Imagination, Innovation, Creativity

Re-Visioning English in Education

SAMPLE

edited by

Jacqueline Manuel
Paul Brock
Don Carter
Wayne Sawyer

PHOENIX EDUCATION

CONTENTS

	DEDICATION	1
	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	2
	FOREWORD	3
1	"WHAT IS WITHIN BECOMES WHAT IS AROUND": IMAGINATION, INNOVATION, CREATIVITY Jacqueline Manuel, Paul Brock, Don Carter and Wayne Sawyer	7
2	ENGLISH: A SUGGESTED VISION AND A STRATEGY John Dixon	13
3	THE VALUE OF LITERATURE AND LANGUAGE IN CONTEMPORARY EDUCATION: A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE Paul Brock	23
4	RESEARCH, PEDAGOGY AND ENGLISH Ken Watson	41
5	A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE ON ATTEMPTS TO INTERNATIONALISE THE ENGLISH CURRICULUM THROUGH GLOBAL EXCHANGES Jeanne Gerlach	57
6	LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE: REVISITING SOME DEFINING EPISODES IN THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH Wayne Sawyer	71
7	GETTING OFF THE SUBJECT; ENGLISH, DRAMA AND MEDIA AND THE COMMONWEALTH OF POWERFUL CULTURE Jonothan Neelands	87
8	"THE BEST MOMENTS ": ADOLESCENTS' READING PRACTICES AND PREFERENCES Jacqueline Manuel	99
9	THE DISAPPEARANCE OF ENJOYMENT: HOW LITERATURE WENT WANDERING IN THE LITERACY WOODS AND GOT LOST Terry Locke	123
10	IMAGINATION, INNOVATION, CREATIVITY: RE-VISIONING ENGLISH IN EDUCATION Libby Gleeson	139

SAMPLE

11 Rich Performance Tasks: Re-imagining Multimedia Drama in the English Classroom 145
Miranda Jefferson

12 "Something Grand and Lustrous": Some Reflections on Creativity in Subject English and Beyond 159
Don Carter

13 Creating Imaginative, Practical Possibilities in K-6 English Classrooms 171
Robyn Ewing

14 *Through the Looking Glass* – Re-Visioning Primary English 183
Annalies Van Westenbrugge

15 Literature as Rich Concept Thought 189
Simon Haines

16 Empathy, Imagination and Creativity in English and Drama 195
Rosyln Arnold and John Hughes

17 "A Love of Teaching and Learning": A Case Study of English Teaching Transformed Through Quality Teaching and Professional Learning 209
Vicki Treble

18 English in England and Wales: A New Era? 219
Sue Brindley

19 Developing Students' Creativity in Primary English Through the Arts 231
Janelle Warhurst, Karen Crawford, Jackie Ireland, Doug Neale, Jenny Pickering, Carla Rathmell, Gretel Watson

20 The *Indij Readers* Project 243
Marg Cossey

21 Creativity, Reading, Writing and Life's Experiences 253
R.D. Walshe

22 Texts, Repetoires and Reading Journals: How Knowing What They Know Helps Readers Read 261
Jack Thomson

23 Goals or Horizons? The Conundrum of Progression in English or a Possible Way of Understanding Formative Assessment in the English Classroom 279
Bethan Marshall

Editors and Contributors 291

SAMPLE

CHAPTER 1

"WHAT IS WITHIN BECOMES WHAT IS AROUND": IMAGINATION, INNOVATION, CREATIVITY

JACQUELINE MANUEL, PAUL BROCK, WAYNE SAWYER, DON CARTER

> It is a serious matter to ask, Why do I teach? We don't come to teaching to punch the clock or count the dollars. Most of us come to teaching to answer a summons or bidding that commands us to do this work. We are drawn to teaching by our passion for our students and love of our subjects – and by our belief that connecting students to potent ideas will yield great things. We are drawn by a sense that we can make a difference in a child's life, in our world, and that engaging in such meaningful work will be cause for great personal fulfilment.
>
> (Intrator & Scribner, 2003: 1)

In reflecting over the contributions in the following pages, the metaphor of a kaleidoscope comes to mind. *Imagination, Innovation, Creativity: Re-Visioning English in Education* commences with the delphic voice of one of the most significant figures in the risorgimento of English that commenced in the 1960s - that of John Dixon, now into his 80s. What follows are the voices of teachers, academics, authors and a range of other educators, each bringing a particular perspective to bear on the various themes and issues that flow within, among and across the chapters in this book: a book that seeks to explore the images that can be revealed, synthesised and recorded as we turn the kaleidoscope of research, scholarship and practice of English education at the local, national and international levels.

But this book is not merely an intellectual stock-taking exercise. The essays collectively stress the importance of reconnecting and re-engaging with what teachers - and thereby, potentially, students - love about English: its unique capacity to engage the mind, the spirit and the heart; to stimulate imagination, curiosity and creative capacities through meaningful immersion in the stories of humanity, and to enrich and develop students' cognitive and affective command and understanding of language in all its expansive dimensions, contexts and purposes.

We could justifiably claim that the present historical moment is unique in its heightened emphasis on educational reform, the centralisation of curriculum, the onrush of technology (and the manifold implications of this for teaching and learning) and the shifting social conditions that have shaped and will inevitably shape English education in ways about which we can now only speculate. Even the most cursory survey of the research literature in the field, however, throws into sharp relief what is perhaps axiomatic about the history English education: since its institutionalisation as a school subject in the 1800s, it has been marked by a consistency of often polarised debates about what does and should constitute the subject, and characterised by its perpetual state of

SAMPLE

'becoming'. *What is English?* - the title of Peter Elbow's 1990 consideration of the nature of the school subject - epitomises an on-going concern in the field for re-definition and re-conceptualisation in quite fundamental ways.

Indeed, trying to capture the nature of 'English' is something to which histories of the subject continually return. "The question of how best to understand and indeed, define, English teaching remains a vexed and contentious feature of English curriculum debate", argue Green and Beavis (1996: 7). The central question posed in Medway's study of the history of the subject in the UK in the period leading up to the 1990s is, "How is it that, in relation to the demands placed upon it, and upon school subjects in general, this subject could have ended up so eccentric?" (1990: 3). Goodwyn has argued that "Since its formation, subject English has been the centre of controversy... Perceived by many as the most important subject in the school curriculum, it has been a barometer for the curricular weather systems surrounding it... English has been more than part of larger changes in education and society; it has been the focus of those changes" (2001: 149).

In some senses, then, it may be impossible to 'pin down' the fluid and shifting 'identity' of English. Among those themes running through these essays, however, one key theme recurs - that of the centrality of creativity and the imagination to English education. Throughout many chapters there is a demand for policy shapers to take far more seriously the realms of the imagination, innovation and creativity. In the 21st century - in which we constantly hear cries of how important the skills of innovation, creativity, imagination, problem solving, and of developing authentic personal relationships will be to the citizens of this century - it remains to be seen how policy, particularly on public assessment, will drive the imperative for these capacities in a nationally centralised curriculum.

Libby Gleeson's essay captures this sense well when she discusses those who conceptualise literacy as principally "a skill based activity which demands discipline, practice and repetition" and those who, rather, consider it more to be "a means of making the world meaningful", where testing of the former can lead to undermining the latter to such an extent that she argues that "bog-standard literacy is now not merely the norm but presented as some kind of success story."

The price of the "success story" has been well highlighted in England. The House of Commons Children, Schools and Families Committee's recent findings on the testing and assessment regime in place since the beginning of the National Curriculum in that country is worth quoting at some length:

> ….teaching to the test, to an extent which narrows the curriculum and puts sustained learning at risk, is widespread… the Government's approach to accountability has meant that test results are pursued at the expense of a rounded education for children…
>
> We believe that teaching to the test and this inappropriate focus on test results may leave young people unprepared for higher education and employment…
>
> A creative, linked curriculum which addresses the interests, needs and talents of all pupils is the casualty of the narrow focus of teaching which we have identified.
>
> Narrowing of the curriculum is problematic… for those subjects which are tested in public examinations, the scope and creativity of what is taught is compromised by a

SAMPLE

> focus on the requirements of the test. We are concerned that any efforts the Government makes to introduce more breadth into the school curriculum are likely to be undermined by the enduring imperative for schools, created by the accountability measures, to ensure that their pupils perform well in national tests…
>
> We are persuaded by the evidence that it is entirely possible to improve test scores through mechanisms such as teaching to the test, narrowing the curriculum and concentrating effort and resources on borderline students. It follows that this apparent improvement may not always be evidence of an underlying enhancement of learning and understanding in pupils…
>
> We consider that the measurement of standards across the full curriculum is virtually impossible under the current testing regime because national tests measure only a small sample of pupils' achievements; and because teaching to the test means that pupils may not retain, or may not even possess in the first place, the skills which are supposedly evidenced by their test results…
>
> Whilst we do not doubt the Government's intentions when it states that "The National Curriculum sets out a clear, full and statutory entitlement to learning for all pupils, irrespective of background or ability", we are persuaded that in practice many children have not received their entitlement and many witnesses believe that this is due to the demands of national testing.
>
> (House of Commons CSFC, 2008: 94-95)

It goes without saying, of course, that quality forms of testing and assessment can be most powerful 'tools' in helping teachers to understand the educational needs, weaknesses and strengths of their students: not only can they be valued forms of diagnostic analysis; they can help to drive more effective forms of teaching and learning. Problems arise, however, when – to draw upon a famous metaphor deployed around a century ago by the great American educator John Dewey - the maps (in this case of testing and assessment) get mistaken for the territory (in this case of the richness of the curriculum and the concomitant imaginative, creative and innovative forms of teaching and learning). It is this very mistaking of the map for the territory that has had teachers of English in England rejecting "being labelled as 'Literacy' teachers" (Goodwyn, 2003: 123).

At a moment in Australian history when the National Curriculum is being developed, the warnings are here about the kind of testing that would defeat any well-intentioned move for richness and depth in that curriculum. In an important article on reading achievement and reading assessment, Scott Paris has distinguished between "constrained" and "unconstrained" skills. There are some skills, he argues, that are more "constrained" than others; they are learned quickly, mastered entirely, and should not be conceptualised as enduring individual difference variables. Identifying the 26 letters of the English alphabet is such a skill. Once mastered, that skill is mastered. There are, however, "unconstrained" skills, such as comprehension, which continue to develop throughout schooling and life. Paris warns that excessive testing of constrained skills leads to an overemphasis on these skills to the exclusion of unconstrained skills such as vocabulary development and comprehension. A second risk is that policymakers and the public equate success on constrained skills with reading proficiency. This creates a minimum competency approach to reading assessment that does not adequately assess children's emerging use and control of literacy (Paris, 2005).

SAMPLE

While Paris is discussing reading skills specifically, a useful analogy can be drawn to broader areas of English. The dangers he describes are precisely the problem described by Gleeson: the constrained minutiae of certain skills and kinds of knowledge become proxies for what is most important, viz. "unconstrained" fluency and sophistication in application and usage.

To return to our theme: a key "unconstrained" area which can be taken up by a National Curriculum (whether the context be Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, or anywhere else) is that which deals with the imaginative and the creative. We do not mean 'creative' in any 'soft' or 'loose' sense. The case for creativity has been well put by Gunther Kress. Kress' (2002) important argument is that education for social reproduction assumes a stability of social and cultural forms. What happens, though, when we live in a globalised era of instability and a world of multi-directional communication, where the "maker of meaning is central" (Kress 2002:21) and "(c)reativity is not rare but the usual condition of all social practices"? (Kress 2002: 20). We still need a subject, he says, which is centrally concerned with "the task of relating the world of inner work and action with the outer world of social and cultural work" (Kress, 2002: 18), and that subject needs "to engage with questions of imagination, creativity and innovation in their inter-relation with the social and cultural world" (Kress 2002: 17).

The historical moment calls out for creativity.

The key issue for education – and for English - is whether that degree of "usual" creativity is to be constrained by such things as national testing of so-called 'basic skills' or whether the form of testing will allow for presentation of the "unconstrained". It remains far too often the case that students' experience of learning is heavily shaped by public assessment regimes that are insufficiently innovative, creative, imaginative and relational. On this point, the words of Maxine Greene find resonance throughout this book:

> To speak of imagination in relation to encounters with the arts is not to talk of fantasy or castles in the air of false hopes. As I view it… imagination is what enables us to enter into the created world of, yes, *Charlotte's Web* and *Winnie the Pooh* and *Don Juan*, and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, and Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, and George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, and Marquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera*, and Puig's *Kiss of the Woman Spider* as novel, film or musical play. Doing so, we find ourselves creating new patterns, finding new connections in our experience… art clarifies and concentrates the meaning of things ordinarily dumb and inchoate… works of art can keep alive 'the power to experience the common world in its fullness'…
>
> (Greene, 2007: 357)

While not one author questions the importance of developing the literacy skills in all students, the theme is that English education must not be restricted by any assessment that would focus only on the 'necessary', to the detriment of the 'sufficient'. Just as 'Mathematics' is inclusive of - but much broader in scope, depth and richness than - basic 'numeracy', so too is 'English' inclusive of – but much broader in scope depth and richness than - basic 'literacy'. At the same time it is important to acknowledge that literacy skills are germane to all school subjects right across the curriculum - not only to English.

A second strong theme in these essays is the need for a confluence of research, scholarship and practice to underpin curriculum reform and pedagogy. This can be partly achieved by recognising

SAMPLE

the imperative for a knowledge of the history of the subject in shaping current thinking. For this reason, there is a strong historical perspective suffusing many chapters. As Patterson recently argued "developments and debates in English teaching need to be understood in terms of their historical and political contexts" (Patterson, 2008: 313). A number of authors invite the English teaching profession to revisit the roots of that great burst of creativity and rigorous re-visioning of English which took place roughly between 1966 and the early 1980s and to thereby re-emphasise the importance of corporate memory to the profession. One imperative is always to remind policy makers that current debates have been around well before the last electoral cycle. Policy makers also need to understand that what might appear to be a contemporary problem may have already been satisfactorily addressed and resolved through earlier research, scholarship and practice as a result of earlier debates: such historical awareness should lessen the too prevalent tendencies to recycle old myths and reinvent new wheels.

The protocols associated with the development of the Australian National Curriculum for English insist on the continuity of the discipline "English" from the first year of schooling (K/P/R) to Year 12, rather than allowing any disjunction between, say, 'literacy' at the primary level and, say, 'literature' at the secondary level. The continuity of what Green (2006) calls the 'literacy' and 'literature' "projects" across K-12 is one reflected in the National Curriculum vision and one which we attempt to take up seriously here.

Recently, the Director-General of the NSW Department of Education and Training, Michael Coutts-Trotter (who has responsibility for one of the largest systems of schools and of training institutions in the world), publicly affirmed the importance of the place of English in school education when he said that:

> (w)e study English language and literature to make sense of the world and of ourselves – to live fully. Through literature we live other lives, experience different worlds, or the same world differently. Reading is not a withdrawal from life, but a leap into it. Literature also bolsters learning in other subjects.
>
> To know why we regulate the conditions of work read George Orwell's description of the Sheffield coal mines in *Road to Wigan Pier*. To grasp the creative possibilities of Chemistry read Primo Levi's *The Periodic Table*. To digest an aspect of totalitarianism - its horrific *Alice in Wonderland* inversion of reality - read Arthur Koestler's *The Trial*.
>
> Literature fuels curiosity, develops empathy and, in Andrew O'Hagan's great description (in his address titled 'The Power of Literature: The News That Stays News' at the *2007 Sydney Writers' Festival*), is the news that stay news - insights into life that are important, useful, and abide.
>
> … Exceptional teachers open the minds and hearts of young people to the news that stays news. And in doing so, give them a quality of life, and a quality of solitude, that will sustain them all their days.
>
> (Coutts-Trotter, 2009)

This book explores what such teachers are doing and can do in opening "the hearts and minds" of the students they engage with every day. When Arnold asks, "are there any new directions or only old ones?", she proposes that the

SAMPLE

> challenge now is to answer that question, and others. I would like to suggest that empathic intelligence is promoted through literature. It is a more complex concept than cognitive and emotional intelligence, capturing as it does moral and ethical issues of care for self and others and considerations of what it means to be a civilized, integrated human being. That consideration, what it means to be a civilized, integrated human being, and how to become one, are fundamental to our thinking about the discipline of English as we might re-conceptualise it for the next decades.
>
> (Arnold, 2008: 23)

We believe that our English teaching profession, committed to providing our students with the best quality of education for the here and now as well as for their future, aspires to conserve the best of our profession's past; to identify and build upon the best of our present; and - while never relinquishing a proper critique of innovation - to forge and embrace new pathways to lead us to a more emboldened, inclusive, imaginative and creative world of English teaching and learning.

This belief has been a catalyst for this book. It is our hope that this belief speaks to the aspirations of English teachers, parents, policy makers, other educators, and all those who strive to make good our promise to the present and future generations of students.

References

Arnold, R. (2008) 'Reflections on English', *Illuminations: Journal of the Arts, English and Literacy Education Research Network*, 1,1: 22-23.

Coutts-Trotter, M. (2009) Occasional Address, *The Paul Brock Award for Excellence in Teaching*, sponsored by the NSW Secondary Principals' Council (SPC) and the Arts, English, Literacy, Education Research Forum (AELE) of the Faculty of Education and Social Work, University of Sydney.

Elbow, P. (1990) *What is English?,* New York: Modern Language Association of America.

Goodwyn, A. (2001) 'Second-tier professionals: English teachers in England', *L1- Educational Studies in Language and Literature*, 1, 2: 149-161.

Goodwyn, A. (2003) ' "We teach English not literacy": "Growth" pedagogy under siege in England', in B. Doecke, D. Homer & H. Nixon (eds.), *English teachers at work: Narratives, Counter-Narratives and Arguments*, Kent Town: Wakefield Press/AATE.

Green, B. (2006) 'English, literacy, rhetoric: changing the project?', *English in education*, 40, 1: 7-19.

Green, B. & Beavis, C. (eds.) (1996) 'Introduction: English teaching and curriculum history', in B. Green & C. Beavis (eds.), *Teaching the English Subjects: Essays on Curriculum History and Australian Schooling*. Geelong: Deakin University Press.

Greene, M. (2007), 'The artistic-aesthetic curriculum', in R. Curren (ed.) *Philosophy of Education: An Anthology*, Malden: Blackwell.

House of Commons Children, Schools and Families Committee (CSFC) (2008) *Testing and Assessment: Third Report of Session 2007-08*, Volume 1. London: The Stationery Office Ltd.

Intrator, S. M. & Scribner, M. (eds.) (2003) *Teaching with Fire,* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Kress, G. (2002) 'English for an era of instability: aesthetics, ethics, creativity and design', *English in Australia*, 134, July: 15-23.

Medway, P. (1990) 'Into the sixties: English and English society at a time of change', in I.F. Goodson and P. Medway (eds.), *Bringing English to Order: The History and Politics of a School Subject*. London, New York and Philadelphia: The Falmer Press.

Paris, S. (2005) 'Reinterpreting the development of reading skills', *Reading Research Quarterly*, 40, 2: April/May/June: 184-202.

Patterson, A. (2008) 'Teaching literature in Australia: examining and reviewing Senior English', *Changing English*, 15, 3: 311-322.

SAMPLE

ENGLISH: A SUGGESTED VISION AND A STRATEGY

JOHN DIXON

Looking forward and looking back from the perspective of four score years

There are advantages and limitations in what I can offer at the age of eighty years. I'm lucky enough to work in a free university, the University of the Third Age (U3A), run by its members. So I'm just not so steeped in the ways that the state system works in detail today - in all its far-flung operations - as to be able to spot the weakest places to hit; or the concessions that might be won; or the latent aspirations to be transformed; and so on. In other words, I'm not really in dialogue with the people who are struggling with the system even while they can't see much beyond it, including those who have convinced themselves that in this world of conflicting demands it may be the best way forward after all.

All I can offer is a selection of ideas from the past that seem to have stood the test of time and may help you inspire an English of the future. Then it is over to you and your friends and colleagues in the English learning and teaching profession!

Interaction

Before we get to 'English', there's a key critical concept we badly need right now, I believe: it's not 'language' or 'discourse', but 'interaction'- what we enter into as we start speaking or writing to each other. Understanding social and cultural interaction is rather pressing in today's world; that's pretty obvious as we look out at, and join in, the global village. That's the macro level. But first, at the micro level, as teachers-and-learners we're inevitably drawn into dialogue, whether it's via face-to-face oral exchanges or written forms. And that's not all: from studying Vygotsky and Luria, I've come to believe that our internalising of those dialogues, from infancy on, sets up potentials - for better and worse - in the kinds of inner dialogues we have with incoming signs (in speech, writing, or the multi-media). More of that later.

First let's tackle an immediate and insidious problem in today's schools. From an interactive point of view, training students to answer multiple-choice questions, whether in class or for external tests, is in effect inculcating a specially restricted kind of dialogue, in which they never ask the questions, aren't invited to invent the answers, and are led to believe that only one answer is correct.

Much the same can be said for the characteristic kinds of teacher-student oral interaction that have been reported in recent international surveys (Alexander, 2000). In 70-80% of the classrooms

SAMPLE