English and inclusion

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Arguments over inclusion are generally located in relation to school admissions policies and in the vexed issue of pupil grouping. These are important questions of policy and practice, but they are not the main focus of this chapter.[1] Beyond such concerns, it might appear that there is nothing to debate about inclusion and English. After all, we all aspire to be inclusive, don't we? What I want to suggest in what follows is that issues around inclusion are not reducible to questions of organisation and access, but are, crucially, questions of pedagogy: what inclusion means and how it can be instantiated in practice in the classroom is, therefore, fundamentally important to the work of English teachers.

SUBJECT KNOWLEDGE: THE AIM OF SCHOOLING?

There is a fairly widespread view that what makes a good teacher is subject knowledge. Those who hold this view have tended to be dismissive of educational theory, regarding it as at best superfluous and at worst a distraction from the real purpose of schooling, which is the transmission both of bodies of knowledge (the proper academic disciplines represented in school subjects) and of an enthusiasm for this knowledge; practical skills such as classroom management are best acquired on the job, by working with more experienced colleagues.

This position was vociferously championed twenty years ago by the 'New Right' (Furlong 2000), a loose grouping of academics and politicians whose support for alternative routes into teaching was underpinned by the conviction that what counted, above all else, was teachers' commitment to their subject (Lawlor 1990). It is this same conviction that has informed more recent policy interventions that have sought to address issues of teacher quality by regulating the intake of initial teacher education provision (House of Commons Children, Schools and Families Committee 2010; Gove 2009). The assumption is that the better qualified (graduates with second- or first-class degrees in the subject that they are to teach, those with higher grades in English and Maths GCSE) will become better teachers: already-acquired subject knowledge, in other words, is regarded as, at the very least, the precondition of effective teaching. From this perspective, what matters is that the person at the front of the English class knows a thing or two about Shakespeare, the subordinate clause and the correct use of the semicolon (or, in slightly more ecumenical versions of the subject, about Scorsese or Soyinka).

An important concomitant of this view has been an impatience with anything that might get in the way of the transmission of subject knowledge, and hence with other conceptions of schooling and its function in relation to the wider society. The 'New Right' were sharply critical of anti-racist and anti-sexist initiatives in education in the 1970s and 1980s (O'Hear 1988; Hillgate 1989). And an echo of these older arguments can be heard in Frank Furedi's lengthy critique of the education policies of the New Labour government (Furedi

2009). Furedi's main line of argument runs something like this. There is a crisis of authority, and more particularly of adult authority in relation to children. This crisis is manifested in schools and in government education policy in a variety of different ways, in a failure of discipline and in a loss of confidence in, and respect for, the academic disciplines. Under New Labour, the role of teachers and of schools has been reconfigured: their primary responsibility is no longer the transmission of established (authoritative) bodies of knowledge – the subject knowledge that was formerly the defining characteristic of the good teacher – but rather a more diffuse (and ever-changing) set of social and ethical duties. Schools, in Furedi's view, are now being expected to address a spectrum of social ills, from obesity to the lack of community cohesion. This is, he argues, simultaneously asking too much and too little of the education system: too much, because schools simply cannot take on the burden of society's disorders; too little, because this reconfiguration of the role of the school betrays a loss of confidence in the capacity of education to effect real change in the lives and life chances of individuals – the kinds of change that might be achieved if schools were to concentrate on transmitting legitimate content.

Furedi's view of teaching and of the subjects that are taught is essentially conservative. I return to this point below, to take issue with the premises from which Furedi is arguing. First, though, it is worth saying that Furedi is correct in identifying a shift in education policy over the past decade or so. I want to explore this shift in a little more detail, focusing on the moment that exemplifies it most clearly.

The government Green Paper, *Every Child Matters* (DfES 2003) was published as a response to the Laming Report into the tragic death of Victoria Climbié, but it was much more than that. Had it been intended to address the specific issues raised by the Laming Report, it might have focused on improving and systematising the coordination of aspects of welfare provision; it might, more particularly, have suggested a bigger role for schools in the care of children at risk. But, from Green Paper onwards, *Every Child Matters* has been a disproportionate response to the events which ostensibly produced it. *Every Child Matters* has become a long-term intervention in schooling, an element in school inspections and in the standards that entrants into the profession are required to meet before they can be granted qualified teacher status (TDA 2007). It offers a different vision of schooling, a fundamentally different conception of the place of the school, a different set of priorities for teachers. Embodied in *Every Child Matters* would appear to be an understanding of the needs of the whole child and the need to look at children's development holistically. Its five outcomes, taken as a package, a coherent whole, emphasise the interrelatedness of health, safety, economic wellbeing, active citizenship, enjoyment and achievement. Schools are thus presented as the hub of community life, the centre of a closely-articulated network of multi-agency social provision.

It is far from easy to equate this conception of the school with the paradigm that had been dominant at least since the 1988 Education Reform Act – the legislation that introduced both the National Curriculum and testing, local

management of schools and open enrolment. The paradigm of schools as small businesses, competing with each other in the education marketplace, invites all interested parties to judge schools, to determine both their worth and their effectiveness, according to the exam results achieved by their students; the *Every Child Matters* paradigm, on the other hand, places on schools the responsibility for ensuring the welfare of the whole child and judges their effectiveness by the contribution that they make to the wellbeing of individuals and of the communities they serve. (And this fundamental change in perspective can be seen to be mirrored in the rebranding – and reorientation – of the government department responsible for the oversight of schools: from Department for Education and Skills to Department for Children, Schools and Families. Schools thus become sandwiched between children and families, schools' role defined as meeting the needs of children and their families.)

When one looks at the academic and educational literature that makes reference to *Every Child Matters*, what is striking about it is that there is a fairly consistent knot of meanings that have clustered around the phrase. In contributions to debates about pastoral teaching, about the shifts in the meaning of multiculturalism and the competing claims of gender and religious identity, in arguments about the rights of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered) students and about fundamental values in education, *Every Child Matters* is used to gesture at and to assert a commitment to principles of equity and equality, to human rights and to social justice (see, for example, Biddulph 2006; Hunt 2006; Patel 2007; Stern 2007). This does not mean,

however, that these principles are embedded in *Every Child Matters* as an identifiable government policy or intervention, nor that the effect of the ECM agenda on schools has been transformative in the way that might be inferred from Furedi; merely that the phrase has entered into the discourse of education in a way that enables it to stand for a set of much more widely-held commitments.[2]

What is at stake here is a fundamental question for all involved in education. It is the question of what schooling is for. One's attitude to initiatives such as *Every Child Matters* will depend, very largely, on one's answer to the bigger question of the function and purposes of schooling itself. For Furedi, the answer is very simple:

> The ascendancy of the social inclusion agenda is symptomatic of a loss of faith in the project of providing an intellectually challenging education for children from different social backgrounds. In previous times, the emphasis of reformers was on the elimination of the social barriers that prevented children from gaining access to quality education. Today, the social engineering imperative of inclusion takes precedence over the content of schooling. That is why a growing number of policy-makers and curriculum experts regard academic education as a barrier to be overcome. ... the social engineering perspective does not take the content of education seriously.

(Furedi 2009: 139)

I have spent some time on Furedi's critique because it is the most clearly articulated version of the position that regards inclusion as, in effect, inimical to education. In what remains of this chapter, I want mount a defence of inclusion as both a necessary and a worthwhile aim of education. The argument I want to pursue, however, is about inclusion not as a set of additional demands placed on schooling, the consequence of policies such as *Every Child Matters*, but rather as the necessary corollary of certain conceptions of learning and of English as a school subject.

WHAT DOES LEARNING LOOK LIKE?

The view of schooling that I started this chapter with is one that I have described as conservative. What I mean by this is not primarily an ascription of party-political affiliation; I want to draw attention, rather, to its underlying assumptions about knowledge and about pedagogy. The model is conservative in that the relevant knowledge – subject knowledge – already exists, in the teacher's head, before the lesson begins; what happens within the lesson is that this knowledge is transferred to the students. This notion of the teaching episode as transmission – the passing on of a pre-existing entity – is one that Furedi explicitly endorses. 'Adults', he insists, 'must assume responsibility for the world as it is and pass on its cultural and intellectual legacy to young people' (Furedi 2009: 49). Culture, like knowledge, is thus seen as a stable entity, passed on in time but, presumably, existing outside history. The teacher is thus the fount of knowledge, while the learner is

positioned as the passive recipient of this legacy, an empty vessel waiting to be filled.

This seems to me to be a fundamental flaw in Furedi's position. Students do not start learning when they enter the classroom; they started learning at birth, if not several months earlier (Tomasello 1999; Hobson 2002). Learning is not accomplished by the acquisition of bite-sized chunks of information, handed out by the teacher. It is more complex and a great deal messier than that. Right from the start, learning is an irreducibly social process, a process that involves not just the brain but the whole body too, a process in which there is no neat separation of intellect and affect, a process of active meaning-making. To treat school learning as an entirely different category from learning in the world, and all that we know about it, is wholly unwarrantable. In making this claim, I am attempting neither to deny the existence or the usefulness of particular bodies of knowledge or ways of knowing, nor to argue that schooling does not have an important part to play in making these available to young people. What I am suggesting, however, is that learning within the classroom happens most effectively and most powerfully when school students are encouraged to draw on the resources that they already possess, their 'funds of knowledge' (Moll 2000).

What I am alluding to here is a body of research and scholarship within a Vygotskian sociocultural tradition. Lev Vygotsky, the Soviet psychologist whose work from the 1920s and early 1930s has become increasingly widely known over the past half century, provides us with a set of insights into

learning that are immensely powerful.[3] Of central importance to the current

argument are three aspects of Vygotskian theory. First, there is the emphasis

on the social, on learning happening in the interaction between people and on

that learning being mediated through culture and history. Learning, in other

words, is not something that occurs in isolated individuals. Second, there is

the understanding that the relationship between thought and semiotic activity

is a complicated one: language enables the development of thought, gives

learners access to resources beyond their immediate experience, but the

process whereby learners develop a full sense of a word is a lengthy one. To

be given a dictionary definition – the meaning – of a word is not enough;

learners need time to explore the connotative dimensions that have accreted

around the sign as it is used, and has been used, and to fill out for themselves

the semiotic potential of that sign (see Gregory 1996: 16-18). The third

aspect, closely related to the complexity of the relationship between thought

and sign, is the complexity of the process whereby 'scientific concepts' are

acquired. What Vygotksy meant by scientific concepts was, very loosely,

school knowledge – the kind of codified, abstract ways of understanding the

world that are represented in subject disciplines. What Vygotsky insisted on

was the necessity of a dialectical relationship between scientific and everyday

(or spontaneous) concepts: the latter, the concepts that learners bring with

them from their lives outside school, are the intellectual resources that enable

them to make sense of the scientific concepts that they are presented with in

the school curriculum, the ideas that will be reorganized and transformed

through the processes of schooling. To suggest that there is a dialectical

relationship between everyday and scientific concepts, however, is to make a

further claim, namely, that the everyday knowledge that the students bring may also transform and reorganize the curricularized knowledge of schooling.[4] As Vygotsky was at pains to emphasize, these theoretical insights are confirmed by teachers' practical experiences:

> No less than experimental research, pedagogical experience demonstrates that *direct instruction in concepts is impossible*. It is pedagogically fruitless. The teacher who attempts to use this approach achieves nothing but a mindless learning of words, an empty verbalism that simulates or imitates the presence of concepts in the child. Under these conditions, the child learns not the concept but the word, and this word is taken over by the child through memory rather than thought. Such knowledge turns out to be inadequate in any meaningful application. This mode of instruction is the basic defect of the purely scholastic verbal modes of teaching which have been universally condemned. *It substitutes the learning of dead and empty verbal schemes for the mastery of living knowledge.*
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> (Vygotsky 1987: 170, my emphases)

And to suggest this means having to reconceptualize the notion of access. No longer is it enough to throw open the school gates and allow the students to enter. As the authors of the Bullock Report acknowledged, a very long time ago:

No child should be expected to cast off the language and culture of

the home as he crosses the school threshold, nor to live and act as

though school and home represent two totally separate and

different cultures which have to be kept firmly apart.

(DES 1975: 286)

Inclusion, I am arguing, is not just about admissions policies or even about

pupil grouping arrangements within the school or the individual classroom. It

is also about knowledge itself – about whose knowledge counts, whose voice

is heard.

In part, this argument is about the practicalities of pedagogy. School students

will, whether one likes it or not, arrive in the classroom with all sorts of other

experiences, with histories that will inform their school identities and the sense

that they make of school knowledge. They will have particular interests in the

knowledge that the school has to offer – and, because they can learn a great

deal from each other, they need to be provided with structured opportunities

for collaborative learning.

In part, though, this argument is about the ethical implications for teachers'

practice. Following the line taken by the Bullock Report, I am suggesting that

part of the respect that teachers owe to their students is to attend to their

lives, cultures, histories and experiences beyond the school gates, to see

these out-of-school identities as integral to the students' identities within the

classroom. And this does mean that teachers should make it their business to

find out about their students, to find out about their other languages and literacies, to find out about the 'funds of knowledge' that are valorised within their communities. Teachers' knowledge of their students is, of course, a very different kind of knowledge from the subject knowledge acquired through a degree course – but it is just as vital an ingredient in teaching. On the PGCE course on which I teach, student teachers are introduced to this idea in their first lecture, where it is presented as a question to be addressed throughout the course, and beyond: *Who are the learners and what do they know?*

One of the texts that we encourage our students to read is *Exiting Nirvana*, Clara Claiborne Park's magnificent account of her autistic daughter, Jessy (Park 2001). In tracing Jessy's life over twenty years and the slow, partial and uneven course of her socialisation, the book stands as testimony to her mother's meticulous observation and documenting of a vast body of evidence – evidence of how the world appears to Jessy, of the meanings that she makes. Park's work is, therefore, a model of attentiveness over time – and is presented to our students as an example of what can be learnt by paying detailed attention to learners.

This conception of a teacher's role is significantly different from that which is envisaged in *Every Child Matters*, where the emphasis is on remediation – the teacher as social worker, as it were – rather than what I am proposing here, which is teachers as ethnographers, finding out about the histories, cultures and values of their students. The model involved in *Every Child Matters* is, in

effect, one of deficit, to be addressed through a range of interventions; the model that can be traced back to the Bullock Report is one of dialogue.

What is being outlined here is the view that processes of learning necessarily involve culture and history – or cultures and histories – and that any account of schooling that neglects these forces is inadequate. This argument is by no means limited to the field of English studies. Science teachers have to engage with the fact that their students will arrive at the classroom or laboratory with very different attitudes to Darwinian theory, for example. To acknowledge this is not to argue that creationism should be taught alongside theories of evolution; it is to suggest that the Science teacher needs to be prepared to recognise the different perspectives that might be encountered and to engage in what can be a very productive epistemological debate about scientific method.[5]

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

To explore in a little more detail the implications of Vygotskian ideas about learning and learners, I want to address the ways in which policies and practices in relation to inclusion can (and should) be informed by ongoing debates around bilingual learners. It might be as well to start with an explanation about the term I have chosen to use and what I mean by it. I include within the category of bilingual learners all those students who operate in more than one language as part of their daily lives 'with some degree of self-confidence' (Miller 1983: x). It is important to note what is not included in this definition. There is no assumption here about the attainment of fluency or

of some external measure of competence: the term attempts to be descriptive, rather than evaluative. Much more commonly used, both in the discourse of policy (for example, QCA 2007) and in teachers' conversations, is the term 'EAL' (English as an additional language). In practice, the label 'EAL' tends to be applied to those learners who have yet to attain full fluency in English. It is, therefore, a label that gestures at what the learners cannot yet do, and at a sub-set of all bilingual learners, whereas the looser, more all-encompassing term 'bilingual' serves to acknowledge the existence of different areas of linguistic knowledge and expertise. Further, 'EAL' emphasises the orientation towards the acquisition of English and hence tends to imply a monolingual norm. It is common for students to cease to be categorised as 'EAL' once it is deemed that they are no longer in need of additional support. Although not usually explicitly articulated as such, the perspective that informs such practice is an assimilationist one, in which difference is identified as deficit. There is, therefore, a relationship between the term that is used and an underlying pedagogic attitude to the 'funds of knowledge' that students possess: 'EAL' assumes a deficit model, while 'bilingualism' encourages the teacher to find out more about what students already know and can do, and to explore how this existing knowledge, acquired beyond the school gates, might be exploited as a resource for learning within the classroom.

There are good reasons for all teachers to be interested in the languages that their students speak. It was from a Congolese student, with whom I was working in a GCSE Maths class, that I learnt about the difference between the lexis of Belgian French and French French, as it were. Whereas a Parisian

would use *soixante-dix*, *quatre-vingts* and *quatre-vingts-dix* for seventy, eighty and ninety, a francophone Congolese would, because of the legacy of Belgian imperialism, say *septante*, *octante* and *nonante*. The difference is of interest within the Maths classroom because the Belgian/Congolese forms are more logical within a decimal counting system: what this opens up is the possibility of students exploring the relationship between arithmetic concepts and the language in which they are expressed. (In English, of course, there is a parallel in the difference between 'eighty' and 'four-score'.) What I also remember, most vividly, is my Congolese student's look of withering scorn, directed at me for my ignorance on these matters.

For English teachers, there might be particularly strong reasons to provide opportunities for students to explore and share their linguistic expertise. English teachers might be expected to be interested in literacy and the acquisition of literacy. In the recent past, it has become fashionable to conceptualise the development of literacy as the acquisition of more or less separate skills and to regard these skills as existing outside any context or culture (DfEE 2001). At the same time, however, the growth of ethnographic interest in situated literacies (Heath 1983; Barton et al. 2000; Street 1984; 1995; 2001) has made it increasingly difficult to accept the adequacy of a model of literacy that fails to take account of context and culture. Bilingual students are often not merely aware of different literacy practices but active and daily participants in a range of different literacy practices (Gregory 1996; 2004; Gregory and Williams 2000; Purewal and Simpson 2010).

To recognise that bilingualism is not a learning difficulty is important (Levine 1996). It makes a difference to the provision that is made for bilingual learners in mainstream classes. It positions both the student and the teacher differently in relation to knowledge and power (think of my Congolese student and of how the moment I described shifted the relationship between her and me). It can also enable the teacher to question assumptions that might otherwise be made about what an appropriate curriculum might look like. For example, the commonsense view – which I have often heard expressed by both new and experienced English teachers – is that Shakespeare is too hard for 'EAL students': since they have yet to acquire full fluency in modern, idiomatic English, how can they be expected to cope with something so linguistically demanding and so different from the vernacular? One of the assumptions in this 'double barrier' thesis is that the acquisition of fluency in the vernacular is a necessary intermediate stage on the route to engagement with Shakespeare.[6] But why should that be the case?

Vernacular English sometimes helps with Shakespeare, but it also can be a hindrance: Shakespearean lexis often causes difficulties for a modern audience precisely because we think we know what a word means when what it meant then is different from any of the meanings attached to it now (Crystal and Crystal 2002). When Tybalt calls Romeo a 'villain', it is very hard for us to recuperate the force of the insult partly because we live in a different society, in which class prejudices are differently articulated, but also because the word Tybalt uses is familiar to us. Our sense of the word is different from Tybalt's, or from how it would have been understood by an Elizabethan audience.

Precisely because they are used to operating in more than one language, bilingual learners are less prone to assume a simple correlation between signifier and signified, less inclined to expect a text to deliver up instantly apprehensible meaning. This metalinguistic awareness can make them better prepared to deal with linguistic difficulty.

The 'double barrier' thesis also tends to isolate language from culture. It assumes that language exists outside culture, and that the difficulties of understanding and interpretation that are posed by a Shakespeare play are primarily linguistic. Often, I would want to argue, they are not – these difficulties relate to culture and history. My experience of teaching *Romeo and Juliet* to Year 9 students in Hackney, most of whom were of Turkish or Kurdish heritage, was that the students found it much easier to make sense of the world of the play, and particularly of the Capulet family relationships and the position that Juliet finds herself in, than I did: the forms of patriarchy that are represented in the play were, in some ways, much closer to their lived experience than they were to my own, either now or in my adolescent past.

When I first started teaching, I was placed in a school where almost all the students were of Bangladeshi heritage. With a class of twelve-year-olds, I developed a scheme of work around oral story-telling. To start things off, I thought I should tell a story. I chose *King Lear.* I had not got much further than 'A long time ago there was a king who had three daughters …' when I had to stop. 'We know this!' the class shouted, as one. 'It's an old Bengali story.' Graciously, they allowed me to continue, only interrupting occasionally when

my version strayed too far from the one with which they were familiar. In recounting this now, I am not suggesting that my twelve-year-olds knew all there was to know about *Lear; w*hat I would want to argue is that their existing 'funds of knowledge' constituted a resource that enabled them to make meaning out of my (more or less) canonical text. What the anecdote also indicates is that the very fact that Shakespeare plays tend to be tissues of old tales is part of what makes them accessible – and endlessly reworkable.

The 'double barrier' thesis is also problematic because it tends to ignore those aspects of doing Shakespeare in the classroom which make it particularly accessible to all. Plays involve more and different semiotic resources than novels, both in the layout of the script (the cues provided by characters' names and stage directions) and in the opportunities for enactment (Gibson 1998; Franks 2003; Yandell 2008). Moreover, there is ready access to a range of interpretations (filmic, visual and so on), that enable all learners to experience the text in performance and that can foreground questions of interpretation (Yandell and Franks 2009).

TEXTS OR READERS: WHERE IS MEANING MADE?

Attitudes to inclusion are, as I have argued thus far, inextricably connected with debates about the aims and purposes of formal education (schooling), as well as with debates about the processes of learning. For teachers within the field of English studies, the issue of inclusion also intersects with long-running debates about the nature of the subject itself.

Issues of inclusion have most commonly manifested themselves in relation to English in debates about which texts should be read in the classroom. These debates have been valuable, to the extent that they have foregrounded the question of representation. As Robert Scholes has argued:

> Understanding the category of literature as a problem - and a problem with a history - is part of what every serious student of English should know. …
>
> As a discipline, English needs both the cool rigor of theory and a passionate commitment to particular texts and ideas. Even as individual readers, we need them both. The political enters the study of English primarily through questions of representation: who is represented, who does the representing, who is object, who is subject - and how do these representations connect to the values of groups, communities, classes, tribes, sects, and nations?
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> (Scholes 1998: 151, 153)

These questions are important. They provide a means of interrogating the selection of texts that is a necessary constituent in the process of constructing a curriculum. To ask which texts should be included in the curriculum necessarily entails a consideration of what has been excluded, and what are the criteria. What is central, what is marginal? Who decides? These questions matter at the level of statutorily enforced national curricula; they matter, too, in relation to the books that are in a departmental stockroom. My argument,

though, is that the selection of text is only one element in processes of inclusion and exclusion. What matters more is how these texts are read: whose readings count?

Something of this is suggested by the approach taken above to Shakespeare, where I have made the assumption that what students bring to the text is worth attending to because it makes a difference to the meanings that are made. If one takes the view that texts are stable repositories of meaning and that, therefore, the task of the reader is merely to uncover that meaning, then the question of what the reader brings to the text is a trivial one. If, on the other hand, one considers that meanings are made by readers in interaction with text, and that these interactions are shaped by the circumstances in which they happen, then one is more inclined to adopt a contingent theory of meaning, and hence to position school students as agentive, as makers of meaning, not merely as recipients of pre-existent, pre-packaged meanings. My objective here is not to offer a potted history of literary theory, but rather to make the point that literary theory, because it confronts the relationship between reader and text, has an important bearing on inclusive practice in the classroom. If meaning is stable and the student's role is merely to assimilate it, then the teacher-dictated annotation of text makes perfect sense as classroom practice. But if students should be encouraged to deploy the full resources of culture and history that they have at their disposal, if textual meaning is construed as irreducibly intertextual, dependent on and arising out of the readers' experience of other texts, then classroom practice might

reasonably be expected to include opportunities for more active and collaborative approaches to text.[7]

I have focused on this theoretical question about where and how meaning is made because it seems to me to be a question of fundamental importance to practice in the classroom. For English teachers, this must involve debates about the choice of text and how texts are read, but it must also involve a consideration of students' lives beyond the classroom, of students' cultural making across an increasingly broad range of modes and media. To do so means taking seriously Raymond Williams' notion of culture as 'a whole way of life' (Williams 1958), as well as heeding the Bullock Report's advice by finding room within the curriculum for students to draw on and explore the diversity of their engagements in wider cultural activity. Now that really would look like an inclusive version of English!

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[1] For a lucid introduction to these matters, see Hart (2004), ch. 2.

[2] For a more accurate sense of what the policy intervention might represent, see Hartley (2007).

[3] This is, of course, an oversimplification. Vygotsky did not work alone and his work took place in a particular context – the aftermath of the Russian Revolution of 1917. His exploration of problems in relation to how children learn was given an urgency by the revolutionary context of his work: the aim was to make a new society, and education had a key role to place in its construction. Equally, Vygotsky's ideas have a history that extends back over centuries of Western thought. For a more detailed account of this intellectual history, see Van der Veer and Valsiner (1991); Hardcastle (2009).

remains a subject of fierce contestation. It is clear that his ideas were

developing, and there are internal tensions and contradictions in what is

available to us. What I am presenting here is a necessarily simplified account.

It is also one that contests a number of readings of the Vygotsky that I find

somewhat reductive. For a fuller account of these debates, see Britton (1987);

Daniels (2001); Gillen (2000), Kozulin et al. (2003).

5 The argument I am making here is the one that was advanced by Professor

Michael Reiss (2008). The furore that greeted Reiss's argument – a

controversy the led to his resignation as director of education at the Royal

Society (see Smith and Henderson 2008) – seems to me almost entirely to

miss the point of Reiss's argument, which was an argument about pedagogy.

6 For a recent expression of this view, see Kearns (2009).

7 What I suggest about texts here has a parallel in the turn in linguistics – the

move from a Saussurean focus on *langue* – the fairly stable structure of

language-as-system – to the sociolinguistic interest in *parole* – language in

use. Of particular interest to teachers, in this respect, is the work that Ben

Rampton has done to demonstrate the complexity of school students'

linguistic choices and appropriations (Rampton 2006).