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Editorial: Bound to Necessity?

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What is the purpose of research into the teaching of English? Knowledge and understanding are required to work effectively with learners of any age, but these principles include both what is traditionally known as *techne* – the skill or craft required to achieve a desired outcome – and the wider understanding denoted by *episteme.* Plato contrasted *episteme* with *doxa* (conventional opinion); *episteme* is associated with a freedom of intelligence, while *techne* in the Greek polis "was a kind of knowledge associated with people who are bound to necessity" (Young 2009).

English teachers characteristically resent being bound to necessity. As Bethan Marshall (2011: 139) writes in her conclusion to *Testing English*: "Despite over 150 years of battle, English teachers are still trying to assess English in a way that makes sense to them." Given the economic and political circumstances within which educators worldwide currently work, it may not be surprising that much of the research presented in this issue of *English in Education* concerns *episteme* rather than *techne.* Paul Tarpey reconsiders the "personal growth" model of English in relation to its current manifestations; Nicholas Stock explores the rhetoric of England's new GCSE English examinations (a qualification for upper secondary students normally aged 16+); Jonathan Glazzard examines the "phonics check" for England's five year olds in relation to various theories of reading; and Paul Gardner compares the discourses of English in England and Australia. In practice, of course, the two kinds of knowledge interrelate, as a sense of epistemic possibility will naturally frame a reflective practitioner's approach to a curricular task. Margaret Merga's large-scale survey of children's reading motivations and interests has direct relevance to classroom practitioners. Jonathan Monk draws on cultural history and theory and Zadie Smith's novel *NW* when preparing his students to write personally about their experience of the city.

Personal response is always paradoxical, given the situated nature of utterance. Another theme of this issue, connected to the relation of *episteme* and *techne*, is the importance of the personal and authentic in the daily work of teaching and learning. Trevor Millum's poem "Class Accents" suggests the complex nature of student and teacher voice. Recording a session in class, the teacher tells his students to be themselves; but he plays various roles, and the situation affects all the participants. When he listens after the lesson, what he hears is not his voice. The poem's title points up the various discourses of the classroom, including but not only those related to social status.

Authenticity in teaching requires congruence between *episteme* and *techne.* English teachers like to believe in what they are required to do. The governmental emphasis on "synthetic phonics" in the teaching of early reading has received a critical response from many practitioners, as a NATE member survey (2014) revealed. Jonathan Glazzard examines the discourse of "synthetic phonics" from various perspectives, including the nature of grapheme-phoneme correspondences in English and the relation between phonic decoding and linguistic comprehension. Focusing specifically on the phonics 'check', Glazzard examines its appropriateness for pupils at this early stage of schooling and its efficacy in relation to established and influential models of reading development.

Paul Tarpey believes that there is an urgent need for practitioners to re-define the epistemology of subject English. Fifty years after the publication of John Dixon's *Growth Through English* (1967), Dixon's "personal growth" model continues to give meaning to the work of many English teachers. Tarpey argues that Dixon's model, even in its earlier iterations, was more radical than the model of

"personal response" to "literary heritage" that frames much current practice. He reminds us that Dixon wrote in 1967: "A new model [of the subject] is needed … to direct our attention to life as it really is." Tarpey's paper draws on Dixon's later writings to suggest ways in which teachers and students can construct learning and relationships whose influence extends well beyond the English classroom.

Nicholas Stock is concerned by the disjunction between teachers' philosophies of English and some of the practices required by the new UK curriculum. He uses Derrida's mode of deconstruction to elucidate the paradoxical meanings of the UK Department for Education's recent reform of English curricula at GCSE. His spirited polemic focuses on the move to assessment entirely by external end-of-course examination, the removal of "open book" assessment in English Literature, and an over-arching change to the grading system. His analysis reveals what he calls the metaphysics of the new arrangements, and he explores how they marginalise ideas and groups. Overall, he brings out the contradictory nature of what is expected from students and teachers within the secondary education system.

Paul Gardner puts these debates in a wider, global perspective. His comparative analysis of primary English in the national curricula of England and Australia reveals very different paradigms of English. The Australian curriculum refers to multimodal textuality and "swims in social spaces", while the English curriculum conceptualises text as a written form to be "dissected, named and consumed". Gardner doesn't deny the technical capacity of teachers in England to construct positive outcomes in these circumstances, but he argues that teacher agency is inevitably limited by national policy frameworks that deny the potential richness of the curriculum and constrain engaged, authentic practice.

Many readers will envy Jonathan Monk's institutional freedom, as a teacher in a London independent (private) school, to involve young people from different school years in a research project focused on their different styles and modes of response to the city. The author's approach to the project is influenced by his reading of Walter Benjamin, Guy Debord and other writers, and the students' writing is mediated not only by their direct experience but also by Zadie Smith's novel *NW*, various contemporary discourses of urban life, and the varieties of technology that the students choose to represent their voices. Student voices are heard again in Margaret Merga's investigation of what educators, parents and librarians might do to help young people develop pleasure in reading. Drawing on a major Western Australia study of children from twenty-four schools, her qualitative research cites the views of numerous respondents.

Urszula Clark's review of Giovanelli and Clayton's *Knowing About Language: Linguistics and the Secondary English Classroom* suggests that the gap is closing between between contemporary linguistic theory and classroom approaches to the teaching of English language. The book argues the inherent value of language teaching and provides a range of practical ideas that are supported by up to date theoretical underpinnings: a pleasing conjunction of *episteme* and *techne*. Victoria Elliott's review of Skidmore and Murakami's *Dialogic Pedagogy* discusses ways in which teachers might develop pedagogy that supports the development of reflective learning and personal understanding in their students.

This issue, then, argues the importance of bringing together *episteme* and *techne* in the experience of English teachers: a consummation devoutly to be wished in present circumstances. Foucault used *episteme* to define what might be called the epistemological unconscious of a community of practice, and he insisted that the essential political problem is to try to *change* our "political,

economic, institutional regime of the production of truth" (Foucault 1976: 113-114). The writers in this issue highlight the need for such change in relation to various aspects of English teaching today.

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