What do English teachers consider to be the value and purposes of English Literature education and how do these interpretations stand alongside those of the State?

 The teaching of literature has long been influenced, or even 'hamstrung' (Ward, 2008) by politics. Though the Cox Report (1989) marks the beginning of prescribed curriculum for all students in England, the rationale underpinning its literature curriculum can be traced back decades earlier to Victorian and post-Victorian views of the role of literature as a powerful tool to cultivate minds and civilise society (Ward, 2008). These views, Ward argues, see students as humbly accessing culturally dominant 'great literature', for example the plays of William Shakespeare. Often considered the nation's 'greatest Briton' or 'greatest English writer', enthusiasm for teaching Shakespeare can be traced back even further to the 1921 Newbolt Report and efforts to create national unity and cultural influence over the working class (Coles, 2004).

More recently, successive governments have argued that promoting common culture via canonical authors in the curriculum benefits disadvantaged students both socially and academically (Coles; 2013). Indeed Shakespeare is often seen as the "saviour of the poor and dispossessed" (ibid. p.54) and that studying his works can liberate disadvantaged children from "ignorance and the chains of dependency" (Gove, 2010). This view is not universally held however.

This research does not seek to dispute that Shakespeare is a "national poet who signifies globally" (Huang, 2013, p.278), indeed his significance "is testified in the numerous quotations, references and jokes that allude to his language, his plays and his themes, not only in self-consciously cultured discourse but in the politics, advertising and journalism of English-speaking communities" (Cheng, 2011, p.547). Instead, this research aims to explore the impact of compulsory academic study and high stakes formal written assessment of the Shakespearean component of the National Curriculum.

My interest in these areas initially arose from teaching experiences within a deprived multi-ethnic community. I want to investigate other English literature teachers' experiences teaching Shakespeare in different institutions, their views of the purposes of English Literature teaching, how these are influenced by the 'assumed' curriculum 'expertise' of governments and media (Hodges, 1993) as well the impact of learning experiences on teachers practice.

Regardless of external pressure, teachers are at the heart of curriculum development and deployment. I hope that this research can identify and disseminate the ways teachers support students in complex urban classrooms negotiate the complex webs of ethnic and social identities, popular culture and the official, national culture imposed by the National Curriculum.

The following literature review explores three research papers which are closely linked to my own proposed research.

In their research paper '*Disturbing stories: Literature as Pedagogical Disruption*' Faulkner and Latham claim literature study is a medium through which we reconsider moral and ethical issues, and reflect on our own lives. They argue that different teaching texts serve particular interests and are connected to teaching identities, demonstrating through their research the unsettling experiences preservice teachers had when traditional views were destabilised. Faulkner and Latham's research acknowledges the potential risks of destabilising and reconstructing teaching identities by questioning the texts studied as part of literature courses. Though my interviews will explore this same topic, differences in methodology will minimise the chance of the research undermining subjects' perceptions of teaching identities.

Faulkner and Latham's research seeks to shift perceptions of the role of literature teachers during a ten week preservice training programme. They recognise the flaws of their own research method: describing the talk and online contributions in which they tracked movement in subjects' beliefs about literature teaching as a "slippery medium", as they are more a form of social action than statements of belief. Also, as not all subjects in the training programme contributed to the online discussion and not all who did contribute showed movement in their declared position, they were cautious whether the study demonstrated curriculum choices produce transformative understandings in teachers generally.

Further, as this research was conducted during a time of professional and personal change, with subjects embarking on a new career, and often transitioning from student to teacher themselves, attributing changes in position to just this research project is also problematic. The researchers noted their findings were problematic as they had left them with "more questions than when we began" but still used this data as the basis of their research.

My own and Faulkner and Latham's research encourages subjects to reflect on both their professional practice and personal views. Whereas Falkner and Latham's research is situated within an artificial environment and tracks movement in subjects' position over an extended time period, my research data will be collected at one point in time and be influenced by genuine classroom experiences.

Faulkner and Latham claim that their findings for preservice teachers are transferrable to inservice teachers, as both are engaging in reading and teaching complex or risky material, "critically reflecting on their beliefs, seeking out and negotiating alternative views, revising and clarifying their positions" and for both "what is occurring matters to them (Faulkner and Latham, 2013, p.115). This claim can be challenged: it is not evident from the study whether the process the preservice teachers went through *mattered* to them personally or because it is a component of their training programme. Furthermore, what *matters* to inservice teachers, has to be balanced with requirements of a particular school context, and professional responsibilities in general. This conflict between internal and external purposes will be explored in my interview questions.

Another research paper which is closely linked to my own proposed research is *'Every child's birthright: Democratic entitlement and the role of canonical literature in the English National Curriculum'*. Coles claims curriculum reforms focused on increasing student access to 'Great Books' and 'cultural heritage' are not straight forward, and have a disabling effect on some students. In particular, she argues that the regulated and assessments driven experiences students have with the canon, particularly Shakespeare, reproduces existing socio-economic differences and inhibits some students from having any meaningful connection with it.

Coles' data was collected from interviews with students and teachers, and 30 hours of observations of four English classes from two contrasting London schools. No reference is made to the way or ways these schools were selected or contrasted or which schools excerpts included in the article were drawn from. It is not possible, therefore, to draw conclusions at a student or individual school basis despite references to the significance of class, power and socio-cultural differences in the rest of the article.

To support Coles' interpretation of the data, excerpts from interviews with teachers and students have been included and discussed. Though it is possible alternative interpretations could be elicited by reading the transcripts, Coles' interpretations are perceived by the reader as valid because they have emerged from a larger body of data e.g. classroom observations, and the subjects appear engaged and comfortable during the interviews e.g. transcripts show students are laughing, suggesting their responses are without natural and freely given.

As Coles' student subjects were from existing class groups, contributions during group interviews could have been influenced by the presence of other subjects and their previous knowledge of and

expectations of each other. For example, students' comments that people who like studying Shakespeare are 'old-fashioned', 'old', 'posh' and 'nerdy' people would not encourage other subjects to admit they enjoyed studying it. This problematic aspect of group interviews could have been minimised by interviewing students separately, however doing so may have been a more intimidating arrangement, potentially inhibiting subject responses.

Coles' and my own proposed research both explore the positioning of teachers between students and curriculum designers, and the difficulties this brings. Coles notes all four teachers she interviewed were concerned that Shakespeare's language was too difficult for their students and adjusted resources and increased student support to counteract this. As evidence, Coles includes transcripts of teachers reassuring students of the ways the difficulty of Shakespeare's work was to be minimised after which she suggests teachers themselves add to the difficulties students have accessing Shakespeare, by conveying "the clear impression that unmediated Shakespeare is extraordinarily difficult, beyond students' capabilities" (Coles, 2013, p.61). This point is again referred to in the conclusion, where it is stated that teachers' mediating role is a product of current assessment-driven practice. By exploring the difficult position that teachers are in, mediating between a compulsory curriculum and the students in front of them, Coles research links to current political discussion (Gove) over entitlement curricula, and the positioning of particular knowledge and cultural artefacts as essential, valuable and powerful. These politically driven concerns are key themes within my own research.

Finally, research by Wade and Sheppard explores the pedagogies teachers employ when teaching texts by Shakespeare and is titled 'How teachers teach Shakespeare'. They claim studying Shakespearean texts needs to be "naturally dynamic, personal, interactive and social rather than static, public, transmissional and solitary", and that experiences with Shakespeare's texts must be first-hand and dramatic to supports students to develop their own personal response. Doing so, they argue, establishes a relationship with the text and supports students to develop their own valid and worthwhile interpretations. This good practice was not evident in the research Wade and Sheppard's conducted and they claim traditional desk-bound methods and approaches are more widely employed than performance and recreative approaches in classrooms.

Wade and Sheppard's research was collected through questionnaires sent via advisory teachers to two randomly selected English teachers in each school across one Local Education Authority. The questionnaire asked subjects to group thirteen teaching strategies used when teaching a

Shakespearean text into the categories 'regularly', 'occasionally', 'rarely', and 'never'. From this data they were able to generalise what the typical or average pedagogical experience is for students studying Shakespeare in this sample group. This approach allows the research data to be readily analysed, though Wade and Sheppard caution differences in ways teachers use strategies are obscured through this methodology and suggest further classroom-based action research is needed.

Wade and Sheppard acknowledge questionnaires inhibit information gathering because "areas of response are determined by the researcher" (Wade and Sheppard, 1994, p.26). To compensate for this, they invited 'open responses' from subjects, the information from which was presented differently from other data in the project. Whereas researcher categories were identified as being used 'regularly', 'occasionally', 'rarely', and 'never', the twenty open responses from teachers were presented as a list, separated into three different areas. Comparing the data from the two areas of the questionnaire is therefore difficult as only one set of data identifies frequency.

Another weakness of Wade and Sheppard's data is that it gives a snapshot of teaching practice, but the reasons for this "remain a matter of speculation" (Wade and Sheppard, 1994, p.27). Ascertaining differences in teaching strategies depending on type of school or level of teacher experience, for example, are not possible from their data. This is because the questionnaire did not ask subjects to give this information about their teaching context and sampling strategies did not ensure a range of responses. Though concluding innovative teachers and high quality initial and inservice training is needed to increase the use of performance and recreative approaches in the classroom, Wade and Sheppard's data does not link the use of these approaches to information about teachers and training.

Wade and Sheppard acknowledge their research is just the beginning and further research is needed. Though not as recent as the two previous papers, I have included their paper because it demonstrates how my own research connected to previous academic work and provides a list of strategies, important for effective teaching of Shakespearean texts, that I can analyse mention of in my own research. This study has also led to my fourth interview question, to ensure subjects have a place to raise issues I have not catered for. Furthermore, though the separation of findings and teaching context enable the researchers to generalise, I have constructed my research to give deeper conclusions by focusing on teachers in an urban context in London. This focus was selected as it is where my own career is based, and I want my research to support my professional development.

Dissertation Proposal

The interviews for this dissertation will be conducted with teachers of English working in secondary schools in inner London. Initial subjects be known to me professionally therefore their selection is both opportunistic (as they are already known to me) and purposeful (in that only colleagues who I know will be able to answer the interview questions and not be hesitant sharing their ideas in some depth will be approached). Access to additional subjects, up to a total of ten subjects, will be through snowballing as initial subjects will introduce others. After preliminary analysis of the interview data, theoretical sampling will begin as initial subjects will be asked if they could introduce further subjects of different gender, race, of differing levels of experience or seniority or with different experience of studying literature at school or university or different experiences as a teacher. Though it may not be possible to achieve saturation, a broad range of subjects will be sought and the balance of subjects may impact on the final direction of the research. If, for example, collecting data from newly qualified teachers is not possible, the research may become more focused on more experienced teachers with some explanation of why interviewing particular sub-groups was not possible.

All subjects will be approached by phone in order to arrange face to face interviews outside of working hours and in a neutral and distraction-free environment. When arranging interviews, subjects will be asked if they would participate in anonymous research for my MA on the teaching of Shakespeare as part of English literature courses. Both in the interviews and when arranging them, further explanation about the dissertation topic will be avoided as it could lead subjects' responses. At the start of face to face interviews, the same explanation of the topic will be given, as well as an indication of the time it is anticipated the interview will take. Consent forms will be given to subjects to sign.

As far as possible follow-up interviews will not be sought as pressures of workload will discourage subjects from participating. This will also minimise the impact of any sample decay. Views on issues in education often change over time and response to stimuli and in response to different roles or experiences in careers. Unlike the research by Faulkner and Latham, my own research seeks to capture a range of subjects' views at just one point in their career.

Some subjects may consider the topic sensitive, as it links to aspects of professionalism, e.g. assessment practice and equality. Subjects' inhibitions exploring the topic will be minimised through

a reassuring, open and friendly tone set during the face to face interviews and letting the subject explain their views without the interviewer interrupting. I anticipate that the potentially sensitive nature of this research (as well as subjects finding time to be interviewed) is the main potential difficulty of this research.

At the start of the interview, details about subjects' roles, experience and school context will be taken then subjects asked open-ended general questions:

What are your views of the purposes of English literature teaching generally and for GCSE English?

How are these views impacted by school processes, media and State involvement?

How do your experiences as a student and teacher of English literature compare?

Are there any other issues you wish to mention regarding literature teaching?

The framing of these questions may be refined after the first interview/s depending on how successfully they are able to capture subjects' views.

During interviews notes will be made of points raised, especially those I want to seek clarification on, areas to probe later in the interview or aspects of the topic which subjects do not mention e.g. assessment, prescribed texts or cultural value. When seeking clarification, probing questions such as *"You mentioned, …. Could you tell me a little more about that?*, will be asked. Care will need to be taken to ensure probes are not suggestive of particular views or pressure subjects to discuss topics they are uncomfortable with.

The only data I will be analysing is the transcriptions of audio recordings of interviews. The recordings will be made on two recording devices to protect against loss of data for any reason. Transcription and analysis will take place after each interview is conducted and before subsequent interviews where possible. Initial analysis of interview transcripts will include memoing, constant comparisons and open coding. The overarching methodology will be similar to Grounded Theory; research will continue as data is analysed to explore issues arising from interviews.

Although my initial research has suggested that the areas of this research link to assessment, culture and the role of teachers generally, there is no intention to generalise the findings beyond the teaching of literature courses at secondary school.

The research process for this dissertation will begin after my Ethics Approval Form has been approved through the Institute ethics process.

When first approaching potential subjects, the nature, duration and purpose of the research will be outlined. Potential subjects will be advised that the research is part of a dissertation for an MA at the Institute of Education, University of London and will involve them giving their personal views, as classroom teachers, on the teaching of Literature, especially the Shakespeare component of GCSE English courses in secondary schools.

Potential subjects will be advised interviews will be recorded to enable accurate transcription and that the recording will be not be kept after it has been transcribed. A climate of trust and professional respect will be sought by offering subjects the opportunity to review the interview transcript. Subjects who do not want to be recorded will not be interviewed – this will ensure a comparable level of detail can be obtained from all subjects through analysis of interview transcripts.

Subjects will be assured that all data will be confidential and anonymous: references to individuals, institutions and boroughs will be anonymised. From the time that potential subjects are approached, their identities will be coded in all documentation (e.g. notes, calendar events). This code will be kept in a different document from interview transcripts and all material will be stored for the duration of the research, writing and marking periods of the dissertation on a password protected personal computer.

As all subjects will be qualified teachers, over the age of 18 and are not being interviewed as representatives of a particular institution, permission is only necessary from the subjects themselves. Employers will not be advised subjects are participating in this research, as information collected may be professionally sensitive and subjects must be protected from any negative cost of participation. Subjects are welcome to discuss their participation with others. Subjects will sign consent form prior to the commencement of the interview, will be informed of their right to withdraw from the research at any time and assured there is no obligation to participate.

It is possible questions or concerns of a professionally sensitive nature may arise during or after interviews. Subjects will be invited to ask questions at the end of the interview, and by phone afterwards if necessary, but advised seek support from their line managers and colleagues around issues of professional practice.

During the planning phase of this research, my understanding of the history of political involvement in curriculum planning and content in the UK has increased significantly. This has given me deeper insight into recent controversial curriculum changes led by the Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove.   I hope this awareness will increase further as I conduct my interviews, analyse the data then write up the research.

Within my professional role, understanding the relationships between teachers' own learning experiences, external pressures and classroom practice is essential. I anticipate my increased awareness through conducting this research will be used to support teachers I line manage, especially beginning teachers and extend my awareness of my own development and desire for autonomy as a teacher of English literature.

This research project is my first experience as a researcher and has been a significant learning experience. Initially I was disheartened by the time it took me to develop a research proposal from my initial interest in curriculum content. I now understand that I first approached this research with an opinion rather than a topic and too fine a focus on one site which would have inhibited richness of data. If I had had more skill as a researcher, I would have started this way.

I anticipate my learning will continue as I embark on this research and look forward to this.

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