowledged that some meanings are more tenable or ‘significant’ than others.

In this kind of classroom the English teacher is not teaching a particular ‘reading’ of, for example, a poem to students. This would be a method used by most teachers who followed an Essentialist model the, ‘This is what this poem is about’ approach. Instead the teacher might make explicit critical strategies for students in order to help them produce their own readings. Thus, a range of readings ‘against the grain’, sometimes called resistant readings, that is, readings or interpretations which resist those which have been produced by dominant critical voices, are allowed and may emerge. This does not necessarily mean that resistant readings will emerge, but the climate is there for them to emerge. This is a critical practice which focuses on contradictions and ‘slippages’ in order to remind us that the meanings we make are neither neutral nor obvious. Teachers would also make students familiar with the ‘dominant’ reading of such a text in order to demonstrate where most people might stand in terms of interpretation, and why they have stood there. (I will explore these
ideas in a more political framework shortly.)

Such a teacher's approach to language teaching would also be pluralistic. Standard English would be regarded as one variety in a broad range, rather than the only variety. Its status as the prestige variety which dominates the academic, political, media and business worlds would be explored, and at the same time the students' own varieties would be validated. A Cultural Studies position might also see that students and teachers make and 'change' notions of culture all the time, it would not necessarily maintain one view of what culture is. Thus, white middle class culture and the products of that culture (I am thinking of different kinds of texts) would stand alongside the products of other cultures rather than in front of them.

Cultural Studies English is underpinned by what Giroux and Aronowitz (1991, p. 213) have described as a position of 'cultural relativism'. Cultural relativism, they argue, is a doctrine regarded as 'pernicious' by the Right because its tenets include beliefs which suggest that canonical texts of the Western intellectual tradition may not be held to be superior to others; that student experience should qualify as a viable form of knowledge; and that ethnic, racial, gender, and other relations play a significant role in the development and influence of mainstream and intellectual culture. This is a position which seems to support, in part, the first notion of difference that I described.

The two positions I have outlined are representative of two extremes. It is likely that English teachers who taught from a 'naive' position would not even recognise that they used a particular pedagogical approach. Whilst it is likely that most teachers would seek to use a range of strategies that simply 'worked well', it is also true to say that the choice of those strategies would likely reveal a practice more dominant in one pedagogical position than another.

Although my own practice is more explicitly informed in some parts of my teaching by radical critiques, school and classroom constraints, and elements of my own conservatism (as a product of combined cultural heritage and personal growth models of English teaching) sometimes mean, as I mentioned earlier, that my practice falls short of my ideal as one which aims to transform and to engender in students a strong degree of tolerance and a sense of social justice.

The practices of 'new' English with their commitment to inclusiveness, representation and the celebration of difference and diversity, rather than the exclusivity and cultural conservatism on which the practices of 'old' English are
based, mean that the struggle for who ‘owns’ English has reached a new intensity especially in countries with strong and influential conservative voices like Great Britain and the United States.

A Clash of Critical Voices

Resurgent conservative attacks on schooling have been surfacing in many English-speaking Western economies with the advent of New Right policies which have swept through all areas of governance. The ideology that stands behind the disaffection with public schooling is complex, but it seems to combine a commitment to traditional family and religious values, gender roles, a defence of capitalist economies, the Western tradition, patriotism, anti-communism and to dismantling the Welfare State. The oppositional voice of the Right has much to lose if our English classes (which are meant to transmit the Best of the West) produce students who are open to supporting diversity and challenging these commitments.

As I suggested in Chapter Three, English teachers have been historically regarded as the legitimate ‘agents’ for ensuring the reproduction of this dominant voice through our work on maintaining the speaking and writing of Standard English in the classroom, and through our work with canonical books studied in conventional New Critical ways. English teaching which moves away from this model angers those who recognise the culturally strategic importance of the job. It is easy to see how those defenders of the dominant voice see challenges to that model as an attack upon all that is best, good and proper by radical discourses which they see as seeking to undermine the social order.

Terry Eagleton comments that contemporary attacks upon the English teaching profession are motivated not simply by a desire to ‘protect’ standards but by a desire to silence dissenting voices:

> What’s currently under fire is not really Marxist, feminist, and deconstruction critics, but the whole cultures of currently marginal communities. (Eagleton, 1993, p. 4)

By attempting to represent and acknowledge ‘difference’ in the English curriculum, and this may be through the study of non-European writers, or through valuing and working explicitly with the language and culture brought to class by students, English teachers are seen by conservative critics as devaluing or watering down the study of English, rather than enriching it.

The study of literature, in particular, has always been bound up with political
beliefs and ideological values.

Any body of theory concerned with human meaning, value, language, feeling and experiences will inevitably engage with the broader, deeper beliefs about the nature of human individuals and societies, problems of power and sexuality, interpretations of past history, versions of the present and hopes for the future. (Eagleton, 1983, p.195)

For example, Shakespeare especially, has been hailed as a writer of neutral if not sacred texts by those who speak with a dominant voice. Traditionally, to question the value of Shakespeare has been difficult for any student or teacher of English so high has his status been among those with prestige and power. In fact, I count this as one of my own ‘blind spots’ having held for years the view that all students at all levels ‘need’ to read his works, and my arguments, in defence, would probably be considered as conservative, although in recent years I have endeavoured to include radical strategies in my teaching of his plays.

Aside from aesthetic considerations about the language of Shakespeare, there is a belief that his plays contain eternal, universal values which can be made clear to young people through contact with his texts. However, I know that texts do not contain values. Values are something we impose on, or extract from the readings we make according to the historical and ideological circumstances of our reading. For example, the feelings of today’s teenagers are not really analogous with those of Romeo and Juliet, as is often argued. The dominant values of the Capulet and Montague families concern mercantile conflict between rich Renaissance families, and it is the code of courtly love and masculine honour which constructs the love of the two teenagers. To pretend that the feelings modern teenagers hold for each other are the same is not to read the text closely and discover the dominant values, but to surrender immediately to the ‘timeless relevance’ argument without reading the text at all. Approaches which take narrative and character as givens in this way will merely reproduce traditional values and interpretations. (McEvoy, 1991)

If we need to fit a justification for the reading of his work into a Cultural Studies position perhaps it needs to be that the cultural hegemony of Shakespeare should be studied exactly because of his high cultural status. Using new critical theory, rather than the old theories of the New Critics, his texts can become sites of conflict, places where dominant readings are challenged and the ideological
uses of those texts are revealed by the production of oppositional readings. As Linda Christian Smith (1991) points out, we all approach texts from our previously acquired gender, class, racial, ethnic, age and sexual identities which mesh with the words on the page to produce meaning. While texts may solidify our social identities, there is also the potential for unsettling us through oppositional readings. Thus, we do not have to accept the cultural hegemony of sacred texts, we need not feel alienated, we can if we choose, look at how our readings of these texts are constructed, and how even Shakespeare was writing from a particular location. When it is possible for students to recognise contradictory readings of a text they see that ‘literature’ does not come as a neutral, unified and coherent whole, but can be seen as a collection of fragments which we unify according to our particular reading practices which fills gaps and makes meaning in the light of our own set of ideas about the world. Thus, literary response is broadened, not narrowed.

It is likely that those arguing from a conservative position would resist the notion that Shakespeare, or indeed any Great Writer might be studied in this way. For one thing not only is the neutrality of the text challenged but the suggestion that a text can be ‘multi-meaninged’ puts into doubt the claim that it is possible to determine the politics or meaning of a text by a straightforward encounter. This approach also opens up debates about cultural and textual authority. English might be the only discipline which allows freedom of expression, but it also limits response by setting boundaries of response (typified by a Leavisian approach). Students’ achievement in English is usually based on their ability to have the correct response, on being able to tell what is good and English students have traditionally had very little say in deciding what is good.

Once meaning becomes a contested area in this way, the potential for instability and dislocation is increased. How will our students know the difference between good and bad? With the propensity of conservative critics to extrapolate, distort and decontextualise for the sake of argument (see my reference to Norman Tebbit in Chapter 3) it is easy to see how this method of literary analysis can become a metaphor for ‘the breakdown of society’.

The use of new critical theory and post-modern approaches in the English classroom is also not without its critics among English teachers (Doeke, 1994). The work is sometimes seen as inaccessible to most students and dangerous in that it has the potential to challenge legitimate and ‘safe’ frameworks which give students a position in which to stand. The exponents of these new ap-
adores to the subject see such criticism as a time-honoured way of dismissing ideas in teaching, especially English teaching. To understand the implications and to assimilate new approaches is to accept that they have the potential to undermine one of the most cherished assumptions of the liberal humanist version of English more popularly expounded - that the teacher has all the answers. (Peim, 1990)

It is true too that some students may resent the use of texts which explore racial, ethnic, gender or religious differences. Attempts to include ‘marginalised voices’ may lead to the argument that such inclusions displace ‘classic’ literary texts. I certainly have experienced situations where students sighed with relief when I have begun working on Shakespeare or have taught grammar in a very traditional way in order to illustrate some point. Because many of these students were ‘second chance’ adults they were coming back to school to ‘get English’ - either School or Sixth Form Certificate, I suspect that they were looking for the English they had, but did not succeed in, when they were first at school. For them ‘real’ English was Shakespeare, nouns and verbs. I have always enjoyed debating these points with classes, and have often responded with a ‘role-play’ where I have set up the class room traditionally and taught in my best ‘transmission mode’, (I have to say here that, once everything has been returned to ‘normal’, there have always been one or two who preferred rows of desks, and transmission!)

Cheryl Johnson (1994) considers if there was or is some safety in teaching the ‘old’ curriculum it is because we could place some distance between ourselves and the text; our participation was not personal and our delight in the text was lofty, even sublime, or objective and scientific. She also points out the amid the conflicting discourses which occur in the ‘new’ classroom, we will struggle with the desire to allow all students’ voices to inform the discussion while understanding that some of these voices may alienate the students from marginalised locations. Rightfully they may refuse to be ‘marginalised representative’ for the day and it is up to us as teachers to speak for them with compassion and knowledge.

**THE CHALLENGE OF POPULAR CULTURE**

Moves in recent years to include not only ‘different’ literature in the senior English curriculum in New Zealand, for example more works by women and writers of colour, but also other language areas like media literacy have prompted many challenges from the fundamentalist Right. To quote Mrs
Brooke once more, 'an obsession with media related issues has reduced the towering structure of English to a rubble.' (1991, p.12)

Allan Bloom, author of the controversial, arch-conservative text The Closing of the American Mind (1987) echoes the sentiments of Mrs Brooke in his abhorrence of mass culture. He launches into a sweeping attack on cultural relativism claiming that those who want to place popular culture, ethnic and racially based cultures, and cultures based in sexual communities (feminist, lesbian and gay) on a par with classical Western tradition are guilty of a form of anti-intellectualism that threatens the moral authority of the state. His answer is to seek a return to 'traditional' knowledge which includes the compulsory teaching of Latin, and to see schools teaching only the Great Books (of which there are one hundred), which embody the Great Values and Ideals of society.

Mike Rose’s text Lives on the Boundary (1989) stands diametrically opposed to Bloom’s as a cultural discourse on the issue of education and literacy. For Rose the task of education is to fit itself to the actual diversity of actual students as we find them. If this means using Rap music to engage the interest of students perhaps as a precursor to the study of literature or non-standard English, then this is a legitimate and valuable use of popular culture in the English classroom. For Bloom it is clear that what the classroom requires is 'benchmarks'. These should be presented in terms of a guiding canonical tradition against which the expressions of students literacy can be measured. It is interesting to consider how the myriad sources and manifestations of 'real' student literacy (song lyrics, car manuals, family stories, weekly magazines) would be perceived and evaluated within the framework of a canonical tradition and what guidance the tradition would provide on how to understand and develop them. It seems clear that the great books and central texts of the canon could quickly become a benchmark against which the expressions of student literacy would be negatively measured. For Bloom benchmarks are imperative. The ultimate benchmark, truth, is the key source of value. For Rose 'truth' or the 'real nature of things' is to be found in student location and identity, and the elements that construct them.

The popular-culture-is-pernicious argument has also been prevalent in England throughout the recent reframing of what stands as English in schools. Tory ministers condemned examination boards for permitting the study of soap operas and situation comedies in schools, and for daring to encourage the critical analysis of advertising, (Buckingham, 1993).
Raymond Williams (ibid.) argues that there is, and indeed always has been a clash between older culture and popular culture. The middle class try to preserve and maintain the old culture against what they see as the destructive forces of popular culture. Williams points out that the popular culture arises from the needs and consciousness of those who create and absorb it - it reflects the inherent gaps and limitations of the old culture.

A '90's English classroom which uses some of the ideas that I have described in this chapter will only become an effective centre for learning, however, if the teacher works to create a classroom environment which reflects the nature of the theory. 'Lecturing' on the gaps and silences in a short story; or the ways in which a particular writer is a product of her time; or the ways in which New Zealand English is unique, whilst students are sitting in rows and the teacher is standing at the front makes a nonsense of the content. I have already discussed the importance of negotiating the curriculum with students; beginning in a way which means you share power also means that this must continue with the use of interactional styles which maintain that sharing. Cazden (1981) takes this idea one step further when she says that teaching needs to be 'culturally responsive'. This implies that English teachers should not only be aware of cultural differences and have strategies for responding to them as teachers, but that we also need to be aware of how these differences affect individual cognitive and interactional styles.

I cannot hope to explore what this latter point might mean within the scope of this work. The relationship between pedagogical practices which support valuing cultural and individual differences, and the impact that this might have on individual cognitive and interactional styles is clearly work that needs to be undertaken by those whose academic work focuses on action research into classroom practice. Crucially though it seems as though this kind of empirical work is essential if the 'gut-feeling-cum-personal observation' methods of many classroom teachers like myself are to be accorded theoretical credibility.
CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

I began this thesis by asking myself a series of questions about whether contemporary English teaching really was in a state of crisis. I was also interested in the way English is perceived by those who are usually, but not always, beyond its day-to-day pedagogical functions. What concerned me about this latter point was the vociferousness of the arguments surrounding what is taught in English and how it is taught. I also wanted to understand where the criticisms directed at English teachers by many outside schools came from, when it seemed to me, having taught for many years, in two different countries and in many kinds of English departments, that English was being taught with more care, skill and with more accountability to students than ever before. I imagined too that in becoming more informed as an English teacher in the area of English pedagogical theory I might be able to answer my critics with more authority and credibility.

I needed also to assess my own practice in a theoretical framework. I wanted to understand where my particular ‘brand’ of English teaching came from and why my social and personal background seemed to be related to my pedagogical approach. It was important for me to discover that where I ‘came from’ (I mean this in broad locational and political terms) was crucial in determining the theoretical model/s I adopted in the teaching of the subject. It would be interesting to discover if this sense of needing to locate oneself is true for all teachers working in pedagogical theory across a range of subjects.

I have described myself as a ‘radical’ teacher (I also like the label that Henry Giroux has accorded to us in the term ‘transformative intellectual’), and I have made no apologies for the fact that I see the role of the English teacher as one which assists in ‘liberating’ students, through the study of language and literature, to become valuable but questioning members of a democratic society. Terry Eagleton touches upon some points which relate to the notion of the radical teacher when he outlines what he sees as the work of the radical literary theorist; there are some parallels here with what I said in Chapter 4:

Radical critics are also open-minded about questions of theory and method: they tend to be pluralists in this respect. Any
method or theory which will contribute to the strategic goal of human emancipation, the production of ‘better people’ through the socialist transformation of society, is acceptable. (1983, p.211)

Eagleton is a Marxist and his Marxism stands against my feminist politics, so in some ways his underlying sentiments here do not exactly concur with mine. I would need to ask him what he meant by human emancipation (does he include women and gays?), I would also need to clarify what he meant by ‘any method’ before I felt completely comfortable. But the reading I like to give to this comment is that my practice as an English teacher is required to be plural in order to serve the plural nature of my classes.

The plural nature of classes, or classes of ‘different’ students has only concerned English teachers since the 1970’s. Then the differences were defined in strict systematic groups - race, gender and class. We know now that these definitions, whilst initially useful, served many students poorly. While perhaps the single most ‘practically’ significant issue that my work on this thesis has done is to confirm my belief in the liberatory role that English has to play in students’ lives, the most intellectually stimulating (and intellectually difficult) issue has been the one I have had to try and tease out concerning the nature of difference and its importance in shaping the role of English today. I feel quite strongly that this impact will result in lasting changes to English content and pedagogy - of course this will not be achieved without a struggle. As I read in the area of English pedagogical theory it became clear to me that although there have been debates about English teaching for almost a century now, the broader base of the current one is significantly different, and this is because it encompasses a much broader base of students. I am thinking of those students who are now demanding equal access to education and for whom ‘old styles’ of methods and content will not do.

Changes in society over the last thirty years have shaken the foundations of many hierarchies and previously unheard voices have demanded to be heard alongside those who have always held the balance of power. Education, as a crucial agent in the legitimation of existing social relations and the status of those who dominate has, in many respects, sought to make room for these different voices whilst the legitimate agents of education: those in schools; those who are school policy makers, might be attempting to make room for these different voices (the equity clause in our school charters in New Zealand is one example of this) the same is not true for those ‘interested publics’ who are seek-
ing to maintain their grip on the decisions of who shall have ‘access’ and who shall not.

When society is in the grip of recession, it will not permit alternative world views; it is not interested in validating different voices, in fact different voices are a liability because they imply heterogeneity. An economically unstable society simply wants to see everyone pulling together to achieve economic prosperity. International moves by neo-liberal governments to turn schools into small businesses, and hospitals into large businesses are two examples of how far economics has entered the public sphere. Employment contracts, national monitoring of standards, external reviews, bulk funding all point towards linking education more with products, with results. Schools are places where people receive an education which will prepare them to compete in the job market.

Where English as a subject fits into all this is interesting. English teachers are seen not only as the ‘transmitters’ of literacy, but also as the guardians of ‘culture’ in our schools in the old Leavisian sense. We are not expected to thwart the way into the dominant culture, but to smooth it. It is the transmission of traditional western cultural values that many neo-liberals see as an important foundation for the rebuilding of the shaky foundations of economic prosperity. There is a sense that if we all agree on a common culture, our countries will become ‘great’ again. What chance is there then for those who do not reflect this common culture?

The resurgence of the traditional white male voice in the struggle over what should be taught in our schools and what counts as legitimate knowledge is a powerful one. Behind this voice family values, religion, capitalism, and patriotism sit. Is it any wonder then that those English teachers who seek, through their choices of texts, methods of teaching, validation of students’ own knowledge and encouragement of challenges to meaning, to make students aware of the diversity of cultural values should find themselves attacked by those who have a vested interest in promoting one way of seeing the world?

In his concluding speech at the International Conference for the Teaching of English in Auckland during 1990, Gerald Grace had this to say of English teachers:

You are people who have respect for different voices that have for too long been suppressed, or silenced or marginalised. The
voice of the Maori; the voice of the Koori; the voice of Black Americans; the voice of Hispanic students; the voice of other ethnic communities; the voice of working class youth and community; the voices of girls and women and within educational institutions the voice of the pupil and the student. This is not because English teachers are cultural and political extremists. On the contrary, it is not teachers of English gathered here who are extremists, it is those who would deny the principle of respect and the principle of empowerment for different voices, these are the extremists.

While teachers of English support and legitimate these different voices, I feel very strongly that although our curriculum area may continue to be a site of struggle, it will not be beaten by the media, by the public, or even by Prince Charles and Agnes-Mary Brooke, into accepting and reflecting in its practice one dominant cultural voice ever again. This does not mean that teachers of English will not acknowledge that particular voice, but that it will be recognised for what it is - one voice among many. English has never lost its Arnoldian moral mission; it is merely being currently enlisted for the oppressed against the oppressors.
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