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"Is there a curriculum voice to reclaim?":

exploring the curriculum-teacher space in secondary English literature education in England.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the secondary English literature curriculum in England from a hitherto minimised perspective, that of novice English teachers (NETs) working with it. Decades of standardised curricula have positioned teachers as receivers rather than makers of curriculum; this underplays both teachers' daily contribution to the curriculum and the tensions and debates generated by it. Following an interpretive paradigm, and taking a narrative approach, the stories of ten NETs are analysed to investigate this under-represented area: the intersection between curriculum and teacher, which I call the 'curriculum-teacher (CT) space'. The CT space is where teachers hold their values, histories and emotions alongside curricular policy, accountability frameworks and disciplinary knowledge. To examine this space, this thesis critically reflects on the literature curriculum in tandem with literary theory, curriculum theory and narrative theory, creating a novel framework to explore NETs' stories. The stories are analysed through an innovative meld of Reflexive Thematic Analysis, dramaturgical coding and literary- style interpretation.

There are presently no empirical studies from England that address the English Literature 'CT space' and yet it is an urgent issue: the current Education Inspection Framework (OFSTED, 2019) has raised curriculum to the top of schools' agenda due to its new 'quality of education' measure whilst the English Literature curriculum (DfE, 2014) continues to divide teachers and, judged by the dropping numbers taking it up at advanced level, disengage pupils. The study's findings challenge the assumption that the external control of curriculum benefits teachers and their pupils. As well as supporting concerns that assessment warps literary study, findings suggest that NETs are inadequately supported by curricular frameworks which a) run counter to their implicit models of literary study and b) understate the emotional-ethical dimensions of literature. These findings contribute new knowledge to the field, the policy and research implications of which are discussed.

Ethics and Data Management Statement

This study was approved by the Bath Spa University Ethics Panel on 11/09/2018. Should you have any concerns regarding ethical matters relating to this study, please contact the Research Support Office at Bath Spa University (researchsupportoffice@bathspa.ac.uk)

All participants provided written informed consent prior to enrolment in the study and for any associated datasets to be utilised as presented within this thesis

The datasets that support the findings of this study are available from the author, Helena Jane Thomas, upon reasonable request.

Copyright Statement

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Finally, but, in a way, mostly, to all the English teachers who endeavour every day to inspire their pupils with a love of literature in often difficult circumstances. Your work is rarely acknowledged or thanked but I thank you now and dedicate this thesis to you.

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Chapter A: Introduction

1. Overview

Literary study is a cornerstone of secondary education in England: it is a mandated aspect of every English child's schooling up to the age of sixteen, constituting one half of the core subject of English. Only one hundred years since The Newbolt Report (Newbolt, 1921) made the case for the teaching of literature in state education, it has acquired a taken-for-granted status in the national curriculum; whilst teachers, policy-makers and the public might disagree on elements of teaching literature, its fundamental value is rarely questioned, if at all (Goodwyn, 2012). And yet, there is much about teaching literature that is contentious, with curriculum changes often provoking public debate. If this is the visible part of literature teaching, less noticed is the daily work of English teachers in their classrooms, with their pupils, working with curricular frameworks as well as, crucially, their own understanding of literature: their knowledge of it, feeling towards it, and sense of its value to pupils.

The space between policy and the English teacher's classroom is under-researched (Wood, 2014), arguably one of Greene's (2000) 'terrible silences where ordinary human speech ought to be audible' (p. 47). I call this the 'curriculum-teacher' (CT) space and it is this hidden aspect of literary education in England's state education system that this thesis aims to illuminate. Using a methodological approach inspired by narrative inquiry, I explore the stories of ten novice English teachers (NETs)

working in schools in south-west England over a two-year period. In doing so, I aim to extend knowledge of the CT space to better understand the current state of teaching literature in England.

This line of enquiry addressed itself to me, in the Gadamerian sense, as a result of my professional experience of teaching literature in English state schools and of, thereafter, teaching teachers of literature as a tutor on the Postgraduate Certificate in Education at Bath Spa University, the combined experience of which constitutes over twenty years of involvement in teaching literature. I am, therefore, a 'backyard researcher' (Kim, 2016, p. 247) and I accept the heightened responsibility this brings for reflexivity. Like Greene (1988), I acknowledge that there is 'always a horizon of pre-understanding on the part of the researcher' (p. 174); in fact, I embrace this as a rich and powerful aspect of the research process and wish to make it as explicit as possible. I am inspired by Greene's (1994) frank statement of positionality and echo it to say that 'what follows can only be presented from the standpoint of a woman researcher in teacher education' (p. 426) whose thinking is influenced by a lifelong personal relationship with literature, including teaching and academic study. I therefore consider it important to share my personal experiences and reasons for undertaking this study, which I do in the following section.

2. The personal motivation for this research

Like most teachers of English in England (Blake & Shortis, 2010; Goodwyn, 2012), I entered teaching with a degree in literature, not language - it was Shakespeare rather than semi-colons that persuaded me into the profession! With that came a strong, albeit semi-conscious at best, mission to inspire pupils to love literature as much as I did which, as a kind of professional 'origin story', is far from unique; on the contrary, English teachers are well-known to be wedded to 'that LOVE of reading (Goodwyn, 2002, p. 66, author's capitalisation) and to be committed to passing it on to pupils.

Teaching did not diminish my relationship with literature or dampen my sense of purpose. The experience was, however, instructive in other ways. Firstly, I came to appreciate the particular qualities of literature that had made it appealing to me as a learner and which were coming into focus through my daily work as a teacher. Enjoying the debate a text could inspire and the infinite array of ideas that one line of poetry could generate in the classroom, I realised that I had always revelled in the 'epistemological uncertainty of literature' (Cuthbert, 2019, p. 182); an uncertainty that opens up room for dialogue and imaginative speculation. To someone who is not one of 'those who think they can possess knowledge and presume it to be complete' (Greene, 2000, p. 53), this felt not only true but exciting. How dull, I realised I had felt as a pupil, to learn only what others already know; how liberating to have at least one space in the curriculum where my mind can work to contribute

to knowledge, to make an offer and an impact.

This feeling of empowerment was what I wanted, as a teacher, for my pupils. I felt this especially keenly, I think, because of the particular context of my teaching experience in the London boroughs of Lewisham and Tower Hamlets. Here, I was teaching pupils who, whilst personally powerful in many ways, arguably lacked the stack of societal 'power', or privilege, automatically afforded to pupils in other contexts, in a state school, in, say, Hertfordshire, or a fee-paying school in Westminster. Many of my pupils were highly literate and bound for Russell Group universities, but many were not. I quickly realised that an insecure grasp of English, a limited vocabulary or difficulty writing coherent academic prose, does not preclude sophisticated literary interpretation. Behold Denisha, who, all gel and nails and hoops I should have removed, raised a languid head one afternoon to make an observation about language Shakespeare gave to Lady Macbeth in the heat of her desire to push her husband to murder. Denisha identified a subtle shade of uncertainty, or fear, on Lady Macbeth's part - all the more convincing when considered in the light of her later guilt and suicide – that I, with my Russell Group degree in literature, had never noticed. I was thrilled to be there at the moment of new knowledge generation in that classroom, with those individuals, on that day; a new experience despite the relentlessly repetitious nature of school life, its timetable and curriculum.

In retrospect, this experience, which was repeated many times in many different ways, explains my subsequent attraction to concepts like Greene's (2014) 'wide-awakeness' (p. 124) which is a state of heightened alertness prompted by the fullest teaching of art or literature. This concept is, inherently, a challenge to the value of a 'predefined curriculum' (p. 125) or, more pertinently, predetermined answers: 'The teacher herself has to be alive. The teacher herself can't come in the room with the problem of Hamlet already solved' (p. 124). My experience with Denisha, and many others, made me aware of the great loss to learning that could result from teachers 'coming to the room with the problem already solved' and prompted a career-long passion for dialogue, listening skills, and the democratic pedagogies that can create the environment necessary for teaching literature in this spirit.

Whilst this might sound relatively uncontroversial, the educational climate in which I have operated throughout my career complicates the picture. For decades, teachers' work has been directed by curricular frameworks and subject to accountability measures (including inspection frameworks, league tables and performance-related pay) that, no matter how well-intentioned or valid, sit uncomfortably, for me, with literature's generative and gloriously unstable epistemology and the pedagogies that this recommends. I am not alone in this feeling. The 'stranglehold' (Gibbons, 2016, p. 35) of the accountability framework is felt keenly by many English teachers whose subject is core to the national curriculum and, therefore, one of the chief means of scrutiny by government, parents and stakeholders. English teachers are under no misapprehension: their pupils'

examination results are crucial to any school's survival in the educational marketplace (Ward and Eden, 2009; Sahlberg, 2011) and the quality of their classroom practice, as judged by external inspectors, is equally essential to any school's Ofsted grading. This was well-established when I was teaching and has only intensified since. The consequence is that, no matter what benefits accountability brings, it limits the chances of teachers practising with the wide-awakeness that Greene (2014) suggests, and I agree, is vital to creating a valuable literary experience for pupils. Rather, the outcome is widespread standardisation of practice (Ball, 2003; Goodwyn, 2012; Hall & McGinity, 2015) which is a potential threat to the 'mobile, living and elusive' (Dixon, 1975, p.1) elements of school English.

I am a witness to the increasing standardisation of English teaching (Goodwyn, 2012). Despite an era of academisation which promised schools autonomy, my experience is that English teachers use remarkably similar methods and teach remarkably similar content. Perhaps this is because compliance has become a significant marker of teachers' quality, as Gibbons (2016) notes:

> ...if you're a successful teacher you take on the [provided] strategies and succeed; if you don't succeed you're probably not a very good teacher and the examination results will damn you to performance management hell (p. 36).

Perhaps, too, it is because in the pressurised environment in which English teachers teach (Goodwyn, 2012a; Anderson, 2013; Wood, 2014; Gibbons, 2016), there is simply no incentive to 'to resist the temptations of oversimplified, linear conceptions

of teaching and learning' (Wood, 2014, p. 3). This is true, too, of its attendant pedagogies: despite classroom dialogue and discussion being something of a signature pedagogy (Shulman, 2005) for teaching literature, it has been significantly undermined in the last decade (Didau, 2015; Mercer, 2015). This is possibly due to its association with 'progressive' teachers (Spencer, 2015) which Michael Gove, then Education Secretary, famously referred to as the 'blob' (Robinson, 2014): a force to be fought in the educational establishment for the general good of pupils. If you believe that knowledge is stable, held by a teacher whose role it is to pass it straightforwardly onto the pupil, it is difficult be persuaded of the merits of discussion and dialogue, as Cambridge academic Neil Mercer found in his exchanges with English teacher and blogger David Didau (Didau, 2015; Mercer, 2015), an exchange which speaks to the rise of a generation of English teachers ideologically wedded to 'traditional' conceptions of the subject: prescriptive rather than descriptive grammar, written literacy rather than oracy, canonical rather than contemporary literature.

I am likewise a witness to this re-emergence of traditional values in English teaching, which are reflected in the current curriculum. Gove's national programmes of study in English (DfE, 2014), still in place at the time of writing, caused a stir when introduced for their unambiguous conservatism. This conservatism was signalled by, amongst other things, a re-emphasis on grammar and a de-emphasis of speaking and listening (which had been a key component of English since the national curriculum was established in 1988). The most transparently traditional aspect of

the curriculum, however, was not only its most controversial but the most pertinent to this study: the decision to narrow the range of literature to strictly canonical texts authored by British writers in Key Stage 4 (Kennedy, 2014). This effectively cancelled much-loved American writers like John Steinbeck and Arthur Miller, a blow to many English teachers in itself, but, more, it communicated an inward-looking nationalism that felt unpalatable to many. The furore was just the latest chapter in a long history of tensions and debates on the matter of the English curriculum, described by Marshall (2000) as a 'battle' (p. 4). As outlined earlier, I have personally felt the tensions of this in my career but how do new entrants to the profession navigate this complex curricular and pedagogical terrain? How can they be supported to manage the tensions inherent in their chosen profession and do so for the benefit of their pupils? As I wrote at the start of this section, these concerns have 'addressed' me directly and provide the impetus for this research.

3. **Aims of the thesis**

The overall purpose of this research is to investigate teachers' experience of teaching literature in England and, in so doing, explore the space where curricular policy and teacher meet. As outlined above, widespread evidence, both anecdotal and peer-reviewed, suggests that curricular policy can create conflict, difficulty and tension (Marshall, 2000; Ball, 2003; Wood, 2014; Gibbons, 2016) and this is potentially problematic terrain for new entrants to the profession. For this reason, my focus will be on novice teachers, which are teachers from the beginning of their training programmes to the end of their first years as qualified teachers.

As there is currently scant research in this area (Wood, 2014), the potential gains are difficult to predict. Nevertheless, I hope to challenge, extend or complement existing conceptions of teaching literature, both from policy and published research, and thereby make a meaningful contribution to professional conversations on the subject, supporting the education of novice teachers. To address the overarching research intention, I have devised three key research questions:

1. What do novice English teachers (NETs)' stories suggest they value about literature and the teaching of literature?
2. What do NETs' stories tell us about the CT space in English Literature?
3. What do NETs' stories suggest might be done differently by the professional community for the benefit of teachers and pupils?

4. Overview of chapters

In the next chapter, I open my literature review with an outline of curriculum theory to establish the broad view. I then describe the current curricular landscape in its widest sense, encompassing England and other Anglophone countries, to show that it is constructed in line with a particular theoretical perspective. This provides the necessary context to explore literature that addresses my concept of the 'CT' space. I begin with curriculum theory that conspicuously includes teachers in reflections on curriculum, using this to reflect on the scope of the relationship between the two. I call this 'defining' the CT space because it sets out aspects of the space that will be important throughout the thesis.

From there, I narrow my focus to English literature, reviewing research that frames the teaching of literature in schools as I see it. This I divide into three parts - *subject*, *curriculum* and *teacher* - on the basis that all are equally important components of the CT space. The first, *subject*, presents aspects of literary study that impact the CT space: the theoretical underpinnings of the academic discipline; the place of the reader in literary reading; and, finally, the broader claims made about the purpose of stories in human life. All these play key parts in the CT space. Likewise, the next component, *curriculum*, is a discussion of the ideas and policies that have influenced the space as it currently exists, including, of course, an overview of the curricular context in schools at the time of writing. Lastly, I consider the *teacher* in the literature CT space. Here I review empirical research that explores teachers'

perspectives on the teaching of literature, which provides an important framework for my own data.

In the subsequent chapter, I present my methodological approach to this study, setting out my philosophical position and rationale for my choice of methodology. I then describe my data collection journey, reflecting on misfires as well as successes, and show how my research has been conducted ethically. Finally, I outline my approach to data analysis, demonstrating its congruence with my overall methodological approach and describing the steps taken to satisfactory analysis. Following this, I present my findings, which I have organised into three themes: *The Strange Case of Literature and Knowledge*; *Of Ethics and Emotional Effects*; and *A Mind of One's Own*. These themes tease out the patterns and insights I found in the data. In my discussion, in the following chapter, I explore these findings in tandem with the literature, using my research questions as a frame for doing so, ensuring that I address each question fully. I conclude the thesis by outlining my original contribution to knowledge and reflecting on its potential significance in the context of literature teaching in England.

5. Acronyms, terms and definitions

Accountability frameworks: by referring to accountability frameworks, I refer to the mechanisms by which teachers are held to account for pupils' learning. This includes the Education Inspection Framework (Ofsted, 2019), league tables which advertise a school's examination results in comparison with others and school performance management measures in which senior leaders hold staff to account by observing lessons, scrutinising pupils' books and setting results-based targets linked, sometimes, to pay.

A Level: Advanced level study of English in school, covering Key Stage 5 (ages 16 – 18)

AQA: Assessment and Qualifications Authority

Curricular frameworks: by using the term 'curricular frameworks' rather than 'curriculum' I make reference to the multiple frameworks that contribute to the national curriculum at the present time. As academies are not obliged to follow the statutory curriculum, the Programmes of Study (DfE, 2014), it is possible to argue that examination specifications and the Education Inspection Framework (Ofsted, 2019) direct the national curriculum as much, if not more, than the statutory requirements.

CT space: the 'curriculum-teacher' space is my term for the conceptual space where curriculum and teacher meet; a way of describing the object of my study.

DES: Department of Education and Science

DfE: Department for Education

EEF: Education Endowment Fund

NETs: I use the term 'novice English teachers' to describe my participants who are all in their training or initial teaching year.

GCSE: General Certificate of Secondary Education

PGCE: Postgraduate Certificate in Education

SLT: Senior Leadership Team

QCA: Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

Chapter B: Literature review

1. **Curriculum theory: a brief overview**

Theorising curriculum is complicated by the fluidity of its definition. Most commonly, curriculum is understood in terms of its Latin root, 'racecourse' - 'a series of obstacles or hurdles (subjects) to be passed' (Marsh, 2009, p. 3). This is straightforward, but not unproblematic; a racecourse implies that competition and award are inevitable elements of any curricular undertaking, and this seems reductive to many. In fact, defining curriculum as a 'racecourse' seems to justify Grundy's (1987) observation that curriculum 'structure' is too often emphasised over (or, worse, confused with) its 'foundations'; a concern echoed in Kelly's (2009) lamentation that 'people still equate a curriculum with a syllabus' (p. 9). A curriculum, according to Kelly (2009), goes 'far beyond' (p.9) syllabus in that it has an overall rationale, which addresses 'deeper concerns' (p. 9) such as its moral purpose. In short, thinking of curriculum as 'foundation' rather than 'structure' helps to highlight its philosophical and theoretical underpinnings, acknowledging that no structure exists in a vacuum and is not neutral.

Taking this into account, it seems fair to consider Pinar's (1974) adaptation of the origins of the word; he preferred to use the Latin infinitive - currere - in order to emphasise the running rather than the race (Marsh, 2009). This semantic shift works to sideline the *outcome* in favour of the *process* and, in moving the idea of curriculum away from the finish line, aspects like quality of experience and moral

purpose can be accommodated. In many ways, the distinction between outcome and process is at the heart of curriculum debate, which can be categorised broadly into those two camps, the first of which promotes education as 'product' as opposed to education as 'development' promulgated by the latter (Kelly, 2009).

1.1 Curriculum as outcome

A curriculum designed around 'outcome' is sometimes called an 'objective-focused' model of curriculum. Notable proponents of this kind of curriculum are Bobbit (1918), Popham (1987) and Tyler (1951), who emerged from the United States in the early twentieth century. They created a paradigm which has been dominant in the US and beyond ever since (Flinders & Thornton, 2017; Scott, 2008) and which is largely responsible for what Sahlberg (2011) calls the 'Global Educational Reform Movement' (p. 174). This is distinguished by measurable outcomes, prescribed standardised curricula and a hefty focus on core subjects - using high-stakes accountability systems as a method of quality assurance and control. From the perspective of an objective-focused approach to curriculum, curriculum development can only proceed when clear goals have been identified: the pre-determined outcomes. This fixed endpoint is crucial in this model of curriculum. Only once these goals are established can learning sequences be constructed, and assessment implemented, to maximise progress towards these goals. The watch words for this model of curriculum are efficiency, rationality and control; it is predicated on the assumption that education proceeds on an input-output, linear

basis and is, accordingly, sometimes called the 'scientific' model of curriculum (Scott, 2008). In terms of curriculum implementation, this approach is most likely to favour 'fidelity-use' or 'teacher-proof' curricula, positioning teachers as 'passive recipients of the wisdom of curriculum developers' (Marsh, 2009, p. 102). The language used to construct curricula based on this model tends to suggest they are value-neutral although opponents would say they are anything but.

1.2 Curriculum as process

A process-driven approach to curriculum, on the other hand, eschews pre-determined outcomes in favour of flexibility and responsiveness to children's interests (Montessori, 1918), prior experience (Dewey, 1938/1997), and/or teachers' personal and situational decision-making (Greene, 2000; Connelly and Clandinin, 1988; Beyer and Apple, 1998). As the process-driven approach tends to view the curriculum as dynamic, flexible, even organic, its positioning of teachers is very different to the objective-focused model: the emphasis on process implies a central place for the teacher. Indeed, this is a position Kelly (2009) views as more of a *fact* unwise to ignore no matter what theoretical model used:

> The quality of any educational experience, then, will depend to a very large extent on the individual teacher responsible for it; and any attempt at controlling the curriculum from the outside which does not recognise that must be doomed to failure, or at best to triviality (p. 15).

The process-model, therefore, perceives teachers as active designers and decision-makers, capable of determining the educational purpose and theoretical underpinning of curricula, as well as successfully improvising (Sorenson, 2014) and responding to the complexities of the curriculum-in-action. Beyer & Apple (1998) define this as *praxis,* 'thought and action combined and enlivened by a sense of power and politics' (p. 4) and they, along with other key theorists in the field, connect this with ethical and personal dimensions of curriculum that the objectives-model, in its rationality, fails to fully address (Connelly and Clandidin, 1988; Greene, 2000; Kelly, 2009). Nevertheless, curricula based on this model are hard to measure, predict or control which renders them difficult, even risky, to use in any kind of systematic way.

This thesis concerns the experience of novice English teachers teaching the current literature curriculum in England. At present, teachers are positioned as deliverers of pre-determined curricular frameworks (Priestley et al, 2015) and my interest is in the experience of those in that position, including their history, beliefs and values. In order to better understand this position, I will next present an overview of the contemporaneous curricular landscape in England.

1.3 The current landscape: the case for an alternative framing of curriculum

Since the 1980s, debate on curriculum theory has waned (Scott, 2008; Priestley, 2011). This has been attributed to the introduction of a standardised, national

curriculum in 1988, which rendered 'curriculum debate ... increasingly pointless' (Kelly, 2009, p.3) as it provided '...a false consensus on curriculum, barely agreed and certainly not negotiated' (Scott, 2008, p. 5). Instead, public discourse centres on 'demands for teacher appraisal and accountability' (Kelly, 2009, p. 2) in a system that uses high-stakes assessments and prescribed professional 'standards' to measure and control teacher performance, as well as employing the market logic of competition to manage schools (Sahlberg, 2011). This is, in Sahlberg's (2011) words, GERM - the 'Global Education Reform Movement' - characterised by 'force, pressure, shame, top-down intervention, markets, competition, standardisation, testing, easier and quicker passages into teaching' (p. xv). Others describe it as performativity (Ball, 2003), deliverology (Barber, Moffit and Kihn, 2010), New Public Management (Hall & McGinity, 2015), 'educationomics' (Stronach, 2010, quoted in Clarke & Moore, 2013, p. 487) or neoliberalism (Davies, 2005; Ball & Olmedo, 2013; Clarke and Moore, 2013; Parr et al, 2015) and its negative impact on teachers as curriculum-makers is an area of much comment in the literature, creating an environment where teachers do not own but, rather, rent their curriculum vision, which is never specific to circumstance or context, philosophy or purpose (Sahlberg, 2011).

One of the most-cited papers in this area is Ball's (2003) *The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity*. Ball (2003) sees evidence of three 'policy technologies' driving reform: 'the market, managerialism and performativity' which align the public sector with 'the methods, culture and ethical system of the private sector' (pp.

215-216). The seemingly objective and hyper-rational language of the policy technologies masks the devastating positioning of individuals in the system, teachers, as functionaries to be scrutinised, compared, incentivised and co-opted into new priorities and vocabularies, the speaking of which, a 'kind of ventriloquism' (p. 218), is necessary for survival in the system. What was the ethics of 'professional judgement and co-operation' becomes the ethics of 'competition and performance' (p. 218) and an individual's personal ethics, along with their values and emotions, are sidelined completely. The result, argues Ball (2003), is a 'struggle over the teacher's soul' (p. 217). He presents empirical evidence to show teachers grappling with conflicting feelings – are their actions for the benefit of pupils or for the benefit of measurement? - which they internalise in a kind of 'terror'; the machinery of the system becoming 'matters of self-doubt and private anxiety rather than public debate' (p. 220).

Agreeing with Ball (2003), Clarke and Moore (2013) argue that teachers experience angst as a result of the language of policy which is designed to disguise its 'inherent impossibility' (p. 489) through, for example, repeated use of the definite article, as in *'the* learning process' (p. 489, author's italics). The policy documents present 'as harmonious and complete what is always complex, contradictory and incomplete' (p. 492); their function, arguably, is to be a 'fantasmatic source of reassurance and certainty in the face of an unruly and chaotic world' (p. 493). When teachers find their reality does not accord with the seemingly neutral and concrete vision of teaching and learning presented in policy, if there is tension between that and their

experience, there is little opportunity to explore this other than from the perspective of 'quality assurance' or 'performance review' where the teacher, rather than the policy, is by default in error (Clarke and Moore, 2013). This speaks to the argument that there is 'disproportionate influence of policy on practice in comparison to that of practice on policy' (p. 488), revealing the imbalanced power relations between the two. Little wonder, then, that teachers' response is either 'terror', as Ball (2003) suggests, or a kind of 'virtuous pragmatism' (Clarke and Moore, 2013, p. 494) as means of survival. According to empirical studies, teachers are often pragmatic, with Hall and McGinity's (2015) study in particular recording high levels of compliance: 'that's the game we have to play' (p. 8). Similarly, Ball's (2003) participants might feel terror but raise little resistance, as in the words of one of his participants, 'I think a lot of people even subconsciously stop doing things to make it easier for themselves' (p. 220).

Clearly, as Hall and McGinity (2015) state, these pressures leave teachers 'with much reduced space for the exercise of their agency' (p. 5) which, among other consequences, denies the 'productive possibilities of tension, conflict and uncertainty' (Clarke and Moore, 2013, p. 492). This denial is a challenge to the development of full professional expertise. Writing as early as the mid-1990s, Greene (2000) recognises this threat, identifying a profession worn down by their positioning in the system as 'clerks or technocrats' (p. 2) and, perhaps optimistically, claiming that teachers are 'not willing to be the unconsulted and largely uninvolved transmitters of certain kinds of privileged knowledge' (Greene, 1994, p. 425). 'How

is the teacher to cope with this?', she cries, 'How is she or he to avoid feeling like a chess piece or a cog or even an accomplice of some kind?' (Greene, 2000, p. 11). Like Ball (2003) and Clarke and Moore (2013), Greene (2000) problematises the framing of educational processes as straightforward and smooth, instead arguing that teachers develop expertise by 'attending to particular children, situation-specific undertakings, the unmeasurable, and the unique' (p. 11). Spotting the dangers in a system driven by an erroneous 'quest for certainty' (p. 18), she dedicates her book, *Releasing the Imagination*, to freeing teachers to 'look through their own eyes... find their own voices...avoid the formulations devised by official others' (p. 20). For Greene, it is an existential obligation to do so, which articulates a form of professionalism radically different to that outlined above. To her, a teacher's professional duty is not to comply but to exercise imagination, and its attendant quality, empathy, and 'truly to attend' (p. 42) to the child, exercising agency through deciding to be 'a teacher capable of freeing other human beings to choose themselves' (Greene, 1973, p. 21).

That Greene's (1973; 2000) perspective is an alternative vision of what *could be*, rather than what *is*, is indicated by both the empirical evidence in a range of studies (Ball, 2003; Anderson, 2013; Wood, 2014; Hall and McGinity, 2015) *and* the response to these studies from the front-line. As well as having a high citation score, Ball's (2003) paper struck 'an extraordinarily resonant chord' (Clarke, 2013, p. 230) with teachers, many of whom contacted him after publication to express the extent to which it chimed with their experiences (Ball and Olmedo, 2013). It would be

speculation to suggest that the personal cost of compliance, of suppressing anxiety and remaining silent in the face of concerns, correlates with recruitment and retention rates in the profession but, as this is a current crisis (Severs, 2022), the possibility should be enough to validate full engagement in the issue. To this end, I suggest it is time to revisit an alternative framing of curriculum, which commanded more scholarly attention in the 1990s before the educational reform movement had taken hold, and which positions the individual teacher at the beating heart of curriculum. This is scholarship that helps to define the CT space and is the focus of the next section.

2. __Defining the CT space__

'Education is a process that must embody the finest elements of what makes us human...' (Beyer & Apple, 1998, p. 6)

The purpose of this section is to explore the literature that acknowledges the intersection where curriculum and teacher meet: the CT space. This is a distinct strand in curriculum scholarship, distinguished by its focus on the human beings involved in the process of education and its positioning of the teacher at the centre of curriculum rather than as a (neutral) tool by which it is enacted. This allows us to examine a space which has been minimised by the current system in order to protect its own ideological underpinnings (Kelly, 2009) - a 'teacher-proof' curriculum, by its very nature, repudiates the rich space where curriculum and teacher meet (apart from in terms of sanctions for teachers who do not deliver what is required). Nevertheless, theory tells us that this space exists: Marsh and Willis (2007) call it the 'experienced and enacted' curriculum, as opposed to the 'planned'; Kelly (2009) refers to the 'actual' curriculum, as opposed to the 'official'; Riseborough (1985) believes the 'official' curriculum converts to the 'ricocheted' curriculum in the classroom and that the result is actually a kind of 'counter- curriculum'.

In this teacher-centric space curriculum inevitably overlaps with pedagogy (Scott, 2008) but it is important to emphasise that it does not *become* it; rather, curriculum is the big picture which *includes* pedagogy. Scott (2008) argues that curriculum

includes: what (content), why (purpose), and how (pedagogy). Beyer and Apple (1998) lament the shift away from considering all these components in teachers' professional dialogue; a phenomenon they attribute to the introduction of standardised curricula, which has 'deskill[ed] teachers' (p. 4) and limited professional dialogue to *how* rather than *what* and *why*. This is important as the aim of this thesis is to explore teachers' experience of the curriculum in its fullest sense, re-introducing *what* and *why* to the CT space.

2.1 Reviewing the CT literature

For the rest of this section, I will review the literature that most directly embraces the teacher herself in conceptions of curriculum. I call this the 'CT literature'. In direct contrast to the idea of an objective, consistent, 'deliverable' curriculum on which outcome-focused models of curriculum are predicated, one of the most striking areas of consensus across the CT literature is the conviction that curriculum can only be understood in terms of 'concrete individuals in specific situations' (Pinar, 1981, p. 175). Curriculum, assert Connelly and Clandinin (1988) 'is something experienced in situations' (p. 6) and Greene (1994) uses this argument to explain the gap between teaching and research, the latter rejected by, 'teachers who knew that their teaching was situation specific and could not be understood in terms of general laws' (Greene, 1994, p. 425).

Curriculum as 'experienced in situations' introduces factors into curriculum that are otherwise omitted, including the feelings, values and aspirations of the teachers involved (Greene, 1973; Connelly and Clandinin, 1988; Biesta, Priestley and Robinson, 2015). Indeed, Connelly and Clandinin (1988) include the *objects* of the classroom – books, desks, lighting – in their conception of curriculum situations, as well as dynamics like teaching methods, friendships and body language - which is also acknowledged by Barnes (1976) when he highlights the 'talk and gestures by which pupils and teachers exchange meanings' (p. 14) in order to demonstrate that 'curriculum is a form of communication' (p. 14). Greene (1973) is scathing in her criticism of those who ignore these factors:

> The teacher is frequently addressed as if he had no life of his own, no body, and no inwardness...infinitely controlled and accommodating, technically efficient, impervious to moods. They are likely to define him by the role he is expected to play in a classroom, with all his loose ends gathered up and all his doubts resolved. The numerous realities in which he exists as a living person are overlooked. His personal biography is overlooked; so are the many ways in which he expresses his private self in language, the horizons he perceives, the perspectives through which he looks on the world. (p. 270)

In this conception, curriculum is positioned *within* the individual teacher and encompasses: feelings, including moods and doubts; biography - the personal history and previous experiences of the teacher; 'horizons and perspectives' - the outlook and values that the teacher brings to the curricular endeavour. I will now use the CT literature to explore each in turn more fully.

When curriculum is placed in the heart of the teacher, infused with her history, knowledge, values, aspiration and desires, then it becomes impossible to avoid affective dimensions of curriculum - the *feelings* it brings and provokes. This might be feelings of joy, as in Whitehead's (1929) idea that teachers must feel excited by, and enjoy, the curriculum, however it might equally include feelings that are negative or challenging: 'What is the curriculum of a lost teacher, one in difficulty?' (Fowler, 2006, p. 8). Despite emotions being a clear implication of conceptions of curriculum that centre the teacher, not all of the CT literature addresses this. Barnes (1976), for example, whilst focusing whole-heartedly on curriculum as the dynamic interplay between teacher and pupils, skates over the issue of the teacher's emotional state. Likewise, Grundy's (1987) insightful study of curriculum in practice, which argues that teachers' actions and experiences are central to curriculum development, does not consider teachers' feelings. It is, as Fowler (2006) claims, an area 'where many fear to look' (p. 28).

Despite this, some scholars in the field do recognise 'the productive possibilities of tension, conflict and uncertainty' (Clarke and Moore, 2013, p. 492) as well as their inevitability in the complex reality of the classroom. For Fowler (2006) it is a question of what teachers can learn from discomfort: 'Struggle and difficulty in teaching ... are sign(s) that research must be done to ask "What is going on? So what? Now what?"' (p. 26). For Beyer and Apple (1998), curriculum is most appropriately

conceived as a series of *dilemmas* with which the teacher must grapple in order to act in a manner that is sound in a range of ways, including ethically and epistemologically. This, they acknowledge, is challenging for teachers who must make incredibly important decisions in unpredictable, and often vexing, circumstances and yet it is this dilemma and difficulty that creates the circumstances for curriculum development and, ultimately, learning. For Greene (1973): 'The human being must experience difficulty and unease if he is to be' (p. 32) and so *difficulty* is part of the existential obligation of the teacher 'choosing to be personally responsible' (p.5) and choosing 'to create himself ... as a teacher capable of freeing other human beings to choose themselves' (p. 21). So, while teachers' emotions are a neglected area of curriculum theorising, it is possible to argue that embracing rather than resisting this research space might be fruitful for greater understanding of the curriculum.

2.1.2 Teachers' biographies

Likewise, the concept of *teachers' biographies* has potential to be a productive area of inquiry, although research in this area has stalled somewhat since the 1980s and 1990s. In those decades, however, there was a body of scholarship (see, for example, Ball and Goodson, 1985) that acknowledged personal biography as a significant factor in curriculum development. For Connelly and Clandinin (1988), it is a question of recognising the historical nature of curriculum 'situations' in which 'what happened yesterday, and the week before, and in fact at any stage in any one

participant's life' (p. 8) is what creates the curriculum; in fact, they state: 'There is

no better way to study curriculum than to study ourselves' (p. 31). This is curriculum

within teacher from a slightly different, although over-lapping, perspective from the

affective dimension considered above: the recognition of teachers' biographies in

curriculum-making introduces the importance of teachers' *stories* - their narrative

understanding of their lives, role, pupils, and, most fundamentally, *themselves*.

Stories, say McEwan and Egan (1995), 'have a vital role to play in helping us to

understand the curriculum' (p. xiii) and, according to Elbaz- Luwisch (2007):

> Once we view curriculum as developed and shaped by
> teachers' narratives, it becomes possible to ask
> questions about the conditions and constraints under
> which teachers tell their stories (p. 363).

The implications of a personal and storied curriculum are far-reaching and

challenging, perhaps even unsettling. Stories might be, as Barthes (1977) claims,

everywhere and in everything; they might be, as Bruner (2003) states, the most

fundamental and universal way of knowing, but it would be remiss to ignore the fact

that they promote self-*deception* as much as self-understanding 'as our proneness to

the seductive power of myths and ideologies suggests' (McEwan and Egan (1995p.

xii). Stories have the power to enlighten, but they also have the power to 'distort and

conceal' (ibid). Nevertheless, it is possible to see this risk as a productive space, as

Connelly and Clandinin (1988) do: their book *Teachers as Curriculum Planners* is

intended to guide teachers through a process of careful reflection on their

biographies and their stories in order for them to develop a nuanced, professional understanding of their role in with the curriculum in the classroom.

2.1.3 Teachers' values

Teachers' stories, therefore, 'shape' the curriculum, an idea widely recognised by narrative research in the field (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988; Goodson, 2014; McEwan and Egan, 1995; Kim, 2016; Gudmundsdottir, 1991). Likewise, there is broad acknowledgment of the interrelated influence of teachers' *values* - their horizons and perspectives (Greene, 1973). Biesta, Priestley and Robinson's (2015) research established that teachers' beliefs play a significant role in directing their curriculum enactment, which seems to agree with Marsh (2009), who states that all teachers are teaching according to a personal 'model' of curriculum, constructed through the filter of their own narrative and values. This, in turn, agrees with Grossman and Thompson (2008) who claim that teachers' beliefs profoundly impact their teaching. This idea presents a challenge, states Furlong (2013), to the long-standing assumption that 'teachers can be programmed to implement desirable curricula effectively.' (p. 70). In fact, according to Kelly (2009), a curriculum must be designed by teachers who are committed to it, who believe in its moral purpose: a curriculum must, therefore, chime with teachers' *values* in order to work.

Much like teachers' stories, there is risk in this. Pinar (1981), whilst arguing strongly that the curriculum is 'imbalanced towards the general' (i.e objective-focused, decontextualised programmes of study), also notes the downside of any re-balancing towards a teacher's specific context or inclinations. He sees this as the 'shadow', unleashed in the form of the colleague who 'we rarely see at a formal meeting - who seems excessively, perhaps compulsively, committed to his individuality, his particularity' (p. 174), leading to non-collegiate, unprofessional practice. This concern finds echoes in Connelly and Clandinin (1988), who are keen to reassure their readers that, despite their heartfelt conviction that teachers should be curriculum planners, they 'do not, of course, mean to license individual whim in the curriculum' (p.13).

Whilst it is vital to be mindful of this, it is, as Kelly (2009) might argue, perilous to ignore a teacher's specific context and inclination altogether. Further, 'whim' (a word doubtless chosen carefully) is different entirely from fully considered and thought-through individual choice; decision-making resulting from careful engagement with curricular 'dilemmas', as envisioned by Beyer and Apple (1998). Arguably, it is only by handing teachers responsibility for this - by giving them the freedom to own their vision, rather than renting it from others (Sahlberg, 2011), and making it their professional duty to do so (Kelly, 2009) - that the chance of anything so careless and potentially unethical as 'whim' can be removed from curriculum.

For Connelly and Clandinin (1988), much of what is explored above - feelings, values and biographies - comes together in one central concept: a teacher's personal knowledge. Through this personal and individual epistemological base, teachers bring together two key questions: '"what is curriculum?" and "how do I do it?"' (p. 4). Connelly and Clandinin (1988) do not explicitly include academic knowledge in this concept; for them, it incorporates practical knowledge as well as knowledge of what they describe as curriculum materials. Despite a body of research on the issue of teachers' knowledge, Connelly and Clandinin (1988) suggest researchers' generally fail to recognise that teachers' actions do not always straightforwardly indicate a certain epistemological construct, that, in fact, knowledge is more complex. Teachers' knowledge is temporal, with a past, present and future, and is necessarily 'flexible and fluid' (p. 25), depending 'in an important measure on the situation' (p. 26).

Whilst Connelly and Clandinin (1988) do not resolve this issue of what teachers' knowledge *is* and what it *does* in the classroom, it raises an important question. The matter of teachers' subject knowledge is, at the time of writing, considered vital enough to form a criterion in both recruitment (teachers with higher graded degrees receive the biggest bursaries to train) and in the current inspection framework for schools (Ofsted, 2019). Connelly and Clandinin's (1988) concept of personal knowledge is much richer than this - involving a teacher's inner-life as well as her

practical and flexible knowledge-in-action in the classroom - but I contend that skating over subject knowledge is an omission. What teachers understand, and what they want to communicate, about their subject is of the utmost importance in any curriculum. This is distinct from the simplistic notion that high grades result in superior knowledge in the context of a classroom. I suggest there is a need to acknowledge teachers' knowledge, as Connelly and Clandinin (1988) do, as dynamic and multi-dimensional, but to do so in the context of subject expertise. Arguably, this is particularly so in the case of literature which has an emotional and ethical pull that renders it peculiarly personal to members of the disciplinary community.

Now that I have defined the CT space as one that includes teachers' feelings, biographies, values and knowledge, I will use the next section to explore in detail the theoretical space in terms of the specific nature of literary study, narrowing the focus from curriculum in general to the English literature curriculum. To acknowledge the different dimensions of this narrowed focus, I have broken it down into three parts: the academic discipline of literary study, the English curriculum and English teachers themselves. I begin with theoretical aspects of literary study, then address how this has been interpreted as a curricular undertaking in state schools in England before focusing on English teachers themselves, reviewing empirical studies to draw conclusions about their position in the CT space.

3. Exploring the CT space in school literary study

The first aspect of the CT space in school literary study is the academic discipline of literary study itself. This is an important part of the CT space in literature teaching in secondary schools because it is, in effect, the foundation on which all else rests (smoothly or otherwise). I begin with a brief overview of theoretical perspectives on literary study before moving on to consider the reader's place in literary interpretation. To finish, I explore a key, but perhaps under-represented, aspect of literary study, which is theory relating to the purpose of stories in human life and development.

3.1 *Subject*: the philosophy and purpose of literature

3.1.1 A theoretical overview

Questions about literary *interpretation*, which can be otherwise framed as literary *knowledge* (Davies et al, 2022), have distinguished and divided literary studies as an academic discipline for decades. The complex and contested nature of literary knowledge is not properly addressed by policy documents relating to English teaching or, according to empirical research explored in a later section in this chapter, fully understood by practising English teachers. Yet, as Eaglestone (2020) argues, the 'philosophical plumbing' of literary study is there under the floorboards of every English classroom and leaving the pipes unattended is liable to cause a flood. In fact, he believes there is already 'something… rotten in the state of English'

(p. 8) and the only sensible response is to pull up the floorboards and have a good look at what lies beneath.

When an English teacher organises a class discussion about Lady Macbeth's character she operates, perhaps inadvertently, within a certain theoretical framework. On the one hand, if she aims to help pupils to generate their own ideas about Lady Macbeth's character based on the text, it might indicate one perspective; if, on the other hand, she wants to teach her pupils that Lady Macbeth is, for example, ambitious, it could suggest another. The difference between the two is the difference between viewing textual interpretation as a process of constructing individual meanings (to sit comfortably alongside others) or as discovering or understanding one true meaning of a text. This is a fault-line in literary interpretation and draws attention to the importance of the underlying principles applied to any reading of a text; upon what *literary theory* is the reader drawing? To consider this, it is necessary to briefly explore literary theory.

The genesis of literary study is biblical hermeneutics (Smith, 2021), which is the pursuit of finding and sharing meaning of the Bible. This was a pursuit of the word of God, one true meaning, and it absorbed much scholarly attention for millennia. In the nineteenth century, however, after the Enlightenment, German 'higher criticism' re-interpreted the scriptures by comparing them to similar world narratives, subjecting the Bible to critical readings that would have previously been considered

sacrilegious (Brewton, n.d.; Stewart, 2018). From this, literary theory emerged, opening the door to a range of ways of interpreting texts. One of the most important outcomes of this shift was the concept of the hermeneutic circle - attributed to Friedrich Schleiermacher's work in the early nineteenth century (George, 2021; Mambrol, 2016). In describing interpretation as circular, this was as significant then as it is now in terms of conceptualising a process that might otherwise be understood as vertical (George, 2021; Bernstein, 2018); after all, we still tend to represent the acquisition of knowledge as a process of 'building' as if we move from one stable layer to the next, without looking down. Instead, hermeneutic circularity acknowledges the process of moving from the whole to the component parts and back in order to develop knowledge that is 'deeper…richer… fuller' rather than 'higher' (George, 2021). The circularity means that: 'conclusions reached and knowledge gained are never static or secure, but simply the basis for the next question' (Smith, 2021, p. 57).

This concept of circularity, then, once identified, helped stake a claim for interpretation as fundamentally different from knowledge acquisition in the scientific sense. With the circle comes motion, dialogue, reflection and review, as the parts and the whole are compared and integrated by the interpreter. Most importantly, this process, being circular, is never complete - a fact that renders it quite distinct from common understanding of the infinitive 'to know'. In terms of literary theory, this ultimately opened up the field by offering alternatives to biblical hermeneutics and the pursuit of one 'true' meaning. Instead, there flourished a 'site

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of theories' (Brewton, n.d.) which can be seen as falling into two camps: on one side, those more traditional theories that 'held to the view that the study of literature has an objective body of knowledge under its scrutiny' (Brewton, n.d.) and, on the other, those that call into 'serious question the objective referent of literary studies' (Brewton, n.d.). The former 'camp', in its adherence to an 'objective body of knowledge', includes theories that fixate on either the author's intentions or the text itself to stabilise the knowledge-base. The latter 'camp', on the other hand, strikes a more relativist position, foregrounding the place of the individual reader and/or the contingent nature of readings in a certain time and place. It is an ontological rather than epistemological divide and, as such, runs deep, as Weaver (2006) notes:

> The fact that many things can be said [about a text]
> constitutes something like a slippery slope to some. It
> is the *fear* of the slippery slope that stymies many from
> taking the hermeneutic path [my italics] (p. 73).

The distinctive ontology and epistemology of interpretation lies at the heart of one of the most influential achievements in the field of hermeneutics: Gadamer's (1975/2004) *Truth and Method*. Here, Gadamer (1975/2004) questions the privileging of scientific modes of knowing, arguing that their 'methods' are insufficient for exploring artistic 'truth' (Smith, 2021; Davey, 2016). For Gadamer (1975/2004), art is not a 'copy', in the Kantian sense; it is a presentation rather than a representation of reality (Davey, 2016) and consequently becomes a separate 'ontological event' (Smith, 2021, p. 61). This 'event' is much more than its creator or the context of its creation: it is a *fusion* of creation, creator and beholder, inviting

each to see beyond their immediate understandings and concerns to new 'horizons' (Gadamer, 1975/2004, p. 304). This fuses new, 'inexhaustible' meanings (Gadamer, 1974/2004, p. 366) because of the dynamic and complex interplay at the heart of the event. This process is necessarily mobile, arguing against any reduction of meaning based on the creator's *intention* or the contextual circumstances of the creation (Knights, 2017). Like Ricoeur (1997), Gadamer believes this way of reading art renders it lifeless (Weaver, 2006), revealing a 'disastrous' (p. 75) misunderstanding of the nature of art itself. For Gadamer (1975/2004), artworks are artworks precisely because of the abundance of meanings they provoke; limitless meanings that are categorically *not* limited to the reconstruction of an author's intention:

> ...it remains the same work whose fullness of meaning is realised in the changing process of understanding, just as it is the same history whose meaning is constantly in the process of being defined. The hermeneutical reduction to the author's meaning is just as inappropriate as the reduction of historical events to the intentions of their protagonists (p. 366)

The fluidity and dynamism of Gadamer's (1975/2004) conception of interpretation is recognised by a range of literary scholars. Literature, Eaglestone (2019) claims, 'is more like a verb than a noun' (p. 5); a literary text, says Iser (1978/1994) is 'dynamic happening... not a definable entity' (p. 23). Definitions, argues Eaglestone (2019), are a preoccupation of the sciences, not the arts, and it is 'exactly this quality of being indefinable' (p. 22) that characterises literature. 'Any belief', asserts Eagleton (2011), 'that the study of literature is the study of a stable, well-definable entity...can be abandoned as a chimera' (p. 9). The student of literature cannot

expect to 'possess knowledge and presume it to be complete' (Greene, 2000, p. 53) because the questions are fundamentally different: 'Science', notes Dillard (1988), 'does not ask what a honeybee *means* [my italics]' (p.140) and calculating the result of an equation 'is not the same sort of question as 'do you understand the poem?' (Eaglestone, 2020, p. 9)'. Even compared to subjects outside of the scientific realm, literary study is peculiarly open. Other pursuits, even in the humanities or social sciences, might seek transparency or consensus, to avoid doubt or uncertainty at all costs, but literature is 'alive to ambiguity [and the] simultaneous presence of many meanings' (ibid, p. 45).

Whilst this, to some, makes literary knowledge exciting, it can be unsettling. Dillard (1988) analogises it as walking on a tightrope: scientists stay upright by looking fixedly ahead but interpreters unsettle themselves by constantly glancing down at their feet. The literary critic, says Cohen (2022), like the psychoanalyst, 'must keep constant watch over her claim to know', operating as she is in a paradigm that develops knowledge through a process of scrutiny and 'perpetual suspicion' (p. 175). For Young (2016), the process is capable of generating a kind of Heideggerian angst as it relates so closely to, indeed seems to confront, the unknowable aspects of life, the infinite mystery of the human condition. Fixating on one meaning of a text based on the author's intentions, is, for him, a profound response to that angst; he draws on Foucault's idea of the 'author function' to explore the misleading comfort in seeking answers, in saying: 'the work just means *this*, end of story [author's italics]' (Young, 2016, p. 22). This, being nothing more than a response to existential threat,

is to misunderstand literary interpretation altogether.

It, nevertheless, seems to be exactly this 'end of story', that drives the work of Hirsch (1967), a literary theorist who is enjoying a resurgence of interest and influence, particularly in terms of school literary study (Bleiman, 2020; Eaglestone, 2020). Hirsch's (1967) *Validity in Interpretation* is an argument for consensus in the field: for establishing one meaning and sticking to it. Literary knowledge, for Hirsch (1967), is not distinct from scientific knowledge. Interpretation is, in fact, a quasi-scientific process of *discovering* meaning through hypothesis and test, after which a consensus can be achieved. The meaning awaiting discovery is firmly that of the author's; Hirsch (1967) rails about the 'radical historicism' that reduces the literary text to 'what it means to us today' (p viii), the result of which is a 'chaotic democracy of "readings"' (p. 5). He seeks, instead, order in the chaos. Without it, he argues, the discipline has no claim to 'genuine knowledge' (p. ix) and the teacher of literature no authority as the 'preserver of a heritage and the conveyer of knowledge' (p. 4). For Hirsch (1967), in direct contrast to those reviewed above, the literary text is unquestionably stable, 'an entity which always remains the same from one moment to the next' (p. 46) with one fixed meaning embedded by the author. This way, once discovered, the literary community can claim to 'know' without the burden of perpetual suspicion (Cohen, 2022).

Hirsch's (1967) influence on literature teaching in secondary schools at the time of

writing (Bleiman, 2020; Eaglestone, 2020; Elliot, 2021) is a significant factor in the faulty pipework, according to Eaglestone (2020). Hirsch's (1967) arguments are diametrically opposed to a whole suite of literary theories, themselves differing, because he operates from within a different paradigm altogether. Whilst Hirsch (1967) values stability in academic disciplines (and authority in teachers), literary study has long embraced Keats's 'negative capability', the ability to be in 'uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason' (Keats, 1817, quoted in Mulroony, 2003, p. 230). Mitchell (2021) describes this as 'metaxu', metaphysical 'inbetweenness' (p. 808), which relies on remaining open, unsure, and in the grey areas. It is a vertiginous position but the height does not diminish if you refuse to look down; in fact, any 'irritable reaching' is likely to overturn you altogether. This is the distinct ontological and epistemological place that literary study occupies in the academic spectrum, almost as far from 'scientism' (Eaglestone, 2020, p. 12) as it is possible to be.

Rather than attempting to render literary knowledge more science-like, it seems fair to suggest that it would be more fruitful to focus on clear delineation of its true form: circular, subject to revision, reliant on interaction and, in many ways, *personal*. In the next section, I explore this further by considering literature which foregrounds the reader in the act of interpretation. This is an important dimension of the 'subject' part of the CT space because, as later sections will show, it is connected to teachers' perspectives on literature teaching.

Like Dillard (1988), Young (2016) compares reading to balancing on a tightrope 'between sobriety and play, I and thou, text and context - all while trying to enjoy the view' (p. 24). The coincidence of their shared metaphor - reading-as-balancing - speaks to the delicate but dynamic interaction, the motion, which creates the circular shape of the interpretative process. As suggested by Young's (2016) words, there is constant to-ing and fro-ing between the different factors at play in interpretation and, crucially, this movement mandates dialogue between those components: it is the *inter* of interpretation. That dialogue and interaction are the bedrocks of interpretation is significant because it recognises the importance of all the different components - 'I and thou, text and context' - including a previously neglected component: the reader.

As Rosenblatt (1994) famously identifies, approaches to textual interpretation until the second half of the twentieth century tended to focus exclusively on either the author, as in traditional literary theory, or the text, as in New Criticism. By contrast, the reader 'remain[ed] in the shadows, taken for granted, to all intents and purposes invisible' (p. 1). Yet, as Rosenblatt's (1994) research demonstrates, the consciousness of the individual reader makes of the text a unique shape; its 'linguistic symbols' (p. 20) resonate differently according to readers' predilections and past experiences. The text is not lost in this - individual readings are *regulated* by the text - but Rosenblatt shows convincingly that, whilst the text is not lost,

neither can the reader be bracketed out of the undertaking. For Rosenblatt (1994), interpretation is a *transaction* between reader and author which is, crucially, an 'active process' (p. 20). It is, in fact, profoundly dynamic; she describes it as a 'live circuit between the reader and "the text"' which brings the text 'into being' (p. 14). There are similarities, here, to Sartre (1967) who sees the reader as the text's life-giver: if a reader is 'inattentive, tired, stupid, or thoughtless' (p. 53) then the work will not 'awaken' and remains lifeless. However, for Rosenblatt (1994) the energy derives from the *transaction* rather than just the reader: the nature of a circuit is that it depends on all components equally. Likewise, she uses the circuit analogy to demonstrate how contingent and irreplicable the transaction is, dependent on a 'specific reader and a specific text at a specific time and place: change any of these, and there occurs a different circuit, a different event - a different poem' (p. 14). The text, then, is not a permanent, stable unit but 'an event in time' (p. 12).

Although Rosenblatt (1994) does not cite him, there are parallels with Gadamer (1975/2004), for whom interpretation is, likewise, an *event*. Like Rosenblatt's (1994), Gadamer's (1975/2004) event is electrically charged: it is sparked by a 'fusion of horizons' (p. 304) where the consciousness of the author and the consciousness of the reader meet. The animating force implied by the electricity metaphor is significant; it communicates the energy and creativity of the process of literary reading. However, the metaphor does not quite do justice to the *agency* of the components involved. For Gadamer, art addresses its audience directly to provoke the process of interpretation (Davey, 2016); Sartre (1967) conceives it as

an *appeal* by the artwork and Iser (1978/1994) sees the artwork as the 'spur' (Iser, 1978/1994, p. x) to interaction with the reader. Once this profoundly agentic move is made by the artwork, the reader, likewise, must act with agency to 'will this strange world into being' (Young, 2016, p. 3). There is hard work in this. Sartre (1967) credited it to be 'as new and original an act as the first invention [the writing]' (p. 53). Gadamer, too, stresses 'the creative effort ... required in generating the interplay between the positions and making the hermeneutic circle 'work'' (Smith, 2021, p. 73). There is volition here - it is a decisive act on the part of the reader to 'ignore or investigate, enrich or evade' the 'dark marks on paper' (Young, 2016, p. 3) with the animating force of interpretation. Viriginia Woolf (1932/2020), after all, claimed that 'independence...is the most important quality a reader can possess' (p. 23). The reader must act on her own freedom to meet that of the author's (Sartre, 1967; Greene, 1995; Young 2016) which renders the activity profoundly agentic. In Sartre's (1967) words: 'One does not write for slaves' (p. 69).

If this force is agentic and decisive, it is also fundamentally *imaginative*. Imagination is an often-neglected aspect of cognition (Warnock, 1978; Egan & Nadaner, 1988; Smith, 1992; Greene, 1995) but the 'willing into being' required in reading a literary text is an act of imagination. In fact, according to Smith (2019), it is the *gaps* that texts leave for 'readerly imaginations' (p. 2) that defines their literariness - while an information textbook is designed to avoid ambiguities, a literary text thrives on them, leaving space for the reader's imaginative response. With reference to the 'domains' of imagination that I constructed in my 2019 publication on the subject,

interpretation relates to all three: the aesthetic, the cognitive and the affective (Thomas, 2019). The aesthetic domain refers to the *artistry* inherent in imagination which is evident in Sartre's (1967) sense of reading as *invention* as well as in the alert, 'wide-awake' attitude literary reading demands (Gadamer, 1975/2004; Greene, 2014). The cognitive domain refers to the way imagination generates alternatives or possibilities in the mind, which is vital when texts are understood as 'conceptually inexhaustible' (Gadamer, 1977/1986, p. 71) and when meaning is created anew with each new 'fusion' or 'event in time'. Imagination is vital, too, for another cognitive element of interpretation: piecing together the different aspects of the text - words, self, context, feelings etc – to bring them into coherence, corresponding to Kant's view that imagination is a cognitive function which unifies disparate parts into a meaningful whole (Thomas, 2019).

Finally, the affective domain refers to imagination's relationship to *empathy*, the human ability to consider perspectives other than your own. Indeed, Gadamer's (1975/2004) fusion of horizons is reliant on this form of imagination, on the imaginative act of seeing through another's eyes (Smith, 2021). Imagination is, to Greene (2000), 'becoming a friend of someone else's mind' (p. 38). Taking a range of perspectives and drawing them into a rich understanding of the text is, as Iser (1978/1994) states, at the heart of interpretation:

> As the reader passes through the various perspectives
> offered by the text and relates the different views and
> patterns to one another he sets the work in motion, and
> so sets himself in motion too (p. 21).

And this is key: it is not just the text that is 'in motion' but the reader, too. Iser (1978/1994) is not alone in understanding the hermeneutic process as intensely personally transformative. Gadamer conceptualises it in terms of travel, seeing the reader as a traveller, 'return[ing] home with new experiences' (Gadamer, 1975/2004, p. 445), with altered perspectives and expanded horizons. Greene (2014), too, claims that 'through the arts, your experience is enlarged and enhanced - you see more, feel more, understand more' (p. 124). Rosenblatt (1994) views the experience as not so much as the text pushing the reader outwards to different vistas but the reader drawing the text in, to become, 'part of the ongoing stream of his life experience, to be reflected on from any angle important to him as a human being' (p. 12).

Reading, then, is a form of experience (Dillard, 1988; Rosenblatt, 1994; Young, 2016), full, embodied and connected to the social world. As such, it can be seen as a way of developing aspects of Self just as much as meeting academic expectations. Benefits of reading that are less formal - the purpose and power of stories for human meaning-making - are important aspects of literary study, regardless of whether they are acknowledged in formal academic settings. As later sections will show, implicit understanding of the purpose of stories in human life forms a clear part of teachers' understanding of their subject. Therefore, I explore this vital aspect of the CT space in literature teaching in the following section.

3.1.3 *From cradle to grave*: the purpose and power of stories

'From cradle to grave', notes Swirski (2007), 'we tell stories with hardly a pause' (p. 1). Fictional representations of reality - stories - are understood by a range of scholars to be fundamental to human life and development (Barthes, 1977; Moyles, 1994; Gottschall, 2013). The question of why this might be taxes many, with proposals ranging from stories being an otherwise useless byproduct of imagination (Gottschall, 2013) to being a fundamental tool necessary for processing language (Armstrong, 2020) or building mental or cognitive capabilities (Boyd, 2009) - in other words, learning.

The pedagogical dimension of stories is broadly understood: a story is 'the mind's flight simulator' (Oatley, 2016, p. 619), 'an ancient virtual reality technology' (Gottschall, 2013, p. 59) which generates knowledge without the risks or costs of, often painful, first-hand experience. Children's pretend play, which is generally acknowledged to be a serious matter of learning and development (Moyles, 1994), is an example of this ancient technology in action. As Gotschall (2013) demonstrates by drawing on a range of empirical psychology research (see Paley, 1991, 2009, 2014; Sutton-Smith, 1986) children learn how to navigate a range of practical, social and moral problems using their innate story grammar, generating simulations around a range of 'knotty problem[s]' (Gottschall, 2013, p. 49) - always the heart of any story (Whaley, 1981) - to build their understanding of what works best. Reaching maturity, the stories become more intricate, relying on 'complexity of

representation and response' (John, 2015, p. 290) to prompt reflection and learning in more sophisticated adult minds. Literary fiction, then, offers adults the opportunity that pretend play offers to children - the chance to pursue the question, 'how should one live?' (Nussbaum, 2015, p. 241).

For learning to take place, the nature of the stories is important. Firstly, fictional, as opposed to non-fictional, accounts are arguably most powerful, as Brudney (2015) demonstrates by drawing comparisons between fictional stories and psychological case studies. Case studies might aim to generate rich, qualitative understanding but, being real, their subjects' 'existence transcends the words of the study' (p. 302) which puts limits on the claims that can be made. By contrast, a fictional world is all there - 'I can know and respond to everything that Emma Bovary is' (p. 302) - so is limited by, and contained within, the words on the page, producing the paradoxical effect of releasing those words to limitless perspectives and multiple possibilities of knowledge and understanding. It is a 'whole' that we can hold up against 'our own experience and our intuitions' (Nussbaum, 2015, p. 245) in order to advance our understanding of what it is to live.

Vitally, it is specifically fiction, rather than non-fiction, that has been shown by cognitive science to act as a simulation tool in the human mind (Oatley, 2016). Neuroimaging data demonstrates that reading about a fictional character undertaking an action activates the same regions of the brain as would be activated

by the action itself (Speer et al, 2009; Gottschall, 2013; Robinson, 2015; Young, 2016); although readers are aware it is fiction, the brain processes the story as real (Gottschall, 2012). Further, it is *literary* fiction that has the most impact: brain scanners show that cliched, well-used metaphors fail to activate the brain's motor system in the same way as they did when fresh (Oatley, 2011). This echoes Bruner's (2003) conviction that, whilst narrative is central to human understanding, banal narratives do nothing to excite the interpretative imagination; more complex or surprising narratives, *literary* narratives, are required to engage and extend the human mind.

These are therefore strong arguments to suggest that stories, specifically fictional and literary stories, are a key method of learning for human beings. This learning, however, is not necessarily academic learning. Instead, the learning could be described as *personal development* and this, inevitably, has moral and ethical dimensions. Whilst remaining mindful of Young's (2016) sceptical take on the scientific data ('bastards enjoy fiction too' (p. 11)), studies do suggest that readers of literary fiction demonstrate greater empathy and more advanced social skills (Johnson et al, 2013; Dodell-Feder and Tamir, 2018), even when factors like the likelihood of empathetic people reading in the first place are controlled for (Oatley, 2016). This makes sense if we consider the research that suggests that, by cognitively processing fictional actions as real, literary fiction literally puts us in another's shoes, neurologically speaking (Robinson, 2015). The brain is activated, the heart quickened and emotions stimulated by the circumstances of a fictional

character (Smith, 1992; Oatley, 2016); in short, empathy is generated. As empathy has long been treasured as a benefit of reading by a range of thinkers, academics and writers (Coles, 1989; Smith, 1992; Greene, 2000; Eaglestone, 2017; 2019), this affirmation from cognitive science is welcome. The *effects* of this well-developed empathy and theory-of-mind have also long been recognised, with studies suggesting the perspective-taking involved in reading overcomes prejudice and increases compassion (Hakemulder, 2000). Reading, stated Henry James, is the 'civic use of the imagination' (Nussbaum, 2015, p. 264), a form of 'social glue' agrees Gottschall (2013, p. 28); 'as if', says a character in Alan Bennett's *The History Boys* about reading, 'a hand has come out and taken yours' (quoted in Eaglestone, 2019, p. 7).

This suggests, therefore, that literature is a means by which human beings make connections and refine their understanding of each other: holding hands is a loving and unifying gesture. It also, importantly, suggests support and emotional succour - parts of human interaction likely to generate wellbeing. The correlation between wellbeing and reading is gaining attention, possibly prompted by a widely-recognised crisis of poor mental health (Dowrick et al, 2012; Williams, 2022). In 2016, in a large-scale study on habits of rest, reading topped the list of activities that participants felt promoted their relaxation and peace (Hammond and Lewis, 2016). More recently, a 2022 study by reading charity *The Reader* found that three-quarters of their respondents saw a positive link between reading and good mental health (Jeynes, 2022). This has prompted some bandwagon-jumping, as if reading 'can thus

be dose-prescribed in much the same way as, say, an antidepressant or a vitamin supplement' (Carney and Robertson, 2022, p. 24-25) but, nevertheless, empirical studies do broadly support the contention that reading promotes positive mental health (Johnson et al, 2013; Dodell-Feder and Tamir, 2018; Carney and Robertson, 2022). Crucially, the effects are closely related to *reflection* on reading in social settings, rather than the reading itself; in other words, it is the interaction with other readers that makes the difference (Carney and Robertson, 2022).

The *subject* dimension of the CT space in school literary study is therefore rich and multi-dimensional. There is no consensus on its theoretical underpinnings but there is a strong tradition of hermeneutic circularity in literary study which embraces endless knowledge generation (Gadamer, 1975/2004) driven by a unique combination of reader, context and text in any reading of a work of literature (Gadamer, 1975/2004; Rosenblatt, 1994). Literary interpretation is, therefore, always subject to revision and this is as unsettling as it is exhilarating, giving literary study a distinctive nature. Literary interpretation is also an agentic and fundamentally imaginative act. Further, a consideration of the subject element of the CT space is, I argue, incomplete without taking into account the way that human beings use stories to make sense of the world, giving school literary study a broader purpose.

In the next section of this chapter, I narrow my focus to consider curricular

frameworks related to school literary study, including influential schools of thought which shaped it before any standardised curriculum was in place.

3.2 *Curriculum: reports, schools of thought and standardised curricula*

The matter of the English curriculum, of which the study of literature is a central part (Goodwyn 2012), has generated fierce debate since the very start of discrete English teaching in the early twentieth century, the threads of which can still be discerned on EduTwitter today. Across the literature, the words used to describe the English curriculum are borrowed from the same lexical field: English teaching is 'an ideological weapon' (Davies, 1996, p. 31), in a 'battle' for the curriculum (Marshall, 2000, p.4) involving 'endless disputes' and 'conflicts' (Ball, 1982, p. 1). Most ascribe these tensions to the fact that the scope of school English is broad and its boundaries unclear (Abbs, 1976; Ball, 1982; Davies, 1996; Marshall, 2000), a fact which renders the concept of 'English' malleable. English, claims John Dixon (1975), '… is a quicksilver among metals - mobile, living and elusive' (p. 1) or, says G.C.Wilson (1964), it is a 'sack of snakes' (quoted in Ellis, 2006, p. 6).

In this section, I explore significant moments in the development of a universal literary education in England. These moments have left indelible marks on the culture and content of the literature curriculum, still identifiable today. I end with an overview of the current curricular landscape in literature teaching in England.

3.2.1 The beginnings: building an 'Empire of English', progressively?

Literary study is just one of a range of aspects of subject English, which also includes grammar, writing, vocabulary, comprehension, media, speaking and listening and others. English literature, nevertheless, dominates conceptions of the subject, is at the heart of the identity of its teachers, and enjoys an uncontested place in the curriculum in England (West, 1994; Goodwyn, 2012). This is extraordinary given that, prior to the twentieth century, English literature was not taught at all, and neither was English recognised as a distinct school subject. That things have changed so profoundly speaks to the enduring power of the early advocates of subject English (Mansworth and Giovanelli, 2021) - initially, the nineteenth-century poet, Matthew Arnold, and the panel of the 1921 Newbolt Report into the teaching of English in England and, later, the Cambridge literary scholar, F. R. Leavis.

Matthew Arnold was not just a prominent poet and cultural critic in Victorian England, he was also a Schools' Inspector from 1851 to 1886. In this role, he witnessed first-hand the 'payment-by-results' policy of the time, which judged (and financially rewarded) schools according to their pupils' results (Ball, 1982; Poulson, 1998; Marshall, 2000). Arnold noted the narrowing, chimeric effects of this policy in his General Report For The Year 1869:

> The circle of the children's reading has thus been
> narrowed and impoverished all the year for the sake of

a *result* at the end of it, and the result is an illusion
(quoted in Parrinder, 1994, p. 25).

To Arnold, this 'narrowed' practice resulted in moral and spiritual deprivation for pupils. His suggested antidote was to open up education to English literature, to the 'best that has been thought or said' (Arnold, 1889, p. viii), to provide for the lower classes a similar educational experience to the study of the Classics in public schools (Poulson, 1998). Like Wordsworth and Coleridge before him, he believed literature should be available to readers of all classes as a spiritual elixir, protecting the heart, the imagination and the inner-life from the productivity and profit-margins of industrialised society. These convictions would come to form what has been later recognised as the Romantic foundations of subject English (Reid, 2002; McGuinn and Stevens, 2004; Stevens, 2012); an important part, therefore, of the curricular framing of English.

Arnold's convictions, however, did not gain traction until decades later when, after the First World War, fraught questions were raised about class division and social justice (Mathieson, 1976). In this context, a panel of writers and critics were commissioned to conduct a report on English teaching in England, headed by Sir Henry Newbolt and thereafter known as The Newbolt Report (Newbolt, 1921). The report is significant and continues to be much-cited and researched (Aldridge and Green, 2019; Cuthbert, 2019a; Manual and Carter, 2019; Perry, 2019; Roberts, 2019; Smith, 2019; Green, 2021), because it 'built the scaffolding for the school subject of English as we know it today' (Perry, 2019, p. 240). On this there is more or less consensus: The Newbolt Report is the skeleton of subject English or, indeed, the

plumbing under the floorboards (Eaglestone, 2020), and so is worthy of extended attention. The report explored the full range of English - language, grammar, oracy - but argued most forcefully for literature. The arguments included: that literature is an *experience*, not a set of facts, and should be taught with passion, imagination and sensitivity by enthusiastic teachers; that teaching literature should start with the child and should aim to shape the 'whole child'; that reading literature leads to personal, spiritual, aesthetic growth; that literature has the power to unite different social classes in the name of a shared national heritage and identity.

Arnold's influence on the panel of the Newbolt Report is widely acknowledged (Mathieson, 1976; Ball, 1982; Poulson, 1998; Marshall, 2000), as is Wordsworth's, which Reid (2002) argues is even stronger. In line with this influence, the report argued for the *experience* of literature over any kind of formal learning resulting from it. English, asserted the panel, should be 'treated as an art, a means of creative expression, a record of human experience' (Newbolt, 1921, p. 11) as well as the means for, 'the gaining of personal experience, an end in itself and, at the same time, an equipment for the understanding of life' (ibid, p. 19). This is a clear description of movement between the 'small picture' of the literary text and the 'bigger picture' of understanding life in general which, with reference to the last section on the *subject* element of the CT space, indicates that hermeneutic circularity was at the heart of the first calls for a literature education in England, as was recognition that stories are important to human beings for learning about the social world. This is particularly evident in the panel's argument that literature is:

> the transmission, not of book learning, but of the influence of personality and the experience of human life. The distinction here made between book learning and true education is of the first importance (Newbolt, 1921, pp. 16-17).

These words are extraordinarily significant: literary study was seen by the Newbolt panel not as formal education, of 'book learning', but, instead, as a more honourable, 'true' educational experience to make meaning of life, suggesting the important part that informal or non-academic learning plays in the 'plumbing' of school literary study.

The panel's vision of *how* literary study might be conducted in England's classrooms reflected this Romantic sense of educational purpose. In suitably aureate language, the panel stated that:

> in dealing with literature the voyage of the mind should be broken as little as possible by the examination of obstacles and the analysis of the element on which the explorer is floating (ibid, p. 11).

It is, therefore, the experience, or the 'journey' that matters: the panel's vision was of children enthralled by a story, lost in the world created by a text, soaking in the experience without interruption. Hardly surprising, then, that the panel was sharply critical of the 'scientific study of the language' (p. 11) - parsing long sections of text - which they observed in Classics teaching. This, they argued, fails to engage all but the most eager pupils and is convenient only for the teacher, 'involving less personal effort on his own part' (p. 11). Instead, they strongly argued for full and lively emotional engagement on the part of the teacher:

to convey anything of the feeling and thought which are the life of literature the teacher must have been touched by them himself and be moved afresh by the act of communicating the touch to others (ibid, p.10-11).

In this vein, the panel warned, in the strongest possible terms, about the 'ruinous' (ibid, p. 16) consequence of failing to find teachers with the 'insight and enthusiasm' (p. 16) to direct literary study. Significantly, given the current context in education, which will be discussed later, the panel particularly urged against teaching that relies on 'conventional appreciations [and] historical details' (p. 16) as means of exploring a literary text and cautioned that, without due diligence, literary study is at risk of being, 'smothered by the demand for definite measurable results, especially the passing of examinations' (p. 55).

Instead of fixating on historical details or examination results, the panel proposed that literary teaching should be driven by a need to inspire pupils to engage in their reading, starting by choosing texts that might appeal to them. 'The teacher', wrote the panel, 'who means the effect of his work to be lasting will start from what the children themselves enjoy' (p. 84). Enjoyment and emotional engagement with literature was important to the panel as vital for the 'full development of mind and character' (p. 181), a conviction which laid the foundation stones of the *personal growth* model of English teaching (Bousted, 2002; Perry, 2019; Mansworth and Giovanelli, 2021). The panel's conception of personal growth through literature was, in many ways, a spiritual quest to counter the damaging effects of industrialisation (further evidence of their Romantic bent). Teaching literature was a way, wrote the

panel, of wresting control of 'the nation's souls' (p. 253) away from business and industry. Literature was 'one of the chief temples of the human spirit, in which all should worship' (p. 259) and promotes, 'the love of truth, the love of beauty, and the love of righteousness' (p. 21). The quasi-religious language even extended to describing teachers as 'missionaries' who must engage in 'propaganda work, organisation and the building up of a staff of assistant missionaries' (ibid, p. 259).

This religious imagery is significant. It might seem just further evidence of the panel's wistful and romantic concept of literary study but, in fact, it reveals a harder truth. At the time of the report, consensus on religious truths was being undermined by political movements and bitter wartime experience alike. The panel explicitly refered to this: we 'now know', they write, 'that the shattered temple of Peace has to be rebuilt more nobly and the fabric of society has to be reconstructed upon more generous lines' (Newbolt, 1921, quoted in Mathieson, 1976, p.219). Post-war England was a traumatised place and established power structures were being questioned. Russia was in the grip of a revolution and this revolution was felt as a significant threat to the ruling classes in Britain. In response, the report argued for 'an education system which prepares children to become encultured into a single model of British culture' (Perry, 2019, p. 243) with the express purpose of maintaining the status-quo. A quasi-religious approach to literature was key to this: religion unites by inspiring an emotional attachment to its tenets; the Newbolt panel used literature 'as a tool to develop emotional commitment to Empire and Nation' (Green and Cormack, 2008, p. 265). As West (1994) notes:

> The induction of the masses into the literary heritage would serve to heal social discord and increase understanding as to why things were as they were and had to remain so (p. 129).

The panel's use of religious metaphors furthered a particular framing of literature as timeless, transcendent and neutral which had the effect of minimising the political dimensions of a text. The combination of elitism, shown through the palpable fear of the working classes, and nationalism has provoked much criticism of the report (Rosen, 1973; West, 1994; Green and Cormack, 2008; Perry, 2019), destabilising its reputation as a 'great achievement of liberal thinking' (Rosen, 1973, p. 47).

Arguably, a similar combination of progressive thinking and conservatism is discernible in the work of the next key figure to influence the field, Cambridge academic and critic, F. R. Leavis, whose work constitutes the Cambridge School (Marshall, 2000). Like the Newbolt panel, Leavis harboured a fervent, quasi-religious belief that the nation should be culturally literate (Marshall, 2000; McGuinn and Stevens, 2004), also positioning teachers as missionary figures who should be 'sensitive, imaginative, perceptive, sympathetic, creative, reflective and responsive' (quoted in Ball, Kenny and Gardiner, 1990, p. 54). Like Arnold (1889), Leavis (1960) believed in the importance and power of high culture and he played a significant part in collating the 'the best that has been thought and said' (Arnold, 1889, p. viii) through his 'Great Tradition' (Leavis, 1960). High culture was important to Leavis in itself but also as a means to fight against what he saw as the threat of popular/mass culture, 'low' culture, which he wished pupils to be able to recognise

and reject (Marshall, 2000). This unambiguously elitist perspective has, according to a range of scholars, persisted in the English curriculum ever since (Ball, Kenny & Gardiner, 1990; Marshall, 2000; McGuinn and Stevens, 2004).

Easy as it would be to dismiss Leavis on these grounds, there is more to his position than just ivory-tower snobbery. Having witnessed Hitler's rise to power in the 1930s (McGuinn and Stevens, 2004), Leavis possessed real and grounded understanding of the power dynamics created by the modern world and its media. In fact, Leavis's concern about the mass media's 'terrifying apparatus of propaganda' (Leavis, 1943, quoted in McGuinn and Stevens, 2004, p. 54) has particular resonance in an era of fake news and the exploitation of social media for political ends. It is hard to argue with his conviction that only an 'intelligent, educated and morally responsible public' can 'forestall or check' (ibid) manipulative use of language in the media. This, for Leavis (1943), was the purpose of teaching literature, to help citizens to 'discriminate and resist' (quoted in McGuinn and Stevens, 2004, p. 54) - a call for critical thinking that would resonate with even the most culturally egalitarian teacher of literature today.

As with the Newbolt Report (Newbolt, 1921), then, the Cambridge School seems to embody a kind of progressivism – challenging given perspectives and working to democratise literary education – whilst simultaneously, perhaps oxymoronically, acting to maintain the status quo through privileging 'high' over 'low' culture. This speaks to enduring tensions in school literary study which, according to West

(1994), are masked by the 'deceptively reassuring' status of literature in the school curriculum which 'disguises substantial ideological differences.' (p. 124). West (1994) refers to more differences than just the unwieldy mix of conservative and progressive values inherent in the 'scaffolding' (Perry, 2019, p. 240) of school literary study, but this is certainly part of it. Here, in the beginning of the story of literature teaching in secondary schools, the foundation was laid for the challenging curricular terrain that novice English teachers must now navigate.

3.2.2 Revisions: Rosen and the London Association of Teachers of English

If the aftermath of the First World War provided the conditions in which calls for English literature in schools could be heard, then it was the fallout of the Second World War that prompted a major re-thinking of this position - and West's (1994) 'substantial ideological differences' (p. 124) rose to the surface. The decade that saw the introduction of National Health Service and the Welfare State also saw the inception of the London Association for the Teaching of English (LATE), which was founded in 1947 and which ultimately established an educational school of thought has been referred to since as the London School (Poulson, 1998; Marshall, 2000), or the Socio-linguistic School (Abbs, 1982). The development of the school was due to the pioneering work of key figures Harold Rosen, John Dixon, Douglas Barnes, and James Britton and was inspired by both a rediscovery of Vygotsky and the founders' experiences in London's ethnically diverse classrooms (Marshall, 2000).

In many ways, although not all, this school diverged significantly from the ideas of its predecessors. Whereas Arnold (1889) and the Newbolt Report (Newbolt, 1921) had operated on a deficiency model of the working classes, seeking to civilise them through a culture they saw as higher than their own (Ellis, 2006), the London School celebrated working-class culture. Culture, in fact, was defined not as the 'high art' of canonical literature but as pupils' language, experiences and values (Gibbons, 2017), to the extent that literature became 'little more than another manifestation of language' (Abbs, 1982, p. 21). Political dimensions of texts were confronted rather than minimised, opening them up to 'politically critical, oppositional perspective[s]' when reading (Westbrook et al, 2011, p.99) in recognition that there is no such thing as neutral language (and neither, we can add, a neutral reader). The London School, therefore, created or exposed ideological differences in English teaching that were such that Rosen, in 1975, claimed that, 'it is becoming increasingly difficult to refuse to take sides' (Rosen, 1975, p. 338).

Correspondingly, the London School's approach to pedagogy was profoundly child-centred. With respect for pupils' culture, came respect for their language, as Rosen (1975) noted, 'children do not come to school to be given language but arrive with it as a going concern' (p. 341). In his seminal *Growth through English,* Dixon (1975) criticised literature teaching that emphasises the culture of the *text* to the exclusion of the culture of the *child*. For Dixon (1975), a good teacher is a sensitive and enthusiastic reader of 'great' literature, as Newbolt (1921) and Leavis (1960) wished, but is also a sensitive reader of a child's 'personal culture' (Dixon, 1975, p.

3) in order to 'bring the two into a fruitful relationship' (ibid). *Growth through English*, and the Dartmouth literacy conference of 1966 which prompted it, has since been recognised as a landmark moment in English teaching, responsible for (re)articulating the importance of literature to pupils' *personal growth* and for drawing teachers' attention to Rosenblatt's transactional theory of literature (Smagorinsky, 2002).

3.2.3 Cox's models and standardised curricula

The Cox Report (DES, 1989) is at least as much a point of reference in the literature regarding English teaching as the Newbolt Report (Newbolt, 1921) and is often used as a frame for empirical research into English teachers' philosophies (discussed in the following section). The report was commissioned to advise on the English-specific content of the upcoming National Curriculum, the first standardised curriculum in England's history. To the astonishment of many who were aware of Cox's previous work (the 'Black Papers' that routinely eviscerated all elements of 'progressive' education), he produced what many considered to be a well-informed report, palatable to a broad range of teachers (Stubbs, 1989; Goodwyn, 1992) (although not to the Conservative government who had commissioned it). That Cox's report managed to please the politically-alert, even radical (Gibbons, 2016), body of English teachers at the time is recognised as a surprising achievement (McCabe, 2008).

It is the aspect of the report that has turned out to be its legacy that might explain his achievement: the inclusion of what have come to be called 'Cox's models'. These models were, as the report states, the 'different views of the subject' (p. 60) that Cox's committee recognised were present in the English teaching community at the time. These were: 1. A "personal growth" view, which 'emphasises…the role of literature in developing children's imaginative and aesthetic lives' 2. A "cross-curricular" view, which recognises English 'is both a subject and a medium of instruction for other subjects' 3. An "adult needs" view, which 'prepare[s] children for the language demands of adult life' 4. A "cultural heritage" view, 'an appreciation of those works of literature that have been widely regarded as amongst the finest in the language' 5. A "cultural analysis" view which 'help[s] children towards a critical understanding of the world and cultural environment in which they live' (DES, 1989, p. 60).

As Marshall (2000) points out, none of the other authors of the subject reports produced at the time felt it necessary to outline a similar range of views, a fact which underscores the unwieldy breadth of English. In fact, early commentators cited this in their critique of Cox's models: that these, smooth, evenly-weighted models were an inadequate representation of the tensions and contradictions within and between them - cultural heritage and critical analysis, for example, do not necessarily co-exist harmoniously, signifying quite divergent positions (Stubbs, 1989; Snow, 1991; Jones, 1992). Nevertheless, the reaction of English teachers, asserts Goodwyn (1992), suggests that Cox was, in fact, paying attention and had articulated

something that resonated. The models certainly proved to be useful for researchers, particularly Goodwyn (1992; 2021) himself, who has used them as a framework in a career-spanning body of research on English teachers' purposes and philosophies. This will be explored in the next section.

However, whatever harmony resulted from the Cox Report was short-lived. Much to the dismay of Cox himself (Cox, 1995), the government refused to fund the suggested changes, leaving much of it unimplemented (McCabe, 2008). By 1993, revisions were ordered and the standardised curriculum underwent its first reinvention in 1995. With the election of a Labour government in 1997 there came a second, inevitable, revision in 1999, followed by another in 2007. This lasted until the current iteration of the national curriculum, at the time of writing, which was introduced in 2014. Each amended framework garnered less support from teachers than the last (Goodwyn, 2012a). Perhaps the most controversial of all the iterations of the national curriculum, particularly in terms of literature specifically, is the current (Gibbons, 2016). It is to this that I turn next, using the next section to describe the current curricular landscape in English teaching.

3.2.4 The current context: 'a sack of snakes'

When the current English Programmes of Study (DfE, 2014), written under the direction of then-Education Secretary, Michael Gove, were introduced, they sparked considerable debate. They were designed along conservative lines, foregrounding a

traditional literary canon and mandating the teaching of Romantic poetry, Victorian novels and Shakespeare. These canonical texts had always been dominant in English classrooms but, under previous curricular frameworks, they had existed alongside a wider range of texts, for example those that are 'informed by the cultural context of the school and experiences of the pupils' (QCA, 2007, p. 70) as the 2007 English curriculum specified. Likewise, the 2014 Programmes of Study (DfE, 2014) removed the 2007 expectation that teachers introduce pupils to 'different cultures and traditions' (ibid, p. 71), instead stipulating an exclusive focus on British authors at Key Stage 4 which had the effect of removing staples *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Of Mice and Men* from the curriculum at this stage. This, perhaps, provoked the strongest reaction. The hashtag #mockingbird trended on Twitter and opposition was voiced by professors of literature and writers alike (Kennedy, 2014). Arguably, Gove's conception of literature as timeless and apolitical and his commitment to promoting a *national* literary heritage has strong parallels with the Newbolt Report (Newbolt, 1921) and Leavis (1960); the reaction against it perhaps demonstrates how influential the London School has been since.

To return to the snakes in the sack of English teaching, there are many and some - text choice, definitions of 'high' and 'low' culture - have already been discussed. However, at the time of writing, one 'snake' seems to dominate the debate: the issue of *knowledge* in English literature. Whilst this is partly to do with the Programmes of Study (DfE, 2014) due to Gove's open admiration of Young (2014) and Hirsch (1967; 1983) and their particular theories of knowledge (which will be discussed

later), it is more accurate to say that it is the current Education Inspection Framework (Ofsted, 2019) that has raised the debate to the top of the agenda. The current curriculum invites teachers to use literature to develop pupils 'culturally, emotionally, intellectually, socially and spiritually' (DfE, 2014, p. 3) and yet this does not seem to reflect the philosophy and practice promoted by the conceptualisation of knowledge in the Education Inspection Framework (Ofsted, 2019), supporting Goodwyn's (2012a) argument that written curricula are full of grandiose rhetoric not borne out by reality. In fact, curriculum is shaped by the technologies of accountability, ushered in by the project of curricular standardisation, that impact teachers most strongly on the frontline (Goodwyn and Findlay, 1999; Ball, 2003; Goodwyn, 2012; 2012a; Wood, 2014; Gibbons, 2016). It is on accountability, then, that any account of the current English curriculum must chiefly focus, in recognition of the central role it plays for both teachers and pupils.

Whilst there has long been scholarly interest in knowledge in English literature, the installation in 2019 of the revised Education Inspection Framework has significantly intensified the debate. This framework includes a new indicator, 'quality of education' (Ofsted, 2019) which foregrounds *curriculum* in education for the first time since accountability frameworks were established, aiming to draw attention away from results obtained by pupils and focus instead on the 'quality' of the curriculum offered by a particular school. Whilst this might have been a release for schools from the stranglehold of assessment, the problem is that, arguably, one set of narrow parameters has been replaced by another as Ofsted (2019) has tightly

defined the term 'quality' in line with their conception of learning. Learning, according to Ofsted (2019a), is 'knowing more and remembering more' (p. 5) leading them to conclude that the marker of 'a good, well-taught curriculum is that pupils know more' (p. 3). This puts pressure on school to make knowledge acquisition and memory retention central to their curricula, reinvigorating debates about knowledge, learning and curriculum.

Knowledge, as has been recognised for millennia, is complex and multi-faceted. 'A glance at the dictionary, says Ayer (1956/1990) 'will show that the verb 'to know' is used in a variety of ways' (quoted in Elliott, 2021, p. 1). Knowing 'that something or other is the case' (ibid) is just one of these ways. Knowing also incorporates wisdom, insight, expertise and experience: recognising honesty or integrity (or their opposites) in fellow human beings; knowing 'hunger or fear' (ibid); knowing how to behave in a range of social contexts. Likewise, in Aristotle's five categories of knowledge, only two, *Episteme* (universal knowledge that can be taught) and *Sophia* (the principles on which the universal knowledge is based), involve knowledge of stable, timeless facts (Eaglestone, 2020). Others include *Techne*, knowing how to do something (a skill, in other words, much-maligned in recent years), and *Phronesis*, which is a kind of wisdom connected to conscious and principled action (Eaglestone, 2020). Whilst it could be argued that learners can make relatively straightforward headway in their study, or acquisition, of *Episteme* - that it is, in a sense, linear - *Techne* and *Phronesis* are more likely to develop unevenly, via more circuitous routes and possibly, particularly in the case of *Phronesis*, evade easy measurement.

If Ofsted's (2019) central criterion for curricular quality is 'knowing more' it suggests that their underpinning conception of knowledge is linear (going from less to more) and measurable, implying Ofsted (2019) understands knowledge as stable and uncontested (or incontestable). This is convenient, of course, for the purposes of accountability but there is more to this conception of knowledge than that. The Education Inspection Framework (Ofsted, 2019) consciously draws on theories of knowledge which are neither neutral nor uncontroversial, along with research that is untested in English classrooms (EEF, 2021). This has significant implications for the teaching of literature in classrooms today. Each will now be discussed in turn.

3.2.4a Powerful knowledge

Ofsted's (2019) reliance on Young's (2014) concept of powerful knowledge is well-known (Eaglestone, 2020; Duoblys, 2022). Powerful knowledge, for Young (2014), is the knowledge pupils need to transcend their experiences or circumstances and he believes it is the duty of education to identify and teach it. Crucially, it is knowledge that pupils might not encounter through their own lives. Young (2014) suggests, for example, that whilst pupils might 'know' a city, like London, from their own experience, the job of a school is to ensure they 'know' it from an academic standpoint - 'the city' as it is understood geographically (Eaglestone, 2020). This, for Young (2014), is an issue of social justice, predicated on the idea that disadvantaged

pupils would not otherwise have access to academic or abstract knowledge. It is a take on social justice diametrically opposed to Rosen's (1973; 1975; 1981), whose own drive to democratise the English curriculum saw deficits not in pupils' knowledge but in the failure of the system to recognise and celebrate that knowledge. This speaks to the nub of the problem regarding Young's (2014) powerful knowledge and the literature curriculum specifically: cultural knowledge, unlike scientific knowledge, is particularly vulnerable to the influence of vested interests (Sriprakash, 2020).

Although Young (2014) is keen to distinguish 'powerful knowledge' from the 'knowledge of the powerful', he seems to fail to recognise that knowledge is 'arguably always in a dialectical relationship with power and identity' (Green, 2018, p. 24) which means that 'powerful knowledge' and the 'knowledge of the powerful' often overlap (Elliott, 2021). As Elliott (2021) points out, 'We all 'knew' in my childhood that Colombus 'discovered' America' (p. 8), a 'fact' that has since been re- evaluated for several reasons. The academic consensus about Colombus's 'discovery' was, arguably, a consequence of the white, male, Eurocentric gaze that dominated the academy. This created an epistemology of white ignorance (Bain, 2018) which Young's (2014) theory risks extending: his framework does not allow for the kind of critique that can, and should, protect against the bias of the powerful, resulting in the active reproduction of privilege rather than any correction of social disadvantage (Sriprakash, 2020). This is quite the opposite of Young's (2014) stated

intention and a considerable problem for the adoption of his theory when teaching subjects like history or English literature.

Ironically, it is one of the central figures in the canon of English literature, second only, perhaps, to Shakespeare, who provides one of the most eviscerating critiques of Young's (2014) theory of knowledge. Dickens's (1854) *Hard Times* predates Young's (2014) work by over 150 years and is a well-worn reference, almost a cliche, but in the current context the satire seems sharper than ever. Thomas Gradgrind is a teacher in a newly-formed factory school and a man fixated on 'nothing but Facts' (Dickens, 1854, p. 3), duly capitalised, for whom other forms of knowing (particularly anything imaginative) are contemptible:

> A man of realities. A man of facts and calculations.
> ...ready to weigh and measure any parcel of human
> nature, and tell you exactly what it comes to (p. 4).

Dickens's depiction of Gradgrind's treatment of Sissy Jupe, or 'Girl Number Twenty', seems to speak directly to Young's (2014) powerful knowledge. When Gradgrind demands that Sissy defines a horse, her answer is based on her intimate, daily knowledge of horses, which is the family business. Gradgrind ridicules this answer - 'Girl number twenty possessed of no facts, in reference to one of the commonest of animals!' (Dickens, 1854, p. 5) - turning instead to Bitzer, who gains approval for his reply: 'Quadruped. Graminivorous. Forty teeth...' etc (p. 6). 'Now girl number twenty,' says Gradgrind. 'You know what a horse is' (p. 6), a brilliantly comic riff on knowledge, it being clear to the reader how much more Sissy knows about horses

than Bitzer. It is, it seems, powerful knowledge writ large, exposing the injustice of making one way of knowing more valid than another. Dickens draws a deliberate and strong contrast between Sissy, female and dark-skinned, and Bitzer, male and so white that 'he looked as though, if he were cut, he would bleed white' (p. 7) which, again, seems to anticipate the power imbalances - male/female, white/black - that make 'powerful knowledge' so troublesome.

3.2.4b Cultural literacy and cultural capital

Another theory underpinning Ofsted's (2019) Education Inspection Framework is evidenced in the English Subject Review (Ofsted, 2022): Hirsch's (1983) cultural literacy. Hirsch (1983) shares with Young (2014) a conviction that explicit teaching of a stable body of knowledge should be central to education, particularly for the most disadvantaged pupils. For Hirsch (1983), this is specifically to improve reading. His conviction comes from his research, which, as an American scholar, is U.S. based. This research assessed how quickly readers read a text about the Civil War. He found that participants who lacked background knowledge (and attendant vocabulary) about the war read more slowly than their more knowledgeable counterparts. They could not achieve the speed of their peers because they were reading forwards and backwards to make sense of the information in the text, as the knowledge domain was new to them. On this basis, Hirsch (1983) called for a national programme of knowledge-building so that all Americans would share the same body of knowledge, ready to apply to challenging texts without slowing down

reading speed. This knowledge, which is the knowledge of the *context* of the written work and its *vocabulary,* must come *before* the act of reading itself to prevent knowledge deficits forming an unnecessary and unfair barrier to achievement in reading.

Due to Hirsch's (1983) influence on the Education Inspection Framework (Ofsted, 2019; 2022), concepts of good practice have altered in line with his research and teachers are currently expected, often mandated, to pre-teach both context and vocabulary when approaching a literary text. The concerns from the English teaching community are multiple. Firstly, Hirsch's (1983) interpretation of slow reading as poor reading possibly misses something key about what his slower participants were doing when they read the text. As Bleiman (2020) argues, knowledge (of context and of vocabulary) is generally derived *from* the act of reading rather than being a prerequisite to it: reading is usually understood to be a means of *gaining* knowledge rather than a test of it. To make this point, Bleiman (2020) draws light-hearted attention to the fact that we do not need to learn about Jedi history, traditions and culture to watch and understand Star Wars; we learn through watching the films. We do not know what knowledge Hirsch's (1983) slower participants gained from their reading about the Civil War (or, indeed, whether it sparked interest, curiosity or questions), but it is fair to assume there may have been some. Secondly, apart from the questionable notion that reading quickly is a sign of reading well (Eaglestone, 2020), the problem is that, rather than correcting social injustices as Hirsch's (1983) supporters suggest, this approach has arguably the

opposite effect. Would, for example, Caribbean culture and traditions be considered worthy of inclusion in a national 'body' of knowledge, perhaps to access the works of C.L.R James, for example? If not, why not? Whose knowledge counts? If it is the knowledge of the already visible and powerful that makes up any national knowledge-building programme then it would be valid to say that it, like Young (2014), reproduces privilege rather than counteracts it.

In this respect, Hirsch's (1983) cultural literacy seems closely related to Ofsted's (2019) concept of 'cultural capital' (Young, 2019). This is 'the essential knowledge that pupils need to be educated citizens, introducing them to the best that has been thought and said' (Ofsted, 2019, p. 43). This derives from Bourdieu's body of sociological scholarship that, as Young (2019) argues, does not seem to have been fully understood by Ofsted (2019). In the specific context of literature teaching in England, it seems 'to be synonymous with teaching 'challenging' canon texts by authors racialised as white' (Leedham, 2022, p. 77), pressuring schools to increase the representation of already over-represented authors from the canon in the name of a distinctly Arnoldian belief in the importance of 'high' culture. Much like the concepts of cultural literacy (Hirsch, 1983) and powerful knowledge (Young, 2014), this risks upholding privilege whilst claiming to do quite the opposite, to promote social justice for the most disadvantaged learners. This is arguably a kind of doublespeak that runs through the current Education Inspection Framework (Ofsted, 2019), something that could be potentially toxic, particularly for teachers of literature committed to cultural egalitarianism.

Along with teaching methods, described above, like pre-teaching knowledge and vocabulary in line with Hirsch's (1983) research, the Education Inspection Framework (Ofsted, 2019) has also adopted, and promotes, findings from cognitive science. This has had a major impact on schools (Perry, 2021), prompting a range of related practices which build knowledge and strengthen memory (EEF, 2021). One of these is retrieval practice (EEF, 2021) which, following Rosenshine's (2012) hugely influential paper, *Principles of Instruction: Research-based strategies that all teachers should know,* is widely implemented in schools in the form of recall questions at the beginning of lessons*.* This aims to move information into pupils' long-term memory so that they can draw on it to undertake a task (EEF, 2021).

The problem for teachers of literature is establishing what information is important for pupils to recall. Even Needham (2023), a proponent of cognitive science in English teaching, admits that recall questions, 'are nothing like the final performance that students encounter when they take an exam' (p. 37) and that asking a recall question about, for example, the meaning of the word 'hubris' will not necessarily support pupils' understanding of Macbeth. This speaks to a central apprehension about cognitive science, which has been, as Perry (2022) notes:

> recommended – and even mandated – before we have a
> real understanding of how the basic science relating to

cognition and memory translates into everyday classroom teaching and learning, across phases and subject areas (n.p.).

This is also a conclusion of the EEF's (2021) report summarising the evidence for cognitive science-based approaches in schools. The report found that the evidence-base is predominantly derived from laboratory research with only limited empirical research from classrooms and no evidence at all from English classrooms (EEF, 2021), striking a note of concern about the pressure English teachers experience to implement the approaches. Certainly, if we accept, as many literary scholars do, that literary knowledge is not static but, in fact, generative and contingent, created by each individual reader in dialogue with the text and other readers (Barthes, 1977), then it is difficult to argue that retrieval practice is the most effective means of learning the discipline:

> our relationship to a book changes: reading is a *process*…This means, of course, that knowing about literature means something different from just knowing facts about, say, the dates of an author, what happens in chapter 3 or reading the Wikipedia summary [author's italics] (Eaglestone, 2019, p. 11).

In summary, the *curriculum* element of the CT space in school literary study is complex, a heady mix of often ideologically disparate schools of thought, the 'scaffolding' (Perry, 2019, p. 240) of literature teaching, and the changing priorities of curricular frameworks, including the Education Inspection Framework (Ofsted, 2019). As with the *subject* dimension of the CT space, the *curriculum* element is distinguished by a lack of consensus about its own theoretical underpinnings and

debates about its key aspects – knowledge, culture and the purpose of literary study – persist. So, the *subject* of literary study and its interpretation as a school *curriculum* are inter-related aspects of an English teacher's CT space. The final piece to consider is the teachers themselves. This is the focus of the next section.

3.3 *Teachers*: English teachers' perspectives on teaching literature

Teachers' perspectives on school literary study are self-evidently a key part of the CT space. In this section, I review the empirical evidence on this central issue, organising the review into three important areas that arise from the published research. Firstly, I explore the matter of teachers' understanding of literary theory, exposing a gap in the empirical evidence-base on English teaching. Secondly, I address the much-discussed issue of teachers' commitment to *personal growth* through literature, which is a dominant aspect of the research. Finally, I confront a concern that also dominates the field: the matter of teachers' feelings regarding assessment and accountability when teaching literature.

3.3.1 Literary theory

There is a limited but dedicated body of empirical research into secondary English teachers' perspectives on literature teaching. In the UK and Australia, a significant thread of this research explores teachers' motivations for teaching literature, including their much-reported passion for reading (Daly, 2004; Goodwyn 1992; 2012; 2017; Wood, 2014; O'Sullivan, 2020). Whilst this research incorporates teachers' 'models' of literature, often framed by Cox's five models of English teaching (DES, 1989), it does not directly address the literary theory, or literary knowledge

(Davies et al, 2022), that underpins these models. Likewise, the body of empirical research into English teachers' *pedagogical* approaches to literature (Yandell and Brady, 2016; Yandell, 2017; Gordon, 2012; 2019) does little more than provide an evidence base from which theoretical underpinnings might be inferred. This constitutes a significant gap in the field as we cannot validate either the claim that reader-response literary theory underpins teachers' work in the classroom (Goodwyn, 2012; O'Sullivan, 2020) or, conversely, the assertion that teachers strive to 'hold aloft the golden apple… the ultimate meaning of the text' (Parr et al., 2015, p. 142).

That a teacher's take on literary interpretation (as opposed to, for example, the more general issue of her personal love of literature) might have a profound impact on work in the classroom is beginning to gain scholarly attention (Malenka, 1995; Parr et al., 2015; O'Sullivan, 2020; Davies et al, 2022) but empirical evidence is thin and, in the UK, seemingly non-existent. Academics in Australia have recently responded with a sizable research project on novice English teachers' conceptions of literary interpretation and how this translates to classroom practice (see Davies et al, 2022) but, in the UK, this issue is still to be directly addressed by empirical research.

In Goodwyn's 2012 paper, a wide-ranging exploration of the 'status' of literature in education, including policy scrutiny and data from English teachers themselves, he comes close to confronting the issue of the theories underpinning teachers' work. In the paper, he acknowledges his own reader-response perspective and speculates

that, like him, teachers' 'theoretical orientation is that of reader-response deriving from Rosenblatt's seminal work' (p. 213), echoing a similar claim he made in a paper twenty years earlier:

> I also feel sure that the influence of reader-response theory plays its part in privileging, in the English teacher's eyes, the individual's response (Goodwyn, 1992, p. 18).

Vitally, however, Goodwyn (2012) notes that neither 'reader-response' nor Rosenblatt are 'part of teachers' vocabulary in England' (p. 213) and he turns this into an aim of the paper:

> One factor I wish to explore, albeit modestly in this paper, is what we mean when we, that is secondary English teachers, talk about reading literature (p. 213).

Disappointingly, the data presented in his paper do not address his reader-response hypothesis sufficiently well to support it. With no real theoretical justification, he separates responses to texts into four categories: 'formal', 'analytical', 'personal' and 'creative' and asks English teacher participants which is given more significance in terms of assessment. The participants overwhelmingly report that it is 'formal' and 'analytical' which, to them, is both 'missing the real point of literary study' (p. 221) and disengaging pupils. Whilst this demonstrates a professional commitment to either 'personal' or 'creative' responses to texts, it does not help us to understand what this means to teachers in terms of a coherent theoretical stance on literary knowledge. Neither is there an indication of why 'personal', for example, must exclude 'formal' or 'analytical'; in fact, a response could be either or both whilst remaining 'personal'. This is a crucial issue: *personal response* to literature is an idea

that studies show resonates with English teachers (Goodwyn, 1992; Goodwyn and Findlay, 1999; Marshall, 2000; Daly, 2004; Wood, 2014) almost as much as the much-discussed *personal growth* through literature (Goodwyn, 1992; 2012) but unless we are clear about the definition and understanding of *personal response*, we cannot draw clear conclusions from this.

Goodwyn's (1992; 2012) articulation of the relationship between *personal response* and *personal growth* does little to increase clarity: in 1992, he conflates them, claiming his empirical evidence that *personal response* is overwhelmingly favoured by English teachers 'suggest[s] to me the key place of Personal Growth in English teachers' thinking' (p. 18); in his study with Findlay in 1999, *personal response* is separate in that it is 'another [to *personal growth*] almost sacred element for English teachers' (p. 28); in 2012, *personal growth* has been relegated to just an 'additional element' (p. 221) of *personal response*, which is the view to which he claims teachers are committed. I would like to argue that a lack of clarity around the concept of *personal response*, and how it relates to literary theory, coupled with so little empirical evidence on teachers' understanding of literary interpretation, is the source of this confusion. *Personal response* is quite distinct from *personal growth* in the sense that it is an action taken by pupils as opposed to an *effect* of deep and sustained reading. That one of the most prolific researchers into English teaching himself lacks perspicuity on this issue is suggestive of a deep-seated 'blind spot' in the field, exposing a gap in research related to literary theory and its impact in the classroom.

One reason for this 'blind spot' might be Cox's models (DES, 1989), which do not encompass the issue of the literary theory underpinning English teachers' work. Whilst the models gifted researchers like Goodwyn with a useful framework for exploring English teachers' perspectives, Cox himself acknowledged that they 'are not the only possible views' (DES, 1989, section 2.20). This is something that Goodwyn (1992) responded to with a key question:

> If they are not the only possible views then are there other important views that Cox and his committee were consciously avoiding? (p. 5)

Whilst it is unlikely that there was a conspiracy by Cox's team to silence a particular view, it is possible that the framework of five models nevertheless had the *effect* of establishing a silence around one of the central issues of English teaching: literary theory. This argument is strengthened when we consider that England, where Cox's models are used as a framework, has the least research of all the Anglophone countries into English teachers' perspectives on literary theory and interpretation. As mentioned above, at the time of writing researchers in Australia have just produced a large-scale, longitudinal study on this very issue (Davies et al, 2022) and, in the US, whilst the research is still scant, there is less of a 'blind spot' and researchers have acknowledged, at least, the need to explore this further (McDiarmid, 1995).

Whilst recognising this blind-spot, it is also useful to explore what *is* known about English teachers' underlying literary theory and approach to literary interpretation. In the US, the conclusion seems to be that teachers bring to teaching a mix of theories

that sometimes run counter to each other. McDiarmid's (1995) research, for example, finds that English teachers selected two literary theories, out of a possible four presented to them, that contradict each other: 'traditional-humanist' and 'reader-response'. The former tends to a belief that the author 'holds' the meaning of the text and the latter that it is the reader who makes meaning. The researcher suggests this represents a failure of undergraduate literature courses, leaving graduates 'unaware of the profoundly different epistemes each theory represents' (p. 18). McDiarmid (1995) feels this is an issue that needs urgent attention because:

> teachers' beliefs about the nature of literature, about the role and purpose of reading literary texts, about the relation of the reader to the text informs their thinking about what they should teach, their role, students' roles, and what needs to be learned and how (p. 7).

For similar reasons, but in an Australian context, Doecke and Mead (2018) seek to better understand the knowledge 'teachers bring to bear in the study of texts' (p. 60). Their resulting large-scale research project, leading to their book *Literary Knowing and the Making of English Teachers* (Davies et al, 2022), is by far the most significant contribution to answering this question to date. Their research suggests that teachers are aware that literary knowledge is complex but that they do not always draw on theoretical perspectives, like Rosenblatt's (1994) theory, to help them to articulate their position (Davies et al, 2022). Nevertheless, it is clear their participants see literary knowledge as inherently unmeasurable, contingent and potentially transformative. It is, in the words of one participant:

> a way of thinking, a way of approaching things…It's an interactive thing, it's moving…it's a dynamic process of

> meaning-making...it's about beauty and personal response (p. 92)

The researchers suggest that teachers of literature do not teach a text but *the ways to respond to it*: literary knowledge to them is 'knowing how texts work [and] acquiring an ability to read for meaning flexibly outside of the literary field' (p. 95). One of the most central ways to respond to a text is through interaction with others to generate literary knowledge. Writing in an earlier paper, using preliminary findings from the project, Doecke and Mead (2018) quote one of their participants as saying:

> So I think it's not just the text on the page, it's the interaction with somebody else that's really important. I mean Alia [a teacher colleague] and I talk about texts and characters and what we might learn from them all the time because I think that's where the learning and the understanding and the knowledge really comes from, and the ability to plug it into our world and our experience (p. 249)

Another participant replies, 'Yeah. So the literary knowledge is the knowledge that comes from discussion' (p. 249).

As Doecke and Mead (2018) point out, there is an implicit rejection in these words of Young's (2014) 'powerful knowledge', of the idea that knowledge is only 'generated outside school communities' (p. 250). Although they do not make the link, I would add there is likewise a clear rejection of Hirsch's (1967) view of interpretation as a process of discovering an author's intended meaning of a text; these teachers instead see literary knowledge as shaped by 'our world and our experience' and through discussion with other readers. Davies et al (2022) develop

this into a concept, 'literary sociability', which 'names the way that any work around texts in classrooms has a relational and dialogic character' (p. 137) grounded in literary theory that views 'the nature of reading as both an event in time and space and a dimension of the autobiographies of readers' (p. 138). Both the 'event in time' and the importance of readers' biographies place this concept firmly in the reader-response camp, providing the most robust evidence yet that this is the theory to which English teachers subscribe. In concluding their 2018 paper, Doecke and Mead criticise key voices in English teaching thus far (including Dixon (1975) and the panel of The Newbolt Report) for their failure to 'address … the question of how literary 'knowledge'… provide[s] a framework for what English teachers do' (p. 261), ending with a clarion call to 'English teachers to revisit their history in order to more confidently affirm the 'knowledge' that is at the heart of their work' (p. 261).

3.3.2 Personal growth through literature

In the UK, as mentioned above, scholarly attention tends to focus on teachers' *philosophies* for teaching literature, the purpose they assign to it, rather than on their understanding of literary knowledge. This is often discussed in relation to Cox's models (DES, 1989): Goodwyn's (2017; 2012; 2002; 1992) research dominates the field in this area and presents consistent empirical evidence that English teachers are wedded to the *personal growth* model of English teaching, which Cox defined thus:

> A "personal growth" view focuses on the child: it emphasises the relationship between language and learning in the individual child, and the role of literature in developing children's imaginative and aesthetic lives (DES, 1989, section 2.21).

There is much to be said about this definition which has been shown to be so central to English teachers' sense of purpose. It communicates, firstly, an emphasis on less academic aspects of a literary education, perhaps helping to explain some of the discomfort English teachers feel regarding the place of formal assessment in literature teaching (discussed in the next section). It also speaks to the way that teachers feel that English is inextricably linked to identity development and to the inner-life of the child. In fact, this is the basis of Smagorinsky's (2002) sense of unease about *personal growth*: its Romantic, Wordsworthian roots are, for him, too indulgent and individualistic, missing a key opportunity to teach pupils their moral responsibilities as social agents in wider communities; 'the personal growth curves of individuals', he states 'often come at the expense of the goals and growth of others' (p. 26).

Taking Cox's (DES, 1989) definition at face value, it is easy to sympathise with this concern as it neglects to mention any connection between an individual's inner-life and their ways of connecting with the social world. However, empirical studies show that teachers' sense of *personal growth* incorporates just that: it is a broader vision which relates to social, emotional and moral development (Goodwyn, 1992; Goodwyn and Findlay, 1999; Marshall, 2000; Daly, 2004; Wood, 2014; Gibbons, 2017; Manuel and Carter, 2019; O'Sullivan, 2020). In his examination of secondary

school English departments' 'Statements of Aims' (which were a common way of expressing departmental philosophies before standardisation), Davies (1996) finds they are, in his words, 'logically...way beyond the scope of a mere English teacher' (p. 16), including:

> to enrich the child's experience and to broaden his horizons through literature; to stimulate his imagination; to awaken his sensitivity to human emotions; to develop in the child a sense of tolerance and understanding; to develop a sense of social awareness (p. 16).

This is self-evidently about more than the inner-life of the individual, devoid of responsibility to others; rather, this unambiguously includes empathy and tolerance, which is, crucially, also evident in Davies et al's (2022) more recent research. The benefit of a literary education, according to one of their participants, is 'just being able to see the world from a different person's perspective that's...most valuable' (p. 117). Perspective-taking is, as already discussed in Section 3.1.2 of this chapter, a key part of the imaginative response that fiction inspires (Greene, 2000) and, as discussed in Section 3.1.3, a way that human beings experience, neurologically, the actions of (invented) others as our own, thereby extending our experience and empathy for others. This extension is, arguably, the 'growth' that English teachers so treasure and it is much more about social cohesion, even social justice, than individualism: 'my commitment to social reform', says a teacher in Parr et al's (2015) research, 'is inextricably linked to my professional identity as an English teacher' (p. 142).

So, Cox's (DES, 1989) definition of *personal growth* model does not quite encompass the concept, indicating there is a need for further precision. Bousted (2002) suggests that Cox (DES, 1989) in seeking to combine two different schools of thought - the Cambridge (which includes the Newbolt Report as well as Leavis) and the London Schools (detailed in Sections 3.2.1 and 3.2.2 of this chapter) - offers a concept so smoothed that it loses some resolution and cannot 'reflect the rich and complex' (p. 186) dimensions of the long tradition of *personal growth* in English teaching. For this reason, Bousted (2002) raises a valid question: where empirical research establishes the prominence of *personal growth* in English teachers' philosophies, did respondents have in mind the same *personal growth* as the researchers? Goodwyn (2017) agrees, noting that Cox's *personal growth* model, 'has endured for 50 years as a short and pithy rendition of what is a profoundly complex and dynamic conceptual framework' (p. 11). Instead, Goodwyn (2017) suggests what he calls 'an invigorated model' (p. 66), *personal and social agency*, which shifts the focus from an (arguably passive) individual (to whom growth happens) to the cultural and social contexts with which individuals (actively) communicate (in order to 'grow'). Acknowledging Goodwyn's (2017) revision, Gibbons (2017) takes it further by suggesting that the epithet 'personal' might be worth omitting altogether, 'given the unhelpful connotations the word attracts' (p. 99). Whilst recognising it is far from catchy, he proposes 'critical, cultural, social and creative agency' (p. 99) as an alternative that might more precisely communicate the model to which English teachers are drawn.

3.3.3 Accountability and assessment

If literary knowledge is personal and nebulous, and if English teachers generally aim to promote *personal growth* as much as, if not more than, acquisition of academic knowledge, how does this play out in schools and how do teachers feel about it? As discussed earlier in this chapter, the current era is widely understood to be characterised by performative measures and top-down pressure where, in Handy's (1995) words, 'What does not get counted does not count' (quoted in Marshall, 2000, p. 149). To Woods (2014), this is a 'constraining system' (p. 5). Writing as an early-career English teacher, Wood (2014) describes her belief that English is a way of exploring with pupils their 'values and ideals' (p. 8) and this is negatively impacted, and compromised, by 'the mechanisms of accountability that we are obliged to engage with' (p. 8). These 'mechanisms' are the various means of scrutiny under which she is placed, including lesson observations and inspections framed by predetermined professional standards. Despite working in a school with few shared schemes of work and, therefore, having 'relative freedom in planning' (p. 5), this freedom is something of a misnomer as Wood (2014) ties herself in anxious knots trying to decide between 'what *is* best for my class and what *looks* best to the scrutiniser or observer (author's italics, p. 5)', which acts as a barrier to 'the potential 'openness and creativity' of the English classroom' (p. 8). Ultimately she reports that her philosophies are too difficult to uphold in an environment 'unsettled by the pressures and constraints that act upon a classroom teacher' (p. 4). Framing the

teacher as the object rather than the subject in this sentence is an eloquent articulation of her sense of her own limited agency.

One of Wood's (2014) frustrations with English teaching is that, whilst she wants to encourage 'independent exploration of ideas and texts' (p.3) to create 'autonomous young adults … able to challenge social injustices' (p. 4), she finds instead that, as she develops, she exerts greater control over her pupils and their ideas, producing 'significantly more teacher-led' (p. 7) lessons as a direct consequence of the pressure to produce results. This kind of negative impact of 'assessment regimes' (Goodwyn, 2012a, p. 212) on 'the personal response to literature that teachers so value' (ibid, p. 224) is echoed across the literature. *Personal response*, as we have seen, is not always well-conceptualised but research suggests that some English teachers notice its absence in the written work of their pupils because of the 'all but ubiquitous acceptance of teaching 'Point, Evidence, Explanation' as the predominant way to construct a response to a text' (Gibbons, 2016, p. 41). Point, Evidence, Explanation (PEE) - sometimes, Point, Evidence, Explanation, Link (PEEL) or Point, Evidence, Developed Analysis, Alternative, Link (PEDAL) or any number of other variations - is a scaffold for structuring a formal response to a text and, as these formal responses are the sole means of assessment in literary study, PEE paragraphs have come to dominate the curriculum: 'I spend more time talking about PEE than Scrooge' cries Thea, Smith et al's (2022) fictionalised student teacher in frustration (p. 4) and in the words of Gibbons's (2019) novice English teachers, it is 'death by PEEL - you get 30 paragraphs exactly the same' (p. 40). This managed and dependent way of

responding to texts supports, to some extent, pupils' assessed work but at the cost of their engagement in authentic literary reading (Fletcher, 2022) and this is a matter of regret for many English teachers (Goodwyn, 2012a; Wood, 2014; Gibbons, 2019).

Significantly, however, not all. Noting a round of observations in which she had seen novice teachers 'instructing pupils in an analytical approach that was highly reductionist' (p.1), teacher educator Lawrence (2019) begins to question the extent to which 'authentic engagement and a personal response to texts [is] at the heart of English teaching' (p. 1) as she feels it once was. She explores this with her novice teacher participants (and students) by sharing and reflecting on a series of activities designed to generate authentic engagement and personal response to poetry. Whilst her participants seem to personally enjoy the activities, they communicate 'genuine confusion' (p. 9) about the need to undertake similar activities in the classroom. 'If it's not being marked, what's the point?' (p. 8) says one novice teacher, indicating an uncritical commitment to assessment-focused teaching. Lawrence (2019) wonders if novice teachers have been so influenced by their placement schools' prescribed pedagogies, which are designed to maximise pupils' results, that they see 'no place for a response to a text that does not fit that proforma' (p. 9). Similarly, Elliott (2021), also a teacher educator, shows through her research with a group of novice English teachers that assessment dominates their thinking, with six out of her seven interviewees suggesting that the purpose of teaching poetry is 'the exam' (p. 92). Distressingly, this is shown by Bleiman (2020) to be echoed by a Year 7 pupil who

was asked to define English: "'Analysing texts", he said, and when asked "Why?" the reply came "To prepare for tests"' (p 26).

In this light, Bleiman's (2020) contention that a sixth model, 'Exam English', should be added to Cox's five models of English teaching seems fair. In her view, this sixth model has grown to the point that it has almost completely eclipsed the others; that teachers above all else teach to and for the test, reflecting the pressure they experience to produce good results for their establishments. Novice teachers, 'enter[ing] a culture where rules and values are established, where ways of teaching English have become unchallenged' (Gibbons, 2016, p. 41) perhaps feel powerless to influence what are settled approaches; certainly, this was Wood's (2014) experience. This is perhaps unsurprising: research shows that novices are acutely concerned about policies, mandates and assessment expectations (Burkhauser and Lesuax, 2017) and, as Britzman (2012) argues, teacher education foregrounds, 'compliance, conformity and mastery' (p. 12) in ways that are unlikely to foster resistance in new entrants to the profession. However, as discussed earlier in this chapter, uneven power relations between policy and practice are felt by teachers of all subjects and levels of experience, suggesting that submitting to accountability measures is a profession-wide response to these external pressures. Unfortunately, in the case of literary study, teachers seem to feel strongly that these pressures 'distort' (Goodwyn, 2012a, p. 212) pupils' experience of their subject.

In summary, this chapter has established that, whilst curriculum is currently prescriptive and fixed by pre-determined goals, this is not the only possible model of curriculum. Curriculum could, instead, be understood as a flexible process which is driven by the situational decision-making of the teacher, informed by her feelings, biography, values and knowledge. This is the CT space and researching this space has potential significance for improving education for teachers and pupils. In the teaching of literature, this space can be conceptualised in terms of its three main components: *subject*, *curriculum* and *teacher*. The subject of literature is an important part of the space because it forms the foundation on which the other components sit and it raises key questions – why are stories so important, what do we do when we interpret a literary text – that need to be considered in the context of literary study in schools. The curriculum, likewise, is self-evidently significant in the CT space and this chapter shows that the literature curriculum has always been distinguished by passionate, often quasi-religious debates which continue despite three decades of standardisation. Teachers, as the final component, seem to understand the complexity and nuance of literary study but do not always use the language of literary theory to express it. Nevertheless, their commitment to *personal growth* is clear and, likewise, there is much evidence of discomfort about the way that assessment and accountability act against their wishes for their pupils, although there is also evidence of newer teachers unable to see beyond the externally set goals of GCSE success.

Chapter C: Methodology

In the previous chapter, I established that there is a theoretical 'space' where curriculum and teacher meet, neglected in research and policy, which I call the CT space. This space is cut through with teachers' personal knowledge (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988), feelings and values as much as curricular content and directives. Building on this, this chapter will outline the intellectual toolkit (Iser, 2006) I have selected to best explore this space, which is a qualitative toolkit grounded in *narrative theory* operating in an interpretative paradigm. 'Narrative modes of knowing' (Bruner, 1986) are at the heart of literary study, part of the CT space under consideration, and suitable for the deep and respectful listening I wish to afford my participants.

After outlining my research questions, I will first address my philosophical position, describing my ontological and epistemological assumptions, which I draw from social constructionism. I will then explore the different ways that a narrative orientation is appropriate for this study, starting with my personal relationship with narrative, which I share in recognition of the 'high levels of disclosure' expected of a narrative researcher (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013, p. 239). Following this, I will briefly outline narrative theory and the narrative 'turn' in the social sciences as a way of setting the context for this study because, as with everything, it does not operate in a vacuum. Lastly, I will summarise the pertinence of narrative to the focus of this thesis - teachers and the English curriculum.

1. Research questions

The purpose of this study is to explore the literature curriculum from the perspective of novice English teachers (NETs) and is framed by the following questions:

4. What do novice English teachers (NETs)' stories suggest they value about literature and the teaching of literature?

5. What do NETs' stories tell us about the CT space in English literature?

6. What do NETs' stories suggest might be done differently by the professional community for the benefit of teachers and pupils?

These questions are grounded in ontological and epistemological assumptions which are explored in the following section where my choice of research approach is also justified.

2. Research approach

A qualitative approach was chosen for this study as most appropriate for the situational, personal and subjective nature of the inquiry (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). NETs' experiences of the literature curriculum are inescapably subjective, as am I, a researcher with my own experiences of the same. Conducting qualitative research, then, allows me to acknowledge this subjectivity as a fundamental aspect of the inquiry. A crucial part of this is outlining my philosophical position to clarify

the grounds on which subsequent research decisions are made. This is the subject of the following section.

Whilst my research design and methods are broadly typical of qualitative research projects, they were informed throughout by the principles of narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry is rooted in an understanding that stories are central to human knowledge and experience; that they are a mechanism through which meaning is made and, therefore, an appropriate method to explore that meaning (Kim, 2016). Clandinin and Connelly (2000), whose work on narrative inquiry is seminal, articulates it thus:

> Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experience that make up people's lives, both individual and social. Simply stated… narrative inquiry is stories lived and told' (p. 20)

These principles shaped my research approach and therefore are an important part of my methodological framework. In the following sections, after outlining my philosophical position, I will share my own understanding of narrative, and my relationship to it, before detailing its influence on my design and approach.

2.1 Philosophical position

In common with many other qualitative researchers, I understand reality to be multiple and knowledge subjective. I also acknowledge that qualitative research presents ongoing 'dilemmas, challenges, complexities, and puzzles' (Kim, 2016, p.31) which complicate even the most straightforward picture. As a result, it is possible to argue, as Denzin and Lincoln (2011) do, that 'all qualitative researchers are philosophers' (quoted in Kim, 2016, p.31) for whom philosophical challenges are ever present and who are, therefore, never fixed but, rather, 'always in the way of becoming' (ibid). I agree with Pinar (1981), who claimed that qualitative research is:

> epistemologically sophisticated, because it understands that a basic meaning of human life is movement, conflict, resolution, conflict, resolution, each thesis and anti-thesis opposing each other in ways which give birth to a new order of understanding and life (p. 186)

As such, whilst I admit the importance of acknowledging my philosophical assumptions, they must be considered in this spirit; as always in flux.

In ontological terms, my working supposition is that social reality is constructed; I share with Denzin and Lincoln (2011) an understanding of 'multiple realities' (p.24), which are shaped by individuals' perceptions and meaning-making for, as Schutz (1967) claims, 'it is the meaning of our experiences and not the ontological structures of the objects which constitutes reality' (1967, quoted in Greene, 1994, pp. 435-436). I draw from social constructionism a critical stance towards taken-

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for-granted knowledge and an understanding of the historically and culturally relativist nature of truth (Burr, 1995). Crotty's (1998) analogy of the tree is useful to illustrate this. A tree might be physically real but its place in human understanding is a construction:

> it is human beings who have constructed it as a tree, given it the name, and attributed to it the associations we make with trees (Crotty, 1998, quoted in Scotland, 2012, p. 11).

Along with the information provided by the senses, it is the 'naming' and the 'associations' that constitute the multiple realities of the tree and these realities are historically and culturally contingent. There are many socially constructed ways of knowing a tree (including ways, in a nod to the importance of stories, that are whimsical or fantastical) and, importantly, these are fundamentally non-hierarchical in the sense that no one way of knowing the tree is superior to another. Importantly, however, different ways of constructing the world 'bring, or invite, a different kind of *action* from human beings... which sustain some patterns of social action and exclude others' (Burr, 1995, p. 5, my italics). A constructed understanding of a tree as sacred or wise leads to protective actions towards it but, when it is understood as just a useful producer of wood, quite different actions follow.

Crucially, this link between socially constructed realities and actions might not be apparent to individuals who cannot always be fully cognisant of the constructions which influence their behaviour (Scotland, 2012). In terms of educational research, this cautions us to remember that teachers are not, as Carter (1993) acknowledges,

'privileged authors who somehow have direct access to truth' (p. 8). Although I aim, as a qualitative researcher, to understand and honour my participants' reality, I recognise, too, the responsibility to make visible the constructions on which participants unconsciously draw, taking heed of Pring's (2015) passionate cry that:

> If only the self-styled radicals of educational research, who subscribe to the equal validity of each person's socially constructed reality, would realise the justification they are providing to the Orwellian managers who seek to transform our understanding of education to their own image and likeness (p. 78).

This is an important part of my positionality: balancing a respectful, open and trusting stance with an appropriately questioning one.

In line with social constructionism, my position on epistemology is that knowledge is a question of perspective rather than fact (Burr, 1995). The verb 'to know', as it is commonly used, seems to suggest a final answer, one that cannot be easily contested or challenged, and which is privileged over others. Considering the lessons of human history, in which 'knowledge' has been shown to be fallible many times, subject to the ideological perspectives of a particular place and time, a belief in valueless knowledge seems to me to be naive at best. 'All knowledge', notes Burr (1995), 'is derived from looking at the world from some perspective or other, and is in the service of some interests rather than others' (p. 6). To this, I believe, we must be relentlessly vigilant. I understand knowledge instead as multi-layered, replete with tensions and ever-developing: I am not one of 'those who think they can possess knowledge and presume it to be complete' (Greene, 2000, p. 53).

My stance as a qualitative researcher - the questions I have asked, the way I have collected data and the methods of data analysis - draws from the tenets of narrative inquiry. This, too, has a personal element, which I will discuss first in the following section before further exploring features of narrative inquiry and justifying its use for this research.

2.2 The narrative orientation of this study

2.2.1 A personal story

'...to train the mind to take off from immediate reality and return to it with new understanding and new strength, nothing quite equals poem and story' (Le Guin, 2019, p4).

Narrative, in the form of literary fiction, has had a significant role in my life. Like Greene (2000), I was young when I realised that 'imaginative literature disclosed alternative ways of being in and thinking about the world' (p. 90) and, like her, I very much wanted to 'see through as many eyes and from as many angles as possible' (p. 94). Retrospectively, it seems to me that I was aware that reading was learning, and learning of the most humane and fascinating kind. I read, and read a lot. Through Anne Holm's *I Am David*, a novel about a child's escape from a concentration camp, I learnt about the terrible human capacity for cruelty and injustice and began to wonder how our actions could either promote or prevent it; through Diana Wynne-Jones's exploration of parallel worlds in her *Chrestomanci* series, I began to suspect what I could not articulate until many years later - that reality is a construction

dependent on the vagaries of history, culture and power; through Ursula Le Guin and her *Earthsea* quartet, I learnt that naming is a powerful process - a first hint of understanding about discourse. These were fictions '...so compelling that they shape our experience...of the real world' (Bruner, 2003, p. 9) and they not only left me richer in knowledge and understanding, they left me with an alert sense of unanswered questions, which only served to pique my interest further.

Of course, as a young reader with limited worldly experience, few stories were so familiar that they constituted what Bruner (1991) calls 'narrative banalization' (p. 9), incapable of generating the vigour of 'unrehearsed interpretive activity' (ibid) so important for meaning-making. However, as I grew older, I matured into a reader keen to be challenged by ambiguity or even obscurity, taking pleasure in the thought-provoking gaps which:

> can only be filled by interpretative acts on the part of the reader who recognizes that the novel is and will remain an open question, that there is no perfect answer or meaning buried in it like gold in the hills [author's italics].' (Greene, 1988, p. 177)

The creativity of the reader is not always acknowledged but, in hindsight, it was this that I enjoyed most: the invitation of the literary text to invent, 'to summon energies...to create meanings, to effect connections, to bring some vital order into existence - if only for a time' (Greene, 2000, p. 98). The criticality of the reader is more recognised and I thoroughly enjoyed this too. Through immersion in literary reading, I learnt to be critical of idle thinking, to be wise to claims made with unwarranted certainty and to be comfortable in Keats's 'negative capability', without

any 'irritable reaching after fact & reason' (quoted in Mulroony, 2003, p. 230) or, as

Ball (2007), quoting Andre Gorz, puts it:

> The beginning of wisdom is the discovery that there
> exist contradictions of permanent tension with which it
> is necessary to live and that it is above all not necessary
> to seek to resolve (p. 119).

By the time I reached adulthood, imaginative literature had instilled in me much that

remains in terms of my moral, intellectual and philosophical leanings and had

impressed upon me an appreciation of the potential narrative holds for powerful and

enduring learning.

2.2.2 Features of narrative (1): stories are all around us

Scholarly attention to narrative was once confined to literary study; outside of this

discipline it was not taken seriously, viewed as, 'unreliable, illegitimate, and even

trivial' (Diamond, 1993, p. 4). However, in the twentieth century, after established

ways of seeing had been unsettled by modernism and postmodernism, it began to be

understood as a central form of communication, quite the opposite of 'trivial';

inseparable from the human condition, human experience and understanding

(Barthes, 1977; Carter, 1993; Bruner, 2003; Clandinin, 2007; Herman, 2007; Brophy,

2007; Goodson, Biesta, Tedder & Adair, 2010; Goodson, Loveless & Stephens, 2013;

Kim, 2016). Attention, therefore, shifted 'from a particular genre of literary writing

to all discourse that can be construed as narratively organised' (Herman, 2007, p. 5).

This included almost every form of human communication, as Barthes (1977) famously stated:

> narrative is present in myth, legend, fables, tales, short stories, epics, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, pantomime, painting...stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news items, conversation...narrative is present in every age, every place, every society; it begins with the very history of mankind... It is simply there, like life itself (p. 251)

Correspondingly, recognition began to grow of the way that narrative 'underpins the development and cohesion of all societies and cultures.' (Brophy, 2007, p. ix) and that 'in a very fundamental sense we exist and live our lives 'in' and 'through' stories' (Goodson, Biesta, Tedder & Adair, 2010, p. 1); that narrative 'like love, is all around us' (McQuillan, 2000, p. 1). 'Where, after all, would we be, and what would we be, without stories?' (Goodson, Biesta, Tedder & Adair, 2010, p. 1).

This acknowledgement led to a 'spread' in scholarly interest in narrative, which successfully 'travelled' to 'psychology, education, social sciences, political thought and policy analysis, health research, law, theology and cognitive science' (Hyvarinen, 2006, p.20 quoted in Herman, 2007, p. 4). Narrative was a means of reconceptualising knowledge, and ways of knowing, which had been more or less unchallenged since the Enlightenment. Lyotard's (1984) landmark report on knowledge, commissioned by the Conseil des Universities in Quebec (Czarniawska, 2004), set precedents in this regard, arguing as it did that 'scientific knowledge does not represent the totality of knowledge' (Lyotard, 1984, quoted in Clandinin, 2007, p. 52) and that 'narrative knowledge', was in fact capable of supporting *more* than

science, namely ethical wisdom and auditory and visual sensibility (Lyotard, 1984, in McQuillan, 2000). Bruner (1986) took up this argument soon after, comparing the 'narrative mode of knowing' with the logico-scientific, or paradigmatic, mode of knowing, with the former being the way that we 'give sense to our lives' (Bruner in Charon & Montello, 2002, p. 3) and organise experience (Czarniawska, 2004). To 'narrate', as Bruner (2003) highlights, derives from both 'telling' (narrare) and 'knowing' (gnarus)' (p. 27).

2.2.3 Features of narrative (2): the 'turn' in the social sciences

The interest in narrative in the social sciences developed contemporaneously with Bruner and Lyotard's work, although it was in the 1990s when it really gathered momentum, marked by the publication of the journal *Narrative Inquiry* (Elliott, 2005). As with other academic domains, narrative disrupted a discipline that had been, since the late nineteenth century, shaped by 'the methodology of the physical sciences' (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 9). Social science aimed to 'develop social laws' which, like physical laws, could reliably make predictions and exert control. In the mid to late twentieth century, however, predictable social laws remained elusive and generalisable findings were found to be unhelpful in comparison to studies focusing on the particular and the local (Polkinghorne, 1988 cited in Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). This resulted in 'more and more acknowledgement of the importance of *perspective and point of view*' (Greene, 1994, p. 424, my italics) as a

counter to 'the well-meaning blindness of researchers convinced of their own neutrality' (ibid, p. 431).

This shift away from positivist modes of research opened the way for the 'turn' towards narrative in the social sciences. In contrast to positivism, narrative inquiry requires 'an acceptance of multiple ways of knowing', an 'understanding of the value of a particular experience, in a particular setting', a recognition of the potential of 'word data' to represent 'the nuances of experience' and a reconfiguring of the researcher-researched relationship to embrace intimacy and intersubjectivity (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, pp. 9-25). Elliott (2005), looking across the social sciences, lists the common themes adopted by narrative researchers as: an interest in people's lived experiences; a desire to empower research participants; an interest in process and change over time; an interest in the self and representations of the self; an awareness that the researcher him/herself is also a narrator.

In educational research specifically, the narrative 'turn' is part of a larger story of bitter disputes within the academic community - 'paradigm wars', as Gage terms them (Gage, 2007, p. 151). In the absence of agreement about how educational research should be conceived and conducted, these ongoing 'wars' are a kind of defining characteristic in themselves. Many in education aspire to the consensus and 'rigour' of medical research; others believe that education is too complex and multi-factored for such an aspiration to work:

> outcomes of teaching depend upon so many variables
> that attempts to formulate testable hypotheses about

> effective teaching are rarely worthwhile (Bassey, 2007,
> p.143)

At the time of writing, a 'what works' approach to educational research dominates (Hounslow-Eyre, 2019), with a strong emphasis on a quasi-scientific evidence-base (Bennett, 2019) and a contemptuous disregard for previous research-based perspectives, regularly dismissed as myths (Christodoulou, 2014). So, while there has been a narrative 'turn' in education, with notable researchers like Bruner (1986; 2003), Connelly and Clandinin (1988; 1998; 2000) and Goodson (2014), amongst others, creating a rich, insightful body of research (Lewis, 2010), it is also true that the current political context in England is largely hostile to such forms of inquiry.

2.2.4 *Story is the stuff of teaching*: why a narrative orientation for this study

Despite this contention, there is a vibrant body of scholarship that recognises the particular merits of narrative for researching education and, specifically, teachers and teaching practice. In the words of Carter (1993), a strong advocate for the use of narrative in educational research, 'telling stories' is the most appropriate way to understand:

> the richness and indeterminacy of our experiences as
> teachers and the complexity of our understandings of
> what teaching is and how others can be prepared to
> engage in this profession (p. 5)

Although other approaches can achieve similar depth, particularly an approach like Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), I deemed narrative to be more

suitable for this study because a) I personally understand stories to be a profoundly important means of knowledge-generation b) this study has stories at its core in the form of the literature that constitutes the English curriculum c) I agree that narrative is a particularly appropriate way to explore teachers and teaching. Gudmundsdottir (2001), for example, argues that narrative more successfully encompasses the 'complexities of classroom practice than do traditional research methods' (p. 226) and Kim (2016) echoes this when she claims that 'teachers' stories…have become key devices in understandings the complex nature of a classroom' (Kim, 2016, p. 18). Elbaz goes further, making an '…epistemological claim that teachers' knowledge in its own terms is ordered by story and can best be understood in this way' (quoted in Carter, 1993, p. 7) and stating that, in fact, 'story is the stuff of teaching' (ibid).

Arguably, the world of the novice teacher, the subject of this thesis, is especially suited to narrative research (Carter, 1993; Allard and Doecke, 2017). Carter (1993) claims novices do not yet have the 'rich store of situated or storied knowledge of curriculum content, classroom social processes' (p.7) and, therefore, their stories of their new environment are valuable sources of knowledge. She argues that:

> …by recording what events are storied by novices, especially over time, it should be possible to gain insights into what they know, how their knowledge is organised, and how their knowledge changes with additional experiences of watching and doing teaching (p.7).

In addition, she draws on Putnam (1987) and Gudmundsdottir (1991) to argue that teachers' way of working with the curriculum is in itself fundamentally influenced by narrative; that teachers develop a 'story-line' which 'imposes meaning on the vast

array of ideas and facts contained in the subject matter' infusing it with 'pedagogical interpretations' and connecting it to 'classroom events' (cited in Carter, 1993, p. 7). Key to this is the idea that social actors move into any context 'from varied biographical locations that have to be recognised' (Schutz cited in Greene, 1994, p. 435); that an individual's consciousness and 'own lived circumstances' are crucial in understanding their experiences and knowledge (ibid, p. 438). This, I felt, was vital for fully addressing my research questions, particularly RQ1 which incorporates an element of biographical detail and seeks to, in effect, make clear NETs' 'storylines' associated with the teaching of literature.

Another aspect of narrative's power in researching teachers and teaching practice is its faculty to give voice to teachers' 'secret stories' (ibid), thereby filling the 'terrible silences' left when 'official languages' dominate the discourse (Greene, 2000, p. 47). Stories 'resist the dominant narratives of instituted power' (Lewis, 2010, p.1): small stories, or petits récits, are to Lyotard (1984) important antidotes to grand or metanarratives. My research questions, particularly RQ2, are designed to focus on the human dimension of curriculum. This tends to be neglected in dominant educational discourse (Davies, 2005) which excludes 'context, character, contradiction, and complexity... voices, values, and experiences' (Carter, 1993, p. 11). It is an official language 'without human provenance or possibility' (Davies, 2005 p. 15) with a 'pervasive non-narrative and behaviourist chill' (McEwan and Egan, 1995, p. xii) that is as devoid of hope or joy as it is blind to any difficulty or struggle experienced by teachers. Taking a narrative approach, then, constitutes a

challenge to this by spotlighting human stories in a fundamentally human job. I see this as essential to addressing all my research questions, but particularly RQ3, which cannot be properly answered without a methodological approach that can 'illuminat[e] the dark spots, the rough edges' (Pinar, 1981, p. 184) of teachers' experience. The narrative approach of this research aims to confront 'ambiguity and dilemma' (Carter, 1993, p. 6) and, if necessary, expose the 'gaps, the broken glass, the unpainted walls, the pallid faces, the empty shelves' which are too often 'obscured or denied' by educational research that looks through a 'distancing lens' (Greene, 1994, p. 447). This is particularly the case given the nature of a contested English curriculum (Brindley, 1994; Cox, 1995; Davies, 1996; Poulson, 1998; Marshall, 2000; Peel, Patterson & Gerlach, 2000; McGuinn and Stevens, 2004; King and Protherough, 2006) which makes for complex terrain for novice teachers.

For these reasons, I have designed my research (which I outline in the following section) to uphold the principles of narrative inquiry. I do not claim this study is pure narrative inquiry; it is, in many ways, a conventional qualitative study, as stated at the start of this section. However, I have taken what I consistently describe as a 'narrative approach', taking great care in the design to create space for participants' stories and encourage rich descriptions of experience. Narrative inquiry is a wide spectrum, as Kim (2016) suggests, encompassing, 'theoretically, philosophically diverse approaches and methods, all revolving around the narratives and stories of research participants' (p 6). This qualitative study aligns with that principle in the sense that my participants' stories are at its heart.

3. Research design and data collection

3.1 Overview of methods

Ensuring that the research methods for this project were methodologically-driven, whilst simultaneously being both practical and ethically robust, was a challenge and has necessitated compromises, much of which is covered in Section 3.3 below. The finalised methods of data collection were designed to maximise opportunities for participants to engage in sincere narrative story-telling. This was achieved by ensuring they felt protected from the power imbalance inherent in my relationship with them as tutor-researcher and by being mindful of their time and workload pressures. The chief method of research is the storying session (SS) although written stories were also collected at one data point. Below is an overview of the research methods. Further details about each research method are provided in Section 3.5:

Table 1 – Overview of Research Methods

Cohort	Autumn 2019	Winter 2019/20	Spring 2020	Summer 2020	Autumn 2020	Winter 2020/21	Spring 2021	Summer 2021
1	Written stories: 'my English autobiography	SS 1	SS 2	SS 3		SS 4	SS 5	SS 6
2					Written stories: 'my English autobiography	SS 1	SS 2	SS 3

3.2 Participants

Participants for this research came exclusively from Bath Spa University's cohort of English PGCE students across two academic years (2019/20 and 2020/21). The PGCE is a ten-month postgraduate course, running from September to June, which qualifies students to teach English in secondary schools to pupils aged eleven to eighteen. The course is predominantly school-based, with PGCE students spending 120 days of the course on school placement: Placement 1 runs from October to December and Placement 2 from February to June. On placement, PGCE students become the main teacher for classes from Year 7 to Year 10 predominantly, building from ten hours to sixteen hours of teaching a week. They gradually increase their role in these classes until they have responsibility for the planning, behaviour management and assessment of their classes with guidance from their school-based mentors. The course therefore represents an intense learning period for PGCE students, who often go from complete inexperience to gaining considerable experience in the space of ten months. I am the academic and pastoral tutor of all English PGCE students, the ethical implications of which are discussed in Section 3.7.

Selection of participants was on a voluntary basis. In order to recruit volunteers, I delivered a short presentation to provide an overview of the project. Following this, information sheets were available for students to take, if interested. Students could then register their interest, or ask further questions, by emailing me privately. When participants had all the information they needed, and indicated they were happy to contribute to the research, I sent them an informed consent form which provided

clear options for consent. This was revisited and checked throughout the research.

In the 2019/20 academic year, six PGCE students volunteered to participate in the project (Cohort 1) and in 2020/21 four PGCE students volunteered (Cohort 2). Of the ten participants, all had work experience before deciding to take up a place on the PGCE (none joined the course straight from their first degree), and they ranged in age from mid-twenties to late-forties. Two participants had just finished higher degrees in English (one PhD, one MA) and five came with experience in education: three had been teaching assistants, one a Housemistress in a boarding school and one a teacher of English abroad. The remaining five joined the course with little or no teaching experience (including the two who had just completed their higher degrees).

3.3 The pilot phase

In the academic year 2018-2019 I conducted a pilot. Having engaged fully with the process of ethical approval, I became acutely aware of the problematic nature of my dual role as both researcher with, and tutor to, my potential participants. My cognisance of this persuaded me to construct a research design that protected participants' anonymity. Although I recognised the cost of this in terms of developing the kind of intimate research relationships so crucial to a narrative approach, I felt the benefits would outweigh this. In fact, I hoped that by bracketing myself out of the data collection, I could open up spaces in which participants could

record and explore the full range of their experiences freely and, in doing so, I would be able to engage them much more actively as co-researchers responsible for generating and reflecting on their own data.

To protect participants' anonymity, I engaged the support of an assistant, who acted as a bridge in terms of communication between my participants and me, and who collected and stored the written data the participants produced. Three English PGCE students volunteered, registering their interest and then consent by communicating with my assistant. The participants were asked to contribute written (anonymised) data at four points through their training years, which are outlined below:

1. An English autobiography (September 2018)
2. A reflection on the English curriculum (October 2018)
3. A two-week field diary (October 2018 – June 2019)
4. A reflection at the end of the PGCE year (June 2019)

Despite this careful design (or perhaps because of it), the pilot yielded unsatisfactory data and I had to revise my approach considerably as a result. I explain this in the following section.

3.4 Taking a narrative approach (1): lessons from the pilot

The first unintended consequence of my pilot research design was that it did not support recruitment to the project. Members of my PGCE cohort were reluctant to commit and I was able to persuade just three students to volunteer. Further, those

who did volunteer seemed to find the data required onerous: the extra written accounts of their experiences being hard, presumably, to balance on top of an enormously busy PGCE workload. The data submitted, which were incomplete, were often lacking in detail and shallow: further evidence that the 'extra' task of being part of the research was too much for my participants. I wondered if this was a direct consequence of participants' anonymity from me: whilst it might have been ethically justified, it seemed to reduce participants' investment in the process, leading to unusable data due to it being under-developed and superficial. I wondered, too, if it might have been the result of the solitary nature of the research; participants were anonymous not just from me but from each other, leaving no room for the social interaction and collaborative meaning-making at the heart of narrative inquiry (Kim, 2016). This, therefore, was my lesson, that the methodological integrity of a research design is paramount. In addition, I learnt that I needed to be even more practical and realistic than I had been about what I could expect participants to do *on top of* their training.

As a result, I revised my approach entirely and focused on constructing a research design that could be a) methodologically grounded b) ethically robust and c) logistically feasible for busy PGCE student-participants. My most significant decision was to re-introduce face-to-face interviews as the only way to generate valuable and rich data in line with the tenets of narrative inquiry. I then implemented the steps outlined in Section 3.7 to mitigate the ethical risks of the project and, finally, I planned what I considered to be an achievable schedule for data collection. In order to maximise the depth and breadth of my data, I decided to collect data over a period

of two years with two different cohorts, the first of which I would interview throughout their first year of teaching as well as their training year. In the following section, I describe the two methods of data collection that I adapted for my revised and final research design.

3.5 Taking a narrative approach (2): description of final research methods

3.5.1 Storying sessions

Storying sessions were the central method of my study. They were a form of interview in which participants were encouraged to share their experiences with me and each other. Interviews are, as Kim (2016) notes, the 'foremost method in narrative inquiry' (p.157) because they elicit verbal, interactive narratives, which are important because stories often take shape in the telling (Kim, 2016). I use the term 'storying sessions' as a way of drawing attention to the overt focus I maintained on their narrative aspects.

The storying sessions were held on university campus or, by necessity, online, at a time convenient to participants, which was usually in the late afternoon at the end of the school day. The sessions lasted for approximately an hour, although some lasted up to nearly two hours. Each session was framed as a chance for participants to share their stories of the weeks leading up to the session and began with a brief reminder of the overall focus of my research, as well as a quick recap of previous session's stories, if appropriate. I sometimes asked my participants to simply

describe their curricular experiences as a way to start. These measures were used in order to prompt narratives without the need for any specific questions, which I wished to avoid (see below). Further detail on the research settings, including where and when they were held, are shared in Section 3.6 below.

To uphold the principles of narrative inquiry in the sessions, I approached them in the following way:

Conscious relinquishment of control: whilst qualitative researchers can decide to conduct interviews anywhere on a continuum from structured to unstructured, 'narrative interviewing' (Kim, 2016, p. 165) demands a stance that goes further by 'giving up the power as an interviewer' (ibid, p. 166). I followed this as closely as I could by limiting my input to introductions before allowing participants' stories to shape the remainder of the sessions. I consciously aimed to 'empower' participants by taking a 'humble and empathetic approach' (ibid, p.158), characterised by being 'attentive, sensitive and responsive' (ibid, p. 164). In contrast to other styles of interview, in which the researcher has more influence on the direction of the dialogue, narrative interviewing involves 'holding questions back so that the person being interviewed can shape stories in his or her own way' (Narayan & George, 2012, p. 522 quoted in Kim, 2016, p. 166), particularly in the 'narration phase' (Kim, 2016, p. 167) where we might borrow from psychoanalysis the idea of active listening (Kim, 2016), before moving to the 'conversation phase' (ibid, p.166) in which a 'collaborative meaning-making process between the interviewer and the

interviewee occurs' (ibid, p.169). In my sessions, I consciously took this narrative stance throughout and was pleased to see how easily and freely participants seemed to share their experiences. However, it is important to note that I was more careful in the 'conversation phase' than Kim (2016) suggests, as I remained acutely aware of my influence as participants' tutor. This gave me potentially more power than my participants to shape any mutually-constructed story which argued against my full involvement in the different narrative threads. The 'conversation phase' was, nevertheless, important in terms of establishing intimacy, which was a key part of my narrative approach, and I will discuss this now.

Establishing intimacy: As McEwan and Egan (1995) argue, narrative meaning-making is 'conducted in the idiom of informal conversation' (p. xi). Again, this distinguishes the narrative interview from other forms of interviewing in qualitative research. As Mears (2017) notes, developing rapport with interviewees is crucial if we are to 'journey into another's perspective...so meaning can be learned and significance shared' (p. 184). One of the key ways to develop this rapport is to approach the interview with 'candour, interest and respect' (p. 185). I ensured, throughout the interview process, that I listened attentively to participants' contributions, being watchful of my own bias when making comments or forming questions, whilst at the same time being open and willing to share when appropriate. This acknowledges that my role as *narrative* interviewer, as Kim (2016) notes, is not to be a therapist or interrogator: professional distance is not the gold standard, although clearly the process must neither be the unguarded chat of close friends.

The balance is not easy to strike and there are no hard-and-fast rules, although I took as my guide the idea that I should be open enough to develop rapport but not so open as to influence participants' responses with my bias. I also took pride in showing 'genuine caring, interest, and respect' (Kim, 2016, p. 163) to encourage the honest sharing of experience. Throughout, I ensured I was welcoming, open and demonstrated sincere gratitude for their time (Mears, 2017). This was rewarded by the consequent openness and sincerity of my participants in the sessions.

Explicit sharing of my narrative approach: Finally, I undertook to ensure the integrity of my narrative approach through the simple but important step of explicitly sharing it with participants. Both my presentation about my research and my information sheet outlined the distinctive features of a narrative approach and, likewise, when reminding participants about my research focus at the start of each storying session, I also reminded them of this narrative stance in order to underscore the way that their stories, including personal elements like emotions, were welcomed in this setting. I believe that this acted to uphold the narrative principles at the heart of this project, helping to avoid the possibility that participants would fall into more familiar research patterns, in which the researcher is in control and has a predetermined objective.

Participants' written narratives were a more minor, but nevertheless crucial, research method in this study. These were written accounts of their 'journeys' into English teaching which I termed their 'English autobiographies'. This was a compulsory PGCE task, something all PGCE students were required to complete before starting the course in September. I ensured that participants consented to this task being used as data.

These written stories were crucial to set the scene for participants' subsequent stories, ensuring that there was data relating to their personal histories, which is an important part of their understanding of curriculum (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988). The advantage of written accounts for this purpose was that they were written with care and deep reflection, making the resulting stories rich with detail about participants' personal relationship to literary study.

3.6 Research settings

In qualitative research, 'where and when the research takes place is a critical factor of the research itself' (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 13) and this is particularly the case for a narrative-focused inquiry as a specific setting has the potential to impact how freely participants share their stories. As the quotation above suggests, a setting includes time - *when* - as well as place - *where* - and I will address these both separately.

Where: The storying sessions were held initially on Bath Spa University campus. This was, in many ways, a practical decision; it would have been ideal to have had a private room away from university in order to distinguish the process from the PGCE and to reiterate that, in this context, I was in the role of researcher rather than tutor. However, that not being possible, I mitigated as much as I could by consciously attempting to make participants feel at ease: I arranged the interview for a time that best suited them, to minimise any feeling of being rushed or squeezed, and made the venue as comfortable as I could, with refreshments freely available. When, at the end of the first session on campus, one of my participants suggested that we could continue the conversation in the pub, I felt I had managed to achieve the right sense of openness and informality!

This was, however, the one and only time I was able to meet with my participants in person due to COVID-19 pandemic and the national lockdown which began on 23rd March 2020. This was, in fact, just a day before my second storying session was due to run. Clearly, this was an alarming and uncertain time and required additional action that I had not planned for in my research design or ethics. Demonstrating the way in which an ethical approach to research is an ongoing process, extending beyond the point at which ethical approval is gained and requiring researchers to consistently show empathy and flexibility (Kim, 2016), I decided I should email my participants on 23rd March 2020 to, firstly, explain that I would be seeking remote alternatives to our planned session the next day but, most importantly, to acknowledge that the stressful new situation might impact their ability, or desire, to continue with the project. As a result of this, I asked participants to email back to

confirm their willingness to continue: I, in effect, sought their consent anew. Whilst this was something I habitually checked before all storying sessions, this was phrased particularly carefully to give participants an easy opportunity to withdraw. Fortunately, all participants responded positively and I rearranged the session for the following week via an online platform.

From that point on, an online platform was the only means available for our sessions as the PGCE remained remote, with all teaching and meetings online, until September 2021 (although the PGCE students were on teaching placements in-person from September 2020). Despite the potential challenge this presented in terms of maintaining the safe, open, easy environment I needed for good quality data, I was surprised to find that the move to remote storying sessions was very smooth. From the first online session, I noticed that participants seemed just as comfortable as they had been on campus; possibly more so, as they were talking from their own homes. Through necessity, I had perhaps found the distinctive space away from campus that I had initially hoped for, convenient and comfortable for all.

When: The storying sessions took place at carefully chosen points in participants' training year and, for Cohort 1, their first year of teaching. These were selected to gather their accumulating experiences across that period. In the table below, I outline what this means in terms of participants' levels of experience and explain important contextual details relevant to each cohort, including

circumstances relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is in recognition of the situated nature of stories, tied intrinsically to, and inevitably shaped by, a particular place and time. For this reason, I made careful note of the context of each data collection point and this forms part of the description below. At this point, I considered these different stages to be potentially significant to the overall findings and, initially, I analysed the data with close attention to the stage of its collection. As I explain in Section 4.2, however, the stages proved to be less meaningful than I predicted because participants' stories did not change notably over the period of the data collection. Nevertheless, as mentioned above, the context of all points of data collection are methodologically significant as *contexts* for participants' stories and therefore worth outlining here:

Table 2 – Stages of Data Collection

Stage 1	Autumn 2019 & 2020	**On starting the teacher training year** At this stage, all participants had newly joined the PGCE course. Further details of their different histories before starting the course can be found in Section 3.2.
Stage 2	Winter 2019 & 2020	**On finishing first placement** At this stage, all participants from both cohorts had completed, or nearly completed, their first school placements, which lasted for 8 weeks from late October until the Christmas holidays. These placements were the first time in a school at all for five of of the ten participants, and the first in an *English state school* for all participants, constituting their first experience of undertaking the roles and responsibilities of an English teacher

		in this context. By the end of this placement, all participants were teaching 10 hours of English lessons a week across Key Stage 3 and 4. Members of Cohort 1, at this stage, were living in pre-pandemic times and were therefore, obviously, unaffected by it. They were, however, in the midst of politically tumultuous post-Brexit Britain: the day of the storying session was the day of the 2019 General Election and they did not know, yet, that Johnson's Conservative party would win with a sizable majority although the presence of the election was palpable in the room and was briefly discussed at the start of the session. Members of Cohort 2, on the other hand, were living in Johnson's Britain and in a global pandemic which impacted their experience in schools enormously: Terms 1 and 2 of 2020/21 were the first opening of schools since the blanket closure during the worst of the pandemic (March to July 2020). This meant that schools were consumed by logistical challenges associated with the duty to keep staff and students safe - enforcing hygiene measures in confined spaces, wearing masks, cleaning desks, (non)issuing of resources and books, teacher (non)movement around the classroom etc - alongside providing an educational experience comparable to that pre-pandemic. At this point, the *Black Lives Matter* movement over the summer of 2020 was widely felt and culturally present.
Stage 3	Spring 2020 & 2021	**On starting second placement** At this stage, all participants across both cohorts had finished their first placements in schools, spent some time back at University, and had been engaged in their second placements for approximately four to five weeks (out of fourteen). Participants were, therefore, deepening their understanding of their profession through experience of a different school and through increased teaching hours and added responsibilities.

		Members of Cohort 1 were, at this point, hugely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic which had resulted in a national lockdown and school closures just at the point of data collection. Whilst this had many implications for the data collection in terms of providing a stressful and alarming backdrop to their storying session in March 2020, it did not affect their experiences preceding that, which is what they drew on in the session: they had, until that point, been teaching as usual in their second placement schools. On the other hand, whilst the pandemic was 'normal' for Cohort 2 at this stage, it was more relevant to the stories they shared as another lockdown in January to March 2021 meant they had been teaching online for the first three weeks in their Placement 2 schools.
Stage 4	Summer 2020 & 2021	**On completion of PGCE year** At this stage, participants from both cohorts had completed their second placements and, consequently, their teacher training year. For members of Cohort 1, the end of their course had been extremely atypical as the remainder of their placements were conducted entirely remotely, meaning that their teaching experience for the last third of their training was online rather than in the classroom. Perhaps for this reason, the conversation with this cohort was more cerebral and abstract, relating less to direct teaching experiences from the previous weeks because these experiences were not available. Members of Cohort 2, on the other hand, completed their second placements in-person and in school although they were sometimes disrupted by COVID-related issues, like bubble closures and social distancing.
Stage 5	Winter 2021	**On completing a first, full term of newly-qualified teaching** At this stage, and from this point on, the data came exclusively from Cohort 1. The participants had just completed their first term of teaching as newly-qualified teachers and had done so after months of lockdown and in schools with varying levels of COVID measures (social distancing, mask wearing and bubble closures). Despite this, most had been more or less solidly in

		school for the first term, September to December, although, unfortunately, at the point of data collection, January 2021, the country was in another national lockdown with full school closure. Participants, therefore, were once again at home and about to start remote teaching. This was anxiety-provoking and stressful for all teachers, and particularly those at the start of their teaching careers.
Stage 6	Spring 2021	**On completing a second term of newly-qualified teaching** Data from this stage were collected in April 2021. At the point of data collection, participants were at the end of a second term of teaching as newly-qualified teachers. The term was atypical, however, as it began at home, with all teachers teaching online. Teachers returned to the classroom from 8th March 2021 onwards, meaning that participants had been teaching back in their classrooms for approximately four to five weeks.
Stage 7	Summer 2021	**On completing the induction year** At this stage, all participants had completed their induction year and were considered fully-qualified teachers. They had, therefore, taught a full timetable of approximately six classes of pupils from Y7 to Y11. Participants had done this whilst managing social distancing measures in schools (including the wearing of masks in lessons) and adapting to online teaching during bubble or full closures in schools.

3.7 Ethical considerations

The most significant ethical factor of this study was the problem presented by my

dual role as both tutor and researcher. As outlined in Section 3.3 above, I attempted

to address this in the pilot phase by removing myself from the data collection,

allowing my participants to be anonymous and submit data via a third party. However, this compromised my narrative stance, which depends on a close, trusting relationship between researcher and researched (Smythe & Murray, 2000; Clandinin, 2007; Kim, 2016) and, therefore, the acknowledgement that I must find a different way to manage the ethical issues became one of my key lessons of the pilot phase.

As anonymity was not possible, therefore, I worked hard to limit the impact of the power imbalance by ensuring that I provided comprehensive information to potential participants in a manner that meant they did not feel pressure to volunteer. To achieve this, I designed a clear 'opt-in' system which required potential participants to *take action* if they wished to participate (they had to: take an information sheet, ask questions, register their interest by proactively emailing me and sign a consent form). I ensured these 'actions' could be undertaken in private and only once participants had time to fully read and comprehend the information (for example, I placed the information sheets on my desk at the end of my presentation and left the room so that participants could freely decide whether or not to take one). No mention of the project was made in teaching sessions (apart from the initial research presentation to recruit volunteers) or outside of the context of the research.

I made sure that participants' lack of anonymity from me as research participants was clear on the information sheet. I also ensured that I put in measures to protect

my participants' confidentiality:

1. Consent forms were signed and submitted in private to avoid research participants being identified by peers.

2. Participants could choose whether or not pseudonyms were used in the thesis - this was an option in recognition of the fact that participants may wish to be named in the research. This was established with a 'confidentiality form' (Kim, 2016, p.159) which allowed participants to identify how to use their data in terms of protecting their anonymity.

3. Pseudonyms were always used for any schools or school professionals referenced in participants' accounts.

4. Participants could request to see and edit their transcribed contributions and their written data, a fact made clear on the information sheet.

I was mindful that 'becoming a teacher in a classroom is a personal matter' (Britzman, 2012, p. 4) and that being a student of teaching can evoke a 'dread of vulnerability and uncertainty' (ibid, p.10) which could be heightened by my position as the participants' tutor. I was aware of the potential sense of vulnerability and unease that could be felt by participants when asked to describe experiences that could be construed as 'failing' or, at least, struggling. I addressed this upfront in the information sheet, which made concerted efforts to verbalise, and therefore legitimise, the expression of uncertainty as a desirable aspect of the research. I also ensured participants were clear about their right to withdraw from the research at

any time, without reason or consequence.

The fact that data have been generated through both individual and group interviews is a consequence of the ethical considerations of the project: volunteers were offered the choice between the two to accommodate those who might feel uncomfortable sharing experiences in a group. One participant of the ten opted for this. In the data analysis, her data was subsumed into the data from all the other participants. When asking for participants' English autobiographies - their written accounts of their 'journeys' into English teaching - I was cognisant of the ethical risk in requesting this very personal account. Whilst I did not ask participants to share information that would be considered sensitive or delicate, it may have been, until then, private. However, the risk associated with this was limited by the fact that participants constructed their written accounts freely, at liberty to conceal or expose whatever they wished, so the potential for any emotional harm (embarrassment, anxiety) was extremely minimal.

These measures were essential for undertaking ethical research but, overall, the risks associated with my research methods were low. My participants were adult postgraduate students and, with reference to criteria set out by Diener and Crandall (1978), could be safely considered competent enough to fully comprehend any information provided and to make informed decisions about volunteering, contributing and withdrawing (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017).

4. Approaches to data analysis

My data analysis method is Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA). RTA is a refined version of Thematic Analysis (TA), developed by Braun and Clarke (2006; 2019; 2021) through years of reflection and research since the publication of their seminal 2006 article on TA. Its key principle is reflexivity, which is shown through the stance of the researcher (self-aware, questioning, willing to embrace and work through uncertainty) and their behaviour (protecting time and space for the important job of reflexivity in the research process). The approach is guided by a six-step process called phases (outlined below) which Braun & Clarke (2021) emphasise should not be considered a rigid set of rules. RTA is described by them as being on one end of a spectrum of TA approaches, it being the 'Big Q' as opposed to 'small Q' end; 'Q' standing for 'qualitative'. This 'Big Q' definition, taken from Kidder and Fine (1987), refers to the fact that RTA, in comparison to 'coding reliability TA' at the other extreme, has qualitative principles running through from philosophical stance to method. Whereas 'coding reliability' is qualitative in method, it is closer to quantitative in its values, in that it is concerned with reliability and objective 'truth' in the positivist sense. RTA, on the other hand, is not concerned with reliability, instead embracing researchers' 'inevitable subjectivity' (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 6) and emphasising the active role of the researcher in generating (rather than 'discovering') codes, themes and patterns in data. In fact, Braun & Clarke (2021) describe subjectivity as the 'primary tool' (p. 6) for RTA, and liken the method to an art rather than a science, foregrounding the creativity, as well as the subjectivity, at

the heart of the process. This stance then impacts on the way that RTA can be evaluated: whilst it cannot be 'accurate or objective' it can be 'weaker, undeveloped, unconvincing, thin and superficial, shallow' (p. 7). This places the test of research validity firmly in the *quality* of the researcher's interpretation.

4.1 A narrative approach to data analysis

I would like to argue that RTA is most suitable for this project because, like Josselson (2011), I see the symbiotic relationship between thematic analysis and narrative research. Its focus on interpretative quality, on the benefits of researcher subjectivity and on the creative, as opposed to scientific, aspects of research makes a clear case for RTA as a method of analysis for this narratively framed project. Central to the theoretical framework of narrative is the conviction that narratives communicate meaning and generate knowledge - we learn from stories and we do so by engaging in deep interpretative activity (Dillard, 1988; Bruner, 2003). It is impossible to enter into this form of knowledge-generation without embracing reflexivity, subjectivity and creativity, just as RTA does. Narrative researchers are expected to: pay close attention to contextual and emotional aspects of experience, use their own 'selves' in the research, develop thoughtful and complex interpretations that open avenues for inquiry, rather than close them down, and embrace nuance, contradiction and other 'messy' elements by resisting the temptation to 'smooth' data (Bruce et al, 2016). RTA is a method that can work within these parameters.

Further, like Josselson (2011), I view this as closely linked to literary reading and the part-to-whole movement of the hermeneutic circle. Given the subject of my study, I wish to consciously embrace that quality in my data analysis. Although the *process* of literary reading is arguably less well articulated than the processes for analysing data in the social sciences, literary reading is, nevertheless, a form of interpretative inquiry that I have undertaken many times. Using available disciplinary guidance from The English Subject Centre as well as AQA examination specifications (AQA, 2014), and drawing on both Rosenblatt's (1994) reader- response theory and Eaglestone's (2017) seminal 'Doing English', I set out the table below to show my understanding of the links between literary reading and RTA:

Table 3 – Links between literary reading and RTA

Phase and nature of data analysis	RTA (from Braun & Clarke)	Literary reading
Locus of inquiry	Data, usually generated by the researcher and available only to her (unless in appendices)	Published text, available to all readers
1	Familiarisation/'immersion' in data/note areas of interest/surprises	Familiarisation/imaginative 'envisionment'/feeling/note first impressions of what is significant
2	Generate codes, which is a process of interpretation driven by researcher subjectivity	Annotate, which is a process of interpretation fuelled by reader subjectivity
3	Begin to find patterns by	Begin to find patterns and

	organising the codes into initial themes	develop notes from annotation
4	Review initial themes	Review notes, usually through sharing ideas with others, testing their validity and refining them
5	Define and name themes	
6	Write report	Write essay
Researcher/reader stance	Multiple realities, no one objective truth, knowledge is constructed. Critical or experiential. Made explicit.	Multiple realities, no one objective truth, knowledge is constructed. Critical. Usually remains implicit.
Researcher/reader qualities	Self-awareness, reflexivity, creativity, sensitivity, openness to alternative interpretations	Creativity, aesthetic sensitivity, openness to alternative interpretations
Evaluation criteria	Convincing argument, clear links between 'evidence' and 'analysis' which is compelling, insightful, thoughtful, rich, complex, deep, nuanced (Braun and Clarke, 2006; 2012; 2023) Philosophical position and assumptions worked through by the researcher and explicitly stated.	Convincing argument, clear links between 'evidence' and 'analysis' which is 'critical, exploratory, thoughtful, insightful, perceptive, assured and sophisticated' (AQA, 2014, n.p.).

4.2 The process in practice

4.2.1 Phases 1 to 3: becoming familiar, coding/annotating and spotting patterns

Braun & Clarke's (2019) first three phases of RTA, familiarisation, coding and pattern-spotting, mirror very closely the act of literary reading and annotation in a way that perhaps other coding methods, sometimes criticised for being reductive, would not. Braun & Clarke (2021) are emphatic in their message that coding in RTA is 'a process not of simple identification, but of *interpretation* [author's italics]' (p. 7) and that the researcher is responsible for spending sufficient time with the data to allow these interpretations to 'develop and deepen' (p. 7) before moving onto the next stages. This is de rigueur for the literary scholar, the calibre of whose work depends on spending quality time (Thomas, 2021) with the literary text. Braun & Clarke's (2019) 'organic' (p. 7) and interpretative approach to coding worked for me as a way of both organising and tracking a large amount of data, as coding should, and, crucially, of paying *close attention* to the content.

In order to stay true to the narrative nature of my inquiry, I used 'dramaturgical coding' (Saldana, 2014) to support my deep recognition of participants' stories. Dramaturgical coding perceives participants as characters in a social drama and assigns codes to reflect this, inviting analysts to organise data according to participants' *objectives, conflicts, tactics, attitudes, emotions* and *subtext* (Saldana, 2014). To this list, I added an additional code: *context.* I needed this for participants' references to factors that are specific to teaching and education, including

curriculum content, assessment tasks and Ofsted inspection visits, for example. Having transcribed the storying sessions myself to maximise my familiarity with the data, I took each stage of data in turn and carefully coded them accordingly. Using dramaturgical codes meant that I was required to interpret participants' accounts from the start, often reading between the lines to extrapolate their objectives, their attitudes or tactics. Conceptualising the process as a form of literary reading supported me to do so with rigour, moving from the data to my interpretation and back to constantly test and interrogate my understanding and assumptions.

My approach was inductive, taking into account Braun & Clarke's (2021) view that RTA does not support a sharp distinction between inductive and deductive approaches because of its ''Big Q' position which makes 'pure' induction impossible: the researcher always bring philosophical metatheoretical assumptions and themselves to the analysis' (p. 6). I had something of my theoretical framework in mind throughout - looking particularly for references to particular discourses in the English curriculum field - and, likewise, I inevitably, although not necessarily consciously, brought to bear my own lived experience to my reading of participants' accounts. I felt the power of this inductive-but-deductive approach as I engaged in these early stages of interpretation and noticed far more interesting textures in the data than I expected when moving from Phase 1, familiarisation, to Phase 2, coding. For example, although it had escaped my notice in the sessions themselves and in the hours spent with my participants' words in the process of transcription, I picked up in the coding process that when describing units of work, participants often did

so *in terms of* the assessment that would follow which strongly suggested the dominance of assessment in schools, especially as participants seemed unaware of this. This example also demonstrates the way in which I coded at both semantic and latent levels (Braun & Clarke, 2012): dramaturgical coding invites reading for latent meanings, like objectives or subtexts but it was also necessary to identify participants' straightforward descriptions, like, for example, the topics they had taught.

This process generated 62 codes across all seven stages of data. Considering the *stages* of data collection to be potentially significant, I produced a separate table of codes for each. Into these tables, I copied and pasted the relevant quotations under the coded heading so that I could view them at a glance. I also highlighted the quotation with a different colour according to which participant it belonged; this was so that I had the opportunity to look for narrative arcs over time from the perspective of one individual, as well as seeing the group view.

Fig. 1 - Screenshot of coding table for Stage 1

Objective	Conflict	Tactics	Attitudes	Emotions	Subtext	Context
3. Prepping for assessment	19. Challenges in classroom	35. Engender enthusiasm through creative writing	2. Humour	1. Tired	11. Older, canonical text are most impressive	6. 'Cultural capital'
My Y7s - Skellig and I'm preparing them for their assessment in which they're going to investigate the friendship between the characters Michael and Mina	Y8 we've done Trash and we haven't got that far with it because it's been... I've been given some advice about how to get them to get roots into the book and engaged in various tasks	I've actually started doing a new thing as well, in the last couple of days. Because it's been rather frustrating, the library's been closed because	I think I've got to the point now where I'm tired, so tired that the madness has set in [laughter] and I think that's what's getting me through.	I think I've got to the point now where I'm tired, so tired that the madness has set in [laughter] and I think that's what's getting me through.	they're doing creative writing based on Beowulf [Lots of impressed noises, oh wow, etc]	my Y8s we are studying a novel called Refugee Boy which is really interesting and there's a lot of cultural capital coming in there, especially considering the school I'm in has got a reputation of white, middle class
my Y9s are doing creative writing but it's all based off the GCSE Lang papers, so it's less creative writing, more how to analyse an	Y10 group doing R&J and I looked at surrogate parental responsibility and they struggled with the	mocks have been going on, so pupils haven't been able to go and swap a book. And because a lot of			So my Y7s are doing The Odyssey [Gasps around the group] D: Can I just go, 'yes!' Y7 we're doing Treasure	We have a big push on cultural heritage, just because the school that I'm at, there is a real push on cultural capital

Using this table, I read across the data at each stage using the circular movement of literary reading - close reading connected to big picture awareness - to support my identification of areas of significance. I then distilled the most significant codes into what I called a 'story arc' of the stage (see table below).

Fig. 2: Example of a story arc

Objectives	Conflict	Emotions	Tactics	Subtext	Attitudes	Context
To raise pupils' consciousness To inspire pupils	Reluctance or disengagement Lack of time to read or experience literature Tired curriculum Externally-mandated pedagogy Controversial text choice	Frustration Stress Pride Enjoyment Discomfort	Pedagogical innovations Personal twist on curriculum Use KS3 to uphold curriculum principles Managing personal emotion	Assessment warps teaching English and the wider world Teachers' own knowledge is vital Talk is fundamental to English	Gratitude/positivity	The knowledge debate Covid

From this, I refined the codes further by categorising them into broader headings like 'text choice', 'assessment' and 'curriculum content'. Under each category heading, at each stage, I wrote extended reflections of participants' stories related to them. My intention was to use these categories to extrapolate from the entire dataset some overriding themes which would address my research questions, taking my analysis, as Braun and Clarke (2012) suggest, from codes to categories and, finally, to themes.

I had to reconsider this approach, however, when it became clear that the categories changed little from stage to stage. Although participants' experience deepened and developed, their preoccupations remained relatively constant and the headings stayed static, leading to repetitious reflections. I realised, therefore, that it was both possible and preferable to define the themes of the whole dataset from careful consideration of the codes I had created for each stage of data. I explain my approach to creating these themes in the following section.

4.2.2 Phases 1 to 6: reviewing and defining themes and writing the report

At this point of the data analysis, I realised that I had lost sight of my own bespoke analytical approach. In my anxiety, as a novice educational researcher, to analyse the data in a way that I could be sure would be seen as valid, I had placed too much emphasis on coding and categories and less on finding meaning in NETs' stories through careful reflection, following a kind of interpretative instinct that Eaglestone (2019) describes as 'becoming attuned' (p. 11) to the language of the text (or data). This process, with its shades of artistry and musicality, was not facilitated by creating categories for each stage. Likewise, by atomising the data into stage and category I had lost sight of the whole and had inadvertently drifted away from the part-to-whole movement of the hermeneutic circle. Tellingly, I had also inadvertently become guilty of creating 'topic summary themes' (Braun and Clarke, 2023, p. 2) and found, first-hand, the truth of Braun and Clarke's (2023) warning that this would result in 'positivism creep' (p. 2) which deadened rather than

illuminated my data. It was a useful reminder to stay true to my narrative approach,

as Josselson (2011) notes:

> Rather than just identifying and describing themes, narrative analysis endeavors to understand the themes in relation to one another as a dynamic whole…The process of analysis is one of piecing together data, making the invisible apparent, deciding on what is significant and insignificant, and linking seemingly unrelated facets of experience together. Analysis is a creative process of organizing data so that the analytic scheme will emerge. Texts are read multiple times in a hermeneutic circle, considering how the whole illuminates the parts, and how the parts in turn offer a fuller and more complex picture of the whole, which then leads to a better understanding of the parts etc [sic] (p. 227)

My task, therefore, was to take a step back in order to 'piece together' the data,

creatively, into a 'dynamic whole'. To do this, I needed to hold the 'whole' securely

in my mind whilst examining the details in relation to it, becoming attuned to the

layers of significance and meaning. This is the challenge of any hermeneutic

approach and it is why it cannot be achieved in one reading (of data or text). Whilst

far too granular in its presentation, my careful coding of the data in Phases 1 to 3

had, in fact, helped me to develop a strong understanding of both the whole dataset

and its constituent parts which became particularly useful as I entered this phase.

I began to make links across the dataset, reflecting thoughtfully on participants'

words and stories. Whilst I had already clearly identified references to literary

knowledge in each stage of data, making Theme 1 a straightforward theme to create,

Themes 2 and 3 began to be visible only after moving out from my close-up view of

the data to an overall sense of meaning across the stages. I began to see that participants' experiences of pupils' emotional responses to texts echoed their own emotional relationship with literature and that that, in turn, was closely related to their understanding of literary ethics, of the way literature had taught them and could teach their pupils to be 'the best humans, basically', in the words of one participant in Stage Four of the data. Likewise, I began to notice that, whilst participants' frustrations about their lack of agency was already relatively clear, there was, in fact, a related thread in their frustrations about pupils' lack of agency in their literary readings. This became Theme 3.

Like Josselson (2011), I found that the separation between the themes was not always clear. As much as I tried to make them distinct, they kept blurring across the constructed boundaries and, despite my adherence to those boundaries for the purpose of reporting, I remain aware that there are overlaps between the different themes and sub-themes that cannot be fully articulated when there is a certain level of categorisation. Nevertheless, Josselson's (2011) assertion that the presence of 'blurred boundaries' (p 232) suggests a truthfulness in the analysis, because it reflects human experience more accurately, both resonated with, and comforted, me. Similarly, at the end of the process I felt satisfied that her measure of quality - that interpretation of data 'brings forth something new - something not apparent in the surface of the text' (p. 228) - was achieved in the final analysis. In fact, I was excited by my discoveries - they had not been apparent, as Josselson (2011) says, on the surface or even after familiarisation and coding and so seemed almost like a

surprise. Although I understand the criticism of using the verb 'emerge' to describe the process of thematic identification (Braun and Clarke, 2023), and I do not use it because I understand the themes are my subjective construction, it did *feel* as if they emerged; it felt, in fact, as if they came from hidden to fully visible outside of my control or will. I suspect that this feeling is common and explains why 'emerge' is used so often but I know that it is misleading, obscuring the fact that I identified the themes through sifting, revisiting, checking, questioning, organising and linking the data, moving from parts to whole all the time.

In writing the report, it became clear that the creation of sub-themes would be necessary in order to delineate between different aspects of the same theme (although, of course, these too overlapped with each other). This supported the coherence of my final report. An overview of the identified themes is below:

The Strange Case of Literature and Knowledge (Theme 1), which unifies participants' stories about: the ways in which English is different from other subjects; pupils' perceptions of English; how literary knowledge is supported, or otherwise, by pedagogy; their implicit models of literary interpretation; their links between knowledge and literary experience.

Of Ethics and Emotional Effects (Theme 2), which unifies participants' stories about: their emotional connection to literature; the ethical responsibilities of the

literature teacher; emotions in the classroom as a result of studying literature; the presence of the wider world in the teaching of literature.

A Mind of One's Own (Theme 3), which unifies participants' stories about: the necessity to use agency and demonstrate independence for literary reading; teaching literature without agency; the benefits of text choice.

Chapter D: Findings

In this chapter, I share evidence from my dataset in full. In line with RTA, I present this thematically, organising my participants' stories under three distinct, but overlapping, themes. Congruous with the narrative steer of this research, I quote my participants' words liberally to most faithfully represent their stories. Nine of the ten participants are directly quoted in this chapter.

1. Theme One: *The Strange Case of Literature and Knowledge*

The data provide widespread evidence, across all stages and cohorts, of participants exploring elements of epistemology in English, although this is not always conscious. Participants never use the word 'epistemology', but the 'subtext' codes 'English as integral to identity', 'English as imagination/play/creativity/the wider world, 'English as personal and healing' and 'Stories are learning', amongst others, combine to suggest a striking consensus about the hermeneutic process involved in knowledge development in English. I have divided this theme into three parts, themselves overlapping, which address different aspects of participants' understanding of knowledge and literary study. The first is the 'colour' of literary knowledge, which relates to its distinctive nature in the school curriculum. The second is the 'shape' of literary knowledge, which links to participants' implicit understanding of the way literary interpretation works. The third is the 'experience' of literary knowledge, which participants see as an important part of literary study.

From Stage Two onwards, when participants are involved in the daily life of the school, the data shows them grappling with, and attempting to articulate, the epistemological constitution of English, which they most often express through drawing distinctions between it and other areas of the school curriculum. These differences seem to be conceptualised in two clear ways: one, in terms of 'shades' of knowledge (discussed below) and, two, in relation to Bloom's (1956) taxonomy (reflecting, perhaps, its ubiquitous influence on education). One participant at Stage Two, for example, makes a direct comparison between English and science, using Bloom's (1956) taxonomy to frame his thoughts: "What she [the science teacher] is aiming for most of the time is knowledge, understanding, knowledge, understanding, absolute bottom of the pyramid. I'm constantly at the top of the pyramid, evaluate this, judge, analyse this". This idea of knowledge at the 'bottom' and evaluation at the 'top' is noticeable in other contributions at this stage, both from Cohort 1 and 2, which show participants trying to make sense of how it works in English. One says, "Personally, I don't think that we can successfully teach things like poetry or Shakespeare without each pupil having a solid grounding in the basics of spelling, grammar and punctuation" and another states that, "..we don't need them to be able to analyse and do all this really deep stuff until they've got vocabulary and knowledge, broad knowledge".

Participants' positioning of literary reading at the top of Bloom's (1956) pyramid in English suggests an implicit recognition of the complexity of literary knowledge. This is often expressed by participants in terms of 'black and white' knowledge. One participant at Stage Two, for example, compares English to what she clearly sees as more epistemologically stable disciplines, "I think maybe in other subjects it does seem to be that there's a right answer or wrong answer…I think they [pupils] like that security of knowing where they are because it's very clear cut, very black and white". Later, at Stage Five, a participant asks her peer about mandated retrieval practice based on Rosenshine's (2012) *Principles of Instruction* which her peer is required to implement, "I only know it from a science perspective where the answers are black and white. Whereas from English, where you want so much personal response, personal thought, opinion, wasn't sure whether the rigidity of the questions would allow them - does it get them free thinking?" Her peer's response - "no, it isn't a platform to them talking about the text [or] a gateway to the learning" suggests their understanding of English as epistemologically 'grey' and therefore unsuited to a series of closed questions. Later again, at Stage Six, a participant notes that, "…if you go somewhere, like MFL or you go to science…they have to remember and they have to know and it's right or wrong but like with us it's very much shades - if you can justify your opinion you're always right".

Knowledge in English as 'shady' or 'grey', therefore, seems to be a majority view for participants across stages and cohorts. However, this seems to be accompanied by a sense of unease; participants' contributions suggest a kind of longing for right or

wrong, either because it is easier to teach, it is preferred by pupils ("they like that security of knowing where they are") or perhaps because it is more welcome in the school system. One participant at Stage Two, for example, makes oblique reference to a kind of pressure she feels to reshape English to fit the 'black and white' concept of knowledge, "don't you find you're always there [at the bottom of Bloom's] with literary devices. I always find myself going and that's the type of...? [literary device] "Yeah, good job!". You remember that word! If you can, spell it!". Interestingly, at Stage Five, this same participant laments pupils' focus on identifying literary devices, reporting her words to her pupils as, "'that's fabulous but what does the metaphor mean? Why is that important? Why does it growl like a lion? What's the importance of that?' They just can't". Her peer agrees, "It's like an adverbial - I couldn't care less. They think that's worthy of a praise point. I said 'Why? That means absolutely nothing to me if you tell me what the word type is. You identify the word type and that's you done? No, no, no'". At the later stages, then, there is evidence that participants' unease has turned to an open frustration at both the inadequacy of 'black and white' knowledge in English and the tendency of pupils (or the system?) to prefer it.

The 'colour' of literary knowledge, then, is understood by participants to be distinctly, and perhaps uniquely, 'grey': a reference to their underlying conceptions of the epistemology of their discipline.

Participants' understanding of knowledge in English as 'grey' speaks to the nature of literary study as not clear-cut but contestable and this indicates awareness of the hermeneutic foundations of English and its interpretive paradigmatic position. Without it being explicitly referenced by any participant throughout the data, the idea of the hermeneutic circle is implicit in many participants' contributions across all seven stages. At Stage One, it is apparent in participants' stories of their own foundational experiences with English as an academic discipline. One participant, for example, shares her successful university project of crafting and distributing a creative piece based on her life: "Other people felt what I was feeling and by sharing my words with them there was a sense of solidarity that filled the room…my mindset was changed from 'doing this for me' to 'being a voice in something a whole lot bigger'". This participant's movement between the details of her own experience and the 'bigger picture' of community, society and politics is fundamental to her sense of her own learning and development. She writes, "I had to keep writing. I knew that I had to create something that was me as well as the women around me". She concludes in a way that describes the hermeneutic process almost perfectly in the sense that she moves from the idea of a particular story impacting on the 'big picture' and, concurrently, understanding of the 'big picture' adjusting the particular story: "[I understood] the importance of telling one's story…and how vital it is for moving forward together as a society. The more I researched feminism and the deeper I read through the words of others the more I thought about my own life".

Likewise, another participant's contribution at this first stage also suggests implicit understanding of the hermeneutic process as she shifts between herself and the wider world in her reading and writing. In an account of her early experiences of reading she writes, "I can see still the soft blue cover of the book about fruit bats that had transported me on my own pair of translucent, spectral wings to the dark forests of deepest Peru. I was forever in my own world". She is simultaneously, oxymoronically, in exotic Peru and in her 'own' world: the use of her second, shorter sentence creates an interesting link between the two. Later, she begins to realise how they interact in a hermeneutic sense as she writes: "These books taught me about the world, about the darkness and the beauty in it, the atrocities and the little pearls of gorgeousness... I was fascinated by it all. My English lessons during this time inspired me to look at the world in a different way. I think I had failed to see just how small my corner of it was". Her movement between the big picture and her own 'small corner' changes both her understanding of the world and her place in it - and both, significantly, are dependent on her English lessons.

In later stages, participants' implicit understanding of the hermeneutic process of English becomes more grounded in the prevailing concerns of schools. At Stage Two, for example, participants discuss the issue of socio-historical context in English, which, although always an aspect of literature teaching (being an important element of the 'big picture' in the hermeneutic circle), had been recently foregrounded by the revised Education Inspection Framework (Ofsted, 2019). This framework, adopting

a Hirschian emphasis on knowledge, points English teachers very directly to the need to explicitly pre-teach socio-historical contextual knowledge of texts, which takes the form of facts about Victorian or Tudor England, for example. For Cohort 1, Stage Two data is collected very soon after the introduction of the framework and participants' contributions suggest the teaching of socio-historical context is high on departmental agendas. One participant, for example, seems inspired by school-based professional development led by Christine Counsell, a high-profile proponent of knowledge-based curricula. He says, "...if we're teaching them things that they have no context for, if they don't understand eighteenth century Britain, if they don't understand that Christianity has the Father, a Son, and the Holy Ghost, how are they going to analyse Shakespeare if they don't understand any religious references?".

As participants do not reference, in their stories, any of the concerns raised about teaching English through fixed historical contexts (Bleiman, 2020), this suggests Ofsted's agenda is significantly more present in English departments than the dissenting voices in the wider professional community. There is, nevertheless, evidence of some misgivings about the curriculum time given to the teaching of 'context' in English; participants do seem concerned that foregrounding a text with weighty lessons on history is somehow awry. One participant says, "Looking at mediaeval England is not a particularly exciting way to get into *Much Ado About Nothing*. It's far more exciting to start off with *Much Ado* and then think, okay, maybe why are these gender conflicts happening? What might have been happening at the time?". She adds, "So I switched it up, and I did lessons actually just getting them

into the text to start off with and then built the context into it. Because to me, that just seems a more natural, organic, interesting way of doing it". Her way of describing her discomfort, and tactics used to overcome it ('switching' up lessons in an act of quiet subversion), suggest that she knows, but cannot quite define, what is off-kilter about her department's approach. Another participant says, "... they wanted me to do four lessons in a row with no literature, just Victorian context. I did it in one, I condensed everything into one worksheet...then got on to the actual novels. We're not history teachers, and we're not supposed to be doing that. And learning the history of Queen Victoria's reign teaches us nothing about English".

In the later stages of the data, as participants grow, perhaps, in pedagogical confidence, there is evidence that they begin to play with the idea of context in literary reading. One, at Stage Five, for example, explains the way that she stretches the generally accepted context of Romanticism to include previously hidden voices. She says: "I'm hoping to go beyond just Coleridge and Wordsworth to thinking broadly about Romanticism as a concept - thinking about poetry from other countries, thinking about women". Here, the participant is clearly working to enliven the interplay between texts and their contexts (emphasis on the plural) by avoiding narrow contextual lenses and, instead, widening and deepening the contextual reach of the material in a way that reflects current concerns. Likewise, another participant at this stage makes even more direct links to contemporaneous issues and, in so doing, shows understanding of the multiplicity of contexts available for the interpretative act. She shares her teaching of Shelley's *Ozymandias* (a poem

about the nature of power explored through the image of a crumbling statue of a once-great leader) by comparing it to the tearing down of Colston's statue in Bristol. She says, "And they loved it. It was like, you could see direct correlation between the themes and the real world around them, and I don't know if that engagement level would have been the same had *Black Lives Matter* not happened over the summer". The same participant found similar success teaching Orwell's *1984* in the light of the NHS's Test and Trace app, which had recently been launched and which was, as she says, "so relevant to them; so interesting to them".

The interpretative process of finding meaning in canonical texts through contemporary events is experienced by this participant and her pupils as exciting and dynamic, responsible for generating engagement as well as, presumably, knowledge. Interestingly, across the data, there is evidence that, even if it were desirable, attempts to bracket out these modern contexts for canonical literature are futile: again and again, participants find themselves managing the resonant connections between texts and contemporaneous events. This will be discussed further when exploring the second theme: *Of Ethics and Emotional Effects.*

Promoting the dynamic interplay between texts and their contexts seems fundamental to teaching literature for participants not just because it is a way of making meaning but because, as evidenced by the participant above, it promotes engagement. This engagement is important in hermeneutics and in reader-response literary theory, which understands interpretation as driven by personal

interest, suggesting participants implicitly recognise these theoretical positions. Regrettably, the issue of pupils' engagement is discussed by participants most often in terms of its lack, which participants put down to three key factors: the mandated, canonical context of the literature curriculum, the standardised pedagogical approaches expected by school leaders and the dominance of assessment.

In terms of the prescribed content of the curriculum, there is evidence that this is a concern as early as Stage Two when participants have only had one relatively short teaching experience in school. There is, for example, a sense of frustration in this participant's rather baleful words, "I just wish we could play with it [the diet of literature] a bit more to actually give them a bit more imagination" which, clearly, suggests she views 'imagination' as vital for learning in English. Another participant worries about the impact of some mandated texts on pupils, "They think, 'I get so much reading done in English because you forced me to read *To Kill a Mockingbird*, I'm not going to go and [go to the library]'", indicating her belief that without proper regard for sparking pupils' interest in a text, overall progress in English is imperilled. Likewise, at Stage Three, one participant sighs that the curriculum lacks "vitality" and that, "there's not even anything living in it... it's kind of shut off" which hints at her perception of literature as a necessarily dynamic artform.

Another participant at Stage Three bemoans the distance between the texts she is teaching and the world of the pupils themselves, which creates a barrier to engagement: "I think it's really hard to sort of build that interest up when it's so far

removed from what the students themselves are actually engaging with, like, in the outside of school and their experience as well, personal experiences". Another decries the lack of "space" in the curriculum "for any kind of individual interest" and, here, the participant is referring to an approach seen in parts of the United States where pupils are able to select from a menu of literary options when studying English, allowing them to choose texts that resonate with them. A participant at Stage Four repeats a regular complaint about the antiquated content of the curriculum: "the newest books on there are 15 years old. And so many of them were written at least 90 years ago, by generally white dead men", which is echoed by a participant from the other cohort at that stage, who says, "the English curriculum appears to have travelled back through the years to the late 1800s…or, if we are really being generous, possibly the 1950s at a stretch".

These observations are hardly surprising - there are slim pickings of contemporary literature on the curriculum at the time of writing - but it is the *reason* for participants' disgruntlement that is revealing. It is transparently not the case that participants themselves dislike canonical or antiquated literature, quite the opposite, they regularly reference their enthusiasm for it ("I love the canon and we should teach from it because it's amazing writing") and appear excited when they have the opportunity to teach Ancient Greek or Old English literature, the oldest elements of the canon. However, at the same time, they feel clear pressure to ensure their pupils are inspired enough for the interpretative act, as one participant says, "you need to build some level of enjoyment because if you go in and stick, I don't

know, I love Dickens, but you know, if you stick them that in Year 7, they're gonna go "oh God". And you're never going to get them again". Another seems to feel real distress as she describes pupils' disengagement - "I'm finding it really hard to get the boys' heads off the desk" - and others speculate that this is the reason that A Level English recruitment is dropping: "they're so bored and it's not inspiring them. So they don't want to go on and study it at A level". One participant at the final stage, in a kind of despondent summary of his observations over the previous two years, identifies this as an issue with the choice of canonical texts that are "divorced from the reality teenagers live today" and do not "have mobile phones in, let alone social media. Maybe this is why pupils are failing to be inspired or engaged". This is significant because it shows participants grappling with the interplay between text and context, and the importance of personal engagement with a text, without quite being able to articulate the problem.

Another barrier participants face in sparking pupils' vital, personal interest in a text is created by mandatory pedagogical approaches (as distinct from mandated curricular content) experienced by participants. This appears as an issue, like the curriculum, as early as Stage Two where one participant in particular communicates real anguish at the way her school requires her to teach; a strictly controlled approach including a grammar starter and an etymological word map every lesson. This is followed by set activities in a set order with minimal emphasis on connecting the work to pupils' experience or interest which, for this participant, takes away "the freedom and creativity that students have to bring to their own work" and is,

consequently, stultifying. She says, "It got to the point where I was *bored* (her emphasis). I was bored, so were the kids. I could see their boredom and their kind of lack of... anything. They were sitting there and they were doing it because they had to. And I was like 'this is so not what English is!'". Interestingly, this participant responds with her own pedagogical innovations, which she succeeds in negotiating with her mentor. She describes working all weekend to try to "make Macbeth fun" which she says was "really hard" but which she does by making links with the characters and contemporary contexts through asking them to imagine and write text messages between Macbeth and his wife. This, she reports, had a huge impact on her pupils: "They went from being, like, "I can't even be bothered to write the title" to, like, 'What are we doing next then? Ah, yeah, I get this, Miss, Miss?' And they're all like engaging, and they're all putting their hands up and they all want to read Macbeth... it completely changed them. And I thought that was really interesting".

Other participants, slightly later at Stage Three, also share feelings of discomfort about pedagogical practices that limit, rather than encourage, pupils' interest and imagination. One, for example, describes being criticised for her attempt to engage her pupils in the feelings produced by a war poem, "I was told not to do that with Years 10 and 11 because time is so short and we don't have long on the poems. I need to be cramming their head with all this knowledge instead of trying to engage them". By "cramming knowledge" this participant means providing pupils with interpretations of literary texts in order to ensure they have those interpretations

ready for their examinations. Others at Stage Three report this as a practice, too, which involves, "going through the poem and going through all the stanzas in a way that gives them your interpretation of it. Like, you are going through it and telling them what to highlight and what to annotate". Another confirms, "so the kids are kind of quite passive…and just copying down and getting all the notes down. Yeah". The problem with this, for participants, is that, as one says, "There's no way for them to engage with and have that personal relationship with the texts that they are reading and studying".

The practice of providing interpretations for pupils in preparation for examinations is an indicator of the pressure felt by teachers in the context of accountability frameworks and league tables. Across the data, participants repeatedly express concern about the dominance of assessment and how, for them, it is the third barrier they face in engaging or inspiring their pupils. For one participant, the pressures of assessment seem to provoke a kind of professional weariness that could be seen as worrying so early in her career (Stage Two). She says, "... there's no writing or reading for the fun of it. It's like 'this is really fun and this is great and this is exciting but we're gonna finish it with an exam-style question'. Every time, without fail". Another, at Stage Three, puts it succinctly when she says, "teaching to the test - it just kills any enthusiasm for it". Her peer agrees, "they [pupils] kept saying 'we're constantly doing assessments' and, bless them, it did feel to them like they were constantly doing assessments because every two to three weeks they *were* actually doing an assessment. So, you did feel a little bit bad for them then because they got

burnout with it - they just didn't want to engage with it really". Others share frustration about teaching being "obviously exam focused" and complain that "I'm constantly testing them" and that "it just takes the enjoyment out of it" even when pupils were having "a really good time until then. They were loving Sheila [from *An Inspector Calls*], they were loving the debate, they loved learning what bourgeoise meant". Another decries the pressure on her to "talk about language devices until they fall asleep", knowledge of language devices being generally seen by schools as a prerequisite for examination success.

Most illuminating, perhaps, in terms of the barrier assessment presents to pupils' engagement in the interpretative act, are the references to the youngest pupils in the school. At Stage Four, for example, one participant makes an interesting observation of his school's approach to Year 7: "This year, I taught a module in the beginning about superheroes, and it was all about creative writing and powerful adjectives and really fun things. And then there was a definite change, 'Right now we're gonna do critical analysis. You know, here is some Dickens' and then we started going through the assessment objectives". By this, he means the GCSE assessment objectives which he feels are important to introduce to pupils early because, "we actually have to start teaching them the skills they are going to need in their GCSE which are very different from having a love of literature. Or love of reading, or anything else".

The fact that this participant sees assessment in opposition to a "love of literature"

or "fun things" like creative writing is telling, although he is not openly uncomfortable about this at this point. Not so, however, for the participant in Cohort 2, also at Stage Four, who describes schools as "battery-style exam factories": strong words, prompted by her observations of schools using Key Stage 3 as GCSE preparation in exactly the way her peer in Cohort 1 describes. Significantly, the first participant's view shifts completely as his experience in schools grow. In the final stage of data collection, he complains about assessment dominating Key Stage 3: "I am asked to only focus on structural language, to ignore characterisation and any creative response to the text in favour of making sure that our Key Stage 3 students are ready for specific GCSE questions. Though I can see that if the students are to pass the exams they must jump through the exam board's hoops, and we must teach to the exam to a certain extent, I worry that in making sure we have an Ofsted approvable curriculum map we are missing out on the breadth of joy in studying English".

The 'shape' of literary knowledge for participants is, then, inherently circular. It is largely reliant on readers'/pupils' engagement to make connections between the text and its multiple possible contexts. Participants' stories suggest, however, that curricular frameworks and school mandates threaten this inherent shape of school literary study, which causes participants some unease.

The experience of literature

As the words of the last participant show, throughout the data there is a strong thread that suggests that the *experience* of literature is fundamentally important to participants, and something they wish to facilitate for their pupils: there seems to be, for participants, a conceptual link between experience and knowledge in English. This is closely related to the idea of personal engagement as a driver to interpretation, discussed above as an aspect of the inherent hermeneutic shape of English. However, this is also a sub-theme in its own right because it goes beyond facilitating interpretation to encompassing experience in a fuller sense, including *emotional* and, perhaps, *aesthetic* experiences of literature which participants demonstrably feel are important for their pupils.

Repeatedly, participants bemoan the lack of time to fully read literary texts with their pupils, which denies pupils an experience of the literature. This is connected to the time pressure created by assessment procedures; participants report that a sizable amount of teaching time is involved in preparation for, and feedback on, mid-term and end-of-term assessments, leaving little room for anything else. One participant at Stage Three, for example, describes her frustration when her teaching of *The Tempest* is undermined by her department's emphasis on teaching PEDAL (Point, Evidence, Developed analysis, Alternative, Link) paragraphs *rather than* the text. She says, "[pupils] only got to see Act 1 Scene 1...They don't know about any other language, we didn't really get anything about Stephano or Trinculo. So the

Shakespearean canon 'this is why it's important part' sort of got missed because I had to just get it all done and dusted so they could write PEDALs about Caliban. As quickly as possible". Another participant describes a similar experience teaching *Much Ado about Nothing*, "They only had about two weeks and then a mid-term, then I marked and we did feedback. And then it's only about another two weeks before they're doing the final assessments, and we had to skip massive parts of it because you just couldn't fit it in".

Only one participant is able to offer a contrasting experience to her peers (and her own on a previous placement) by sharing her second placement school's less intrusive assessment cycle which allowed her to fully immerse her pupils in their text, *Animal Farm*: "They got to actually read the whole text. We got to enjoy it. They got some discussion. It was much better, much better". However, at Stage Six complaints continue as participants refer to, "that weird exam focus we can never get away from" which restricts the experience of literature for pupils. One participant says, "...we did a little bit of the book and then we did a PEE paragraph then a little bit more of the book. And then we did the innovation task then a little bit more and then we did the hot task. ...And I can understand why they don't engage with it because it's so bitty as a kind of topic". The same participant reports the pupils' reactions to this, "'Why are we doing another assessment? We did one a week and a half ago' and I'm like 'I realise we did one week and a half ago but now this is your hot task. That was your innovation task'" and speaks with regret about the fact that this meant they did not finish reading the novel: "Just such a shame because they

aren't going to come away with any enjoyment of that book". Likewise, at Stage Seven, one participant discusses her department's decision to buy in pre-designed and resourced 'mastery' curriculum which limits the teaching of *Jane Eyre* to just the first ten chapters, leaving pupils without a sense of the whole (although with, according to the participant, plenty of instruction on the historical context of the novel).

That the 'experience' of literature is important to participants is, therefore, chiefly discernible through their complaints that school systems do not allow it. There are very few stories about managing to facilitate a desirable experience for pupils and this, for participants, is a matter of some regret.

2. Theme Two: *Of Ethics and Emotional Effects*

The presence of an inherent emotional-ethical dimension to participants' conceptions of literary study is evident across the data. As early as Stage One, where participants choose to foreground both emotional and ethical aspects of English in their descriptions of their 'journeys' into teaching, participants suggest literary study can encourage compassionate communities, whether in the family home, the classroom or in society generally. By implication, this imbues English with power to break down barriers between people and combat prejudice or narrow-mindness. Participants' regard for this aspect of English remains true throughout the stages, evident in their concern for using English to promote pupils' safety and tackle nationalism, racism and misogyny. I consider the dimensions of this theme in three sections, the first exploring participants' stories of their own personal and emotional connection to literature, the second considering their commitment to pupils' safety and wellbeing and the third addressing the links participants make between literary study and social justice.

2.1 Early emotional encounters with literature

At Stage One, when participants share childhood encounters with reading, says one, "My earliest memory is of books" and another, "From a young age I have always loved stories, my parents being avid readers themselves would read to me every night before I went to sleep as a child". Another quotes Scout's words in *To Kill A Mockingbird* to describe her relationship with reading, "Until I feared I would lose it,

I never loved to read. One does not love breathing" and goes on to say, "My earliest memory of reading was sitting in my living room with my mum and my brother and taking it in turns to read a chapter each of Private Peaceful".

The association for all these participants between identity, parental love and reading is strong. It seems important to all of them to emphasise that their attachment to reading has been life-long - even something that constitutes a first memory. For the majority of the participants, this is intrinsically tied to relationships with caregivers. One writes, "My paternal grandparents had a big role in the upbringing of myself and my younger brother and my Grandma has a deep love of reading. Both my grandparents, and my parents when they were able, passed on this love for books". Likewise, another cites reading as a vital building block in her family's dynamics, "Me, my mum and my brother bonded over the story of Charlie and his little brother Tommo and still to this very day bond over the memory of reading it together".

This is not only a question of attachment, but of identity: these participants connect their love of reading to the reading identities of their caregivers - a Grandma with a "deep love" and parents who are "avid readers", indicating a familial inheritance that is significant to them and which is a source of pride. Just one participant had a more jarring connection between family life and reading, books being the only constant in an otherwise disrupted childhood characterised by seven house moves before secondary school. Still, for this participant, the palpable insecurity caused by moving was soothed by, "the battered blue bookcase with the unsteady legs [that] was

always there". The implication of her metaphor of a damaged but resilient bookcase is clear: no matter what physical 'batterings' might threaten it, literature - and her love for reading - will prevail because it is so deeply felt and experienced.

The reassurance that books could provide for this participant is one of numerous examples of a strong emotional connection to English in participants' early experiences with their subject. This is shown in emotional reactions to stories; *Private Peaceful* brought home the horrors of World War One for one participant and another remembers crying herself to sleep after *The Little Princess*. Both these participants described vivid reactions, too, to *Of Mice And Men.* One says*, "*At GCSE I remember begging my English teacher to study something other than *Of Mice and Men* as having read it before I was so traumatised by the ending I did not want to go through that again and cry in class" and the other describes the general reaction in class to the text: "The whole class were reading through trembling bottom lips, with tears dripping onto the pages and blurring the words".

These accounts suggest that, for participants, English connects to personal development in the sense that it expands emotional experiences and empathy for others but, importantly, it also helps to establish empathetic bonds in a class (much like the bonds created in the family home). This experience seems vital to participants' conception of their subject which is perhaps best articulated by a participant who writes that, "I hope that I can show others what reading and writing can do, how powerful it is and how freeing too. Literature can help us to make sense

of the world and can also show us the complexity and wonderful strangeness of the lives of those who inhabit it. Books, I think, can provide us with the tools we need to build lives for ourselves and encourage us to look at the world with different eyes".

The phrase "tools we need to build lives for ourselves" indicates that, for participants, English is much more than acquiring knowledge within the discipline, either to become more knowledgeable about, say, Dickens or to pass examinations. It is a way of connecting with the world and developing skills needed for life. Notably, there is no suggestion in this participant's words that she means functional skills of any kind; instead, the sense is that books help readers develop emotional maturity and an empathetic disposition which seems important to participants. One of the ways books do this is by providing solace to readers, referenced by one participant when she says that books are, "the place I go to when I need comfort and one of the best tools that I have found for maintaining my mental health". Likewise, another participant writes in some detail about what exactly it is that makes English such a nurturing presence in her life. She says about writing, "I was able to say whatever I chose, create fantastical beasts and build a whole world for myself out of paper and ink. It was a way of speaking and showing that I could think, that I had something to say, even in those days of crippling panic attacks and through the first time that I chose not to eat". And about reading, she says, "Pursued by spectral wolves, I hid in corners beneath my pile of books and tried to become invisible. At least invisibility guaranteed safety. It guaranteed a few hours of evading the bruises, the treading on eggshells, and that ever- present, aching fear".

These words point to a powerful relationship between participants and their subject that pervades the data. English seems much more than just a subject they chose to study at university. Reading and writing appear to constitute a thread that runs from childhood through to later stages in life, showing significance in terms of wellbeing, personal development and life choices that makes it much less a subject of study and much more an important aspect of Self.

2.2. Addressing an unsafe world

Participants' stories suggest a robust ethical commitment to using the English curriculum to ensure pupils are protected from some of the more dangerous elements of contemporary society. This concern for promoting pupils' safety is most clearly seen in later stages of the data, when they seem acutely aware of the threats facing pupils. At Stage Four, this appears strongly, with participants sharing their unease about pupils' preparedness for the 'real' world: for determining bias in news (and fake news), negotiating the online world safely and voting in an informed way. As one participant says, "if you don't do anything else then you send them out able to make critical choices about what they're reading online, or what they're reading in the newspaper, you know, you've achieved something". Another participant argues that Media Studies should have equal weight to Literature and Language as part of an English curriculum in order for pupils to "understand the modern world". There is clear concern that any study of English should promote a kind of moral

growth so that pupils are ready to become ethical members of society: "That's [a focus on critical thinking with particular reference to media] what's going to make them the best humans basically".

This discussion, at Stage Four, marks the first time that participants seem to pay real attention to what would be considered the language side of the English curriculum rather than literature: so, advertisements, politics and media. It appears again, strongly, at Stage Six as participants discuss their feeling that English departments should respond much more robustly to threats online by improving the media elements of the English curriculum. One participant frames this in terms of the threat of extremism, seeing media education as a 'tool' necessary for pupils to resist increasingly sophisticated use of media to persuade and recruit young people to militancy. Another describes her horror at pupils developing political opinions through TikTok. She says, "Apparently all these videos are circulating about Biden's policies …. Now, I was like 'you need to critically look at this. Who is promoting this? If you are believing everything people tell you on this random social media site about politicians' policies without actually listening to the politician, or reading what they're saying, that is really worrying to me'". Her pupils, who had been persuaded that Biden is corrupt, "were actually convinced, utterly convinced" - this participant's distress can be felt in the repetition of that word. The rest of the group at this stage concur and there is a tangible feeling that the curriculum does not support them in addressing these real-life issues. One participant concludes, "we need to change everything".

Although these comments do not relate directly to the teaching of literature – participants reference elements of media that appear, if at all, in the language side of the English curriculum – I include it in these findings because I believe it constitutes significant evidence of participants' commitment to the ethical dimension of both English and English teaching. This commitment runs through their work and is just as relevant to what they value about the teaching of literature which, as discussed in the next section, is seen by participants as an opportunity to promote the empathy and ethical vigilance that will help pupils to navigate the world outside literature.

2.3 Combating prejudice

Keeping pupils safe is intrinsically connected to the third aspect of this theme I have identified: the desire to use literary study to promote empathy and combat prejudice of all kinds. Sometimes this is expressed in general terms, as in this participant's words at Stage Two, which seems to sum up the feeling of all participants, "In an English lesson, that's our job, in a way, is to inspire and make them *want to be better people* by introducing them to great literature [my italics]". He goes on to talk about the "joy" of "paradigm shifting moments" when teaching a text helps pupils to recognise and empathise with an unheard perspective or hidden voices. Likewise, another participant at this stage decries the mandatory teaching of the canon to low-ability Year 7 not because they are low-ability but because she is denied the chance to support their personal development: "I have Year 7s where it's like actually

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Winnie the Pooh [instead of a mandated canonical text] might help you because you don't know that much about friendship. And AA Milne teaches a lot about friendship".

As well as these broad expressions of encouraging empathy through texts, there are also, more often, specific references to concerns prompted by current affairs. For example, at Stage Two, one participant is vociferous in her condemnation of the perspective-limiting nature of the literature curriculum *in terms of* political events: "It currently feels as though there is something amiss in the English curriculum in the UK at this stage. Whilst the nation spirals forth into the uncertainty of Brexit and tensions once again rise at the notion of Britain severing its ties with the European Union, xenophobia, racism, and fear have also dug their claws into pockets of our society", linking this to "shortfalls in the curriculum, namely, the impetus placed upon British literature and the 'English literary heritage', which has facilitated a loss of many exceptional and thought-provoking non-British texts". Another agrees, bemoaning curricular constraints which deny pupils at Key Stage 4, "an opportunity to broaden their horizons and develop an understanding of other cultures and the experiences of other people across the world, both in the past and the present". At Stage Three, a participant relays a conversation with a pupil in which she tries to make him aware of the purpose of English as she sees it: "I sort of explained to a student in my class, 'this is why it's really important. It's like, you know, you've got sort of civil rights in there, you've got, you know, anti-homophobia, you've got

everything, and it's challenging, those ideas', and he was like, 'oh, I just thought it was words on a page!'".

The most predominant of participants' ethical concerns, racism, which is explicitly linked to the explosion of interest in the *Black Lives Matter* movement prompted by George Floyd's murder in 2020, speaks to the powerful interplay between text and contexts, as explored in the first theme: *The Strange Case of Literature and Knowledge.* This echoes across the cohorts and stages in many ways. At Stage Three, for example, one participant makes clear links between the English curriculum and *Black Lives Matter*, "I think that's what's really sad. I think the fact that English teachers are having to try and get, you know, BLM in there. Why isn't it already there? … why aren't we studying, you know, Nigerian authors, why aren't they on the curriculum?". It is an interesting observation: despite no official obligation to do so, she suggests English teachers are finding ways to diversify the curriculum and address current concerns. This is borne out in other participants' contributions, suggesting commitment to diversification from novice and experienced English teachers alike. At Stage Two, for example, one participant details her department's approach: "with *To Kill a Mockingbird* they focused heavily on the racial aspects. There was a big section of the racial aspects in teaching". Another cites similar reason for her department selecting particular poems, "so the poems specifically chosen were lots of Maya Angelou, Agard and stuff like that, so lots of racism and all that sort of thing, so I guess, if I had to hazard a guess as to why that's been put there, it would be to just give them that worldly experience". Significantly, both these

participants are from Cohort 1 and are therefore talking, at this early stage, before Floyd's murder, which demonstrates a pre-existing commitment to this objective in the teaching of literature.

There is no doubt, however, that events in 2020 intensify the focus, with more sustained comment on how English should combat racism after the rise to prominence of the *Black Lives Matter* movement. This is raised repeatedly with particular reference to one long-standing curricular text: *Of Mice and Men*. At Stage Three, one participant shares the "huge debate" in her department due to *Of Mice and Men*'s openly prejudicial language. Her department had decided to forbid use of the language, compelling teachers and pupils to "skip it in the sentence" (which resulted in various classroom management challenges). She says, "...personally I don't agree with that because it's sort of, like, you know, it's it's almost like it's giving it power a little bit. The whole point of the words in there - it's like it's not Steinbeck's being racist. It's showing how some of these characters are racist. By saying 'we're not going to mention this word' it's them going 'Why we're not gonna mention it?' It becomes almost a challenge to mention it".

At Stage Five, participants again report difficulties with teaching *Of Mice and Men.* One participant says that his department has decided to send a letter home to parents explaining the reasons for teaching such a controversial text and another talks about the fact that the inclusion of the text in the curriculum was challenged by

one of her Year 9 pupils unhappy with the language used in it. As this participant says, "it does again present a bit of a problem with teaching the text".

By Stage Seven, the situation has worsened. One participant describes a "serious racial incident" resulting directly from an English lesson on the text, which culminated in physical violence between pupils and involvement from parents and other stakeholders. The department, ultimately, made the decision to remove the text from their curriculum. Another participant at this final stage also describes serious challenges in teaching the text: she had been troubled by the urgent appeals of her solitary black pupil (in a class of white pupils) during her recent lesson on *Of Mice and Men*. He had emailed her several times during the lesson and asked in person between lessons to "go over it again", referring to her boundary-setting on the use of the offensive language in the text. Palpable from her account is not just the pupil's distress and anxiety but also her own worry and discomfort in the face of managing such an ethical and emotional minefield.

It is not just racial tensions that participants have to navigate as part of daily life in the English classroom, but, likewise, issues related to gender. This also seems linked to teaching *Of Mice and Men*. One participant in Stage Two, for example, describes her department's, "very big gender push [because they] noticed that the boys within it were being very misogynistic about Curley's wife, so they had a big gender push, everyone met and decided next week, we're focusing on Curley's wife, and what that means and how she was actually a victim in a situation". Another participant, much

later at Stage Six, shares a very similar experience, explaining that there is "a cultural problem at my school at the moment, which is hitting really hard in terms of the sexist nature of the way that they [pupils] talk to each other". As *Of Mice and Men* depicts male violence against a female, the text, in effect, surfaced this pre-existing tension which presented significant challenges for this participant. She says, "... they had such horrible things to say about Curley's wife...It was horrible. It was a really horrible two weeks to be honest, it was just so intense, so quickly". In the end, she concludes that the nub of the problem is a mismatch between the text and the levels of maturity in Year 9, that pupils this age are simply "not ready" for *Of Mice and Men*. Similarly, another participant raises her concerns about her department's decision to teach *Oliver Twist* in Year 7, considering, again, the depiction of male violence against a female, aggravated in this case by the fact that the final assessment is a creative piece from the perspective of Nancy. She asks, "is teaching Nancy an appropriate thing to be teaching Year 7? Is creative writing appropriate for them to be doing? Probably not because they're not going to get the nuances of women's place in that kind of world, especially with what's going on at the moment".

"What's going on at the moment" is that the issue of male-on-female violence is particularly, painfully present at the time of the storying session, in the form of the murder of Sarah Everard by Wayne Couzens, causing significant anger and shock in the country. This, again, draws attention back to the multiple relations between text and context**s**, and the folly of attempting to fix meaning to just one, historical context, which relates clearly to the previous theme. It is also, however, an incredibly

important part of this theme, in that it speaks to the arguably hidden work of English teachers in managing the ethical aspects of their subject raised by literary texts and current events. Even for participants, so early in their careers, there is considerable evidence of them rising to this 'hidden' challenge. This can be seen, for example, in the decision of one participant at Stage Three to create and teach "a lesson on code switching with my Year 9" as well as adapting other materials, "...for World Book Day instead of sort, there was like quite a generic sort of PowerPoint thing and I did sort of "books that changed the world" but sort of contemporary. So looking at *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race"*. Another participant consciously adds to a Key Stage 3 unit of work on nature poetry, "I had a lesson leftover so I did *Island Man* by Grace Nichols. And again, we talked a lot about you know, the story behind that and different people's experiences and all that kind of stuff and it started a really good conversation". The fact that this 'hidden' role is embraced by participants as an aspect of their conception of their subject is suggested at a late stage, Stage Six, when one participant describes the way she challenged male pupils' reactions to a female protagonist in a literary text she was teaching and notes, "Our subject is one of the only ones that gives scope for that sort of thing", indicating a real commitment to taking advantage of that scope and teaching literature with an ethical alertness, something that is shared across cohorts and stages.

<u>3.</u> **Theme Three:** _A Mind of One's Own_

Ideas associated with agency as a fundamental aspect of literary study appear throughout the data in a number of ways. Participants value the agentic and empowering elements of studying English themselves as well as seeing agency, in the form of pupils' autonomous or independent thought, as a prerequisite for progress in their subject. As novice teachers, agency is also linked to participants' accounts of their own professional agentic choices (or lack thereof). As a result, I have divided this theme into two distinct sections: the first will explore the idea of literary study as necessarily agentic and the second will consider participants' experiences of their own professional agency.

3.1. Independence and agency in literary study

At Stage One, participants' sense of English as agentic is clear. One participant, for example, pinpoints her childhood love for writing to the ability to "say whatever I chose, create fantastical beasts and build a whole world for myself out of paper and ink" and her love for reading as the ability to "go anywhere I chose". The power to make these agentic choices through English, both in terms of conjuring entirely new written worlds, and in terms of generating imaginative images of represented ones, speaks to the idea that at least part of the job of learning in English is to _generate_ rather than _reproduce_ knowledge (which makes an obvious link back to the first theme). The agency suggested by this seems important to all participants: one describes her choice to organise literature around the central theme of feminism in

her university project and another does the same with her choice of mental illness and literature. Another participant shares a feeling of empowerment when writing, "I enjoyed the challenge of it and the feeling of making something from nothing", going on to describe her study of creative writing in particular as "one of the most freeing experiences of my life". Another participant thinks forward to her chosen career, showing clear emphasis on agency: "I hope that I can show others what reading and writing can do, how powerful it is and how freeing too".

However, very soon in participants' experiences of school, as early as Stage Two, there is evidence that this objective is proving difficult to achieve. One participant at this stage relates this to assessment pressure, saying that "... it makes me sad to see them [the participant's aims for teaching literature] almost overridden in the classroom by the fact of 'this is the exam. This is what we're doing. This is the absolutely prescribed format in which you must write. Do it'". The "prescribed format" and preparation this involves causes some discomfort as a result of its extremely anti-agentic approach, "... with my Y8s I had to spend a whole week leading up to their assessment just doing MEDAL chains and just.. almost, like, spoon feeding them the quotes that they would need to use and the analysis behind it and all of this that - they had really really good results, I was really pleased with the results that came out - but I wonder whether the same results would have been achieved if I hadn't literally shoved it down their throat for about two weeks" [MEDAL is one of the variety of acronyms used in schools to scaffold analytic writing; in this case it stands for Method, Evidence, Developed Analysis, Alternative, Link].

The significance of this, in terms of this theme, is that the participant questions the validity of her pupils' progress, despite clear evidence of it, because it has been achieved in the absence of learner agency, which suggests a strong correlation in her mind between agency and achievement in English. This is echoed by the words of another participant at this stage who feels analytical writing scaffolds overly dominate English teaching and do not allow for "independent thought and genuine analysis of the text", instead encouraging feature-spotting ("this is a simile") without valid interpretation. Other participants' contrastingly positive stories of success provide further evidence of this implicit link between agency and achievement: one participant, for example, feels pride that she, "encouraged them [pupils] to develop their own views and opinions on specific themes and characters through writing stories or playscripts". This, for her, is successful because she, "allow[ed] them the freedom to explore their ideas on the text, whilst also developing their analytical skills". Likewise, another participant expresses pleasure at: "Being able to see the students writing freely, designing characters and worlds of their own, and having the space to express themselves without the pressure of being correct or incorrect".

This experience of supporting pupils' independent or 'free' writing is not one that is heard often in the data. More often are stories of frustration that the school system somehow does not facilitate it. At Stage Three, as discussed in the first theme, participants share their discomfort about being expected to provide their examination classes with interpretations of literary texts. Significantly, again, whilst

this might well support achievement in examinations, participants communicate concerns that this is not a valid achievement in terms of the discipline of English, most obviously shown by pupils' inability to adapt to higher courses of study. One participant says, "I've heard some teachers, as well - some A level teachers complaining that their students can't come up with their own opinions, which you do need to do at A level, because they've been spoon-fed everything at GCSE. So even the ones that are taking up the subject, they're not prepared for it and they're not ready for it because they've not been taught that way". This re-emerges at Stage Six when a participant decries the lack of "independent thought" demonstrated by her Key Stage 3 pupils and communicates her resistance to "give them my ideas" (although, the clear implication is that she must, and other teachers do, in order to prepare them for assessment). She attributes pupils' inability to develop their own opinions - "But miss, I don't know what I meant to think about the point" - to a "fear of making mistakes" that she implies is a consequence of the dominance of assessment through education generally. Another participant at this stage notes that by scaffolding pupils' responses to a text in preparation for an assessment, which she is required to do, she is lumbered with identikit paragraphs to mark, which "is quite soul-destroying because you end up just reading basically the same variation of the paragraph you kind of work together on in class. And I just think, oh, come on. I don't want just to hear that, I want something else, you know". The frustration in this participant's voice is evident and the "something else" that she so wishes to see is a hint to her sense of what English *is*. To her, and other participants, this seems to

be reliant on independent thought, which is active, personal, imaginative and completely unique to each learner.

In this conception of English, then, it is possible to see how providing pupils with interpretations of texts and insisting on adherence to rigid writing frames is viewed as running counter to the proper education of pupils in the subject. At Stage Five this is discussed by participants in relation to the relatively new adoption by a number of schools of Rosenshine's (2012) *Principles of Instruction*. Rosenshine's (2012) argument that effective teachers begin each lesson with 'with a short review of previous learning' (p. 31) leads one participant's school to implement a non-negotiable mandate. To follow this, teachers must begin each lesson with a low stakes quiz consisting of exactly ten questions. As discussed in the first theme, the participant who experiences this describes the approach as "not a gateway into learning" for pupils in English and interestingly, in terms of this theme, she makes adaptations to attempt to address this. She changes some of the questions to creative writing prompts, which, "makes it a little bit nicer, because at least they get their imagination going, at least they get thinking about language and the kind of choices they're making". Here, the participant implicitly references a relationship between agency and achievement, revealing her belief that learning in English is dependent on conscious and active choices.

The manner in which professional agency is limited in English's state education system is well-documented in the literature (Ball, 2003; Clarke and Moore, 2013; Wood, 2014; Priestley, Biesta and Robinson, 2015). For this reason, it is not surprising that it appears in participants' discussions across cohorts and stages. There are two clear ways in which participants explore their agency as subject teachers of English: one is *what* participants teach, the content of curriculum, and the other is *how* they teach it, pedagogical approaches.

In terms of the first, curriculum content, the lack of freedom to choose texts is a repeated area of discussion, although there is evidence across the stages that participants accept their lack of agency in this area. This is firstly because they appear to subscribe to the importance of the canon, showing real enthusiasm for Shakespeare and classics such as *The Odyssey*, and secondly because there is a degree of acceptance: as one participant puts it, "You take the King's coin, you do the King's bidding". There are a number of implications of this lack of freedom to choose texts, however. First, and most overwhelmingly, participants report that it presents challenges in terms of catering for pupils' levels of atttainment. This generates a significant amount of the conflict shared in participants' stories and contributes appreciably to feelings of frustration and stress. One participant as early as Stage Two, for example, makes a direct link with her lack of agency to choose texts and pupils' (lack of) progress, "I obviously - I don't have a choice and I feel like I'm being

drowned in literally 'The children don't understand'". She goes on to say, "There's just too much canon a lot of the time. Only because I have low ability students, so all of them sit there and go, but why am I learning this? I don't get it. Why does this matter? I'd rather read *Harry Potter*. And I'm like, I also would rather read *Harry Potter* because I adore *Harry Potter*". Later, she cries, "Oh God, there's a lot of canon and I'd really love some freedom!".

Another participant decries the inflexibility of text choice, "We don't treat the kids as individuals - this is the Y8 text and everybody will do that. And really, some of them are the reading age of five years less than that. And really they shouldn't be reading - this book is completely inappropriate. In terms of their reading level, they should be reading *Revolting Rhymes*". Another participant notes that, '"... if I didn't have to do *Tell Tale Heart* and I could do something - if I didn't have to do Gothic fiction, because that was the way my school directed the curriculum, if I had complete freedom, I could have that class for a week, do a little bit of this a little bit of that and decide 'you know what the best way to ... make sure you know how to do all this is to focus you in this direction with a non-fiction text'". Participants link this disconnect between text choice and ability to both poor behaviour, "...and these kids are kicking off not because they want to, but because they're embarrassed that they don't understand the words" and poor pedagogical decisions: "But the fact is, I've had it with a low ability class, the only way I could get it through to them was to put a video on. And that frustrated me to no end and it started to make me realise, why am I teaching this if they don't get it? So that was a bit frustrating".

This experience is not limited to the lack of freedom to choose texts but extends to other aspects of the content of the English curriculum. A participant at Stage Two, for example, finds focus on writing frames frustrating because she feels they are not working for pupils. She says, "Yeah, the general consensus among the student teachers in the department is that they're finding it really really difficult to handle Year 7 because, even though they've only just started this building blocks unit, they're still being asked to write analytical paragraphs in Term 1 and 2 of Year 7 and everyday one of the student teachers will come in and say they're just not getting it and I can spend as long as I want going over MEDAL chains and PEE chains or whatever and they just can't access it". Similarly, at Stage Five, another participant raises the issue of mandated curricular content in relation to ability but, this time, it is neither text choice nor struggling pupils that is the issue. The participant says, "We're doing Language Paper 1, Question 5 with Year 9". This is the creative writing aspect of the Language GCSE and, as well as suggesting an unconscious acceptance of assessment *as* curricular content, this is a problem for her because it is not demanding enough for her pupils. Her experience of teaching this to her high attaining Year 9s is that the topic, based strictly on the outcome at GCSE, prevents pupils from writing *narratives* and instead requires them simply to write descriptively in response to a pictorial prompt. The participant reports that her pupils are insufficiently challenged by this. She says, "You can see why they find it so dull. Because all they want to do is use their imaginations and you can't, for this Question 5, you can only describe... they are finding it very boring... it's just not

difficult for them". This participant can see that her pupils need more challenge but feels powerless to change it, a clear example of a pitfall of limiting teachers' professional judgement, preventing response to pupils' needs.

In this case, the reason for this limit on agency is the pressure to prepare pupils for examinations. The data suggest that examination specifications heavily shape curriculum content across Key Stage 3 and 4 in schools. One participant, in fact, pinpoints her department's overriding purpose as Bleiman's (2020) suggested addition to Cox's (DES, 1989) models, 'Exam English' rather than, for example, 'personal growth' or 'cultural analysis'. Other references to the dominance of assessment are more implicit, for example, when participants describe the unit of work they are teaching in terms of the GCSE ("we're teaching Language Paper 2"). Whilst this is largely unconscious, one participant shows some critical awareness of it, openly decrying its dominance in the Year 9 curriculum in her school, "...the reason I'm doing creative writing with my Year 9s - I'm focusing entirely on Language Paper 1 - is because they have to do the Language paper". She adds, acerbically, "That is what I'm teaching, GCSE Language Paper 1 and 2: we have actually had a Question 1 lesson, a Question 2 lesson". Other participants notice it in a narrowing of the curriculum at Key Stage 4. One says: "And they enter GCSEs. And it will be exactly how it is for the exam board. And all of the personal growth stuff is kind of like set aside. Now you need to hit targets". Another participant echoes this: "As you get further along the school, it's very exam specs but then the younger years are a little bit more free, a little bit more creative". Yet another confirms, "...there

was definitely a lot more freedom with the younger years. Year 11 I was basically having to teach exactly to the exam".

This 'freedom' at Key Stage 3 is valued by participants as a means of overcoming the limitations otherwise experienced, with clear evidence of this being utilised where possible. For example, at Stage Two, one participant shares the reason for choosing a particular class reader at Key Stage 3, "...there's some really complex messages in there - stuff about race, stuff about society, about poverty - so you could have the room really play around with that". Other examples include inserting black, Indian and German poets in a World War 1 poetry unit of work and including women in a Romantic poetry unit of work. These choices, participants report, have a direct impact on teaching, one saying it was: "Definitely more successful, I think because I could tell them why I chose those poems and why I thought they would be good in the context of the unit as a whole". Another explains why she feels agentic choices of content are important: "You've got more ownership, more understanding and confidence that is conveyed in your teaching".

Nevertheless, these moments of adapting the content of the curriculum seem very few. Other stories reveal powerlessness to make curricular changes. For example, one participant expresses disappointment that her request to teach a poem is refused by her department because "it's not an AQA poem". She, nevertheless, seems to accept that she has no decision-making influence on the curriculum, as do her peers; indeed, most participants' stories suggest low expectations of professional

agency in terms of text choice. For example, this participant's definition of freedom in the context of teaching Dickens to Year 7 seems very limited: he says, "Yes I could look at Mr. Gradgrind, but that language for Year 7s is really, that's hardcore English language. And I looked at that and went, 'Miss Havisham is much better, more accessible to my Year 7s'. And I've enjoyed having that freedom". The switching of an extract from *Hard Times* to an extract from *Great Expectations*, both by Dickens, is not clear evidence of real professional agency but it satisfies the participant in this case. Likewise, another participant claims to feel "very lucky because I had a range of books to choose from for Year 8" and another says she feels grateful to have enough curriculum time, as a core subject teacher, "to move it [the unit of work] around a bit, because it was the only way to get them to...[engage]", which she understands is much harder for foundation subject teachers. Arguably, choosing from a set range of books in one year group and having sufficient space and autonomy to make decisions that benefit learners are the least a professional can expect but, here, participants understand this as particularly fortunate and free, raising questions about the constraints generally experienced.

Perhaps because participants accept their lack of curricular agency, it is to pedagogy they turn in their attempts to find ways to overcome pupils' barriers to learning. One participant at Stage Two, for example, uses rap for Shakespeare, "And in the end I found the American Shakespeare company's version of *Othello* which is Othello as a rapper, and Iago is one of his rap buddies, and Desdemona is just a voice in the background. But it meant that they were suddenly like, 'Oh, okay, I kind of get it a

little bit more, because there was no man in ruffles, and no men in tight pants and those sorts of things'". Later, the same participant experiences success when she uses *The Lion King* to teach *Hamlet*, "…suddenly, they were far more engaged. I was significantly happier going into that classroom". Another participant focuses on fun, "So I came up with ideas - I spent all weekend trying to make these, you know, trying to make *Macbeth* fun, trying to make *Animal Farm* fun (which was really hard). And once I did that, even if it's just like 10 mins in one lesson, the kids were just immediately different". At these moments, the frustration transforms into a kind of pride, as participants visibly light up with the achievement of turning reluctant learners of the canon into engaged ones.

However, sometimes participants find their pedagogical agency as curtailed as their curricular. Most participants, across both cohorts, are subject to some form of centralised directive which mandates certain ways of teaching in the classroom, although the extent of this varies. There is very little evidence that these mandated approaches are experienced as supportive and, at times, seem to cause stress and frustration. For example, at Stage Two, a commonly-used strategy for promoting reading in schools, 'silent reading' at the start of lessons, is the source of irritation for one participant: "But the problem that I find with that is that there's about five students in my year seven class that when they're doing that 10 minutes reading, they will just sit and stare at the page blankly for 10 minutes. And so I tried putting in an extra starter of having to write down the name of the book, what page you got to and just summing up what you read that day. But then the teachers have told me

to stop because it's not connected to the learning, so it confuses the students. And I'm like, but it is connected because it's connected to the reading starter. So I, I find that quite a difficult thing". Another participant agrees, reflecting on her school's "rigid expectations" which mandate silent reading and which, to her, is ineffective, "I've never seen it done successfully - it just seems like a waste of lesson time". Here, both participants find themselves unable to remedy what seems to be a failing policy because they are denied the professional agency to do so; both, particularly the former, find this a frustrating impediment. A third participant likewise finds her pupils "don't actually engage with the reading" during silent reading time and so takes advantage of the opportunity when the library is closed to instead set a free writing activity which works well for her - "they got really into it". Again, however, this is a circumstance the participant exploits rather than it being her professional entitlement to change the diet for her pupils, no matter how beneficial they might find it.

A more extreme example of frustration due to pedagogical mandates comes from the other cohort at the same stage, Stage Two. One participant's written account shows this clearly, as she describes, "uncontrollable tears streaming down my face almost daily, the quivering temptation to give it all up. I know, without a shadow of a doubt that this will be one of the hardest years of my life". Whilst these feelings are not explicitly linked to professional agency in this account, her verbal explanations in the storying sessions suggest that her limited agency is likely a significant contributing factor to her negative emotional state. "We had medium-term plans",

she says of her placement school, "and they were really, 'this is when you need to do this, you have 1-2 weeks and this is when you have to do it - in this order'. And there was all this stuff we had to do. And it was quite stressful to try and incorporate all of this in the time that we had. It was like 'quick, just do it'". She adds, "I was getting quite frustrated with it and I was kind of blaming myself that they weren't engaged". Attempting to use her professional judgement to address the lack of engagement, she trialled a classroom strategy, "I got them to do their own speech - I got them to use the language techniques that Orwell uses and do their own speech and I got told afterward that I couldn't actually do that. Yeah. So if one of the SLTs came into my lesson I would have been, like, told off for doing that because it didn't come under the umbrella of 'making every lesson count'". This inflexibility seems to cause the participant the most stress and dissatisfaction. She is unable to use her judgement to diagnose and respond to problems; she is not able to set her own goals. The goal is fixed by the senior leadership team under the tagline 'making every lesson count' and what 'counts' is not a decision entrusted to any of the school's class teachers. Here, what counts to this participant is pupils' interaction with the text, which is reasonable particularly given the text is a challenging one (*Animal Farm* by George Orwell) for a young (Year 8) class. Little wonder, then, that the participant's tone when she refers to this mandated approach suggests she is sceptical of its merits and resentful of its control over her practice.

Likewise, at Stage Five, the participant who is teaching according to Rosenshine's (2012) *Principles of Instruction*, already discussed in other themes, is half-amused at

the rigidity of the approach which specifies exactly ten questions ("once I gave them eight questions rather than ten and apparently that is not ok") and she is likewise arch about the efficiency of the strategy, both in terms of planning time ("The longest part of my planning is doing this low-stakes quiz") and in terms of teaching energy spent on it: the checking required to ensure compliance is a sizeable job involving checking the colour of pen used (green for corrections) and issuing detentions if answers are not corrected ("it's actually a high-stakes quiz!"). Her modest adaptation of this, detailed in the previous subsection, is evidence of a desire participants seem to have to find the pockets of agency where they can, both to support pupils to overcome learning barriers and to uphold their understanding of a proper education in English.

Sadly, however, not all participants are satisfied with such scant opportunities for professional agency. One participant, in particular, decides to leave before the end of her first year of teaching, citing the "restrictive curriculum" as her chief reason for this (along with "long hours" and "budget cuts"), expressing her feeling that "the classroom experience would be richer and more compelling for both student and teacher if there was an opportunity to read more texts that drew on current issues and that would facilitate empowering discussions". Instead, she feels powerless to improve the offer for her "disengaged, disinterested and, sadly, a little disillusioned" pupils who she reports ask her repeatedly "Why can't we look at something more relevant to us?". As she has no agency in what she sees as a distressing situation, she makes the decision to leave the profession.

<u>Chapter E: Discussion</u>

In this chapter, I discuss my data in response to the literature reviewed earlier in Chapter B and in direct relation to my three research questions. All three themes will used to address each research question in turn.

1. **<u>What do novice English teachers (NETs)' stories suggest they value about literature and the teaching of literature?</u>**

<u>1.1</u> <u>The complex, circular and distinctive nature of literary study</u>

Participants' stories suggest they recognise and value the disciplinary character of literary study, which they see as distinctive from other subjects in the curriculum (science and languages are particularly mentioned as comparison points). Their choice of words set up a clear opposition: whilst English has "shades" and is "personal", "free", and based on "opinions", other subjects are "black and white", "clear cut", "rigid" and based on "remembering" and "knowing". This seems to echo a substantial thread in the literature, not least Gadamer's (1975/2004) exposition on the ontological differences between the sciences and the arts. The binary nature of participants' words also suggest they concur with Eaglestone's (2020) sharp division between scientific knowledge (calculating the result of an equation) and literary (understanding a poem).

That scientific knowledge is, for participants, "black and white" and "rigid", seems to me to be an implicit reference to Aristotelian *Episteme* or *Sophia*: timeless principles

of scientific fact. By implication, this suggests participants' awareness that other epistemological categories exist; that knowledge, as Aristotle shows, is not limited to this "black and white" conception alone. Literary study is instead, as one participant says, "very much shades", a description that brings to mind the grey area of Keats's negative capability or Mitchell's (2021) metaxu: a space where mystery is prized above certainty. Participants value the complexity of this: there is a subtle boast when they note their position at the "top" of Bloom's (1956) taxonomy, as opposed to the science teachers who they think operate at the "bottom". The bottom of Bloom's (1956) pyramid, "remembering and knowing", is a place for other subjects *not* for English says one participant whose use of words makes an unconscious (but precise) reference to Ofsted's (2019a) definition of learning. This adds weight to unease about how well this definition serves school literary study (Bleiman, 2020; Eaglestone, 2020), particularly as corresponding practices to build knowledge and memory retention remain untested in English classrooms (EFF, 2021).

That NETs *value* the complexity of literary study is further suggested by their commitment to it despite facing resistance from pupils in much the same way that Davies et al's (2022) teachers do: "I think they like the security of knowing where they are", says one of my participants, echoing Clare's description of her anxious pupils in Australia asking, 'Am I right or am I wrong?' (Davies et al, 2022, p. 113). It is important not to underestimate the pull of easily checked and completed knowledge, with no tightrope to balance (Dillard, 1988; Young, 2016), no metaxu to

navigate (Mitchell, 2021), no angst caused by a text's endless capacity for meaning (Young, 2016). One NET, for example, describes her tendency to gravitate to those moments of straightforward knowledge transferral - "I always find myself going 'And that's the type of…[literary device]? Good job! You remember that word!" - which, to some extent, echoes the warning of the Newbolt panel (Newbolt, 1921) that 'scientific' approaches to teaching literature are attractive to teachers because they involve 'less personal effort' (p. 11) on the teacher's part. Despite this, significantly, participants ultimately reject the easier path, instead challenging pupils to comment on the meaning of literary devices, rather than just label them: "You identify a word type and that's you done? No, no, no". For participants, this is not an adequate way of knowing in literary study which seems to be for them, as it is for Eaglestone (2019), quite 'different from just knowing facts' (p. 11).

In further evidence that complexity is something NETs value in literary study, NETs enact subtle but significant acts of subversion in schools, to avoid mandates that they believe promote misconceptions of knowledge in English. One participant, for example, noting that mandated retrieval practice is "not a gateway to learning" in English which needs "so much personal response, personal thought", changes the recap questions to creative writing prompts to encourage pupils' autonomous and imaginative use of English. The same participant switches the teaching of *Much Ado About Nothing* to put text before context, allowing her to draw out relevant issues like "gender conflict" from the text rather than starting by filling her pupils with historical facts as the school wishes her to. Her way is, in her view, more "natural,

organic and interesting". Another participant, for similar reasons, refuses to follow department guidance regarding pre-teaching Victorian context because "we're not supposed to be doing that… learning the history of Queen Victoria's reign teaches us nothing about English".

This comment is interesting because Victorian history is demonstrably useful when teaching nineteenth century literature and yet this participant feels strongly that it "teaches nothing". This is an important indication of what participants understand and *value* about literature. I would like to argue that the fact that teaching socio-historical context *before* reading a literary text feels 'wrong' to participants is because they recognise that fixing a text to its historical context undermines literary knowledge, threatening the movement and the interplay between text and contexts (emphasis on the plural). This aligns with a range of scholarly perspectives. Gadamer (1975/2004), for example, states that, 'the text that is understood historically is forced to abandon its claim to be true' (p. 173) and Ricoeur (1997) believes historical readings deaden the interpretative act, rendering artworks lifeless. Lee (2021) argues that teaching literature in terms of one, specific historical context is reductive, trivialising both complex historical events and the literary text itself.

Although participants do not refer to these ideas, their pedagogical choices make their implicit understanding manifest. Teaching context through, rather than before, *Much Ado About Nothing* as more "natural, organic and interesting" is a kind of echo

of Bleiman's (2020) *Star Wars* analogy, in which she questions whether we need to learn about Jedi culture before watching or, instead, learn about it *through* immersion in the story as a counter to Hirsch's (1983) research. This participant seems to agree. Likewise, the participants who a) search for aspects of Romantic Britain that speak to contemporary concerns like gender politics or nationalism b) use the fall of Colston's statue to teach *Ozymandias* and Test and Trace to teach *1984* or c) help pupils reimagine Macbeth's relationship with his wife through text messaging all inherently reject Hirsch's (1967) criticism of 'radical historicism' and its 'chaotic democracy of "readings"' (p. 5). Participants do not offer their pupils text and context, but text and *contexts*, promoting the circular motion of interpretation to inspire a multiplicity of readings. This provides notable evidence of their implicit understanding of the hermeneutic circle.

To participants' obvious pleasure, the approaches work. Emphasising Colston's connection to Shelley's *Ozymandias* inspires "high engagement" from one participant's pupils, and another participant's approach to Macbeth is startlingly effective: "And they're all like engaging, and they're all putting their hands up and they all want to read Macbeth... it completely changed them". If you accept a hermeneutic conception of knowledge, which is 'interest-driven, based on personal commitment, creative imagination and passion' (Zimmerman, 2016, n.p.) then it follows that it is the teacher's job to generate this to promote pupils' progress, bringing pupil and text 'into a fruitful relationship' (Dixon, 1975, p. 3). This is what, it seems, participants value and are committed to doing. They work hard to generate

energy between text, context and pupil and, in this, there is an indication that they understand, as Gadamer (1975/2004) and Rosenblatt (1994) did, that literary interpretation depends on a kind of electric 'fusion of horizons' or 'event in time'. "Had *Black Lives Matter* not happened over the summer", says one participant, "I don't know if that engagement level would have been the same", showing her inherent recognition of Rosenblatt's (1994) literary *transaction*:

> The reading of a text is an event occurring at a particular time in a particular environment at a particular moment in the life history of the reader. The transaction will involve not only the past experience but also the present state of present interests or preoccupations of the reader' (p. 20)

By acknowledging that it was the *connection* between Colston's statue, *Black Lives Matter* and *Ozymandias* that created engagement, and, crucially, suggesting it *would have been different* if one of those components was not in place, this participant seems to recognise what Rosenblatt (1994) found through her empirical research that each poem is created in a specific time by a unique reader: 'change any of these, and there occurs a different circuit, a different event, a different poem' (p. 14). Participants do not feel, like Hirsch (1967), that this is chaos; participants seem to understand that different 'big pictures' generate different perspectives which are essential to the most interesting or sophisticated interpretations. They intuitively recognise that, without unlimited contexts to enliven interpretation, the movement of the hermeneutic circle would stall (Gijsbers, 2018).

This is a significant finding. Teachers' theoretical conception of literary interpretation, or literary knowledge (Davies et al, 2022), is a gap in scholarship in England. McDiarmid's (1995) work is useful, if outdated, but is U.S.-based. In Australia, the gap has been recognised (Doecke and Mead, 2018) and responded to with a large-scale study (Davies et al, 2022), but there are no parallel studies on teachers in England. In England, as discussed in my literature review, research on English teachers tends to explore their philosophies for teaching English as a whole, using or adapting Cox's models as a framework and consistently finding teachers predominantly subscribe to *personal growth*. The specific question of teachers' understanding of literary knowledge and interpretation is not adequately addressed. This research, then, provides initial preliminary evidence to indicate that NETs value literature as both complex and circular, based on a seemingly intuitive understanding of the importance of the hermeneutic circle.

This understanding is shown not just through NETs' pedagogical decisions, as discussed, but through their stories of formative literary experiences, suggesting their understanding has deep roots. One participant, for example, grows into a fuller understanding of herself and her gender identity through her study of feminist literature which, in turn, creates a profound connection to a community of others whose experiences resonate with hers and vice versa. Her literary study not only develops her literary knowledge but her knowledge of *herself* and the *wider world* as her perspective circles around all three, making connections between them all. "Literature" states another participant, "can help us to make sense of the world and

can also show us the complexity and wonderful strangeness of the lives of those who inhabit it"; words which seem to closely mirror Eaglestone's (2019): 'Understanding a text is a special case of understanding in general... the way in which human existence understands its being in the world' (p. 30). Gadamer (1975/2004) compares it to travel, describing readers who 'return home with new experiences' (p. 445) and participants, too, link reading firmly to experience of the wider world, one participant claiming that reading encouraged her to see both the "darkness" and "beauty" of the world as well as her own "small corner" of it. Here, the small picture is, somewhat ironically, the wider world, which she finds in the text, and the big picture is her understanding of herself and her identity: she experiences the hermeneutic circle in motion and shows, through her reflections, that she values this.

NETs' understanding of the hermeneutic circle is particularly striking given the current curricular context in English teaching, which has arguably lost its sense of the circle, overemphasising 'local operations' in English, like formulas for structuring essays, to the detriment of 'global moves', like the big ideas needed for convincing and critical interpretations of texts (Bleiman, 2020, p. 31). Even Bleiman (2020), in drawing valid attention to this, does not reference the hermeneutic circle in doing so. Participants likewise do not explicitly remark on it but, nevertheless, it provides an inbuilt 'shape' for interpretation on which NETs draw. That neither research nor educational policy relating to English teaching allude to the hermeneutic circle strongly indicates the need for its better articulation. Justification of hermeneutics in the English curriculum could be supportive for NETs

as they endeavour to induct young learners of literature into the rhythms of the discipline.

1.2 The *act* of interpretation

The evidence in my data that NETs recognise the literary text as an 'event in time' (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 12) is a first in research into English teaching. This, being a cornerstone of Rosenblatt's (1994) pioneering theory, is a step towards corroboration that reader-response theory underpins English teachers' approach to literary study (Goodwyn, 1992). It also suggests that NETs accept Rosenblatt's (1994) framing of the work of literary interpretation, which is best articulated by her, and which speaks to NETs' understanding of the *action* required for good reading:

> Under the magnetism of the ordered symbols of the text, he [the reader] marshals his resources and crystallizes [sic] out from the stuff of memory, thought, and feeling a new order, a new experience, which he sees as the poem. This becomes part of the ongoing stream of his life experience, to be reflected on from any angle important to him as a human being' (p. 12)

This speaks to NETs' desire to facilitate, in the words of one participant, "independent thought or genuine analysis" in their teaching of literature and to avoid positioning pupils as passive recipients of information. Rosenblatt's (1994) reader is profoundly active, mobilising a 'new order' in an effort that is both personal, coming from 'memory, thought and feeling', and unambiguously agentic. The reader *creates* the poem and the reader decides *how* and *when* this poem will be

used as a part of his life experience. The act of independence and agency suggested by this conception of literary reading is something participants seem to understand, prompting them to complain of school pressure to provide pupils with interpretations or scaffold writing to the extent it produces paragraphs that are all the same. This leads me to conclude that part of what participants value about literature is the independent, agentic act of literary interpretation.

As with the hermeneutic circle, this seems to originate in NETs' early encounters with literature. When describing their own formative experiences with reading, participants repeatedly use variations of the word freedom, making a connection between literary study and personal liberty, the ability to *choose* or *decide*. Young (2016) is clear about this connection. For him, the act of reading is an act of individual independence and power, the result of the reader's decision to 'investigate, enrich' the words on a page and 'will' the world of the text 'into being' (p. 3). This echoes Barthes (1977), who suggests that readers *produce*, rather than consume, the literary text and, likewise, Sartre (1967), who believes the reader invents the text anew. One participant in particular exemplifies this, describing literary study as "powerful" and "freeing", her childhood book about fruit bats transporting her on "my own pair of translucent, spectral wings to the dark forests of deepest Peru. I was forever in my own world". Peru is her "own" world because it is a Peru of her making and of which she is in interpretive charge. She relishes the same power when writing: "I was able to say whatever I chose… and build a whole world for myself out of paper and ink". She attributes her desire to teach English to

her wish to pass on this creative and interpretative power. More widely, NETs'
stories suggest power and freedom are indicators of visible learning in English for
them – and a marker of successful teaching. When they support pupils to, in their
words, "develop their own views" or "explore their ideas" or give them "the space to
express themselves", they encourage the 'independence [that] is the most important
quality a reader can possess' (Woolf, 1932/2020, p. 23) and, crucially, this is
important to, and a source of pride for, participants.

While research has consistently suggested that English teachers value *personal
response* as a marker of quality in literary interpretation (Goodwyn, 1992; Goodwyn
and Findlay, 1999; Marshall, 2000; Daly, 2004; Goodwyn, 2012; Wood, 2014), its
connection to the independence of the interpretative act is not necessarily made
explicit. As discussed in the literature review, *personal response* is not always well
conceptualised and is sometimes conflated with *personal growth* and/or
erroneously set up in opposition to 'formal' and 'analytical' writing (Goodwyn, 2012,
p.220). In fact, my participants seem to feel that a personal response from pupils is
important because it *contributes* to high-quality analytical writing - the only way to
avoid 'identikit' paragraphs. Analytical writing itself is, therefore, not the problem;
it is the *dependence* on provided interpretations and/or structure which seems to be
a sign to participants that literary reading is not taking place. Their desire to see
"independent thought", "thinking about choices" and "analytical skills" in their
pupils' work indicates they understand literary interpretation as an *act* that relies
on a reader's agency.

This is significant because it suggests that NETs do not seek to 'hold aloft the golden apple' (Parr et al, 2015, p. 142) and pass on a fixed textual interpretation to pupils but instead support them to generate it themselves. Literary interpretation is, after all, an *action*; it is a 'verb not a noun' (Eaglestone, 2017). A noun, being tangible and finite, could be passed straightforwardly from teacher to pupil; a verb is an act of *doing,* requiring action on the part of the doer. That the action is not always recognised as an aspect of literary study is possibly because of its cerebral, rather than physical, nature. And yet, a person 'becomes a reader', says Rosenblatt (1994), 'by virtue of *his activity* in relationship to a text' (p. 18, my italics) because a text alone, as Sartre (1967) shows, 'cannot *make* anything happen' (quoted in Young, 2016, p. 8, author's italics): for all the claims made about the transformative power of reading, a piece of literature will remain lifeless without the wilful work of the reader (Sartre, 1967). That participants seem to understand this again indicates an underlying commitment to the tenets of reader-response theory (Goodwyn, 1992).

Whilst literary reading might be an independent act, it is not an isolated one. Quite the opposite, literary study is recognised as dialogic and relational (Davies et al, 2022); 'a long conversation through time' (Eaglestone, 2017, p. 32). Interaction with other readers is as important as interaction with texts, (infinite) contexts, and aspects of the Self (like memory, thought and feeling) in order to generate literary knowledge (Carney and Robertson, 2022). My participants suggest they value dialogue highly in relation to literary study. One participant cites dialogue as the

reason for her good experience of teaching Shakespeare: "They got some discussion. It was much better, much better"; another cites a lack of "empowering discussions" as a reason for leaving the profession. Davies et al (2022), likewise, find their early career English teachers have 'a strong emphasis on promoting reading as a scene of social interaction' (p. 137), leading the researchers to coin a term for it, 'literary sociability', which is 'the way that any work around texts within classrooms has a relational and dialogic character' (p. 137). This is not surprising given the way that dialogue can serve the distinctive epistemology of literary study. Through dialogue, you 'may see connections that were not immediately apparent…perhaps even a profound revision' (Barnes, 2010, pp. 7-8). Dialogue is not a means of gaining new knowledge but of extending and/or reshaping existing knowledge (Barnes, 2010), making it essential to a circular subject like English: it is the oil that makes the hermeneutic circle turn. The fact that participants value dialogue is, I would argue, another indication of their implicit theoretical position on literary study, which is active, reader-centric and dialogic.

1.3 Emotional and ethical development

Dialogue is significant for another reason. As Gibbons (2017) notes, and as my participant acknowledges when she refers to "empowering" discussions, talk in the English classroom is an aspect of literary study that relates to *personal growth*. Whilst my data corroborates previous research on *personal growth* as a long-held and sincerely-felt aim of English teachers, it also makes an important contribution

to efforts to refine it. Refinement is necessary for, as Bousted (2002) suggests, the haziness of the concept arguably undermines conclusions about its purchase on the English teaching community. What do teachers mean when they subscribe to *personal growth*? Both Goodwyn (2017) and Gibbons (2017) address this with their 'invigorated model[s]' (Goodwyn, 2017, p. 66) - *personal and social agency* and *critical, cultural, social and creative agency* respectively. My data, however, lead me to conclude that whilst both Goodwyn (2017) and Gibbons (2017) revised definitions are a step forward, neither does sufficient justice to either the *emotional* or *ethical* dimensions of *personal growth* that, to my mind, reverberate powerfully through the data. I will discuss this now.

Gadamer's (1975/2004) reader-as-traveller metaphor makes a connection between reading and life experience that confers to the act of reading *personal and emotional* dimensions (and implications). My data is rich with evidence that this is the case for participants. Their childhood memories of reading are replete with feelings: the refuge that reading provides for one participant when she needs it; the emotional devastation caused by texts like *Private Peaceful, Of Mice and Men* or *The Little Princess* for others. NETs wholeheartedly value the emotional experiences provided by reading, which are experiences they remember vividly. This echoes a long tradition in English teaching of valuing the emotional dimensions of literature (Mansworth and Giovanelli, 2021). The authors of the Newbolt Report (Newbolt, 1921) certainly valued it, proposing English teachers should be professionally obliged to model their own emotional response to literature for pupils, 'moved

afresh by communicating...to others' (p. 10-11); likewise, in the 1990s, English teachers' written aims included to 'awaken [pupils'] sensitivity to human emotions' (Davies, 1996, p. 16), suggesting a strong professional commitment to it within the English teaching community. In fact, the current curriculum, which underplays emotion, can be seen as the outlier, 'at odds with the way the subject is envisioned by many teachers' (Mansworth and Giovanelli, 2021, p. 213).

For my participants, the emotional dimension of literary study is significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, participants' emotion-laden memories of reading seem inextricably linked to family and identity, making reading an inherent part of *who they are* rather than just what they do. This chimes with a wide range of empirical research on teachers' love of, and commitment to, reading as a treasured aspect of Self (Goodwyn, 2002; Daly, 2004; Wood, 2014; Davies et al, 2022) and their consequent motivation to pass this onto pupils (Goodwyn, 2002). Secondly, related to this, participants' emotional response to literature has a direct impact on their relationships, being integral to bonding with family and/or peers, supporting Gottschall's (2013) view that reading is important as a kind of 'social glue' (p. 28). One participant's experience of reading *Of Mice and Men* as a pupil, for example, prompts a shared and bonding emotional reaction between her and her classmates: "The whole class were reading through trembling bottom lips, with tears dripping onto the pages and blurring the words". The intimacy of this moment is something the Newbolt panel (Newbolt, 1921) envisioned for literature classrooms, which they argue could be valuable spaces for a communal emotional experience and should be

protected as such (Mansworth and Giovanelli, 2021). Thirdly, the explicit reference participants make to the positive effect of reading on their wellbeing, in some cases in particularly extreme episodes of ill-health, provides considerable support to studies which make similar claims (Carney and Robertson, 2022; Jeynes, 2022; Dedell-Feder and Tamir, 2018; Hammond and Lewis, 2016; Johnson et al, 2013).

In fact, the emotional succour participants find in books plays into a long tradition of association between literature and emotional expression, which research suggests forms a part of English teachers' identity (McGuinn and Stevens, 2004; Reid, 2002). There is a trope-like ring, for example, to one participant's evocative use of a bookcase to signify her relationship with reading, "the battered blue bookcase with the unsteady legs" which is "always there" through her disrupted childhood involving several house moves. This seems to be echoed in Young's (2016) use of a bookcase to a similar end: 'To my right is a small, stained pine bookcase. It contains, among other things, my childhood' (p. 1). It is a wistful image: an unremarkable household object made exceptional and meaningful by holding so many worlds of imagination on its shelves. The appealing poetry of this - the oxymoronic extraordinary ordinariness of the object - suggests the enduring legacy of a Wordsworthian link between literature, identity and emotional expression which underpins literary knowledge in quite a distinctive way.

Several of the participants share stories of formative experiences which make further links between literature, identity and emotions: the stories of the angst created by *Private Peaceful* or *The Little Princess* clearly mean something to participants; through them they learn something, they travel somewhere, they return changed and with an indelible memory of the experience. In school, as teachers, this connection between reading and emotional development shows when one participant wishes she could teach *Winne the Pooh*, because pupils "don't know that much about friendship. And AA Milne teaches a lot about friendship". This is significant because pupils learning how to navigate the emotional terrain of relationships is, at least in that moment, more important to her than their reading levels.

Perhaps this participant is drawing on her understanding that a text can be important in terms of *what it can do* for pupils rather than just what it is and, in doing so, showing that she understands literature is not just important as emotional catharsis but can also be a kind of ethical training ground. She values stories as an 'ancient virtual reality technology' (Gottschall, 201, p. 49) through which human beings learn: there are plenty of opportunities, after all, for pupils to develop friendship skills in the playground; why should their English teacher feel the need to incorporate this into her curriculum? Why are invented friendships necessary? If, as Brudney (2015) suggests, it is the ontologically independent nature of fiction that imbues it with its educational potential, giving fictional representation more power than the playground, then it is possible to see why an English teacher instinctively

embraces it as part of her role. We can hold up fiction, whole, and look at our lives against it, giving it a morally *practical* purpose, an invitation to confront the Socratean question 'how should one live?' (Nussbaum, 2015, p. 241). This is, according to the Newbolt panel (Newbolt, 1921), the 'true education' offered by literary study; an education 'of human life' which they propose, startlingly, is more desirable than 'book learning' (pp. 16-17).

I would like to argue, then, that emotional-ethical dimensions of literature play into the concept of *personal growth*; that 'complex and dynamic' (Goodwyn, 2017, p. 11) framework that begins with the Newbolt panel's emphasis on non-academic learning, 'the full development of the mind and character' (Newbolt, 1921 p. 21) that can come through literary study. Emotional development as an aspect of *personal growth* is underplayed in the literature: it does not feature in either Cox's (DES, 1989) original definition or in Gibbons's (2017) or Goodwyn's (2017) revised versions. Yet NETs' stories speak to its importance, as they believe that literature can help young readers navigate emotions in personal relationships, enhance their own emotional wellbeing and create bonds in relationships through sharing emotional reactions to stories. NETs, like O'Sullivan's and Goodwyn's (2021) English teacher participants, 'ascrib[e] to English a transformative power, able to bring about life changes' (p. 40) and emotion plays a key part in this.

Importantly, this is not just emotion for its own sake, nothing that might support Smagorinsky's (2002) contention that *personal growth* is too individualistic. Quite

the opposite, participants seem to see it as an important step towards social cohesion; this is, after all, the motivation for teaching *Winnie the Pooh*. Yes, books, in the words of one participant, "can provide us with the tools we need to build lives for ourselves" but, as she goes on to suggest, part of this is the ability "to look at the world with different eyes". Far from the self-indulgence that Smagorinsky (2002) suggests, the *personal growth* participants want for their pupils is not an enriched inner-life - this is but a minor part of it - but greater empathy and ethical maturity. This manifests itself in a number of ways in NETs' stories and I will consider them now.

Participants value teaching literature as an ethical opportunity, one that is a key part of their professional responsibility to pupils; as one participant says when describing her department's commitment to addressing misogyny, "our subject is one of the only ones that gives scope for that sort of thing". Notably, this ethical responsibility is not demanded by any curricular or policy documents relating to teaching English; it is even, perhaps, 'logically...way beyond the scope of a mere English teacher' (Davies, 1996, p. 16). Yet participants, and their colleagues, take it as seriously as any mandated professional duty; they value literature as a means to "make them [pupils] the best humans, basically" and to "make them want to be better people".

Crucially, what this means for participants is not just helping pupils to be better friends to each other but encouraging them to exercise empathy to all human beings;

to challenge prejudice and check privilege. In the words of one participant, literature should provide pupils with "an understanding of other cultures and the experience of other people across the world". For this reason, participants regularly express their discomfort about the removal of non-British authors from the Key Stage 4 English curriculum and link this, with some justice given the author of the curriculum was one of the key figures in Brexit, with the UK's vote to leave the European Union. The strength of feeling about this is palpable, as participants observe a country being "clawed by xenophobia, racism, and fear" and express distress at the loss of "exceptional and thought-provoking non-British texts".

This stance is also apparent in participants', and their colleagues', reported actions which are sometimes curricular (the addition or removal of texts according to their relative value in counteracting prejudice) and sometimes pedagogical (re-organising the teaching of a particular text to address prejudice). The driver seems to be for pupils to develop empathy towards others by opening up otherwise unheard perspectives from often marginalised individuals and groups: it is the social justice mission that research suggests plays a key part in English teachers' identity (Parr et al, 2015). NETs do not understand *personal growth* as individualism (Smagorinsky, 2002) but, on the contrary, as a process of extending outwards from Self to embrace others as *equally valid* beings.

And here is the link between *personal growth* and dialogue that I made at the start of this section. Dialogue, dependent as it is on receptive language (listening) as

much, if not more than, productive (speaking), is a means of paying close attention to the experience of others in order to remain conscious of, and actively avoid, 'othering'. Reading, likewise, is a form of listening. Through reading, we 'grow' personally by putting ourselves aside, expanding our experience by respectfully focusing on others. This is recognised by scholarship as much outside of the field of literary studies as inside it (Hakemulder, 2000; Patoine, 2022). Indeed, as research shows that we *become* the characters we read in fiction in a neurological sense (Speer et al, 2009), it is possible to see how emotional immersion in stories can mitigate self-interest and promote empathy for others, just as my participants believe. But there is more because, as Young (2016) warns, 'bastards enjoy fiction too' (p. 11) and I would like to argue that participants understand that, as Carney and Robertson's (2022) research suggests, it is the *reflection on literature with others* that makes the difference. This creates, in effect, a double listening: first the reading itself and then the attention to the ideas of others about the text. As Davies et al (2022) show, this 'literary sociability' is central to the work of English teachers and it is also valued by my participants who show consistently that they take as a professional responsibility the development of pupils' empathy to others through literature.

In summary, the evidence suggests that what NETs value about literature is the dynamic movement of the hermeneutic circle, the active and independent role of the reader in interpretation and the emotional-ethical opportunities of literary study and teaching.

2. **What do NETs' stories tell us about the CT space in English literature?**

In the previous section, I argue that participants understand that fixing a text to a specific historical context works against literary interpretation because it overlooks rich resonances with a range of possible contexts, including contemporary ones. Their stories also show, however, that this relationship between texts and contexts is an unavoidable feature of their CT space. Contemporary events impact their teaching of even the most archaic texts, often in unanticipated ways, demonstrating the veracity of the 'unlimited contexts' (Gijsbers, 2018) of the hermeneutic circle which operates in the literature classroom whether or not this is officially recognised. This is an important finding, unexamined elsewhere in research, and a visceral part of NETs' CT space. Although NETs engage wholeheartedly with the implications of this, they find that they are unsupported by curricular frameworks or school systems and this seems to cause them some concern.

NETs share regular stories of one text in particular, *Of Mice and Men*. This begins with conversations about departmental directives to avoid the offensive language in the text but soon escalates to stories, told with palpable dismay, of "horrible… really horrible" consequences of teaching the text. One story is a moving account of a black pupil's feelings of vulnerability and fear provoked by the text, another describes a physical fracas which ultimately leads to the text being removed from the departmental curriculum and another reports the misogyny it inspires in male Year

9 pupils. These stories seem to be good examples of what Riseborough (1985) calls the 'ricocheted' curriculum, which is, for him, a way of describing the dynamic and unpredictable nature of curriculum-in-action. 'Ricocheted' certainly seems an apt term for the way the subject matter in participants' classrooms spins out of control (and speaks to the need for curriculum scholarship to acknowledge curriculum as three-dimensional). When Leavis (1943) set out his vision that English teachers, responsible for shaping the newly-created subject in schools, should be 'sensitive, imaginative, perceptive, sympathetic, creative, reflective and responsive' (quoted in Ball, Kenny and Gardiner, 1990, p. 54), it is unlikely he was anticipating the kind of situation my participants experienced. However, his words bear a relationship with NETs' stories and communicate a truth that still holds. Art is designed to evoke a response; it is, as Gadamer (1975/2004) asserts, a provocation. The text is a 'spur' (Iser, 1978/1994, p. x) which 'sets the work in motion, and so sets himself [the reader] in motion too' (p. 21). NETs' stories provide clear evidence of readers 'set in motion' and, as Leavis (1943) intuited, this requires delicate handling on the part of the teacher. This is a reality of NETs' CT space; they must be equal to the challenge it creates.

Despite its absence from written frameworks, policy or professional standards, NETs' stories suggest they are fully engaged with this aspect of their CT space. In relation to the particular issue of *Of Mice and Men*, for example, participants consistently raise concerns about the limitations of racialised fictional representations in the curriculum, insert texts, where possible, to address this (like

Why I No Longer Talk to White People about Race) as well as calling for more black-authored texts - "why can't we teach Nigerian authors?" - and drawing connections between poems, like *Ozymandias*, and *Black Lives Matters*. However, there are other 'big pictures' to which participants show sensitivity: male-on-female violence, which makes one participant question the departmental focus on Nancy in teaching *Oliver Twist* and which appears regularly in participants' stories in relation to Curley's wife in *Of Mice and Men*; nationalism, which participants worry is being encouraged by excluding non-British texts and which one participant seeks to quietly counter by adding German poets to her World War 1 poetry unit; the plight of refugees, which inspires one participant to teach Nichols's *Island Man*. As discussed earlier, this is a kind of vigilance to social justice that can be seen as operating in a long tradition in English teachers' identity (Daly, 2004) but in research it is rarely, if ever, connected to the circular nature of literary knowledge and the 'event in time' (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 12) that a text creates. I wish to make this link explicit here.

My participants' difficult classroom experiences with *Of Mice and Men*, which are a direct consequence of contemporaneous events like George Floyd's murder, are fundamentally connected to the nature of literary knowledge and reveal the hermeneutic circle in motion. NETs' experiences eloquently argue against conceptualising literary knowledge, as Hirsch (1967) does, as stable or timeless (which Hirsch himself begins to acknowledge in his later work when he admits that knowledge may be subject to changing perspectives (see Hirsch, 1984)). Quite the opposite, NETs' stories show that literary knowledge is inescapably contingent and

subject to revision: *Of Mice and Men* has altered profoundly due to the changing 'big picture' of circumstances in which it is read, creating a different circuit and a different text (Rosenblatt, 1994). In this case, it creates a text that, after years of enjoying a cherished place in the curriculum, becomes unpalatable, putting into little doubt the power of the 'event in time' created by the 'fusion' of *Of Mice and Men* with these particular circumstances and these specific pupils. Despite the fact that it is under-represented in research on English teaching, and despite the fact that NETs themselves do not use the term, the literary 'event in time' is a manifest part of NETs' CT space.

2.2 The sixth model of English teaching

Bleiman (2020) posits that, in addition to Cox's five models of English teaching (DES, 1989), there has developed a sixth, which she calls 'Exam English' (p. 26). This, she suggests, dominates professional practice to the point of excluding all others. NETs' stories uphold her impression: one participant chooses Bleiman's (2020) model to describe her department's purpose; others complain of "that weird exam focus we can never get away from", "obviously exam-focused teaching" and the fact that they are "constantly testing them"; another is blunt in her description of schools as "battery-style exam factories". According to the literature, the problem with the heavy assessment focus is that, whilst it succeeds in satisfying accountability measures, it threatens the personal, emotional and mobile aspects of literary study already discussed and, as a result, 'distorts' (Goodwyn, 2012a, p. 212) the teaching of literature, disengaging pupils along the way (Anderson, 2013). NETs' stories

largely confirm this and also demonstrate the extent to which 'Exam English' is a clear part of their CT space.

'Exam English' permeates NETs' daily experience in schools. Regrettably, in many ways, it creates for participants, as it does for Wood (2014), a 'constraining system' (p. 5) that seems to work against their valid aims for teaching literature. Participants, being eager to provide pupils with experiences of literature where, in the words of the Newbolt Report, 'the voyage of the mind should be broken as little as possible' (Newbolt 1921, p. 11), find, much to their chagrin, that this is made impossible as a result of mandated approaches to assessment. "It's so bitty" says one participant of teaching a novel when required to stop and regularly assess pupils, leaving her powerless to create a space where the text can be experienced and enjoyed. This is echoed by other participants, all of whom have a story about a text they could not finish teaching or which had to be truncated to allow for assessments, to the detriment of the literary experience.

Participants communicate a kind of resigned distress when they discuss the effects of this on pupils: "it just kills any enthusiasm for it", "they just didn't want to engage with it really", "it just takes the enjoyment out of it". It, at the very least, is an irritant in NETs' CT space, as shown in one participant's annoyance that she had to bypass the "important part" of Shakespeare "so they could write PEDALs about Caliban. As quickly as possible". There is just one lone story of a school which prioritises pupils' reading experience, and the participant who encounters it is exultant about the

effects: "They got to actually read the whole text. We got to enjoy it. They got some discussion. It was much better, much better". Enjoying a text and discussing it with others are, arguably, prerequisites for teaching literature, and should be the rule rather than the exception. NETs' stories suggest they are anything but.

Not only do schools' 'assessment regimes' (Goodwyn, 2012a, p. 212) damage the experience of literature for pupils in NETs' CT space, interrupting the story, curtailing their enjoyment and limiting the opportunity for discussion with others, but they also threaten another treasured aspect of literary study: 'the personal response to literature that teachers so value' (p. 224). *Personal response*, as earlier discussed, is distinct from *personal growth* and I explore it as such here. Participants raise concerns about the "spoon feeding" required to guide pupils towards their assessments which, significantly, they claim exist as much in Key Stage 4 as they do in Key Stage 3, when it might be argued that they are necessary scaffolds for young learners of literature. When one participant, for example, attempts to help her Year 10 and 11 pupils connect personally with the contexts and emotions of their GCSE poems, she is stopped from doing so by her mentor who, instead, wants her to use her limited teaching time "cramming their heads with all this knowledge" - interpretations of the poems that they can regurgitate in their examinations. Other participants are dismayed by the formulaic paragraphs encouraged by prescriptive writing scaffolds designed to improve assessment outcomes or the retrieval practice that fails to encourage engagement with the text. "There's no way", says on participant, "for them to engage with and have that personal relationship with the

texts that they are reading and studying". Educational establishments acting to *prevent* pupils' personal response to literature, under pressure from accountability frameworks, should be, and is, a matter of considerable concern for the English teaching community (Goodwyn 2012; Wood, 2014; Gibbons, 2019).

Even in pupils' earlier years, which are regularly described as more "free" by participants (itself evidence of the influence of assessment - the more distant the assessment, the more agency given to the teacher), NETs' stories suggest assessment dominates and distorts the curricular experience for teachers and pupils. One participant frames his school's reason for starting Year 7 pupils on GCSE assessment objectives as a kind of inescapable professional duty: "we actually have to start teaching them the skills they are going to need in their GCSE", acknowledging that this is "very different from having a love of literature. Or love of reading". This participant's conviction could be seen as a kind of 'ventriloquism' (Ball, 2003, p. 218), particularly when considered in the light of his resigned conclusion that teaching GCSE in Year 7 is "different from having a love of literature". It is, perhaps, evidence of the compliance Hall and McGinity (2015) find across the profession in their empirical research: this same participant, in fact, echoes their findings almost exactly when he says "you take the King's coin, you do the King's bidding", just as a teacher in their study says 'that's the game we have to play' (p. 8). In prioritising examination success, this participant has internalised the 'formulations of official others' (Greene, 2000, p. 20), arguably placing the needs of the system over the right of his pupils to enjoy literature. Later, this changes as his disillusionment grows: by

the final stage of data collection, he shares serious concerns that the system is compromising the "joy in studying English"; nevertheless, he still maintains some of that framing when he says "they must jump through the exam board's hoops, and we must teach to the exam to a certain extent".

The phenomenon of 'teaching to the test' is well-known and it is the stated aim of the current Education Inspection Framework (Ofsted, 2019), with its new indicator 'quality of education', to shift the focus from assessment to curriculum. My data was collected from 2019, just at the point this framework was implemented, to 2021 but there is no evidence in NETs' stories from this period that assessment pressures have slackened. In fact, assessment is by far the biggest barrier to NETs exercising any professional agency in their CT space, which sometimes generates feelings of frustration and sometimes passes without comment, being normalised as part of the system: teachers have long been required to bend to the 'third voice' in their classrooms (Goodwyn, 2012; Anderson, 2013; Wood, 2014) and, likewise, novice teachers have, for years, 'enter[ed] a culture where rules and values are established, where ways of teaching English have become unchallenged' (Gibbons, 2016, p. 41). One participant, for example, barely notices the evidence of assessment dominating, even becoming, curriculum in the title of her Year 9 unit of work - "Language Paper 1, Question 5" - although she does register her feelings of frustration in the disservice this unit does to her high-attaining pupils, to which she is powerless to respond. Another participant does, however, notice this, sounding a little despairing when she exclaims, "we have actually had a Question 1 lesson, a Question 2 lesson".

Nevertheless, neither this participant nor her peers have the agency to change anything, revealing their position as 'clerks or technocrats' (Greene, 2000, p. 2), 'unconsulted and largely uninvolved' (Greene, 1994, p. 425) in schools' curricular endeavours. This somewhat lowly positioning is an unambiguous feature of NETs' CT space. It plays out as stories of multiple actions that NETs perform against their will or, at least, despite their misgivings: letting PEE paragraphs dominate the teaching of a text, or teaching them too early in pupils' literary education; teaching GCSE-focused units of work to Key Stage 3 pupils, excluding 'creative responses' and neglecting the importance of enjoyment of literature; enforcing 'silent reading', which is understood to improve results, despite its inefficacy; teaching canonical texts, to prepare for examinations, regardless of their suitability to particular groups of pupils.

Most tellingly of all, despite the fact that these assessment-focused approaches work on their own terms, supporting pupils towards success in their national examinations, this does not seem to mitigate participants' feelings about them. One participant in particular, for example, communicates a kind of oxymoronic pride about her Year 8 pupils' results whilst simultaneously questioning the validity of them because they were achieved by "literally shov[ing] it down their throats for about two weeks". Although separated by one hundred and fifty years, this seems to resonate with Arnold's (1869) criticism of the Victorian school system which he claimed narrowed its teaching of reading '...for the sake of a *result* at the end of it,

and the result is an illusion' (quoted in Parrinder, 1994, p. 25). The results are chimeric, to Arnold and to my participant, because they have been achieved with the school's, rather than the pupil's, interests in mind: Arnold's schools would have their funding withdrawn if their results were not satisfactory, creating a high-stakes environment likely to result in schools prioritising the result over everything else, including pupils' experience of reading and their ability to engage with it beyond the examination. NETs' schools are, arguably, in a very similar position: poor results can lead to poor Ofsted grades, unhappy staff and a reduced roll as parents make alternative choices for their children. This, too, can ultimately lead to funding cuts and possibly school closure. This pressure is reflected in the extent to which pupils are guided towards their examinations, leading to a literary education that does not necessarily foreground pupils' independence, imagination or agency. Participants' reports of A Level pupils who, according to their colleagues, struggle to "come up with their own opinions", who are not prepared for the work of the interpretative act required in literary study, are evidence of the consequences of this.

We can only speculate how the Newbolt panel (Newbolt, 1921) might have felt to find English teachers in this position exactly one hundred years after they warned literature teaching could be 'smothered by the demand for definite measurable results, especially the passing of examinations' (Newbolt, 1921, p. 55); a warning that has proven to be quite prescient. How this impacts pupils remains an open question, although we might make inferences from the plummeting numbers of pupils taking English Literature to A level (Weale, 2019); how it impacts teachers is

more known, with research suggesting that English teachers are 'deeply concerned to reverse th[e] pattern' (Goodwyn, 2012, p. 212) but are often forced into positions of 'virtuous pragmatism' (Clarke and Moore, 2013, p. 494) or 'ventriloquism' (Ball, 2003, p. 218). This involves bending words and their actions to the will of the system and swallowing concerns to become 'matters of private anxiety rather than public debate' (p. 220) - as one participant shows when she says, "I was blaming myself that they weren't engaged". The fear and submission that result from bending to the will of the system are toxic parts of NETs' CT space. According to one participant, it drives her from the profession altogether: she explains her decision to leave in terms of her powerlessness to engage and empower pupils through discussion on a range of texts and in terms of her experience of schools as "battery-style exam factories", words which indicate how pressing an issue assessment is in NETs' CT space.

2.3 The plumbing under the floorboards

In referring to plumbing, I borrow from Eaglestone (2020), using his term to explore a range of underlying systems that impact on NET's CT space. These are literary theory, canonical literature and both the Cambridge and London Schools of secondary literary education.

When Eaglestone (2020) contends that there is 'something... rotten in the state of English' (p. 8), it might be assumed he is referring to the distortions discussed above as a result of assessment pressure. In fact, although accountability and assessment

are a part of the overall problem he identifies, he is drawing attention to something deeper, which he describes as the (faulty) philosophical 'plumbing' under the floorboards of school literary study. His chief concern is that particular conceptions of literary study, based on Hirsch (1967; 1983) and to some extent Young (2014), are over-represented in secondary English education. NETs' stories substantiate this in many ways, indicating that, as Eaglestone (2020) claims, Hirsch's (1983) work in particular is a noticeable feature of NETs' CT space. In the first stage of data collection, marking only a few weeks of school experience for participants, one NET articulates a clearly pro-Hirsch view on teaching reading. "We don't need them to be able to analyse and do all this deep stuff until they've got vocabulary and knowledge, broad knowledge", he says, and "how are they going to analyse Shakespeare if they don't understand any religious references?" Although the participant does not mention, or seem aware, of Hirsch (1983), his influence is undeniable in the distinctive argument the participant makes and in the fact that he cites a school training session led by Christine Counsell, a contemporary proponent of Hirsch's (1983) work, as the source of the view.

Participants experience a number of pedagogical mandates drawn from Hirsch's (1983) work, most notably instructions to foreground socio-historical context in their teaching of literature or to explicitly pre-teach the vocabulary pupils will encounter in any text. Apart from the participant quoted above, who himself changes his views in later stages of the data collection, these mandates feel uncomfortable to participants, but they cannot confidently articulate why. Their

uncertainty makes an interesting contrast to the conviction in the above participant's tone and, perhaps, indicative of the lack of school training sessions addressing forms of literary knowledge other than Hirsch's (1983), leaving NETs uncertain about the reader-centric theories on which they implicitly draw. This lends credence to Eaglestone's (2020) concerns about 'the *philosophical error* at the deepest level' of English teaching, 'which has, almost unrecognised, bubbled up into our everyday educational work' (author's italics, p. 7).

One of the most compelling pieces of evidence for this is the fact that participants find they can only uphold reader-centric forms of literary interpretation by *subverting* school mandates, indicating the extent to which reader-response theories of literature have lost purchase in secondary English education. As discussed earlier, NETs' stories show they are keen to generate pupils' personal responses and spark energy in their experience of texts in line with Rosenblatt's (1994) seminal work on the place of the reader in literary study, but they find they are not always able to do this. In the case of one participant in particular, her desire to generate an 'event in time' for her pupils is so strong that she is visibly distressed she is blocked from doing so by her school's approach:

> It got to the point where I was *bored* (her emphasis). I was bored, so were the kids. I could see their boredom and their kind of lack of… anything. They were sitting there and they were doing it because they had to. And I was like "this is so not what English is!.

This resonates with Whitehead's (1929) perspective that curriculum must be *enjoyed* by a teacher, the lack of which this participant is clearly suffering from in her

CT space, and which deserves to be taken seriously as an issue in education. Her comments, however, also relate directly to the 'plumbing' of literary study - "this is so not what English is!" The implication of this is that without an electric spark and without any kind of personal response, the pupils are not learning - even if they can later demonstrate they 'remember and know' (Ofsted, 2019) the content of the lesson. If pupils are "doing it because they had to", they cannot be committing to the act of interpretation that is so important to my participants and Eaglestone (2020) alike. Most significantly, it is the *school* that is the barrier to pupils making this commitment. In fact, by disrupting the school's approach and working hard to make "fun" lessons which connect the text to pupils' own experience, this participant turns the situation around, "it completely changed them", she says, "and I thought that was really interesting". It is, indeed, interesting, suggesting that making efforts to create this connection between text and pupil is an important part of an English teacher's professional duty. That participants experience school systems that *prevent* this upholds concerns about the current skewing of literary study in schools (Bleiman, 2020; Eaglestone, 2020).

NETs' stories reveal that another dominant part of their CT space is the curricular expectation to teach a heavy proportion of canonical texts. The canon has long been the backbone of the discipline of literary study at a tertiary level and was a central part of the early calls to teach literature at secondary level (Newbolt, 1921) – it is part of the plumbing of literary study. However, whilst canonical literature is very much part of the unquestioned status (Goodwyn, 2012) of literary study, and has

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never been excluded from curricular frameworks, the current frameworks (DfE, 2014) place particularly strong emphasis on (British) canonical texts. NETs are enthusiastic about canonical texts - there are exclamations of joy, for example, when given a chance to teach texts like *Beowulf* or *The Odyssey* and participants are troubled when school systems limit pupils' full immersion in Shakespeare, suggesting there are very few qualms when it comes to teaching him in the first place. One participant states, "I love the canon and we should teach from it because it's amazing writing". However, as NETs' experience in school develops, participants begin to feel there is "just too much canon a lot of the time" and complaints emerge about the curriculum being "populated with dead white men", dominated by "the late 1800s...or, if we are really being generous, possibly the 1950s". Canonical literature seems to be, then, a complex aspect of the CT space in English literature: it dominates curricular frameworks and is both treasured and experienced as harmful by NETs simultaneously.

One of the harmful aspects of the canon for NETs is the mismatch between the texts and some of their pupils: stories about the challenge of teaching canonical texts to lower-attaining or reluctant pupils appear in the data repeatedly, causing stress and frustration. This study cannot assess how much this is a novice issue, a question of yet-undeveloped skill, or felt across the profession, although there is research to suggest it is a challenge for most teachers (Powell, 2021), particularly as teachers have limited opportunities to make alternative text choices. Whilst this is an enduring issue in English teaching, it has intensified due to the current Education

Inspection Framework (Ofsted, 2019) which specifies that schools should build 'ambitious' curricula that provide their pupils with 'cultural capital'. As Leedham (2022) points out, this has been widely interpreted by schools as a directive to teach substantial amounts of pre-1914 canonical literature to all pupils, regardless of attainment level.

Significantly, participants feel this works *against* them: one participant describes the way in which her pupils have been put off reading by being forced to read complex texts in her classroom, to her chagrin and regret; another worries that introducing Dickens in Year 7, which schools do in order to prepare pupils for nineteenth century literature in their GCSEs (Smith et al, 2022), will put them off for life; another describes the dread she feels every lesson when she is required to teach *Hamlet*, "I don't have a choice and I feel like I'm being drowned in literally 'The children don't understand'"; another makes links between canonical texts and the dropping rates of pupils taking literary study on to A Level - "they're so bored and it's not inspiring them. So they don't want to go on and study it at A level"; another illustrates the outcome, as she sees it, of relentless canon in the curriculum, saying "I'm finding it really hard to get the boys' heads off the desk" and, finally, one participant sums it up when he says:

> English should reflect and examine life, but the texts we teach rarely have mobile phones in, let alone social media. Maybe this is why pupils are failing to be inspired or engaged. Teachers seem tired, fearful and wary of anything new.

Further, participants' strong feeling that the canon is "divorced from the reality teenagers live today" presents, indirectly, safeguarding issues for participants, which adds another layer of tension to this part of NETs' CT space. NETs' stories show they feel genuinely anxious about the safety of their pupils, particularly online, citing concerns about pupils' ability to detect bias and avoid being radicalised - a real and present danger. The heavy focus on the canon, mandated by the English programmes of study (DfE, 2014), limits the time available for teaching anything else, including this issue that NETs feel is so urgent.

Although keeping pupils safe online would generally be considered outside the scope of a French or Art teacher, it is possible to see how it falls under the remit of the English teacher. The inclusion of media study has a long history in subject English, originating, according to Davies (1996), in Leavis's 'entirely hostile stance' (p. 24) but flourishing later thanks to the critical literacy perspective of The London School (Marshall, 2000). In the curriculum at the time of writing, however, references to media are much reduced, particularly as it explicitly excludes study of transient texts (DfE, 2014), which prevents scrutiny of social media or websites. This marks the current curriculum as being ideologically more aligned to the Cambridge School (including the Newbolt Report) than the London School and this is an important part of the underlying plumbing which impacts NETs.

The Cambridge School is evident in NETs' CT space both in terms of their own love of the canon and in terms of the curricular frameworks in which they operate. The

current programmes of study echo the Cambridge School's Romantic inclinations in the stated aim to develop pupils 'culturally, emotionally, intellectually, socially and spiritually' through literature (DfE, 2014, p. 3). They also uphold the Cambridge School's commitment to the traditional English literary canon which is important for similar reasons to both. In fact, when Perry (2019) comments on 'an education system which prepares children to become encultured into a single model of British culture' (p. 243), you could be forgiven for thinking he describes the current, which has actively excluded non-British authored texts from Key Stage 4, when, in fact, he refers to the Newbolt Report (Newbolt, 1921) which, authored in the fractious period after the Great War, viewed literature as a 'tool to develop emotional commitment to Empire and Nation' (Green and Cormack, 2008, p. 265). This aspect of the plumbing of school literary study is one against which participants passionately rail, seeing it as a nationalistic and regressive framing of canonical literature: "Whilst the nation spirals forth into the uncertainty of Brexit and tensions once again rise at the notion of Britain severing its ties with the European Union, xenophobia, racism, and fear have also dug their claws into pockets of our society", says one participant. Another cites as a reason for leaving the profession a literature curriculum that does not explore the "current structure of our society" and denies pupils "the opportunity to ask questions about and explore literature from other cultures".

NETs, then, understand that English literature is not, no matter how it might be formulated in policy documents, apolitical, and that language and power are always

in close relationship. Therefore, despite their appreciation of the canon, in line with the Cambridge School, there is also clear evidence of the legacy of the London School in their views. The London School sought to democratise literary education by centring voices not always championed in canonical constructions: in the 1950s, this was chiefly voices from the working class; now, similar efforts are underway to foreground writers racialised as non-white (Leedham, 2022). These efforts are not always supported by official frameworks and so are reliant on teachers' sense of social justice and commitment to the ethical opportunities of literary study. Participants, as already discussed in this chapter, make a number of quietly subversive efforts to foreground voices which would otherwise be excluded and/or they feel frustrated if they are prevented from doing so. Therefore, despite the fact the written curriculum has effectively expunged the London School from its framing of literature, it seems to be alive and present in NETs' CT space.

To some extent, then, in NETs' CT space the Cambridge School, with its traditional, faux-neutral framing of literary study, upheld in policy frameworks, clashes directly with the London School, to which participants owe their understanding of language and power. As a result, there is an element of conflict around the central issue of canonical literature in the CT space. This tallies with West's (1994) view that the signifier 'literature' in the curriculum is a mask for deep contradictions and tensions in the profession. There are overlaps between the two schools (Gibbons, 2019), particularly in the concept of *personal growth,* and this creates a space in which many teachers can operate. However, NETs struggle to achieve the kind of

equilibrium between the two schools that might satisfy their own philosophies of literary study as the London School has been so minimised in written frameworks. This speaks to an interesting power imbalance between policy, which mandates canonical literature, and practice, which seeks to question it, as Leedham (2022) notes:

> it's hard to both inculcate students into the canon and meet the demands of accountability and assessment, while simultaneously questioning what the canon is (p. 74)

This power imbalance is an identifiable part of NETs' CT space, a sign of the 'disproportionate influence of policy on practice in comparison to that of practice on policy' (Clarke and Moore, 2013, p. 494). Two participants, by far the most forthright and coherent critics of this imbalance in the curriculum, decide against teaching in England: one leaves the profession altogether, one takes up a post internationally. Whilst this clearly cannot be assigned to this aspect of their CT space alone, it nevertheless argues for its serious consideration as a factor in their experience of the curriculum.

3. **<u>What do NETs' stories suggest might be done differently by the professional community for the benefit of teachers and pupils?</u>**

<u>3.1 Articulate theory</u>

Hermeneutics, in the Gadamerian sense, understands literary interpretation as circular, involving a to-ing and fro-ing movement between text and context(s), the small and big pictures, in a way that includes aspects of Self as well as wider factors. Participants' stories of their own journeys to expertise in English, as well as their understanding of good practice when teaching literature, suggest they implicitly recognise the circularity of the discipline, although the hermeneutic circle is not once explicitly mentioned, and does not seem to form a part of participants' lexicon. Likewise, their commitment to the central and active place of the reader in literary interpretation is not articulated with reference to corresponding literary theory. This echoes McDiarmid's (1995) research which concludes that English teachers are not well served by undergraduate literary study and their resulting lack of clarity leads to a muddle of sometimes contradictory approaches to interpretation in the English classroom.

Although my participants' implicit references to theory are more coherent than McDiarmid's (1995), indicating they have a more-or-less consistent position on literary knowledge and interpretation, they occasionally interweave reader-response theories with ideas from completely different perspectives like Hirsch's

(1983). This creates a potentially unwieldy mix of theories influencing classroom teaching of literature. As discussed earlier in this chapter, whilst participants receive school-based training on Hirsch-influenced theory, they make no reference to training sessions for other theories, like reader-response. Consequently, although one participant feels strongly that historical context, pre-taught and divorced from the text itself, "teaches nothing", he does not push this perspective further by explaining why he feels this way; neither does the participant who cannot explain her similar objections in terms other than it feeling somehow not "natural, organic". I contend that this is because participants do not consciously recognise their underlying theoretical perspectives, and this limits their ability to articulate their grievances.

The mismatch between conceptions of literary knowledge in curricular frameworks and specialist teachers' understanding of the same is reflected in research which suggests this has a warping effect on English teaching (Anderson, 2013; Wood, 2014; Bleiman, 2020; Eaglestone, 2020). There is, therefore, an urgent need for English teachers to be in a position to confidently defend the distinctive qualities of literary epistemology, which are qualities my research shows NETs recognise. Policy makers and teacher educators might be encouraged, therefore, to draw on inherent expertise in the English teaching community, using their understanding of complex, uncertain and circular literary knowledge to make explicit its constitution, including the rewards and challenges in the classroom. This could be a step towards addressing the 'philosophical error at the deepest level' (Eaglestone, 2020, p. 7),

supporting teachers to 'reclaim' their 'curriculum voice' (Apple, 1990, p. 526) and do what my data shows they seek to do - provide the highest quality literary experience for their pupils.

Closely related to this is the issue of *personal response*. NET's stories reflect their regard for pupils' *personal response*, which is coherent with research on English teachers and their values in terms of teaching literature (Daly, 2004; Goodwyn, 2012; Wood, 2014), but the term itself, being ill-defined, risks being either dismissed as woolly or conflated with *personal growth* (Goodwyn, 2012). *Personal growth*, in fact, is a (welcome) outcome of literary reading, one which English teachers have been shown to prize highly (Bousted, 2002); *personal response*, on the other hand, is at the heart of convincing literary interpretation, a prerequisite to successful analytical writing, and a sophisticated cognitive undertaking, involving as it does the 'marshalling' of 'thought and feeling' into a 'new order' (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 12).

Pupils are unlikely to be able to undertake this independent interpretative act without teachers' careful attention and deliberate practice. The cognitive challenge is significant, requiring from pupils independence, imagination and agency and full scrutiny of both the big and small pictures of the hermeneutic circle. According to NETs' stories, this challenge is not being properly met by current practices; instead, participants' complain of formulaic or parrotted written responses which they find deeply unsatisfactory. This is supported by a body of research that worries about the same, about 'death by PEEL' (Gibbons, 2019, p. 40), about prescribed and limited

teaching which impoverishes pupils' writing (Anderson, 2013) and about the diminishing of *personal response* in assessment-driven English teaching (Goodwyn, 2012). The correspondences between this research and the stories of my participants suggests that the profession needs to articulate more assertively the purpose and value of *personal response* in school literary study in relation to corresponding literary theory.

One of the ways this might be done is to explicitly connect *personal response* to Rosenblatt's (1994) concept of the literary 'event in time' (p. 12) which my research suggests is an inevitable aspect of literary study, whether or not it is acknowledged by policy or even teachers themselves. This 'event' which theorises literary learning as a circuit, reliant on the unique combination 'in time' of reader, contexts and text, centres the reader's response to a text in the act of literary interpretation. It is the clear forerunner to English teachers' concept of *personal response* (Goodwyn, 2012) and deserves championing. This could be achieved by, firstly, ensuring that there is no confusion about its relativist position, which is not extreme, although its detractors might claim it is. Rosenblatt (1994), in fact, is clear that the text itself must regulate the reader's response; it is not a free-for-all, not the chaos that Hirsch (1983) so feared: the reader operates 'under the guidance of the text' (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 12). There is much academic and intellectual work required to construct from the text, contexts and Self a personal response that will be convincing to others; this is the work of the student of literature and it should not be underestimated.

Likewise, the work of the teacher to facilitate an 'event in time' might be seen as frivolous, or nebulous, because it does not necessarily produce immediate results of measurable progress. It is important that this is robustly countered by outlining the skill involved in generating the energy of the literary event in the classroom which involves teachers finding ways to build pupils' engagement in a text, drawing consciously on their interests, emotions and prior knowledge to help them to connect with the fine details of the text and then articulate a clear, authentic response to it. Far from being whimsical, this is an approach to literary reading grounded in Rosenblatt's (1994) empirical research.

By articulating the link(s) between *personal response* and the theoretical 'plumbing' of literary study in the form of reader-response theory, and by being more specific about the intellectual activity involved, the English teaching community could benefit from a more precise rendering of the concept than currently exists in research or policy. This could work in tandem with a more confident claim for the complex, uncertain and circular epistemological foundation of literary study, carving a distinct place for it in an educational system that currently shows preference for linear or scientific ways of knowing. Ultimately, this could result in a system that upholds specialists' understanding of literature, rather than one that actively constructs barriers to it. This is much to be desired for teachers' job satisfaction and pupils' literary education.

3.2 Acknowledge emotional-ethical dimensions of literature

NETs value literature as an emotional experience and an opportunity for ethical education. This echoes a long tradition in literary study, constituting aspects of its disciplinary character. Nevertheless, both dimensions are underrepresented in the curricular frameworks within which English teachers operate. Although the current Programme of Study (DfE, 2014) 'unquestionably recognises the kind of knowledge that English offers' (Eaglestone, 2020, p. 11) when it claims literature develops pupils 'culturally, emotionally, intellectually, socially and spiritually' through communication of 'ideas and emotions' (p.3), NETs' stories indicate that this does not translate to the classroom. This is likely to be because there is no corresponding emphasis on emotions or ethics in the Education Inspection Framework (Ofsted, 2019) and/or GCSE English Literature examination assessment criteria. As a result, when NETs demonstrate through their actions that they value both emotion and ethics in the teaching of literature, they most often do so in addition to, or even *in spite of*, school approaches to literary study: they act on their personal, ethical stance, their professional integrity, as much as external control measures (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988; Kelly, 2009; Marsh, 2009; Biesta, Priestley and Robinson, 2015). It is revealing to see novice teachers willing to meet the ethical invitation of the literary text - 'How should one live?' (Nussbaum, 2015, p. 241) - and recommends that written frameworks find a way to encompass this 'coalface' commitment in official formulations of the subject.

There are multiple challenges in this. For a start, Nussbaum (2015) warns of the 'reductive moralizing [sic]' (p. 244) that an overtly ethical approach to literary study might produce and Gearon (2019), similarly, suggests that teaching for ethics leads to teachers providing 'ready-made interpretation[s]' (p. 401) to ensure pupils receive 'the' moral message. Certainly, approaching literature with one prescribed outcome in mind runs counter to its disciplinary nature - treating it *only* as a way to learn an ethical lesson is as dangerous as approaching it *only* to pass an examination. To address this, it may be necessary to critically examine the current conception of curriculum, which positions teachers as 'passive recipients of the wisdom of curriculum developers' (Marsh, 2009, p. 102) and maintains an arguably 'fantasmatic' (Clarke and Moore, 2013, p. 493) faith in teaching and learning as predictable and linear, falling neatly into place behind clearly prescribed outcomes. This conception is inadequate because it cannot reflect the complexity of the emotional-ethical opportunity of literature teaching.

Instead, Beyer and Apple's (1998) understanding of curriculum as a series of dilemmas seems to have more potential. Engaging with these dilemmas, teachers must attend fully to the 'difficulty and unease' (Greene, 1973, p. 32) that can nurture attentive, flexible professional expertise (Greene, 1973, 2000; Pinar, 1981; Beyer and Apple, 1998; Fowler, 2006; Clarke and Moore, 2013). This acknowledges, rather than trying to control or minimise, the complex, contingent and ultimately unforeseeable nature of emotional and ethical immersion in a literary text, rebalancing a curriculum that currently tends 'towards the general' (Pinar, 1981,

p.175) rather than 'concrete individuals in specific circumstances' (ibid). Instead, conceptions of curriculum could confront the crucial decisions teachers are required to make 'in very uncertain and trying circumstances' (Beyer and Apple, 1998, p. 7) in order to truly reflect and support teachers' work. In the current landscape, this might involve, for example, loosening the top-down expectation to pre-teach knowledge and vocabulary and, instead, exploring *with* teachers the many ways (possibly including knowledge and vocabulary) that sophisticated literary texts might challenge pupils, including on an emotional-ethical level.

NETs' stories provide clear evidence of the challenges they face in the 'uncertain and trying circumstances' of their classroom, as they attempt to manage intense reactions to thorny issues like race and gender. As yet, research on English teaching does not fully address this aspect of teachers' professional experience, although a conversation is beginning on social media which marks this as a wider issue than just my participants' stories. For example, in March 2023 an English teacher tweeted '8 tips for teaching suicide' after realising that he had 'absolutely zero knowledge' about talking about suicide 'effectively and responsibly' (Mr Pink, 2023, n.p.) when teaching key literary texts like *Romeo and Juliet* and *An Inspector Calls*. Nevertheless, the difficulty of navigating the complex ethical space created by literature teaching, and the personal toll it takes on teachers, is under-researched and ignored in accountability and policy frameworks, including those pertaining to teacher education. My data suggests this must be urgently rectified. Whilst *Of Mice and Men* is clearly problematic in itself, leading to its removal from many schools since my

data was collected, the issue cannot be dismissed as a problem with one text. In fact, it might be more useful to view it as part of a larger truth about the power of fiction, which is designed to provoke (Sartre, 1967; Gadamer, 1975/2004; Iser, 1978/1994) and to engender an emotional reaction; a fact completely ignored by hyperrational educational frameworks. Retreating from, or denying, this aspect of literary study is demonstrably unworkable, risking teachers', as well as, most importantly, pupils' wellbeing and safety.

Addressing this may involve putting at the service of literary education the theories that relate not just to literature but to stories more generally: to the enduring power of narrative in shaping experience and developing knowledge (Clandinin, 2007). It has long been accepted that story-immersion is a legitimate educational method for young children, a natural way of learning that has been rightly incorporated into 'formal' education in the early years. Much of what is claimed for the literary education of secondary-aged pupils - from the Newbolt Report (Newbolt, 1921) to the current Programme of Study (DfE, 2014) - echoes the claims made for pretend play in the early years. Literature is 'the gaining of personal experience…an equipment for the understanding of life' (Newbolt, 1921, p. 19) and develops pupils 'culturally, emotionally, intellectually, socially and spiritually' (DfE, 2014, p. 3), which research suggests are also the benefits of stories for very young children (Paley, 1991; 2009; 2014; Sutton-Smith, 1986). Likewise, many similar benefits are claimed for adults, outside of formal learning environments, who are regular readers of fiction, for example: enriched social connections and sense of community; greater

sense of wellbeing; increased empathy (Dowrick et al, 2012; Johnson et al, 2013; Hammond and Lewis, 2016; Dodell-Feder and Tamir, 2018; Carney and Robertson, 2022; Jeynes, 2022). As argued in my literature review, neuroscience, to some extent, helps us to understand this. It shows that fiction, particularly literary fiction, with its capacity to engage, surprise and challenge readers, is experienced as 'real' in neurological terms, imbuing it with precisely that capacity to educate through experience that has long been claimed for it (Robinson, 2015; Oatley, 2016).

Literary fiction *is*, therefore, as NETs' intuit, an emotional experience and an opportunity for ethical education: it is one manifestation of a wider, deeper human preoccupation with stories as a means to learn, connect and develop. On the basis of NETs' stories, this presents unique challenges to literature teachers that are not fully addressed, or even understood, in the current education system. This is particularly the case as it is heavily influenced by research on reading that foregrounds *comprehension*, as Hirsch's (1983) does, with minimal regard to whether the text involved is fictional and why, or how, that matters. In fact, it matters hugely, as fiction is designed to provoke, preoccupy and transform its readers and has been shown to do so, as we have seen. Whilst it might sound obvious to state that fiction is fundamentally distinct from non-fiction (putting aside, for the moment, the obvious overlaps in genres like creative non-fiction), this might be more robustly articulated in the context of school literary education. This could help to counter any assumption that an evocative and visceral text like *Of Mice and Men* can be

approached in the classroom like any other comprehension activity, which is the consequence of mandates like pre-teaching vocabulary and contextual 'knowledge'.

3.3 Value teachers' agency as designers of curriculum

Beyer and Apple's (1998) concern that curriculum standardisation denies teachers any involvement in *what* is taught, and *why*, limiting professional dialogue to *how* a subject is taught, seems valid in the light of NETs' stories. There are repeated instances of NETs wishing for influence on *what* is taught, almost always because they have evidence that it is not serving their pupils, from the participant who can see the creative writing unit does not teach her pupils anything new to the participants who find texts like *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Hamlet* and *Hard Times* obstructive in terms of gaining pupils' engagement in literary study. NETs also want the *what* of curriculum to better reflect their own values: "why aren't we studying, you know, Nigerian authors, why aren't they on the curriculum?" This argues for the need to revisit ideas of curriculum as situation-specific and contingent to support teachers to cater for their pupils (Greene, 1973; Pinar, 1981; Connelly and Clandinin, 1988) and as having the potential to be shaped by teachers' values to support teachers' commitment to their classroom work (Gudmundsdottir, 1991; Grossman and Thompson, 2008; Biesta, Priestley and Robinson, 2015).

NETs' stories also add substance to Beyer and Apple's (1998) conjecture that teachers' limited inclusion in curriculum decisions results in reduced expertise. This

must be admitted as a possible outcome when NETs are denied the chance to experiment with different curriculum content in order to, for example, respond to pupils' lack of engagement in silent reading or to meet the creative writing needs of high-attaining pupils. This inevitably narrows the scope of NETs' expertise, missing a vital opportunity to learn what content might work for pupils, using the 'productive possibilities of tension, conflict and uncertainty' (Clarke and Moore, 2013, p. 492) to guide their development. Frustratingly, it also means that NETs do not have the opportunity 'truly to attend' (Greene, 1973, p. 42) to their pupils, responding to their particularities, their 'situation-specific undertakings' (Greene, 2000, p. 11) and what about them is 'unmeasurable' or 'unique' (p.11); they cannot ask, as Fowler (2006) suggests struggling teachers should: 'What is going on? So what? Now what?' (p. 26). Without drawing on their specialist knowledge to create 'situation-specific' experiences of literature or writing for their pupils, their understanding of what this involves is necessarily restricted. This makes somewhat redundant the specialist knowledge teachers bring to the profession and potentially negatively affects pupils. 'How is the teacher to cope with this?', asks Greene (2000), 'to avoid feeling like a chess piece or a cog or even an accomplice of some kind?' (p. 11).

One of the ways participants cope with this is to rebel, albeit in the most modest ways possible, by adapting curriculum content, or pedagogical mandates, to better serve their pupils' needs. This is always reported to be positive: "I enjoyed having that freedom", says one participant of switching the Dickens's extract he is

instructed to teach his Year 7 pupils; another prefers her altered retrieval practice, which is "a little bit nicer, because at least they get their imagination going"; another finds her adaptations to her Year 8 unit of work on *Macbeth* transforms it for her pupils. This strikes a hopeful note, a reminder of hooks's (1994) belief that agency can be found, that teachers can find ways to be 'active participants in the pedagogical process' (p. 183), no matter the structural impediments. Nevertheless, it is hard to ignore the implication of NETs' stories, which is that they must either yield to schools' directives *or* act in what they see as the best interests of pupils and the integrity of their subject: the two are, at least on occasion, mutually exclusive. Clearly, a system of education that presents teachers with this choice, albeit unintentionally, is unenviable and as the literature suggests that it is more usual for teachers to *submit* to directives than *subvert* them (Ball, 2003; Wood, 2014; Hall and McGinity, 2015; Gibbons, 2016), it opens up the possibility that pupils' literary education is suffering as a result.

Confronting this is likely to require a systemic acknowledgement that teachers' agency can be a constructive, rather than threatening, aspect of curriculum. Currently, the standardised curriculum in England seems designed to reduce the *risk* of teachers' agency: it is a 'teacher proof' system, managed through detailed and dogmatic inspection frameworks and underpinned by prescribed professional standards (Clarke and Moore, 2013). It is a system that debars teachers from owning their curriculum vision so, as Sahlberg (2015) notes, they are forced to rent it instead - from inspection frameworks, examination specifications or from increasingly

monetised curriculum packages offered by organisations with profit in mind (a literal rather than metaphorical 'renting' of curriculum). Even when granted some freedom in planning, the ubiquitous presence of the 'third voice' (Wood, 2014, p. 7) acts as a kind of invisible, but powerful, force which, for Wood (2014), is anxiety-provoking and which shapes 'the way I teach and my perception of the subject itself' (p. 5). Only in the summer term, after examinations and performance management cycles have been completed, can Wood (2014) teach lessons congruent with her vision and in response to her pupils. At this time of the year, she notes, 'my audience is singular – my attention is on my students, not on any 'third voice' (p. 10). This, according to Wood (2014), creates more satisfactory and effective lessons, something that echoes NETs' experiences on the rare occasions they are given an opportunity to curate the content of a topic. One participant reports that her teaching is "more successful... because I could tell them why I chose those poems and why I thought they would be good" and another feels that "more ownership" leads to "more understanding and confidence ... in your teaching".

"Why I thought they would be good", in the above participant's words, is a simple statement but holds a profound point. 'Many people still equate a curriculum with a syllabus' (p. 9), laments Kelly (2009) and, indeed, without engagement with *why* particular content is taught, it becomes a syllabus, one that, in theory, needs only perfunctory understanding and knowledge from the teacher - just enough to jump through the hoops set. I wonder how many English teachers can explain to their Key Stage 4 pupils *why* they are studying *A Christmas Carol* or *Macbeth*? This is a

rhetorical question: there is no accessible reason for teachers, other than 'for the exam'. It is not that either of those texts are inappropriate but, rather, that their inclusion in schools' curricula has nothing to do with teachers. And yet, how much better and more satisfying the teaching seems to be for NETs when they do have a handle on why they are teaching curriculum content; what a potential loss to the system if this is as rare as NETs' stories suggest.

I would like to argue that my research provides an empathically affirmative answer to Apple's (1990) question - 'Is there a curriculum voice to reclaim?' (p. 526) - and posit that reclaiming it will necessitate a renewed view of curriculum itself, a reinvigoration of curriculum debate and a shifting of power dynamic between policy and practice so that their relative influence is proportionate rather than weighted so heavily on one side. This is a not inconsiderable challenge but one that stands to benefit teachers and pupils alike and which, in a growing recruitment and mental health crisis, must be seen as a welcome change.

Chapter F: Conclusion

<u>1. Original contribution to knowledge</u>

In this thesis I have described a novel theoretical space in which curriculum and teacher meet, the CT space, by drawing on scholarship that argues for a central place for the teacher in any curricular endeavour (Pinar, 1981; Connelly and Clandinin, 1988; Apple, 1990; Greene, 1973, 2000). This space is overlooked, particularly in contemporary discourse, and yet holds great significance to the quality of any educational project. In terms of teaching literature, the space conceptually connects dimensions that are not routinely linked, including: research on the purpose and benefits of fiction; literary theory; historical perspectives of school literary study and empirical research on English teachers' views of teaching literature.

The stories of ten novice English teachers (NETs) were collected over a two-year period to explore their experiences of the literature curriculum. This generated empirical data that, for the first time in an English context, analysed in such depth NETs' feelings, values and beliefs relating to teaching literature and its curricular frameworks, as well as their direct lived experience of the literature classroom. Addressing three central research questions, the findings of this study have potentially significant implications for the English teaching community and, in this chapter, I bring the discussion into clearer focus by summarising its original contribution to knowledge.

Overall, this thesis concludes that ***curricular frameworks inadequately reflect novice teachers' understanding and experience of literary study***. This is because a) NETs operate on an implicit understanding of literary interpretation which is not supported by curricular frameworks (which links to the concept of *personal response*) and b) NETs not only prize the emotional and ethical dimensions of literary study (which links to the concept of *personal growth*), they also experience its emotional impact in the classroom, which is unacknowledged in curricular frameworks. This new knowledge is important because it might support the creation of more robust and representative curricular frameworks, incorporating better articulation of literary study's particular characteristics for the benefit of teachers and pupils in secondary schools. Additionally, this thesis contributes further evidence of phenomena already identified in the research field, namely the negative impact of accountability on teachers of English literature in terms of restricting their agency and enforcing 'distorting' (Goodwyn, 2012a, p. 212) assessment procedures.

The first aspect of my contribution to knowledge, relating to NETs' models of literary interpretation, is significant not just because it is new but because it could support a re-energised conversation about literary study at secondary level, helping teachers to advocate for versions of best practice that are not currently officially sanctioned. NETs' stories reflect their implicit understanding of the hermeneutic circle, with its movement between (unlimited) contexts and textual details, spurred by the provocation of the artwork. Whilst this model of interpretation has long been a

mainstay of tertiary literary study (Eaglestone, 2017), school curricular frameworks instead draw on opposing literary theories (Hirsch, 1967; 1983) or incompatible theories of knowledge (Young, 2014) and pedagogy (Rosenshine, 2012). The resulting school mandates - for example, pre-teaching historical context or beginning each lesson with retrieval practice - are subverted by NETs, albeit in limited ways, in order to best serve their pupils' needs. This adds weight to Eaglestone's (2020) and Bleiman's (2020) misgivings about the research which informs the current literature curriculum. This thesis provides knowledge that might empower future teachers to resist current dominant forms of curriculum and pedagogy.

NETs' stories also indicate that they draw on reader-response theories, as Goodwyn (2012) suggests English teachers do, which is a significant aspect of their understanding of literary interpretation. Their adherence to reader-response theories is chiefly demonstrated through their pedagogical choices. These choices provide evidence of the value NETs place on pupils' literary *experience* and of the teacher's responsibility to facilitate an 'event in time' (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 12). As reader-response theories are inadequately reflected in curricular frameworks, NETs create an 'event in time' in the classroom at no-one's behest but their own and, despite the lack of official impetus or authority, are clear that the lessons in which they play with the 'circuit' (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 14) of the text, supporting pupils to make energising connections with it, are their most successful. Pupils' authentic engagement with a text is, according to many (Goodwyn, 2012; Eaglestone, 2017;

Lawrence, 2019; Bleiman, 2020), 'the heart of English' (Lawrence, 2019, p. 1) and NETs seem to agree, communicating pride in their pupils' progress when they see this. Conversely, when pupils do not demonstrate authentic engagement, NETs do not feel satisfied with their learning even when their levels, as assessed by current frameworks, suggest progress. This indicates NETs recognise the importance of *personal response* as a clear marker of aptitude in literary study.

Personal response is an enduring concept which, for English teachers if not for policy designers, has long been considered the gold standard in the teaching of literature at secondary school (Goodwyn, 2017). As I argue in the Discussion chapter, *personal response* has clear links to Rosenblatt's (1994) 'event in time' (p. 12) in its emphasis on individuals making their own shape of a text, regulated by the text itself but inspired and fashioned by pre-existing knowledge and experience. In terms of its use in the English teaching community, *personal response* is a well-used but blurry term (Goodwyn, 2017), leaving it open to accusations that it is not academically robust or valid. However, as Rosenblatt (1994) shows, developing a personal response to a text is intellectually challenging, requiring significant independent action on the part of the reader/pupil. By facilitating an 'event in time' for pupils, by helping them to make fruitful connections between their world and the text and exploring their own and each other's ideas in the process, NETs help pupils to meet this intellectual challenge. This is a form of scaffold for literary interpretation and a potentially powerful alternative to the more commonly-used PEE paragraph (Gibbons, 2019) which provides structure for pupils' writing but does not explicitly

address the process of developing interpretations. To better validate *personal response* as an important step in pupils' progression towards advanced literary study, a clear link needs to be made to literary theory, countering any assumptions that it is weak or woolly practice.

The need to champion *personal response* despite widespread practitioner understanding of the concept is suggestive of the power imbalance between policy and practice (Clarke and Moore, 2013), with the former far outweighing the latter. However, as aspects of Rosenblatt's (1994) reader-response theories and the hermeneutic circle (as well as elements of the London School which will be discussed below) prevail in NETs' curricular models *despite* being minimised in current frameworks, there is evidence in this study of the wisdom of Kelly's (2009) warning to policy-makers that they ignore practitioners at their peril. NETs' stories, in fact, constitute a challenge to the authority of written curricular frameworks which, hyper-rational and faux-neutral (Clarke and Moore, 2013), tend to suggest consensus where there is none (West, 1994). Whilst NETs are generally compliant - which is a recognised effect of accountability frameworks (Ball, 2003) - the quiet subversions and/or withdrawal from England's state system altogether of NETs, is an argument against teacher-proofing (Marsh, 2009) the curriculum. As Kelly (2009) argues, like it or not, a teacher is central to the curricular effort in schools and must be understood as active and agentic, perhaps necessitating a reconfiguration of the concept of professionalism itself to incorporate more than just compliance.

The second aspect of my contribution to knowledge, which concerns the emotional and ethical dimensions of literature teaching, is significant because it exposes a hitherto overlooked implication of teaching literature which considerably impacts NETs. At the time of writing, the issue of texts 'triggering' pre-existing trauma has started to gain attention in online professional dialogue (see, for example, Mr Pink, 2023) but, although this emerging recognition of the profound emotional dimensions of literature chimes with this study, indicating that it is felt more widely than my dataset, academic research on the matter is scant. NETs' stories suggest it is a pressing issue, however, and this speaks to a gap between research and teachers' experience. This thesis is a small step towards filling this gap as it provides useful and previously untold accounts of difficult classroom experiences for which NETs feel unprepared and which are not reflected in the curricular frameworks which could support them.

Moreover, NETs' stories about pupils' reactions to literary texts provide further evidence of the veracity of Rosenblatt's (1994) 'event in time' (p. 12) and the powerful movement of the hermeneutic circle in the study of literature. Literary texts are living, resonant pieces of art and they cannot, and must not, be reduced, as Bleiman (2020) argues, to atomised parts (like, for example, literary devices) nor fixed to a particular context. Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* cannot be limited to Victorian England just as Shakespeare's *Macbeth* cannot be understood only through Jacobean England; to do so would be to limit the depth of knowledge that can be

gained from the texts. They cannot be understood through these single contexts both because it is theoretically reductive but also because it does not work in practice: this research suggests that it is futile to try to atomise or limit the way a reader can know a literary text. Due to the very fact that they are artworks, they will spur the reader into motion (Gadamer, 1975/2004; Iser, 1978/1994), as they did in NETs' classrooms, and readers will make connections to their own lives and contexts, just in the way Rosenblatt (1994) observed, whether or not this is acknowledged or sanctioned. Arguably, if readers do not, the interpretative act becomes difficult to undertake, making a lack of emotional engagement in a text a threat to pupils' progress in literary study. However, this emotional engagement must be managed skilfully by teachers who show respect for the gravity of the issues explored by a literary text to avoid harm to any pupil (or teacher) and this, currently, is not adequately addressed in research, teacher education or continuing professional development.

Although NETs seem surprised by the extent of the emotional impact of literary texts on their pupils, their own stories of their personal encounters with literature indicate they are strongly aware, have experienced and, most importantly, value the emotional and ethical dimensions of literary texts. These dimensions seem to form part of NETs' understanding of *personal growth* through literature, a concept to which they are as attached as research suggests many English teachers are (Goodwyn, 2012; 2017). *Personal growth*, enduring though it is, does not benefit from sharp definition (Bousted, 2002; Goodwyn, 2017) and, interestingly, both of

the recent revisions offered by Goodwyn (2017) and Gibbons (2017) do not directly reference emotions or ethics (although the latter might be implied). This is a striking omission in the light of NETs' stories which are rich with examples of the way they view literature as an opportunity to promote pupils' ethical and emotional growth. For example, for demonstrably ethical reasons, NETs communicate real concern about the failure of the current curriculum to address critical literacy. Much as members of the London School did decades earlier, NETs want to use literature to challenge dominant perspectives and/or celebrate marginal voices. The cultural heritage skew of the current curriculum not only limits their ability to do so, it also creates a curricular gap around media literacy which NETs feel deeply when they recognise that pupils are not receiving sufficient guidance to safely navigate social media. Likewise, NETs express their desire to use literature to support the development of pupils' emotional maturity and ability to form healthy relationships. This demonstrates the strong emotional-ethical dimension of their understanding of *personal growth* which is neither reflected in curricular frameworks or, to its fullest extent, in research on the concept.

Finally, and crucially, the emotional fallout NETs experience in their classrooms speaks to the constitution of literature itself, particularly literary *fiction*. Novels and plays are artistic forms which arise from and draw on the power and purpose of stories in human life. This means that they utilise and embody the storied nature of human knowledge development, immersing readers in a narrative in order to extend their understanding of a range of aspects of human life. Currently, some models of

best practice do not seem to differentiate between fiction and non-fiction reading; they are grounded in studies focused on non-fiction reading (Hirsch, 1983) but applied to all reading, including literary reading. This has led to the widespread adoption of approaches such as pre-teaching vocabulary and contextual knowledge. These approaches may have much merit when it comes to the comprehension of non-fiction texts but their efficacy with regard to literary reading is not tested. Certainly, they fail to embrace the emotional impact of the literary text, and how this can be used to help pupils develop original and convincing interpretations.

These models of best practice do not acknowledge, either, the peculiar power of fiction to immerse readers, neurologically, in the lives of their characters (Robinson, 2015) - an immersion that must and should have an emotional dimension. This immersion may be necessary for stories to have the educative effect that they are recognised as having; for being the 'mind's flight simulator' (Oatley, 2016, p. 619) which can provide a way of learning without the cost of firsthand experience (Gottschall, 2013). Learning *through* story, then, is an important aspect of fiction: this is one reason that pre-teaching contextual knowledge seems contrary, even counter-productive, to some (Bleiman, 2020; Eaglestone, 2020) as readers learn about the context of the text through the experience of reading. Arguably, the profession would benefit from a model of literature teaching more connected to research on reading fiction, rather than non-fiction. As my research suggests that NETs generally do not explicitly reference the theoretical underpinnings on which

they seem to operate, this is a wider issue, limiting as it does the extent to which they can articulate, and perhaps defend, their own understanding of their subject.

2. Possible future lines of enquiry/recommendations

I am keen that future enquiry on this topic establishes the extent to which the data represents the views of the English teaching community more generally, including more experienced staff. To influence policy decisions, this would be a crucial next step. This would likely necessitate a different methodological approach to facilitate work with a larger dataset. The conclusions of this study would not have been possible without the open-ended, intimate lens supplied by narrative inquiry - insights into NETs' implicit models of literary interpretation and details of their classroom experiences would have likely remained elusive with more distant methods. Nevertheless, the next step might require a more structured approach, using this study as the groundwork on which to base the lines of inquiry, directly addressing its key findings with a wider dataset.

Results from a wider and more varied dataset would provide further confirmation of this study's findings relating to teachers' understanding and experiences of teaching literature. This would strengthen the following recommendations for teachers and policy-makers which I draw from my findings:

- The professional community, including teachers and academics, could seek opportunities to articulate the theoretical underpinnings of school literary study so that it could be better reflected in curricular frameworks. This might involve developing a sharpened definition of both *personal response* and *personal growth*. It also might necessitate a wider acknowledgement that the study of literature is demonstrably different to other areas of school study, particularly compulsory subjects.

- Policy-makers and those involved in teacher education could consider guidance for English teachers to support them in teaching stories from literature that might reflect the lived experiences of pupils and/or aggravate pre-existing prejudice, inequality or trauma.

- Policy-makers could reconsider the merit of 'teacher-proofing' curricular frameworks and acknowledge the benefits of incorporating teachers' expertise and understanding. This might involve reframing the concept of curriculum as process rather than outcome and would also likely necessitate a recognition of the context-dependent nature of curricular endeavours.

4. <u>Limitations: never the final story</u>

Whilst I believe that my philosophical position and adoption of a narrative approach can, and has, generated valuable knowledge in this study, I also believe it is crucial to recognise its drawbacks as these have profound implications. I have made a case in this thesis for the particular rather than the general; of 'small stories' as opposed to metanarratives; of the importance of recognising complexity, difficulty and struggle in teaching. However, I likewise value studies that are generalisable, quantitative or positivist. Like Pinar (1981), I believe that a balance is desirable and, like Carter (1993), I can see that an exclusive commitment to in-depth, non-generalisable research would be 'illegitimate if not actually harmful' (p. 8). Fundamentally, it is vital to remember, and I do, that, whilst stories are as powerful and important, they are also dangerous:

> Stories can be misused. Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot and many other demagogues stand as an awful warning to us of the need to discover the truth beneath the veneer of stories' (Brophy, 2007, p. xi)

While Brophy's (2007) concept of an objective truth lurking behind a 'veneer' of narrative is questionable, his concern does speak to an enduring misgiving about working with something as capricious and slippery as a human being telling a story. Stories can deceive as readily as they illuminate; their power can turn them into weapons when they are exploited to 'distort or conceal' or 'to promote…one point of view to the detriment of others' (McEwan and Egan, 1995, p. xii). This has played out horrifyingly in history, as the above quotation notes, and is playing out now in

the wretched and worrying rise of disinformation, false and deliberately misleading narratives which are finding widespread purchase on social media (Moravec, Minas and Dennis, 2018). This is not an insignificant issue and is truly, 'the dark side to the functioning of narrative' (McEwan and Egan, 1995, p. xii).

To mitigate this, I acknowledge a story is always incomplete, remembering to ask: 'What does story capture and what does it leave out?' (Carter, 1993, p. 5). The close-up narrative lens inevitably obscures as much as it discloses and, without understanding that we risk being like one of the blind men in the fable, touching a different part of an elephant and coming to wildly different conclusions, all erroneous, without sight of the creature as a whole (Kim, 2016). The limitation of this study is that it is not, and can never be, the final story. However, by acknowledging this limitation, I show I am alert to the 'danger of the single story' (Adichie, 2009). It is this that distinguishes the dark from the light in terms of storied knowledge-generation: whereas stories that seek to deceive generally claim to be the final word - the single story - this is not true of stories that seek, genuinely, to expand human knowledge. These stories invite challenge, revision and the existence of multiple, conflicting stories. This story is one of those.

I began this thesis with a reflection on my own experiences of teaching literature, citing this as one of my main motivations for undertaking this project. Literature is a lifelong love of mine and sharing that love with pupils was always a thrill. I am grateful for the opportunity that this research has given me to vicariously spend time again in the literature classroom. It has been a privilege to listen to NETs' stories and enter into their lived experiences; it has been an honour to hear them explore, question and discuss the idea of literature in school.

Literature, as I think my data demonstrates, has a profound impact on those who engage in it whole-heartedly and this should never be underestimated. The responsibility of teachers to help their pupils to embrace literature as a part of their life is huge and must be reckoned with alongside their responsibility to promote pupils' progress, as defined by whatever assessment frameworks are in place. As the Newbolt panel cautioned us over 100 years ago, literature cannot be reduced to its component parts nor to an exercise in assessment (Newbolt, 1921). Neither, therefore, can the job of an English teacher be summed up as such. Beginning a lesson with retrieval practice, explicitly teaching pupils advanced vocabulary or asking pupils to write a plethora of PEE paragraphs cannot, alone, make a great teacher of literature. I look forward to the day when the complexity of teaching practices that can best support pupil engagement in literature is better understood. In the meantime, I dedicate this study to those teachers whose daily work in bringing

pupil and literary text into a 'fruitful relationship' (Dixon, 1975, p. 3) goes unseen by the system - unlikely to satisfy performance review targets - but is recognised by pupils, many of whom I meet as adults in PGCE interviews and who, on being asked why they want to be a teacher, invariably reply, "Well, I know it sounds like a cliche, but I had this English teacher…".

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