

Editorial

We begin this issue with a story. Fatima Abshir reflects on language, history, culture and identity as they have impinged on her sense of her place in the world. Born in Denmark to Somali parents, she tells a story that is sometimes disturbing, the more so because schooling is represented as centrally implicated in processes whereby her identity was questioned, denied, erased. And yet the story is full of optimism, not just because it ends on an upbeat, as Fatima contemplates what she has to offer as a teacher, but because the telling of the story is itself an assertion of agency, a speaking back to oppression and marginalisation.

The act of writing also occupies a salient place in Heidi Hallman and Melanie Burdick's Bakhtinian analysis of a project involving prospective teachers working in a writing centre located in an urban charter school. For the prospective teachers, writing functioned as a space for reflection, where public and private worlds and discourses met and where the writers' prior assumptions about themselves, about the high school students whom they encountered, and about the purposes of education itself could be interrogated.

Schooling in general, and English teaching in particular, are presented as sites of struggle in the following two pieces. Salomé Romylos and Robert Balfour explore the tensions which inform the pedagogic attitudes and practices of literature teachers in South Africa. Their interest is in the knowledge domains that are at play in the work of literature teachers; what emerges most strongly from their research, however, is the contradiction between teachers' personal and professional commitment to more open, reader-oriented approaches to literature and the narrower, text-oriented reading pedagogy that is demanded by high-stakes assessment. As Jeanne Dyches and Brandon Sams indicate, similar dilemmas confront teachers in the United States: on the one hand, the Scylla of 'pedagogic traditionalism', as they term it – teaching to the mandated curricula and standards; on the other, the Charybdis of 'pedagogic idealism' – an approach that maintains a commitment to values of social justice without engaging in the messy, contingent business of everyday practice. Dyches and Sams offer 'pedagogic realism' as a way through this impasse, suggesting an approach to teaching Chaucer's 'Wife of Bath' as an instance of what this might mean in the classroom.

Somewhat fraught, too, are questions about the relationship of schooling to the world(s) beyond the school gates. From their survey of providers of undergraduate English programmes in the UK, Andrea Macrae, Billy Clark and Marcello Giovanelli conclude that those who work in university English departments have a less than perfect awareness of the content and requirements of the varieties of English courses that are on offer at A-level (the curricula offered in the final two years of school that are represented as preparation for the demands of university study).

Jenny Elliott considers the shifting conceptions of creativity that have been mobilised in policy and practice in primary education over the past seventy years. She focuses on one recent intervention, the 'ZipZap' programme, aimed at encouraging teachers to identify themselves as writers and illustrators, thus fostering such practices among primary schoolchildren. While recognising the gains that involvement in the programme brought to

teachers and their pupils, Elliott looks carefully at how the programme was situated in discourses of accountability, and at the danger that such interventions can amount to the privatisation of creativity, enforcing a separation between the 'core' work of teachers and the more 'creative' input of experts brought in from beyond the school.

Reading aloud is a practice that tends to be associated with primary schools and with the out-of-school literacy practices that involve children. Sam Duncan's article challenges this assumption, as she reports on one element in a larger research project looking at the role of reading aloud in Britain today. Here, she analyses Mass Observation data that suggest that reading aloud is happening all around us, a much more important aspect of everyday life than we might have imagined – and one worthy of further investigation.

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