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More than canons: teacher knowledge and the literary domain of the secondary English curriculum

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Background: The matter of teacher knowledge in the curriculum subject of English is not simple. Certainly it is not easy to delineate what its ‘content knowledge’ should be and how this relates to other aspects of teacher knowledge. In the context of education policy in England, at a time of change when the nature of the subject and its pedagogy are under scrutiny, the issue acquires heightened relevance from an initial teacher preparation perspective.

Purpose: This paper sets out to consider the following questions: how do teachers of English acquire their teacher knowledge? What is known about the nuanced process of teacher knowledge development in English? Curriculum content is one element of teacher knowledge, but in the literary domain of English it does not suffice to specify what and how much should be read. The questions are discussed from the perspective of the knowledge development of postgraduate English teachers during initial teacher preparation.

Sources of evidence: Literature concerning the development of teacher knowledge and expertise both generally and in the curriculum subject of English is critically discussed. Within the literature, the notion of the mentor–novice dialogue is identified as an important way of developing teacher knowledge. Alongside the literature, three illustrative mentor accounts are presented, drawn from the experience of postgraduate students learning to teach English to secondary school pupils.

Main argument: The mentor accounts suggest that the boundaries of English are not easily demarcated. They indicate that the knowledge developed is other than the ‘content’ knowledge that might be acquired through initial degree studies. It is argued that teacher education demands a conception of teaching that takes full account of this knowledge development. At the same time, specific dispositions that do not automatically follow from prior academic attainment appear to be relevant. It is suggested that how these are cultivated, and how they are distinctive to the subject discipline are important questions for initial teacher preparation.

Conclusions: Whatever the new contexts for initial teacher preparation, understanding how teachers acquire and apply ‘teacherly’ knowledge deserves as much attention as the content of a subject or the prior attainment of entrants to the profession. Initial teacher preparation arrangements need to acknowledge the complexity of learning to teach English as a curriculum subject. Learning to teach is a nuanced process, requiring engagement with a dedicated pedagogical content knowledge. In literary English teaching, this comprises attention to micro and macro aspects concurrently, for example through attention to individual texts concurrent with consideration of conceptions of readers and reading.

Key words: English; curriculum; teacher education; knowledge; dispositions; reform

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Introduction

For teachers of literature, the matter of what constitutes necessary teachers' knowledge has long been debated. In England, mainstream discussion of apposite knowledge has tended to focus on content knowledge, such that texts and authors listed in national curriculum documents define what a teacher of English should know. The last 25 years have seen vigorous debate about the content of the statutory programmes of study prior to each subsequent revision of curricular detail [see 'the Cox report' (Department of Education and Science and the Welsh Office 1989); Cox 1995; DFE 1993]. The curriculum for England is once again under review (DFE 2010) and the pattern continues: requirements look set to provide lists of what should be read (Gove 2010; Vasagar 2010), and persist in framing discussions of knowledge according to a content knowledge paradigm. It is a rationalist view of knowledge shaped by metricity (Nussbaum 1990).

The majority of secondary school teachers of English in the UK enter the profession as postgraduates, either through universities or colleges (for the postgraduate certificate of education – known as the PGCE), or via employment-based training routes (see DFE 2010 item 2.23 for summary). All providers of training must guide professional training with reference to nationally applicable professional competences or 'standards' against which student-teachers are assessed for the award of Qualified Teacher Status (QTS; TDA 2007). The model is in flux as a result of educational policy changes (see DFE 2010 and NCSL 2011 for detailed account). The balance is shifting so that a greater proportion of entrants will join the profession through employment-based provision, but also such that the extent to which training is structured and guided is likely to alter radically. The professional competences themselves have been redefined (DFE 2011), while other developments include assessment-only entry, where entrants with prior experiences of teaching (for example in other countries) will not be required to undergo a programme of training, and a substantial extension of a scheme promoting the entry and progress of graduates with first-class honours degrees.

This paper suggests that understanding how student-teachers of English acquire and apply their knowledge is deserving of attention, especially in the context of changing initial teacher preparation where common means and opportunities for developing knowledge cannot be assumed. Two key questions arise for consideration:

- (1) How do teachers of English acquire their teacher knowledge?
- (2) What is known about the nuanced process of teacher knowledge development in English?

Each of these questions will be addressed first through a critical review of the literature relating to teacher knowledge, and then by applying the notion of the mentor–novice dialogue (Ethel and McMeniman 2000) to illustrative mentor accounts drawn from the experience of postgraduate students learning to teach English to secondary school pupils. Finally, analysis of the accounts will inform discussion of possible implications for initial teacher preparation.

Literature review

Teacher knowledge

Recent studies suggest teacher knowledge and its acquisition are difficult, contested issues, in terms both of pre-service teachers' perceptions of *what* they are learning (Wong et al. 2008) and of initial teacher preparation (ITP) content (cf. Blake and Shortis 2010), while earlier studies have recognised the limitations of learning to teach through observation of experts alone (Baker, Burman, and Jones 1989; Grossman 1989; Kane 1993). The means by which novices develop 'teacherly' knowledge, however, remain unclear (Fairbanks 2010). A survey of existing literature in the field begins here with Dewey's proposition that 'only that which has been organised into our disposition so as to enable us to adapt the environment to our needs and to adapt our aims and desires to the situation in which we live is knowledge' (Dewey 1916/1966, 344). This posits a form of Aristotelian practical reasoning (Nussbaum 1990) or 'wisdom of practice' (Shulman 2000, 134), which, by implication, will be unique to each subject discipline and the context of teaching. It suggests a view of teaching as something complex, with facility acquired as something 'more than a craft skill. It is a social, political and moral activity... it has an ethic' (Marshall 2010).

The recent literature concerning teachers' knowledge is largely derived from Shulman's work (1987) but has antecedents in the commentaries of Bruner (1974) and, in the early 20th century, John Dewey (1933/1974). Often the literature has taken a generalist character, for example attempting taxonomies of knowledge (the knowledge base), or considering the relationship of knowledge to practice (knowledge-in-action). In addition, there have been sporadic, concentrated periods where these general explorations are applied or refined within subject disciplines. Since Shulman, these have offered plentiful exhortations to ITP practitioners concerning what their courses should do, though with conspicuous lack of attention to the outworking of such ideas.

The knowledge base

Shulman (1987) presented seven categories of knowledge: those of content; general pedagogical knowledge; curriculum; pedagogical content; learners and their characteristics; educational contexts; and of educational ends, purposes and values.

The nature of teacher knowledge was further considered within and beyond the 'Knowledge Growth in Teaching Project' (Grossman 1990; Grossman and Richert 1988; Gudmundsdottir and Shulman 1987; Wilson, Shulman, and Richert 1987; Wilson and Wineburg 1988). Pedagogical content knowledge is the focus here, what Shulman (1987, 64) termed 'that special amalgam of content and pedagogy that is uniquely the province of teachers, their own special form of professional understanding'.

As might be anticipated, pedagogical content knowledge was subsequently explored relative to different school subject disciplines, examples spanning elementary and senior phases (cf. Mathematics – Marks 1990, Langrall et al. 1996; Technology – Margerum-Leys and Marx 2004; Science – Goodnough and Hung 2009; Geography – Ormrod and Cole 1996; and English – Grossman 1989). These authors and others variously elaborated upon, refined (Segall 2004) or critiqued

(Ball 2000) Shulman's categories. As a collection, they suggest that understanding the complexities of teaching extends beyond observation of expert practice.

Further studies considered the intersection of pedagogical content knowledge with dimensions as diverse as teachers' values (Gudmundsdottir 1990), pupils' emotional responses to teaching (Rosiek 2003), mentoring (Feiman-Nemser and Parker 1990), teachers' portfolios of professional development (Craig 2003), and 'curriculum case writing' (Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, and Shulman 2002). The first three of these areas are especially pertinent to the present articulation of dispositions relative to English literary pedagogical content knowledge.

Knowledge in English, knowledge-in-action

If it seems fairly simple to see how Shulman's categories relate to initial teacher preparation in providing a taxonomy of knowledge, it is not quite so easy to see the dynamic relationship between these elements or how they combine in practice and process. Competences related to subject knowledge and dispositions have been researched under the moniker 'wicked competences' (Page and Knight 2007, 6) precisely because of their potentially fuzzy, nebulous or difficult nature. Shulman's own remarks (1987, 65) perhaps indicate why:

... the teacher of English should know English and American prose and poetry, written and spoken language use and comprehension and grammar ... with the critical literature that applies to particular novels or epics ... [and] understand alternative theories of interpretation and criticism and *how these might relate to the issues of curriculum and teaching*. [My italics]

The list seems reasonable enough at first glance, but the limited workability of the suggestions soon becomes apparent: how much prose and poetry? Of myriad possibilities, which texts, which theories and which critics? What model of language use should underpin teaching? What attitude to uses of non-standard forms of English? It is immensely appealing to formulate a list of 'should knows' and 'should dos', for it offers up the possibility of checklists to tick off during the process of learning to teach. For example, it is easy to set the student the task of reading *Hamlet*, duly confirming the target when met. There is no easy correlation, however, between what the student seems to know via prior qualification or declared self-study – and what happens to this knowledge in action in the classroom. For the pre-service teacher of English to orchestrate these different categories of knowledge requires 'discernment' and 'perception': 'some sort of complex responsiveness to the salient features of one's concrete situation' (Nussbaum 1990, 55, citing then paraphrasing Aristotle) and to the study text in hand (Segall 2004).

Dewey was pioneering in considering the knowledge development of teachers around the relationship between thought and action (1904/1974), in a gradual process of becoming more 'knowing'. *Intelligent action* went beyond observing and imitating other colleagues: novice teachers would use judgement informed by knowledge of their teaching content but also of the process of learning. In this we find the basis of knowledge-in-action. In their research into how novice teachers 'unlock' the knowledge-in-action of more experienced expert colleagues, Ethel and McMeniman (2000) provide three compact surveys of related literature. The first, concerning the distinction between expert and novice teachers, comprises generalist material and teaching-specific material. The second concerns reflective practice and

the third situated cognition. Their own study posits the importance of mentor–novice dialogue ‘making explicit and gaining access to the thinking underlying expert teaching’ (p. 99) because it supports novices in their ‘understanding of the relationships between the theoretical and practical components’ (p. 98) of their initial teacher preparation. This constitutes a ‘cognitive intervention’ (p. 89).

Mentor–novice dialogue

What sort of mentoring dialogue in English supports a student’s access to the expert thinking of experienced teachers? What contributes to the cognitive element of mentoring interventions? The mentor accounts provided in this paper report discussions and actions shared by student-teachers and mentors in their department settings. The notion that workplace dialogue contributes to the improvement of school teachers’ learning is established (Hodkinson and Hodkinson 2005), if not taken for granted as valuable or fundamental *per se*. McNamara (1995, 59), for example, states that the influence of mentors and indeed tutors ‘may be regarded as useful insofar as they are able to help students adapt to the requirements and exigencies of the particular classrooms in which they learn to teach’, but qualifies this assertion with the caution that guiding novices to ‘perform effectively within given circumstances’ has dangers if ‘students do little more than seek workable solutions to practical problems’. Most crucial of all for McNamara ‘in terms of developing professional capability is the quality and suitability of the advice and support that students receive and their capacity to reflect upon it and incorporate it in their own teaching’ (p. 59). Citing earlier studies of expert advice (Dunn, Taylor, and Hemming 1989; McIntyre and Hagger 1993), he emphasises the unique position of the mentor to offer advice specific to the immediate context of the class and the pupils in it. A study of mentors’ learning about their own role confirms the importance of their interventions, stating that it is only some time into their new professional role that ‘novices shift from a focus on their own performance to becoming sensitive to individual pupils in the classroom’ (Orland 2001, 86). One mentor describes the thrust of mentoring itself as ‘figuring out how the pieces stick together and also being able to break the process down into small steps and back to the big picture again without getting stuck in the small steps’ (p. 85).

According to these sources, effective mentoring of novices draws concurrently on the mentor’s awareness of immediate situated detail concerning pupils, and on additional capacity for acknowledging and working in response to wider purposes. In this respect, the particular manner in which a mentor chooses to express guidance to a novice may be counter-intuitive. For instance, Strong and Baron (2004) note that their analysis reveals the frequent ‘efforts of mentors to avoid giving direct advice’ (p. 55), with their corpus of conversational data including ‘many indirect suggestions’. They speculate that this may result from the philosophy of the programme at the heart of the study and recognise that studies of other programmes should explore this phenomenon more fully.

In mentor–novice dialogue, not only the needs of pupils but also the content to be taught requires detailed consideration: in this case literary texts. Crucially, in their new capacity, student-teachers of English have to approach texts in a manner not required of them in earlier literary study. Where in prior schooling or higher education they have studied texts as objects for attention, now instead they must

approach each text as a unique resource. Each text is a distinct ‘pedagogical invitation’ (Segall 2004, 492) and hence a catalyst for learning in others rather than an artefact for their own contemplation. If McNamara’s attention to developing professional capability through the student’s reflection upon guidance is to be observed, somehow the English mentor has to induct the student to a way of conceiving of texts as a resource for learning. It is in this that the ‘small steps’ of English mentoring merge with the ‘big picture’. For example, it cannot be possible for a mentor to anticipate which texts their mentee will teach in future, nor the specific opportunities presented by each of those texts. Instead, while the mentor guides a student with regard to the detail of the text in hand, they are also likely to foster ways of dealing with texts generally. In addition, this principle will extend to metatexts: each text will be approached not only of itself, but with respect to curricular frameworks.

Because responses to texts frequently have an affective dimension, and because the attitudes and beliefs concerning literary value are similarly personal, it is quite probable that English mentors may deploy the lateral mentoring strategies identified above (Strong and Baron 2004). This is particularly the case if they are committed to the student developing their own informed ethos rather than adopting one ready-made in imitation of someone else. Attending to the big picture then entails interrogation of the discipline, as it is manifest in policy requirements and examination board specifications. If we recall Tsui’s explorations of expertise (Tsui 2003), in which ongoing reflection is a defining trait, it is also consistent to establish and continually re-examine purposes for teaching (Grossman and Stodolsky 1995), and specifically for teaching the discipline.

A complementary process is the tentative identification of an epistemology unique to the discipline of expertise (Hillocks 1999). What does it mean for the beginning teacher to become and be a teacher of English? How does it relate to what others say about their experience in what is nominally an equivalent role? These questions are considered relative to other disciplines (those of Science and History) by Burn, Childs, and McNicholl (2007) who claim their study confirms ‘the complexity of the process by which teachers’ pedagogical constructions are created and the many different components that contribute to them’ (p. 429). In the case of Science, opportunities to learn collaboratively arose from a working environment in which there was ‘the confidence necessary among staff to admit problems and seek advice’. In History, however, ‘contested aspects of the curriculum saw mentors questioning a critical component of their own pedagogical constructions’, which reportedly inhibited their discussion of these with student-teachers and consequently collaboration with student-teachers in the development of their own constructions. For Burn, Childs, and McNicholl (2007), the contrasts suggest the importance of an expansive learning environment in which there is ‘close collaborative working’ (Hodkinson and Hodkinson 2005, 124) and associated mutual support across the department in supporting novice learning.

This theme is also explored by Ellis (2007), who provides a framework for studying teachers’ knowledge development as process, consistent with a conception of developing expertise (Tsui 2005) over time. Describing work in a secondary school English department by way of illustration, he asserts the communality of subject knowledge – ‘collective knowledge’ – identifying three related dimensions: ‘culture’, ‘practice’ and ‘agents... the individual learners (in this example, English teachers) and their potential for action’ (Ellis 2007, 458).

In its attention to the settings in which teachers work, *culture* overlaps with Shulman's knowledge of both contexts and educational ends (1987, 64), though the arena for practice is also a conceptual arena where 'practice determines the boundaries of the field and the rules by which the field as a whole validates knowledge'. Shulman does not stress a corresponding interdependence of knowledge categories, nor does he arrive at the emphasis placed by Ellis upon 'a dynamic process of change arising out of competing claims and contestation originating fundamentally out of practices in multiple settings' (p. 457). When expressing culture manifest in English, Ellis emphasises the cultural identity of the subject comprising the totality of 'English teaching in secondary schools', 'subject politics and policies' (for example at the level of national curricula) and available 'cultural resources' (p. 456). By the latter he means the concepts and associated terminology generally held to belong to the discipline, and provides the literary English concepts of metaphor, syntax and narrative by way of illustration.

Practice is considered a compromise over 'matters of subject paradigm and pedagogy' (p. 457): there will be internal differentiation of approach according to individual teachers' perspectives on their subject. Nevertheless, a school English department functions as a 'community of practice' in which a discipline, a conceptual system, develops out of the interaction of participants. Shared 'subject paradigms and pedagogies' (p. 456) will be expressed within an English department's schemes of work, and articulated in department policy. These documents represent 'collective knowledge' (p. 456) and serve as a blueprint for broadly similar teaching practices across a department team. The consistency and quality of that practice depends also on 'relationships between English teachers'. Ellis allows too, however, for individuals having varying scope 'to work on rules' of knowledge validation themselves, hence their agency arising from their 'individual knowing' (p. 456).

As *agents*, pre-service teachers have potential to develop their professional outlooks and identities in response to what they perceive around them. These constitute 'conceptions of purposes' (Grossman and Stodolosky 1995), overlapping with Shulman's category of ends and purposes but adding the individual's agency to come to 'understand and interpret the goals of the community of practice' (Ellis 2007, 458) in which they find themselves.

Within the context of an English department, this might be a matter of the novice recognising the unspoken ethos of the team's teaching of Shakespeare. For instance, the novice may identify that the authority of the text – and, hence, the author as a 'cultural icon' – can be reinforced in a didactic pedagogy and classroom activities where pupils rehearse a correct answer. This might differ from the novice's own impulse to introduce a more drama-oriented approach. Such an inclination could derive from the novice's own experience of learning Shakespeare, and illustrates how difference exists within the overarching *culture* of the discipline. Nevertheless, the novice could find it hard to realise such an approach. For example, in teaching act two, scene two from *Henry V* (Gurr 2005), the novice may assume it will be a challenge for pupils to recognise whom Henry addresses at certain points. The difficulty arises partly in variation between names used in his dialogue and those in the script. The king calls the character of Scroop 'lord Masham' (line 13) and Gray 'my gentle knight' (line 14). Further, awareness of the direction of address is crucial as Henry confronts each in turn with summary of their guilt (lines 76–141) prior to their arrest. The novice may believe there is no way to overcome this potential confusion other than by drawing pupils' attention to the matter and explaining the

forms of address used. On observing an experienced teacher work with the scene, however, the novice sees how activity requiring pupils to ‘walk through’ the scene using an abridged version leads them to work out the relationships themselves. Thus the pupils are able to ascertain who Henry might be looking or moving towards at any point, and deduce the response of other characters. Influenced by Rex Gibson’s activity acknowledging deixis in drama (Gibson 1998, 84), the approach shows the novice that performance and comprehension of text can be combined to give pupils skills with potential application to other scripts in future. The novice is thus an agent in reconciling culture and practice, with scope to put similar approaches into action.

If the novice chooses to draw on these influences in their own teaching, they have some bearing, some *agency* on the situated *practice* of the department. Even if they do not, their interaction with experienced teachers and alternative practices is evidently an important element of learning to teach, and contributes in Ellis’ view to the development of a novice’s ‘epistemological stance’ (2007, 456). The interaction could, through the contrast of approaches, help the novice understand and articulate their own educational purposes more fully, or could lead to them qualifying their existing model should they find merits in the practices surrounding them.

Studies of novice teachers learning to teach English

The literature offers some insightful descriptions and analyses of novice teachers’ experiences of learning to teach English. For example, Grossman (1989) provided a study based on the experiences of six pre-service teachers of English, with particular attention to coursework and observed lessons. Clift (1991) also took a case-study approach, though attended only to ‘one woman’s experiences as she began formal preparation to teach Secondary English’ (p. 357). Clift recognised the ‘ill-defined’ content of the subject, arguing that ‘knowledge development for teaching is a continuous and shifting interplay among many incompletely developed knowledge schemes’ (p. 358) and that formal teacher preparation at the time was not structured to ‘take the dynamic nature of knowledge development into account’ (p. 358). She reflected on the relevance of schema theory (cf. Spiro et al. 1987), concluding that multiple schemata are called upon concurrently as the teacher of English interacts with pupils; that gaps in teacher knowledge become evident as they attempt to ‘integrate across schemes as they put knowledge into practice’ (p. 364) (echoing Tsui’s *integrated knowledge base*); and that initial teacher preparation ‘curricula are not designed to foster knowledge integration across schemes’ (p. 364). Ultimately, Clift felt the only structure for knowledge integration ‘resided within’ the student at the heart of the study.

Reflecting on the breadth of the language arts disciplines, other studies have attended to how understanding pupils’ conceptions of reading might inform novice teachers’ developing practice. Bondy (1990), with a focus on the elementary phase, articulated the urgent need for enhanced initial teacher preparation instruction in reading and writing (Nolen, McCutchen and Berninger 1990, cross-phase) and considered how mentor–novice conversations supported novice understanding of ‘subject matter’ (Feiman-Nemser and Parker 1990, cross-phase with one of four cases having a secondary English focus).

One group of studies explores the literary domain of English specifically, either in terms of aesthetics (Madoc-Jones 2005), as moral education (Hilder 2005; Frydaki

and Mamoura 2008) or in the context of a multiliteracies framework (Roswell, Kosnik, and Beck 2008). Each presents a case for special attention for their interest in initial teacher preparation. To quite a significant degree, attention to learning through the study of literature has, in the last 20 years, been subsumed in the discussion of functional and skills-based literacy more broadly. Nathanson, Pruslow, and Levitt (2008) provide details of a broad survey of novice-teacher reading habits and reflect on how these may shape the reading experiences of those they teach. Trier (2007) reports on supporting novice-teachers' understanding of literacy through attention to representations of 'literacy events' in film. Ohi (2007), though with a focus on qualified teachers, attends to 'preparedness' to teach literacy, tracing a path back to initial preparation though recognising the impact of other factors, especially of teaching context.

An interest in the physical location for developing understanding to support teaching is shared with the work of Larson and Phillips (2005), which closely examines the negotiation by novice-teachers of conflicting versions of literacy articulated across various training sites, specifically those of placement schools and the university.

In summary, the varied research literature described here suggests that literary pedagogic subject knowledge works concurrently at micro and macro levels. Individual study texts afford their own distinctive pedagogies, while more generic pedagogical content knowledge also informs a teacher's approach. Because this overarching pedagogical content knowledge encompasses strategies for stimulating responses to texts, it has affective and subjective dimensions. Knowledge comprising these traits is also value-laden, whether or not the teacher is alert to them.

Some of the studies referred to above offer models for describing a student's development relative to their context. Literary English teaching may benefit from cognitive intervention: it is suggested that by making students aware of their own values, and of those inherent within departments, policy and curricular detail, mentors can support students in finding their own ethos and pedagogy.

Presentation and analysis of mentor descriptions of supporting developing knowledge in English

The review of the literature above drew attention to the importance of mentor–novice dialogue in the process of supporting novice teachers in developing knowledge in English. Further understanding of this dialogue may be gained by examining how mentors articulate their own practices in support of students' developing subject knowledge in the literary domain of English. The term 'mentor' in this context means an experienced teacher nominated by their school to take on the role of guiding the developing practice of a student-teacher in the placement component of a university-based initial teacher preparation programme. The comment and analysis that follows draw on the accounts of three different mentors, describing practice as they chose to articulate it in formalised systems for their own professional development. These comprised written submissions for accredited professional recognition. The system was supported by the General Teaching Council for England as a means to foster reflective practice, according status through nationally recognised certification. Mentors volunteered their accounts for my consideration as members of the same initial teacher preparation partnership: I was the university tutor to the same students they guided in school. The accounts

describe support provided by the mentors for pre-service teachers in the contexts of learning to teach (1) prose fiction, (2) Shakespeare and (3) poetry. The extracts presented here were selected from the full mentor submissions. I selected extracts that in their content described distinctive practice suggesting the particular requirements of each category.

Mentor description and analysis 1: Learning about teaching prose fiction. How is the mentor supporting the novice teacher's developing knowledge?

In this first example, the mentor describes a process that moves beyond a 'content'-oriented conception of subject knowledge (cf. Davis and Sumara 1997):

I discussed [i.e. with the student teacher] what sort of texts I felt were appropriate for different age groups, the texts that could be found on the courses that we teach, as well as giving some suggestions as to what I deemed to be 'great reads'. This ended up being the stimulus to a discussion on reading generally and how reading is encouraged outside as well as within school...how we promote the reading of literature in the local community, something that I may have failed to mention otherwise. I explained how we run a community book group in cooperation with the town's library and explained which texts we have read in the past, how meetings run and how the group is successful because it allows staff to socialize with parents through their experience of literature. In addition, we also discussed issues of boys reading literature and texts that appeal to boys specifically. Again, we discussed how our school runs a 'Dads and lads' course to help raise the idea of reading being something interesting and potentially fun, as well as allowing the creation of a social network through literature.

Clearly, the requisite knowledge of the English teacher as described here comprises more than familiarity with particular novels. Teachers' values (Gudmundsdottir 1990) are relevant in terms of what could constitute the appropriateness of texts for specific ages, and indeed what might define 'great reads'. Further, the exploration of contexts and purposes for reading beyond the English classroom can nurture in the student awareness of the relationship between their teaching and the broader reading attitudes and practices of pupils. In turn this can support understanding of how motivation to read – and indeed pleasure in reading – might be fostered. Conceptions of purposes (Grossman and Stodolsky 1995) arise within a community of practice. Attention to 'what we do when we read' can help the student appreciate the cognitive and affective demands made by reading and take account of these in classroom practice. In effect, this establishes an 'epistemological stance' concerning reading (cf. Hillocks 1999) that acknowledges pupils' emotional responses to teaching (Rosiek 2003) and texts (according to the unique affordance of each, Segall 2004). The mentor's final sentence, with its emphasis on how the school engages the community through a course that allows 'the creation of a social network' articulates something to the student very different from how to set about teaching in a classroom. The example can suggest to students the agency of teachers in a broader community. In this, it resonates with Ellis' model, indicating to the student the possibility that the arena for their *practice* is more than the classroom, department or even school. Moreover, it describes a *culture* inclusive of parents and the local community, not simply professional figures. This account, then, illustrates how a mentor can introduce the student to new conceptions of the role of teacher as well as how to teach. The approach also conveys the possibility that teachers can influence the terms of both *practice* and *culture*.

Mentor description and analysis 2: Learning about teaching Shakespeare. How is the mentor supporting the novice teacher's developing knowledge?

A second example, focussing on learning how to teach the plays of Shakespeare, suggests that developing a pedagogic-content understanding of applicable strategies and resources is complex. Specifically, each literary form offers particular 'pedagogical invitations' (Segall 2004) refined still further at the level of individual text. Here, the mentor designed a cycle for knowledge development even though the student did not have opportunity to teach Shakespeare plays with classes herself, instead progressing through close observation and support of experienced teachers working with classes towards examination. The approach was framed in response to a supposed problem:

In talking about the topics together we [i.e. the mentor and the student teacher] agreed that often, despite a good knowledge of many plays, Shakespeare can prove a difficult area to teach. The pupils face almost a language barrier in accessing the plays, as well as usually complex plot.

The implied matter of pupil engagement was considered parallel to obligations presented by examination requirements. The mentor noted becoming:

more aware of the need to balance meeting the criteria for coursework with delivering exciting lessons, and although this is something which becomes easier as teaching experience increases, for student teachers this needs to be very explicitly discussed . . . as a result, our discussion has become more focussed upon the mark schemes and specifications.

Salient knowledge here comprised knowledge of the study text itself; of meta-texts such as the relevant specifications, assessment criteria and of dedicated examination board guidance; and, by implication, of principles of assessment and related practices (e.g. interpretation of criteria, application of grades). The navigation of these considerations equates to Ellis's three systems (2007). *Practice* is worked out in relation to *culture* defined by the complex interplay of the immediate institution, the curriculum, the university and here – most overtly – the specifications of a given examination board.

The outcomes here confirm the interplay of the 'small steps' and 'the big picture' previously identified (Orland 2001). With attention to learners in their classes, the mentor believes the student-teacher would be able to take steps to become 'more able to identify how to aid students in achieving specific grades'. However, the mentor also supports the student-teacher's capacity to understand the bigger picture. The student-teacher is guided towards empathy for pupils' experience of reading Shakespeare. The mentor fosters appreciation of the difficulties in moving towards what she termed 'ways into the subject', identifying 'a range of styles and activities used for teaching Shakespeare'. In avoiding attention to a single Shakespeare play, the mentor deploys an indirect strategy akin to avoiding 'direct advice' (Strong and Baron 2004, 55).

In reporting this process, the mentor made overt reference to making the student-teacher 'party to the thought processes that an experienced teacher goes through', highlighting the dynamic nature of subject knowledge. This is means to unlock knowledge-in-action (Ethel and McMeniman 2000). Student-teachers' learning thus develops if, further to observing examples of 'such constructions in the practice of experienced teachers . . . student teachers can also gain insights

into the processes by which they are generated' (Burn, Childs, and McNicholl 2007, 442).

Mentor description and analysis 3: Learning about teaching poetry. How is the mentor supporting the novice teacher's developing knowledge?

In this illustrative example, a process of collaboration indicates the situated nature of effective subject knowledge development. *How* and *where*, the circumstances of its development, are important. First, student-teacher and mentor engaged in the joint planning of lessons around the curricular, examination specification-prescribed domain of 'Poetry from Different Cultures' (AQA 2009). From the outset of the description, the mentor makes clear an intention akin to unlocking knowledge-in-action:

I modeled my planning process for the student far more explicitly than I have done previously.

Next, he describes an approach comparable to recognising the 'pedagogic invitation' (Segall 2004) of the study texts in hand, and, furthermore, to considering what it means for individual learners to respond to those invitations:

We particularly focused on the issue of encouraging pupils to engage personally with the poems, by providing meaningful 'ways in' and a variety of interactions with the poems in addition to the transmission of content required for examinations.

Finally, the mentor describes a working process that presents to the student sharing and application of collective knowledge, also encouraging the student-teacher's agency:

The second half of our meeting was spent working collaboratively with another colleague and another student [from another institution's course of ITP], in which we generated ideas as a group before dividing the poems to plan high quality lessons that would combine to make the majority of a well-resourced scheme of work. The involvement of others in the mentoring and planning process was a new and helpful component of the mentoring process, which I feel gave the student a genuine experience of effective 'real' practice within a department.

In this illustration, relevant subject knowledge is positioned as an appreciation of processes in settings other than the classroom itself: something concerning professional and collegial co-operation towards the creation of lesson plans and resources (cf. Burn, Childs, and McNicholl 2007). The process affords the student some insight to the 'expert teacher's planning thoughts... not only much richer than those of the novice teacher's, they also reflect a much more *integrated knowledge base*' (Tsui 2005, 173) where the interconnectedness of different types of knowledge – for instance, of texts in hand and curricular detail – come into play. It seems subject knowledge cannot be divorced from contexts of shared use and application, accessed and developed as a form of collective knowledge experienced in context (Hodkinson and Hodkinson 2005).

As with the previous example, this mentor-student pair also had a particular orientation to the exigencies of assessment. The mentor considered 'the discussion of

the tensions between producing measurable outcomes (exam results) and broader educative goals and ideals (what are we *actually* trying to achieve as English teachers?) as an important part of the mentoring process', also asserting it to be 'vital that student teachers are aware of these tensions and see them being worked out in practice.' Effective mentoring practice, from this standpoint, necessitates acknowledgement of the inter-relatedness of principles, values and knowledge of text. 'Knowing' the poem in isolation was evidently not sufficient: the mentor describes a process in the student's teaching where she came to 'create opportunities for pupils to interact and transform the poems to deepen understanding'. Once again, there is an inference here of knowledge *beyond* the text, the significance for the beginning teacher of a nascent understanding, to inform classroom practice, of the possible responses of others to texts under scrutiny.

Implications for initial teacher preparation and conclusions

Clearly, the three mentor descriptions analysed above are illustrative and too small in number to contribute to the evidence base. However, in the context of the literature, the analyses do suggest the limitations of 'content knowledge'-based conceptions of teacher-knowledge and the importance of mentor support that goes beyond content knowledge in initial teacher preparation. The analyses illustrate the mentor's role in the potential transformation of students' *a priori* content knowledge from a state where it is practically inert (that is to say intramental and undeployed in the classroom) to one of pedagogical subject knowledge-in-action. It is a shift from content specialist to pedagogue (Shulman 1987) within complex and dynamic social systems (Ellis 2007). In English literary study, the pedagogical affordance of the text in hand is, of course, also important – and seen by mentor participants as central to learning.

We would argue that effective contexts for teacher education need to acknowledge how novice teachers learn. The emerging discourse of dispositions as applied to teacher education (Dottin 2009) is a start, with origins in Dewey's work. 'Pedagogical dispositions' are those 'habits of pedagogical mindfulness and thoughtfulness (reflective capacity) that render professional actions and conduct more intelligent' (Dottin 2009, 85). These dispositions have a cognitive aspect in that 'knowledge and skills must be acquired and used to enhance mindfulness and thoughtfulness' (p. 85). The purpose of recognising these is to bring about some movement, ideally rapid, on the continuum between novice and expert English teachers, towards rich and integrated knowledge and a repertoire of pedagogical routines that support flexibility in practice (Tsui 2005). Ideally, students will progress to the 'fullest form' of pedagogical content knowledge which underpins the act of teaching (Turner-Bisset 2001, 141). Beginning teachers should retain space to develop their own informed sense of 'what a subject is and is not' (Marshall 2010), and a conception of a discipline that encompasses not only content but pedagogy too. The good English teacher, then, knows 'not only their content' but 'things about their content that make effective instruction possible' (Grossman, Wilson, and Shulman 1989, 25).

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