Subject and Subjects:

Conceptions of

High School English

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Abstract

'English' as a high school subject discipline is a deeply contested space. Since its inception in the early twentieth century, the discipline of English has taken on many forms and purposes. From the preservation of grammatical standards to the induction into high culture and creativity, it seems fair to say that few subjects suffer such an identity crisis over their purpose and function as English does. Added to this, the growing intensity in the politicisation of educational practices has led to significant reforms in English curriculum and assessment with a new GCSE course introduced recently. This thesis describes and analyses debates in English teaching before using data gathered from my own school to explore and evaluate how English is being created and what is happening to its participants. To aid my analysis of what English is and its purposes, I have chosen to use the 'Four Discourses' theory offered by Jacques Lacan (1901-1981). Far from merely an exotic range of ideas, Lacan's theory is used here because it offers interesting explorations of subjectivity, language, and insights into the unconscious. Basically, Lacan looks at four ways to see human interactions in a social world: Master (governance over others), University (institutions and how they deliver the Master's messages), Hysteric (protesting and objecting to the Master), and Analyst (revolutionary ways of rebelling against the Master). The use of Lacan's theory is not seen as a panacea to educational complexities, but as offering alternative perspectives and as having the capacity to generate new understanding. It would be tedious to merely write diatribic invective and polemic about the surreptitious forces of the master signifiers. Instead, the research looks at the effects upon and within classroom English to create new understanding. Drawing on Lacan, I argue that the 'subject' of English and how it makes its participants 'subjects' can be seen in interesting ways. I use the Lacanian theory of 'Four Discourses' and classroom data to interrogate the difficulties and opportunities presented in navigating the new English curriculum.'

Keywords: English, subject, subjectivity, Lacan, discourse, narrative.

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Part 1: Introduction

This research project has been undertaken by a high school English teacher with the aim of making a contribution to the field of English education and Lacanian analysis. The research is written from my perspective as a practising English teacher and researcher in a very large high school English department [1] teaching the new GCSE English course [2]. Also, the research considers how theory can complicate, refresh, and reimagine what we think we are doing when we teach English as a high school discipline.

Part one outlines the nature of the problem in teaching this new GCSE English course and sets the context for why the research was carried out. This first part also considers my own perspective before considering what the literature tells us about the practice of English education. Methodological arguments are also made outlining the nature of the enquiry I have conducted before introducing the key aspects of Lacan's 'Four Discourses' to enable the reader to see how I have interpreted this theory and how I am using it in my analysis.

Part two outlines two key aspects of the research project: English as a high school 'subject' and how teachers and students are made into 'subjects'. The use of such terminology around subjectivity is problematic and multi-faceted, so I try to make clear what sense I make of this terminology to allow the reader to see how I am treating such concepts. Then, I outline some of the major themes and moments that occurred during the research to show how Lacan's 'Four

[1] The school has an English teaching Faculty of fourteen staff members teaching over 1,900 eleven to eighteen year olds. It is the fourth largest comprehensive secondary school in the UK.

[2] The General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE) is a series of examinations taken in Britain (and abroad through certain examination awarding bodies) by 16 year olds. They are designed to be the final exams taken by high school students before beginning the next stage of their education. The GCSE in English has traditionally been assessed through a mixture of coursework (redrafted internal assessments) and examinations. However, in 2015 the British government decided to reform GCSE qualifications and make them more rigorous, difficult, and demanding.

Discourse' theory helps me to see the practice of English teaching in new and interesting ways. Finally in part two, I consider the benefits of moving away from traditional didactic instruction to allow English to become a more radical and resistant opportunity.

Finally, in part three, I consider the implications of my findings and discuss how English can use the subject (as a high school discipline) to shape the subjects (those involved in the practice of it). The conclusion of the thesis shows how Lacan's ideas can be applied to the wider field outside my own practice. I hope to show the reader in this research project that the field of study and the conclusions drawn from it say something interesting about high school English in 2017.

1.1 Why this Thesis?

The redesigning of GCSE curricular and examinations in English in 2015 contained many changes. Most significantly: the removal of coursework; the narrowing of literary variety to very canonical texts; one tier of entry so that every student sits the same exam with the same question wording and difficulty; removal of speaking and listening (as it was felt that this component was artificially inflating grades); a stronger focus on accuracy and prescriptivism; grades replaced by a one to nine number system (one being a G grade and eight / nine being an A* grade), and more challenging examinations. That is a lot of change in one fell swoop and the government was heavily criticised as being too ambitious and rushed in its scope. This in turn led to much debate within the field of English education and more widely regarding the feasibility and likely effects of such changes.

As Britain recovered slowly from the economic recession of 2008, the focus of future economic stability seemed to turn to educational reform. The core subjects of English, Maths and Science were increasingly seen as vehicles for

employability, skills and economic stability. As the position of the UK in Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA[3]) tables had fallen, data was used as justification for more fundamental changes: those of accuracy, prescriptivism, British literature, and tougher exams. English became more noticeably political than ever before and became the battleground for national identity. Historically speaking, there have been problems with homogenous curricular as an antidote to crises. Various national strategies have cost millions and have appeared and disappeared according to political fashions. It was clear that national curricular and school practice were now being guided by economic imperatives.

The recent Confederation of British Industry (CBI) report (conducted in partnership with Pearson education) entitled 'Gateway to Growth', argues that the future economic status of the country is dependent upon the raising of perceived low literacy standards. The report uses phrases such as Britain needs a ‘role in the global marketplace … [as] many businesses are not satisfied with the attitudes and skills of school leavers, including [their] communication skills (52% of consulted employers)’. Such a statement places high school English departments at the epicentre of economic risk. The report goes on to highlight that the UK had fallen from 17th in the world for reading in 2006 to 23rd in 2012 and argues that this is a sign that English teaching has neglected the basics in favour of less demanding curriculum content and skill development. Such a statistic is used as evidence to support the assertion that 'employers want the education system to better prepare young people for life outside the school gates ... [and] reflect the needs of the labour market' (6). As a counter narrative, Duckworth (2015) asserts that ‘education for work positions education as a commodity … [it] pays no regard to issues of economic, political

[3] PISA is a worldwide study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in member and non-member nations of 15-year-old school pupils' achievement in reading, Maths and Science. Beginning in 2000 and repeated every three years, it allows countries to measure their performance in an international context.

and social equality' (www.bera.ac.uk). A contestation seems to exist between the needs of the economic system and the desires of the individual in a social world. Later in the thesis, Lacanian discourse theory will be used to show how the needs of the system and its 'master signifiers' (rules and expectations) can be disrupted and that the challenge to these master signifiers should form an important part of the English practitioner's purpose.

Consequently, the constant changes and reforms present teachers with major challenges. Successive British governments have operated a top down system of change that promotes political imperatives. The changes have been so regular that one might see change as the focus of reform in itself. Indeed, if educational reform is now a Master discourse (Brown, 2017), then the conceptions of 'accuracy', 'Britishness', and 'culture', have all become masters to the everyday practice of the English teacher: created and demanded by governmental policy and its inspection regime.

Originally, English as a subject discipline was conceived as a less academic replacement for Classics: the study of which was aimed at rhetoric and the teaching of quality of argument and impressive diatribic verbosity. Originally, English education was given a duty to 'purify and disinfect' the language of the poorer classes (Sampson, 1924, p.28) and the current refocus on grammar could be attributed to an attempted remedy for perceived language degeneration, where English teachers are 'failed guardians of language propriety' (Myhill, 2011, p.74).[4]

This way of seeing English is supported by governmental policy and the statistical data of official discourses. These voices are the institutionalised versions of what Lacan calls the Master discourse: the forces that are hidden,

[4] Similarly, Goodwyn (2011) asserts that the 1989-92 KAL (Knowledge About Language project) was 'influenced by prescriptive forces … [connecting] correctness in language with moral and social order and its opposite' (p.25).

but pervasive in official versions of English practice. Ofsted, governors, teachers, students and parents all have a politic interest in English practice with no shortage of opinions on how and what is taught in a web of 'vertical accountability chains' (Wenger, 2009). Inevitably, such pressures from all sides have a significant impact on what the subject is, what the subject becomes and how it is taught. In this way, it could be argued that English is the most political of all the core subjects given that it plays a central role in local, national and international measurements. Perhaps this designation is simply because the core skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening are so fundamental to intellectual development in western intellectual societies. More probably, however, more contentious competing discourses are at play.

English has always been an ideological battleground containing 'controversial domains of nationalism, politics ... curriculum control' (Goodwyn, 2011. p.20). Consequently, such debates have resulted in many contesting definitions for English teachers, from 'the preachers of culture' (Mathieson, 1975) to 'critical dissenters' and 'old grammarians' (Marshall, 2000). Indeed, such debates are ongoing. Interestingly, the Cambridge Assessment (2013) report into English suggests that cultural imperatives mixed with the Cox Report (1989), the National Literacy Strategy (1998), and the functional English agenda has given English an identity crisis. The Cox Report (1989) proposed five models of English teaching: a personal growth view; cross-curricular approach; adult-needs emphasis; a cultural heritage model and a cultural analysis view. Fleming and Stevens (2015) debate whether such views of English teaching are adequate as guiding principles, or whether Goodwyn (1997) is more accurate when he argues that such principles 'do not have a comfortable or neutral relationship with each other; neither are they politically or historically innocent' (p.39). From primary phonics to secondary school grammar, the identity of English has become synonymous with a standards agenda. Indeed, it could be argued that we have returned in curriculum terms to the Newbolt Report (1921) with its recommendations on language, literature and prescriptivist grammar as

a preserver of national standards and culture. Perhaps this is not surprising when you consider Ofsted's 2011 report 'Removing Barriers to Literacy', which cites limited vocabulary, low aspirations and lack of cultural experience as the root cause of poor achievement in English. The link from this to poverty is also made by many official reports. This intimation of English as an equalising and moral practice will be analysed more thoroughly later in the thesis.

1.2 Key Research Questions

As I began this study, I was interested in finding out more about how English was working in my own classroom, as well as find out what others thought about it. To explore such ideas, I was cognizant of the need to research the views of students, English teachers and my own reflections. Yet, I had to narrow this down further. As a high school English teacher and a researcher, I felt that this dual role required some clearer thinking of how I would approach the study. It seemed sensible to research something that I could get at and analyse in action before looking at reactions to it. Given that the new GCSE English curriculum was just beginning in 2015, I decided that looking at something new would provide me with the opportunity to research something current. My research choices were not arbitrary, but based on something that I was involved in and felt that I could get at. Philosophically speaking, I recognised that I needed to disturb the dust of my own preconceptions by looking at how my own and different epistemologies (beliefs) of English could be examined, tested, and reimagined. Initially, I considered capturing classroom data to explore what English was. Yet, I found that as I was reading more challenging texts during the course, the ideas of Lacan captured my imagination. I began to be intrigued by his take on how power works, what happens to people in systems, and the potential power of the role of the unconscious.

In order to collect data at regular points, I chose my own mixed ability Year 10 class (who were the first year group to experience the new GCSE course); four colleagues: a female of over 10 years' experience; a male of over 10 years' experience and key stage 4 co-ordinator; a female newly qualified teacher and a male of five years' experience. Such categories were chosen to allow differences in the enactment of policy to emerge and thus enrich the analysis of phenomena. In addition, I realised that I had to document my own emerging understanding of my own practice and to find a way to examine others' voices that would allow me to look at the empirical evidence through a Lacanian lens. The rationale for choosing such participants was to enable me to see how English works for a group of students and also how it works for a group of colleagues with divergent experiences.

The formulation of my key research questions was problematic. I found that I could quite easily create a list of problems and issues around English as a high school subject, but it proved to be more difficult to clarify something that could be researchable and would bear analysis. My initial questions that coloured my early approach to this study included: what happens in English classrooms to enact this new GCSE curriculum? What does this practice do to the teachers of it? What does this practice do to the students? What opportunities are offered by the new English GCSE? What threats does it pose? What is the nature of English as a school subject? What is English in schools today and what could it become? What wider issues are at work both in and out of schools that shape what we understand by doing English at high school? Whose versions of English are prevailing and how can these be disrupted and reimagined?

Without wishing to conflate complex terminology, I also needed to consider my own epistemology of the subject. The use of the word 'subject' itself is a very complicated term. Psychoanalytical theory suggests that the use of the word 'I' is deeply problematic: it is not clear who the 'I' is in terms of role, approach, or how conscious someone is. It is not possible for someone to be objective and

part of my research is to take account of and for the subjective nature of being a researcher. Consequently, the opportunity to interrogate my own ideas and attitudes whilst listening to the other voices in the conversation about English seemed to be fertile ground for a thesis: to ask what transformations pupils, staff and I go through as we do 'English'?

Everything we do could be seen as an intellectual construction. Ergo, everything is created by the views of someone and the views that shape this can be conscious and unconscious. As Rabinow suggests: reason is a political problem and it is necessary to see whose reason is prevailing and with what consequences (1984, p.14). These ideas began to shape my thinking to look at what is being won and lost in high school English practice.

Ultimately, my final research questions were formulated by my reading of psychoanalytical theory. The contestable notions of what is a subject (in the sense of a high school discipline) and what are subjects (in terms of people involved in it) are deeply problematic, yet fascinating to me. A fuller discussion of the issues surrounding such terminology will follow later in the thesis. In formulating this study, I was most interested in two key questions:

1) What holds the 'subject' of high school English in place?

2) What holds 'subjects' in place in high school English?

I am aware that the idea of something being held in place needs clarification for the reader. Far from being a fixed position, the 'holding' is more dynamic. If we see the function of high school English in a particular way, then this disavows many other versions of English and this has consequences for what is decided upon and enacted in a classroom. A simpler way of looking at it might be to say that choice inevitably leads to preferment of something and the exclusion of another. This notion of holding is used to not only show how choices are made,

but how they are sustained within classroom practice. In deciding on these research questions, I am aware that my own way of looking is an essential part of the analysis and that I can account for, but not eliminate subjective analysis.

1.3 My Context

A new national curriculum is now in its second year, with the subject of English being redesigned with a 'back to basics' approach (Goouch, 2011). This has led to the implementation of contentious plans to put classic literature (at least two Shakespeare plays and Romantic poetry) at the forefront of the early secondary curriculum, qualifying it by stating that this is the knowledge that employers want (BBC News, 1/9/14).[5] With the national context politicising English even further, the tension between what is being taught and why it is being taught becomes more problematic.

Historically, what constitutes the discipline of high school English (initially a replacement for Classics of Greco-Roman literature) and its function is deeply contested: from the need to teach grammar as social purity; the induction into 'high culture' through reading canon literature to the functional ability to survive the information saturated modern world. English and Literacy[6] appear to contain many conflicting and contestable notions of teaching, learning, policy, practice, enactment and accountability. Ultimately, the choice of any language to

[5] Academies are not obliged to follow this new curriculum. Some commentators have argued that a white, middle class view of what is worthy culture bears little resemblance to modern Britain. Interestingly, a colleague of mine was criticised heavily for mentioning in a meeting that she did not like Shakespeare. This shows how deeply contentious ideologies can flow through the core of English as a school discipline.

[6] Can English be separate from Literacy and what are the consequences for this epistemological view? Primary English often uses these terms interchangeably and yet in initial interviews with Secondary English teachers, some strong exceptions to this emerged. At a recent Summer School, one pupil asked if we were having a Literacy lesson today. My tension with this term being used as a substitute for English was surprising to me. It could be argued that the brush of 'literacy' is broader than 'English' and as they are conflated more tensions occur.

describe or categorise is political and I am interested in exploring the heterogeneity of the subject and test the boundaries of how competing discourses and pressures shape what actually happens in a high school English classroom.

To return to my own viewpoint, I centred on the need to capture my emerging understanding through a narrative learning journal. For some, a narrative approach could be seen as unscientific or too subjective. It is essential, however, to acknowledge the prejudices, experiences, beliefs and values that I bring to the research process: my own history is a necessary analysis.

As a first-generation university graduate in English Literature, I have first-hand experience of the benefits of education. As a teenager, I was encouraged by my father to work hard and get out of the small Yorkshire town I am from. I see now that he was partly driven by his own identity as a frustrated non-graduate. However, I have existed with an uncritical approach to the subject of English for many years now (a follower of the Dead Poets' Society model in my initial apprenticeship into the profession in 2000) and wished to disrupt this with some meaningful thinking, research and narrative writing. Critically, I felt caught in what Žižek calls a 'closed self-propelling loop ... a fetishistic satisfaction' (2006, p. 63). In other words, I play the game of teaching English year to year in a quiet compliance where very little dust is disturbed. This idea describes how someone can feel resistance in a passive way, but be so involved in the reproduction of it and be complicit in its perpetuation. Recognising that what you do and what you become part of is an interesting and complex idea. A literary parallel can be found in Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights (1847), where Cathy cannot separate herself from her lover by stating 'Nelly, I am Heathcliff'. This self-recognition in another creates a fused identity of comforting reflection. I am motivated by a desire to break that mirror and see how more disrupted my identity can be as it is re-imagined and awakened. Now, I turn to the institutional context I am working in.

As part of a very large high school with higher than average numbers of bilingual and special needs students I am fascinated by what English feels like for students of all abilities and backgrounds. Traditionally, I would have described English as an emancipatory subject: giving pupils freedom and understanding, but such definitions are fraught with difficulties. After Foucault, Ball (2013) refers to emancipatory aims as a 'new ontology of learning and a very elaborate technology of the self' (p.133), but argues that this leads to a deeper and more intense subjectivization, where performativity becomes a 'new moral system' (p.138). Thus, it is possible to see how an emancipatory intention creates more power games to be played and navigated through professional life. Indeed, Ball goes on to suggest that concepts (like literate, accurate, cultural and sophisticated) are treated commonly as neutral, but, he argues, they are intensely political. This presents a significant difficulty: political multiplicity surrounds each piece of language. Indeed, Freire (1985) describes how English teachers work bureaucratically rather than artistically. Ergo, English teachers tick the boxes of what is required, but that this compliance denies the creative side of teaching the subject. Such ideas appear to be worth exploring in this project: to what extent is English an artistic or bureaucratic exercise and what discourses, parameters and challenges do those interpretations and paradigms present? In terms of the expectations of school as an institution, there are expectations of monitoring, accountability, and adherence. To what extent this adherence crushes other ways of doing English that are potentially more exciting and effective is of compelling interest to me.

I must confess that in my experience of teaching I have seen my role as the enforcer of comprehension, linguistic correctness with a dash of high culture for good measure. I came to the conclusion during the early stages of the research that this 'version' of English needs to be unpicked and explored with student experiences to enlighten the developing narrative of discovery. I am fascinated by the exploration of questions like what is it like to be in a secondary school

English class at this significant moment in reform? What is being attended to and won or lost for students? What possibilities and constraints exist in this political space for the players in this theatre?

Preliminary research was carried out over one year by interviewing and collecting narrative writing from students, the four English teachers, and my own narrative journal entries. The research was carried out with Year 10 into Year 11 students: focussing on 'Key Stage 4. [7] During this period methods such as semi-structured interviews, focus groups, observations and reflective diaries were used. Such methods were used with the intent of unfolding the realities of high school English and then submitting such phenomena to psychoanalytical analysis.

The use of Lacan's 'Four Discourses' enabled me to see the data through new eyes. For example, a piece of 100 word writing from a Year 10 student outlined what they thought English at high school is. The response was interesting in that it gave a participant's opinion on their experience of being in my class. What my initial analysis of the data did not give though was an insight into deeper factors, such as: what effect does government policy have on English teachers; how does the institution affect student experience; what unspoken things were happening in lessons, and what was being offered and denied by current practice? In reading Žižek, Wall and Perrin (2015) describe how a lens can help to notice things that are often taken for granted, and that how we represent something gives insights into the phenomena and that particular way of seeing. This idea of the unconscious and unnoticed factors underneath everyday action and reaction, in my opinion, is the justification for using Lacanian analysis as a lens to re-examine my data.

[7] Key Stage 4 refers to the final two years of compulsory education in British high schools: year 10 and 11 (14-16 years old). It is at the end of this stage that students take their compulsory education terminal examinations known as GCSEs.

This thesis takes the form of a meta-narrative, where I have used narrative writing, interviews, conversations, observations, and field notes (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). This is the form the thesis takes: an introduction to data pieces with Lacanian theoretical discussion to deepen the analysis and understanding. This is an attempt to move beyond curriculum paraphernalia and arguments over Newbolt's concepts into a more interesting and problematic story of what English looks like at high school and what this tells us about the possibilities, limitations, agency and disavowals of the lenses of looking.

1.4 Where Am I Coming From?

A researcher must always account for their individual presence in research, as they can never be neutral. In accounting for my presence, I am not seeking to remove it for the purpose of an impossible objectivity, but to make allowance for it as a necessary part of the analysis. As a researcher, I am not a psychoanalyst and my purpose is not to subject myself to novice psychoanalysis, but to look at how I have arrived at my present ideas in this research project.[8]

My childhood experiences of English and my love of reading came from my mother. I thought it was important to capture my story of how and why I fell in love with reading and ultimately the subject. This journal entry was written early in the research and marks an important stage in my understanding at that particular moment:

> *Coming from a working-class family with a twin brother and an elder sister, we had some books in the house, but they mainly came from the local library, which we visited religiously every week. My mother loves*

[8] I am aware of the need to account for my prejudices, assumptions and biases in the research process and have sought to mitigate these by showing my data and draft writing to a colleague at school who is an experienced doctoral researcher in a critical friend capacity.

reading, but what you might call 'trashy' novels. My father read the paper and occasionally favourite Sherlock Holmes stories. I was always into horror and adventure fiction. By quite a young age I had read many 'classic' books. Although I found them quite hard to understand, I had the feeling that if I could get my head around this level of reading, then I had a good chance of doing well at school and being the first in my family to attend university. I was taken to places of historic and literary interest and spent a lot of my childhood in museums. I know that I find popular culture hard to assimilate with more middle-class culture and I recognise how difficult students can find the subject if they do not read regularly or take an interest in history and politics. I am finding more and more that my lessons involve explanations of things that I knew as a young kid. I do struggle sometimes to understand why some students don't enjoy English. But then, when I think about it, I loved English (I suppose initially) because I felt that I was good at it. It was the opposite for me in Maths lessons though.

(Journal Entry – June 2014)

Roseboro (2008) suggests that we all have 'normative assumptions' and these 'prevent us from understanding [that these normative assumptions] … are deeply contextualised and historicized' (p.93). In other words, whether consciously cognizant of them or not, I base my practice on what I consider to be the standardised and correct way of doing something. Such perceptions have their roots in the shared values and contexts of such practice. Working at a school that had been subject to special measures by OFSTED in 2008[9], a culture had grown over time of subservience to official checklists and hyper-

[9] OFSTED (The Office for Standards in Education) is the school inspection body in the UK. 'Special Measures' is Ofsted's label for a school in need of intervention due to poor results or mismanagement. This status leads to enforced procedures, regular re-inspection, and close monitoring for a minimum of 12 months until the school can prove it has addressed all the concerns. Some schools have been kept in this category for three years though, as Ofsted would only accept three years' worth of improved results data to remove 'Special Measures'.

accountability structures. Perhaps it is no surprise to see that although the school has gone from strength to strength since then, the culture of hyper-accountability and standardised practice has continued.

To revisit my research questions, I am looking at what holds the 'subject' of English in place and what holds 'subjects' in place. In addressing these questions, this thesis has a double purpose. Firstly, to explore the processes and discourses that shape the experience of high school English; secondly, and concurrently, to look at how English practice can test and reimagine the current constraints to make the best of a potentially very narrow experience. In doing so, I am engaging in, what Lacan calls, Hysteric and Analyst discourses to explore the margins of high school English and explore the limitations of hegemonic identity. In other words, the thesis is not merely trying to report what is found, but to question how and what is found at the same time as considering what else could be found. As Fleming and Stevens (2015) assert: the world of targets, data and prescription has no place for human complexity (p.8). Indeed, the real nature of the subject has to be discovered and reinvented ever anew by those most intensively involved. Fleming and Stevens advocate that unthinking obedience to prescribed content is reductive to the creative opportunities available within any restricted prescription.

My ideological assumptions in this project were captured by an early piece of writing that I did, which provides a context for my journey:

> *'English should be what? Well, I guess it should be accurate, enjoyable, cultured, literate and standard'* (January 2014)

Of course, what I had not considered up to this point was the extent to which I, as a teacher, embody the institution that I serve. In other words, inevitably, my role is to produce the rational individual with moral, developmental, cognitive and social skills. Ergo, my practice and earlier comments comprise a modernist

project. My project charts the stages of challenging the notion of stable identities of subject and subjects within English practice. This led me to consider my intended role, perceived role and actual role. The self is a multiplicitous complexity of cultural, social, political and psychological processes that shape who we are and how we view ourselves in the world.

The concept of the 'self' or 'subjectivity' is a very complex and well debated idea. Descartes' 17th Century supposition of 'I think therefore I am' offers a self-fulfilling position of power, but seems to lack agency through its adherence to discourse. This is because it is not always possible to see the chains that control us, let alone remove them through will alone. Louis Althusser (1918-1990) differs from Lacan (1901-1981) and Foucault (1926-1984, Althusser's student) in his discussion of subjectivity. Althusser (1971) states that '[a] knowing subject is an individual conceived of as a sovereign, relational and unified consciousness, in control of language and meaning. The 'I' that thinks and speaks … [is the] apparent author of meaning'. Therefore, a subject can be the agent and subject of ideological practices, particularly ideological state apparatuses of school, profession, and group. Whereas Lacan might see such views as all too clean: a subject can be a creator of and conditioned by ideology, but the discourses might be much harder to discern, categorise and resist. In relation to my research, this shows how complex it can be to look at what is happening in an empirical world: phenomena and causes are not always visible or researchable. However, in looking at classroom evidence and the views of participants, the intention is to present cautious, but convincing analysis and arguments detailing the causes and effects of English practice.

An interesting aside in terms of subjectivity and discourse is the gender issue in English. Traditionally, girls outperform boys in GCSE English and arguments have ranged from the emotional development of girls to the abstract meanings of language which may be more suited to certain students. However, Judith Butler (1997) may see this as being a totally performative aspect (chosen

performance): gender by social construction. Similarly, the author Angela Carter (1979) refers to the social fiction of femininity. Identities are constructed by and within discourses and subject position is not a stable identity, they can be choices or resistance against something else (Davies and Harre, 1990). [10]

Another key term to discuss at this point is that of 'discourse'. Originating from Latin meaning 'running to and from', the meaning of the term is the centre of some debate. A key description of discourse is offered by Foucault (1972), who asserts that discourses are 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (p.49). Therefore, it is not an unmediated access to reality and there is no position outside of discourse. In applying this to my research, we can see how the focus upon descriptors, developmental stages and standards are impositions created by and for, what Lacan calls, the Master and University discourses. Further explanation of these terms and their relevance to the research will be explored later in the thesis.

1.5 A Point of Disruption

Unconscious beliefs can often highlight themselves during a research project. What follows here is an example of one such disruption where what I thought I was doing clashed with my reasoning for doing it in that way. English, more than most school subjects, courts much opinion and controversy over how it should be taught and why. The 'humanist' approach to teaching English is arguably the most common. Such a conceptualisation is based upon the exploration through literature and language of the essential experience of being

[10] It is possible to see how identities offer both opportunities and dangers for educational practice. In a recent 2016 interview, Nick Gibb (the Government School's Minister) suggested that cultural capital was one of the inequalities that schools could address. Arguably, by placing the equalisation of poverty of opportunity at the door of schools we can see how some students are at an immediate advantage / disadvantage.

human. Such a paradigm finds its opponent in the exploration of Marxism, Feminism, and New Historicism (cultural theory) and more radical critical approaches. Such an approach is suggested by English scholars such as Leavis and Bradley who use Shakespearean tragedy as a springboard for discussing literature on the level of the commonality and ubiquity of human experience through a model of practical criticism. Such a conceptualisation was noticeable within my narrative journal data:

> *More disruptions in my practice are occurring as I began to see problems with the latent assumptions behind habituous practice. During a GCSE lesson on the villainy of Iago[11] and whether he deserves any audience sympathy, I was keen to impress upon the students that Iago is a narrative construction painted through monologue and dialogue. This confused students who had strong opinions based upon their human reactions to his Machiavellian ensnarement of the fellow dramatis personae. However, literature must surely have a human element where we experience sympathy and or antipathy towards such constructions and inevitably experience something about the nature of being alive with all its joys, pains, pleasures and strife.*
>
> (Journal Entry July 2015)

On reflection, such an entry serves to illustrate two points. Firstly, I am displaying a very romantic epistemology of English belonging to that of Dr Keating in the Dead Poets' Society mode, where literature is vicarious human experience. In such a mode, language becomes the transmitter of pathos

[11] Iago is the racist villain of Shakespeare's 'Othello' (1603), who manages to convince black Othello that his innocent wife Desdemona has made him a cuckold. Othello, full of rage, and believing himself to be saving her in the afterlife, stifles Desdemona with a pillow. Iago often attracts the revulsion of the audience / students, yet Shakespeare has Iago confiding in the audience, through soliloquys, so that we feel complicit in his plot of maniacal jealousy.

(emotion) and ethos (ethics), rather than logos (logic). Such a position presents difficulties, as it presumes empathy as the core skill of accessing and developing in English as a subject. Arguably, such concepts are more ephemeral and linked to individual psychology, history, values, ethics and world-view. Concomitantly, maybe every aspect of human behaviour is also dependent upon this. Secondly, although characters can enter the collective consciousness of readers and audiences, it is not without difficulty to teach the concept of mimesis (imitation of the real world through art).

As my reading and awareness of the complexities of English practice grew, so did the tensions. A significant alternative method for teaching English is the linguistic approach. Semiotic theory is concerned with the codes of a language, what De Saussure (1857-1913) calls 'langue', is systematic and synchronic (language at a specific point in time) and can be isolated from 'parole', which has diachronic functions (how language has evolved through time). Such conceptions privilege the units of meaning over a holistic view of literature as a cohesive unit and show the tension between word, sentence and text level concerns in the practice and methods of teaching English as a school discipline. For example, notions of prescriptivist and descriptivist grammar provide theories that indicate the current thinking of educational policy makers and their response to the use and abuse of language. Theorists such as Durkheim (1911) offer very interesting ideas regarding this way of seeing English. He states that education systems are mirrors of society, designed to 'express their needs' and create a workforce to suit its needs.

Of course, a central tension in English and the standards agenda at present is the valorising of high stakes testing to judge the educational landscape as economic value in PISA rankings (mentioned earlier). Such demands upon teachers are significant and invite more detailed analysis of how this is currently shaping secondary English and influencing the practice of it. I have become fascinated whilst reading about Marx's (1867) concept of 'automatisches

subjekt' (automatic subjectivity), where agents bring about a self-fulfilling process of subjectivity; often unknowingly to themselves. Such an idea can be applied to the practice of English teaching: there is an end-game of exams that professionals qualify with their compliance, although it may cause them unrest and be contrary to their values or paradigm of what English teaching should or ought to be. Similarly, it could be argued that some students succeed because they enjoy the system or they are able to identify with it.

1.6 Summary – the Lie of the Land

Chapter one has outlined the thinking and disruptions that shaped the research project. In outlining my own opinions and dilemmas, I intend to account for own subjectivity and to argue for my self-reflection as a researcher and participant. In looking at two key approaches to high school English of the 'humanist' teaching of literature and the linguistic standards model, I attempted to clarify where my thinking was at the beginning of the research project. The main aim of this is to show how my understanding and analysis has developed in sophistication and awareness through the research journey. These arguments will be visited again later in the thesis, but in a more refined and data rich manner.

To recap my key research questions, I am looking at what holds the 'subject' of English in place and what holds 'subjects' in place. Primarily, I am seeking to analyse the data to tell a more sophisticated account of my learning journey. In order to demonstrate my emergent understanding, chapter two engages with the existing literature surrounding English education. Chapter three details my methodological thinking in conducting an action research project using narrative writing before chapter four concludes part one with introducing the paradigm of Lacan's 'Four Discourses' and the concepts of 'subject' and 'subjectivity'. To supplement the reader's understanding of how this Lacanian

theory works, I include an example by analysing a small section of script from the popular film ‘Dead Poets’ Society’ (1989).

Part two of the thesis is labelled ‘Subject and Subjectivity’ and outlines how the data was collected, what data is included, what data is excluded and the justification for such decisions. Chapter six then goes on to present the main findings and debates using data to explore the issues using Lacan’s ‘Four Discourses’ to cast interesting light on the debate. Part two concludes with chapter seven outlining how the data suggested radical and resistant alternatives to current practice that is intended to move the research from the descriptive and analytical, to suggest ways forward for English teaching practice.

Finally, part three ‘Analysis and Discussion’, details how Lacan’s ideas about subjectivity have been developed by Žižek and other theorists and how they relate to my research. It is hoped that chapter eight demonstrates how important Lacanian theory could be to the development and reimagining of English teaching. The thesis concludes with chapter nine drawing out the main conclusions of the research; revisiting the key research questions, and evaluating them to suggest some areas for further research.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

2.1 What is English Education?

'A Cockatrice hast thou hatched to the world'

Duchess of York in 4.1.55 from Shakespeare's *Richard III* (1592)

The practical conceptions of English, as a high school subject, could be described as a cockatrice: a mythical beast comprised of a two-legged dragon with a rooster's head. Ergo, it characterises the split identity and concurrent hybridous multiplicity of the nature of English. This multiplicity of conceptions seem to range from the pragmatic functions of literacy; the essential humanist view of teaching understanding; the induction into cultural capital to preserve a national narrative; the pleasure and enjoyment of reading and the synthesis of language and literary texts with cultural theory and critical approaches. I wish to suggest that far from being exclusive positions, these conceptualisations are part of an interplay that reveal decisions, enactments, discourses and effects upon 'subjects'. As English is packaged up in discursive styles for different purposes, it impacts on what people do. Certain epistemologies and discourses of English are designed to fit certain models / functions and in such models there are identities and epistemologies that are marginalised. As an agent in practice and research, I am aware of how I influence and how I am influenced by these prevailing discourses.

As conflicting discourses compete within the subject, it seems timely to take a fresh look at how the discipline of high school English is functioning. In respect of this, I remind the reader that the research is focussed on two questions: what is holding the subject in place? (What debates, processes, enactment and practice give English teaching its characteristics in my current school?). And

how does English hold ‘subjects’ in place? (How are students being positioned? What are they becoming? How are English teachers positioned? What is the subject doing to people and how?) In order to explore these two key questions, I am providing an overview of historical debates on the field to show English’s evolution; researching the empirical practice in my school of both myself and others, and using theoretical concepts proposed by Lacan to explore ‘subjectivity’ and ‘discourse’ in high school English.

The subject of English could also be described as a living contradiction: the world of work demands wider and more functional skills, whereas English has seen a narrowing of assessment foci to discourage the perceived gaming of the system. [12] It could be argued that English is now suffering from a reductive invert model where the assessment drives all in a model of results accountability over a student centred one. Other debates centre around Bernstein’s (1971) theory of elaborate and restricted codes and whether the purpose of English has become to induct students into a class rich elaborate code at the expense of real understanding (Davison, 2011). In this way ‘the oppressed are required to climb the ladder ... [and the] higher they get, the more they resemble the oppressors’ in a classic Animal Farm denouement (MacSwan and McLaren, 1997, p.334). Of course, one tension here is Bourdieu’s (2007) notion that ‘different social groups have different social capital’ and English is ridden with class complications (Davison, 2011, p.171). Some claim this means that English is a game that some students have already won or lost upon their induction into formal education as English aims at Trudghill’s (1972) theory of overt prestige, where standard forms of English and elaborate codes are celebrated and others disavowed. Nonetheless, debates centre around what English education is doing and what for. Clearly, a tension

[12] The removal of speaking and listening from GCSE English assessment recently could be defended by arguing that a separate certificate at age 16 for speaking and listening is a more valuable step. However, many schools intend to complete the tasks for this in year 8 or 9 and given its lack of inclusion in league tables, one must question how oracy has gained any status here.

exists between changing curriculum restraints being exacerbated by increasing assessment restraints as teachers teach for the test in five years' time and neglect other discourses. Furthermore, the discursive practices of English teaching have not received the theoretical analysis as that of Maths (Brown) or Art (Atkinson), particularly in the field of the psychoanalytical analysis of English education and its educative processes.

2.2 Whose English?

As well as considering what we are doing when we teach English and what the students are being asked to do, we must also consider who we are doing it for? Schools exist in a convoluted system of pleasing many masters that are both internal and external to the classroom and institution. Allow me to use a literary-historical example to illustrate my point. When Charlotte, Emily and Anne Brontë opened their ill-fated school in 1844 at Haworth, they could be said to attempting to fulfil three purposes. Firstly, to obtain an income in keeping with limited female opportunities during the period; secondly, to provide the local populace with a chance of education which had been so transformative for their father Patrick's opportunities. Thirdly, to give the local populace the basic skills of reading, writing, arithmetic and discipline to be functional and employable in the local wool factories that had sprung up along the hills of Bradford in West Yorkshire. Seen in this way, education may fulfil the needs of economic production. Of course, education for intellectual improvement and personal growth is a counter imperative. But, arguably it has been a secondary imperative for the lower classes whom could be said to have been 'kept in their place' by what William Blake refers to as the 'mind forged manacles' of class acquiescence (1795). In this way, what version of English is being taught must be followed by a secondary question of: for whom and what purpose?

The 2014 refresh of the National Curriculum in English claims to 'promote high standards of language and literacy by equipping pupils with a strong command of the spoken and written language, and to develop their love of literature through widespread reading for enjoyment' Yet, 'below the surface of such apparently contestable and transparent statements lie all sorts of conflicting opinions, ideologies, methodologies and philosophies' (Fleming and Stevens, 2015, p.91). High School English departments are used to constant change. The new curriculum purports to free teachers pedagogically and remove levels, yet still measure progress. Also, it makes broad brush statements about the skills and range of material to be taught, including the rather mysterious 'seminal world literature' requirement. (National Framework Document, July 2013).

A look back over the history of what English has been and for what purposes follows to enable me to situate the debates. The Newbolt Report (1921) and 'English for the English' by George Sampson (1924), although more liberal in their approach than many would believe, are stalwart on the need for purification of English. As Fleming and Stevens (2015) assert, the reports contain both 'romantic ideas about creative imagination and a lack of tolerance of diversification of language' (p.4). Over half a century later, the 1975 Bullock report offered a more psychologically introverted definition: seeing language in terms of thinking and meaning, not just communication. Similarly, the Kingman Report of 1988 argued for a division between knowledge about language and language in use: 'the starting point for English teachers in the classroom must then be the use of language, with technical terminology and the study of conventions of language playing a supportive rather than a dominant role' (Fleming and Stevens, 2015, p.7). This goes some way to explain why as a school student, I have no recollection of any grammar or technical terminology in my English lessons. So lacking was my knowledge about grammar that I had to fill in such gaps by studying linguistics alongside my Literature studies as an undergraduate and then as a student teacher.

Such debates demonstrate how English is charged with the solving of many issues and the fulfilment of many demands. Of course, the view of English as a panacea for complex social and political issues is very problematic, although successive governments often try to use it for such purposes. Traditionally, government policy in Britain has seen homogenous initiatives dispensed like medicine. Yet, they take little account of the dynamic nature of social complexities in children, teachers, classrooms, schools, communities and society. Perhaps, more than any other subject, English is best placed to take account of these contextual variances.

In this study, the focus is not so much on debating what English is for and the historically recurrent rumblings that are time immemorial, but more to look at English practice in a new way through the filter of Lacan's discourse theories. In capturing data to analyse, I am attempting to locate episodes for an analytical discussion of practice with theory to re-imagine the practise of English within an action research model which is aimed at emancipation and re-definition.

The epistemology of English is an interesting and volatile field of inquiry. So far, I have concerned myself with debates regarding English education in the secondary school. However, a very interesting debate can also be traced through the epistemology of English in the university and its academic aims, which naturally filter down to the high school level: given that English graduates then go on to teach in the high school. The a priori assumption is that English is going to exist, but how do we justify its existence? A cynic might say that it is founded upon the middle-class English teacher having a job.

2.3 Ideologies of English

English has many different ideologies at play and many debates regarding the functions of it. Teachers of English have been instructed at GCSE and A level favour cultural critical views in examination contexts, with a focus upon

psychological, Marxist and feminist readings. What is taught in English classrooms is further contested by the different prejudices of what the English teacher knows or values. There is also the possibility of an uncritical fall-back position from one's own schooling. Given the nature of English as a process subject, rather than exclusively a content one, there is much variation in the knowledge and interests of the individual English teacher. Thus, it is often argued that the texts we studied become the ones that we think should be studied, in a self-aggrandising way.

English as a discipline originally addressed the demand of learning rhetoric: to express yourself with force and originality to convey your ideas. Similarly, an early justification of English was that you should read material that challenges you, even though may not like it at first. Two major schools of thought regarding the epistemology of English and its purpose can be summarised by contrasting the ideas of Hazlitt and Coleridge with those of Leavis and Eliot. Hazlitt / Coleridge's much earlier position (circa 1810) fronted the notion of personal pleasure in reading literature. Such a view was significantly influenced by Greek and Roman models of quality, where literature of high value was seen to give a personal giddy and vertiginous intellectual pleasure. In contrast, Leavis / Eliot promoted the new critical approach to English in the 1920s where reading was to establish a critical mind and nothing to do with pleasure. In summary, the approach can be summarised as: it is good for you to read challenging books and you may not enjoy it, but tough: intellectual development is the key.

A turn of the century philosophy also had influence in the 1960s: the Frankfurt school [13] is a critical theory of self-conscious social critique. This position encouraged readers to read against the text. This was the opposite of hailing quality: it promoted the idea that culture is not your friend. An example of this

[13] The 'Frankfurt school' refers to the interwar dissident movement coming from the Institute of Social Research at Goethe University. The movement sought to discredit both Socialism and Capitalism as theories that came from the top down. Instead, ideas should be generated from reading against dominant ideas and originate from those outside of government.

might be that in studying Shakespeare, we need to look at what Shakespeare is not addressing; the absences and silences. Indeed, it could be argued that the processes of pleasure are now replacing literature as a category: film as culture because culture is porous and still ideological, whether literary or not. A further theory is offered by Bloom (1994), a critic of the Frankfurt school, who argues that whatever critique is placed upon Shakespeare, Shakespeare is always one step ahead. For example, he argues that feminist criticism of Shakespeare should take account of the progressive nature of the writer, in that he was already writing women better than anyone else. These debates which have shaped the graduate and post-graduate discourse are starting to find their way into the high school discourse.

English a discipline and how it is taught is a site of contestation. But, what are the characteristics of high school English? It could be argued that English serves different functions for different groups of students, and herein lays its epistemological and ontological complexities. For some students, English has the function of helping them to develop critical thinking skills. For others, it could be to enable them to effectively complain about a service they receive in the future using what they have learnt about effective argument and persuasion at high school. Durkheim's (1911) social theories suggest that education can have many purposes, for some it has the purely functional purposes of employment and social continuation, for others to tick a box to pass school, and for some to engage in a passion or a profession. Later in the thesis, using data, I will outline how such debates manifest themselves in the English classroom and how Lacan's discourse theories can shed new light on such ideas. It seems prudent to stop for a moment to consider the special place that one writer in particular has in the canon, the curriculum, and the collective national consciousness: William Shakespeare (1564-1616).

2.4 A note on Shakespeare: a Secular Religion?

Shakespeare ... Few literary names inspire such a mixture of reverence, apathy and revulsion from students, parents and teachers. Many people base such views on their experience of passages when in the lower years of secondary school and their views are often intrinsically tied to their view of English at high school as either a positive or negative experience. Shakespeare is a secular religion for many, leading to a kind of ritual tribute and deification. For many students, the notions of Shakespeare as historical artefact, as cultural capital and as linguistically forbidding, present major challenges. It is a classic trope that students are confused by Shakespeare's language. Shakespearean idiom may well be as obtuse as Beowulf in the future: will Tudor English be taught then as an anachronistic foreign language? For many, the idea that Shakespeare might not be the figure-head of the canon is a difficult one and would represent a 'giving in' by acknowledging that it is too difficult for some students. However, this idea is not unlike the reason for the creation of the subject: a softening of the demands of classical literature by removing the foreign language barrier.

Doubtless, Shakespeare is part of the national imaginary, but to conceive of a literature as nationally bordered creates many areas of conflict. It certainly seems curious that a jobbing playwright who courted controversy and provided material for the most popular entertainment of the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean ages might be seen as dull and irrelevant by some. Or is that me just imposing my intrinsic enjoyment upon others and objecting to heterogeneous opinion? Still, what is clear is that people have strong opinions on what should / should not be studied in English. These are often based upon the books that they studied at school and thus the canon perpetuates, seldom allowing in new and exciting contemporary literature. In many ways, this thesis will go on to discuss how we can become trapped and limited in our scope if we are too reverential to our own experiences and see them as absolutes and have internalised them as our own immovable architecture. This also applies in no

small measure to the discourses, ideologies and epistemologies within and without me as a teacher researcher.

2.5 Summary:

It seems reasonable to argue that English represents a myriad of different discourses and yet governmental policy charges the subject with the task of moral equalisation. For example, being weak in English can have many root causes, such as poverty, lack of opportunity, cultural capital or aspiration. Yet, policy would dictate that more English schooling is the salvo for such problems. This presents a moral problem for me: I believe in the power of education to transform people's lives, yet I engage in and perpetuate a problematic system designed to valorise some and denigrate others. In this way, by interrogating the discourses and paradigms through data collection, narrative writing and analysis, I am seeking to define and refine my understanding of what I do; how and why in the dynamic of enacting competing discourses in the secondary English classroom.

As Westbrook et al (2011) assert: 'Literacy is intertwined with issues around culture, gender, class and race in a more complex relationship than can be reflected in a neatly packaged set of training materials' (p.95). Such a position is at odds with official discourses such as the National Literacy Strategy framework (1998-2011) which saw centrally created and disseminated materials with step by step instructions on delivery, where a teacher was an intermediary in a lesson delivered by central government. It carried the caveat of remedying deficit and improving standards, but in my experience felt patronising and sterile to students. Such considerations show how English can be termed as a problematic, unstable amalgam of contradictory identities. I see English as an enabling subject and wish to investigate if there is a better way to fashion the teaching of English in school to respond to the demands of employers, the need

for accountability of practice and learners' attainment and the recognition of the many competing discourses and versions of the subject. In designing a project that could enable me to see the practice of English and to collect data that could be analysed, many methodological considerations were necessary.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

3.1 What is Methodology?

Strega (2005) defines methodology as 'theoretical and conceptual frameworks within which research as a practice is located' (p.205). In seeking to identify a conceptual framework to research the issues within the teaching of English, I was drawn to a hermeneutic approach of action research, where 'researchers do research on themselves' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2002) and can investigate the latent issues that exist in contextual spaces. I was seeking a deeper understanding of participants' experiences of doing English. Such views and experiences very much depend upon the individual views of participants and so I was moved away from my first framework of critical realism and its notion of the 'real' proposed by Bhaskar [14] and much more drawn to the multiple reality frames of Lacanian psychoanalysis, where the language of a participant can reveal thoughts, ideas and experiences in terms of personal truths and unconscious revelations. One methodological stance I was taking in the design of the research project was the contention that truths are not universal, but are 'multiple, partial and perspectival' (Strega, 2005). Recognising that I was not conducting a scientific investigation, it became necessary to resist the prevailing professional pressure of quantitative measurements to prove impact through improvement intervention and much more important to explore the agency, or otherwise, felt by participants in classroom events where a constructivist paradigm (a way of seeing learning as a joint enterprise with researcher and participants) was at the heart of its inception with an emancipatory intent: to

[14] Primarily, Bhaskar's (2011) critical realism sees ontological reality as 'intransitive', where 'things exist independently of their descriptions' (p.150) or fixed and epistemological knowledge as 'transitive' and always in flux. In other words, there is a reality but empirical evidence about such reality is always just out of satisfactory explanation or successful capture. Bhaskar argues that reality 'cannot be read off the empirical world. But neither can it be reconstructed from our subjective experiences' (p.88). Hence, there is a 'real' out there, but we cannot touch it.

reconsider English practice. During the process of evaluating and writing about paradigms, my thinking had shifted[15] to an understanding that I am not researching the world, but researching and refining my understanding of it.

In terms of methodology, I am very conscious of the tension that exists between research and institutional pressures in practitioner research. In choosing qualitative approaches, I was mindful of Patton (2002) that 'the researcher is the instrument' and that I was not aiming for answers or facts, but for an exploration. Psychoanalysis would traditionally see the function of writing and rewriting the self as a type of therapy. In Macbeth (1606), the physician reports on Lady Macbeth's madness by exclaiming 'therein the patient must minister to himself': in an example of pre-Freudian thinking (V. III). I am aware that a notion of cure here is not in keeping with my ideas or paradigmatic frame. Nonetheless, the idea of narrative writing as an access tool to unlock implicit assumptions was appealing and presented the chance to critically interrogate practices. As Ward and Zarate (2011) assert, narrative writing allows better stories to be constructed to discover what has been 'hidden, repressed or disavowed' (p.36). In this way, the narratives become a form of self-discovery.

Furthermore, Brown explores how the self is iterative and hermeneutic in nature and by consequence: fluid, unfixed and temporal. Also, Brown (1994) explains how narrative writing can follow an 'intend to' motive rather than mere causal explanations of 'because', thus moving the focus towards responsibility and control into learning how and why I do things. In exploring the nature and hidden discourses of English, I am not seeking absolute meanings, but evolving my thoughts in the field as a contribution to knowledge about front-line practice.

In many ways, the use of action research and narrative to gather data is appropriate to this thesis: given that I am an English teacher who is navigating

[15] Kuhn's (1962) notion of paradigm shift theorises the altering of ontological and epistemological frames through challenging received knowledge and developing new theories.

the choppy waters of the new curriculum at the time of writing and a post-graduate researcher. In conducting this research, I am cognizant of the need to research English and my own journey as a researcher. As mentioned briefly above, in order to be more analytical and active within my experience, I looked at a variety of methodological approaches from grounded theory to critical realism. Given that I am looking at phenomena that occur in a classroom environment where not all is visible, I decided to employ an action research hermeneutic approach, as it allows the researcher to directly address 'the problem of the division between theory and practice, and assumes that the two are intertwined with neither at a more valued position … in a cyclical process' (Noffke and Somekh, 2011). In order to ensure that I was being attentive to other voices in researching conceptualisations of English, I collected data from my own classroom experiences in a narrative journal; conducted semi-structured interviews with four English colleagues and also collected data from Year 10 pupils to gather their views about their English experiences throughout the year. I was very mindful of the need to collaborate to ensure that 'further understanding is pursued' (Gill and Goodson, 2011, p.158), rather than an uncritical mass of data.

3.2 Action Research and Hermeneutics:

Action research is a method of research that allows a researcher to refine their understanding through several phases. Some theorists have interrogated the nomenclature of 'action research' and what that suggests. Hopkins (2002) states that the term action research is unhelpful as it can become too prescriptive, he chooses to term it 'classroom research by teachers', as it should be 'in aspiration at least, emancipatory' (p.51). The question of whether action research is 'real' research is an interesting and much debated one. Claxton (2006), following an established and elitist viewpoint, refers to teacher research as research with a small 'r', presumably because research is

traditionally conducted by the remote academe. Elliott (1995) had earlier challenged this traditional elitist view and suggests that action research confronts the theory / practice problem by fusing 'teaching and research into a singular activity'. He argues that theory 'implies remoteness … implies a threat … from the academic community' (p.47). Elliott's ideas concerning 'realising in practice' offers the teaching profession an opportunity to see how educational policy and empirical recommendations can be tested and contextually interpreted by 'inside researchers' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2002). Thus, action research seems to question the traditional assumptions of who is equipped to do 'research'. In conducting this research project, I was cognizant that these kinds of methodological demands figure into decisions about data collection and the appropriate instruments with which to collect data.

Initially, I theorised that a multi-perspective approach to collecting data would improve the 'democratic validity' of my inquiry and make it more truthful (Anderson et al, 2007). However, as I read more regarding hermeneutic methodology and the Lacanian theories around subjective truths, I began to let go of the deeply problematic intention of truth and instead focussed on the imperative to use the multiple language rich data to refine the stories I could tell using it. This severely disrupted my pre-conceptions regarding proof but I had to defend my course of action institutionally because the school funded part of the course fees. A complication existed between the institution's desire for cold hard objective evidence of impact and my shifting understanding. This meant that although I was free to research what I wanted to, I did have to report on my progress and account for what I was doing and with what impact. Serving multiple masters was very tricky. In the end, I had to let go of the need to satisfy the interests of my institution and instead be as attentive and candid as possible in collecting and interpreting data.

In conducting the research, it was necessary to consider the problems and challenges of collecting data within a psychoanalytical research project.

Psychoanalysis views the mind as a type of ontological abstraction: we construct knowledge and truth but can never fully uncover or understand it. Philosophically, it is compatible with idealism (the external world exists only in the mind): 'realities are apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based' (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p.110). Furthermore, 'the conventional distinction between ontology and epistemology disappears' because the subject and the object enter into a dialectic (ibid). In other words, everyone has their own 'subjective reality' of school: 'English' cannot help but project such allusive fragments of experience through their attitudes and values (Barry 1995). The availability of these fragments is the central tension of this method. However, I am drawn to a hermeneutic approach of action research, where 'researchers do research on themselves' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2002) and can investigate the latent issues that exist in contextual spaces.

However, as a caveat, I do find the application of a psychoanalytical paradigm to be fraught with ethical difficulties. To psychoanalyse participant responses or indeed your own self with little training or expertise seems uncomfortable; what Walterstein (2009) refers to as the dangers of 'invasion of privacy ... excess exposure ... potential betrayal' (p.129). Crucially, one of the challenges of research is not to pin down the views presented (both directly and indirectly) by such ideas, but use data to further my own understanding and stimulate more debates about the function, purpose and experiences of English: what Brown and England (2005) refer to as a transitive epistemology: a shifting picture.

There are of course further criticisms of such an approach. Opponents of a psychoanalytical paradigm defend the notion of reality and the absurdity of mind worlds; claiming that psychoanalytical frames can lead to the fatalism of post-modernism where everything fails. Concomitantly, it seems that psychoanalysis does not seek to render inquiry as disabled, but as a way of testing and contesting accounts to create better stories. Such an approach leads to problematizing what is 'real' and whether the 'real' of English can be got at or

whether it is a subjective relativism internally held in mental concepts that are quasi-understood. Nonetheless, Lacan (2007) asserts that the most visible things can be the least noticeable and a thrust of this research is to remove these scotomas (blind-spots) to see discourses of English practice.

In support of my methods, I found Newton's (2010) assertion that semi-structured interviews provide 'rich, original voices which can be used to construct research narratives' very interesting (p.6). Being attentive to a voice is important and is internally valid to the exploration of the issues in question, even though they may be externally irrelevant. However, such interviews are 'ethically very sensitive (p.6): trust and professional respect are fundamental to such a method. In asking questions of colleagues and students I became more aware of the dangers of 'procedural bias' (Macintyre, 2000) by not being too enthusiastic about those aspects that I found more favourable. I also had to be attentive to asking questions in the same way with my participants and this was more difficult than I first imagined. [16]

Of course, interviewing within a psychoanalytical paradigm has significant dangers. Interviews can be used to 'elicit unconscious material from the participant', but this presents a 'conflicted role ... as both researcher and quasi-therapist' (Holmes, 2013, p.167). This is ethically questionable and I felt very unqualified and uneasy about employing such a method. [17] In a bid to mitigate this, I was attentive to Ball's (2013) assertion that education 'constitutes them, or some of them, as powerful subjects' and as 'artefacts of power' (p.5). Thus, I struggled with the idea that I had to account for the power dynamics in interviews. Crucially, the hierarchy of the interviewer; their relationship to the

[16] Barbour and Schostak (2011) propose three strategies to get to the 'real' in research methods: imposition, grounding and emergence. Schostak asserts that interviewing involves 'symbolic violence' (p.62), but the key issue remains that interviewing involves getting at what is on the mind of the interviewee.

[17] Holmes criticises studies such as Lorimer (2010) and StrØmme et al (2010), arguing that some researchers base 'methodologies around dual roles as researchers and therapists' (p.170).

interviewee; the intended and perceived purpose of the interview, and what consequences candour could have, all concerned me. I also recognised that I had to be attentive to what empirical evidence could tell me and not see the inquiry as a way of gathering evidence for premeditated suppositions. Crucially, one of the challenges of action research is not to pin down the views presented (both directly and indirectly) by such ideas, but use data to further my own understanding.

Biesta (2007) suggests that a critical understanding of your own ethical and professional understanding and experience is essential as all pedagogic choices are ethical choices. Consequently, this contested field of 'English' and all its discourses, explicit and implicit, tells stories about the lives and welfare of others: how they are subjected and positioned is of deep critical importance to the nature of the inquiry and any arising arguments. Such concerns demanded a deeper understanding regarding the ethical issues surrounding my research. Piper and Simons (2011) propose 'process consent' where consent with others is rolling, renegotiated and open to participant perceptions. Initially, I considered involving the views of the whole Year 10 group (310 pupils), but in attempting to tell a personal story of development, I acknowledged the need to go for depth over scale and avoid positivistic parameters of numbers and statistics. This helped to develop my awareness of the importance of scale in enquiry and the significant ethical challenges that are presented with any research, let alone something that is possibly so amorphous as 'what is English and how is it working?' Of central importance here is that I am not researching the world, but researching my understanding of it.

My awareness of how claims can be made from educational research is also important to methodological concerns. Every piece of research is commanded to answer the 'so what?' challenge and prove that it has a basis in relevance, contribution, and robustness. As a teacher prior to post-graduate research, I saw research claims as professionally indisputable drivers of policy. As a

researcher, I am considering whether 'the validity criteria of the social sciences is too limited' to account for the dynamic, unpredictable and organic development of action research enquiry' (Herr and Anderson, 2005). Therefore, terms such as validity and reliability become very unstable in a multiple truth paradigm. [18] In this respect, any claims I can make are tentative at best. Perhaps the only realistic claim is that my own conceptions of the discipline of English; my understanding of my professionalism and my future practice as an English teacher are noble ends in themselves as I struggle to make sense of where I am, what I am doing, for what and why.

In making methodological choices about researching how English works, I am aware it holds no apparent truth, but is part of an ideological frame: influenced by professional training, practice and official discourses. This contrasts sharply with a psychoanalytical paradigm, where the refining of a story to improve it is paramount; independent of the emancipatory freedom principle. Such a position occurs because Lacanian psychoanalysis suggests that you cannot be freed from your mind and so even the notion of emancipation is a subjective construct worthy of contesting. In support of this, Guba and Lincoln (1994) demonstrate that what we see as factual is produced by theory and by values. Therefore, research can be seen as a contaminated process where any results remain 'always human constructions' (p.108). Furthermore, employing the methodology of hermeneutics demonstrates tensions in professional identity through this Lacanian Psychoanalytic paradigm. Gallagher's (1992) four theoretical hermeneutic domains of: conservative (supporting the status quo); moderate (accommodating other perspectives); critical (breaking out of ideology) and radical (slippage and instability) demonstrate these different tensions. They

[18] Validity, according to Eikeland (2001), (writing from an action research perspective), is the status, quality, competency and transformational power of a piece of research. Payne and Payne (2004) define reliability as 'consistent measurements, when the phenomena are stable, regardless of who uses it'; whereas Checkland and Holwell (1998) advocate the volatile flux of human behaviour that renders reliability anathema in hermeneutic methodology.

show how teacher practitioners move between acceptance and resistance in the different professional situations they encounter. For example, the concept of teacher as facilitator has been propagated by the independent learning agenda; it could be argued that this has reduced teacher's professional status to that of the 'hired help' in a world where pedagogy and not knowledge is power.

Unfortunately, pedagogy is not immediately valuable to those outside of teaching and so professionalism potentially suffers as the professional space undergoes metamorphosis. In an attack upon knowledge as a key to freedom, Lacan's (1949) theory of the mirror stage in children denies that practitioners can free anyone; only assist people's journeys of self-understanding (p.131). Hyldgaard (2009) goes further, asserting that 'unconscious processes of transference are an uncontrollable condition for educational success' (p.296). In other words: whether a personal connection exists between pupils and teacher is essential although beyond the influence of educational policy or individual consciousness. The individuality of English teachers should be one of the subject's main strengths. However, homogenous practice could be seen as strangling the individuality out of English teaching as an art. This was an important motivating factor in using semi-structured interviews with colleagues: to look at adherence to external pressures and attend to the individually creative influences upon some of my colleagues. To supplement the interviews, I also opted to use narrative writing to attempt to capture the individual voices of my participants.

3.3 Narrative Writing:

From the oral traditions originating from antiquity, through to the revolution of print in the fifteenth century, narrative refers to a story: a woven tale of complications and resolutions that entertain, educate, shock, scare, and delight. In the modern world, the term 'narrative' is used in a wide variety of different

senses. Andrews et al (2008) identify how narrative has become a ‘popular portmanteau term’, yet is ‘strikingly diverse’ (pp.2-3). In politics, ‘narrative’ is used to describe the consistency and cohesion of message; in cultural studies the term can be used to describe the underlying world-view or social commentary. In many of these areas, narrative is something to be controlled or pre-communicated rather than being an attempt to get an accurate record of what someone is feeling or thinking at a critical moment. Yet, even such stories are ‘shaped by their listeners’ (p.3).

One major challenge in collecting data regarding the practice of high school English was to employ an instrument that would allow me to capture my developing understanding and, more significantly, those of my colleagues and students. In writing a narrative journal, I was mindful of the advice by Gill and Goodson. They advocate Elliot’s (2005) account of narrative being constituted of: ‘temporality, meaning and social encounters’ (p.25). Such terms can be further simplified to mean time, significance and context. In this way, human subjectivity is part of the research process. Gill and Goodson go on to use Giddens (1991, p. 55) that a narrative researcher’s self-identity is ‘fundamental to their own ontological security, which is ‘robust’ and ‘fragile’ at the same time’ (p.159). This allows the ‘I’ to shift in the research process. A further challenge is offered by the authors: that of approaching why stories are told in certain ways at certain moments in time and this allows the researcher to critically examine how personal and social change interrelate in a dialogic process that is full of tensions (p.160). Such an approach allows ‘not just knowing about oneself, but knowing oneself through multiple ways of seeing the world’ (Bold, 2012, p.3). This necessitates a subjective stance, which presents challenges in terms of explicating findings as valid and reasonable when they are so personally engendered.

Furthermore, Bold (2012) asserts that ‘narrative research usually sets out to explore an interesting phenomenon … [in a] content narrative and the meta-

narrative' (p.16). In other words, there are two stories being told: the data presented as evidence and the research story being told in a concurrent and symbiotic way. Indeed, Bold goes on to suggest that the nature of interpretation changing over time allows a reimagining of data that 'adds rigour to the research process' (p.31), which allows 'deep reflection' and 'problematizing apparently simple events' (p.137). In seeking to problematize events that seem superficially simple, narrative inquiry is difficult. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe the importance of narrative inquiry and some of its complications as a method:

> Life is filled with narrative fragments, enacted in storied moments of time and space, and reflected upon and understood in terms of narrative unities and discontinuities … Narrative inquiry is stories lived and told … Journals take on an intimately puzzling quality … There is also the possibility that research interviews may be controlled by participants. They may ask to be interviewed on a particular topic, so they have an opportunity to give an account of themselves around that topic. However, whether the topic is chosen by participants or researcher, the kinds of questions asked and the way they are structured provide a frame within which participants shape their accounts of experience.
>
> (pp.17, 20, 103, & 110)

Difficulties such as these presented significant challenges to me in my data gathering. With such difficulties in mind, I had to try to understand the ideas, events, theories, and experiences behind the stories. To mitigate the difficulties, Webster and Mertova (2007) highlight the positives of narrative enquiry as addressing issues of 'complexity and human-centredness' (p.11) and that 'narrative illustrates the temporal notion of experience, recognising that one's understanding of people and events changes' (p.2). Various other authors have promoted narrative as a research method: Clandinin and Connelly (1990),

Angus (1995). They propose that narrative research provides a useful counterpoint to statistical data and gives a verisimilitude that more traditional research traditions do not. This real-life capture can also act as a temporal record of the research context (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Narrative seems to be more concerned with 'individual truths rather than identifying generalizable and repeatable events' (Webster and Mertova, 2007, p.89). This assertion, if followed, justifies narrative's use in research about contextual experiences.

In terms of inquiry, I see this project as being an inductive piece of action research. Such a methodology is appropriate due to the desire to study the emergent issues that transpire in the field. Furthermore I wished to build a 'more sophisticated account of my own subjectivity' (Brown, 2007, p. 3) and develop a greater understanding of my own positionality within practice to reimagine my professional role and its constraints, opportunities and parameters. Brown suggests that research 'transforms the human subject it sets out to document' (p.7). In setting out to transform my understanding, I saw the process of hermeneutic action research as giving me the opportunity to write a narrative to document the self at temporal stages and refine the explanations.

However, there are methodological dangers in writing the self and documenting others' selves in a research process. Alvermann (2010) warns against the dangers of focussing on the emic (insider) self as solipsism: being preoccupied with and indulgent in one's own feelings. With this in mind, I intended to collect data from the students: including interviews and data snapshots, as well as teacher interviews, a focus group and a validation group to provide challenge and rigorous scrutiny of my assumptions and claims. This whole methodology is based upon Alvermann's premise of seeing 'truth as tension, and as movement' (p.56).

Furthermore, in researching with others there are tensions around the privileged position of being the researcher and trying to unlock what the conscious and unconscious processes of selection and deletion might be. Applying such ideas

to my context and research interest suggests some significant implications. To what extent a researcher can access and understand the experience of 'English' from students, other teachers and the self is full of ethical challenges. One example is: avoiding seeing subjects as 'other' or the dangers of labelling pupils in micro-populations of special needs or free school meals when exploring their understandings of the subject and its pedagogy. The key consideration here is to question why do I think that and why is it that for them, in order to attempt to capture some of the unstable myriad of conceptions at work in the professional and personal space. Such spaces are never neutral, as Bahktin argues. (Goouch, 2011, p. 82).

3.4 Summary

The research project involved conducting semi-structured interviews with my four colleagues on three occasions over the course of the year. Simultaneously, I conducted group semi-structured interviews of ten students at a time three times over the research cycle: this meant that I conducted nine semi-structured interviews with students. Also, I asked students and my four colleagues to write 100 words every half-term (six occasions over the year) as a narrative account of their experiences of high school English as the new GCSE course was taught for the first time. Finally, I recorded my weekly observations in my learning journal that included thoughts and ideas about experiences in and out of the classroom. The multiple methods were designed to capture a myriad of voices that could provide an array of views about the subject of English and how those involved could be positioned and affected.

This focus upon narrative introduces some very interesting debates around how the self can be narrated. In his thought-provoking book, Homo Deus (2015), Yuval Noah Harari analyses how the narrating self is sanctified by Liberalism. In

other words, people are free (to a point) to believe in the narratives available to them:

> [Liberalism] allows it [the self] to vote in the polling stations, in the supermarket and in the marriage market. For Centuries this made good sense, because although the narrating self believed in all kinds of fictions and fantasies, no alternative system knew me better. Yet, once we have a system that really does know me better, it will be foolhardy to leave authority in the hands of the narrating self … in politics too the narrating self follows the peak-end rule. It forgets the vast majority of events, remembers only a few extreme incidents and gives a wholly disproportional weight to recent happenings.
>
> [pp. 338-339]

Such a view offers two interesting consequences for my research practice. Firstly, that the narrating self sees only what it chooses to see (consciously or unconsciously) and the reality it attempts to capture is only a form of expressionism. [19] Secondly, there are many fictions and fantasies that exist in the scopophilic acts act of looking, thinking, and writing that filter and distort the observed phenomena. An important consideration is to account for such fictions and fantasies as part of the exploration and analysis.

[19] Expressionism is an art-form that does not represent reality. Instead, it portrays the perception and selective opinions of a character, artist, writer, or reader. One famous example is Arthur Miller's 'Death of a Salesman' (1949), where a failing fantasist named Willy Loman sees romanticised memories and a temporally distorted present as he struggles with the mundanity of his life and his failure to be a big shot in 1940's America. We see what Willy sees and we are therefore inside his head and not an observer of any objective reality, if that is even possible in the first place.

Chapter 4 – Paradigm of Lacanian Psychoanalysis

4.1 Introducing Lacanian Discourse Theory

In seeking to problematize my understanding of English and look at how it works, I became aware that I needed a theoretical frame that would reveal interesting perspectives that would be relevant to both the aims of the study and appropriate to the methodology. In looking at discourse and subjectivity, I began to read a variety of post-structural and Marxist critics. I began to recognise that I needed a frame that would take my analysis beyond that of power dynamics into something more expansive and challenging. Bracher (1994) recommends Lacanian discourse theory as something that 'avoids both the Scylla of (Marxist) reflectionism, where language and culture are hurled against the rock of the real, and the Charybdis of (post-structural) idealism, where all that passes is sucked in and devoured by language' (p.1)[20]. In other words, Lacanian discourse theory is uniquely placed to avoid the evils of overgeneralisation and failure to say anything. More on Lacan's discourse theory later.

A major aspect of Lacanian theory concerns the notion of the 'subject', as opposed to 'object'. At first I saw this dichotomy as a simple distinction between third person detachment and first person experience. Yet, Lacan's ideas are not so simple or clearly defined: there is even a debate over whether the 'subject' even equates to the 'self'. Murray (2016) sees object and subject as exclusive

[20] Scylla is the mythical monster that devours Greek sailors and Charybdis refers to the whirlpool that destroys ships in Homer's The Odyssey (8th Century BC). It has become a metaphor for being caught between two evils: a rock and a hard place; Catch 22, in modern idiom.

to one another and describes how Lacan's ideas depend on mutual dependence and mutual exclusivity. In Psychology, minds can be treated as 'objects of Science', but can make 'little or no reference to their particular subjective dimensions' (p.87). Murray insists that for Lacan the self needs an object to give it a rudimentary sense of self-hood. Therefore, one could see the assessment system, as the object, providing the subject with meaning, and producing the other. Interestingly, the Lacanian 'other' is also a slippery concept: interchangeably used for object, unconscious, and representation.

In using a term such as 'subject', 'object' and 'other', there are many dangers of oversimplification and conflation of a number of different meanings. Murray (2016) shows how the 'subject', in a linguistic sense, refers to a relationship between a verb and an object. Yet, it can also refer to a sign that is spoken or not spoken: ergo, conscious or unconscious. Lacan makes a unique contribution to the conception of the 'subject', by seeing it as 'the subject of the unconscious' and an 'individual truth' (p.174). Yet, Lacan maintains that a subject can only exist in language and that language provides the terms of subjectivity. In other words, we have no escape from using symbols (language) to articulate our represented selves. Thus, we have to encode our selfhood in order to articulate it.

Murray details how an analysand (patient) brings an issue into the consulting room which is 'complex, and obscure, and painful' (p.6). This difficulty in articulation can be equally applied to the difficulties in understanding and applying Lacan's ideas. A common mistake is that Lacan meant something that can be simplified as a set of applicable criteria or a reified interpretation. In seeking to study the subject and subjects of English there are significant challenges.

Lacan is not easy to read or understand. Many commentators note that Lacan can be deliberately opaque and contradictory (Roseboro 2008, Murray 2016).

The concept of subjectivity is slippery, as is the application of the 'Four Discourses' model. It is important to document my struggle to come to 'an' understanding of Lacan's ideas; notice that I use the indefinite article: there are only interpretations and no one truth of Lacan's intellectual philosophy. It is hoped that by exploring my struggle with Lacan's ideas around the 'subject', I can aid the reader's understanding of how I applied the ideas and see how interesting a challenge Lacan's ideas are. This is necessary to avoid seeing Lacan's theories as Master discourse and 'othering' what I am analysing.

Furthermore, the use of Lacanian discourse theory offers an opportunity to effect change. In analysing Lacan's discourse theory, Alcorn (1994) sees Lacan as unique due to the synthesising of two different ideas on subjectivity. Essentially, the two theories can be captured as a post-structural concept of a subject being controlled by the puppet master of discourse. Secondly, the psychoanalytic conception suggests a metaphor of a fish in a bowl: the subject contains discourse and has the power to 'alter, manipulate, resist and transform' discursive systems (p.20). Essentially, the 'subject operates upon discourse, and discourse operates the subject' (p.27), with the subject 'best defined as the one who suffers' (p.28). This really struck a chord with me after revisiting an early narrative journal entry of mine:

> *After reading Bold's (2012) book on narrative research, I am beginning to see how I have to take account of what I am attending to and noticing. Seeing myself as an instrument and a potential contaminator of research with the dangers of students telling me what they think I want to hear rather than their genuine thoughts is a hurdle I have to get to grips with. If not, then what am I actually finding out or seeking to change other than a random collection of ideas about English? My students are currently keeping a written record of their response to lessons in the new GCSE curriculum. I am interested in the idea of capturing what Bold refers to as 'events' in the students and my own experiences to reach tentative*

suggestions rather than certainty and conclusions. Bold says that 'outcomes are not always the same for everyone despite them having the same experiences' and that narrative can capture what is happening to subjects within discourse.

(Journal Entry - December 2014)

One central area of concern to the thesis is that of discourse: what discourse(s) are occurring, where are they coming from and how can exploring them develop an understanding of professional practice? Lacan in his Seminar XVII explains how four types of discourse offer different explanations of how language works in social phenomena: Master, University, Hysteric and Analyst.

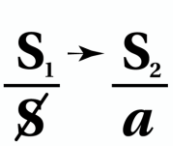
Lacan's (2007) theory is important because he insists that 'all determinations of the subject, and therefore of thought, depends on discourse' (p.152). Lacan suggests that what makes a discourse is what it is referring to: 'the reference of a discourse is what it acknowledges it wants to master' (p.79). I found this idea very complex for two main reasons. Firstly, if discourse is aiming to master something, then are all discourses potential master discourses? After pondering upon this, I began to consider that it depends on power. If a discourse is seeking to subjugate other ideas, then it is operating in the master / slave dialectic. For example, the insistence upon accuracy and standards as an educational model has to repress creativity to some extent, either consciously or unconsciously.

Secondly, does a discourse have the intent to master something that is unacknowledged or hidden? Many have pointed to the complexity of Lacan, and yet the difficulty seems not just understanding what is stated, but also what is implied. A significant challenge in reading Lacan is the dense collection of indistinct terms that have multiple meanings throughout his work. One example of this could be Lacan's statement '[l]anguage is the condition of the unconscious' (p.41). The noun here provides the crux of the problem: does it

mean conditional of / on, or does it refer to the state of it? In English terms, does the use of linguistic signifiers decide the meaning or is it describing the meaning? Such a debate is never far from the reader's mind when reading Lacan's work. He even provides a caveat for the limitations of his 'Four Discourses' theory: 'My little quadrupled schemas … are not the Ouija boards of history. It is not necessarily the case that things always happen this way, and that things rotate in the same direction' (p.188).

As a general summary, Roseboro (2008) suggests that the Master discourse creates the subject; the University discourse frames the subject's knowledge; the Hysteric discourse represents the search for truth of the unconscious, and the Analyst discourse brings knowledge into the space of truth. The Four Discourses of Lacan present a 'different subject position and this position determines the subject's speaking relationship to the other. In addition, the relationship between the subject position and the 'other' determine the 'truth' produced in each discourse, hence the discourse will operate differently and create a different product' (Roseboro, 2008).

Lacan uses mathemes to explain his theory as diagrams. For purposes of economy, he uses symbols to capture central factors or positions that can then be moved around to show how language works differently in different circumstances. The richness of the Lacanian schemas is further enhanced by the four factors of master signifiers (S1), knowledge (S2), the divided subject ($), and the object (a). A brief explanation of what the symbols mean follows to allow the reader to understand how they fit into the analysis later on.



As Bracher (1994) describes:

- The master signifiers (S1) are things that the subject has an identity with, where their value goes without saying. There are many unsaid, but widely obeyed demands made on schools and English teachers through educational discourses of accuracy, culture, standards, enjoyment, and employability, for example.

- Knowledge (S2) creates what a subject is: they are interpellated by what types of knowledge are given credence. This comes down to what is it that I am meant to be doing when I teach English? How do I know this? Where are my reference points for my ontological beliefs and epistemological frames?

- The divided subject ($) is what is 'operative in all the various ways in which we fail to identify ourselves, grasp ourselves, or coincide with ourselves' (Bracher, 1994, p.113). Consequently, discourse acts upon and within us to create the division between what we are meant to be and what we feel we are when discourse forces homogeneity and fails to take account of our heterogeneity.

- Finally, the object (a) can be seen as the object of desire: what we seek to fill with our fantasies to make up for the feeling of lack. Students in school fulfil the role of being the object of desire for the teacher's gaze who is compelled to follow the system for credit and success. The question arises: how is my gaze as an English teacher constituted and how does it interpellate students as subjects?

4.2 Lacan's Four Discourses

The term 'discourse' is problematic. It is used interchangeably between disciplines such as the law, medicine, and politics, for example, to refer to their individual system of meaning. For Lacan, discourse appears to be a way of understanding how language functions in a system and its social effects. Lacan offers 'Four Discourses' to show how social systems work. Žižek (1999) provides a useful explanation of the differences between the 'Four Discourses', stating that the Master names an ideal; the University teaches bureaucratic conformity of the ideal; the Hysteric questions the naming of the ideal, and the Analyst focuses on the gap between the naming and the questioning (p.165). In order to explain the significance of Lacan's discourse theory, I will further explain the nature of each of the 'Four Discourses' and how they are related to both my research questions and my conclusions later in the thesis.

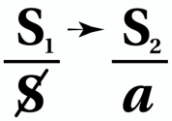
Master Discourse

Lacan's Master discourse takes its origins from the Hegelian master / slave dialectic, where power is contingent upon someone being powerless: every master needs a slave and vice versa. The Master discourse can be seen as the hidden dominating powers that exist only to reproduce themselves. One example of this might be the pervasive forces of traditional narratives like the current use of the term 'austerity' in government economic rhetoric.

In terms of education, we can see how children are shaped by the expectations put upon them: schools are compared to other schools; children compare

themselves to other children with reference to the metrics that specify what they are compared to what they are supposed to be. Such Master discourses and policies shape education and dictate versions of English that are fashioned from a limited brief promoted by economic competition and regulation. In this discourse, English teaching becomes about choosing texts for national ‘British values’, where the text becomes a Master discourse for political ideology. Also, concepts such as culture, accuracy, literate, Britishness, and employment become drivers of epistemology from above. In Lacan’s Master discourse, there is no room for individual desires or alternative cultures as these are considered alien to the production and standards models of English education.

Lacan's discourse of the Master outlines how people are rendered as a 'divided subject'. That is, we are positioned as being caught between something and nothing. In other words, we are taught to desire something as it is preferable to nothing and this makes us divided: a kind of piggy in the middle, if you will. The pressure to succeed at school comes not necessarily from the will to learn, but from the desire to satisfy the ‘other’. This 'divided subject' ($) is represented as a teacher (S1) for students (S2) leading to what remains, the failure (a). In simpler terms, the Master discourse tells you what you should want, even though you can never win even by trying to get it: the system is stacked against you.



Lacan’s Master Discourse Schema:

Here master signifiers (S1) produce unquestioned authoritative knowledge (S2) with no room for the individual’s desires (a) and this produces an unfulfilled person ($).

Lacan (2007) terms Master discourse as where 'the subject finds himself, along with all the illusions that this comprises, bound to the master signifier, whereas knowledge brings about his insertion into jouissance' (p.93) and the master ‘plays upon … the crystal of language’ (p.152). Such statements present Lacan's reader with many difficulties. It is not at all clear what Lacan means by such verbosity and I struggled to make sense of the ambiguous use of such terminology. Lacan's definition of a subject is multifaceted; what are these illusions; what is the nature of the binding to a master signifier; which definition of jouissance is Lacan working with here? On the face of it, the sense of the statement suggests that someone sees things that are not real as they are controlled by a desire, whilst they learn knowledge that produces pain / a loss.

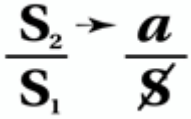
Alas, Lacan's ideas are rarely so simple. A more complex reading may suggest that someone (whose identity has been determined for them by the master) sees things that are not real (deliberate mirages that are suppressed not hidden by the identity formation) as they are controlled by a desire (what someone is told to want by their induction into the discourse), whilst they learn knowledge (manufactured truths to be digested and repeated) that produces a loss (a painful disconnect as they realise that being involved in this system has a price that denies their individuality). It is this need to see past the stated and into the multi-inferential which makes Lacan's work so fascinating and infuriating in equal measure.

University Discourse

Lacan's University discourse can be seen as representative of an institution like a school, or a national / politically engendered curriculum. This University discourse presents the illusion of neutral knowledge but it has a normative dimension (expected outcomes) and acts as a hidden master (Žižek, 2014). Žižek argues that 'beneath the appearance of choice you have a much stronger

injunction ... you have to want to ... we know better than you what you really want'. So in teacher terms, the Master and University discourses tell us what we should freely choose: a paradox that can be seen in contemporary classrooms where the functional employment narrative is used to demand compliance, but dressed up as choice to acquiesce with a system of oppression: you'll need this to get a job …

The University discourse stands for the establishment and determines what needs to be known in systematic knowledge. In this discourse, knowledge is only considered valuable if it fits prescribed guidelines. Ergo, English needs to fit the scope of what needs to be known in literature, removing more anti-establishment and experimental texts for the purpose of protecting the canon. This discourse is seen as being operated by the hidden Master discourse, who presents the University as its icon or social representation. University discourse is often seen as pure bureaucracy that shuts out the individual with a box of eternal demands that alienates the student as a receiver of S2: knowledge. Potentially, this leaves the subject of this discourse with two choices: conformity or the ostracisation of rebellion. Of course, the fables that are presented as pure knowledge (fables as in they are only one version of the story carrying a didactic purpose), are personified as a stable 'I': a place where subjectivity is stable, simple and traditional. Because University discourse's power lies in its 'rationality rather than brute force' teachers might see this reproduction of knowledge as emancipating students: 'this empowerment comes through the acquisition and use of cultural codes of power enacted in classrooms and reflective of the rules of the dominant culture … But, any kind of 'success' is defined solely on the terms of the dominant discourse, and any action outside those bounds as both aberrant and a failure on the part of the individual' (Thomas, 2014).



Lacan's University Discourse Schema:

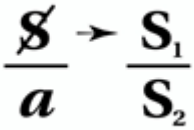
> Here, knowledge (S2) is built upon master messages (S1) which produces a desire in the student (a) to 'play the game' and produce a compromised individual ($).

Lacan (2007) describes the University discourse as a quarter turn that brings 'unnatural knowledge out of its primitive localization at the level of the slave into the dominant place, by virtue of having become pure knowledge of the master, ruled by his command' (p.104). The difficulty in following this idea lies in the concept of natural and unnatural knowledge. If we concede that unnatural knowledge is artificial knowledge that goes against nature, then it is man-made synthetic knowledge that is designed to control the masses. Although, it could equally mean that what has been used historically to subjugate the slave is ameliorated from unnatural to pure by its application to mass society through the institution, where the institution is a facade for the master. This demonstrates what is so intriguing about reading Lacan: he poses questions and problems, whilst avoiding fixed meanings and certainties. Lacan states that the problem with University discourse is that a 'subject has emerged … [but] … subject of what? A divided subject in any case' (p.148): the slipping nature of conceptualisation, what subject has emerged, and according to what parameters and conditions produce a division of the self that neither truly knows itself, nor abandons itself. Later in the thesis, I show how these ideas have interesting ramifications for English practice and its participants.

Hysteric Discourse

The word hysteric stems from hysteria and carries the social taboo of mental illness and disease. Coming from a psychiatric background as a practising analyst, Lacan's idea is primarily about placing the psychological neurosis / symptom in the foreground to address the master. However, it remains in thrall

to the master and can only express its objection to such signifiers (Bracher, 1994). Lacan's Hysteric discourse is concerned with the experiences and conflicting demands made of the alienated / divided subject. In this discourse, the master is questioned and authoritarian discourse is disrupted. Žižek (2006) describes how in this discourse, there can be a gap between performance and awareness of that performance: where intellectual protest is combined with practical compliance. Here, criticism becomes about questioning the established values and learning to be critically autonomous: enabling students to see and make connections demands not telling, but teaching the 'rules of the game' (Scholes, 1985). Fundamentally, understanding cultural codes is not enough for developing the Hysteric discourse; but to understand the attitude taken by such codes. In schools, there are many occasions when students demonstrate a disconnection between their sense of self and the expectations of the University imposition of self; such as finding something boring when the teacher finds it fascinating. This discourse places the subject as the agent who is subversive and gives voice to their sense of alienation / of being left out. Later, I hope to show through my data and analysis that English practice often invokes Hysteric discourse.



Lacan's Hysteric Discourse Schema:

Here the divided subject ($) uses their desires (a) to object to master messages (S1) which produces new alternative knowledge (S2).

Lacan (2007) asserts that the hysteric wants a master: 'she wants the other to be a master, and to know lots of things, but at the same time she doesn't want him to know so much that he does not believe she is the supreme price of all his knowledge. In other words, she wants a master she can reign over. She reigns

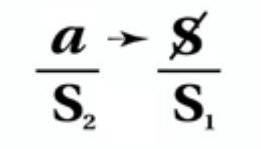
and he does not govern' (p.129). Applying these ideas to my study proved to be difficult. I struggled to see how Hysteric discourse is applicable to English teaching, except through the idea of dissatisfaction. However, after further thinking and reading, I began to consider that the master provides comfort for students and teacher; it provides a sense of reassurance that we are doing what we are supposed to and therefore fulfilling our given purpose. Yet, this is a fantasy, as the subject suppresses their desires and searches for a new master. This carries the opportunities and dangers of feeling split, but not always being able to articulate why. This split is useful when exploring how English pulls subjects in many directions.

Analyst Discourse

Finally, the Analyst discourse can be described as the enactment of the divided self to produce new master signifiers by the subject. In this discourse, knowledge is placed in the dock by psychoanalytic experience (Lacan, 1977) and asks students to 'critically consider how the world is presented to them and the ways they situate themselves within the world' (Thomas, 2014). In beginning with subject's desires (a), the Analyst discourse 'asks the individual to recognise that her own discourse is not fully within her control, but rather involves … an ethic of listening for the underlying truth of a message rather than its overt content, and in this way it is oppositional to authoritarian discourses, where overt content is reified and absolutized' (ibid).

It is most often seen as the most revolutionary, progressive and empowering form of discourse, as it sees the subject's desires and anxieties as important in the process of learning. Of course, in English education, examining repressed identities is something that the GCSE curriculum disavows. Many argue that the Analyst discourse, taken from the therapeutic function of psychoanalysis, should be a central part of educational practice. One may argue that it is in self-

reflective discourse where English becomes more idiosyncratic and personally affective in a way that seeks dissolution from master signifiers. Indeed, Thomas (2014) goes on to assert that Analyst discourse ‘actively works to empower students’ exposure of oppressive and dictatorial aspects of discursive structures … creating a new condition of knowledge … the art educator has no knowledge to give students other than analytic knowledge’.



Lacan’s Analyst Discourse Schema:

Here the subject’s desires (a) are underpinned by knowledge (S2), which addresses the divided self ($) to create new and alternative master messages (S1).

Lacan (2007) explains how the master is treated in Analyst discourse: 'the master in all this makes a small effort to make everything work, in other words, he gives an order. Simply by fulfilling his function as master he loses something' (p.107). This explains how the master is not dominant, but is at the end of the chain. Here, the desire is the agent, whilst the master is the loss. Lacan argues that the nature of Analytic discourse is to rebel against common sense: ‘this displacement that never ceases, is the very condition of analytic discourse’ (p.147). In rebelling against the status quo, new knowledge is created and the Master discourse becomes transformed. Fundamentally, this is ‘where the analyst positions himself … as the cause of desire … one that is validated by a practice … perhaps it is from the Analyst discourse that there can emerge another style of master signifier because S1 is the production’ (pp.152, 176).

Lacan's discourses not only contain four positions to see how language can structure the world, but also contains fixed positions within the schema of the speaker (agent or master) in the top left; the other (slave / to whom the discourse is addressed) in the top right; the truth (which is often repressed or

hidden) in the bottom left, and production (what is created by the interpellation by dominant factors of a discourse) in the bottom right.

To simplify, allow me to use an example. Imagine an English teacher is teaching a classic poem to students to demonstrate the quality of the poet and teach poetic appreciation. The teacher is the active dominant agent who is expounding the hidden master truth that quality literature is supposed to be obscure, difficult and forbidding. Indeed, it has been chosen as classic because of such qualities. The student is the receiver of messages in the classroom context and thus is the addressee of the discourse. By being interpellated with the idea that poetry is obscure, odd, hard and puzzling, the subject can produce a number of effects: a reinforcement that they are not clever or cultured enough to 'get it'; being put off by the ambiguity of the language; an affinity with the intellectual elite; the feeling that students have to like it because as Saclecl (1994) suggests: the great 'Other' wants it and this demand is good for you in ways you do not yet comprehend; or other effects that create types of subjectivized selves. Furthermore, Salecl also asserts that instruction is the goal of education and any morality or personality forming effects are by products. Such a view suggests that successful teaching is a happy accident that cannot be directly linked back to one factor or a single theory of instruction. Such views are contrary to the medicinal approach of education that the official discourses of English seem to be returning to.

So, Lacan's theory of 'Four Discourses' represents four different ways of knowing and thinking about how discourse works:

> The discourses in question are nothing other than the signifying articulation, the apparatus whose presence, where existing status alone dominates and governs anything that at any given moment is capable of emerging as speech.
>
> (Lacan, 2007, p.166)

So, why am I using Lacan? Bracher (1994) suggests that Lacan offers a ‘rigorously dialogical structure’ that allows us to see the forces that shape, categorise, define and subjectivise us and allows us to ‘intervene more effectively’. Also, the relevance to education is that Lacan’s schema helps us to see how ‘education works, and why it often doesn’t, at least not in the intended manner’ (p.127). Furthermore, Lacan’s schema of ‘Four Discourses’ allows me to look at classroom empirical evidence and find different ways to think about and challenge the practice of high school English by taking account of the Master discourse; to the institutional practices; to the divided self within education, and the challenging of received wisdom to create new master signifiers that contain the possibility of real change in education. As Bracher suggests, of all rhetorical theories, Lacan’s ‘Four Discourses’ offers the ‘means for explaining how a given text moves people’ (p.126). Lacan’s model is not merely a theory of ‘what’, but a dynamic theory of ‘how’ socio-linguistic interaction affects people and what can be done to address iniquities and inequities. Here is one such inequity.

One such inequity and iniquity identified amongst my colleagues in the first semi-structured interviews was that of the same examination for all abilities of student. Colleagues commented that the same texts of 'The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde', 'An Inspector Calls' and 'Macbeth' with the same examination question for all pupils are problematic. The concern is that students who are engaging with the texts on a very intellectual level with a passion for reading cannot be served by the same examination as pupils who are demonstrating their functional capabilities to pass an exam at sixteen years old and avoid resitting the course the following year. However, this view is problematic too: is this view also responsible for a lack of equality having drawn the relevance of English to the level of academic ability, social capital and

intellectual fascination? As I will show, the realities of classroom experience suggest that teachers find this a difficult terrain to navigate.

4.3 'O Captain, My Captain!' - Lacanian Analysis in Action

In order to adequately explain my understanding of and use of Lacan's 'Four Discourses' in this research project, it seems necessary to explicate this, and I do so with an example analysis from the script of a popular film. Psychoanalysis seeks to problematize the core of why people do and say things: essentially to fully explore the complexity of life. In a famous scene from the classic film The Dead Poets' Society (1989), Todd Anderson and his classmates are challenged in a private boarding school in 1959 to tear up the status quo and to live deliberately by the inimitable English master Mr Keating (poignantly played by the late Robin Williams). The scene is interesting in that it provides an insight into two very different views of English teaching: a traditional University discourse approach and a maverick hybrid of Hysteric and Analytical discourse.

In Mr Keating's first full English class, the following scene occurs:

> *KEATING: Gentlemen, open your text to page twenty-one of the introduction. Mr. Perry, will you read the opening paragraph of the preface, entitled "Understanding Poetry"?*
>
> *NEIL: [Reading] Understanding Poetry, by Dr. J. Evans Pritchard, Ph.D. To fully understand poetry, we must first be fluent with its meter, rhyme, and figures of speech. Then ask two questions: one, how artfully has the objective of the poem been rendered, and two, how important is that objective. Question one rates the poem's perfection; question two rates its importance. And once these questions have been answered, determining a poem's greatness becomes a relatively simple matter. If the poem's score for perfection is plotted along the horizontal of a graph,*

and its importance is plotted on the vertical, then calculating the total area of the poem yields the measure of its greatness. A sonnet by Byron may score high on the vertical, but only average on the horizontal. A Shakespearean sonnet, on the other hand, would score high both horizontally and vertically, yielding a massive total area, thereby revealing the poem to be truly great. As you proceed through the poetry in this book, practice this rating method. As your ability to evaluate poems in this matter grows, so will - so will your enjoyment and understanding of poetry.

[Pause]

KEATING: … Excrement. That's what I think of Mr. J. Evans Pritchard. We're not laying pipe, we're talking about poetry. I mean, how can you describe poetry like American Bandstand? I like Byron, I give him a 42, but I can't dance to it. Now I want you to rip out that page. Go on, rip out the entire page. You heard me, rip it out. Rip it out!

[Mr McAllister is not impressed as he comes into the room]

KEATING: Keep ripping gentlemen. This is a battle, a war. And the casualties could be your hearts and souls. Thank you Mr. Dalton. Armies of academics going forward; measuring poetry! No, we will not have that here. No more of Mr. J. Evans Pritchard. Now in my class you will learn to think for yourselves again. You will learn to savour words and language. No matter what anybody tells you, words and ideas can change the world. I see that look in Mr. Pitt's eye, like nineteenth century literature has nothing to do with going to business school or medical school. Right? Maybe. Mr. Hopkins, you may agree with him, thinking "Yes, we should simply study our Mr. Pritchard and learn our rhyme and

meter and go quietly about the business of achieving other ambitions." I have a little secret for ya. Huddle up. Huddle up!

We don't read and write poetry because it's cute. We read and write poetry because we are members of the human race. And the human race is filled with passion. Medicine, law, business, engineering, these are all noble pursuits, and necessary to sustain life. But poetry, beauty, romance, love, these are what we stay alive for … That the powerful play goes on and you may contribute a verse. What will your verse be …?

For me, the unfettered joy of this scene lies in its emancipatory intent: Keating believes that students need to be released from prevailing discourse. In applying Lacan's 'Four Discourses' theory to this episode, many interesting ideas can be raised: psychoanalysis lets us see things that may appear as given or hidden. The Dr Pritchard article shows how perfection and importance are the intended Master discourses; a reproduced and handed down imperialistic force of compliance that is despotically dismissive of any individual response. This knowledge claims an assumed dominance that represses the individual and reduces education to something to be digested, assimilated to and reproduced: a pass the parcel of knowledge that is never unwrapped. For Lacan, these master signifiers are identified with death and castration in that they cut and limit the subject's individuality. The scene lampoons such knowledge through the highly problematic assertions made: 'A Shakespearean sonnet … truly great … greatness becomes a relatively simple matter'. Ostensibly, reducing something as complex and ambiguous as poetry to a positivist view of graph plotting shows the University discourse at work and its attempts to measure, quantify, and categorise.

The discourse of the University can be summarised as the 'system', where bureaucracy and impersonal knowledge force us to produce ourselves as alienated and disenfranchised subjects. Therefore, to be successful, pass

school and get on, one is forced to ‘simply study our Mr Pritchard and learn our rhyme and meter’. This submission to power for the purposes of delayed gratification turns subjects into avatars of the Master discourse (Bracher, 1994). Perhaps the most problematic line in the whole of this scene is the idea that pleasure is linked to submission: ‘as your ability to evaluate … so will your enjoyment’. Ergo, pleasure comes from submitting and acquiescing to external power. The object of desire according to Lacan is that part of a subject’s being that is left out and produced by a predetermined identity for the subject. Seeing students as objects that must be taught what to desire to conform to the system is highly problematic for Keating, as it should be for all educationalists.

Keating’s philosophy could be seen as a maverick hybrid of Hysteric and Analytical discourse. The character denounces the University avatar and the Master as ‘excrement’, even in front of his superior Mr McAllister whose arrival is an attempt to bring the divided self to dominant conformity. Lacan’s Hysteric discourse places the divided subject as the primary agent where the enforced subjectivities are faded to make room for the fringes. However, we must notice that Keating does not destroy Master and University discourses: the boys will have to pass the course. Instead, Keating sees the value of anti-productive activity, over the capitalist need to reproduce the status quo: ‘learn to think for yourselves again … poetry, beauty, romance, love, these are what we stay alive for … what will your verse be?’ Lacan’s theory of Analyst discourse gives primacy to the object of desire and would see a teacher as countering tyranny by employing an ethical treatment of individual responses. Lacan (2007) describes this discourse as ‘shifting gears’ where a subject seeks to separate themselves from oppressive master signifiers. In this discourse, new knowledge is produced: new master signifiers. In this case, Keating seeks to encourage students to create new master signifiers of the soul, heart and passion of poetry over the transactional system of the existing Master and University discourses. By using Lacan to examine interview responses and classroom data, I intend to offer insights into the hidden aspects of English classroom practice.

Finally on The Dead Poets' Society, most of the students in his class grow to love Keating and demonstrate an act of affection for 'Captain, my Captain' at the conclusion of the film when Keating is fired. However, not all of them do. There are students in Keating's class who are too afraid to follow the Hysteric and Analyst discourses, preferring instead to stay within the game of University and Master discourse to protect their future employability and remove the threat of expulsion or the withholding of their future. These students are unable to connect with these alternative views and instead choose to re-identify with the traditional signifiers. However, the genie is out of the bottle and the students have an alternative frame with which to think. Life will not be the same for them. Perhaps one purpose of the film is not only to demonstrate how traditional power structures aim to protect their mastery through control, but also how education should be seen as the 'lighting of a fire and not the filling of a pail' (Plutarch 50-120 AD).[21]

4.4 Subjects and Subjectivity

As previously touched upon, what constitutes a school 'subject' and its 'subjects' are deeply problematic contestations. Brown (2016) in discussing the school discipline of Maths suggests that 'a sense of where Mathematics is located is never finally resolved … has it been delivered to me as if it is a product to be brought to me by a supermarket van?' (p.78). In his critique of curriculum as delivery and acquisition, Brown asks important questions regarding a subject's epistemology. Furthermore, Brown refers to the frames of reference for a subject where 'social practices' define the content and context. Similarly, English is partially defined by social practices of writing to argue, being persuasive, being culturally privileged, or using standard-English.

[21] Apocryphally attributed to W B Yeats 1865-1939.

However, the Lacanian idea of ‘holes in discourse’; suggests that what we see as common sense can be seen as deficiency.

Similarly, Habermas’ (1972) ‘systematically distorted communication’ theory demonstrates how versions of common sense should be resisted as power over subservient groups by dominant ideologies. Indeed, Lacan warns us to be ‘wary of the image’ as it is always distorted by and for contextual discourses. However, rather than just writing a thesis on exploring the nature of ‘subject’ and ‘subjects’ through analysing the discourses, I wish to present something more radical and contemporary. Emerging and divergent theories of what English is leads to a nexus of conjunctions. These localities and their complexities perhaps provide some explanation of how and why English as a discipline is so contested and definitions so multiplicitous. For students who experience school English, their understandings are co-created by the system’s expectations, institutional decisions, individual teacher methodologies and a student’s own individual experiences. This co-creation can be explored as a discourse, with questions being asked to understand how subjects are interpellated within it and by it. This produces splits of identity and purpose.

Brown (2017) shows how Lacanian theory ‘portrays a split subject, divided’ between what they do and what they say they are doing. (p.50) Brown explores the ‘schizophrenic’ subject positions that people are placed into by their involvement in and with discourses. This is linked by Brown to Lacan’s (2007) conception of language using us, rather than us using it (p.66). In being used by language, it suggests that we are not the arbiters of language, nor even architects, but signifiers used by the sign. In considering my own divisions as I struggled with Lacan and applying his theories, I noticed that my division had moved from a feeling of lack of cultural knowledge when I was younger to a conscious attempt to resist Master discourses within, whilst maintaining and valorising them in my professional actions and language. Murray (2016) succinctly captures the challenge of this thesis: to account for complexity whilst aiming for clarity: ‘[t]o treat Lacan as split … is thus to treat him as simple and

complex at the same time' (p.14). Murray also describes how Lacan's work is 'fragmented, ambiguous and contradictory' (p.30). The dense and difficult nature of Lacan's work is described as taking on 'the appearance of surrealist performances' (p.67). Ergo, they have rational parts but are blended to make them strange and alienating.

In building a more analytical account of my understanding of subjectivity, it is important to note that one of the central tenets of Lacan's theory on subjectivity is that the subject is 'elusive … layered, subtle and complex' (Bailly, 2009, p.28). With such a slippery and unknowable conceptualisation, it seems reasonable to discuss subjectivity in terms of what can be discovered about it both personally as a researcher and by analysing the writing and speech of students and staff colleagues to discover more about the full complexities of how such subjectivities are created. Bailly (2009) writes about how Lacan believes in the schismatic element of identity creation: you separate the 'subject' from itself into an 'object' that can be studied (as in a reflection). Such an 'alienating experience' (p.30) is necessary to begin to understand what I am and what others see of me. This is one reason for the methodological decision of writing a narrative journal entry every week: to attempt to capture an evolving auto-ethnography of my changing understanding of subject and subjects through reading, writing, observation and data collection. In support of this, Roseboro (2008) argues that 'narratives can serve as metaphors for lived experience, as a way to understand that which we may not be able to personally claim' (p.43).

One danger here is that as Lacan has argued: 'human beings are very largely oblivious of their own Subject' and that an understanding of subjective truth can allow 'the objective 'me' and the subjective 'I' [to be] … united' (Bailly, 2009, p.34). Following the concepts of Saussurian linguistics, Lacan views the subject as being created by signifiers, not in charge of them. Just like language, human

identity is unstable and is the sum of its parts, not the holder of them. Of course, there are oppositions to this notion of the subject.

Concomitantly, Rabinow (1984) argues that 'subject' has two meanings: to 'subject someone else by control and dependence, and [to be] tied down to his own identity by a conscience or a self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to' (p.21). The tension here then is that Lacanian theory might argue that the subject is far more unstable and always in state of representation (Roseboro, 2008) than this Foucauldian normalisation notion and that there is more autonomy than being trapped in a 'web of objective codification' (Rabinow, 1984, p.22). It is useful to consider Lacan's three realms of knowing reality: symbolic, real and the imaginary. It is vital to understand that the Lacanian subject is always temporal and connected in complex ways to the realm of the imaginary (the self), the real (the unspeakable) and the symbolic (language). The real is the unspeakable that cannot be captured by language; the symbolic is what is represented by discourse through language, and the imaginary is one's understanding of own self. Therefore, we can see how everything, whether it be teaching, understanding or questioning are all products of representation. As MacCabe (1974) claims: 'The unconscious is that effect of language which escapes the conscious subject in the distance between the act of signification in which the subject passes from signifier to signifier and what is signified in which the subject finds himself in place as, for example, the pronoun 'I'' (p.64).

A further Lacanian theory useful to the research project is the concept of the 'mirror stage', where, in human development, the child recognises itself as separate from the mother figure and so experiences a loss of joint identity and gains the first understanding of separation and independence. Roseboro (2008) argues that Lacan's mirror stage sees self-identity in relation to other people and objects. Therefore, the subject is contextually bound in its self-concept, identification and concept of the other by discursive practices. Consequently, it is never complete but always being re-presented. Such an idea can be related

to the role of Lacan's University discourse. The University discourse is characterised by what needs to be known to produce systematic knowledge in a regulated system such as school. School subjects and the conceptions that create and enact them are all based on ideological decisions in determining what needs to be known; what is of value and what knowledge will gain the qualification prizes on offer. In this way, as English is enacted in classrooms, the teacher's gaze can be seen as a mirror for the child that permits them through learned experience to identify themselves as being proficient, mediocre or deficient at English. Lacan explains this as a reattachment process where children may project an old fear to a new context as they struggle to represent and re-construct their identity. Thus, past doubts over ability, cultural capital or experience of English may manifest itself in lacking confidence in English. The pressure to 'enjoy' English and find 'pleasure' in reading through the new curriculum adds further complexities to the notion of subject and its relation to an object like literature. In applying Lacanian concepts here, there is a fruitful discussion with many consequences for the subject of English and its holding of subjects.

4.5 The Century of the Self

An important idea in the concept of the subject is the unconscious. In terms of English, we might have returned to the days of the Newbolt report in essence, but the self and its conception has undergone profound development and change during the last century. The seminal BBC documentary 'The Century of the Self' takes an interesting look at how psychoanalytical theory has shaped conceptions of the self and subjectivity throughout the twentieth century. Beginning with Edward Bernays' methods to hook into the unconscious desires of the masses to control their primitive forces and render them docile; to the principle of 'engineering of consent' (where product desire makes the self a consumer), the programme shows how the self can be manipulated to choose what the elite want the public to choose. Such a theory proposes that values

need to be internalised so that the subject is stable and shares a common identity.

This idea could be linked to the concepts of British values, employability and culture in English education: where educational policy aims at a common identity to preserve, conserve, and stabilise educational agendas in the public consciousness. By the 1960s, it was recognised that the new self was not behaving like a predictable consumer. Similarly, it could be argued that educational discourse does not allow for individual experience, although teachers try to identify what drives students and what they want in order to understand them and create a way to join the separate lines of desires and drives.

4.6 Summary

In summarising the 'Four Discourses' of Lacan and the debates around subjectivity, my purpose was to set the scene for the analysis to come in part two of the thesis. In outlining Lacan's main theories and how they relate to English education, part two will build on this knowledge to show how the data that I have collected and selected can be illuminated by Lacan's theories. Next, part two of the thesis considers some of the major themes and issues that my data suggested with analytical discussion.

Part 2 – Subject and Subjectivity

Chapter 5 – Teaching and Researching English Education

5.1 Introduction

Whilst the collection of data at the points outlined was quite straightforward, the analysis of the data and the decisions about what to include and exclude was much more problematic. Firstly, the main problem was the issue of me being a participant in the research. Participant research data may be relatively simple to collect, but the themes, ideas, and accounting for the self as a researcher required a lot of consideration.

The practical issues with teaching and researching as a joint endeavour can mean that the researcher conflates the emergent themes of the data with their own prejudices and views. In order to ameliorate this, I conducted some preparatory research by presenting my analysis of the first 100-word data point with my four colleague research participants.

To recap the research methods, I conducted:

- Semi-structured interviews with my four colleagues on three occasions over the course of the year.

- Group semi-structured interviews of 10 students at a time three times over the research cycle: this meant that I conducted nine semi-structured interviews with students.
- Students and my four colleagues wrote 100-words every half-term (six occasions over the year) as a narrative account of their experiences of high school English as the new GCSE course was taught for the first time.
- Recordings of my weekly observations in my learning journal that included thoughts and ideas about experiences in and out of the classroom.

5.2 Designing the Research Project

Following the first data point of conducting semi-structured interviews and collecting the 100-words of data from students and four colleagues, I realised something. I realised that to make analytical sense of the data I was collecting and writing in my own narrative journal, I needed to allow the issues to emerge from the data, and not transpose my early ideas onto the remaining data to be collected. By standing back and allowing the research process to breathe, I could then make sense of it at key points.

A clear challenge with this data collection was the unsaid pressure for students to say what they think a teacher wants to hear. Participants can often be unsure of the dual identity of a teacher researcher and this can cause complications. It was important not to assume or discount student understandings, as references to discourse may manifest themselves very differently for each participant, particularly for students as opposed to teachers. It took several reminders that students and colleagues were allowed to give their views and responses in confidence and that nothing they say would be reported to anyone else, let alone members of the school's senior leadership team, to open the dialogue.

This was especially difficult as I am a member of the school's senior leadership team. However, I did see that responses became more honest and personal as I was able to demonstrate that I was keeping my word. Framing the research project to participants as the research being about my learning and understanding definitely helped with these early issues.

5.3 Collecting and Selecting Data

Collecting the data presented significant challenges, including giving students the necessary time and thinking space to reflect.

I used a dictaphone device to record the semi-structured interviews and transcribed them before allowing my participants to see the transcriptions for checking and approval. To aid with this, recordings were made available to cross-reference the transcriptions. I wanted to ensure that I was not seeking opportunities to tell a preconceived story, and ensure that any pauses or emphasis were accurately transcribed. Also, I ensured that student 100-word accounts were anonymous and that I would be looking at their views to help me to understand the issues and therefore become a more responsive and informed practitioner.

Also, I found it difficult to avoid a descriptive mode in my own narrative journal, as I didn't always have the necessary knowledge or insight at the time to make sense of what I had collected. My emerging understanding and further reading of Lacan's 'Four Discourses' took place concurrently to collecting research data. Therefore, this meant that I had to have periods of gestation to allow me to come back to data and see it through more informed and analytically developed eyes.

It is necessary to explain why I have included and excluded the data that I have collected. Although I collected a significant amount of data, I was aware of the

need to use the data to say something about how English works in its various guises and what it does to its participants. I wanted to develop my understanding of the practice of English and how Lacan's 'Four Discourses' could help me to see the issues in a fresh and intellectually stimulating light. It became necessary to see the data in terms of suggestive themes.

This kind of focus necessitated coding the data into themes that could be analysed and provide scope for further reading and analysis. I am aware that selecting themes and selecting the data to best explicate the debate of such themes carries dangers. Dangers such as: conflating evidence; misrepresenting participant views, and looking for convenient issues had to be resisted. However, it was necessary to find patterns and themes to present findings for discussion and analysis, but they had to be verified with participants in a validation meeting that consisted of my four colleagues and ten students out of the thirty who participated and were invited. The ten students were selected to represent the diversity of the class across gender, ethnicity, ability, and socio-economic background. Although, I am aware that such selection is also not without its problems. Participants listened to the major themes that I had selected from the data and were able to challenge and ask questions. This led to me re-categorising my themes and beginning the analysis again.

In selecting data from some of the semi-structured interviews, 100-word accounts, and my own journal, but not other data, I had to ensure that it was representative. Therefore, the inclusion of data and categories in the chapter that follows present the best examples I have of recurrent phenomena in my data and should not be seen as isolated incidents. In some sections of the data, I have used a meta-narrative where I use a number of different participant student accounts to bring together themes from the data.

5.4 Summary

In this chapter I have endeavoured to outline what I did to collect the data and how I tried to ameliorate the dangers that are present in participant research. In writing the next chapter I was aware of the need to perform three functions: to demonstrate empirical data as evidence of English classroom practice; to show my emerging understanding of the field, and to use Lacan's 'Four Discourses' to analyse the subjectivity issues within English practice.

Chapter 6 – Findings of English Subject and Subjectivities

6.1 Introduction

To aid the reader's understanding, I have selected themes and issues that were suggested by the data. Such an approach allowed me to relate the empirical evidence with Lacanian theory to analyse and discuss the data. Lacanian theory can help to frame the story of how we are affected by implementation of new the GCSE English course and how people respond to new practices. Thus, I draw upon Lacanian discourse theory to make sense of the data and build an analytical apparatus around it. To explicate my analysis and discussion of what holds the 'subject' of English in place and analyse how it crates 'subjects' within it, I have used themes.

To summarise key issues raised in the data, I have highlighted the following:

- The misfiring canon: the impact of text choice in GCSE English
- English as employability and standards: functional aspects of English
- Enjoyment, pleasure and jouissance: enjoyment in English
- The 'other': how English can include and exclude
- English as 'marvellous medicine': English as a cure

- Britishness and national values: English as cultural imperative

Each theme is explored in relation to data and Lacan's 'Four Discourse' theory.

6.2 The Misfiring Canon

One major theme that was pronounced in my collected data was that of text choice in GCSE English. The 'canon' of English literature refers to a mark of quality and tradition that has been the centre of much debate since its original inception by the poet Alexander Pope (1688-1744): the original canon contained expected authors such as Shakespeare and Chaucer. Which texts should be selected for study is often an area of contention. The British government have made dramatic changes recently to the list of approved texts to be studied in GCSE and these were outlined in the 2016 white paper. As an example of Master discourse, the government white paper of 2016 presents many challenges to schools. Of most relevance to the subject of English are the following points:

> The new national curriculum is forward-looking while equipping children with core knowledge about the best that has been thought and written – balancing three Shakespeare plays and the study of a broad sweep of British history… We have set a new gold standard for reformed GCSEs, which will be more academically demanding … A 21st century education also promotes integration so that young people can play their part in our society. Schools and other education providers have an important role to play in promoting the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual tolerance and respect of those with different faiths and beliefs, while developing the knowledge, critical thinking and character traits that enable pupils to identify and challenge extremist views.

(DFE, 2016)

In presenting the English curriculum as ‘the best that has been thought and written’, there is a tension as the subject of English is often characterised as a challenger to established views: students are actively encouraged to think in ways that challenge the status quo. This can result in an uneasy relationship between the coronation of iconic literature / values and the rebellious critique of the values and issues that the texts explore and how they relate to students’ own lives.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to engage in a full discussion of what makes for quality literature, or literature, as opposed to popular fiction. However, the issues surrounding the debate are worth some consideration given that they form a significant basis for the epistemology of English and were a key feature of data from student and colleague participants. Many students expressed the view in the first 100-word data collection that the choice of literature is often too old and irrelevant to them and their lives.

What makes something literary and non-literary? Pop fiction could be considered non-literary and can be seen as something that gives pleasure without improving the mind; provides escapism, is crafted in familiar genre conventions and simplifies complex issues. The canon (a word originally used to describe major bible passages) of English literature has its origins in the notion of the authentic / official / orthodox and having lasting literary value. The 18th Century poet Alexander Pope is credited with establishing one of the first canons, which naturally exclude as much as they include. Traditionally, being European, male, white and dead is a requirement to be considered for the canon. Many find this notion to be imperialistic. Harold Bloom (1994) argues that what qualifies as having literary value must have strangeness (being odd and difficult), depth, be personally challenging in nature, have difficulty and complexity. Therefore, what Bloom considers literary is something that expands

the consciousness of the reader. Consequently, it is possible to be popular and canonical but there are severe tensions between popularism and the canon. Stephen King (whose work is disliked by Bloom) captures the problematic nature of literary value and 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder' taste in his forward to Night Shift (1978):

> Writing is a catch-as-catch-can sort of occupation. All of us seem to come equipped with filters on the floors of our minds, and all the filters having different sizes and meshes. What catches in my filter may run right through yours. What catches yours may pass through mine, no sweat. (Foreword to '*The Night Shift')*

This debate of what literary texts are studied is a key issue in what holds English in place as a school subject. Many have strong opinions on what should be studied and these are often based in the prejudices / self-reference of their own experiences. One of my colleagues noted that parental views of what should be studied in the subject are regularly shared in an attempt to influence curriculum decisions. Nonetheless, it is clear that the new curriculum has removed some of the most popular and traditional GCSE literary texts. In seeking to narrow the text choice to the realm of white, male, Victorian, and dead, the new curriculum seems to have a disturbing effect. During the second 100-word data collection point with students, many students expressed the same sentiment as the following student: 'I loved reading when I was a kid. I still like it now. But, I find Dickens, Keats and all that to be really really dull. We don't do anything modern anymore.' If we look at this through the lens of Lacan's discourses, student objections suggest a lack of relevance to their own lived experience. It seems that the intention to reconnect students with culture may not be doing that, but instead alienating students into seeing the text as the other that they are to meant to desire, but struggle to engage with on anything other than compulsion. Here we can see how school students are shaped by the expectations that are placed upon them. In seeing English as tradition and

cultural reproduction, we can see how policy promotes a limited brief for English as a subject. What is most striking is that many students see a subject that I think of as dynamic and edgy, as irrelevant, dusty, and non-progressive.

The new English Curriculum focusses on literature as its prime method of examination text, (even the English Language draft papers include extracts from Daphne du Maurier's Rebecca, 1938). There is an emphasis on classic literature and studying substantial whole texts in detail, from: Shakespeare; 19th century novel; selection of poetry since 1789, including Romantic poetry, and fiction or drama from the British Isles from 1914 onwards. Such a new curriculum demands a reframing of how the subject is enacted and taught. The greater difficulty, wider range but narrower representation of texts in the new specifications, means that close-focus sentence level teaching will be insufficient. Students will need to infer or deduce reasonable meanings when faced with unfamiliar words; recognise the layered effects of figurative language; perceive tonal effects like irony, exaggeration, innuendo, and humour. Arguably, this is what the curriculum should be assessing, but it is in opposition to the previous examinations where non-fiction texts tested understanding rather than analysis of form and structure. In part, this thesis is concerned with how the boundaries and limits of this new curriculum can be tested and explored to reimagine the subject of English and assert its relevance for pupils outside of obedience to Master discourse.

To summarise, many students showed antipathy towards traditional canonical texts suggesting that they feel 'irrelevant' and 'remote'. In doing so they expressed preferment for modern literature that was less traditional but 'more relevant' and 'more enjoyable'. Students were particularly concerned about a perceived 'obsession' in the curriculum with 'Victorian and Edwardian eras' and a concern that Shakespeare is a perennial and is 'wearisome'. Do students always know what is good for them or what is beneficial for their historical knowledge and cultural development? There is a danger that they are reporting

a desire to repeat what they feel comfortable with regarding texts that may not have the demands of canonical literature. However, many students who profess themselves as avid readers expressed antipathy for set texts, denouncing them as 'not pleasurable at all'. Perhaps this is partly a problem of representation: they do not see their concerns or views represented. As a slight aside, it does seem ironic that the Victorian era (named after the reign of the female monarch of 63 years and 7 months) was an age that took little account of the rights, voice or struggles of femininity, compared to contemporary society.

By stating that students must learn to recite poetry, no doubt the government believe they are giving students cultural capital. Concomitantly, perhaps Lacan would see the new requirement for year 7 (aged 11) students to rote learn Romantic poetry as a manipulation of desire: they must see this as a desired end in itself. Such traditional text choice that presents a narrow view of life, culture, and philosophy is defended as the guardian of culture by government policy. However, here can be seen how the intention and the effect appear to be rather misaligned and contradictory.

To tie these thoughts together with my research method, Webster and Mertova (2007) see narrative inquiry as an ‘event driven tool of research’, where a ‘critical event is almost always a change experience’ (pp. 71, 75). Such experiences often involve a clash or traumatic component that redefines and reimagines held theories about practice: in this case, the canon. For example, the following data demonstrates an attempt to record my experience of teaching Victorian literature for a test. Here my experience and ideals encounter a difficult clash:

> *Teaching ‘The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde’ has been particularly challenging this week. Although only a short text (novella), the text has proven to be too difficult for many students. I am trying to unlock the text, show its relevance, and get students excited about its*

philosophical concerns. However, I find myself constantly reducing the text to simple and fairly dull precepts. In seeking to hook children into Victorian concerns, I am finding that to enable students to understand it, I have to strip the text of any context and address its Victorian inception as a side show for them to get marks on context. They have a test next week and we are rote learning quotations with answers that students are dutifully learning off by heart. I don't know if I would go as far as calling this experience traumatic, but it is very disturbing to me that texts that say something challenging and wonderful about the mystery of humanity should be squashed into rote learning quotations and explanations that are devoid of any personal understanding. Currently, I am wondering whether I am doing this because I feel compelled to or whether I am being paranoid about how much work students might not do before the test. The test anxiety feels like it is all on me as a teacher. I asked the students how many of them had enjoyed or found the text interesting at the end of today's lesson. An unscientific method, yes, but the straw poll revealed that only 2 out of 32 were positive about the text. I attribute this to the way it had been taught for assessment. But does it have to be?

(February 2016)

Here, the anxieties are my own as I struggle to square the difficulty and remoteness of the book's style with the fascination of its themes for students. A double problem exists here: the issues around the canon of literature and the enactment of practice to teach the material of that canon. As an interesting aside, the faculty at my school have now decided to change from Jekyll and Hyde to Dickens' 'A Christmas Carol' (1843). Although Dickens' novella is still dense in style (typical of the period), the plot is more familiar to students and in the words of a member of staff 'there are more film versions of it.' Here, the University discourse enacts the Master through Hysteric means producing split subjects that are obedient, but looking for the line of least resistance. It seems

unlikely that this is what the curriculum was designed to do, yet the split subject has to try and square the conflicts.

6.3 English as Employability and Standards

Over the course of the year I chose six points to ask students what they think English is and what it is for. Significantly, I found that one of the key concepts that holds English in place for students was one of employment and economic function. Responses such as: 'I need it to get a job ... Employers are looking for it ... Employers on the news moan about young people having poor literacy' were common to most responses. Granted, the skills of a workforce can be linked to the economic success of a business and nation. However, to only see the function of high school English as the production of economic worth and global competition appears to be very reductive. What is evident, rather unsurprisingly is that the Master discourse, transmitted through the University / institution / school discourse is succeeding perfectly. In many ways it is contributing to what Bailly (2009) refers to as the 'castratedness of the subject': that is what the student is desiring is not really being offered, but is deferred into an uncertain temporal space. Such a discourse seems very much in charge of how English is held as a subject by subjects. [22]

As McMahon (1997) argues: 'the regime of the signifiers (S1) certainly empowers students within academic fields, particularly successful students, but the signifier (S1) can also be used to keep students in their places … [involving] an initiation though pain that thereby 'civilises' the desires of the student who

[22] Thomas (2014) states that there is '[n]o place for the desires of the subject, or the individual's unconsciousness … no room for subjects to act in any way other than to use the signifiers made available to them by the system to continually reproduce the system' (p.52). Thus, there is no escape, only reproduction of the status quo: a very closed and narrow trap.

would otherwise remain feral' (p.7). Nowhere was this felt more painfully than in one journal entry of mine in which I reported my despair:

> *I am teaching them to pass an exam. I don't feel I am teaching them English. What we're doing will get them some credit for the next stage of education which is important, but there is very little love or inspiration in what I am doing with these students. Actually, I feel pretty hopeless about what I am doing and why I am doing it. Orwell might see the current practice of English as a kind of brainwashing.*
>
> (Journal Entry – April 2016)

Here I report being caught by the fantasy of what others expect of me versus what I expect of myself and how competing pressures give power only to Master and University discourse, which ultimately holds the rewards of high school English. This concept of 'transference' (Britzman, 2009) suggests that the fantasy places the individual in thrall to the Master. In other words, the subject of English can be seen as a control tool to ensure student acquiescence. A deeper struggle that I have with this theory though is that it also applies to me. What I am to others and what they expect of me is fascinatingly complex. If I am expected to shape students in such a way that they dutifully pass their exam and leave, then it is very successful. But, if I am expected to encourage students to think for themselves, be autonomous, be independent, then the success is very limited indeed. If other stakeholders see the English teacher as the one who teaches conformity, then this presents a disturbing epistemology.

Interestingly, a more unusual perspective was offered by one respondent, who suggested that the purpose of English was to 'help our writing to be sufficient'. If we consider the word 'sufficient' to mean good enough: then good enough for what, whom, when, where and why? Lacan might argue that the University discourse is keeping the Master alive and well here. Other students saw the

purpose of English as something less helpful and more indulgent: 'pedantic expanding on single words ... over-analysing language is useless ... to give you a cutting edge'. Seeing English as a gratuitous intellectual show-boating perhaps gives English its most negative image, where some people who share a cultural interest seek to micro-analyse in a way that turns many students off. This links in to what Bailly (2009) refers to as the 'institution perpetuating its fantasy of itself – in maintaining, brightly polished, its master signifiers'(p.159). Therefore, Lacanian theory might suggest that institutions do not only echo the voice of the Master, they also repackage and represent discourses that make themselves seem venerable and special. Returning to McMahon (1997), the University discourse 'demand[s] that students empower themselves by learning certain techniques of knowledge production … [the] University [discourse] demands that time must not be wasted' (p.9). Here English teaching can be seen a 'disciplinary pressure' where fantasy and desire are ignored, and that can lead to disenfranchisement with English education and even student / teacher cynicism of the English teacher's motives and practices (Filipi, 2011).

The idea of English being indulgent and pedantic was balanced by other responses in the final 100-word data set that suggested the purpose of English is merely to 'prepare for an exam and cause students stress'. This performative function was very present in the students' concerns. Most responses identified stress as the main issue with the new no coursework GCSE English curriculum: 'demoralising, harder ... frustrating ... everything relies on it'. Many concerns were raised regarding how the new curriculum is to be enacted: the new confusing grading scheme; the lack of information regarding grading examples; much more challenging due to no tiering; the challenge for EAL[23] and the feeling that the difficulty of extracts can make the subject inaccessible and demoralise student confidence.

[23] EAL refers to students for whom English is an Additional Language. Such students are bilingual and do not speak English as their first language at home or have only recently arrived in the UK and need support to access the curriculum.

In applying Lacanian theory, it is possible to see how the Master discourse conducts a marionette show of subjects: where a ‘power / structure decides what is true, S1 is given primacy and the divided self ($) retreats beneath this power / structure … the purpose is the reproduction of culture, knowledge and society (S2) against the objet a’ (Filipi, 2011). Such imperatives can feel like a paradoxical conflict and my four English teacher participants all reported in semi-interviews how disheartening they found teaching the new curriculum as opposed to their desire to teach the enjoyment and empowerment of English as a subject. Again, such pressures are difficult to square when faced with the puppeteering Master discourse and the marionette University discourse: ‘as jouissance builds up, pleasure decreases, in order for enjoyment to be, it must be used, otherwise it creates pain’ (ibid). There seems to be something rather perverse in being told that we have to enjoy something that demands conformity and the disavowal of the personal; what should be a personal choice becomes a necessity and a forced expectation.

During interviews and narrative accounts, the primary purpose of English was seen by teachers and students to pass an exam and to get a job. My teaching colleague expressed ideals of helping students to personally engage with the world and debate issues such as racism, culture and society. However, a tension was recognised in this: that the new system prevents a full link up of issues through history, as a little bit of context is all that is allowed and it can feel like a bolt on. Furthermore, the new syllabus is seen as being skewed towards middle-class students who already possess significant cultural capital. Again, the issue of student morale was raised with an example cited of lower ability students who are desperate to do well, but feel ‘gutted’ by their grade and it can be hard to keep them motivated if they feel like giving up.

Lacan’s concept of the divided subject ($) offers an interesting alternative analysis here. It could be argued that the divided subject is not a natural

phenomenon in human subjectivity, but that English education seeks to put the split in to students by giving a series of mixed messages: you must conform to speech acts, conventions, rules, laws and habits … but you must also retain the creative individuality and idiosyncrasies that will enable you to write creative pieces in exam conditions. McMahon (1997) argues that the University's solution to troublesome or non-conformist behaviours is to 'nurture the hysteric back to quiet … productivity'. The Hysterical discourse offers the 'primacy of the divided self ($) over ultimate desire (a). Hysteria violates textual and disciplinary codes, rules, conventions, modes of production' (Filipi, 2011). Perhaps this clash between discourses in English education is most pertinently illuminated through the demand for enjoyment in the new English curriculum.

6.4 Enjoyment, Pleasure and Jouissance

As an English teacher, I approach the subject from the viewpoint of enjoyment and engagement. Personally, the idea of reading worthy books that have literary and cultural merit is hard to resist. Most English degree courses chart the development of the canon of English literature, as well as the discontents of that canon. However, school based English lives very much within a canon of value that represent a quality of style and substance that is considered a standard for studying the subject. Recent government initiatives and Ofsted requirements have centred upon the extent to which schools encourage, promote and measure 'reading for pleasure'. It is vital to note that the notion of enjoyment resists any analysis or reduction, but it still constructs subjects rather than merely explaining the self.

Ricoeur's (1985) theory of the interpellation between the fictional world and life world of the reader raises some interesting points regarding the concept of pleasure in reading literature and teaching English. He asserts that the

acquirement of meaning in a literary text is only achieved when the projected world and the life world of the reader meet (p.160). One should not assume however, that Ricoeur is simply restating the Barthesian reader response theory, but instead he offers a more philosophically concentrated version of the need for personal engagement with texts to 'indicate and to transform the human action' (ibid). It could be argued that this is the pleasure principle in action: allowing fiction to redefine and reconstitute beliefs and paradigms about time, truth and experience.

However, as I found in my classroom observations and journal, this assimilation between reader and writer worlds is very difficult to enact:

> *Try as I might, I am finding it really difficult to get past the otherness of literary texts for students to explore the mimesis and verisimilitude of it. Cries of 'why are we doing this and this is boring' are met with 'come on now, it's about being human. Have you never felt jealous of someone else or had an ambition that you thought was unlikely or too dark to share?' But to really engage with literature, and I guess to enjoy it, is a personal thing. Can it even be taught? I feel that I need to break out of the teaching of English as vicarious experience into a more radical approach.*
>
> (Journal Entry – Oct 2016)

Such a conceptualisation of English as enjoyment and pleasure cannot be separated from an ideological stance: in many ways this conceptualisation could be described as ideology exemplified. For example, is this conception of English a self-motivated enjoyment principle for the teacher? I notice that my enthusiasm for texts that I enjoy is greater as I engage in Hazlitt's (1778-1830) principles of wanting to spread the vertiginous enjoyment of the subject. It is interesting to me in my research experiences, how trying to step outside to look at this works on the same level of a fish trying to notice the water: the paradigm

of enjoyment within English is so ubiquitously apparent that exploring this as an ideological position is difficult.

Such a position created a troubling piece of data that I recorded in my narrative journal. This episode occurred during the teaching of creative writing to Year 7 students. The topic for study and composition was to be gothic horror and this created feelings of excitement in anticipation of creating thrilling results that were enthusiastically encouraged by me. However, although the students' compositions were very good, I sensed their disappointment with something.

> *Gothic horror writing; always a winner with Year 7: the examples and clips I show always create an excitement amongst the students, who by and large approach the genre with a relish of anticipated enjoyment. Students are writing their pieces and seem to be disappointed with the standard of their resulting work. It's actually very good, but they are waiting for it to jump off the page, become magical and chill the blood. It's not just that they are novices, it also seems that I have built up the expectations so much that they seem to hit an inevitable disappointment. I feel that I have betrayed them, but can't say that as I am the voice of enthusiasm in the room. I want them to feel the terror of writing and reading each other's stories, but there is a gap, a lack, a void.*
>
> (Journal Entry – September 2015)

The Lacanian concept of 'jouissance' is complex and its definition is contested. It has been seen as a sensation beyond pleasure; a synergy that goes beyond the mechanical; an imperative of the super-ego; lust; enjoyment; something beyond pleasure and a resolving of the tension between discourse and history (Roseboro, 2008; Braunstein 2003; Fink 2004). Of course, the use of the term 'pleasure' or 'enjoyment' is not politically neutral or unproblematic. Žižek (2005) explains how 'jouissance' is experienced in the symbolic order of language:

pleasure has to be realised and has to be captured in language to show its realisation. Lacan (2007) refers to jouissance as ‘the jar of the Danaides … it begins with a tickle and ends in a blaze of petrol’ (p.72). Lacan references the Greek myth of the Danaides (whose eternal punishment is to fill leaking jars with water to atone for murdering their husbands) to demonstrate how jouissance is a destructive and alienating practice that shows the gap between desire and its deferral. Lacanian jouissance has no release or catharsis and so there is no happy ending or enjoyment as such. Such a debate over nomenclature and its import in a term like enjoyment / pleasure / jouissance demonstrates how tensions are created when defining terms to recognise, term and enact them in a school context.

Lacan (2007) makes a distinction between ‘jouissance expected’: a fantasy or illusory and mythicized ideal that can never be achieved and ‘jouissance obtained’: a pleasure that falls short of the idealised standard. Thus the imagined cannot match the intensity of the real and so the subject experiences a ‘subjective destitution’. My identity as a practitioner is built upon presenting an enthusiasm for everything I teach that could be disavowing the difficulties and struggles of genuine writing: who says that enjoyment or pleasure are key to studying a topic? Who postulates that something as enigmatic as enjoyment can be arrested or captured? Such disturbances have encouraged me to see how such conceptions can be both emancipatory and deeply problematic.

The issue of reading for pleasure and enjoyment seems loaded with difficulties. It seems unreasonable to write into a curriculum that someone will enjoy something. Many English staff do their best to make lessons interesting, linking them to modern culture and demonstrating the common human experience within them. However, tedium was a common theme reported by students in the 100-word data sets. In particular, poetry was reported to be the most tedious. Most students reported that they 'despise poetry with a passion', find it

'cringeworthy' and one male student responded 'no, of course not' when asked if they like poetry, as if this was merely common sense.

In writing about Lacan and Mathematics education, Pais (2015) suggests ‘it is an aspiration as pious as it is naïve to assume that students will engage in Mathematics for the satisfaction of exploring Mathematics’. Thus with English, an equal naivety exists in assumptions that English will be enjoyed and will give pleasure to students. Indeed it may be even seen as symbolically violent to do so. Furthermore, Brown (2016) suggests that Maths is ‘not primarily held in place, intellectually or administratively, by its perceived functionality … [more likely it exists as] … a consequence of rationality or even as a matter of belief’ (p.9). It is important to consider what the rationalities are, what they are hailing and what they are disavowing. Thus, the wide variety of competing paradigms can be seen in English practice as the teacher slips in and out of paradigms in communicating with the students. I suggest that a greater attentiveness to the variety of paradigms would enable the teaching of English to be more cognizant of the challenges and tensions that its participants experience.

6.5 The ‘Other’

The new curriculum appears to repress literature outside of the canon. In turn this means that anything outside of the established order is seen as inferior and considered popular / vulgar: ‘Literature … used in secondary education to fabricate and simultaneously dominate, isolate and repress the ‘basic’ language of the dominated classes’ (Rice and Waugh, 1996). Therefore, reading literature can be seen as an alienating practice for some students who ‘find in reading, nothing but the confirmation of their inferiority. Subjection means domination and repression by the literary discourse deemed inarticulate, faulty and inadequate for the expression of complex ideas and feelings’ (ibid). In direct contrast, English is often seen as a school subject charged with looking at

different views and alternatives to intellectually free people from narrow and parochial perspectives.

In seeing English through the eyes of the Analyst discourse and the emancipatory principle, a key concept is that of 'constraint' (Scholes, 1985). In other words, when choices are made, constraint is an inevitable consequence. Indeed, 'school is the one place where our major concern is to study what we don't know, to confront ‘Otherness’ rather than to ignore it or convert it into a simulacrum of ourselves' (Ibid, p.59). Roseboro (2008) argues that we should see any curriculum as ‘a set of perspectives … [that] reflect a particular set of interests’. Additionally, these interests can facilitate the ‘construction of identity, marginality and difference’ (p.68). A challenge here is to be aware of the political and attempt to capture narratives of the self that introspectively look at the entanglement of individual and collective desire. Of course, this ‘otherness’ and being made to feel excluded is a very real danger in the English curriculum and its enactment. Roseboro (2008) asserts that ‘educators are co-constructors of knowledge … [and] … mediate between objectivity and subjectivity’ (p.69). However, the new assessment system with its focus on isolating skills in the exam and relying on more rote learning could be said to reverting back to a reductive conceptualisation of education as recounting knowledge to pass exams.

Roseboro calls for the teaching profession to challenge normative assumptions and demands multiple versions of history. Such an approach is not unlike psychoanalytical practice, where the finding and uncovering of the self is bound in language. One example of this approach could be to treat literary texts as analysands (patients) to be uncovered and explored and aim to expose the injustices and neuroses of versions of English. It seems more pertinent than ever to follow such advice in the new curriculum, to ‘learn to hear and understand the alternate discourses of oppressed people’ (Roseboro, 2008, p.81).

Rather than closing down debate and presenting a fatalistic vision of how oppressed and trapped English may be by ideological practices, Lacanian theory may offer much hope for transforming practice. Roseboro (2008) uses Lacanian theory to suggest that 'stories can serve as metaphors for our own lived experiences and, by using them we can begin to speak the unspeakable because through the story, we create distance' (p.43). He goes on to suggest that this can lead to the exploration of marginalised groups to challenge dominant discourses of white privilege, patriarchy, sexism and hetero-sexism.

In my research, I noticed that English teachers at my school are consciously aiming to front the human experience above that of a curricular cultural imperialism. For example, one colleague taught the skills needed for the unseen poetry exam through cultural exploration of other literatures than the dominant and the selected. Here we can see an opportunity to shift the holding of English and reframing it in a more representative space. Perhaps one could ask whether the curriculum is creating equity of experience or a cultural relativism. Freire (1998) explains how two participants in a literacy program saw their village in a new way when outside of it: 'by taking some distance, they emerged and were thus able to see it as they never had before' (p.21). One example of this from my data that came from a semi-structured interview with a colleague, was the enactment of teaching Stevenson's 'Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde' (1886). In linking Jekyll and Hyde to the nature of human hypocrisy, duality and various scandals from MP expenses to Mossack Fonseca [24], the text was lifted out of its alienating Victorian epoch and allow students to reflect upon the mystery of human experience and nature. In this way, English education can take on a role akin to psychoanalysis where the unconscious and the unspoken enable a richer understanding of ourselves rather than a valedictory scopophilic 'othering' that can turn so many students off literature.

[24] Various scandals from some MPs abusing expense payments, to the richest hiding their wealth in off-shore tax exempt accounts in 2013-15.

Another theoretical concern useful to the research findings is that of the 'other' in a cultural sense. Edward Said's (1978) theory of 'othering' asserts that different cultures can be seen as alien and in need of domination through authority. Said asserts that we should 'challenge the notion that difference implies hostility, a frozen reified set of opposed essences' (p.350). This, in turn, can lead to some texts being chosen purely to tick a box and cover the very minimal diversity requirements of the curriculum. Said warns that one of the dangers of paying lip service to difference is that it ignores the 'cultural strength' of the other and risks fundamental representation (p.40). By representing culture as occidental (western) and oriental (eastern), there is a marginalising of the other eastern literature, culture, history, and ontology. Perhaps Said's most pertinent comments concern the textual attitudes to the western canon (which texts are considered as the best ones to study):

> It is a fallacy to assume that the swarming, unpredictable, and problematic mass in which human beings live can be understood on the basis of what books – texts – say; to apply what one learns out of a book literally to reality is to risk folly or ruin … It seems a common human failing to prefer the schematic authority of a text to the disorientations of direct encounters with the human.
>
> (p.93)

Therefore, a self-dynamic tradition subsists of textual authority governing what society finds acceptable to reproduce as textual attitudes. Here it seems we are being warned of the dangers of taking our social, moral, and cultural codes from selected literature that has ideological effects. Such concerns resonate with data collected during the second 100-word data collection. Here, a student of Pakistani heritage commented that the ways characters see the world in literary texts are not representative: 'I don't see myself in these characters, nor do I take how to behave from them. My cultural heritage as a second generation

British Muslim is not valued by the education system, except for a token poem about an Indian corner shop. How patronising …' So, rather than promoting a diverse cultural representation of modern Britain, the English curriculum could be seen as proactively 'othering' many students.

Further to this, the theory of 'otherness' and Master discourse can be deconstructed by understanding the power dynamics at play in the term 'British values'. Banks (2013) suggests that 'individuals who only know the world from their own cultural perspectives are denied important parts of the human experience and are culturally and ethnically encapsulated' (p.3). There is a tension at work when a teacher wishes to be broader, more representative and critically aware than a curriculum allows the English teacher to be. In abandoning American literature regulars such as To Kill a Mockingbird (1960) and Of Mice and Men (1937), the only non-British literature is now in the GCSE poetry anthology and is a marginal part of it. English teachers face fashioning a classroom experience that plays the exam game, but also enriches the cultural awareness and understanding of others. However, I found examples in my own and others' practice where space can and must be carved for this. For example, Years 7-9 have developed into a resistant space where multi-cultural voices can be explored. Texts such as Refugee Boy (2001), Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry (1976), The Wheel of Surya (1992), Trumpet (1998) and The Fat Black Woman's Poems (1984) are explorations of different cultural identities in a way that the prescribed literature is not. One student responded in her final 100-word data piece:

> *Yes, I know we have to do certain texts for the exam, but reading these different books have given me something to cherish. A poem is still a poem. It can still be hard and challenging whether it is 200 years old or written last week by a Victorian or someone from the West Indies. English is at its best when I feel I can relate to something. I don't feel that in the examination texts at all.*

('Becky' – July 2016)

In their seminal work 'The Empire Writes Back', Ashcroft et al (1989, 2005) explain how the subject of English presents many areas of contestation:

> The study of English has always been a densely political and cultural phenomenon, a practice in which language and literature have both been called into service of a profound and embracing nationalism … [where] the study of English and the growth of Empire proceeded from a single ideological climate … cultural hegemony has been maintained through canonical assumptions about literary activity, and through attitudes to post-colonial literatures which identify them as isolated national off-shoots of English Literature, and which therefore relegate them to marginal and subordinate positions … A canon is not a body of texts per se, but rather a set of reading practises (the enactment of innumerable individual and community assumptions, for example, about genre, about literature, and even about writing). These reading practices, in their turn, are resident in institutional structures, such as educational curricula.
>
> (pp. 2-3, 7, 186).

Ergo, the imperative is not merely to replace texts to take account of difference, but to challenge reading practices: quite a challenge for high school English teachers and students. In order to attempt this feat of changing reading practices, it seems incumbent upon English teachers to make students aware of the richness of literature and teach them to explicitly question the text and read against the grain. Of course, the challenge of doing this whilst playing the examination and accountability game should not be underestimated, nor should the Lacanian idea that the text itself shapes reading practices.

6.6 English as Marvellous Medicine

Another tension that I found in my data, was the notion of English being a solution for a myriad of educational problems and issues. It seems that a lot of anxieties gather around the issue of English and it can become reified as a medicinal cure to ease them. During a semi-structured interview at the end of the research, a male colleague of less than five years' experience explained that he felt tension at the idea of teaching enjoyment or pleasure citing the performative nature of the subject and its assessment as contrary to such an ideal. One example given was: 'At a recent parents' evening, a parent was accusing me of not motivating her son enough as he never reads at home. This blame seems to be on the teacher's shoulders and removed any trace of parental responsibility in student motivation, habits or achievement'. On the topic of choice of literature, it was suggested that the syllabus does not contain enough variety of historical period or alternative perspective and that this is influenced by funding cuts where English departments must persist with canonical literature due to financial constraints in buying new books. He argues that literature is seen by too many as a kind of mythical moral medicine designed to teach students to think and behave in certain ways, when more contemporary writers can be just as valid in developing the intellectual curiosity and criticality of students.

Of course, one key intervention strategy for underachieving students is for them to do more English, so that they become normalised or cured. From a Lacanian perspective, the notion of 'cure' is to be treated with suspicion. The idea of something being prescribed carries the uneasy aftertaste of something being treated due to inferiority or lack. Such a view was noticeable in several of the 100-word data accounts from students on the last data collection. In response to the question: 'Based on what we have studied this term, what do you think is the purpose of English and how does it affect you?' comments included:

- ‘We don’t all see the same things in the same way, but it seems that we are expected to say certain things in the exam’
- ‘How is everyone doing the same narrow texts going to create a more tolerant society?’
- ‘I don’t take my morality from Jekyll and Hyde, nor does Macbeth make me think again about murder: I already know what is right and wrong’
- ‘If you want to be part of the elite, then you have to study elitist things. Just like people say they like Opera, even if they don’t because it makes them sound posher’

Related to such comments is the theory of Elbow’s ‘Goals of English’ (1990). Elbow proposes that English has endemic aims, values and principles at its core. Elbow suggests that they are to:

- improve morality
- prepare good workers
- create an elite
- produce good citizens
- foster personal growth and offset inequity.

What seems paradoxical here is the conflict between offsetting inequity and maintaining an elite: an elite of what - standards, culture or social class? Many school disciplines may aim to promote and refine character, but few are used as a vanguard of national values and consciousness like English. One may argue that there is little benign about a subject that has such valedictory aims and ambitions. For example, the notion of British values in producing good citizens, which carry implicit moral mores.

6.7 Britishness and a National Narrative

This notion of literature as a shaper of values has led in part to pressure on schools. As government looks for soundbite solutions to complex problems, policies like the 'Prevent' strategy are born. Such a policy seeks to place the identification of extremist views and behaviours upon teachers. [25]A further idea was to counteract dissident views by introducing the concept of 'British values' as something to be taught and promoted. Consequently, teachers are now charged with teaching British values, as though that is a neutral and unproblematic term. Naturally, the meaning of such a term is fraught with complexities and debates.

During the second semi-structured interview with a male colleague of over 10 years' teaching experience, he suggested that it is at best naïve to assume that the same text material will produce the same experience in students. Such a model places historical culture on a pedestal and could be accused of ignoring multi-culturalism in favour of idealised pasts. My colleague felt uneasy about Britishness being taught explicitly through literature: 'we are preserving stories, but not the language of it; Dickens' stories are great, but the language is convoluted and largely inaccessible for many students. Dickens is not the moral compass of Britain and it must be very alienating for many students.'

Furthermore, he felt that a student's understanding of history, the Christian Bible, myths and legends were the prevailing culture in achieving well at school and that 'lower' forms of culture are seen as 'alternative culture' that demand less imagination and effort than reading literature. He reported, 'I feel English is stuck in the past: we are inducting students into a middle class club where prevailing cultures are seen as desirable. We are being told that we must have

[25] The 'Prevent Strategy' of 2003 to the present day, is part of the government's counter-terrorism strategy known as 'Contest'. It was designed to discover and support young people at risk of carrying out terrorist acts. It has attracted wide criticism within teaching: being portrayed as suspicion and mistrust of innocent people.

highly accurate and skilled grammarians who know how to pass exams and value high culture. Sadly, this is likely to be why so many students feel hopeless about the new syllabus and exams.' [26] A Lacanian view might suggest that the reproduction of the fantasy is perpetuated by the teacher, even though it sits very uncomfortably with them. This adherence and concurrent dissatisfaction with University discourse (as a marionette of the Master discourse) creates a troubled and split individual who has to struggle with the expectations of their professional role and personal tensions.

To continue, the issue of Britishness is mentioned several times in official governmental documents. Zephaniah (2014) gives a useful contribution to the debate:

> If you are going to teach it, you have to pick a version of Britishness … one that suits the status quo … are you going to teach the real details of slavery? I know you may mention it, but as part of Britishness? As part of where we got where we got today? If the government decide what it is, and this is the version we have got to teach, we just get a sanitised government-approved version. Britishness may mean different things to different people.

Perhaps one notable exception in the broad sweep of British history at school is the removal of most of the ethnic British figures, such as the half Jamaican and half Scottish Mary Seacole and her role in Crimean War medicine. It can be argued that to define democracy, law, liberty and respect as British is to surrender to cultural relativism. A further example of this occurred during the research when my school unveiled its new values system: using the acronym

[26] 'Having been inculcated with a certain culture and being convinced of its righteousness, even if ambivalent of their chances of success, they wish to proceed with the conveyance of that culture to the more or less initiated'(Kelly 1992). This could mean that English teachers are preaching their hobby / passion and could be a kind of symbolic violence.

FRED for Fairness, Respect, Equality, and Dignity, students are reminded about our values in school. Seemingly unproblematic, except when they were labelled as ‘British Values’ with a huge Union Jack attached to them. The unintended consequence of this is to claim cultural relativism: that there is something essentially British about fairness, respect, equality, and dignity, rather than just human decency independent of any national identity or flag.

Similarly, it could be argued that English teaching becomes about choosing texts for national ‘British values’, where the text becomes a Master discourse for political ideology. ‘Particular values and ideals are presented as absolute and self-evident truth … asserted by authority’ (Thomas, 2014, p.50) and not concerned with other views. This positioning of authoritative views as a kind of ‘common sense’ promotes the discourse of the Master. Such expected obedience to this Master discourse disavows any discontent or divergent opinion and therefore aims to remain powerful by declaring its wants and needs as common for society to retain its decency: ‘correct content for art learning because of tradition … adheres to rigidly prescribed content without concern for why the content matters … good students know how to produce what the teacher as proxy for the Master wants to hear’ (ibid). Similarly, this sense of playing a game to please the Master is what preserves culture and retains privilege over minority groups and cultures.

In common with Coles (2016), Habib (2014) asserts that ‘an exploration of Britishness need not be a hegemonic act where teachers uncritically impose a dominant discourse of Britishness on their students. Instead, teachers can work on ways to give students a safe space to express their identity’. A more radical perspective is offered by Samudzi (2016) who argues that diversity agendas in education hinder justice and equity. Instead, the curriculum must be representative of identities. Such a view is useful in choosing Key Stage 3 texts (11-14 years), where teachers have some autonomy to wrap the subject around

student interest and cultural assimilation. However, such a hope is unworkable in the tightly prescribed GCSE curriculum. Perhaps the way to tackle this issue is in the way we teach the texts, rather than the content of what texts we teach. This will be explored in the final section of the thesis.

Roseboro (2008) argues that narrative accounts provide a framework for understanding, regardless of their vantage point. This is so because the capturing of stories begins to create distance. Such a view offers two interesting perspectives: the nature of literature as vicariously lived experience and the making visible of dominant privileged discourses. Roseboro cites Edgerton (1996) in demanding curriculum reform for such a purpose:

> Literary works of marginalised groups can provide a passage to a shifting of discourse away from conceptions of multiculturalism as something we 'add on' to the curriculum, 'do for' marginalised groups, or as a means of to simply 'change attitudes'. Such a shift away from is a shift toward a more fluid and thoughtful 'discourse of encounters' in its abrogation of the problem of representation - representation as it concerns such entities and notions of identity, culture, and civilisation - and in its problematization of notions of cultural translation.
>
> (p.6)

In my school, I observed in classes (and in my own practice) how teachers attempt to mitigate such concerns by consciously aiming to front the human experience above that of cultural imperialism and relativism. One colleague taught the skills of unseen poetry for GCSE through cultural exploration of other literatures than the dominant and preferentially selected. This shows how teachers can fuse the University and Hysteric discourses to fight for a representative space. However, as mentioned, this has led unfortunately to the reduction of representative literature to Key Stage 3 where it is not valorised as substantial, artistic or old enough due to its exclusion from terminal

assessments at key stage 4 and 5. Such exclusion creates an issue of alienation. Indeed, Lacan (1949), in referring to locusts, identifies the concept of 'homoeomorphic identification' of the subject with the 'visual action of a similar image' with regards to attraction and reproduction (p.35). Therefore, students who see their cultural experiences or ambitions as valuing literary culture are more likely to be hailed by it under the teacher's gaze. Likewise, those who do not see their cultural experiences in this way become alienated from it.

6.8 Summary

This chapter has aimed to explore key themes that emerged from the data during the coding phase after its collation. Such key themes demonstrate that English as a school subject is held in place by many competing factors and voices. Such factors place external and internal pressures upon subjects to assimilate with expectations and to disavow their personal tensions. Similarly, the effects of these competing voices upon individuals are significant and there is little space for dissenting opinion in the new GCSE course and its methods.

Chapter 7 – English as Radical Resistance

7.1 Introduction

Whilst it appears to be difficult to carve out any resistant space and room for the individual within the practice of English, it is necessary to seek for it. In this chapter, I outline the ways in which Lacanian theory can help English practitioners to identify new ways of seeing and of imagining subjectivity. For many, English is one of the few educational spaces for personal views and questioning of the status quo. In a subject with a radical reputation, it seems incumbent upon English educators to find the space to address the constraints of the new GCSE curriculum. In this section, I aim to draw together some of the major themes from my research and present data alongside Lacanian theory to look at some different paths for English practice.

7.2 Resistant Spaces

Kelly (1992) suggests that ‘the perennial protests by many students about the ‘relevance’ of curricular materials speaks to this disquiet’ and dissatisfaction with the student experience of English. These feelings may well be a part of the resistance out of which a more ‘exciting and informed study of English might come’ (p.3). However, there are constraints of assessment and curricular; examinations still have to be passed whether students feel excited and resistant or not. McMahon (1997) cites Lacan’s Analyst discourse and suggests that ‘the discourse of the Analyst is the regime of the teacher who listens to the students without pre-empting their desires … [however] on the dark side [it] is commonly just the Master or the University in disguise … a common place didactic strategy to rephrase a student’s utterance in ‘acceptable’ terminology’ (p.12).

In its purest intent, the Analyst discourse ‘places the objet a (the object of desire) as prime over the meaning making systems (S2). The product of the Analyst discourse is the divided subject over the power / structure’ (Filipi, 2011). Also, student desires take precedence over master demands even if they are anti-productive. These are real tensions in English teaching practice: to mediate between the personal and the systemic; to satisfy the individual and the accountability needs, and to aim at personal liberation whilst teaching an unforgiving conformity.

This tension between the personal and the systemic is a well-worn debate and it is one that I documented at the start of my research, before I had studied and considered Lacan’s Analyst discourse. To explicate this point, I include the following journal entry from 2015:

> *During many lessons with GCSE students, I have been very troubled by the language used by pupils regarding their upcoming mock exam. I gave the class a ‘big speech’ today about the eternity of their GCSE English and what certain grades suggest to a future employer about their skills and dedication. However, a big disruptive moment for me was the horrific realisation that I often present myself as an educational capitalist.*

> *In this way I quantify and judge their future market value in employment. Perhaps most disturbingly, this 'moral architecture' (Ball, 2013) is tacitly complied with by students who dutifully enquire whether using this semi-colon here will get them an extra mark in their coursework. I feel like a participant in a game that I neither wanted to play, nor wanted to watch. This is troubling me. Indeed, it is a game that I did not really conceive was being played at all. I feel a little foolish about it.*
>
> (Journal Entry - September 2015)

In applying Lacanian theory to this data, some interesting ideas can be generated. Bracher (1994) asserts that the self is determined by discourse in the social and the psychological order including 'thought, affect, enjoyment, meaning, and even one's identity and sense of being' (p.108). This suggests that these abstractions are determined by what knowledge is fronted. In other words, I can see the data through the lens of what is behind the views I am interrogating. Bracher refers to views and actions as being avatars of a primary identification: the reason behind why people say and do what they say and do. In the data above, my attentiveness to Master discourses of employability, literacy, culture, and accuracy is evident. Such a theory of primary and secondary identifications allows us to see how we are interpellated by discourse. In such identifications, some things are being hailed and others are being disavowed: the type of knowledge that is being promoted characterises its avatars. Hence, the unsaid and often barely acknowledged Master discourses can be brought out into the open and their basis for being; their influence upon practice, and their manifestation in a classroom setting can be more deeply understood.

One criticism of such views may be that to scrutinise the ineffable power of discourses can only lead to a desperate fatalism where scrutiny can only recognise and label, not transform. I disagree with this contestation: in seeing my motivations to students as bound up in political ideology, I can become more

socially attentive to the personal benefits of the subject and not propagate the fear principle that has been so prevalent in educational policy and discourse in recent times. Indeed, the data shows how Master discourse filters down to the English classroom, where not only are students subjugated through fear, but they are also encouraged to desire their subjugation. My teaching experiences and my understanding of Lacan encourages me to believe that we can do something different to ameliorate such problems.

To continue with some more resistant and challenging ideas, I include some early data that I collected and then discarded, only to find it again and see its value. I asked my Year 10 students to write down what they thought English is and what follows represents a collation of a number of students' views:

> *English is a subject with an identity crisis: I am never sure whether we are doing English, History, Sociology, Psychology, RE or Politics. This doesn't seem a problem until you realise that what we're tested on is very narrow. I really don't feel that creativity is important in English exams and so we do less and less of it as we progress through school. I really feel that it is about standards over creativity now.*
>
> *Another big issue is that of Shakespeare. I feel disconnected from it not only in terms of history and culture, but also of language: if top set students are really struggling with it, how is it for students who find the subject difficult anyway? I can see how studying Shakespeare is seen as a gold standard of the subject, but for me this belief in seeing Shakespeare as a god really undermines the value of contemporary literature from different cultures that have equally important things to say about life. What does modern Britain have to do with this sense of English history that says that dead white middle class males are the only ones worth listening to?*
>
> (September 2015)

Lacan's Hysteric discourse provides an interesting frame through which to analyse this data. Thomas (2014) states that '[a] Hysterical discourse challenges academic language to expand and account for difference and to recognise previously disallowed signifiers to enter into constellations by which to align (self) knowledge' (p.54). In order to explore this issue, I conducted a further semi-structured interview with four students in Year 10 who had been born in Pakistan and Bangladesh to seek out their views regarding their experience of English in Year 10 so far. Selecting those students was not about positive discrimination, but was designed to see how the new curriculum focus affected students of dual heritage. Responses suggested that there was some trepidation regarding the idea of Britishness and British values. One student remarked that 'Macbeth is warning the audience of the dangers of plotting, murder and overthrow with the morality of anti-witchcraft to frighten a Jacobean audience into compliance.' This female student saw the morality of mankind being upheld, rather than anything essentially British.

Furthermore, another student found a more Hysteric response (in the Lacanian sense) by suggesting that 'Shakespeare uses the Gunpowder Plot of 1605 and the crime of regicide in Macbeth to reinforce the establishment, as no doubt writers had to at the time'. It is interesting that students found the challenge to Master discourse through Hysteric means. Finally, it was noted by the students that the horror of Macbeth is a lesson in not succumbing to tempting ambition and to accept the limitations that God has placed on your existence. In this way, the morality and didactic lessons of the set texts in English Literature are those of the contemporary establishment. Lacan asserts that the Hysteric individual actually wants a Master because they are oblivious to what no Master would look like although in Hysteric discourse the master signifiers begin to lose their unchallenged authority and power. This loosening of absolute authority is necessary to see English practice in new ways.

Further to this, Kelly (1992) argues that 'English curriculums have been slow to reflect a more accurate representation of our pluralistic and globally inter-

dependent world. In the face of such biased selection and study of texts, other measures can be enacted to encourage a 'reading against' this elitism … Literature classes can become places in which students learn to question representation, voice, text, and context in the development of 'readings' of the world and the relationship of literature to that world' (p.8). Thus, there is a need to challenge the parameters of what is currently holding the subject and subjects in place, by imagining and practising a more Analytic discourse with the teaching of English. To explicate my analysis further, I go back in time to resurrect an older debate concerning the place of English. Next, I turn to what is known as the Frankfurt school of conceptualisations of English: that of English as concerning cultural theory and radical ideologies. [27]

7.3 English as Teaching Cultural Theory and Radical Ideologies

Scholes (1985) sees literary interpretation as 'ideology', in that to 'teach interpretation of a literary text, we must be prepared to teach the cultural text as well'. Indeed, the 'act of interpretation involves ... seeing the resemblance [and] ... noting the difference' (p.34). I take this to mean that we cannot teach interpretations of texts without teaching contextual factors. Contextual factors might refer to ideological representations of history, society, politics, gender, biography, and contexts of production and reception. Ergo, ideology is pervasive in everything that we teach in English; especially in teaching literature. This is a useful approach to unpick my observations from a Year 13 English Literature lesson I have taught.

In her short story 'The Tiger's Bride', Angela Carter (1979) retells the Beauty and the Beast story in a florid and gender progressive way. In the story,

[27] As mentioned earlier, the 'Frankfurt school' believed that ideas should be generated from reading against dominant ideas and against the grain of a literary text.

Beauty's father references Shakespeare's Othello (1603) to explore his loss: 'like the base Indian who threw a pearl away richer than all his tribe' (V.II). Carter intertextualises this, possibly as a way of overdramatising male folly and iniquity. However, enabling students to see and make connections demands not only telling but teaching the 'rules of the interpretive game' (Scholes, 1985, p.30). Merely noting the cultural codes is not enough, but to understand the attitude taken by such codes by the meaning maker: arguably the reader. This is where the importance of cultural theory enters the arena of English teaching.

To aid my understanding of the teaching of criticism, structuralism and formalism have something to offer. As Scholes (1985) attests, literary theory exists 'in a world of institutional structures and political forces ... Texts are places where power and weakness become visible and discussable' (p.11). Thus, the purpose and function of literary theory on a text is to unblinker people and render the peripherally marginal as palpable. To return to Lacan, these political forces have a complex web of causal factors: master signifiers that are enacted by the institution, struggled over by split subjects, and rebelled against by the subject's desires. As explained earlier, reason is a political problem and it is necessary to see whose reason is prevailing and with what consequences (Rabinow, 1984, p.14).

Lacan is less interested in power per se than its effects upon subjects and the unconscious. In contrast, Foucault is very interested in power politics. Foucault (1972) suggests that institutions are comparable to genres, hence school as a genre in itself with its rules, powers and tensions. If we look at the role of the institution, or in a Lacanian sense, the discourse of the University, many interesting tensions and opportunities arise. One of the key issues in English is the sense of superiority and cultural capital prevalent in high literature. It does seem that difficulty and illusive ambiguity can be seen as a badge of honour to be worn by members of the literary club. A key challenge here is to 'open the way between the literary ... and the social text in which we live ... breaking the

hermetic seal' (Scholes, 1985, p.24). A significant challenge exists here: texts need to be taught in a way that opens an intellectual dialogue within and between students. This demands that students should not be given readings that demonstrate an English teacher's intellectual superiority, but that they should be taught the tools to produce their own readings. This is a very different way of teaching literature than I witnessed in my research and my experience of English teaching.

Scholes (1985) asserts that the act of reading and understanding demands knowledge of two codes: generic and cultural. Thus, students needs to be moved on from 'following a narrative ... within' to 'thematising one ... upon' one. In this way, reading becomes an enactment and something that is created by interpretation from a position of agency. In teaching interpretation, the exploration of historical, social, political and psychological context is often demanded. However, one of the key findings is that the subject of English is partly held in place by the density of its multi-disciplinary nature.

Of course, such practice can seem simplistic and yet is very complex. It could even be argued that the new-historicist views move away from the reader response theories of Barthes and actually narrow interpretation rather than enriching it.[28] One such theorist who addressed this is Fish (1980), who argues that a text is only ever a creation of interpretive imagination. This creates the interpreter as a powerful agent. Yet, Scholes disagrees and questions just how autonomous an interpreter is able to be. Scholes discredits Fish's concept of 'interpretive communities' asserting that interpretation is not free, but a collection of ideological codes. For example, in studying Wuthering Heights (1847), one's interpretation of Heathcliff may fall into a series of codified norms: Gothic villain, Marxist hero, symbolic of Ireland, post-colonial victim or Byronic

[28] New Historicism sees historical artefacts as equal to literature as they are both seen as products of their time. Whereas, Barthes (1915-1980) suggested that the text reads the reader and meanings are individual. This is what Barthes called the 'Death of the Author' (1968).

romanticism for example. In classroom practice, I can see how looking for a consensus that is both understandable and usable in an examination for a student is both a driver and limiter of real interpretation. In a Lacanian sense this could represent the fusing of the external discourses of the Master and the University with the internal discourses of the Hysteric and the Analyst. This shows how English is charged with the serving of multiple masters. This necessitates reading not with, but against the grain of the text. This way of approaching literature has not been fashionable amongst the University discourse and its institutions. Thus a debate can be opened concerning what English teaching is for: teaching method, reading, or practices?

When I was a university student in the mid to late 1990s, literary theory was becoming fashionable within English degrees. I studied the radical theories of Marx, Bakhtin, Derrida, Butler and Said; believing that such approaches would not necessarily be needed to teach at high school, due to its academic complexity. As I began to teach, I struggled to see a link between how such theoretical angles could have any discernible benefit for teaching students to be accurate, use quotations and digest understandable readings. Literary theory soon became unhailed knowledge and was consigned to the filing cabinet of unconscious past studies in my head; especially as it was too hard to communicate it to students. However, in my recent practice I have become very interested in the idea of reading against the grain of a text to problematize and enrich interpretations. Such an approach is most fruitfully witnessed in A level practice. After speaking to sixth form students, I became aware of their attention to simplifications of Marxism and Feminism, but they possessed precious little knowledge of any other approaches. Horkheimer (1937) refers to critical theory as self-conscious social critique that is aimed at change and emancipation through enlightenment, where the story conceals as much as it reveals. Similarly, Habermas (1972) refers to it as a form of hermeneutics with an interest in the contradictions of human experiential reality. Personally, the most forbidding parts of cultural theory are the breadth and complexity of a wide

variety of theoretical conceptions. I include examples from my journal to document moments in my growing awareness of research and attempting to step outside of my classroom world to observe phenomena:

> *In considering such issues of ontology, epistemology and methodology, I am drawn to include a short passage from F Scott Fitzgerald's great American novel 'the Great Gatsby' (1925). The outsider-insider narrator Nick Carraway states: 'I was within and without; simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life' (Chapter 2, p.24). From an ontological perspective he believes that he is not only a paradoxical mixture of participant and outsider, but also a co-creator of the reality, or 'actuality' in a Derridean sense. The narrator therefore cannot view anything dispassionately or value-free as the events themselves co-construct his identity. This is a more florid description of participant research than action research (Stenhouse 1975; Elliott, 1991) can offer: Mcniff and Whitehead's (2002) 'living contradiction' is more succinct but less poetic.*
>
> (Journal Entry – June 2015)

> *Artistic or bureaucratic is an interesting divergence of epistemology for English: not that it has to be one or the other, but looking outside of the labels and onto self-construction. Lacan's mirror theories give an interesting ways of shattering concepts and attempting to escape from a paradigmatic paralysis where I am trying to get out of a trap / restraint and see things in a new way. I need to carve out ways in lessons to create opportunities to capture how perspectives are constructed: privileging the perspective rather than what it is looking at.*

I am trying to explore not what I am looking at, but how I am constructing what I am looking at: why I see it that way, given where I am coming from. I feel caught in a kind of trap where the Lacanian concepts of desire and drive have inducted me into an epistemology of high culture. Considering Žižek's idea of fetishistic disavowal, coming to love what once excluded you, is interesting because I feel that whereas I once was fearful of an elaborate code (Bernstein, 1971), I am now a proponent of it. This creates an interesting view of teaching literature: engagement with cultural history, biography and new-historicism. So, race and jealousy in Shakespeare's Othello are different to the contextual view of Jacobean England, race politics and conceptions of tragic villainy. I can see the 'Death of the Author' (Barthes) theory at work with the text taking on a life of its own and their personal contextual and critical reading of it overtaking any cultural history or context. More radically, Biesta (2012) argues that teaching should be maieutic: bringing out what is already there. Biesta also uses examples from Piaget, Vygotsky and Dewey stating that 'students have to construct their own insights, understandings and knowledge'.

(Journal Entry - Nov 2015)

Barthes (1968), in his work 'The Death of the Author' suggests that 'writing is that neutral, complicit, oblique space where our subject slips away' (Rice and Waugh, 1996, p.118). He claims that the author is a modern figure, born out of the arrogance of individualism and that removing the author 'utterly transforms the modern text … every text is eternally written here and now … a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, bleed and clash … a tissue of signs, an intimation that is lost, infinitely deferred … a text's unity lies not in its origin, but in its destination' (p.119). But, what can be done to ameliorate this perceived mono-culturalism in the practice of English? One such method could be the approaches of literary theory that cast light and shadow on texts in different ways. By teaching the text as something that can

change under lenses and perspectives, we, as teachers are being much more responsive to the intellectual ambiguities of texts. In this way, the discourse of the Analyst is useful: to see the text as a patient that can be understood in terms of its subconscious and repressed ideas.

In his work on 'The Subject', Lacan describes subjectivity as 'constructed in language and discourse, and rather than being fixed and unified, the subject is split, unstable or fragmented' (Rice and Waugh, 1996). For Lacan the unconscious is structured like a language; a network of social differences. Lacan challenges the Descartian notion of 'I think, therefore I am' and suggests that 'I am where I think not': the unconscious is where true self-hood lies. Further to this, Barry (1995) states that Lacan forces us to reject the conventional view of characterisation in literature because a wholly different reading strategy is demanded: unlike Freud, Lacan does not look for the author; instead he sees the text as a metaphor, which throws light upon aspects of the unconscious. The difficulty in enacting this theory in an English classroom is that such concepts are very difficult to understand, let alone teach to students. It would need to be done in a very accessible and simplified way. Lacanian theory might see this simplicity as a desire from the teacher.

A further complication is that here is where Lacan's ideas and the assessment system clash. GCSE English examinations are testing the recall, contextual knowledge, and language analysis skills of students. As an experienced exam marker, I would suggest that only the most exceptional students are able to see the text as a metaphor for unconscious aspects of society and individual subjects. This is mainly due to what is being valorised in high stakes testing. Furthermore, it may be that students know but do not write about it based on conceptions of who the examiner is or their conceptions of their conscious and unconscious knowledge.

7.4 Using Gallagher's model to Reimagine English Practice

Given the new curriculum foci, it seems more essential than ever before to find resistant and alternative spaces for the teaching of English. One such model was offered by Gallagher (1992). His four areas of hermeneutics provide an interesting theory for such concerns. The four areas for examining interpretation are: conservative, moderate, critical, and radical. At this point, I aim to show how such ideas might work as a model for teaching interpretation in English and how Lacanian 'Four Discourse' theory can explicate it.

Firstly, the idea of 'conservative hermeneutics' is concerned with understanding something in the way it was intended, if such a contestation can actually be proven. In English terms, this suggests a correct reading of a literary text in understanding it in the same way as the teacher. We might equate this to the lecture style of English teaching where power and agency is held in a Master and University discourse that reproduces inequalities and symbolically violent impositions. This trap can be wonderfully difficult to escape and such reproduction of received understandings makes no account for student individuality, nor the fascinating concept of desires. However, this model of English teaching can often be reverted to when terminal examinations are imminent. Unfortunately, it is very tempting as an English teacher to believe that you are empowering students by engaging in a 'sit there and listen to what you should write' model.

Secondly, 'moderate hermeneutics' refers to English teachers accommodating student perspectives, where tradition is not fixed, but transformed by the educative process. This sense of a collective exploratory journey is the most common mode of iterative teaching practice in high school English classrooms in my research findings. Of course, this rather simplifies the complexities of Lacan's fragmented self, where ontology is shifting and participants are playing roles in a fluid and dynamic way, not unlike Shakespeare's 'All the world's a stage' metaphor: 'And all the men and women merely players … And one man in his time plays many parts' (As You Like It, 1599, II. VII). Such a model allows

students to make independent connections and arguments, however, it can also lead to a kind of chaos where interpretations are all equally valid and often lack quality (a problematic idea in itself).

More transformative is the concept of ‘critical hermeneutics’, where education attempts to break away and observe ideologies. This sometimes carries the nomenclature of critical education theory. Habermas (1972) suggests that we are stuck in ideology and resisting its tides and ubiquity must be a battle for emancipation. However, in an English teaching sense, if we expose ideologies and discourses of the Master and the University, then what replaces it, another ideology? This is interesting and potentially dangerous work, as I found when students began to question the authority and validity of official discourses and examination requirements. Inevitably, there comes a point where resistance has to give way to the practicalities of the exam and credit system, which has power over all. The fact remains that we can object, but then have to conform anyway if the students and teachers are to play the game and bid for the prizes of successful results. We can liken his to Lacan’s notion of the mirror stage and the gaze where subjects are formed and split by interpellation into what the discourse wants them to be. Of course, such interpellation need not be conscious, even unconsciously it shapes perceptions and actions, maybe more so.

Finally, the fourth area is that of ‘radical hermeneutics’. This seeks to discredit systems of power and provide new ways of seeing a world that is constant flux and slippage (to use a Foucauldian and Derridean sense). In teaching English, such an approach requires tremendous bravery and focus to avoid it becoming hopeless fatalism. For example, students can be encouraged to question the political angles of Priestley’s ‘An Inspector Calls’ (1945) and critique the prevailing discourses inherent in his exploration of pre-Titanic and pre-war 1912, and post-war 1945. What separates this from the mere exploration of context is that it is not only in historical terms that power is questioned; it is contemporary terms also. Thus can occur a clash between English teaching

practice and government expectations of a teacher to be ideologically and politically neutral, if that is even possible.

A further application of this lies in the following consideration. Such hermeneutic modes are not solely based upon the approach of the teacher, which depends upon their individual opinions and ontologies. It is also true of students themselves. Individuals do not just read literary texts; literary texts also read them. Perhaps the biggest challenge in the English classroom is to take account of and make allowance for the individuality of student responses and the creative independence and uniqueness of student readings of the canon.

To illustrate, let us apply the four hermeneutics model to generate readings of Shakespeare's Macbeth (1606). 'Conservative' modes may see the text as denouncing the evil of witchcraft and human ambition, thus upholding the morality of obedience and conformity. A 'moderate' reading may see the play as a character study of the corruption of power and the moral malaise that follows lusty greed and encourages the viewer to examine the recesses of their own 'black and deep desires' (I.4). A 'critical' hermeneutic reading may see the text as breaking out of an ideology that kingship is divinely anointed. Also, that the ideology of kingship and power changes in the play and finally we are encouraged to see the human frailty that exists in us all, independent of power, status and wealth. Finally, a 'radical' reading may see the play as discrediting the notion of monarchy entirely: as the errors of the powerful have rippling consequences for all. It may consider that a society without hierarchy would create less misery, as Ross mourns:

> Alas, poor country!
> Almost afraid to know itself. It cannot
> Be called our mother, but our grave, where nothing,
> But who knows nothing, is once seen to smile;
> Where sighs and groans and shrieks that rend the air
> Are made, not marked; where violent sorrow seems

A modern ecstasy. The dead man's knell
Is there scarce asked for who, and good men's lives
Expire before the flowers in their caps,
Dying or ere they sicken.

(Shakespeare, Macbeth, 1606, IV. III)

This then gives rise to modern parallels involving critiques of political hypocrisy, scandals and injustices. In looking at how English can be reimagined in this way, the approach taken in teaching English ultimately affects how it is held in place and how it affects the subjects within it.

7.5 Defining a Space for English

In imagining new ways to approach English in the new curriculum and to make it more equitable for its participants, I include some data and analysis from a semi-structured interview. In the interview, I asked a senior colleague about what she thought English is and should be. Interestingly, she saw English as inseparable from literacy. The response was surprising, because I found that she described her own school experience as a solution to the problem of low literacy. The following extract was recorded and is part-transcribed below to provide a point of discussion:

> *Literacy is the ability to function independently … to be able to pick up a magazine or book for yourself … Parental interest, or lack of is the biggest problem … children of inarticulate parents have the biggest disadvantage …All this let's teach them more grammar is not helping … outside experiences and trips are the best solution to literacy problems: they need some experiences outside of their everyday life … this helps them to be curious.*
>
> (Extract from recorded semi-structured Interview – April 2015)

In applying Freud's notion of 'drive' (what motivates you) and 'desire' (acceptance of your compliance), psychoanalysis seeks to uncover allusive fragments and construct the story of a viewpoint. Here, the speaker sees the benefits of cultural capital experiences and possibly reveals the enjoyment she felt from them whilst at school. Potentially, she also demonstrates compliance in teaching and re-teaching grammar that she feels will not have the desired effect of independence. In following Lacan, a more dynamic view is offered by Žižek (2006) who suggests that cynical distance hides your compliance and that ideology is ingrained upon your unconscious. [29] Through this filter, we can see how everything we do and say is ideological, whether the ideology sits comfortably or consciously with us or not.

A further disruption to my understanding has been prompted by Brown's (2007) description of Žižek's 'fetishistic satisfaction', where we are compelled to behave in a 'closed self-propelling loop'; a kind of blind self-identity where we behave without thinking; or become so complicit that we perpetuate it. Such a notion of comfort and habit can trap teacher professionalism into over compliance or unthinking complacency. One example of this relates to my method of data collection. Because I had patterns of inattention, I did not focus readily enough on the non-verbal and prosodic features of interview participants, which could give further insights. I recognise the need for further reading in social semiotics to explore such ideas further. This has made me realise that the issues around English could be far more complex, multiplicitious

[29] Quoting Foucault, Hyldgaard (2009) asserts that the unconscious is a 'historically variable, discursive construction'; something which is particular to epoch and place, but still constructed. Whereas Badiou (2003) sees it as something which cannot be reduced to historical logic – a 'universal singularity'; something which is independent of context and is unique to everyone; unique as a fingerprint. Furthermore, Hyldgaard suggests that the 'unconscious processes of transference are an uncontrollable condition for educational success'. She argues that speech is performative, but the real essence of human connection depends upon the compatibility of individuals' subconscious; a fascinating proposition with interesting consequences for teacher charisma and conduct.

and socially constructed than my professional views had previously allowed. It is very interesting to me how 'psychoanalytical theory provides an important opportunity to go beyond constructivist accounts' (Brown, 2010, p.32).

Britzman (2009) argues that learning a new profession (in my case: research) resurfaces the 'chaotic' and 'painful' memories of apprenticeship into a discourse: a timely reminder of how English can feel for students as they are entered into a symbolic order of normalisation. Indeed, she suggests that 'both professions [teacher and research student] experience the conflict between theory and practice' (p.91). In this way, practitioner research can be seen as a victim of the slippage of language: where exemplification of whom you are, what you are doing and why you are doing it can only ever record constructed impressions of theoretical frames or what we miss and observe as significant. As Scott (2005) contends, the responses that researchers and participants give might not be truthful or informed enough to be reliable, but nonetheless, they are all we have. Furthermore, he argues that because there is an 'inevitable transitive dimension to epistemology, it is not sensible or even feasible to say that there is a real world that exists of and beyond the current ways that are chosen to describe it' (p.634).

7.6 Summary

In being more progressive and radical to find new ways to imagine English, there are many challenges. In this chapter I have outlined how subjectivity can be seen in a more radical way to offer ways forward for English teaching. The role of the subconscious; external Master and University discourses; internal Hysteric and Analyst discourses, and literary theory seem to be potentially powerful vehicles for developing English practice. To what extent a very busy English teacher can account for the full complexity of these issues and still perform the role to the requirements of the Mater and the University is not a simple issue. Perhaps for English practice to evolve in this new space of the

current GCSE course, a deeper understanding of how it holds and shapes subjectivity is necessary. This forms the basis of the next chapter.

Part 3 – Discussion and Implications

Lacan's 'Four Discourses' offer a variety of insights into how English is conceptualised, enacted, and its impacts. However, Lacanian theory also raises many questions and issues that proffer further exploration. In this next section, I am attempting to articulate the next stage of my research journey and draw more practical relevance for English education by looking at how desire, fantasy, lack, the mirror, drive, and desire can be considered more explicitly. It is worth noting that this section draws on a different professional identity: one that has attempted to reconfigure the dust that had been disturbed by Lacanian discourse theory. Ultimately, the aim of part three is to outline the implications and possible future directions of my research, as well as discussing how Lacan's ideas have been developed by his interpreters since Seminar XVII's publication. In many ways, this section is designed to argue for the relevance and practicality of Lacanian ideas to affect educational change.

Chapter 8 – English as Pygmalion: using the Subject to Shape Subjects

8.1 Introduction

George Bernard Shaw's play 'Pygmalion', first performed in 1913 (subsequently made into the classic musical film My Fair Lady in 1964) uses the Greek myth of Pygmalion as its source. In mythology, Pygmalion carves a woman out of ivory and is so fixated with her beauty that he falls in love with the statue. It is a classic tale of the dangers of fantasy and the projections that an individual can place upon the object of their desire. In Shaw's play, a linguistics professor named Henry Higgins takes the east-end flower girl Eliza Doolittle and wagers that he can turn her into a lady by giving her elocution lessons. The premise of the play is clearly that the only thing that separates the classes is educational opportunity. Although changed somewhat, the principle of the Greek myth is still intact: that what someone else wants or demands of you has a profound impact upon an individual's sense of self and their behaviours. This is a very useful starting point for the next analysis in the thesis: how Lacanian ideas can help us to understand, in a more complex way, the challenges of subjectivity in teaching and being taught English.

8.2 Desire, Fantasy, Mirror, and Lack

The theory of transference explores the fantasy of what someone else wants of you. The question arises of what master are you trying to please and why? I have explored how the teacher's gaze contains a desire to satisfy the other: what someone else wants of you. I like to think of it as a Pygmalion transference. In Pygmalion, Higgins succeeds in changing the class of Eliza by giving her education. She becomes what he desires, but loses the idiosyncratic individuality that made her unique.

To use Lacanian and Žižekian ideas: I am aware that, as an English teacher, I present the object that students are told to desire (reified knowledge) in return for academic credit. Žižek (2001) argues that 'we are obliged to enjoy. Enjoyment becomes a kind of weird perverted duty … desire is for desire itself

… elusive of surplus … we aim at the gold in the middle of the object precisely to enjoy the surface … this is what is the anti-metaphysical lesson, which is difficult to accept.' Žižek also states that 'desire is metonymical, it shifts from one object to another'. In other words, we can see how desire is framed by particular objects: Shakespeare or a poem, for example.

The objet petit a (object of desire) for Lacan (2007) is: 'the subjective element constitutive of objective-external reality' (p.55). I struggle with defining this idea adequately. It could mean that there is no objectivity and that everything exists as a representation, filtered through the blood, prejudices, and gaze of an individual. Or, it could suggest that reality is created by putting in a suture of a subjective element in external reality – like the painted background that gives an illusion of reality. This means that the 'partial objets petit a are neither subjective nor objective, but the short-circuit of the two dimensions: the subjective stain / stand in that sustains the order of objectivity, and the objective 'bone in the throat' that sustains subjectivity' (p.65). Therefore, the gaze appears to have a double function: as an objective thing that sustains subjectivity and blurs reality as to make it inaccessible.

Later, Britzman (2009) argues that if we reduce subjectivity to techniques, rubrics, tips and an avalanche of advice then this 'foreclose[s] the emotional storms and aesthetic conflicts that are constitutive features of working with uncertainty' (p.144). Ergo, treating subjects as an empty vessel is naïve and denies the complexities. Interestingly, Britzman refers to Lacanian ideas of who actually owns learning: 'the quest is impossible, for how can we actually possess the other's love and knowledge? … not only out of reach but belongs to someone else'. Lacanian analysis suggests that this is related to desire and drive. The power-loop suggests that we are inducted into what to desire by the master signifiers that shape our experiences. Fundamentally, Lacan's concept of the object cause of desire is linked to anxiety. Thus, the small 'other': 'l'object petit a' represents what a subject deems desirable in the real world object.

If we apply this to English we can see that, to some extent, an English teacher's job is to get students to desire the sustaining of desire .The elaborate and forbidding codes of demanding literature take commitment to break down and many English lessons can become an exercise in narrative simplification and pseudo-translation. Surprisingly, the new GCSE for English contains extracts that often have a reading age of seventeen years plus, whereas the average reading age of a GCSE student is fourteen years old. In addition, the closed book nature of the exams means that students must commit large sections of text to memory, as they will not have a copy of the books or poems in front of them, not even SEND (special educational needs and disabilities) students, many of which have recall, attention, development, and memory difficulties.

To return to Lacan, this desire to persist with the literary, the florid, and the semantically forbidding could be seen as just being perpetuated by a Master discourse: Shakespearean poetry is exclusive and high culture is the prize. Of course, Lacanian analysis is rarely so simple. It is complicated by the notion of Lacan's $ (the divided / split subject) in the 'Four Discourse' model. The $ is the barred / castrated subject: the subject that wants the phallus Master object, but is endlessly deferred by its unobtainability. Thus, the painful jouissance is the promised, deflated by the reality: the gap between desire and its deferral. Lacanian jouissance has no release or catharsis. It is deeply problematic if we apply the idea to a more stringent, demanding, and linguistically obtuse curriculum.

Students have reported in the data collected that they feel disenfranchised and limited by this new English curriculum. Freudian psychoanalysis placed heavy significance upon the phallus as the sexual presence and lack object, whereas Lacan developed the discussion into the realms of power, authority, and the Hegelian master / slave dialectic. If we look at the knowledge curriculum as the lost phallus (a gateway to power, culture, educatedness and social mobility), then it is representing opportunity and as such perpetuates its own existence, importance and desirability. Furthermore, when this Master discourse enters the

symbolic order through language, it becomes more mystical, more ambiguous and more semiotically opaque. Lacan explores how drives are not needs: they are wants rather than necessities. However, in an employment, capitalist, and accountability focussed educational economy, wants and needs become difficult to separate. We instruct students what to desire and then they engage in an interplay that shuts many out and allows a few to gain pleasure in it. If the pressure is to force yourself to enjoy it / desire it, not just learn it, then this could be seen as terroristic force and symbolic violence.

In discussing a Lacanian analysis of Art education, Atkinson (2011) reflects upon Badiou's notion of being and event: where there is an 'ongoing process of existence and change through which human subjects emerge' (xi). A Foucauldian appropriation of subject is more 'constituted through specific practices and discourses' than a Cartesian 'I think, therefore I am' notion. Butler (1997) merges Foucauldian ideas with psychoanalysis to suggest that 'passionate attachments' form a subjection to particular norms and values. Passionate attachments are described as those things that we are drawn to, compelled to, and under the influence of, consciously or unconsciously. In drawing some of these ideas together, it is necessary to consider how passionate attachments are part of practice, as these constitute subjectivity and encourage us to desire certain things. Therefore, as Butler suggests: dominative power is not external to the subject; it forms and creates the subject.

8.3 The Lacanian Subject(s)

Atkinson (2011) suggests that Lacan's approximation of the subject is complex and multi-faceted:

> For Lacan, the constitution of the subject … involves a complex relation between lack, desire, drive and fantasy … The triad of imaginary, symbolic and real plays an important part in Lacan's formulation of the process of subjectivity … The phrase 'to make Art practices relevant to

> life worlds of students' is too quick, in that it obscures the complexities and perhaps impossible difficulties of such a pedagogical project … In general terms, the emphasis upon technical ability and skill that dominates the early secondary Art curriculum has replaced the innovative learning practices … pedagogic drive is largely conceived of as remedial, to provide learners with skills.
>
> (pp. 24-5, 59, 60)

Similarly, these complexities are relevant to English: where very contestable terms are used in new curricular that gloss over the complexities of their enactment. It is too simplistic and naïve to argue that English should be relevant to students' lives, equip them all with the skills needed in the workplace, and rescue the UK economy from armageddon. Yet, this is how curricular combines the imaginary, symbolic and real into a nexus of skill formation and competency checklists to ascertain how complicit each school and teacher is to the master signifiers.

Additionally, Atkinson refers to how an audit culture has 'channelled becoming along prescribed routes' in Art education. (p.98). Similarly, in English, assessment loses something of the transformation of studying literature and instead has a reductive effect that is more liminal, marginal and a fantasy. Perhaps English is more defined by lack than most school disciplines? I agree with Atkinson who critiques assessment methods as fantasies to cover the lack. Therefore, the existence of such criteria cons us into imagining there is something within it, when the whole enterprise may be a 'moth eaten musical brocade' to use a metaphor from Larkin's poem 'Aubade' (a tattered piece of cloth used by Larkin to critique religion as a fantasy). So, literary exam descriptors such as 'sophisticated, appreciation, conceptual, sharp and analytical' are symbolic exchanges that are not inherent to the work of students, but are Master institutional impositions that categorise. This categorisation carries the danger of heterogeneous normalisation, producing text-book and

insipid expostulations (Žižek, 1989). Such reponses lack inherent character, originality and personality, but fulfil the rubrics of the examination game where students achieve; the school receive a stay of execution from Ofsted, and teachers dread their appraisal less.

Furthermore, Atkinson argues for a dynamic view that culture should be approached not as independent entities, but as a 'series of dynamic relations and transformations' (p.144); thus, reducing the othering and diminishing the power that multi-culturalism has over us as we struggle to understand each other and 'accept the tension between distance and working together' (p.145). Such a view does not see Britishness or middle-class culture as given, but as something to be questioned, transformed, and reimagined.

Similarly transformative in the realm of English education, I am drawn to the Easthope's (1991) argument that there is 'no master without slaves … minority culture is defined in a binary opposition with mass civilisation … although literary study does have a rationale … it is deeply embedded in ideology, concealed within the mode of the aesthetic' (pp. 4-13). Thus, viewpoints are hidden and concealed within the desire to 'feel' literature over ideological engagement. Easthope argues that a new paradigm of cultural studies had emerged in the 1990s that reimagines literary study, where all voices are heard, not just the educated elite. Perhaps this is a little too optimistic. Easthope cites the Lacanian point that meaning is produced temporally in a dialectic movement: we anticipate meanings, but find an anchoring point that pins down meanings. For example, we read forward and read backwards when resolutions are made, such as the descriptions of Jekyll and Hyde's secrecy that the reader is directed to re-evaluate when plot twists are manifested. There is no one correct definition and Easthope calls this 'unlimited polysemy' (p.25). Although an older theory, Easthope's idea has interesting ramifications for analysing what holds English and its participants in place.

Easthope identifies many ways of reading at different levels. Firstly, the level of social practice (institutional reading: the focus on the elitism of literary English and the reproduction of the elitism in schools). Secondly, the level of the signifier (to look at how the vocabulary is constructed; a linguistic reading; a discourse analysis; relation between the signifier and signified, like word and sentence level analysis). The final way of reading offered by Easthope is at the level of the signifies (the thematic exploration of ideology, social comment, symbolic representations, critical readings such as Marxist, gendered, psychoanalysis, the Lacanian divided subject of Jekyll and Hyde or Lady Macbeth). Easthope distinguishes the literary object from the object of cultural studies: the 'literary object is imaginatively transcendent, authored, canonical, always already past; the object of cultural studies is immanent and material, produced and reproduced collectively through labour in a continuing present' (p.175).

A slightly different conception of the notion of the object is offered by Žižek (1989), who refers to the concept of the 'sublime object' being a fantasy that gathers all problems into one focus, such as Nazi propaganda blaming Jewish immigrants for German economic difficulties in the 1930s. This seems an extreme example, yet it encapsulates his point: it is very problematic and far too simplistic to umbrella a myriad of difficult issues under one convenient term: often this ignorance can lead to violent ends. To apply the theory, English is often seen by governments as a solution for economic, cultural, poverty, aspiration and employment demands. This hailing of English as a medicine captures the fantasy. However, as an English professional, I disagree with a lot, but I do it anyway. Žižek refers to this as 'fetishistic disavowal', where desire, drive and ideology grabs us and we start to enjoy the benefits of what we might disagree with. The difficulty for English practice is ideology is as unconsciously operable as the water in which the fish swims and very difficult to detect (Bourdieu, 2007).

The ‘real’ according to Lacan is something that remains the same, in this case the examination credit system, and is indifferent to local contextualities. However, it is interesting to postulate whether English teaching itself is a fantasy: failure is necessary to valorise achievements and so the reality that educational success is not for all is hidden and implicit within Master discourse. Self-identity is set in relation to others (people and objects), so it is contextually bound: self-concept / identification / othering. Roseboro (2008) explains how Lacan might see the transformation from ‘other’ to ‘I’ as identification with subject and its internalization or recognition of intrinsic value or interest. Thus, the English curriculum can be seen as a mirror that is seeking to transform the ‘other’ into an ’I’ where knowledge that is separate or alien becomes internalised as cultural capital. It could be argued that this quest for cultural capital is part of the desire drive for English teachers. In using Lacanian discourse theory as a paradigmatic frame in this thesis, important complications arise, such the notion of the self-consciousness of the subjects.

8.4 English as a Mirror

Naturally, any social practice such as teaching is complicated by how you see yourself within it. This goes some way towards explaining why some people see themselves as hopeless at Mathematics or sport: they have internalised pictures of themselves as incapable generated by experiences, which reflect back at them. This produces a self-consciousness. Fink (2004) states that a Lacanian self-consciousness arises by ‘internalizing the way the Other sees one, by assimilating the Other’s approving and disapproving looks and comments, one learns to see oneself as the Other knows one’ (p.108). Such an explanation of the mirror and reflection shows how the Hysteric discourse and Analytic discourse can work: the transformation of the subject through the mechanics of social episodes in institutional contexts. Therefore, the mirroring can be done through the enactment of a curriculum model.

In exploring the curriculum as a mirror idea, we can see how, like the curriculum, the mirror 'belongs to a timeline … a story that explains its existence' (Roseboro, 2008, p.20). Furthermore, encounters with the mirror are context dependent: 'whether the child encounters the mirror on her / his own, is placed before the mirror playfully, or left in front of the mirror in disgust would provide different encounters with the mirror and, possibly, different constructions of self' (ibid). This is relevant to the enactment of the curriculum: how does the student encounter the mirror of the subject and the teacher's gaze? Is the subject being presented as a knowledge pill or as problematic space where we can learn to question? Of course, the political, institutional and professional pressures all impinge upon how English is packaged and presented to students. Roseboro (2008) goes further with the mirror explanation by looking at the Baradian notion of 'materiality'. [30] In other words, it is not just what the mirror shows, which is only a representation of something else, but what the mirror itself looks like: 'the material contexts of the mirror are equally important as the situational contexts … material reflectivity'.

Consequently, one interesting approach is to 'question the construction of the mirror itself' (p.21). For example, take the recent horror film Oculus (2014). The film follows the story of two siblings who bring back a strange and antiquated mirror that allegedly had caused their father to go mad and murder their mother over a decade ago. Common to modern horror, the director places the haunted object as the central antagonist of the film. What is strange about it is that the mirror reflects what it wants you to see: illusions that are deceptive to promulgate its own Master discourse of violence and murder. In a less dramatic

[30] If we apply Barad's (2003) term 'materiality', we can see how test results and progress tables can be viewed as just a teleologically produced and constructed reality that reveals more about the mechanism than any 'truth' about English. Such a position can be seen in the professional space, where more ephemeral measures such as 'confidence' and 'learning climate' make claims that are difficult to validate or measure.

and less ostentatious way, the English curriculum can be seen as a deceptive mirror that strips the subject of agency and lets them see only what the master signifiers want the subject to see. In this research project, I found that where students experienced the curriculum and its enactment as hegemonic knowledge to be digested, there was a stronger sense of negativity towards it. Whereas, when a more Hysteric and Analytic hermeneutic discourse was employed, students were able to experience alternative literature and alternative political voices, so that they could 'become aware of the contributions of their signifying affiliations … to examine repressed aspects of their identities, and critically consider how the world is presented to them and the ways they situate themselves within the world' (Thomas, 2014, p.55). To reflect on the tensions that I recorded from a teacher's perspective, I include an example of analysis from our final semi-structured interview.

8.5 A Vignette – A Colleague's Tensions with English as a Subject

In June 2016, I conducted a third and final semi-structured interview with the Key Stage 4 leader for English at school. To provide analysis, I include an overview of the points made before looking at the interview through the filter of Lacanian discourse theory to show how the theory and practice intersect to give a more meaningful and deeper analysis of English.

My colleague recognised that the new GCSE English syllabus has some positives: 'an introduction to a range of literature; language and literature now linking up and it is not easier to get a C on the foundation tier.' However, he raised many concerns about how it is to be enacted: the new confusing grading scheme; the lack of information regarding grading examples; the increased challenge of grading due to no tiering; the potential difficulties for students with English as an additional language, and the feeling that the reading level of extracts can make the subject inaccessible and demoralise student confidence:

‘They’re not the same ability, so how can they access the same material? … many second language students cannot access English from a hundred and sixty years ago … teaching kids Dickensian English is very challenging and some of my students have now given up on it already; trying to keep them going is really difficult .. I feel that Dickens’ stories are good, but personally I hate reading Dickens. I guess it is a matter of personal taste ... why do we have to look back almost 200 years for a good novel?’

Drawing on Žižek’s (2014) developmental ideas of Lacan’s ‘Four Discourses’, it is possible to see how the teacher is interpellated by discourse as a divided subject who must obey powerful ideological choices and be expected to love it freely. Žižek points out that Master discourse allows the master to tell the subject what they should desire freely. This desiring of the object, in this case the Dickens text, can never be satisfied as it represents a desire for something else: the homogeneity of student desire and acquiescence to domination. The paradox is stark. Žižek also refers to the Freudian concept of ‘drive’ where a repeated failure is caused by circulation around an object of desire. It seems that my colleague recognises that there is something symbolically violent and destructive to student motivation, yet the chase has to continue; what he is for others encapsulates his own feeling of lack: as he feels the split. To follow Lacan, this might be viewed as a pure Master discourse: I ($) am represented as a teacher (S1) for students as a signifier of symbolic identity (S2), with no room for the fantasy structure (a).

My colleague saw the removal of coursework as a positive, as it removes the over-dependency upon teachers and puts the ‘emphasis back onto the students’. However, there was also recognition that this will necessitate weekly mock exams and this could play unfairly for students with test anxiety. Teaching students formulas to learn off by heart in tests, such as rote learning sentences and paragraphs to shoe-horn into examination responses presented another issue. Freire (1998) suggests that 'by giving students formulas to receive and

store, we have not offered him the means of authentic thought ... not exchange ideas, but to dictate' (p.34). My colleague suggested that there is a concern with the enactment of English and to what extent English is merely performative in function. Indeed, attempts to be more creative and imaginative in lessons are often viewed a waste of time by students and as a luxury by English teachers. Recently, I taught a Year 11 lesson where the class had a rip-roaring discussion about whether Jekyll and Hyde are dual characters or merely an excuse for immoral behaviour. However, I felt compelled to cut short the debate because I had to test them on whether they had learnt the sentence starters off by heart from their homework task. Here, the students were enjoying the debate; suddenly the enjoyment was totally dampened by my perception that the exam game needed to be approached in this didactic and depressingly passive manner. It seems that ideology, discourse, and subjectivity run deep and are hard to change. This University discourse demonstrates the pervasive power of the hidden master, where teacher and student play the game in denial of rebellion or contestation. Žižek refers to the meta-rules of ideology where the disconnect from many students due to subject matter, text choice, or teaching method supports an implicit ideology that English is taught to disavow individual connection, rather than promote it.

The interview then turned to the concept of Britishness in the new English curriculum. My colleague suggested that

> *These preferences for Romantic poetry, Shakespeare and historical culture put some ideas on a pedestal and are being valorised by the government. But it depends on your understanding of history, bible etc … Also, Dickens' treatment of his wife or Romantic poets taking drugs, the slave trade, Empire, are they British values too?*
>
> (Semi-structured Interview – June 2016)

Here we see Hysteric discourse in action: a resistance to policy that is complicitly implemented faithfully. My colleague is troubled by the demands of the Master discourse. Žižek describes this process as: I don't know what I am ($), so I address a question to the master (S1) to give me knowledge (S2) to tell me what I am as the object (a).

Thomas (2014) also offers explanations of the Hysterical discourse and how it can be positively attributed: 'It shifts master signifiers away from positions of truth and power, allowing for different kinds of knowledge to be produced and different possibilities for the subject to put desire to work … it calls out the master … [shows the] contradictions between conscious and unconscious knowledge' (p.54). In this semi-structured interview, my colleague and I explored how new knowledge can be produced by teaching students to read against the grain of a literary text and to see the canon as an object of critique. I saw one lesson taught by the same colleague where questioning the text, its assumptions, and what is disavows became an interesting springboard to move beyond narrow exam criteria into an empowering discussion. It seems that this is one of the major hurdles to be navigated in English practice: to expound eclecticism of reading for students to find their own voice and interests, whilst also upholding the canon for exam purposes, but seeing it as ideological construct.

Here we can see the Analyst discourse that brings the hidden and unknown discourse out into the open to bring unconscious complicity under scrutiny. As mentioned earlier in the thesis, Thomas (2014) sees Analytic discourse as being able to resist established power through self –knowledge: 'the individual recognise[s] that her own discourse is not fully within her control and in this way it is oppositional to authoritarian discourses, where overt content is reified and absolutized' (p.55); whereas, Žižek describes it as the object of desire (a) supresses knowledge (S2) and addresses the patient ($) to leave the remaining

master signifiers (S1). Therefore, the function of English is bound up with the anxieties of the English practitioner.

8.6 Summary

How subjects view objects and other subjects is key to develop our understanding of Lacanian theory and its role in presenting new perspectives on English teaching. This chapter has examined how consideration of the mirror, lack, desire, and drive can provide interesting angles on how the subject and subjects are held in place. Also, I have analysed how Žižek's development of Lacanian discourse provides important insights into how the subject is interpellated by discourse. Ultimately, this chapter has sought to present deeper theoretical angles on how Lacanian theory can be used to compliment an understanding of the processes and products of English education. In the final chapter, I seek to draw together the key messages of the thesis; revisit the key questions; discuss the implications of the thesis for the practice of high school English, and identify areas for further research.

Chapter 9 – Conclusions

9.1 Overview

This thesis is designed to explore how conceptions of English as a subject are held in place and how conceptions of subjects are held in place. In terms of what 'holds' something in place, I am exploring the circumstances, contexts, decisions, prejudices, inclusions, omissions, and complexities that make something what it appears to be. The complexity of this task is significant as it carries the challenge of being able to access, observe, research, collect, and analyse data to explore the issues. In this chapter, I am seeking to revisit my key research questions, explore to what extent I have addressed them. I also

present my findings, discuss the implications of my findings, and identify areas for further exploration that this study offers.

9.2 Contexts

In making any claim to knowledge, it is important to recognise the context-specific nature of the work and how my own prejudices and views form part of the claim. A critical question to ask of research is ‘so what?’ What is the value of the research and what can be taken from it? What can I share about the research? What claims can be made? Claims are made on a basis of demonstrating ‘the validity of both knowledge and the process of coming to know ... evidence ... to the validity of the research claim’ (McNiff, 2007). Ergo, the journey must be argued for before any destination can be justified. Where it becomes more difficult is how to judge such evidence against criteria and how such criteria is argued for, with what rigour and underpinning? Claims are tentative at best and often counter to the policy generation of many educational research claims.

In my research, I was aware of the need to look at my own positioning first and analyse where I was coming from, both personally and professionally. As outlined earlier in the thesis, my personal values were challenged by the new English curriculum and I felt great tension with the expectations of teachers and students. At the conclusion of this research study, I still feel this unease. However, such unease is tempered by the possibility of my English practice (and hopefully others’ practice) becoming more consciously cognisant of the complexities to be navigated. In choosing to conduct research with narrative and semi-structured interviews, I wanted to tell a story not only about what I did and found out, but how what I did changed me. This is the core purpose of self-reflective research. In my conclusions and summing up, I am attempting to take account of these important considerations.

9.3 English and the National Curriculum

My key research questions for this study are: what holds the 'subject' of high school English in place and what holds 'subjects' in place? Through this thesis, I have endeavoured to show how complex these questions are. The debates surrounding the purposes of English play a significant role in determining what and how English is taught and, throughout my seventeen year career, I have witnessed how English has been taken away from practitioners and has become a more overtly political concern. What happens to the people involved in such discursive packages of the subject is an interesting area. In following Lacan, the subject is always temporal and connected in complex ways to the realm of the imaginary (the self), the real (the unspeakable) and the symbolic (language). Therefore, English as a high school subject and its effect upon subjects is very complex to make determinate claims about. Perhaps, the most appropriate claim that can be made about my research questions and my research is that they have opened up to me new complexities and conceptions that have changed how I see and how I teach English.

My conclusions from the research can be summarised into four broad categories. Firstly, that English as a subject is not a stable entity and that is a spiralling dynamic collection of competing discourses that hail and disavow a range ideas, epistemologies and subjective positions. Intertwined with these competing discourses are political accountabilities and competition between schools. Such competition runs counter to another discourse of collaboration. This means that English departments and schools feel in competition with each other for results, whilst seeking to collaborate to provide the best experience for students: a tangled web indeed. As more demands are made upon the subject of English, practitioners and students seem to become less sure about how to meet such demands and retain some of the creative freedoms that English might have traditionally enjoyed, although its politicisation is a constant feature.

Secondly, the changes to English education in the past two years have exacerbated and redrawn some time immemorial debates of correctness, accuracy, culture and the national imaginary. However, these debates are occurring in a post-Brexit voting world, with massive public spending cuts and our economic well being placed at the door of the teaching profession. Furthermore, there is a tension between 'performativity' (the need to be seen to be performing to standards and expectations) and teaching a love of the subject. Moreover, teaching someone to love something is fraught with difficulties. It could be argued that we all have a choice to enjoy or not enjoy; to love or dislike anything that is presented to us. Whilst English teachers may aspire to teach enjoyment and love, this as a valedictory aim is deeply problematic.

Thirdly, that Lacanian discourse allows the researcher to see something new and interesting in such debates. By using the discourses of the Master, University, Hysteric, and Analyst, the researcher can critique actions and empirical events in a way that moves beyond power and instead looks at the complexities of the social world. This social world must then be challenged so that English seeks to teach a critique of itself.

Finally, that how English positions students and teachers as subjects is coloured by a wide variety of influences from the national priorities of government, to the local contextualities of schools, to the individual passionate attachments of teachers to the dynamic of the classroom and the students inhabiting these classrooms. My students reported to me towards the end of the research that they had no idea that education was so political. This is not news to teachers, but it is surprising how stealthy and silent discourse can be when it is active, yet seemingly dormant.

Such conclusions have potentially interesting consequences for the English teaching professional and the practices of teaching English. What one thinks about English reveals a story about you, not about English. This sense of self-

reflection and reconnection with professional purpose has been very enlightening. So, how can this analysis be used to contribute towards the future of my own and possibly others' English practice? In applying Lacanian discourse theory, there are many opportunities that can be followed to make the practice of English teaching more democratic, more emancipatory and less symbolically violent.

One of the tenets of Lacan's theory lies in the notion of problematizing the 'I': it is not a straightforward identity as the subjective self does not know itself. 'We have only to understand the mirror stage as an identification, in the full sense that analysis gives the term; namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image' (Lacan, 2007). Thus the sense that we make refers to a previous version of ourselves. The warning to '[b]e wary of the image' (ibid) also suggests that you should never trust the perceived realities, as they are fragments of contextually bound and referential experience that are unstable and constantly shifting.

9.4 The new GCSE English course

To outline how English can be reimagined, I include two narrative data sources: one from my learning journal, and one from the final 100-word data collection from a Year 11 student.

In February 2016, Nick Gibb (the Schools Minister) gave a speech entitled 'What is a good education in the 21st Century?' In the speech, he outlined his vision for the new curriculum and defended its aims. He suggested that 'the recipient of a core academic curriculum leaves school with an intellectual hinterland, which allows them to make sense of the world around them.' Gibb

goes on to state that the new curriculum was crafted to counter the '2007 rewrite of the national curriculum, which systematically expunged any mention of subject content, replacing it with references to 'processes', 'concepts', and with an overlay of 'personal, learning and thinking skills' such as 'independent learning' and 'learning to learn'. The speech ends with this mission statement: 'It is the driving ambition for this government that a core academic curriculum should not be the preserve of a social elite, but instead the entitlement of every single child. Though there are some inequalities which schools cannot address, the unequal distribution of intellectual and cultural capital is one that they can.' To capture my narrative ideas at the end of this research and to evaluate my own passionate attachments, I wrote my final journal entry:

> *I have just re-read Nick Gibb's views regarding the new national curriculum and am assimilating it with my own experiences over the past eighteen months of teaching it.*
>
> *Of course, the really telling messages in Gibb's speech lie in the lexical choices being made that give clues as to what paradigms and discourses are being attended to. The use of the word 'recipient' encapsulates the aims of the English curriculum and the phrase 'hinterland' meaning a region that is beyond what is visible or known, suggests that without such bestowing of gifts, then students remain ignorant of the fruits of knowledge. In my view, Government policy starts from a philosophical nonsense that everyone can access every area of the curriculum, regardless of ability, and if you can't then it's because of poor teaching. It is naïve to believe that you can add in culture and massive challenge like cream into a hot chocolate. However, it would be difficult to argue against such an aspiration. It is not the aspiration I find challenging, it is the practicalities of achieving it that seem to be so hideously simplified. Employers constantly tell the teaching profession that students lack skills*

and are not work ready. How can devaluing vocational options and independent learning in favour of a 'classical' education be serving employers?

I agree that being working class should not mean that you don't study Shakespeare or a volume of classic poetry. To a degree it is emancipatory in its aim, but I think that the main problem is that the curriculum is over-ambitious in its scope: you have to cover two poems every lesson to get through it all, which removes time for anything else, including dealing with the problems that students encounter or challenging behaviours.

There is no time to explore, you tell them what to think and they regurgitate – that's all it is. Depressingly, our English faculty has just begun to teach the rote-learning of paragraphs about Macbeth. This is now beginning to look like nothing more than a memory test of things that may be only half understood. What about students who are completely alienated by it and disengaged despite teachers best efforts? It is depressing to see, but the current education model sees class as the defining factor of the ability setting system in English. It smacks of the elite telling everyone else what they should learn and know.

I realise that I am looking at education through the frame of the Analyst discourse. The competing desires and discourses are addressing my split subjectivity and reminding me that my own interpellation is not within my control. The main challenge is to account for the individuality of students and limit the damage the new curriculum may inflict by being attentive to alternative voices.

(Journal Entry – November 2016)

Here can be seen examples of what Butler (1997) terms ‘passionate attachments’. My objection to the volume of poetry to be covered is informed by my experience of feeling like I am delivering a package to a customer. If volume is being favoured over depth and personal engagement, then there is the danger that the humanity and personal relationships, that are so important in teaching, are at risk. Secondly, I also refer to the potential elitism of the new English curriculum. It seems that the valorisation of achievement becomes contingent upon the failure of others and this naturally creates a divisive system that is more culturally despotic than meritocratic. These issues could be addressed through tiering the examinations; introducing modern fiction / multicultural fiction, and slimming down the curriculum to favour depth over volume. However, as these are procedural decisions that are unlikely to be enacted, I conclude this thesis with an examination of a student point of view and some recommendations for teaching the new GCSE English gathered from the study.

In the final data point in October I asked Year 11 students to write a final 100-words to capture their views, ideas, feelings and thoughts about their experience of the new GCSE English curriculum. Here, I have collated various responses into a meta-narrative to capture voices from the group. Whilst it is not a single narrative, it does include a variety of voices and a multiplicity of opinions (Heikkinen, Huttunen and Syrjala, 2007).

> *I have been in tears at times during this year. I consider myself to be good at English, but have really struggled to understand what we have read and the demands that are made on us for exams. I feel like I am doing A levels, not GCSEs (before I am ready for them). Sometimes our teacher has to translate what we are reading to such an extent that it almost seems pointless. Some students in the class just want to know*

what is on the exam, but even I find the poetry we have to study irrelevant. Although I am in a top set, I end up just focussing on the quotations I have to learn and I have no time or desire to individually explore it. With 15 poems, a novel, and two plays to know for exams where you don't have any of the texts in front of you at all, it becomes about a memory test; who can regurgitate what the teacher told you. I am completely terrified by the closed nature of the exam. It seems like we are the guinea pigs who are going to get a raw deal. I feel like the system is weighted against me and I am being set up to fail. Even the sample English Language paper has lengthy unseen extracts from Huxley's Brave New World on it. It's just too much to expect everyone to sit the same paper. I guess it was not designed to be like this, but with so much to cover and remember it's no surprise that it's turning me off English and I used to love it.

[I have included all comments that were made apart from one dissenting voice who expressed his enjoyment of the new curriculum because he has a 'fantastic memory and feels that exams are quite easy.']

(Year 11 Meta-narrative – October 2016)

Here, in both narrative accounts by students and me, can be seen the Hysteric discourse where the divided subject is keenly felt. There is much resistance to the subjective interpellation caused by the Master and University discourses that require submission. It is clear that 'some forms of human subjectivity, are affirmed, while others are devalued and silenced' and that 'reading choices are much more intricately linked tied to people's lived realities and to social relations of power than is ever usually acknowledged in English classrooms' (Kelly, 1992). This study has shown to me that the new curriculum does present challenges, but it can also provide some opportunities and Lacanian theory can help us to find them.

In seeking to respond to the challenges, Fleming and Stevens (2015) offer some useful suggestions for countering the problems with the new GCSE English course. They offer a hopeful message where the philosophy and method of teachers is the key: English can be seen mechanistically, or as linguistic depth that is communal and rich, occurring in 'cultural contexts' (9). Thus, the key is the enactment of the prescription. Given that English lies on shifting sands, then 'the real nature of the subject has to be discovered and invented ever anew by those most intensively involved' (p.12), and given that English is 'centrally concerned with values, personal identity, and developing and expressing critical opinion' (p.7), then 'we need, paradoxically, to be rigorous in creating the objective circumstances to allow our pupils' own subjectivities to take root' (pp. 7, 16). It is incumbent upon English teachers to navigate the terrain of the new curriculum and its enactment in a way that does not cause symbolic violence or position students as divided with the valorisation of knowledge as desire. Given that terminal examinations are a necessary part of schooling and have their place, English has to be about more than just teaching the test. Roseboro (2008) argues that a 'Lacanian, post-formal curriculum … requires that we seek and identify truths, we work to become integrated beings by hearing the unconscious (that which we do not want to or cannot face), and that we understand the limitations on our constructions of self / identity' (p.98).

Taking this further, Clarke (2012) refers to the Lacanian concept of the Möbius subject, where the constructions of self depart from 'pure' identities and blur such boundaries that neoliberal versions of education rely upon. Clarke suggests that the 'Möbius educational subject's simultaneous and paradoxical embodiment of singularity, plurality, and difference exposes the inadequacies of an education grounded in discourses of mastery and instead demands engagement with the other side of education' (p.57). The relevance for practice here is that there must be attention paid to other discourses and other voices

that challenge the master signifiers, such as teaching specifically the need to read against the grain of texts and for students to see their own voice as powerful to counteract the chaotic conceptions of the new GCSE curriculum. Indeed, this research has made me reflect upon the way I view the teaching of reading as an educational enterprise. With this in mind, how to approach reading in English is an important area to consider and this is addressed by the work of Paul Ricouer (1913-2005) who combines (amongst other things) theory on psychoanalysis, narrative theory and hermeneutics.

9.5 Ricouer's 'Fictive Experience' of English

Although coming from universalism and Kant, as opposed to the relativism of Lacan, Ricouer has written extensively on the nature of reading and English. Ricoeur's theory of refiguration by the reader suggests that literature changes some people who read it. This is what Ricoeur calls the 'fictive experience' (1985, p.6). This concept consists of the duality of the imaginary and temporary inhabiting of the textual world and a 'transcendence within immanence' (ibid), where the reader takes the fictive experience with them into their own world. Whilst it may only change some readers, such a vicarious transformation of a reader's experience occurs in a real world, much like Brontë's (1847) transformational simile for Cathy: 'I have dreamed dreams in my life that have gone through me like wine through water and altered the colour of my mind' (Wuthering Heights, Chapter IX, p.5). This produces a different notion of subjectivity to Lacan: Ricouer's subject is not used by language, but enriched by it. Here, fiction alters the subject's perception and has the power to transform it beyond the therapeutic encounter.

This refiguration aspect of mimesis is interesting as it suggests a reconstitution and changed world view that creates what Ricoeur calls an 'abyss ... in our

symbolic apprehension of the world' (1985, p.21). In other words, reading literature is a paradigm shifting experience. This view of cultural assimilation is suggestive of the reader taking something with them from the act of reading. However, this way of looking at the study of literature is not without its difficulties. In considering Wuthering Heights, Eagleton (2005) asserts that 'if you enjoy enough of an economic surplus, then you have the leisure and resources to engage in personal moral or spiritual issues for their own sake. And this is known as culture … it can cultivate the resources to indulge in friendship, art, the intellect and humanity as ends in themselves' (p.139).

As Ricoeur states: story events take place in the past experience of a narrative voice; for example: in Wuthering Heights Nelly Dean reflects upon past events from the perspective of experience. This fronts her anachronological prejudice upon Heathcliff's youth: 'But I was completely deceived as you will hear' (Chapter IV, p.6). Of course, such experiences are fictional and do not refer to an actual past. However, literature is knowingly fictional and operates in a third space and time with an alternative reality that disclaims its own epoch's existence; whereas history aims at the opposite. One significant example of this from my classroom practice occurred when studying 'To Kill a Mockingbird' with a Year 9 class.

> *In teaching Chapter 11 of 'To Kill a Mockingbird', I recognised a moral purpose of challenging prejudice, but also a cultural one. The approach that I noticed myself taking is one where cultural capital and induction into a cultural club gives pupils a tool to access or solidify a middle class culture. I noticed a real fear of political correctness with the 'n' word repeated numerously in the chapter and pupils opting out of reading it out. An uneasiness pervaded the room and I found myself launching into a well-practised script about the historical norms of the 1930s and our justified moral outrage of today with the taboo language. This meta-*

reality demands an empathy with and a disassociation from a fictional construct of Tom Robinson.

(Journal Entry - Oct 15)

9.6 Epistemology and Subjectivity revisited

In looking at conceptions of English and the reader / response theories of essentialism, I have been challenged by the theoretical philosophies of Ricoeur and his concepts of time in fictional narrative. Reading Ricoeur has encouraged me to reconsider my concept of the nature of narrative as both a literary enterprise and as a method for capturing hermeneutic experiences of self-reflexive research. Ricoeur refers to Aristotle's concepts of muthos (narrative emplotment) and mimesis (representation) as philosophical problems in reading and understanding literature. In referencing Ricoeur's work, Dowling (2011) asserts that 'literary works are self-contained worlds within their own laws and their own logic, subject to distortion when made to answer to ideologies or doctrines external to themselves' (p.2). In teaching literature, this represents a significant disturbance. For example, in evaluating the socio-political history of Shakespeare's Othello regarding race, economy and tragic villainy, we must be wary of the dangers of mimesis.

Ricoeur identifies mimesis as having three chronological functions: the mental and sensory capturing of culture; the fixed form of committing such culture to writing, and the reconstitution of ideas into the cultural sphere that changes the text and the reader themselves. Thus, ideas external to the text but prevalent in the study of literature, point to an epistemology of conflation, where the study of English becomes fused with politics, history, rituals, sociology, psychology and religious knowledge. This might be termed as 'context' in English curricular, but can demonstrate a false bolting on of extra information that does not enhance any understanding, but can consume genuine personal engagement.

Dowling (2011) uses an example of Roman Catholic practices to highlight the differences between actions and rituals in cultural knowledge. This demonstrates how knowledge about religious practices and rituals become essential in decoding literature. One notable example supported by a narrative was recorded by a Year 13 student regarding Marlowe's 'Dr Faustus' (1589): 'I find one of the biggest barriers to be my lack of knowledge about the bible and the concepts of Catholicism; the differences between it and Protestantism and how the play uses this for comedy. Also, the countless mythological references can be explained, but make the text forbidding' (Year 13 student narrative, October 2014). This notion of exclusivity that the student is referring to is one reason for literature's high status and its difficulty being appropriate to advanced level study. In my own personal context, I remember feeling the same sense of exclusion and inhibition as a student. However, I have now developed a sense of professional self which is tied up in my efficacy regarding this induction. This points to what Žižek would call 'fetishistic satisfaction', where we are compelled to behave in a 'closed self-propelling loop'; a kind of blind self-identity where we behave without thinking as an automatic comfort zone norm (Brown, 2007).

Most interestingly, Ricoeur (1984) refers to the concept of 'discordant concordance' where the events of plot occur in a co-existent denouement of plot that is prefigured. In other words, there is a sense of plot events in a text which are complimented by the wholeness of it and a grander narrative. Dowling explores how Ricoeur goes further by suggesting that narrative is a shared experience that transcends history; as opposed to history which is tied to an event. The notion of culture and history in English education is a problematic and fascinating one. For example, New Historicist views, such as those proposed by Stephen Greenblatt suggest the central importance of historical artefacts and knowledge as equally valuable as the text. Such an ideological frame carries assumptions, values and beliefs about the nature and pedagogy of English teaching. Critically, in the same way that Barad explores the concept

of materiality (an ultrasound is a technologically produced image of constructed reality only), the fringes of new historicism suppose that historical artefacts or accounts are history rather than subjectively constructive realities. One critique of this is that history is written by the victors and that historical documents and artefacts are as open to ideological distortion as any literary work. Furthermore, Žižek might consider such an ideology of artefacts as history as an unconscious fantasy that structures a reality phenomenon.

Indeed, one paradigm of literature could be to look for meaning in 'meta-narratives' that teach grand narratives that are common to all readers. This post-modern term, coined by Lyotard (1979) asserts a mistrust of grand narratives such as progress and enlightenment offered by modernity. Such a post-modern paradigm demonstrates how English as a subject can be subversive and exciting. For example, Eagleton (2005) describes Jonathan Swift (1667 – 1745) as an ontologically fascinating narrator in 'Gulliver's Travels' (1726) who makes the familiar unfamiliar by presenting Gulliver as the outsider with an inside knowledge that nothing is absolute and perceived reality is monstrous. Such an effect is achieved through the alienating description of objects and people as disassociated from the narrator. Eagleton suggests that this 'constantly shifting … vantage point … is an implicit critique of a naïve belief in objectivity' (p.48).

Such an example links to the idea of subjectivity. To what extent I am part of the story is an interesting contention in research. For example, what I say about English is indicative of my values, beliefs and practices, rather than any illuminating theory about English as a subject. One of the tenets of this research has been to make the comfortable strange and disrupted to construct a more illuminating and compelling story of classroom practice and theoretical conceptions. If we accept the contention that teaching is an art and that art cannot be standardised to be delivered, then it is the idiosyncrasies of practice that make teaching and learning English, in particular, such a personal

experience. Government policy may seek to place objectivity upon English, but it seems to me that English is an intersubjective entity. That is, it 'depends upon communication among many … [it] has no objective value … [yet] billions of people believe in its value' (Harari, 2015, p. 146). Harari takes this further: '[e]very child, teacher and inspector also knows that when forced to choose between the two, [high marks or deep understanding] most schools go for the marks' (p.170). Despite this attentiveness to neoliberal measurement and accountability, English surely has a moral duty to be more representative of society and promote empathy, tolerance, and understanding. During this research project, I have become aware of how colleagues, students, and I actively seek out opportunities to find alternative spaces and make English a more representative experience.

How English is packaged as a subject and how it affects subjects has been the focus of this research project. I have sought to use Lacan's 'Four Discourses' to analyse English through a psychoanalytical lens. Thematically speaking, English looks different when it operates in each of the 'Four Discourse' areas. From Master discourses of politically engendered aims; to University discourse enactment of the master; to the split subject of the Hysteric discourse, and the recognition of individual desire in the Analyst discourse, the practice of English looks radically different depending upon which discourse is valorised. Perhaps it is timely for English teachers to see the value of Analyst discourse as the most progressive view of English. Although the current system seems more prescriptive than ever, there are some opportunities for freedom in the way the prescription is dispensed. It seems more important than ever that English teachers use these opportunities to create a more representative and personal experience in English, despite the constraints of the examination curriculum.

From this research I have further questions and research interests: what is the nature of gender politics and how do they affect conceptions of English? How does the new curriculum affect the most and least able? What difference would

a more Analyst attentive conception of English do to student understanding of the subject? How does the new English GCSE affect students who have English as an additional language? How might Lacan's 'graph of desire' help me to reimagine pleasure and enjoyment of English? What are the implications of English practice for uptake at A level? What political transformations will affect English in the future? To what extent does the new GCSE English satisfy the demands of employers?

As the new GCSE English course sees its first cohort to sit the examinations this summer in 2017, the efficacy of English teachers and the value of students' ideas will once again be judged by statistics, accountability, and comparative hierarchy. This may not change any time soon, but English seems uniquely placed to find opportunities in practice to be more radical and more representative.

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