The Position of English in Secondary Schools in Ex-Industrial Communities of the East Midlands of England

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Abstract

This thesis explores the position of English in ten secondary school located in ex-industrial communities of the East Midlands of England. The research is situated in a context of national education reforms, seen by some to promote a problematic version of English based on inappropriate epistemological foundations, lacking the subject's wider potential as a socially just discipline; since the introduction of the reforms, English has become increasingly unpopular in schools. This thesis challenges system-level policies by exploring how influential teachers position English in the contexts of their schools.

Qualitative data was gathered using semi-structured interviews with the Heads of English during the summer of 2019. Reflexive Thematic Analysis techniques were utilised to construct five themes: accountability, purpose, policies, curriculum and context. Ball et al.'s policy enactment work (2012), and Lefebvre's theory of spatial practice (1991) were employed to help analyse the data in response to three questions: What is the place of English? What are the purposes of English for the schools and pupils? What factors influence the production of the subject?

The main contributions of this thesis include showing how English has a central position in the schools because of its impact on their institutional reputations; for the pupils, however, English can go beyond a qualification to extend cultural horizons. This thesis also shows how Heads of Department can use their limited agency to position English as a more socially just subject than the version suggested by English education policy.

This thesis suggests how the content, assessment and organisation of English can be reformed to develop a more socially just and engaging curriculum.

Chapter One: Introduction

Education reforms introduced in England since 2010 have shifted the nature of English in secondary schools. While the revised National Curriculum (NC) declares that English is 'pre-eminent in education and society' (DfE, 2014a, p.14), others argue that this version of the subject is built on problematic foundations (Elliott, 2020; Hodgson & Harris, 2022); that it is principally driven by highstakes, inappropriate examinations, (Marsh, 2017; Marshall, 2017); and that it lacks diversity in both content and pedagogy (Gibbons, 2019; Nelson-Addy et al, 2019). More pupils than ever study English to the age of 16 (JCQ, 2022), but fewer than ever continue (Bleiman, 2017; Ofsted, 2022). It is now claimed that 'Something is rotten in the state of English.' (Eaglestone, 2021, p.8).

Such issues raise questions about the position of English in secondary schools: what is its place in schools; what is its purpose; and how is it produced? Through this research I explore these questions in the context of ten secondary schools located in ex-industrial communities in the East Midlands of England. English is rarely researched in schools like these, and this thesis sheds new light on the state of English across the country, following the education reforms of the 2010s (DfE, 2010a; DfE, 2016).

My central argument is that English does indeed have a 'pre-eminent' position in the schools in this study, but that this is an uncomfortable position, bearing a high cost. Now, pupils routinely study language in a positivist, scientific way, employing highly technical terminology seldom used elsewhere, in formulaic lessons using formulaic pedagogies so that they can pass exams; meanwhile, the love and passion for English are fading (Gibbons, 2017). The range of texts included in the NC and the General Certificate for Secondary

Education (GCSE) exam specifications, usually taken when pupils are 16, is very limited, and the government remains proud of the dominance of 'dead, white, men' (Gibb, 2021) not representative of the wider population. While the position of English in education policy has become more influential since the education reforms of the 2010s, the place of English in the hearts of pupils has diminished: *'with the new GCSE the students don't love it as they used to'*, as Michael[1], one of the Heads of Departments (HoDs) in this study comments.

Yet this thesis also highlights reasons for optimism. While there are no signs of a mass movement of English teachers opposing government policy, such as the SATs boycotts in the early 1990s, there are signs that momentum is growing towards a shift in the curriculum. Examination boards are diversifying the texts available to study for GCSE exams (e.g. AQA, 2023; Edexcel, 2023), and professional associations such as the British Educational Research Association (BERA) and the National Association for the Teaching of English (NATE) provide spaces for teachers and academics to explore English in a critical way, looking forward to new possibilities (e.g. Elliott & Hodgson, 2021; Goodwyn et al., 2019; Perry, 2023). Emerging research demonstrates how some teachers and headteachers 'seek to promulgate creative practice as widely as possible. Far from being led by the Curriculum, they actively resist key aspects of it' (Smith, 2023, p.118), while journals such as *Changing English* regularly publish articles written by English teachers, often new to the profession, who have the confidence and support to challenge dominant pedagogies (e.g. Iffath, 2020; Yandell et al., 2022). This develops previous research, indicating that English teachers are adept at translating system-

[1] All names of people and places included in the research data are pseudonyms.

level policy into practices they are comfortable with in the context of their own values and schools (Ball et al., 2012; Goodwyn, 2019a; Marshall, 2000).

It is evident from the literature that 'more work needs to be done' (Elliott & Courtney, 2023) to produce an English curriculum fully relevant for 21st century England. This thesis contributes to such debates by showing how English can, in the hands of experienced Heads of Departments (HoDs), become more than a tool for examination outcomes, a passport for pupils to gain employment or a means of cultural transmission. Such HoDs look beyond high-stakes examinations to a view of English balancing the dual pressures of school accountability measures with the encouragement of pupils' personal and cultural growth. This thesis shows that English remains a 'quicksilver' (Dixon, 1975, p.1) subject, tricky to constrain, retaining the power to help children 'read not so much about different people, but about people differently' (Meek, 1988, p.29).

In this chapter I locate the current NC in its historical context, before detailing the nature of the project including the research questions. I then explain the context of the research in terms of the schools, the choice of geographical situation and why I am an appropriate person to conduct this research. I conclude by discussing the overall structure of this thesis.

1.1 English in English Secondary Schools

The place, purpose and production of English in schools have always been contested by teachers, politicians and sometimes national media (see Eaglestone, 2017; Goodwyn, 2011; Marshall, 2000); perspectives on English differ, not only according to who is considering the subject, but also changes with over time (Perry, 2019). English in schools began by

attempting to establish a language still in formation as a credible European language of merit (Mulcaster, 1582). As society developed through the Industrial Revolution, English became part of an education movement aimed at enculturing the masses in England and the British Empire (see Walsh, 2007) by introducing them to 'the best that has been thought and said in the world' (Arnold, 1869/1993, p.190). After the First World War, English was part of attempts at 'bridging the social chasms which divide us' (BoE, 1921, p.6), while for academics in the following generation, such as F.R. Leavis and Denys Thompson, it was more about resisting what they saw as the 'levelling-down' (Leavis & Thompson, 1948, p.3) of civilization brought about by mass culture; such resistance was to be achieved by teaching certain children high aesthetic taste, particularly through the disciplined study of the *Great Tradition* (Eaglestone, 2017; Leavis, 1948).

The influence of the 'preachers of culture' (Mathieson, 1975 / 2018) remained, and can be felt today, but their dominance was challenged by a burgeoning understanding of the importance of language beyond Standard English (SE), challenges led by the London School after the second world war (Barnes et al., 1969; Gibbons, 2013). Building on the work of James Britton, John Dixon succinctly expressed this approach with the Personal Growth Model of English (Dixon, 1975). Dixon envisioned English as 'the meeting point of experience, language and society' (ibid., p.85), stressing the importance of English as a means of pupils coming to understand society and their place within it. Such a view has influenced generations of English teachers (Goodwyn, 2016), as well as the original iteration of the NC (DES, 1989), as I now discuss.

View
Personal Growth Focuses on the child: it emphasises the relationship between language and learning in the individual child, and the role of literature in developing children's imaginative and aesthetic lives;
Cross-curricular Focuses on the school: it emphasises that all teachers (of English and of other subjects) have a responsibility to help children with the language demands of different subjects on the school curriculum; otherwise areas of the curriculum may be closed to them. In England, English is different from other school subjects, in that it is both a subject and a medium of instruction for other subjects;
Adult Needs Focuses on communication outside the school; it emphasises the responsibility of English teachers to prepare children for the language demands of adult life, including the workplace in a fast-changing world. Children need to learn to deal with the day-to-day demands of spoken language and print; they also need to be able to write clearly, appropriately and effectively;
Cultural Heritage Emphasises the responsibility of schools to lead children to an appreciation of the works of literature that have been widely regarded as amongst the finest in the language;
Cultural Analysis Emphasises the role of English in helping children towards a critical understanding of the world and cultural environment in which they live. Children should know about the processes by which meanings are conveyed, and about the ways in which print and other media carry values.

Table 1 Cox's Five Views (DES, 1989, 2.21-2.25)

The first version of the NC proposed five views of English (see Table 1), whilst acknowledging 'that they are not the only possible views, they are not sharply distinguishable, and they are certainly not mutually exclusive' (DES, 1989, para 2.20). Dixon's influence can be seen in the inclusion of the Personal Growth view, while the wider influence of the London School can be seen in both the Cross-curricular and the Cultural Analysis views (Gibbons, 2013). In Cox's model these are complemented by the Adult Needs view, emphasised by both the *Newbolt Report* (BoE, 1921) and the later *Bullock Report* (DES, 1975), while the Cultural Heritage view operates in the older tradition of Arnold and Leavis noted above. Thus, the *Cox Report* offered a relatively comprehensive view of the complexities of English as a school subject in contemporary schools and was well-received by teachers of English (Goodwyn, 1992). The government, however, was less impressed and within a couple of years the *Cox Report* was replaced by a NC more focused on Adult Needs

and Cultural Heritage (Cox, 1995; DFE, 1993). The current NC, introduced in 2014 with the stated intention of introducing 'pupils to the best that has been thought and said' (DfE, 2014a, p.6), echoing Matthew Arnold's words above, remains focused on Adult Needs and Cultural Transmission, but other views of English are neglected. This is problematic for a number of reasons.

Firstly, the current NC is explicitly informed (e.g. Gibb, 2014) by models of knowledge widely considered to be unsuited for the dominant epistemology of English as a school subject (e.g. Doecke & Mead, 2018; Eaglestone, 2021; Hodgson & Harris, 2022; Yandell, 2017). Secondly, there is concern about the lack of diversity in the NC, both in terms of the range of literature encouraged for study by the NC (e.g. Nelson-Addy et al., 2019; Yandell et al., 2022), and the emphasis on teaching a single dialect, SE, at the expense of other dialects and the impact this has on pupils' cultural identity (e.g. Cushing & Pye, 2021). Thirdly, concerns have been raised about the nature of assessment in English (e.g. Marsh, 2017; Marshall, 2017) which, when viewed in conjunction with wider reforms to school accountability measures such as Progress 8 (DfE, 2018), are felt by some to risk English becoming principally an exam-focused subject, side-lining creativity (Gibbons, 2019; Perry, 2021a; Smith, 2023). Another change to the high-stakes GCSE is the removal of Speaking and Listening (S&L) from pupils' final grades, and potentially diminishing dialogic approaches to teaching, long-recognised as essential for high-quality learning (Dixon, 1975; Gilbert, 2022; Mercer & Littleton, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978). While a number of these concerns are not new, as explored in the Literature Review chapter below, it has recently been argued that now 'Something is rotten in the state of English' (Eaglestone, 2021, p.8) and that current macro-level, national policy

seeks to circumscribe English itself (DfE, 2019a, 2019b; Ofsted, 2022), limiting its 'quicksilver' (Dixon, 1975, p.1) nature.

1.2 The Research

In this thesis I explore the position of English in a selection of ten secondary schools, using qualitative, semi-structured interviews with the schools' Heads of English departments as my primary data. I am not attempting a fully rounded, definitive exploration of such a complex subject; this is beyond the scale of an EdD thesis. Rather, this is my own interpretation of the place and purpose of English in a group of English secondary schools, using interviews with key players as my source, and words as my medium. I adopt a constructivist position (Crotty, 1998) when analysing the data, and I am not attempting to develop the kind of 'powerful knowledge' (Muller & Young, 2019) underpinning the NC; one of the implications of this approach is that the contexts of the schools and research participants assume a high degree of significance for how I have interpreted the data and constructed meaning.

I have chosen to work with Heads of English for three reasons. Firstly, they have an important perspective on the place of English because they are a link between school leadership and classroom practice and thus can see their subject in the context of the whole school curriculum. Secondly, they also tend to have a degree of experience, and sometimes expertise (Goodwyn, 2011), which enables them to develop an understanding of the purpose of English beyond their own values. Thirdly, they are important actors in the production of English because of their responsibilities as in-school middle leaders. Research suggests that HoDs have important roles to play in policy enactment (e.g. Ainsworth et al.,

2022; Harris & Jones, 2017; Lipscombe et al., 2023), although there is little research specifically into Heads of English themselves.

This research is located in secondary schools in ex-industrial communities in the East Midlands of England for a number of reasons. Firstly, these communities have rarely been the focus of Twenty-first Century academic research into the teaching of English. Between 2019 and the summer of 2023, two UK-based peer-reviewed journals specialising in the teaching of English in secondary schools, *Changing English* and *English in Education*, published 61 articles reporting original research conducted in English secondary schools; two articles were clearly located in the East Midlands, both coming out of the research this thesis is based on (Perry, 2021a, 2022b). The majority of research is carried out in London or the Southeast of England and while this is valuable, interesting and informs this thesis, other areas of the country have different characteristics, as I discuss below (p.26). This thesis begins to illuminate the position of English in schools located in such communities. It is also important that the communities in this research are located in ex-industrial towns or villages, as the majority of educational research is carried out in cities. Secondly, these are so-called Red Wall communities, influential in both the Brexit debates and recent General Elections which have helped shape contemporary English society (Mattinson, 2020). Finally, the East Midlands is where I live and work, helping to develop beginning teachers of English through a university-based Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) course, as I discuss in more depth below, so it is an area that I know well.

In the remainder of this Introduction, I explain the research questions guiding this thesis before discussing why this research is both timely and important, locating it in the context

of both the current education policy environment and the East Midlands of England. I then present my position in this research, establishing why this is of interest to me and why I am a relevant person to research this field. I conclude by briefly outlining the structure for this thesis.

1.2.1 Research Questions

The Main Research Question (MRQ) focuses on the position of English as a school subject in secondary schools in the East Midlands of England:

- MRQ How is English positioned as a school subject in a selection of secondary schools in English ex-industrial communities?

In this question, 'position' functions as a verb to emphasise the ways that English is in constant development, responding to the changing demands of policy, society and experience. Questions about the position of English are not new, having been raised a century ago in the *Newbolt Report* (BoE, 1921, p.27) and partially addressed by the NC which states that 'English has a pre-eminent place in education and society' (DfE, 2014a, p.14). However, this assumes a shared understanding of the place and purpose of English across the education sector and across society.

This leads to three Sub-Research Questions:

- **SRQ1** What is the place of English in the schools?
- **SRQ2** What is the purpose of English in the schools?
- **SRQ3** What factors influence the production of English in the schools?

SRQ1 What is the place of English in the schools?

Place is important for the study of language (Crystal, 2004) and literature (Drabble, 2009), and in this thesis I am exploring the place of English in relation to other elements of

secondary schools to understand if it is 'pre-eminent' (op.cit.). Influenced by the feminist geographer Doreen Massey, Thomson and Hall offer three ways of conceptualising *place* in relation to researching schools which help to understand the place of English. Firstly,

> Places are not discrete territories, but are sites entangled in what [Massey] calls 'stretched out relations'. Rather than being confined to one small site, the relations in a site and between the people and the 'things' within/on it extend beyond the material location (ibid., pp. 15-16)

Secondly, 'A place is shaped by historical and contemporary distributions of resources – both material and discursive. Some places are wealthier than others, some have both wealth and status' (ibid., p. 17). Thirdly, a place

> is the result of ongoing processes of arrival, departure, disruption and intervention…Place can be understood as a 'coming together' of trajectories…people are always working out what the place is, what is going on there and how they might live within it' (ibid, p,19)

Taken together, Thomson and Hall's views of place emphasise the everyday complexity of schools, highlighting how they continually work in, create and adapt to changing contexts. To help structure this question, which is explored in Chapter 5, I have adapted a recognized framework for discussing context in schools focusing on the situated, material, professional and external contexts (Ball et al., 2012). These offer a detailed view of the place of English in

the schools, partially in relation to other subjects, and at a level focused on the minutiae of the subject including what resources it has and how these might affect teaching.

SRQ2 What is the purpose of English in the schools?

SRQ2 investigates what English is *for* according to the HoDs, particularly focusing on what they suggest about the purposes of English for the schools and for their pupils. In terms of the purpose of English for the schools, the HoDs discuss the significance of English Language and English Literature for various performativity measures and how these affect institutional reputations. In terms of the pupils, the HoDs discuss how English can be a passport to employment, but also as issues more connected with how English can be used to help develop young people's sense of belonging and social justice. Such ideas were alluded to in previous iterations of the NC in England (e.g. QCA, 2007), and are important elements of the recent *Curriculum for Wales* (GOV.WALES, 2023), expressed through the concept of *cynefin* (see Chapman et al., 2023). SRQ2 explores how some HoDs remain committed to such concepts, and how they include them in their work.

SRQ3 What factors influence the production of English in the schools?

The final sub-research question takes a more explicitly theoretical stance, informed by Henri Lefebvre's theories of spatial practice (Lefebvre, 1991), to investigate the production of English in the schools, and I will now take some time to outline Lefebvre's theory. Lefebvre uses 'production' to explore how meaning comes into being over time, using the triad of *conceived space*, *perceived space* and *lived space*. According to Lefebvre the *conceived space* comprises the texts and documents intended to guide and inform practice, such as policies and exam syllabi; these can operate at the system-level, the regional-level, the school-level and the department-level. *Perceived space* refers to the physical, temporal and other

resources which make up the environment where life is experienced. In the context of this thesis, the perceived space includes physical resources such as classrooms and available stock; the teachers themselves, including their experiences and values; the time available to teach the subject; and the amount of money available to enable the teaching of the subject. The *lived space* is 'the space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects' (Lefebvre, 1991, p.39). This is where people make sense of how the conceived space and the perceived space interact, and then how spaces work together to continually produce and reproduce meaning and possibility through protagonists' imaginations. The lived space is not only where people use their imaginations to make sense of the world, it is also the space where people imagine what could be and is thus a creative space.

In Lefebvre's terms, spatial analysis involves exploring the relationship between the triad of perceived, conceived and lived spaces that produce everyday life. Lefebvre's framework rarely identifies unknown issues or problems, 'rather it is about providing explanatory frameworks that, perhaps, disrupt understandings in, and posit new possibilities for, 'mainstream' education policies' (Gulson and Symes, 2007a, p.2). An important aspect of Lefebvre's theory is that each of the three spaces are part of the same whole; they should not ultimately be considered as distinct from each other in everyday life,

> The perceived-conceived-lived triad…loses all force if it is treated as an abstract 'model'. If it cannot grasp the concrete (as distinct from the 'immediate'), then its import is severely limited, amounting to no more than that of one ideological mediation among others (Lefebvre, 1991, p.40)

However, due to the linear nature of the written thesis there are occasions when the different spaces are discussed separately for the sake of clarity.

Lefebvre's framework has influenced several fields including geography (e.g. Massey, 2005) and urban planning (e.g. Soja, 1996, Watkins, 2005). More recently his work has been applied to educational practice (Gulson and Symes, 2007b; Ferrare and Apple, 2010; Thomson, Hall and Jones, 2010; Middleton, 2013; McIntyre and Jones, 2014; Smith, 2018); his work has been used to think about English (Mansworth, 2016) and I have used the data from this thesis to publish two articles using Lefebvre's framework, focusing on the production of English in secondary schools, particularly English Literature (Perry, 2022a; Perry, 2022b) which has begun to be used by others (e.g. Barnard, 2023).

Lefebvre's theory of spatial practice theory is helpful for this thesis as it enables me to show how the subject of English, and English departments themselves, are produced by a range of conceived, perceived and lived spaces each unique to individual schools. Lefebvre's theoretical model also offers new perspectives on how policies are enacted in practice. Other perspectives have been used, such as Ball et al who use Foucault to develop their understanding of policy enactment (e.g. Ball, 2013), illuminating ways in which policies can influence practice, particularly through the application of the metaphor of the panopticon (Perryman et al., 2018). Using Lefebvre, I am able to offer a fresh perspective on policy enactment, emphasizing dominant policies, the range of resources required to teach in English schools, and the roles that protagonists' imaginations play in curriculum production. In the final chapter I suggest some alternative theoretical approaches which can be used in

future research to understand the place and purpose of English, particularly in the context of decolonizing the curriculum. However, as this thesis is more directly focused on the views of key individuals, namely the HoDs, Lefebvre's framework is useful because allows me to construct my analysis of their views, emphasizing how the three different spaces interact to produce English.

Each SRQ is explored in a separate chapter using relevant themes identified with Reflexive Thematic Analysis techniques (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2019) to illustrate and explore the meanings I have constructed from the participants' responses; this is described in depth in Chapter 3.

1.3 The schools and their communities

I use 'community' in a similar way to Thomson and Hall, as

> a geographical area, just like a neighbourhood, but also the people who live there. Like neighbourhood, the people in a community are assumed to share either some kind of history or cultural characteristics (Thomson and Hall, 2017, p.72)

Thomson and Hall go on to develop the idea of community, rejecting the idea that there is a single community served by a school,

> Even where a school does draw largely from its surrounds, or where it attracts students of a particular faith or curriculum orientation or selects on the basis of test

results, there will be multiple communities within the apparent common educational frame (ibid., p.77)

HoDs from ten secondary schools located in the East Midlands of England participated in this research, with each school located in an ex-industrial community outside of cities. The schools are of varying size (see Table 2 below); all are non-selective; all are co-educational; none are religiously affiliated. At the time of data collection eight of the ten schools were academies and all were rated 'Good' by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted). Eight of the schools have their own sixth form; one school, Tissington, shares its site with the local leisure centre.

HoD	School	Location	Number of Pupils	Status	6th Form?
Bill	Clumber Community School	Village	879	Local Authority	N
Emma	Elvaston School	Village	798	Multi-Academy Trust	Y
Helen	Scarsdale Academy	Town	1331	Multi-Academy Trust	Y
Karen	The Hathersage Academy	Large Town	1491	Multi-Academy Trust	Y
Martin	Stanage Community School	Village	682	Multi-Academy Trust	N
Michael	The Ladybower Secondary School	Village	830	Multi-Academy Trust	Y
Peter	Dovedale Academy	Village	1275	Multi-Academy Trust	Y
Sam	Tissington School	Town	1203	Local Authority	Y
Sarah	Thornbridge Academy	Large Town	1106	Academy	Y
Wendy	Peveril Comprehensive School	Town	2500	Multi-Academy Trust	Y

Table 2 Schools

The majority of the schools are geographically located on the peripheries of their communities, typically with ex-council housing on one side, and open, agricultural spaces on

the other side. Mainly built in the 1960s, the schools were originally intended to serve their immediate, local communities. This idea became diluted over time as schools have been opened to something akin to market forces, and parents have been able to theoretically choose their children's schools. However, most of the pupils in these schools still live in the immediate vicinity, and more experienced HoDs report that they are teaching successive generations of pupils, such as Michael who has taught at The Ladybower Secondary School for over twenty years who notes *'I've just taught my first grandchild, I'm very happy for students to stay here, it's a lovely area and the students are happy'*.

The housing stock near the schools is showing its age. Most of the houses are semi-detached or terraced, typically two- or three-bedroom properties. Gardens are generally well kept, and it is clear that many households take great pride in their homes. New cars are in the driveways along with caravans and large 4x4s. Skylines are punctuated by flag poles with St. George flags flying; local amenities might include a newsagent or small supermarket, perhaps a pub. These communities are not characterised by obvious poverty or decline, but neither do they feel vibrant or exciting.

Several of the schools serve agricultural communities, which by their nature are widespread and often isolated. The schools also tend to serve outlying villages, some of which are characterised by large, private homes. Peter, the HoD at Dovedale Academy, illustrates the social spread across his school's catchment area,

it is very diverse, I mean there are, obviously Fishpool [another local village] over there which is quite affluent and those children may have more access, more parents who have a rich literary culture than some of the kids around here,

The contrast between Fishpool and the village where the school itself is located is keenly felt in the school and it works hard with the two Fishpool primary schools to encourage their pupils to join Dovedale in Year 7.

Hathersage and Thornbridge are slightly different to the other schools in this study. Although they are geographically too far apart to consider each other as competitors, both academies are located in the same large town, referred to as Minetown in this thesis. There are two Local Authority (LA) maintained schools, Clumber Community School and Tissington School, both in the same LA, while the other schools are academies; most are part of Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs). Peveril Comprehensive School is recognised as a lead school in its MAT, while the other schools do not see themselves as leading MATs. Elvaston has a different status to the other academies as it is sponsor-led, meaning that it was effectively forced to become an academy by the Department for Education (DfE) under the control of a convertor academy or MAT; Thornbridge Academy is a stand-alone academy meaning that is not part of a MAT.

Architecturally, several of the schools have prefabricated, low-rise tower blocks, characterised by red or blue square cladding commonly used in school construction across England during the 1950s and 1960s (Harwood, 2010). Most of the schools have been extended or developed since their initial construction; they rarely have a single style of

architecture and many of the buildings feel outdated. In Dovedale, for example, the English department is located in a tower block which literally shakes in strong winds. Internal wood cladding, darkened by decades of pupils' bags rubbing against it, can engender an oppressive atmosphere; the building is very cold in the winter and very hot in the summer. The only school in this study which does not have a hodgepodge of styles is Clumber which was completely rebuilt in the mid-2010; the corridors are spacious, and the classrooms are light, although still quite small.

1.4 The East Midlands

The East Midlands region of England has an industrial heritage, dominated by coalmines and mills, but such industries are largely redundant. In 1921, the year the *Newbolt Report* was published, 10.2% of the working population of the most populous county in the East Midlands, for example, were employed in mining or quarrying, making these the largest employers of the time; the most recent data shows that sector now employs 0.1% of the working population (NOMIS, 2023, np). Now the coalmines are closed, and the region has felt neglected and 'left behind' for decades (Mattinson, 2020); the East Midlands is a post-industrial region.

Although employment is higher than the national average across the East Midlands, earnings remain lower than the national average (NOMIS, 2023, np). The post-industrial communities where the schools in this study are located have been economically characterised in the following way:

> *(1) The economy of Britain's older industrial towns is essentially stagnant*
>
> *(2) There remains substantial labour market slack in older industrial towns*

> *(3) Pay and conditions in older industrial towns are often poor*
>
> *(4) Older industrial towns are increasingly becoming dormitories for men and women who work elsewhere*
>
> *(5) International migration is a prominent feature of recent trends in the towns*
>
> (Beatty & Fothergill, 2018, p. 4)

The industrial heritage of the area has been identified as a key factor in the lack of social mobility across the region, and this has been explicitly linked with relatively low educational outcomes,

> older industrial towns with a mining or manufacturing legacy, such as Minetown, also do very badly for social mobility…they often have relatively limited job opportunities and clusters of low pay…disadvantaged young people in post-industrial areas are half as likely to achieve two or more A-levels (or equivalent) and almost half as likely to go to university compared with those in more socially and ethnically diverse urban areas (The Social Commission, 2017, p.14)

Data suggests that three of the ten worst performing local authority areas in terms of social mobility across the UK are located in communities where this research takes place (ibid., p.5). A perceived link between social deprivation and mining heritage is also highlighted by Ofsted, 'Educational provision in the East Midlands is plagued by mediocrity...Levels of deprivation and unemployment are high in the **former coalfield areas**,' (Ofsted, 2014, pp. 3-4 emphasis in original).

Communities represented in this study received media attention during the second half of the 2010s because they were strongly in favour of Brexit, and they made up some of the 'red wall' seats which the Labour Party lost to the Conservatives in the 2019 election (Mattinson, 2020). These communities voted more strongly in favour of leaving the EU than the regional average, with 60% voting to leave in the more rural areas, and 70% in the towns, making these some of the most strongly pro-Brexit areas in the UK (The Electoral Commission, 2019). Following the 2019 UK general election all of the MPs in constituencies covered in this study were Conservative, continuing a trend of Labour losing seats to the Conservatives beginning in the 2015 General Election (UK Parliament, 2019).

In terms of ethnic diversity, the schools in this research are located in communities where an average of 92.7% of census respondents identify as White British; two of the schools, Scarsdale and Stanage, are in communities with over 95% (ONS, 2022, np). The national average for England is 76.2%, but this includes London where 36.8% of respondents identified as White British; when London is removed from the calculation the average for England is 81.2% (GOV.UK, 2022, np). Across the East Midlands region 79.6% of the *Census 2021* respondents identified as White British. This is important for this study for two reasons. Firstly, it emphasises the difference in the research context between this study and the majority of research into the teaching of English noted above (p.14); secondly, several research participants discuss issues around the relationship between the lack of diversity in the curriculum and the ethnic mix of their school communities, as I discuss below (6.2.2 & 7.2.3).

Much of the art and literature associated with the East Midlands reflects social injustice and a sense that things are never as good as they were. From Robin Hood's mythical attempts to redistribute wealth to D. H. Lawrence's depictions of the industrial communities of his childhood as places of, 'utter hopeless ugliness for a long and gruesome mile: houses, rows of wretched, small, begrimed, brick houses, with black slate roofs for lids, sharp angles and wilful, blank dreariness…The people were as haggard, shapeless, and dreary as the countryside, and as unfriendly' (Lawrence, 1928/1961, pp.14-15); there is a pervasive mood of threat and decline, often rooted in social class divisions. Later generations showed a similarly depressed view of life in the region (e.g. Sillitoe, 1996) while more recently the television crime drama *Sherwood* (Hodgson, 2022) focused viewers' attention on murder and social desolation. Set against the backdrop of the very real, ingrained enmity between families split by the Miners' Strike of the 1980s, emotions still keenly felt across the region, this series reminded the audience that the events of the past continue to influence the present.

1.5 My place in the research

My own place in this research is informed by my personal and professional background. I have worked in the education sector since the early 1990s, as I will describe below, but my personal background is also relevant for understanding this research. Now I live and work in the East Midlands, but I grew up in the Southwest of England. The son of two primary school teachers, I went to an all-boys' grammar school in Plymouth and was part of the final cohort to study O-Levels. Even though my dad was a headteacher at the time, I was largely unaware of the huge changes happening to education in the 1980s and my education was relatively smooth and academically successful.

My school was originally built as a military hospital by Napoleonic prisoners of war and is situated next to Devonport Dock Yard. As a pupil, I remember the sound of the gunfire of Royal Marines on training exercises during the school day, and novels such as William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, with its references to the naval base Devonport which I could see from my school, spoke clearly to me. I understood Ralph's faith that the Royal Navy would eventually rescue the boys from the island, but I also recognised the reality hinted at by Golding, that the adult military can cause far more destruction even than the child villain, Jack; I still find the final image of the novel, with the embarrassed sailor looking out to sea, towards a warship to be genuinely disturbing.

Golding punctuates the tension of the novel with moments of calm, such as Ralph's dream of Dartmoor, one of the UK's great wild places, and a place of great importance to me. Dartmoor is often used in literature as a sinister location, such as Conan Doyle's *Hound of the Baskervilles*, but it has always been a place of calm and safety for me, which is also how it is used in *Lord of the Flies*. With its wild, open spaces the moor was also used by Ted Hughes, who lived much of his life in a village on the outskirts of Dartmoor and used it in much of his writing. I loved his poetry, and it was one particular moment in an English lesson, studying Hughes' poem '*Bayonet Charge'*, that my English teacher, Pam Shaw, led me to understand how my own interpretations of poetry, and hence my fourteen-year-old interpretations of everything else, had validity. That specific moment, studying English with a great teacher of English, situated in a school only a few miles from where the poet lived, made everything seem a bit more real to me.

I began my teaching career as an English teacher in a city school in the East Midlands where I worked for seven years before moving back to the Southwest of England, living and working in Cornwall from 2000 to 2017. Cornwall is a beautiful county, but beset by economic decline and relatively high levels of poverty; it has been described as 'the Least Developed Area' in England (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2016) and shares economic similarities with the East Midlands. The last operating Cornish tin mine, South Crofty, closed in the late 1990s, just before I became Head of English at the secondary school in the nearest small town. One of my grandfathers was a tin miner in Cornwall and I recognised how South Crofty's closure felt more significant and traumatic than simply 'the end of an era'. Teaching in a school with old mine shafts under the sports fields, the sense of despondency and anger in the local population, mixed with some denial, was palpable, best expressed by a piece of graffiti daubed on the wall of the mine, which read, 'Cornish lads are fishermen and Cornish lads are miners too, but when the fish and tin are gone what are the Cornish boys to do?' (National Archive, 1998).

Picture 1. South Crofty Tin Mine, Cornwall, www.cornwallforever.co.uk/history/south-crofty-tin-mine-closes

It was a feeling I had experienced before, during my teacher training year in North Nottinghamshire when the coal mines were finally told they were all going to close.

After some years as Head of English, Assistant Headteacher and then Deputy Headteacher at a different school in Cornwall, I took up my position as headteacher of a Cornish secondary school in January 2010. This was five months before the election of the Conservative-led Coalition Government and the introduction of the wide-ranging education reforms which form the political background to much of this thesis.

In practical terms, the reforms meant that as an inexperienced headteacher I had to navigate new GCSEs, new assessment systems, new Ofsted frameworks and the move to academisation; I was also contending with the day-to-day work of leading a school with a large financial deficit in a depressed, ex-industrial community. The deficit was caused by a low birth-rate in the local population and in order to keep the school viable I had to make one third of the staff redundant, a painful process. However, the school remained popular among the community and was growing when the DfE initiated the academisation process in 2014. This was an exciting piece of work, to begin with, but as the Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) took increasingly direct control over the academy, as it became, the process became difficult. I was instructed to make all but one of my Senior Leadership Team (SLT) redundant, before the MAT asked me to leave the academy in 2015. Ultimately the MAT itself was dissolved by the DfE following questions about its operations in Parliament and on national television (BBC, 2018; Thomson, 2020; Whittaker, 2018). While this was a difficult, painful period, it led me to work in Higher Education (HE) from 2016 and return to my first professional passion: English.

I now work in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) at a university in the East Midlands of England, lecturing on the university's secondary English programmes for the Post Graduate

Certificate in Education (PGCE) and leading the School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) courses. It feels like the culture of government reform has followed me from my days in schools, and I have had to work with my colleagues in ITE in navigating new policies such as the *ITT Common Core Framework* and the *ITT Market Review* (DfE, 2019b, 2022a). These policies are seen by some as attempts to circumscribe teacher education (Brooks et al., 2023; Cushing, 2023b), mirroring the school-level reforms I experienced as headteacher. One of the implications of these changes for our PGCE students is that while their experience as school pupils was shaped by government reforms to the school system, their experience as ITE students is now shaped by further reforms to the ITE sector. This means that their experience of education has been largely shaped by centralised reform and control, including a very specific model of knowledge which is not felt to be appropriate for the teaching of English (e.g. Eaglestone, 2021), as explored elsewhere in this thesis (2.2). This is one of the reasons that this thesis is timely, as it offers a view of how English is produced in secondary schools during a time of intensive reform. It is helpful to see how HoDs are responding to such reforms, as I have presented elsewhere (Perry, 2021a), and this is helpful for me to share with PGCE students who have only seen the product of reforms, rather than alternative models of what English can be.

In this section I have shown how I have first-hand experience of teaching English in secondary schools; I have held the responsibility for leading English at both department and whole school level; and I am now responsible for helping to develop the next generation of English teachers. In addition to my own direct experience, I am also married to an English teacher who works in a large mainstream secondary school, and I am a governor at a

secondary school in the region. Thus, I feel that I am suitably qualified to conduct this research.

1.6 Thesis Structure

This thesis follows a relatively conventional structure. *Chapter 2* is the Literature Review, exploring current thinking about the subject of English in English secondary schools. This chapter takes a critical approach to the National Curriculum (DfE, 2014a), discussing its epistemological position before exploring the place and purpose of Literature and Language in the NC.

Chapter 3 discusses the methodological approaches and decisions taken during this thesis, including ethical considerations, while *Chapter 4* presents the research participants so that the reader can gain a sense of their professional backgrounds.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 present the main data relevant for this thesis. Chapter 5 focuses on the place of English in the schools making use of a theoretical framework designed to discuss the context of policy enactment (Ball et al., 2012). This chapter explores how material, professional and external contexts affect the place of English in the schools. Chapter 6 focuses on the purpose of English in the schools. In this chapter I interpret what the HoDs say about the role of English for pupils and schools. Chapter 7 focuses on the production of English in the schools making extensive use of Lefebvre's theory about spatial practice to discuss the production of English in the schools (Lefebvre, 1991), exploring how policy, context and imagination interact to produce English in practice.

Chapter 8 presents my conclusions about the position of English in secondary schools in ex-industrial communities in the East Midlands of England. Drawing on my interpretations of the data, I identify four problems with the current position of English in the schools, and then make some recommendations to address these problems. I suggest a number of avenues for future research into the position of English, before concluding with a personal statement.

Having set out the purpose of this thesis and the reasons why I am a suitable person to conduct the research, I now move on to the Literature Review which critically explores English as a secondary school subject in the English school system.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In this chapter I explore the purpose of English in English secondary schools by looking at the version of the National Curriculum (NC) used by the HoDs in this study (DfE, 2014a). The NC has been one of the foundations of English teaching since the late 1980s, but it has existed in various versions (Cox, 1995; Davison, 2019; Andy Goodwyn, 2019b; Jones, 2003). I critically analyse the underlying epistemology of the current NC before exploring how different elements traditionally considered to make up the English curriculum are now presented, including Literature and Language. The relationship between English and the assessment regime is then explored; I conclude with a brief exploration of the literature about Heads of English as they are central to this thesis.

2.1 The National Curriculum for English (2014)

The NC is intended to be a 'traditional knowledge-rich curriculum' (Gibb, 2021; Gove, 2013) stressing how 'English has a pre-eminent place in education and society' (DfE, 2014a, p.14). However, interpreting this statement means being clear about which view of 'English' is being used, as well as being clear about what is meant by 'knowledge' in this context.

Using the language of the original NC noted above (p.11) the current version adopts Adult Needs and Cultural Transmission views of English, stating that the primary purposes of English include enabling pupils to 'communicate'; to 'develop culturally, emotionally, intellectually, socially and spiritually'; 'to acquire knowledge'; and to enable them to 'participat[e] fully as a member of society' (DfE, 2014a, p.14). It also states that pupils should be taught how to 'appreciate the depth and power of the English literary heritage through: reading a wider range of high-quality, challenging, classic literature and literary non-fiction,' (ibid., p.86). The 2014 NC pays little attention to the Personal Growth, Cross-

curricular or Cultural Analysis views broadly welcomed by English teachers (DES, 1989; Goodwyn, 1992; Goodwyn, 2019c), thus adopting a more limited view of English than earlier iterations.

Regarding *knowledge* the NC encourages a focus on 'the essential knowledge and understanding that pupils should be expected to have to enable them to take their place as educated members of society' (DfE, 2010a, p.42). The term *essential knowledge* is appropriated from earlier versions of the NC (DfES, 2004; QCA, 2007), but is given added emphasis in current policy. The NC, as well as Ofsted, both invoke Arnold, noting that *essential knowledge* is 'the best that has been thought and said' (Arnold, 1869/1993, p.190; DfE, 2014a, p.6; Ofsted, 2019b, p.10). Yet while this phrase is a part of the policy landscape, it is problematic for at least two reasons.

The full phrase used by Arnold concerns culture as, 'A *pursuit* of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world' (Arnold, 1869/1993, p.190 emphasis added). This is a more expansive view of culture than offered by the NC, emphasizing that learning, and perhaps life itself, is an ongoing, dynamic 'pursuit' of knowledge rather than a static 'introduction' to existing facts and ideas. Thus, the NC looks towards a positivist epistemological stance rather than the constructivist position more widely associated with the discipline (Dixon, 1975; Eaglestone, 2021; Elliott, 2020). This is explored in greater depth below.

A second point of difference between the NC and Arnold is that the former inspector of schools refers to 'the best which has been thought and said *in the world*' (op. cit., emphasis added). Such a global ontological view is omitted from the current NC, an omission drawing attention to an approach known as 'Our Island Story', the nationalist view of England's place in the world dating back to 1905 (see Talbot, 2022). This view highlights England's positive achievements as a colonial force while downplaying negative elements of the country's history, a narrative used by the Conservative government since 2010 and influential in the Brexit vote of 2016 (see Wellings, 2016).

Michael Gove, the Secretary of State for Education at the time of the education reforms informing much of this thesis, explicitly promoted the 'Our Island Story' view whilst proclaiming that 'Our literature is the best *in the world'* in the context of selling his view of education to the Conservative Party (Gove, 2010 cited in Vasagar & Sparrow, 2010, emphasis added). Here, Gove echoes one of the more nationalistic phrases of the *Newbolt Report* when it stated that 'no Englishman competent to judge doubts that our literature ranks among the two or three greatest *in the world*…it is the richest of all' (BoE, 1921, p.200 emphasis added). The use of 'in the world' by Gove and *Newbolt* is different to its use by Arnold; in the texts by Gove and *Newbolt* English literature is placed above the literature of other countries, while Arnold's use of 'in the world' points towards his belief that other countries' cultures are potential sources for 'the best which has been thought and said' (Arnold, 1869/1993, p.193), implying that England is not inherently superior. The Our Island Story narrative is unsympathetic to the multi-cultural nature of many English communities (Nelson-Addy et al., 2019; Snapper, 2020; Yandell, 2020b), but is consistent with the views of E.D. Hirsch, a major influence on the NC, as I discuss in more depth below (p.38).

However, even if one accepts the more expansive view of Arnold compared with the current NC, the question about who identifies the essential knowledge which constitutes *the best* remains, 'Once again, we ask 'according to whom?'' (Elliott, 2020, p.98). I now move on to critically discuss the ideas of two writers who have helped the government's approach to deciding on what is *the best*: E.D. Hirsch and, firstly, M. Young.

2.2.1 Powerful Knowledge

Young is concerned with the role of the curriculum in developing a sense of subject discipline (Young, 2014). For Young, this is achieved through the successful learning of *powerful knowledge*, the 'specialized' and 'disciplinary' knowledge which 'liberates children from their daily experience.' (Young, 2013, p.118). This view prioritizes knowledge which can be applied independent of context (see Elliott, 2020) and is recognized as part of a global, social realist movement to 'bring knowledge back' into education (Deng, 2021), although there is little evidence that knowledge has ever been absent. Young does not write much about English in schools, but he does mention literature, stating that 'great art works are 'powerful' because they engage with feelings such as guilt, remorse, regret, responsibility and joy that are emotions experienced in particular contexts but common to all human beings' (Young, 2013, p.108), echoing the NC's purpose of helping pupils 'develop culturally, emotionally, intellectually, socially and spiritually.' (DfE, 2014a, p.14). Further echoing the government and Ofsted (Gove, 2014a; Ofsted, 2019b), Young identifies powerful knowledge as a social justice issue, being 'about the entitlement to knowledge of all students regardless of whether they reject it or find it difficult. If some knowledge is 'better', how can we deny it to all pupils [?]' (op. cit., p.109).

However, Young's view of knowledge in the context of teaching English is criticized for its promotion of scientific, propositional knowledge which 'neglects the democratic need for critical literacy' (Wrigley, 2018, p.21). Eaglestone develops this idea, arguing that the positivist, scientist-like approach inherent in the *powerful knowledge* model presents knowledge of English as removed from learners' own 'experience, value and judgement,' (Eaglestone, 2021, p.17). Writing specifically about teaching literature, Eaglestone argues that these areas are vital for individuals' interpretation of texts; I would argue that his ideas are equally valid for considering teaching language as this is also a personal skill used in different ways by each individual.

2.2.2 Cultural Literacy

Hirsch's view of knowledge influencing the current curriculum (Gibb, 2014; Yandell, 2017) is *cultural literacy*, defined as 'what the "common reader" of a newspaper in a literate culture could be expected to know' (Hirsch, 1983, p.166). *Cultural literacy* relies on the idea that pupils need particular background knowledge to understand the content and concepts valued by the education system as well as wider society, and research supports the role of background knowledge in learning to a degree (e.g. Lupo et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2021). For Hirsch, however, background knowledge rooted in concepts of national identity has become the 'the minimal aim of schooling' (op.cit.); more recently Hirsch has stated that 'Human education is an acculturation into a tribal ethnicity – which is made up chiefly of a communicative store of shared knowledge and values and loyalties' (Hirsch, 2022, p.86). Although he argued against a national curriculum per se (Hirsch, 1985) Hirsch advocates for all pupils to be taught a core body of knowledge as part of his approach to combat multiculturalism and 'ensure our children's mastery of American literate culture' (Hirsch, 1987, p.18). The unspoken corollary of this is that if people do not know the corpus of 5000

items he identified as the essential knowledge required to achieve cultural literacy in the USA (Hirsch, 1987), then they are not complete citizens.

As with Young, Hirsch's view has been critiqued on several fronts. Eaglestone argues that Hirsch's ideas are epistemologically unsuited for the teaching of English, with *cultural literacy*, as well as *powerful knowledge*, rooted in the concept of *episteme*, 'the kind of knowledge which characterises the natural sciences' (Eaglestone, 2021, p12). Eaglestone argues that it is more appropriate to consider the teaching of English, especially English literature, as 'a form of *techne*, a knowing how, a knowing your way around…[and] English is a form of *phronesis* too, learnt from doing things together, arguing, listening to other people's points of view' (ibid., p.11). Eaglestone further characterises Hirsch's cultural literacy model as encouraging a 'right-or-wrong' (ibid., p.28) attitude towards teaching and assessment, 'in the natural sciences, the experiment is correct if all the students reach the same result; in the study of literature, the lesson has gone well if all the students come up with different, informed interpretations' (ibid.). Eaglestone's interpretation of Hirsch supports others' views locating *cultural literacy* as teaching propositional knowledge which can be readily assessed and taught through rote learning (Hirsch, 1987, 2016), but not encouraging the critical skills of subjective interpretation which are more difficult to assess (Roberts, 2019).

Secondly, there is concern about how *cultural literacy* stresses the importance of a single, dominant national culture. Hodgson and Harris explore the origins of Hirsch's thinking about culture, highlighting his emphasis on the importance of a single national culture in the context of an increasingly multicultural society, noting that he,

> …sought to restore a White narrative of American history, and Gove and Gibb's adaptation of Hirsch's ideas to the curriculum in England and Wales similarly foregrounded a White British perspective on history and literature. But the naïve and authoritarian views of E.D. Hirsch are entirely irrelevant to the culture (and cultural literacy) of a modern society, which is inherently multicultural and multilingual (Hodgson & Harris, 2022, p.12)

The essential knowledge evinced by *cultural literacy* and advanced by the NC has, for some, led to a curriculum too narrowly focused on literature written by dead, white, British men and lacking diversity (Mansworth, 2016), although government ministers explicitly defend this stance (Gibb, 2021). Research has found that 'Fewer than 1% of candidates for GCSE English Literature in 2019 answered a question on a novel by an author of colour' (Penguin & Runnymede Trust, 2021, p.6), while 'No more that 7%...answered on a full length novel or play by a woman' (ibid., p.7). In the following section I focus on Literature in English secondary schools, and explore the issue of diversity in the school curriculum in more depth.

2.3 Literature

Until the reformed GCSEs of the 2010s it had been possible to claim that it was increasingly 'common to include texts of contemporary or recent authors in the [examination] specifications' (Cambridge Assessment, 2008, p.82). However, because of the focus on the Hirschian version of *cultural literacy* discussed above, this is not the case with the current NC, deliberately dominated as it is by a *Great Tradition*-style canon of texts predominantly written by 'dead white men' (Gibb, 2021, np). Few authors call for the complete removal of

these texts from the curriculum and the cultural heritage model remains important for many teachers of English (Goodwyn, 2012). However, calls for the curriculum to be decolonized and/or diversified has been repeatedly made in the context of developing the role of English as a tool for improving social justice (e.g. Elliott, 2023; Nelson-Addy et al., 2019; Rauf, 2021; Snapper, 2020; Snapper, 2023; Trust, 2021; Yandell, 2020a). Decolonizing and diversifying the secondary school English curriculum have been the subject of much recent research, particularly in the context of inner-city London schools (e.g. Iffath, 2020; Talbot, 2022; Yandell, 2020a), with an international Delphi-study demonstrating that issues around race and diversifying the curriculum are amongst '*the most important*' (Elliott & Hodgson, 2021, p.3 emphasis in original) priorities for research into English teaching.

It is the case that while the NC emphasizes a traditional canon, several of the GCSE examination boards appear to be responding to societal change by diversifying the range of texts available for examination (AQA, 2023; Edexcel, 2023; OCR, 2022). Yet, while attempts to diversify the English curriculum appear to be gathering pace, such attempts are challenging for schools. Firstly, teachers' abilities to teach newly available texts rests on a wide range of factors including available budgets, teachers' experience, teachers' knowledge, teachers' values and their actual agency to select texts (Elliott & Courtney, 2023; Perry, 2021a; Watson et al., 2022). Secondly, analysis of the texts included in curriculum models designed to decolonize and diversify the school curriculum models reveals that the texts are not as diverse as they may initially appear. Such texts often 'tend to be on the theme of identity…thus perhaps neglecting the broader, more eclectic range of themes and ideas which writers of colour address' (Nelson-Addy et al., 2023, p.27); this echoes a recent survey study which found that poetry taught under the name of *poetry*

from other cultures can create 'an overwhelming impression of melancholy, sadness and difficulty' (Elliott & Courtney, 2023, p.99). This risks reinforcing the othering of communities, thus undermining the mission of social justice so important for teachers of English (Elliott & Hodgson, 2021) rather than taking the opportunity to discuss the complex nature of English identity (Green, 2022); this is discussed later in this thesis in relation to the data I present (7.2.3).

Additionally, Ofsted warn that the introduction of more diverse, contemporary literature 'can also lead to significant, influential texts being removed from the curriculum or texts being included only because they address contemporary issues rather than due to literary merit' (ibid.); they stress that,

> any rationale for choosing texts should be based on the knowledge, practices and traditions of the subject itself. Other purposes, for example learning about a particular contemporary social issue, such as 'homelessness' or 'social media shaming', should take a back seat to literary merit (Ofsted, 2022, np)

Ofsted offer no evidence that 'significant, influential texts' are being removed from school curriculum models beyond a reference to a blog by a government advisor decrying the teaching of Young Adult fiction in schools, suggesting that award-winning novels including *Maggot Moon* and *The Hate U Give* are not 'high[] quality texts' (Didau, 2021, np). Such views do not give sufficient respect to the complexities of how teachers choose texts to teach, including their agency and values as well as structural and material factors (Watson et al., 2022), but Ofsted's views are important for schools as the data in this thesis makes

clear (5.3.1). Having discussed what the literature indicates about English Literature in secondary schools, I now turn to English Language.

2.4 Language

2.4.1 Reading

In secondary schools the current NC focuses on *reading for comprehension* and *reading for pleasure*, specifying that pupils should learn 'how language, including figurative language, vocabulary choice, grammar, text structure and organisational features, present[] meaning' (DfE, 2014a, p.83). It also specifies that pupils should be taught to 'critically evaluate texts' (ibid., p.86) and that pupils should read 'increasingly challenging texts' (ibid., p.83), thus enabling pupils to develop their vocabulary and contextual knowledge required for comprehending the texts (DfE, 2023). There is little about reading acquisition in secondary schools as the NC assumes that the majority of pupils are fluent readers by the end of KS2 (Ofsted, 2022). However, the default text type assumed by the NC is paper based, with little acknowledgement of digital formats which may require modified approaches to the reading process (Frean, 2022; OECD, 2019a; van der Weel & Mangen, 2016).

However, while the standard of reading in the UK is recognised to be above average compared with other countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), it has plateaued since the mid-2000s (OECD, 2019b) There are concerns about the number of pupils entering secondary school with low levels of reading, with particular concerns about the extent to which children read for pleasure (Ofsted, 2022). The benefits of reading for pleasure are well established (Cole et al., 2022; DfE, 2012) and there is significant research into how schools can encourage it (Cremin, 2020; Cremin et al., 2023). Even so, data collected at a national level suggests that children are now choosing

to read less frequently in their own time; that they enjoy reading less than before the Covid pandemic; and that they read texts within their comfort levels rather than 'increasingly challenging texts' (Topping & Clark, 2023); perhaps this is not surprising as being challenged may remove the *pleasure* from *reading for pleasure*. The decline is reading is apparent in the East Midlands, with enjoyment decreasing by 7.5% between 2021 and 2022 (Cole et al., 2022, p.3). The data indicates that girls choose to read more than boys, with the National Literacy Trust (NLT) highlighting that 45.6% of boys surveyed enjoyed reading in 2022, compared with 54.9% of girls (Cole et al., 2022, p.3). The gap has increased since 2019, and of particular concern for this study is that 'Boys who received FSMs[2] had the lowest levels of reading enjoyment… decreasing from 46.3% in 2020 to 39.8% in 2022' (ibid.). This suggests to me that such boys were enjoying reading more during the Covid pandemic than when they are at school. This continues the established narrative of boys underperforming in English, (e.g Ingram, 2009; QCA, 1998; Willis, 1977), a narrative which feminist readings challenge as it seeks to 'reinforc[e] male privilege by justifying a greater focus and expenditure on meeting boys' needs (at the expense of girls)' (Francis, 2006, p.189). However, it is important for understanding some of the arguments put forward by the HoDs about how they choose the texts they teach, which is discussed later in this thesis (6.2.2 & 7.2.2).

Some schools are attempting to encourage reading development and reading for pleasure through the use of IT-related packages such as Accelerated Reader (AR) (Renaissance, 2023), and these are discussed by several HoDs later in this thesis (5.1). Such schemes are

[2] FSMs – Free School Meals, often used as a proxy for Disadvantaged Pupils

predicated on calculating and assigning texts a level of difficulty so that pupils can choose, or be directed towards, 'increasingly challenging texts' (DfE, 2014, p.83). The government does not support the use of schemes such as these that conflate 'a text's complexity [with] its linguistic complexity' (DfE, 2023, p.160), stating that such schemes 'are not an effective way of improving pupils' comprehension' (ibid.). However, while comprehension may not be directly improved by reading the texts included in the AR scheme, one of the outcomes of AR in schools is that it provides data about pupils' reading choices, albeit within the context of a purchased reading scheme. AR allows pupils to choose any text available within a school library, but the data provided does not offer detail about who the pupils are, meaning that it is impossible to say if all the pupils in a school are involved or if they are from a specific intervention group, for example. The data indicates that the most popular titles for Y8 include *Gangsta Granny*[3], *Heartstopper Volume 1*[4] and the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*[5] series which accounted for eight titles in the top twenty (Topping & Clark, 2023, p.79). However, according to this research the most popular title for Y8 is *Animal Farm*[6]; the list also includes *Of Mice and Men*[7], and *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*[8], texts frequently taught in Y8 (Kneen et al., 2022), suggesting that the popularity of these texts in the AR research is influenced by the school curriculum. This is not surprising, but it does imply that AR research does not necessarily reflect pupils' independent reading choices. Watson et al.'s research, carried out across the South West of the UK, also serves to emphasise the relative lack of diversity in school curriculum text choices discussed above, as well as to emphasise a range of factors

[3] David Walliams
[4] Alice Oseman
[5] Jeff Kinney
[6] George Orwell
[7] John Steinbeck
[8] John Boyne

influencing teachers' agency when choosing texts (Watson et al., 2022); these include teacher knowledge; teachers' desire to diversify the curriculum, especially in the name of personal growth views of English; and financial considerations which I have discussed elsewhere (see Perry, 2021a).

2.4.2 Writing

The NC says that pupils should be taught how to write 'formal expository and narrative essays' (ibid.) as well as letter, notes, 'scripts, poetry and other imaginative writing' (ibid.). In KS4 pupils should be able 'to describe, narrate, explain, instruct, give and respond to information, and argue' (ibid., p.86). There is an emphasis on Standard English (SE), although in KS4 pupils should be 'analysing some of the differences between spoken and written language, including differences associated with formal and informal registers, and between Standard English and other varieties of English' (ibid.) Thus there is a move away from the genre based approaches to teaching writing encouraged by the National Strategies and previous versions of the NC (DfEE, 1998; Myhill et al., 2013; QCA, 2007). In practice, however, the current NC replaces one set of non-fiction genres with a different set, sometimes referred to by examination boards as 'transactional writing' (Pearson/Edexcel, 2022).

There has long been concern that the focus on the specific types of English required for examination success can lead teachers to adopt a limited range of pedagogical approaches, using restrictive scaffolds to drill pupils in writing so that 'English becomes a weird kind of game. Strategies of pleasing the examiner take precedence' (Dixon, 1975, p.93). Gibbons notes that In current English classrooms Dixon's 'weird kind of game' can be played with tightly taught scaffolds such as the 'all pervasive' (Gibbons, 2019, p.43) Point Evidence

Explain (PEE) paragraph and its multiple derivatives, described as 'an overly structured, stifling writing pedagogy' (ibid.). Such approaches are discouraged by the GCSE examination boards (AQA, 2021), and there is emerging research that some teachers are returning to alternative approaches to teaching writing, including the 'process approach' rooted more strongly in linguistics and formative assessment than the current NC model (Keen, 2022; Marshall, 2004); it will be interesting to see how these develop.

2.4.2.1 Creative writing

Such approaches contrast with creative writing practices whose place in the curriculum is felt to have become marginalised under the NC (Smith, 2019). There is a long tradition of schools and English teachers being encouraged to include creative writing in their curriculum models (Abbs, 1982; Gibbons, 2013; Gilbert & MacLeroy, 2021), and it is seen to support the personal growth view of English long favoured by many English teachers (Goodwyn, 2016). While the first iteration of the NC acknowledged the importance of personal growth and creativity (DES, 1989; Gilbert, 2021), the most recent version does not use the word 'creative' in the context of English teaching[9]. Ofsted accepts that 'English…has a strong creative and expressive dimension' (Ofsted, 2022, np), but as their work supports the NC they offer no further thoughts on creativity in writing.

GCSEs include a creative writing element, which ensures its inclusion in the curriculum (e.g. AQA, 2014). However, the pupils have to complete their creative writing task under exam conditions, atypical of how writers actually create their work (Myhill et al., 2023), and the tight link between the English GCSE and whole school accountability measures is seen to

[9] There are fourteen uses of the word 'creative' in the current NC, most frequently used in Mathematics, Science and Design Technology (DfE, 2014).

encourage a formulaic approach to writing (Gibbons, 2019; Marshall, 2017). The exam boards themselves have been critical of how, in the exams, 'Some students had leaned heavily upon 'learned' responses, the details of which are quickly recognisable and do not often add to their piece' (AQA, 2021, p.7); this is indicative of how schools teach writing in preparation for the GCSE examinations (Elliott, 2020; Gibbons, 2019). Such approaches do not support Young's vision of powerful knowledge in the English curriculum; they do not support the stated aims of the NC (Eaglestone, 2021); and they do not encourage creative writing as a way 'to change the world for the better' (Gilbert, 2021, p.165).

2.4.3 Grammar

The NC is clear that pupils 'should be taught *the correct* use of grammar' (DfE, 2014a, p.11 emphasis added) and that by KS3 pupils should be 'using Standard English confidently in their own writing' (ibid., p.84). The emphasis on a 'correct use of grammar' and SE has been present throughout the evolution of the NC, however, the current NC focuses on the prescriptive use of grammar with nods to the descriptive use of grammar in KS4. Two major debates concern the teaching of grammar in English schools: signature pedagogies of teaching grammar (e.g. Myhill et al., 2013), and the relationship between teaching 'the correct use of grammar' and identity (Cushing & Pye, 2021).

Many current teachers of English experienced the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) (DfEE, 1998) because they were either taught in the 1990s and early 2000s, or they were teaching during that period themselves, and thus experienced detailed teaching about grammar, yet concern remains about teachers' subject knowledge for teaching grammar (Myhill et al., 2023). Myhill's approach focuses on equipping teachers with the metalinguistic skills to teach grammar in a descriptive way, enabling pupils to reach a deeper understanding of

how writers and speakers achieve their effects (Myhill, 2021; Myhill & Newman, 2016). Most recently her work has focused on helping teachers develop their own creative writing skills, drawing attention to the gap between the type of creative writing in GCSE exams discussed above and how professional creative writers actually work (Myhill et al., 2023).

The relationship between teaching grammar and the construction of identity has a long history in English teaching. A century ago, the *Newbolt Report* advocated teaching grammar to focus on those elements of grammar useful for analysing languages other than English to demonstrate that 'Greek, Latin and German are less subtle, less supple, less serviceable, and – dare we say it? – less civilized than modern English,' (BoE, 1921, p.289). This illustrates how the *Report* used English to demonstrate a 'jingoistic' (Eagleton, 1983/2008, p.25) cultural superiority over others, as well as the contradictory approach to education taken by the *Report* identified by several writers (e.g. Aldridge & Green, 2019; Shayer, 1972). Written in the shadow of World War One, the *Report* recognised that English 'is a living organism in process of constant change' (op. cit., p.293) and the teaching of grammar was of limited use for teaching English; however, the authors also advocated for teaching grammar to prove that English is somehow better than other languages, particularly German. Some have argued that this demonstrates one way the *Newbolt Report* continues to influence current government policy about the teaching of English, and specifically grammar, in ways which act 'to structurally maintain power imbalances, reaffirm social hierarchies, which transcend into language hierarchies, and reinforce linguistic inequality' (Cushing & Pye, 2021, p.84). Through this lens, Cushing shows that the current teaching of grammar in some schools is prescriptive to the point of being authoritarian, which he locates in the wider context of the English school system.

Cushing's work serves three purposes. Firstly, he shows how grammar is now subject to the 'what works', positivist agenda of education policy critiqued by Eaglestone and others (e.g. Biesta, 2010). This view sees the NC prescribing a single 'correct use of grammar' (DfE, 2014a, p.11), indicating a shift from longer established traditions of teaching English (see Crystal, 2004), more sympathetic to the idea of English as 'a living organism in process of constant change' (BoE, 1921, p.293); this is also a shift from the later *Bullock Report* which highlighted the 'arbitrary' introduction of grammar rules at various points in the history of English (DES, 1975, p.170). Secondly, Cushing shows how the teaching of grammar has assumed a more central place in the school curriculum since the 2010 education reforms; it is notable, for example, that the *Bullock Report* only includes three paragraphs about grammar (ibid., pp.169-170). Thirdly, Cushing shows how subject content and subject pedagogy are being used in some schools as controlling mechanisms rather than emancipatory tools, negatively affecting some groups of pupils (Cushing, 2023a).

Developing a long-standing theme of research into the relationship between the teaching of English in state schools and the experiences of pupils from the wide range of cultures and ethnicities attending such schools (e.g. Bryan, 1994; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000), Cushing describes the current NC as encouraging 'anti-Black linguistic racism' (Cushing, 2023a). Yet, along with others, Cushing also shows how creative, confident teachers can adapt the existing curriculum to meet the perceived needs of pupils in multicultural schools and communities within the demands of the examination system (e.g. Price, 2023; Yandell et al., 2022). This indicates that while the current curriculum is challenging for teachers, involving emotional labour, there is scope for it to be adapted to meet the needs of different groups.

Such research is typically located in London schools, carrying on the London School research tradition established after World War Two (Barnes et al., 1969; Gibbons, 2012, 2013; Rosen & Burgess, 1980) exploring the relationship between teaching English language and identity; however, there is less research into this issue in schools in ex-industrial communities as I have noted above (1.2).

2.4.4 Speaking and Listening

Cushing, along with others, is also concerned about the place and purpose of Speaking and Listening in the school curriculum which, like grammar, can be seen as prescriptive or descriptive. While the revised NC includes Speaking and Listening, it is now an ungraded element of the GCSE which does not contribute to pupils' overall grades, raising concerns that oracy skills are not being taught as extensively as under previous versions (Alexander, 2021; James, 2018). There are three main concerns about the sidelining of Speaking and Listening from the curriculum. Firstly, through the single-lens focus on SE in the NC any teaching of oracy skills serves to reinforce the cultural dominance of a single, national identity (Gilbert, 2022); secondly, the removal of any study of dialects other than SE diminishes pupils' opportunities to learn about how language operates in the contexts of their own communities (Cushing & Pye, 2021); thirdly, the reduction of time spent teaching oracy skills diminished pupils' chances of learning how to engage in dialogue, so essential for learning as well as for adult life and one of the identified signature pedagogies of English teaching (Elliott, 2020). In this section of the literature review I critically explore each of these concerns in turn.

The relationship between language and spoken English has often been expressed in terms of social justice. Dixon, for example, noted that 'Language of course asserts our membership of

a speech fellowship. To members of lower status groups, then, standard [English] is a prestige dialect spoken by the upper status groups or classes' (Dixon, 1975, p.18); for him, this meant that teachers should be teaching SE dialect as a means of 'teaching me the way into larger society' (Ellison, cited in Dixon, 1975, p.19). However, the difference with the current NC compared with earlier iterations is that the study of dialects other than SE is now omitted, thus prescribing a single, dominant model of class-based language with little recognition given to other dialects or less formal registers (DfE, 2014a, 2021; Ofsted, 2019a).

There has been long-standing concern about the attributed value of SE in relation to other dialects and sociolects serving to reduce other versions to a lesser status and reproduce existing dominant power dynamics (e.g. Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977/1990; Hoggart, 1957; Willis, 1977). Such a view has historically been viewed through the lens of social class (see Perry, 2021b), and is now often viewed through a lens of ethnicity or school culture (e.g. Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Cushing, 2023a; Gilbert, 2022; Kircher & Fox, 2019). This demonstrates how the teaching of spoken language can serve to present dialects other than SE as socially inferior, maintaining the social superiority of those who use SE as their main dialect. I argue that this is consistent with Hirsch's approach to supressing multicultural identities in education described above (Hirsch, 2022) which has the effect of using schools to encourage a single, national identity through the teaching of language as well as literature, an effect that many commentators and teachers find problematic (e.g. Ahmed et al., 2021; Perry, 2021b; Talbot, 2022; Yandell, 2020a).

A second, closely related issue is how the focus on a single dialect limits pupils' knowledge about how language operates. Such knowledge has been seen as a valuable source of study

(Barnes et al., 1969) and was an important part of the short-lived Language in the National Curriculum (LINC) initiative and the related National Oracy Project (Johnson, 1994). LINC aimed to provide a pedagogical approach to the *Kingman Report's* approach to the place of language in schools (Carter, 1994; DES, 1988); it was intended to be a detailed way to support all teachers to teach a model of language based on contemporary linguistics, but was pulled by the government in an early example of the increasingly prescriptive approach to curriculum content that has come to characterise national policy (Apple et al., 2022; Cox, 1995; Cushing, 2023b; Goddard, 1991). Because the current NC only focuses on SE, pupils' abilities to explore how the grammar of spoken English works is limited. Such study was encouraged in previous curriculum models (DfES, 2004; QCA, 2004); I argue that the revised NC serves to limits pupils' cultural capital, in the way the phrase is used by the government, because it removes the opportunities to study language varieties.

There is also a Cultural Heritage element to the removal of the study of dialect. The *Newbolt Report* saw dialect as important to help preserve a sense of place in the teaching of English, 'We believe it to be in the highest interests of English culture that local patriotism, with all that entails, should be encouraged' (BoE, 1921, p.145). Such a view was echoed in previous versions of the NC (e.g. QCA, 2007) but is out of step with the current NC and its assumption of a shared Island Story. The removal of the study of dialect from the NC limits pupils' cultural capital; this is a further example of how the curriculum seeks to prescribe a single national identity.

A third problem with the removal of Speaking and Listening is the impact on learning across the curriculum, a situation which 'Many English teachers regard…as retrogressive, because

they seem to ignore what has been learnt about the need for students to learn about and make progress in their talk' (Cliff Hodges & Rawlinson-Mills, 2019, p.50). The role of spoken language in learning was acknowledged in the *Newbolt Report*, with subsequent research deepening the understanding of how speaking and listening help learners construct knowledge (e.g. Dixon, 1975; Elliott, 2020; Mercer & Littleton, 2007; Perry et al., 2018; Vygotsky, 1978). While the NC states that pupils should be taught to work 'effectively in groups of different sizes and tak[e] on required roles' (DfE, 2014a, p.88), some see it as encouraging increasingly didactic pedagogies (e.g. Didau, 2015; Gibb, 2021) with an underlying authoritarian aspect (Cushing & Pye, 2021; Gilbert, 2022) rather than as opportunities to teach pupils 'how we construct knowledge in English' (Elliott, 2020, p.13) . There are groups trying to introduce more expansive approaches to teaching oracy which are more sympathetic to learning theory (e.g. Voice 21, 2022), although these have been critiqued for reinforcing the NC model of oracy (Cushing, 2023b). This implies that the teaching of oracy is now seen to operate as a prescriptive, authoritarian tool for transmissive, didactic teaching rather than an opportunity for pupils to develop their learning skills making use of what is currently known about learning theory.

The purpose of Speaking and Listening in the NC, then, is characterised by the government in terms of social justice rooted in the deficit view of spoken language which has been present in the discourse around English teaching since at least the *Newbolt Report*. The *Report* noted that 'Many children, when they first come to school, can scarcely talk at all' (op. cit. p, 68), while the current NC states that 'a greater focus on oracy can enable disadvantaged students to fulfil their potential and narrow the attainment gap between them and more advantaged peers' (DfE, 2014, p.3), and some HoDs in this study echo such

views as I discuss in subsequent chapters (7.2.4). However, although there are some schools using oracy to help pupils develop their cultural capital in more ambitious ways than current policy suggests (see Knight, 2023), speaking and listening is more widely seen as a tool for ensuring that the social status quo is maintained; its effective removal from the GCSE assessment means that its place in the English curriculum is diminished.

2.5 Assessment

The penultimate theme explored in this literature review is the relationship between English teaching and summative assessment in secondary schools. There has been a close relationship between English, summative assessment and whole school performance measures since the nineteenth century. For example, pupils' outcomes in reading tests had a direct impact on school funding with the effect that 'children's reading has thus been narrowed and impoverished all the year for the sake of a *result* at the end of it, and the *result* is an illusion' (Arnold, 1910, p.126 emphasis in original); for Arnold, the results were illusionary because the pupils had simply been taught to rote learn and recite a small selection of passages rather than explore any deeper textual significance. The *Newbolt Report* was conflicted about examinations, believing them to be unreliable indicators of pupils' understanding or emotional engagement with literature in particular, a concern which continues (Mansworth & Giovanelli, 2021). Ultimately, however, the *Report* noted that 'To exempt Literature alone from [the] scope [of the examination system] would simply exclude the teaching of Literature from a number of schools' (BoE, 1921, p.301) and for some this is indicative of the contradictory nature of the *Report's* conclusions (see Green, 2021).

2.5.1 100% Examination

The coalition government removed all elements of coursework from the GCSE examinations in the mid-2010s, replacing it with a fully terminal, written examination. Two central reasons for this were proposed: firstly, there was concern about grade inflation influenced by teachers' marking of coursework; secondly, the knowledge-curriculum, explored above, was more suited to an examination than a coursework approach (Gove, 2014a; Stringer, 2012).

Traditionally, teachers of English have been seen to favour coursework (QCA, 2006), but its place in the examination system has been gradually diminished since the mid-2000s. Coursework was altered so that it was created as a Controlled Assessment (CA), similar to exam conditions, in an attempt to reduce perceived cheating by pupils and/or schools, although the validity of CA as a means of assessing English was unclear because practice between schools remained inconsistent (Vowles, 2012). The QCA survey included 100 Heads of English and they were more positive about coursework than other subject leaders, noting how coursework can 'give teachers greater freedom and flexibility with the curriculum' (ibid., p.5). However, they also highlight 'the burden of marking' (ibid.) more highly than teachers of other subjects, perhaps exacerbated by English teachers' willingness to provide support for coursework beyond lessons (ibid.). According to the survey, 66% of teachers opposed the removal of coursework, with those who teach an oral element most strongly opposing this being removed (ibid.).

2.5.2 Closed Book Examination

According to the government, the return of closed book examinations in the mid-2010s has 'returned rigour to our exams' (DfE, 2016, p.3), implying that previous assessment models lacked rigour, although there little evidence of this is presented by the government beyond

England's positions in international league tables (DfE, 2010b); the use of 'returned' also highlights how the government seeks to look backwards towards 'traditional' rather than 'progressive' models of education. The closed book nature of the examinations was underlined by an increasing use of previously unseen texts in the exams causing English teachers to become concerned that this would alter signature pedagogies of English to become ones where 'pupils practise analysis of countless numbers of unseen, pre-20th century non-fiction passages; and spelling, punctuation and grammar will abound' (Marshall, 2017, p.41).

Particular concern has been raised about the impact of closed book examinations on the teaching of poetry, shifting pedagogy in ways which, according to teachers in one study, negatively 'affected creativity, distribution of classroom time and students' enjoyment of poetry' (Marsh, 2017, p.289). According to Marsh, teachers feared that the teaching of poetry would become the kind of teaching dismissed by Arnold in the nineteenth century and 'that all educational principles are engulfed in the notion that education is the satisfaction of the external examiner' (BoE, 1921, p.53).

2.5.3 English and whole school performance measures

English has had an important role in whole school performance measures since the nineteenth century as noted above. However, since the education reforms of the 2010s, assessment has become more closely linked with school accountability measures than before (Marshall, 2017). Two major changes have been particularly important for the teaching of English. Firstly, GCSE resits were removed from the system of points feeding into how a school's position in league tables is determined; the effect on some schools was that they could no longer enter pupils for multiple retakes of the GCSE throughout Y10 and Y11

until they achieved a good enough grade (Ingram et al, 2018). Secondly, while English Language GCSE outcomes have been central to schools' positions in influential league tables since the mid-2000s (Leckie & Goldstein, 2017), the development of Progress 8 (P8) measures in the mid-2010s gave increased weighting to English Literature GCSE outcomes as well (DfE, 2018) and its inclusion in the English Baccalaureate (EBacc). Since then, English Literature has become an almost compulsory GCSE and the number of pupils taking the English Literature GCSE exam increased from 367,880 in 2016 to 524,420 in 2017[10], the first year of the reformed examination (JCQ, 2022). Since those pupils took their GCSEs the combined number of pupils taking A level examinations in English Literature, English Language and English Language & Literature has declined from 74,360 in 2017 to 53,965 in 2022[11] (ibid.). This has reinforced the pedagogical changes noted by Marsh, above, now repurposed to maximise the maximum number of pupils achieving good GCSE English Literature outcomes.

With more pupils taking the high stakes GCSE English Literature Ofsted has become concerned about the number of schools 'gaming' the system by trying to gain an advantage for their pupils (Ofsted, 2020b, p.8). Drawing on evidence from school inspections and observations from advisors, Ofsted highlight as problematic those schools entering pupils for English Language GCSE during Y10 rather than Y11, and those schools where pupils 'have very different GCSE results for English literature and English language (which may indicate that the school has focussed on teaching only one of those subjects)' (ibid., p.65). Another example criticised by Ofsted is schools trying to improve their positions in league tables by

[10] For comparison, the number of pupils sitting Mathematics GCSE in 2016 was 534,440 and 537,620 in 2017.
[11] For comparison, the number of pupils taking A level Mathematics exams has increased from 88,830 in 2017 to 89,605 in 2022.

following advice from organisations such as PiXL[12], such as entering 'entire cohorts for obscure qualifications so that they perform better on the new Progress 8 performance measure' (Wiggins, 2016, np).

Ofsted has also criticised schools which put 'all or most children in a school on a narrow, sometimes repetitive curriculum, to achieve exam results that are better than the school down the road' (Ofsted, 2020a, np). This has been evidenced for Ofsted by the introduction of three-year KS4 programmes designed to prepare pupils for the GCSE, with the corollary effect of reducing KS3 to a narrower, two-year course (Ofsted, 2017). However, Ofsted have also said that 'there is no 'preferred length' of KS3. It's for schools to decide their own curriculum and how it is enacted across the school' (Harford, 2020, np). Furthermore, recent government funded research involving over 400 English secondary schools exploring the link between the length of key stages and GCSE outcomes found that it 'is unable to conclude that any differences in observed outcomes are due to the length of KS4' (Poet et al., 2023, p.83). Thus, Ofsted have shifted from a position whereby they appeared to dictate how schools organise their curricular models, to a position where they have clarified that schools have the autonomy to decide their own curriculum models. Curriculum design for English, then, is a matter for school leaders, including the HoDs in this study.

Having critically explored the literature about the English curriculum in secondary schools I now turn my attention to a critical analysis of the literature about Heads of English

[12] PiXL – *Partners in Excellence*, an organization which schools pay for advice and support: pixl.org.uk

departments. This helps to understand their positions in schools and how these are evolving.

2.6 Heads of English

Much has been written about teachers of English (Barnes et al., 1984; Gibbons, 2017; Goodwyn, 2011; Marshall, 2000; Mathieson, 1975 / 2018; Shayer, 1972), but research about Heads of English departments is relatively uncommon. In this section I explore the current literature about middle leadership in the English school system, before exploring what has been written about the leadership practices of Heads of English.

2.6.1 Middle leadership

Heads of English departments (HoDs) typically work in the space referred to as *middle leadership* in schools (Leithwood, 2016; De Nobile, 2018), although this term is evolving as the Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) school system becomes established in England (Ainsworth et al., 2022; Courtney & McGinty, 2022). Middle leadership signifies that HoDs have a senior role to mainscale classroom teachers, but they are not typically part of schools' Senior Leadership Teams (SLTs). Research acknowledges the importance of middle leaders for the smooth running of schools, while suggesting that they have 'limited opportunities…to develop a strong sense of agency, educational ideology and authentic professional responsibility' (Ainsworth et al., 2022) and that the pressures on their workloads are increasing (NAHT, 2019); however, this should be treated with some caution as the research was carried out by a teaching union who could have a vested interest in presenting a negative picture of workload.

Yet middle leadership has received less research attention than more senior levels of leadership (Bennett et al., 2007; De Nobile, 2018) and such attention appears to be decreasing (Harris et al., 2019); a systematic literature review referring to nearly 300 articles

published since 2006 highlights multiple gaps in existing research, including the impact of middle leaders on pupils' outcomes (Lipscombe et al., 2023). Another gap in the literature about middle leaders is that they are often referred to as a homogeneous group, rather than anything more granular. There is little evidence about the effect of age or experience on middle leaders, for example, as there is for classroom teachers or more senior leaders in schools (Crow et al., 2017; Day & Gu, 2010); it would be helpful to develop a greater understanding of who HoDs are and how they work in the contexts of their schools and it is hoped that this thesis helps such developments.

2.6.2 Heads of English

The extant literature specifically about Heads of English has mainly focused on descriptions of management duties. Abbot's research into the role of Heads of English in the USA in the 1920s explored the 'real' and 'ideal' amount of time spent on a range of professional tasks divided into five broad categories: Personal, Administrative, Supervisory, Community and Professional (Abbott, 1922, p. 274). An early version of the role is briefly mentioned in *The Newbolt Report*, which noted that 'specialist' teachers of English 'should be allowed the same powers of direction as are usually given to the senior teacher in Mathematics, Science or Modern Languages' (BoE, 1921, p. 121), indicating both the emerging role of senior teachers and the emerging place of English as a subject. Some direction about what the 'Chief English Master' should do was offered by the Board of Education (BoE), including 'securing the attainment and maintenance in each form of a due standard in each essential part of the work, oral and written' (BoE, 1924, p.34). The BoE also noted that the one of the key roles of the 'Chief Master of English' was to enable 'his [sic] colleagues…particularly in the study of authors, to give the note and quality of his own method and personality' (ibid.). In an early recognition of teacher agency, the BoE warned against the narrowing of

pedagogical approaches, clear that the teaching of English would suffer 'if the process took place under the exclusive influence of any one school of thought' (ibid., p. 35).

The role of Head of Department (HoD) as schools know it today emerged after the 1944 Education Reform Act (Medway et al., 2014), and was established by the 1960s (Inglis, 1969). *The Bullock Report* noted that Heads of English 'were experiencing considerable pressures, and they had insufficient time and help available to them. Despite this, the majority were managing remarkably well and were succeeding in developing a strong team approach' (DES, 1975, p.230), prefiguring the NAHT's findings noted above, but also emphasising the importance of a team approach to leadership, subsequently highlighted by The English Centre's *English Department Book* (Marigold et al., 1982). Much of the advice in that book was practical, concentrating on how to organise meetings, or plan stationery orders, with shorter sections focusing on 'leadership practices'. Updated by the English and Media Centre (Furlong & Ogborn, 1995), the 1990s edition added 'Organisation & Management' into the title, and included new sections about 'department development plans', 'Monitoring the work of the department', 'Analysing your results' and a whole chapter about 'The OFSTED Inspection'. The emerging discourse of performativity is clear, highlighting the changing perceptions of middle leadership in schools as education policy evolved in the 1990s. However, there remain gaps in the knowledge base about Heads of English departments.

Further research is required to understand the extent to which Heads of English departments' Subject Content Knowledge and Pedagogical Content Knowledge (Shulman, 2000) intersect with their autonomy and agency to make effective leadership choices (Ainsworth et al., 2022; Priestley et al., 2012; Watson et al., 2022). Research is also required

to understand the emerging work of Subject Directors (SDs) across MATs (Ainsworth et al., 2022). SDs are an emerging protagonist in the education field, operating across schools but not necessarily in the same way in every MAT; they are not the same as Advanced Skills Teachers or Lead Practitioners (Goodwyn, 2023) and they appear to have a more senior role. It remains to be seen what impact SDs have on English in practice as their roles, as well as the roles of MATs, continue to evolve (Greany & McGinity, 2021).

2.7 Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have critically explored much of the literature about the current National Curriculum. I have shown how there are concerns about its epistemological and ideological foundations impacting subject content and subject pedagogy. Many commentators feel that the NC is overly focused on a narrow range of texts rooted in the *Great Tradition* canon of English Literature; this neither reflects modern society nor encourages pupils to love literature. There is also felt to be an undue focus on Standard English at the expense of other forms of English, and this is felt to be part of wider attempts to impose a single national identity, 'Our Island Story'. A corrolorary effect is the encouragement of authoritarian pedagogies, which are seen to be damaging to pupils' opportunities for personal growth. Such approaches are felt to be further encouraged by the new place of English in whole school performance measures, especially Progress 8, which have seen almost all KS4 pupils study English Literature GCSE for the first time. However, whilst the dominant feeling is that 'Something is rotten in the state of English' (Eaglestone, 2021, p.8), emerging research shows how teachers are able to use their agency to resist the intentions of the NC and teach in more creative ways suitable for the contexts of their own communities. Yet the majority of such research is carried out in the context of London

schools, and more work needs to be done to understand what this might look like in other parts of England; this thesis hopes to contribute to such a picture.

In the next section of this thesis I explain the methodological decisions I have taken in designing and carrying out this research. I also explain the ethical choices I have made.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological and ethical considerations informing this qualitative research study. Explicitly constructivist in nature (Crotty, 1998), this thesis explores, interprets and presents qualitative data (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) principally derived from semi-structured interviews (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015) with ten Heads of English departments (HoDs) in order to answer specific, original research questions (Flick, 2014; Burr, 2015; Biesta, 2020). As noted above (1.2.1) this thesis draws on Thomson and Hall's work on *Place-Based Methods for Researching Schools* (Thomson and Hall, 2017) and utilizes Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) to identify relevant themes and findings (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Braun *et al.*, 2019; Braun and Clarke, 2021a).

3.1 School selection

A process of purposive sampling was followed whereby relevant schools were identified (Flick, 2014). In discussion with my principal supervisor three selection criteria were identified with the aim of minimizing variables whilst recognizing the inherent differences between schools: the schools should be geographically appropriate; they should be in an existing relationship with the institution where I work as a teacher educator; they should all share the same Ofsted grade, Good, at the time of sampling decisions.

As this study concerns secondary schools in ex-industrial communities of the East Midlands of England the first selection criterium was geographical. The East Midlands of England covers an area of approximately 6000 square miles, and it was important to identify schools in a manageable geographical location to enable me to travel to the schools. It was felt that in-person interviews would afford richer data for this study than other forms of data

collection (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018), and I needed to be mindful of my own wellbeing in terms of travel (BERA, 2018).

A decision was taken to identify schools who had an existing relationship with the university where I work, and wherever possible with schools which hosted Secondary English Initial Teacher Education (ITE) students. There were practical and ethical reasons for this. The practical reason was that gaining access to these schools and their English departments was judged to be easier than gaining access to schools with no existing relationship. The second reason was the ethical and commercial argument about the potential of the research project to be seen by other ITE providers as a covert attempt to expand the university's school partnership network in a commercially competitive environment.

A third selection criterion was to focus on schools rated *Good* by Ofsted at the time of data collection. *Good* is the most common Ofsted rating for secondary schools in England (OfSTED, 2022, section 3.1) and schools with different ratings face different sets of pressures, whether they are *Outstanding*, *Require Improvement* or *Inadequate*. It would be interesting to carry out equivalent research in such schools, but that is beyond the scale of this thesis.

Taking these criteria into account, an initial group of twelve secondary schools was identified. The Heads of Department (HoDs) at these schools were first approached via email; two of the HoDs from the selection of twelve chose not to participate, resulting in a sample of ten secondary schools (Table 2, p.21). This was felt to be an appropriate number of schools; large enough to offer rich data, while small enough to be manageable for a

doctoral student with a full-time job (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). The version of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) used in this thesis also resists the idea that data needs to be fully saturated by working with all relevant cases (Braun and Clarke, 2021b), associating such a method with positivist research rather than the constructionist stance I have adopted.

One of the effects of my approach to identifying the schools is that it prioritizes the nature of the schools, rather than the HoDs themselves. The focus of the thesis is the school subject of English, rather than middle leadership so I did not explicitly consider the gender, age, ethnicity or any protected characteristics of the HoDs when identifying potential research participants. In the event half were female and all were White; this has influenced my data interpretations in unexpected ways, raising some questions for future research as I explore in the Conclusion chapter of this thesis. Table 3 offers basic characteristics of the HoDs and the schools and the HoDs are depicted in greater depth in the following chapter to provide the reader with a greater sense of context and place.

Name	**School**	**Years Teaching**	**Time in role (years)**	**Number of schools**
Bill	Clumber Community College	7	2	2
Emma	Elvaston School	9	3	3
Helen	Scarsdale Academy	12	2	3
Karen	The Hathersage Academy	18	4	2
Martin	Stanage Community School	8	0.5	2
Michael	The Ladybower Secondary School	29	22	1
Peter	Dovedale Academy	23	19	3
Sam	Tissington School	14	6	3
Sarah	Thornbridge Academy	16	3	1
Wendy	Peveril Comprehensive School	19	4	7

Table 3 Heads of English

3.2 Data collection

The data were collected by individual semi-structured interviews (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015). Semi-structured interviews were deemed to be an appropriate technique for data collection in this instance, affording opportunities to investigate the research topic in depth, but with the flexibility to explore themes which emerged during the interview itself (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). The interviews lasted between 40 minutes and one hour; all but one interview took place in the participants' schools during the school day, with the remaining interview taking place in my university office. Locating the interviews in the schools helped me to develop an understanding of the place of English in these schools, reflected in subsequent chapters of this thesis. An interview schedule was developed (see Appendix 2) which sought to initially put the participants at ease, before moving on to specific questions designed to elicit responses to answer the research questions.

I attempted to create an open, professional and respectful atmosphere during the interviews. I did this by trying to talk with the participants as an interested peer, someone who understands the field of English education from the perspective of practitioner as much as an academic. Essentially, I wanted to come across as trustworthy in the sense of understanding the field but without a deep understanding of the schools' specific contexts (BERA, 2018). As mentioned above, although I had previously visited all of the schools as part of my professional role, I did not know the HoDs themselves and I was keen to establish my credibility with them as an experienced English teacher and school leader who has an understanding of the contemporary school environment.

I used the first interview, with Martin, as a pilot. This interview produced valuable data, but also highlighted my inexperience as a research interviewer. In seeking to establish a professional relationship with Martin I consciously foregrounded my professional history as an ex-Head of English and an ex-secondary school headteacher during the preliminary conversation before the interview was recorded. During the interview I felt that this affected some of Martin's responses, potentially by creating an unbalanced power dynamic of experienced senior leader talking with a middle leader. I interpreted his responses to be more in common with how he would present his views to senior teacher colleagues rather than a researcher. While Martin's interview generated interesting, relevant data, in subsequent interviews with the other participants I was more conscious about emphasizing my researcher role than establishing my 'teacher credibility' as discussed later in this chapter (p.77). The interview schedule became a guide rather than a script, highlighting the usefulness of semi-structured interviews as a mean of data collection; each of the HoDs discussed the topics I was interested in, but not necessarily in the order suggested by the schedule. This meant that I had to remain alert during the interviews to ensure that all relevant topics were discussed.

The interviews were audio recorded using both a digital Dictaphone and a password protected app on a smartphone as a back-up. The quality of recordings was good, with only a single occasion of one indistinguishable word. I manually transcribed the interviews in full during the summer of 2019. While this was time-consuming it allowed me to become very familiar with the content (Braun and Clarke, 2006) as well as to understand my own interviewing style more thoroughly (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015, p.207). I chose to transcribe the interviews verbatim, including pauses and laughter. Conversation analysis

(CA) was not the object of this research; rather, the purpose is meaning analysis (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015, p.209) not requiring specialist notation associated with CA. This resulted in ten transcripts closely reflecting the participants' response and nearly 200 pages of double-spaced transcripts; these are available if requested. There were a small number of occasions when the spoken word was slightly altered in the written form to improve readability, but I have been careful to maintain the original sense as closely as possible. Following transcription, the recordings were then deleted.

3.3 Data analysis – Reflexive Thematic Analysis

To help make sense of the data I utilized Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) methods appropriate for qualitative, constructivist research (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Braun *et al.*, 2019). RTA aims to help researchers develop key themes from rigorous analysis of data sets. This typically involves six phases: 1) familiarizing yourself with your data; 2) generating initial codes; 3) generating initial themes; 4) reviewing themes; 5) defining and naming themes; 6) producing the report. This is a flexible approach, intended to be 'A starting point for your journey, not a map' (Braun, Clarke and Hayfield, 2022) and in this section I will explain how I have used RTA in this research.

Firstly, I familiarized myself with my data (Phase 1) through the process of data collection and interview transcription. As noted above, I manually transcribed all the interviews so that I developed a 'thorough understanding' of my data (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.88) enabling me to quickly generate a group of initial codes (Phase 2). Initial codes were both semantic and latent; some were explicitly discussed by participants, while others were inferred by my meaning making. An example of a semantic code would be *accountability* which was openly discussed by multiple participants; an example of a latent code would be *deficit view of*

communities. No HoD openly declared such a view, but I have inferred this from some of their comments. An example is when Helen describes how she attempts to teach a diverse range of texts during KS3 in part because,

> *for some of the kids in this type of community it might be the only chance they get to experience some of these things, because once they leave they're perhaps not going to open another book or read another poem*

I inferred from this extract an unspoken belief that the community in which her school is situated does not commonly engage in reading the kind of texts she feels they should be reading. This is also an example of how one extract can support multiple codes as it also exemplifies the *KS3 v. KS4* code, because Helen is discussing why she makes particular text choices in KS3.

Identifying codes was a recursive process rather than a singular activity completed at the start of the analytical process. This process continued during the writing process, with some codes being discarded and new codes introduced until the final drafting stage. I generated the code of *reputation*, for example, quite late in the research although it felt like I was naming a concept which had been developing in my mind for several months. The final group of forty-six codes is represented in Figure 1, below.

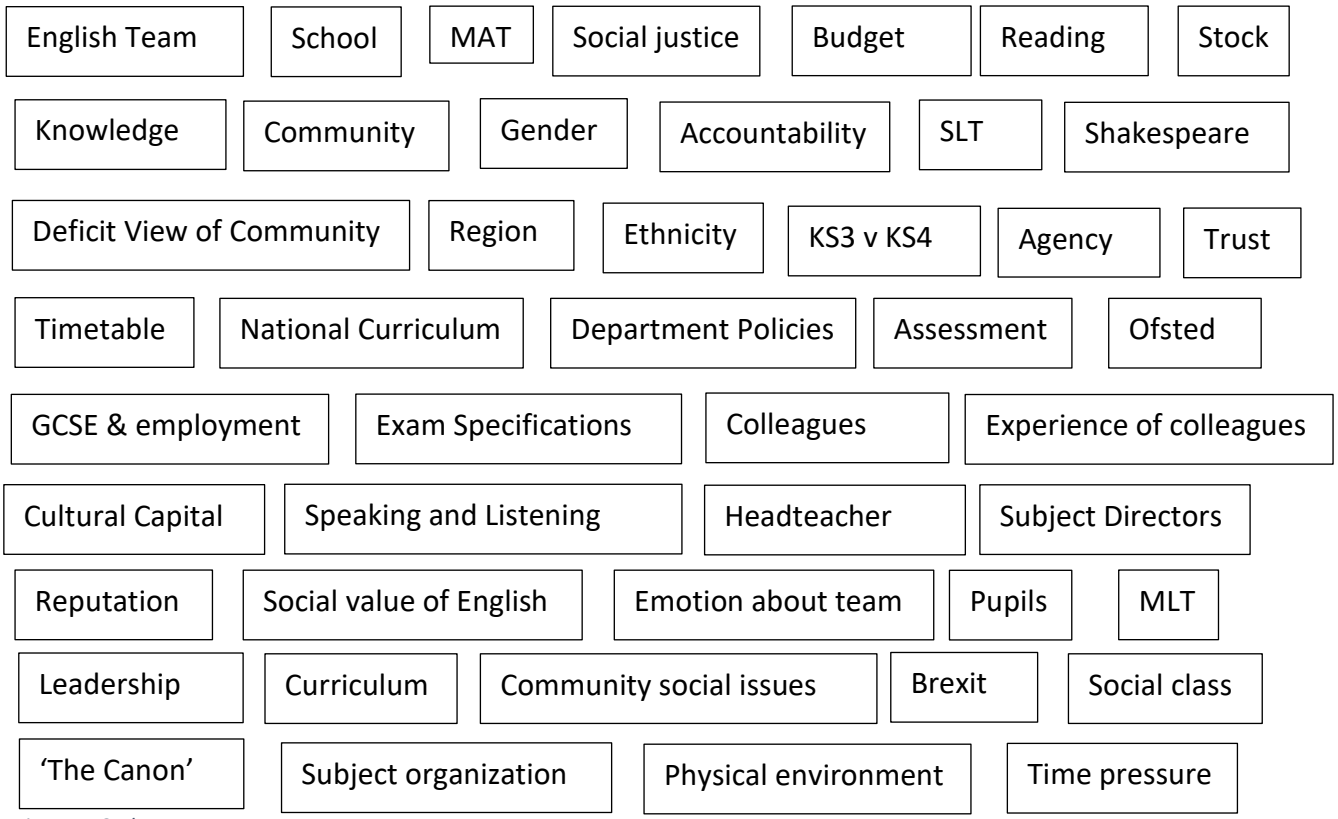

Figure 1 Codes

In Phase 3 various themes were initially generated, and then altered or discarded as my reading of the full data corpus developed during Phase 4. In this type of qualitative research, theme generation is a creative process rather than a way of discovering or uncovering themes which pre-exist my analysis in a positivist way (Braun and Clarke, 2021a). Differentiating codes and themes was carried out using Clarke and Braun's definitions, '[codes are] entities that capture (at least) one observation, display (usually just) one facet; themes, in contrast, are like multi-faceted crystals' (Braun and Clarke, 2021a, p.340). Six candidate themes were identified, *People, Reasons for teaching English*, *Resources*, *Content*, *Emotions*, *Social justice*. These were later refined to align more effectively with the research questions, generating a modified set of six themes, *Context, Purpose*, *Policies*, *Accountability*, *Curriculum* and *Social Justice*. During this process the *Curriculum* code was reconsidered as a theme while a candidate theme, *Social Justice*, was re-considered as a sub-theme of *Purpose*, resulting in the five themes presented below (Table 4).

This process was informed by several areas of reading including my reading and re-reading of the interview data; my developing understanding of published literature at the beginning of the process; my interpretations of items published during the research process such as the 2022 White Paper (DfE, 2022) and the Ofsted document about research into English teaching (Ofsted, 2022). Newly published research literature also added to my understanding of the data as did my increasing familiarity with research methods literature.

The fifth phase, *defining and naming themes*, came at the end of the analysis phase of the research project and was unexpectedly demanding. I needed to distil my thoughts about the data which forced me to actually stop the analysis. I found the act of stopping to be surprisingly difficult. While I was comfortable with the idea that my research is interpretative and constructionist, thus negating the requirement for full saturation of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2021b), saying to myself that '*I have done enough analysis to write my thesis'* took a leap of faith and some confidence which I did not completely feel. Confidence was gained by discussing the research with my supervisors as well as publishing and presenting elements of the thesis (e.g. Perry, 2021b, 2022b; Perry, 2023).

Accountability	Purpose	Policies	Curriculum	Context
Agency	***School***	Assessment	Assessment	***Situated***
Leadership	Accountability	Cultural capital	Cultural capital	Community
Reputation	Assessment	Department policies	Exam specifications	Community social issues
Trust	Passport	Exam specifications	Knowledge	Community - deficit view
	Reputation	National Curriculum	KS3 v KS4	Pupils
		Ofsted	Pupil Engagement	Region
	Social justice	Progress 8	Reading	School
	Brexit		School	
	Community social issues		Shakespeare	***Professional***
	GCSE & employment		Speaking & Listening	Colleagues
	Gender		The canon	English team
	Race		Timetable	English team - emotions
	Social class		Subject organization	English team - experience
	Social justice			Headteacher
	Social value of English			Leadership
				Middle Leadership Team
				Senior Leadership Team
				Subject Directors
				Material
				Budget
				Physical environment
				Stock
				Timetable
				External
				Multi-Academy Trust
				Ofsted

Table 4 Themes and Codes

In the following section I will briefly discuss the five central themes from Table 4, before presenting some of the limitations of this study.

3.3.1 Accountability

This theme explored how the Heads of English were influenced by their sense of accountability and how this interacted with other codes, including agency, trust and reputation. This theme also helped to understand the HoDs' sense of leadership. Elements

of this theme also appear under other themes, such as *reputation*, which also appears in the Purposes theme.

3.3.2 Purpose

The purpose of teaching English has been organised in two sub-themes. Firstly, what it the purpose of teaching English for the school? This overlaps with the theme of Accountability. Secondly, what is the purpose of teaching English in terms of social justice? Although none of the HoDs used the term 'social justice', I have inferred their meaning in the context of two texts. *The Importance of Teaching* was the White Paper has strongly influenced the education environment in England since 2010 (DfE, 2010); this was written in the language of social justice, albeit an interpretation of social justice with which I disagree. The second text is Elliott and Hodgson's internationally researched 'agenda for English education research' (Elliott and Hodgson, 2021) which found that social justice is the top research priority for the respondents to their survey.

3.3.3 Policies

This theme was present in both semantic and latent forms. Semantically all of the HoDs referred to national level policies such as Progress 8; latently I inferred that all of the HoDs were influenced by *The Importance of Teaching* (op. cit.). Some documents included in this theme have a slightly different technical status to a policy, such as the NC (DfE, 2014a), but they have been included in this theme as they are used by stakeholders as policies.

3.3.4 Curriculum

This theme sought to explore how the HoDs consider the concept of curriculum, as well as how the curriculum interacts with the place, purpose and production of English in these schools. I am using 'curriculum' in a multi-faceted way reflecting the influence of different curriculum theorists (e.g. Kelly, 2009; Apple, 2019) as well as those who are more focused

on curriculum content, including different ontological interpretations of 'curriculum' (e.g. Young, 2014).

3.3.5 Context

This theme had the highest number of codes and I used a framework developed by Ball et al (Ball *et al.*, 2012) to help organise these into relevant sub-themes (see Chapter 5). This theme allows me to help to understand the place of English, as well as the interplay between the context of the schools, the contexts of the teachers and the context of English. This moves beyond place-based interpretations, although these are an important element of the research (Thomson and Hall, 2017).

3.4 Limitations

The limitations of space attached to any doctoral work, and particularly an EdD, means that this research does not cover every potential aspect of the topic. A relatively small number of HoDs, ten, were involved with the interviews; the schools all shared some similar characteristics in that they were all secondary schools in ex-industrial communities of the East Midlands of England which were rated Good by Ofsted. Interviewing a greater number of HoDs in different types of schools in a wider range of contexts would offer a richer understanding of the place, purpose and production of English as a school subject. However, the design of this research has enabled a very focused view of these schools, allowing me to illuminate the central issues, at least as they were in the late 2010s. It would be of interest to return to these schools to understand how their situations have altered. I know that at least three of the Heads of English have either retired or taken on new roles, while the Ofsted grade of one school has been changed from Good to Requires Improvement; it would be interesting to see how such school specific changes have affected English. In the final chapter of this thesis, I suggest how this research could be further developed.

3.5 Ethics

The ethics for this project were considered in accordance with both the *Code of Research Conduct and Research Ethics* policy issued by the University of Nottingham (UoN, 2019) and the British Education Research Association's *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* (BERA, 2018). The research was designed with 'honesty, rigour, transparency and open communication, care and respect, and accountability' (UoN, 2019) underpinning every stage. My responsibilities to participants, stakeholders, the community of educational researchers, publication and dissemination, and the wellbeing and development of myself and my supervisors (BERA, 2018) were also fundamental to this research. I was also conscious of my own role in the research as a simultaneously inexperienced researcher, an experienced teacher of English and a school leader. My intention was to combine these aspects of my developing experience to move towards 'thick ethical description' (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015, p.90) so that I would use my 'practical wisdom' derived from my previous career to guide my practice during the research, including my behaviours during the interviews and my interpretations of the data; the effect of this became clearer to me following the first interview, with Martin, discussed above (p.69).

A key principle of the University of Nottingham's *Code of Research Ethics and Conduct* is that research will aim at 'Maximising Benefit' (UoN, 2019, p.26). I considered the balance between harm and benefit for the HoDs participating in this study (BERA, 2018; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018; UoN, 2019). Benefits included the opportunity for participants to reflect on their own work with an interested peer not linked to their school, a rare occasion in my experience; harm included the amount of time taken out of their working day for the interview and, potentially, discussing their school or Multi-Academy Trust (MAT)

in an uncomfortable way. On balance, it was felt that the opportunities afforded by the interview process outweighed the potential negatives for the HoDs. This research also seeks to maximize benefit by focusing on a research topic affecting tens of thousands of pupils across a large region under-represented in existing research (Perry, 2021), and then making the findings as accessible as possible via international conferences and publications (Perry, 2018; Perry and Roberts, 2021; Perry, 2022). The research has also altered the content of some of my teaching with Initial Teacher Education (ITE) students at the university where I teach, hopefully improving the quality of student experience.

A number of other ethical issues were taken into account during the research design stage of this study. These included the consideration of problems which could arise from my professional relationship with the schools involved with the study; for example, if the interview did not go well from the perspective of the HoD this could, potentially, affect the relationship between that school and any current or future ITE students the university placed at that school; this is an example of my concern for institutional reputation echoing the HoD's concerns as explored below. In a competitive ITE environment any bad experience with the university risks damaging the institutional reputation, as well as risking my professional reputation; this could lead to the school not working with the university in the future. I also considered the implications of researching schools who were not already in a formal partnership with the university, which could have been perceived to be ethically unreasonable vis-à-vis other ITE providers in the region.

Secondly, I needed to ensure that the research participants felt able to speak freely about their own institutions, including their pupils, communities and colleagues. Some of the

collected data was potentially sensitive. For example, one HoD, Emma at Elvaston School responded to a question about Subject Directors for English being appointed by the Multi-Academy Trust (MAT). Such a person would have some authority over Emma, but the role was vacant at the time of her interview, and she describes her attitude to the role as

> *Sceptical, I think for me to say that I've seen two other Subject Directors in the post who haven't lasted long, who haven't had a huge impact in terms of supporting me or this school or the students.*

The introduction of Subject Directors was clearly a large investment by the MAT, and Emma's feels it has not been a successful initiative. Expressing such a view could have negative consequences for Emma, and I am pleased that she felt able to make such comments. This highlighted to me my ethical responsibility to interpret and report her views as well as I could.

Such ethical responsibility worked in other ways too, such as when Martin discusses his approach to narrowing the English curriculum in KS3 to support GCSE preparation in KS4. He seems to feel that I might consider his views to be controversial as he uses phrases such a *'I can sleep easily at night'* and *'I freely admit that'*; in the analysis of his interview not only did I consider my ethical responsibilities towards Martin, but I also considered my ethical responsibilities towards both English and my own experience as a school leader and an academic. This led me to present an interpretation of Martin's words which he may feel to be critical of his stance, but I wanted to be honest in my interpretations.

To mitigate for such considerations, I attempted to create a sense of confidentiality by pseudonymizing the research participants, their schools and their communities (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015, p.94). The schools, communities and research participants were 'pseudonymized as far as possible' (UoN, 2019, p.14). I wanted to retain a sense of place for the schools, as place is an important theme for this project; this is why I chose to give the schools pseudonyms rather than labels, such as 'School A'. I chose to name them after regional locations to maintain the sense of regionality; I ensured that the names for schools I chose were not already taken by existing schools and that they did not reflect locations which could be used to identify individual schools. I did not give the participants the option to use their own names in the research as suggested by some authors (e.g. Flick, 2014); if one participant wanted to do this then this could have placed the others in a potentially awkward position if they did not want either their names or the names of their schools used. I chose names for the HoDs culturally similar to their actual names to maintain a sense of authentic identity. I have also pseudonymized the names of towns and communities. However, because of the number of participating schools and HoDs, ten, it has been difficult to ensure absolute confidentiality. While no 'special category data' (UoN, 2019, p.13) was collected, some personal data and contextual data, such as the length of time a HoD had been teaching or carrying out the role was integral to this research. This makes it difficult to ensure absolute confidentiality, which is often the case with qualitative research, and it is potentially possible for a colleague within one of the schools to identify a HoD (Flick, 2014, p.59).

Voluntary informed consent was received from each of the participants (BERA, 2018) who were repeatedly advised that they could withdraw from the project at any stage until the

data had been collected; consent was given orally and in writing (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). The research project was explained to the participants in an initial introductory email and then reiterated before the actual interview commenced; each of the participants were given an Information Sheet and signed a Consent Form (Appendix 1); these were checked by my principal supervisor. The forms included the aims of the project, my responsibilities as a researcher and the possible use of the data, including the potential for publication. No incentives were offered, but two of the HoDs took the opportunity of the research interview to request a strong ITE student for the following year, presenting me with an unexpected ethical dilemma. At the time I responded in a polite, but noncommittal way, and I do not believe that this ultimately affected where we placed our student teachers.

Ethical approval was granted by the appropriate body at the University of Nottingham in March 2019 and data collection began the following month.

The next chapter is relatively brief and offers my impressions of the Heads of Departments so that the reader can begin to develop a sense of the data when it is discussed in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 4: Research Participants

In this chapter I introduce the research participants, offering a brief description of the ten HoDs in alphabetical order of their first name pseudonyms. The HoDs were aged from their early-thirties to their early-sixties. The youngest HoD, Martin, had been in role for 6 months at the time of the study, while the oldest, Michael, had been in his role for 22 years, spending his entire teaching career in the same school. The average length of teaching career was 15 years, and the average length of time for these HoDs in their current role was 3.5 years, although some HoDs has been in post substantially longer than this. Table 5 provides a brief overview of the HoD's careers.

Name	School	Years Teaching	Time in role (years)	Number of schools
Bill	Clumber Community College	7	2	2
Emma	Elvaston School	9	3	3
Helen	Scarsdale Academy	12	2	3
Karen	The Hathersage Academy	18	4	2
Martin	Stanage Community School	8	0.5	2
Michael	The Ladybower Secondary School	29	22	1
Peter	Dovedale Academy	23	19	3
Sam	Tissington School	14	6	3
Sarah	Thornbridge Academy	16	3	1
Wendy	Peveril Comprehensive School	19	4	7

Table 5 HoDs' Careers Summaries

All of the participants could be described as White British; five were female (Emma, Helen, Karen, Sarah and Wendy) and the others were male.

4.1 Bill – Clumber Community School

I interviewed Bill in a small, purpose-built meeting room at Clumber Community School. The school was rebuilt in the 2010s with a lot of pupil artwork on display, much of it representing the local mining heritage. Bill was a little embarrassed by the fact that he was

wearing sports gear, rather than his usual suit and tie, because the day of the interview was also the school's sports day and he was about to look after the long-jump competition. This also explained why the pupils were all in their PE kits, but with different coloured face markings which I later learned indicated which 'house' the pupils were in.

Bill has the least teaching experience of the HoDs in this study, having completed his PGCE seven years earlier. However, Bill is also the HoD with the longest previous career. Now in his mid-thirties, Bill had worked in finance before becoming an English teacher, spending several years working for a large multi-national bank in Asia and then in London. While working in Asia a friend asked Bill to help with some teaching activities, and he quickly grew to love it. When he moved to London, Bill negotiated with his employers so that he could spend one day each week helping out in local schools to help him prepare for a PGCE. Despite this experience, Bill had difficulty gaining a place on a PGCE programme because of his previous qualifications, so he put himself through an Open University degree in English, and then a Masters degree. All of this was achieved part-time, and self-financed. When he achieved his degrees, Bill was finally accepted onto a PGCE programme in the East Midlands, with his main school placement at Clumber, the school where he is now Head of English. His first substantive teaching role was at one of the other schools in this study, but he soon returned to Clumber School as a Teacher of English.

His route to becoming HoD has involved relatively rapid promotions, taking on roles such as Head of KS4 for English after two years of teaching. This meant that Bill was in place to stand in for the previous HoD when she became ill, and by the time of this study Bill had been HoD for two years, with the first year as a temporary position.

Bill clearly sees himself as dedicated to Clumber. He is one of the few HoDs in this study to make unprompted references to the children at the school, who, *'seem so down-to-earth, for want of a better term, they're very honest, they'll tell you what they're thinking, but I like that'*. He is very positive in his approach to teaching, which he expresses in contrast to his previous role in finance,

> *I've got the best job in the world, I've got the best team, I love what I do, there's not been a day that I've driven to Clumber and dreaded coming into work, and I can't say that about banking; there were many times when I wanted that hour commute to go on and on and on, but I love getting here in the morning, I love getting into that office, and I wouldn't change it for the world.*

4.2 Emma – Elvaston School

Like Bill, Emma had a different job before becoming a teacher, but unlike Bill, she worked in education as a Teaching Assistant (TA). She then undertook a school-based teacher training programme with a university in the East Midlands of England, training at a school which is very similar to her current school, Elvaston, and only a few miles away. She stayed there for six years, gaining whole school responsibilities including Literacy Coordinator. Emma moved to a different school, this time a city school, before moving to Elvaston after one year as Second in English; like Bill, she took on the role of acting HoD when the previous HoD became ill and after a year Emma took on the role permanently.

Emma has multiple roles in the school beyond Head of English. Emma is known in Elvaston School as an Associate School Leader; this is a layer of school leadership between middle leaders, such as HoDs, and senior leaders, such as Deputy Principal or Principal, which does not necessarily exist in all schools. Emma coordinates Elvaston's ITE programme; she coordinates a whole school mentoring programme for the teaching staff; and she is the school's Literacy Coordinator. While this seems a lot of responsibility for one person, this is typical of smaller schools such as Elvaston where there are fewer staff to draw on than in larger schools. Emma clearly enjoys the responsibility, and she also clearly enjoys working to help people develop, whether they are pupils, student teachers or experienced colleagues.

4.3 Helen – Scarsdale Academy

Helen has been teaching a little longer than either Bill or Emma and has been Head of English at Scarsdale Academy for three years. Uniquely among the HoDs in this study, Helen was a pupil at the school where she is now Head of English. When she left Scarsdale, she took a degree in English Language before studying to become a teacher. Helen trained in two schools: the first school was located in one of the most affluent areas of a large town, while the second school was in one of the most deprived areas. It was in this second school where Helen began to find her sense of purpose as a teacher, *'I felt that was more of a school where I related to the children, but I felt like I could do more there, I was more use there'*. This was where she got her first job, staying there for nine years. During this time Helen took on different responsibilities, including Head of KS3 English and Head of Year. Following a maternity leave, Helen moved back to her hometown, Scarsdale, to be closer to her family, and took the position of mainscale English teacher at the school where she was a pupil.

When Helen joined Scarsdale it was in an intense period of change. The school's Ofsted rating had been changed from Outstanding to Inadequate, the most dramatic change possible. This led to the appointment of a new headteacher who had actually been Helen's form tutor when she was a pupil and he was a Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT). The new headteacher brought in a lot of change to Scarsdale, which Helen feels contributed to a high staff turnover, including in the English department. This meant that the existing Head of English left the school and, when no one applied for the job, Helen took on the role as a temporary position in the first instance. Recognising that the English department had few schemes of work and little collegiality, Helen drew on her experience at her previous school to develop an approach to teaching English which she feels helped the school move up another Ofsted grade when they were next '*Ofsted-ed*'.

Interviewing Helen in the English office in Scarsdale, full of old class sets of novels, marking piling up on some tables and a general sense of busy-ness, her sense of loyalty to her English team, her headteacher and, perhaps most strongly, her community was clear. The school is in a community which, according to Helen, some of the teachers characterize as having low expectations, *'it just annoys me so much that people have already pigeon-holed the kids before they've seen what they are capable of*'. She sees herself, along with some other teachers in her department who also attended the school, as a role model for the pupils at Scarsdale.

4.4 Karen – The Hathersage Academy

One of the older participants in this study, Karen came into teaching as a mature student in her 30s. After she left school Karen spent a decade working in secretarial roles before

thinking, *'there must be more to life than working in an office'*. She completed a university access course, before taking a two-year degree in English and History. During her university course she volunteered in some schools which convinced her to take a PGCE. Like both Bill and Emma, Karen's first job as an NQT was in one of her PGCE teaching placement schools, but not in the usual way. At that time, the schools in the town where Karen got her first job were being reorganised from the middle-school system, to the secondary school system. Although Karen was technically appointed by Hathersage Academy, which was a high-school at the time, she was deployed to the equivalent middle-school, which was due to be merged with Hathersage. This was because she has done her teaching placement at the middle-school and it was felt that was where her experience would be best suited. After the schools were formally merged, and subsequently just known as The Hathersage Academy, Karen was quickly promoted to take on responsibility for KS3 English, then KS4 and then Head of Department. Hathersage is part of a small Trust, and now Karen oversees English across the schools in the Trust as well as being HoD at her school.

In a similar way to Bill, Karen work for most of her teaching career in a single school community and it is clear that she has a deep understanding of and affection for the pupils in the school. She feels experienced with the school community, *'I've been here a long time, so the students over time, you know, this town's students are this town's students'*, and she is clear about the role that English can play in broadening pupils' horizons, as I explore below.

4.5 Martin – Stanage Community School

Martin was the least experienced HoD in this study, having been in post for only two school terms at the time of his interview, but he had experience in other jobs before joining the teaching profession. Stanage Community School was Martin's third school since he began teaching eight years previously, and before becoming a teacher he had spent a year working for a publisher; a year working for a charity with offenders; a year teaching kindergarten in China; and a year teaching vocational qualifications in Further Education (FE) colleges in the UK. Following his PGCE at a university in the southwest of England, Martin took an NQT position in a grammar school, being quickly promoted to take on a school-wide responsibility for monitoring the academic progress of high achieving pupils. He was then asked to be in charge of KS4 English during a colleague's maternity leave, before taking on the role permanently. He applied for a Head of English role in the East Midlands to move closer to his partner, and although he was unsuccessful in his initial application the principal of that school encouraged him to apply for a role at Stanage Community School in the same MAT, which is where he is now Head of English.

Martin was the only research participant who opted to be interviewed in my university office, rather than in his school, and the interview took place during a school holiday. Unprompted, Martin brought several resources he used to monitor pupil progress across his department; these helped to provide some context for his working. Stanage had an Ofsted inspection two weeks before the interview and Martin spoke with an energy familiar to anyone who has taken part in such an event in schools, a mixture of nerves, diffidence and confidence.

4.6 Michael – The Ladybower Secondary School

Michael has had a very different career to the HoDs described above. The eldest of the research participants, Michael completed his PGCE in the late 1980s, applied for a job as an English teacher at The Ladybower Secondary School without really knowing where it was, took the job and has been there ever since. He became Head of English, *'without being particularly good…[because] nobody else had an interest in taking it on*,'. He now has additional responsibilities, in a similar way to Emma. He is a member of SLT, as well as being Ladybower's ITE coordinator; he also line manages another curriculum area. Despite such additional workload commitments, his focus remains primarily on English, *'within the school day I just get left alone to be an English teacher and head of department and I think that is important'.* Michael is very clear that he is able to focus his operational attention on English work because of the quality of his English department as well as the trust placed in him by the school's SLT.

Although Michael originally believed Ladybower was in the middle of a large city when he initially applied for the job, it quickly became apparent to him that the school was, at the time, in an industrial small town, dominated in every sense by the local coal mine. The stock heads remain clearly visible from the school, and are classified as listed buildings, reflecting the importance of the industry to the wider community, despite no mining operations since 2003. Since joining the school, Michael has seen the decline of the mining industry, which was by far the largest employer in the community, and how the community adapted to such large-scale change. This is typical of the ex-industrial communities in this study, although perhaps Michael has the most direct experience of how such communities have altered during this period of industrial decline.

4.7 Peter – Dovedale Academy

A similar age to Michael, Peter has also worked at his current school for a longer time than the other HoDs, but he has had a more varied career. Prior to studying for his PGCE, Peter worked as a journalist and taught English in Greece for several years before beginning teaching in the East Midlands of England when he was 30. He worked at two different schools, gaining promotion to second in department, before joining Dovedale Academy in 2000, when it was called Dovedale School, where he has remained. Peter says that *'I've been quite lucky working here, I mean when I came I did a little bit of research enquiring about what sort of school it was'* suggesting that he had no strong urge to work at Dovedale in particular, but that he considers it to be a good fit for him, noting

> *This is where I'm likely to be staying as Head of English [LAUGHS] I'm at that stage of my career, I've no great ambitions to go and start somewhere new at this stage, so I think I'll be working out my time here*

Peter has few resources in his department, which is based across the top two floors of a three-storey tower block and is showing its age. The classroom where I interviewed Peter was quite small, with class sets of novels and exercise books across most work surfaces. Strangely there was a single adult shoe lodged in a ceiling joist, which I eventually understood to be part of an in-joke between colleagues; the aim of the joke was to place the shoe in your colleagues' rooms without them knowing you had done so, an indication of the sense of easy collegiality amongst the English department. In a similar way to Michael, Peter is clearly dedicated to his colleagues, and he sees one of his main roles as ensuring that the school recruits high quality teachers of English who support each other.

4.8 Sam – Tissington School

Sam has been in post at Tissington for six years, the third school in his fourteen year-long career. He left his first school, an inner-city secondary school, to take up the Head of Drama position in a rural school led by a headteacher who Sam enjoyed working with, *'I liked the freedom he gave you to do things how you wanted to do it'*. Although Sam soon took on the role of Head of English at that school, when the headteacher left to become headteacher at Tissington, Sam soon followed to take up the role of Head of English.

Sam's school, Tissington, is very proud of 'The Tissington Way', a particular ethos which included the pupils not having a school uniform and referring to their teachers by their first names; the school also resisted becoming an academy (see 5.2.1 below). Such features are not unique to Tissington and there are other schools in the region, but not in this study, which share these features, but Tissington did use this as a kind of brand to attract pupils and staff to the school. Tissington had repeatedly changed Ofsted ratings, alternating between Good and Requires Improvement several times since the early 2000s; at the time of this research the school was rated as Good, but this was altered to 'Requires Improvement' the following term. Sam was very efficient in his interview, which took place in a purpose-built meeting room off the school Reception. He answered most of the questions very directly, and when the school bell rang, he made his apologies and left for his next lesson.

4.9 Sarah – The Thornbridge Academy

Sarah is one of the two HoDs in this study who has worked at a single school. She has been at The Thornbridge Academy for sixteen years, including time for maternity leaves. Sarah was promoted to KS3 Coordinator for English after a couple of years teaching in the

department, then second in department before becoming acting HoD when the post holder took long term sick leave. This temporary post was made permanent after a year, and Sarah has been HoD since then.

Sarah initially took me to the English department office where her team were having their morning break. There was a cheerful atmosphere, and I was made to feel at ease straightaway, and offered a coffee. Like most department offices this one was full of exercise books, class sets of novels, mock exam papers waiting to be marked and computers for staff use. The interview itself took place in a nearby classroom and was the only one to be interrupted by a pupil, who came into the room to collect a class set of novels.

As the interview developed it became clear to me that Sarah had a deep understanding of the community served by Thornbridge, and she was keen to portray the pupils in a similar way to how Helen portrayed her pupils at The Hathersage Academy. Both HoDs were very conscious that their communities have been characterised in the media as white, working-class communities with an attendant undertone of deprivation. Sarah is keen to use her position to help her pupils develop,

> *…we really do try through some of our schemes to address some of the prejudices that are in this area, you do sort of accept that kids are coming to school with a lot of baggage and opinions that they've obviously picked up at home and we want to open up their minds to different perspective*

Brexit was still a major topic of conversation in the school, and it was interesting to see how Sarah, out of all of the HoDs discussed issues of social justice with the greatest passion.

4.10 Wendy – Peveril Comprehensive School

The final HoD in this study, Wendy, works in a very large secondary school built in the 1960s. Like some of the other HoDs, such as Martin and Bill, Wendy's route to becoming HoD is complex. Wendy worked for seven different education organisations during her nineteen-year teaching career, including several years working as an advisor for her Local Authority (LA), and a period working for the National Strategies on the Functional Skills programme. This meant that Wendy was able to work across many schools, and to write curriculum materials for subjects other than English.

Wendy has not enjoyed every school where she worked; one school in particular caused her to become *'very frustrated'* which led to her leaving the classroom to become a consultant. Wendy characterises her route to becoming HoD at Peveril as a twisting journey, where she is helped by others along the way. She *'hooked up again'* with a colleague to work as an advisor, and she links her current role with knowing Peveril's deputy head. She considers herself to be self-aware, noting that she was, *'a bit arrogant I suppose'* to think that she could return to school leadership following her period as an advisor and consultant. Unable to gain a leadership position she returned to schools in a mainscale teacher role for a small school which was part of a MAT with a very distinctive ethos. This MAT did not suit Wendy, and she left that school to join Peveril, one of the largest schools in the region, as a mainscale teacher of English. At the time of the interview Wendy had been at Peveril for six years and HoD for four years, *'So now I'm just at the point where I'm getting a bit frustrated*

again, yeah, so, but um, yeah, I mean, yeah [LAUGHS]' which suggests, perhaps, that Wendy might be considering the next destination in her career.

In this chapter I have offered my impressions of the HoDs. Although they all share a job title, they are all individuals with differing career paths and trajectories; they are not a homogeneous group. Some have taught for decades in the same school, while others have moved multiple times; some have had previous careers, while others have moved from school pupil to university student to schoolteacher; some have rich understandings of the school communities, while others are still learning. All were generous with their time and their thoughts.

In the following three chapters I present my interpretations of what the HoDs say about the place, purpose and production of English in their schools, taking each SRQ in turn.

Chapter 5: What is the place of English in the schools?

This chapter is concerned with the place of English in the schools as indicated by the relationship between English and other elements of school life, cognizant of Thomson and Hall's comment that 'Places are not discrete territories, but are sites entangled in what [Massey] calls 'stretched out relations'' (Thomson & Hall, 2017, p.15), in this case, the relations between English and other areas of the schools. To help structure my discussion of the place of English in relation to other areas of school life, I have used Ball et al.'s framework for discussing school context (Ball et al., 2012) which has become well-established (e.g. Adams, 2016; Alcorn & Thrupp, 2012; Greany & Higham, 2018; Harris et al., 2016; Leithwood et al., 2020). Their research led to a framework conceptualizing four dimensions of school context:

- **Situated contexts** (such as locale, school histories and settings).
- **Professional cultures** (such as values, teacher commitments and experiences, and 'policy management' in schools).
- **Material contexts** (e.g. staffing, budget, buildings, technology and infrastructure).
- **External contexts** (e.g. degree and quality of local authority support, pressures and expectations from broader policy context, such as Ofsted ratings, league table positions, legal requirements and responsibilities).

(Ball et al., 2012, p.21 emphases in original)

Each dimension is conceptualized separately for the purposes of clarity, but the authors are clear that the aspects 'overlap and are inter-connected.' (ibid.). The four dimensions are used to explore how multiple policies are simultaneously enacted over time in English

secondary schools. Because of the link between policy and practice, Ball et al.'s work is of value to this thesis; although this thesis is not specifically directed at exploring policy enactment in schools, this field does influence some of the analysis, so Ball et al.'s work is of relevance. In this chapter I focus on the Professional, Material and External contexts as the Situated context of the schools has been largely discussed in Chapter 1.

5.1 Material Contexts

The material context of English is the most tangible dimension of Ball et al's framework, referring to the '"physical" aspects of a school: buildings and budgets, but also to levels of staffing, information technologies and infrastructure' (Ball et al., 2012, p.29). The HoDs in this study do not discuss the architecture of their schools or classrooms in any detail, perhaps because such spaces constitute their lived reality to the extent that they take them for granted, so Section 5.1.1 constitutes my reflections on what I have seen when visiting the schools either for the interviews or for other purposes. While it is beyond the scale of this thesis to present details of every English space in the schools in this study, here I offer a depiction of the working spaces used across the schools, partially inspired by multimodal approaches to research (Kress et al., 2005).

5.1.1. Buildings

All of the classrooms where English is taught at the schools in this study would be officially classed as 'basic teaching' rooms, a technical definition used by the Department for Education (DfE) to help define the number of pupils a school can have (DfE, 2014b). Most of the schools in this study were built in the early 1960s as part of the post-World War Two reforms to education (Harwood, 2010) and the English rooms tend to have a dark, enclosed feel to them. It is not an exaggeration to say that Matthew Arnold would immediately recognise these teaching spaces.

Most of the classrooms have seating for approximately thirty pupils, leaving little room to physically move around when all of the pupils are present, thus limiting the range of activities which a teacher can utilise during lessons. White-topped tables are typically arranged in rows, with colourful plastic chairs specially designed to make it difficult for pupils to rock back. Displays are usually constructed by the teachers, often including examples of pupils' work, definitions of subject terminology, commercial posters about set texts, theatre productions or films. These help each room have a slightly different feel, reflecting individual teachers' interests, but they are immediately recognisable as 'English classrooms'. Most of the classrooms also have displays relevant for a tutor group as well as subject-specific displays, reminding everyone in the room that it is both a teaching space and a pastoral space. Other displays include safeguarding displays, behaviour policies and health and safety notices; in some, but not all, of the academies these are branded with logos or mottos developed by their MATs; such displays tend to be repeated in all of the classrooms across those academies. All of the classrooms have digital projectors attached to the ceiling, allowing the teachers to project digital presentations onto electronic screens at the front of the room; in some schools these are the only central focal points for teaching, while others also have conventional whiteboards. The projectors are rare concessions to the 21st century in the English classrooms; none of the schools in this selection have adopted the use of tablets in their lessons, and the pupils use A4 sized exercise books for their written work.

Yet the once-neat displays on the walls are often frayed, damaged by the everyday coming and going of pupils, their bags brushing the work on the walls. Piles of resources, including

exercise books, paper and sets of texts, rest on benches around the sides of the rooms. My experiences visiting each of these schools throughout the school year is that the rooms feel very busy all year; the tiredness of the rooms is not limited to the time of data collection.

Outside of the classrooms, the corridors are often used as a type of gallery for the subject, with displays of pupils' work presented on the walls, sometimes protected from passing pupils by plastic screens. Most of the departments also have offices dedicated to the English department. These offices typically have workspaces set aside for teachers to mark books or plan lessons; in some schools, individual teachers have marked out their own spaces with family photographs, for example. Computers and printers are evident, so that the teachers can plan lessons, use emails, or enter data to school monitoring systems. A variety of food-related appliances are in these rooms to help the teachers through their days, such as microwave ovens, fridges and kettles; there are always lots of mugs and lots of coffee. Displays in these offices typically includes formal posters from the MAT or the school's SLT indicating academic targets and recent levels of pupil performance, but there are also often other wall spaces given over to less formal displays, such as photographs of department members on a night out, or at a wedding. In some schools these English workrooms are exclusively for staff, while pupils sometimes come into other schools' workrooms to collect books or resources.

The combination of such homely features as kettles, microwaves and personal photographs, along with work laptops and displays of professional targets indicate the extent to which these schools encourage the English staff to spend time together. On one hand this is indicative of close-knit teams, but it can also be seen as embodying the move towards a

disciplinary approach to the curriculum. Just as Young influenced the development of clearly defined subject disciplines in schools (Young, 2014), downplaying connections between subjects, so these English offices embody this concept, encouraging staff to physically remain within rooms dedicated to their subjects. The English teachers eat, drink and work in these offices, rarely connecting with colleagues who teach other subjects. The exception to this is Stanage Community School where the English department share their office with the Maths department. I feel this illustrates how English and Maths are often considered to have parity in the English school system, frequently being compared with each other, as discussed by a number of HoDs in this study (see 5.2.3).

5.1.2 Budgets

Each of the HoDs shared information about their departmental budgets (Table 6).

School Name	HoD	Pupils on Roll	Department Budget	Per Pupil Budget
Clumber Community School	Bill	879	£5,000	£5.69
Elvaston School	Emma	798	£6,000	£7.52
Scarsdale Academy	Helen	1331	£7,000	£5.26
The Hathersage Academy	Karen	1491	£6,500	£4.36
Stanage Community School	Martin	682	£5,500	£8.06
The Ladybower Secondary School	Michael	830	£7,500	£9.04
Dovedale Academy	Peter	1275	£9,000	£7.06
Tissington School	Sam	1203	£8,000	£6.65
Thornbridge Academy	Sarah	1106	£8,000	£7.23
Peveril Comprehensive School	Wendy	2500	£17,000	£6.80
Average		1209.5	£7,950	£6.77

Table 6 English Department Budgets

On the surface these figures indicate large disparities in how English department budgets are allocated across the ten schools, with The Ladybower Secondary School allocating over twice the budget per pupil, £9.04, than The Hathersage Academy, which allocates £4.36. This is partially explained by the different ways the schools delegate funding to departments. Karen explains that in The Hathersage Academy,

that budget doesn't include things like photocopying, that's separate, and you can imagine in an English department how much photocopying there is, so that comes out of a separate fund, that we don't even have to worry about, we just photocopy away, occasionally we get an email saying, 'calm down' [LAUGHS]

Other HoDs indicate that photocopying is part of their department budget. Wendy is typical, saying that her main expenses include, *'photocopying, books, displays, remarks, ICT comes out of budget, so printing, toners any replacement stock'*. Finance has a clear impact on how the texts that are taught change over the years and the approach to the purchase of new texts differs across the schools. Karen comments that they have decided to carry on teaching *Romeo and Juliet* in Y9, partly because of teachers' knowledge of the text, but also because of financial considerations, '*we just continue with* Romeo and Juliet *because that was always the coursework text, and some of it was down to finances, you know you don't want to go out and buy another 300 books'*. Yet, while the HoDs are mindful of their finances, many of them are able to purchase new class sets of novels. Michael discusses how the KS3 curriculum at Ladybower has had to change,

In KS3 we've had to change a lot of our books because primary school covers so much, so 4 or 5 years ago we did books such as Holes *which were a lovely read, not very academic, but they've all done those sorts of books, so we've brought in in Y9 we*

> *brought in* The Road[13]*, Y8 we've just started doing* The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time[14]

Others, such as Sam at Tissington, are explicit about the financial constraints faced by their schools,

> *the school is at break-even at the moment, you know there was talk of redundancies a couple of years ago, but thankfully that went away, people took voluntary redundancy so we are in a position where the school is financially solvent, but you know we've been asked to be mindful*

This affects how he approached the choice of texts when the reformed GCSEs were introduced,

> *so we had 250 copies of* Macbeth*, we also had 250 copies of* An Inspector Calls*, so you know it was just natural that when we went to the new spec that we were going to do those texts*

But Sam has been able to invest in new texts, albeit in a way which is unusual for the HoDs in this study in his explicit attention to the need for financial efficiency,

[13] Cormac McCarthy
[14] Mark Haddon

> *if someone comes to me and says they want to do a bit of Ishiguru next year, or* Wonder[15] *or whatever then it's not a problem, let's have a look at costing, what can we get a class set for, how many teachers are going to use it, is it cost efficient over the year*

Perhaps reflecting his previous career in international finance, Bill has an entrepreneurial approach to purchases. Looking to refresh Clumber Community School's range of texts in KS3, but not having a large budget, he looked to a novel solution,

> *in our cupboard there were 60 brand new copies of* Lord of the Flies *that were still in the Amazon box with the tape on, we had about £400 of books here that were just doing nothing, so I went to Finance and said, 'Can I sell these?', 'Of course you can' so I sold them to a lady from a school in another city; I met here in the Ikea car park, two weeks ago, on a Friday night at 7 o'clock [LAUGHING], transferred the book, she gave me the cheque, bizarre, they take the mickey out of me in the Finance Office, saying 'what deals are you making in Ikea car park this week?', but it's just gaining that extra funding*

Clumber is the only school in this study which insists on KS4 pupils buying their GCSE texts because Bill wants all pupils in KS4 to be able to annotate the books they study, but *'we just couldn't afford to fund it ourselves'*. The answer at Clumber is,

[15] R.J. Palacio

We get the pupils to buy their KS4 texts, we call it the Literature Bundle, and it's £14 that they pay about Christmas time in Y9, and we order them in for them, and that causes no problems whatsoever; PP [Pupil Premium] pupils obviously, there are some issues there, but we fund those pupils, we've done it now for 3 years, it's worked out wonderfully well

Clumber Community School is in an isolated, rural community with 27.6% of pupils eligible for Pupil Premium (PP) funding, almost precisely the national average at the time of data collection (DfE, 2019c). By using the school's PP budget, and asking the other parents to purchase the books, Bill will be saving a considerable amount of his department's budget for other purposes.

The data does not allow me to say how the funding of English compares with other subjects in the schools, but the interviews do reveal that all of the HoDs in this study are clear about their financial responsibilities. Most also appear to understand how English fits in with whole school priorities, indicating an intersection between material and professional contexts.

5.1.3 Teaching Time

Each of the HoDs also shared details about the amount of time allocated to the teaching of English in their schools, including the differences between KS3 and KS4 (Table 7).

School Name	Minutes per Week: KS3	Minutes per Week: KS4	Total
Clumber Community School	240	240	480
Elvaston School	200	266.6	466.6
Scarsdale Academy	240	300	540
The Hathersage Academy	300	270	570
Stanage Community School	240	240	480
The Ladybower Secondary School	220	300	520
Dovedale Academy	200	240	440
Tissington School	180	270	450
Thornbridge Academy	210	270	480
Peveril Comprehensive School	210	233	443
Average	224	262.96	486.96

Table 7 Allocation of teaching time for English lessons

Some schools, such as Elvaston School, operate a two-week timetable with an uneven spread of English lessons across the fortnight, resulting in partial or uneven numbers. The majority of schools allocate more time in KS4 than in KS3 for teaching English, reflecting the teaching of English Language and English Literature GCSEs; only Hathersage has the opposite, with 30 minutes more per week in KS3 than KS4. I discuss how the HoDs use the time available to teach below, particularly in respect of the influence of assessment on the teaching of English (7.4).

5.1.4 Staff

Perhaps the most significant material context, in Ball et al.'s terms, is staff (Table 8). The average number of English teachers across the ten schools is 12.3 (see Table 4). However, this includes an unusually large number of English teachers, 25, at Peveril Comprehensive School, which has an unusually large number of pupils, 2500; for comparison, the smallest school in this study, Stanage Community School, has 42 teachers across the entire school. If Peveril is excluded from the figures, then the average number of English teachers in the

remaining nine schools drops to 10.9. The number of pupils on roll is taken from DfE Performance Tables (DfE, 2019c); the Performance Tables are updated regularly to reflect current data, but the data used in this thesis is taken from 2019 so that it accurately reflects the context of the schools at the time of my data collection.

School Name	Age Range	Pupils on roll	Number of English Teachers	% of Teachers Who are English Teachers
Clumber Community School	11-16	879	10	18.9%
Elvaston School	11-18	798	9	18.8%
Scarsdale Academy	11-18	1331	15	15.3%
The Hathersage Academy	11-18	1491	15	15.0%
Stanage Community School	11-16	682	6	14.3%
The Ladybower Secondary School	11-18	830	9	20.0%
Dovedale Academy	11-18	1275	12	12.6%
Tissington School	11-18	1203	12	14.8%
Thornbridge Academy	11-18	1106	10	13.3%
Peveril Comprehensive School	11-18	2500	25	13.8%
Average		1209.5	12.3	15.7%

Table 8 Number of English Teachers in the Schools

The figures in Table 8, however, only reveal a surface level of detail about the number of teachers who teach English in the schools. The Ladybower Secondary School, for example, employs a proportionately large number of teachers who teach English, but this does not indicate the amount of time that each teacher in the department is able to give to teaching the subject. Michael at Ladybower has additional leadership roles across the school which take him away from teaching English for part of each week. He is the ITE coordinator, *'so I'm going and watching other people's lessons is a drain because you only get five frees a week, I've observed three people this week so suddenly it's a busy week'*; he is also a member of SLT, taking up more of his time. Additionally, one of his team has *'other mentoring roles around the school'*, taking her away from teaching English, and there is a teacher in her first

year of teaching. At the time of data collection teachers in their first year of teaching were termed Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs); this entitled them to a slightly reduced timetable in their first year of teaching to concentrate on developing classroom skills. Since September 2021 this has been superseded by the Early Career Teacher (ECT) framework, extending the reduced timetable for an additional year.

Other HoDs also discuss the range of roles their colleagues have which reduce the amount of time available to teach. As well as an NQT, Karen, at Hathersage has two Heads of Year, the school's Head of Sixth Form and the school's Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENDCo) who also has a role across the MAT. Wendy, at Peveril, is unique in that she has the school's Headteacher as part of her team, as well as an Assistant Headteacher. She says that the Assistant Headteacher teaches 32% of the timetable, while the Headteacher has a single Year 11 group, approximately 10% of the timetable. However, in my previous experience as a headteacher who had teaching groups, the events of a busy and unpredictable school day frequently mean that you are unable to teach every scheduled lesson in a week, thus placing additional teaching pressures on colleagues.

As well as roles such as SENDCo or Head of Year, there are roles within departments which also reduce teachers contact time with pupils. All of the HoDs discuss colleagues who assist them in the running of their departments. Emma, HoD at Elvaston, describes how in addition to the school SENDCo being part of her team,

> *I've also got a member of staff who's head of Key Stage 5 who's been teaching 16 or 17 years, I've got one Head of Media and … I've got other TLR [Teaching and Learning*

Responsibility point] holders, I've got a Second in Department in charge of Key Stage 3

A TLR is a formal, paid recognition of additional responsibilities beyond classroom teaching, sometimes including reductions to teaching time; most of the HoDs have multiple TLR holders. Emma is typical of the HoDs in having individual colleagues with TLRs responsible for different Key Stages; in her case she has one for KS3 and one for KS5, while she maintains responsibility for the GCSE years during KS4. Bill organises his team in a slightly different way. Like Emma, Bill has three TLR holders in his department, one is responsible for KS4, one for Y8/9 and the third is responsible for overseeing pupils' transition from primary school into Y7. Martin also has a second in department role, but this is a job-share between two teachers, *'One of them is the old head of department…the other joint second is an NQT plus two [years of teaching]'*, offering a range of experience in a single position.

Another feature of Martin's department, which was common to other departments is the employment of ex-Heads of English departments. Bill works with an ex-Head of English who used to work at a nearby school, but who,

wanted to get back in the classroom and when I observed him on his interview, I've never ever seen a teacher like him before in my life, he just got you eating out of the palm of his hand, so charismatic, so I'm getting a lot of advice from him as well, pulling from his years of experience

Peter, at Dovedale, has three ex-Heads of English in his department. One is Peter's KS4 coordinator,

> *I've got my head of KS4 is in his early 40s, he's got an English degree, again, he used to be a head of English, he was head of English at another school in the nearby town, but he decided that he just didn't want all the pressure anymore and he didn't need the money so much and he stepped down and he's very happy to be having that responsibility, but not being the person right at the front*

His KS3 coordinator is also an ex-Head of English at an inner-city secondary school, as well as a third teacher,

> *who was at a school in a nearby city, she's in her 40s, she's also been a head of English before, but then dropped down for health reasons, and when she came back, she just wanted to be an English teacher*

The influence of ex-HoDs in the departments is discussed in Chapter 7.

Another feature mentioned by several HoDs is teachers who either trained at the schools where they now teach or who began their teaching careers at the school. Karen at Hathersage comments that,

> *we've been really lucky over the years, so most people who came as NQTs have stayed, so we don't lose many of them, so currently we've got six teachers in the*

department who all came here as NQTs and are still here, and have been here over a decade, and I mentored all the five below me [LAUGHS] at some point, we've just taken on a new NQT for next year and we're really excited about that, so she's obviously fitted in really well and she knows the school, and she's really happy here and I think it's really important that they feel they are in the right school from the off

Michael uses his role as the school's ITE Coordinator to identify potential NQT/ECTs during their training year,

I look at the trainees and I think, who can we keep this year, who do we want working here? I think for the longevity of this school and this department headhunting the right teachers, we've had different headteachers, we've had different strategies, the only thing that's made a really big difference, in my department anyway, is the quality of the teachers

Emma also has an NQT in her department at Elvaston, and she also has a Recently Qualified Teacher (RQT), meaning a teacher in their second or third year of teaching. Emma notes differences between her NQT and her RQT, which she attributes in part to their different experiences in the early stages of their careers,

my NQT is very enthusiastic, very motivated, very resilient and brings a lot of energy to the department whereas my RQT I've already seen that they aren't so positive; I don't know if that has anything to do with the school where they spent their NQT year

In terms of the material contexts of schools, Emma, along with the other HoDs, reminds us that while staff are the central resource, they are also people who experience life in different ways, affecting the experience of English in schools.

A further element is the number of staff who also work as GCSE examiners. The HoDs feel this gives them an advantage in terms of planning schemes of work to maximise pupils' outcomes, although different HoDs can come to different conclusions about what this looks like in practice, perhaps showing the importance of specific school contexts. Martin, for example, says that *'as an AQA examiner I know that students who tackle* A Christmas Carol *are likely to score lower marks than students who tackle the other texts, because everyone is doing* A Christmas Carol'. Bill, however, who also teaches the AQA syllabus, has a different view,

> *I mean, we've got four Literature examiners across the faculty, so we know where the good marks and the good exam responses come from and generally,* A Christmas Carol *and* Macbeth *are where the best ones are, it's not just pie-in-the-sky choices, we've had a think about it*

As well as English teachers, there are other staff who contribute to English. Bill has two Teaching Assistants dedicated to the English department at Clumber, and Peter has,

> *one or two people attached to the department doing things like, so my wife is an English teacher but she's doing things like teaching looked after kids and things like that, who need extra care, and we've got a couple of teaching assistants and*

somebody who's like in charge of the library, who used to be a drama teacher here, and is teaching the Hackney Literacy Project[16] *where children in Y7 and 8 are taken out of their modern languages lessons and taught in groups of about 7 or 8, and that's going to be continuing next year*

This suggests that Dovedale School places English, or rather Literacy, above Modern Languages.

All of the schools have a library, and most have librarians, but Elvaston appears to be the only school in this study where the librarian is considered to be part of the English department. In the other schools, librarians occupy an ambiguous position. Peveril Comprehensive School, for example, is unusual in employing a qualified librarian, but the status of the library itself is typical of the other schools, '*the library is both part of English and a separate entity… it's not part of the department as such, I don't line manage it, but we have really, really close ties with it'.* At Clumber the library is operated by a dedicated librarian who support pupils' literacy development out of lessons,

The library, you walk in there between half past eight and ten to nine, during Registration and its buzzing with kids that we've identified in English, and they then work with them, we are identifying kids who are behind on their reading age, or struggling with the analytical side of things in English, and they'll do the inference training, you'll walk in in the morning and it's buzzing with learning, we've never had

[16] Hackney Literacy Project is a commercially available package designed to help improve the literacy skills of 'the lowest achieving pupils in Y7' https://www.hackneyservicesforschools.co.uk/product/lit-programme

that before; the library before was, basically, just a bit of a youth club, and now it's buzzing with learning, so it's fantastic

Here, Bill highlights how the use of the library at Clumber has shifted: it is no longer *'a bit of a youth club'*, it is now *'buzzing with learning'*. The library has been repurposed as a learning space rather than a space to relax; Bill's use of *'buzzing'* and *'fantastic'* indicates his view that this is a positive development.

A detailed analysis of the place and purpose of school libraries is beyond the scope of this thesis, but the existence of libraries and librarians indicates that these schools are prepared to invest resources in them. Several of the English departments in this study use their libraries as regular venues for timetabled 'library lessons'. In some schools these are for personal reading, while in others they are opportunities to access reading schemes, most frequently the Accelerated Reader (AR) scheme discussed in the Literature Review chapter, to support pupils' literacy development. At Clumber, AR is funded from the Local Authority (LA), indicating that the LA is willing to invest in helping the schools they are responsible for to develop pupils' literacy skills.

5.2 Professional Context

The Professional context of schools is concerned with, 'examining ethos, teachers' values and commitments within schools' (Ball et al., 2012, p.26). It is possible to construct a sense of the ethos of schools and English departments from the data in this thesis, but it is more difficult to draw any conclusions about the HoD's values from the data as this was not a part of the initial research design; this would be an interesting area to explore in future research,

which could add to existing research about English teachers (e.g. Goodwyn, 2011; Marshall, 2000), but is beyond the scope of this thesis. This section concentrates on how English is influenced by whole school ethos; how it is influenced by the department ethos and how English is placed in relation to other subjects.

5.2.1 Whole school ethos

Professional context is exemplified by Ball et al. by referring to one of their research schools they call Atwood, which had a very particular culture including the pupils not having a school uniform. While this is unusual in most English secondary schools it is similar to one of the schools in this study, Tissington, and the HoD, Sam discusses his school's ethos, 'The Tissington Way', in more detail than anyone else in this thesis as noted above.

Tissington is the name of the town and the school, as well as this whole school ethos, perhaps encouraging a sense of *cynefin* in the school (see p.17 above). One outward expression of 'The Tissington Way' is that, like Atwood School in Ball et al.'s study (Ball et al., 2012), Tissington pupils wear their own choice of clothes, rather than a school uniform. More significantly for understanding the place and purpose of English in the school, Sam also presents 'The Tissington Way' as a policy enabling him to have a degree of agency in how he organizes the English department. He presents this in the context of a new headteacher, Philip, who Sam says was employed to '*oversee*' whole school improvements in the wake of negative Ofsted reports; this is an example of different elements of Ball et al.'s framework overlapping, in this case the Professional context of the new headteacher, the Situated context of school histories and the External context of Ofsted ratings (see 5.3.1 below). The new headteacher,

came in off the back of the previous head who had been here a number of years. Lots of things were coined 'The Tissington Way' and Philip came in and tried to refresh that, and I suppose I did as well… so from the moment I arrived they gave me the freedom to set things up, it took a while to get things sorted because of staffing issues and financial issues that we've had within the school, restructuring and rebudgeting and things, but at no point did Philip or Simon [deputy headteacher] come to me and say, 'This is the way that things must be done'

Sam extends this level of professional trust to his colleagues in the English department, '*I have no set way that I want my team to deliver things as long as they're aware that the bottom line is the kids need to be getting a good deal out of it*'. This is an example of how a whole school ethos affects middle leaders' approaches to department practice; it also illustrates the significance of a headteacher as a professional role model.

Returning to the ways that a school-level ethos affects the place and purpose of English, Sam also identifies '*The Tissington Way'* as an influence on how he has developed curriculum content at his school,

I know when I first arrived the number of times I heard this phrase 'The Tissington Way' so we've tried to include texts which give [pupils] a more worldly approach and we try to make sure that they get to deal with some of the key issues that are going to come up, so we look at race, we look at gender, we look at you know, relationships, the texts that we cover deal with these things that these young people are going to be facing and hopefully through literature, or through English they are

> *able to manage some of the experiences that they go through and see some examples in literature or whatever that they can relate to, or if not, at least debating some of the things that they're going to encounter over the next four or five, six, ten years, life that they are going to live*

This illustrates how Sam attributes the way in which a whole school ethos, *'The Tissington Way'*, influences the way he is treated as a HoD; the way he treats his colleagues; and how he chooses curriculum content. This also illustrates Sam's hopes that the experience of studying English will help the pupils understand their current life, as well as to help prepare them for adult life, perhaps helping develop their sense of *cynefin* described in the Introduction chapter.

5.2.2 Department ethos

Several HoDs discuss how they work with their colleagues within their departments. Michael, for example, describes colleagues working together,

> *you walk past every morning and you see two or three re-writing schemes of work, you look at the stuff they're producing and you think 'oh my god', and they're planning that together. I think that's a thing that works well in the department, we've got such a spread of types of people, age, length of service here and yet you can see people working in clusters, not because I'm asking them to but because they want to and they just think it's important*

This implies a collaborative team, having shared outcomes and shared working practices; Michael's admiration for them is clear. Michael's depiction of his team also suggests

colleagues' willingness to work undirected, using each other's experience to do what they feel is important. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to make any judgments about the quality of the plans themselves, but it is possible using this data to suggest that Michael's colleagues use their expertise to help develop both a curriculum and a team (Enow & Goodwyn, 2018). Michael suggests that his role is minimal, although I feel this deliberately downplays his influence in a self-deprecating way. Later in this thesis I show how protective Michael is of his department in the face of MAT directives to teach in particular ways (7.5.2).

5.2.3 The place of English in relation to other subjects

Several participants discuss the place of English in relation to other subjects, echoing Thomson and Hall's comment about 'stretched out relations' (Thomson & Hall, 2017, p.15). Michael, for example, describes the differing situations of English, Maths and Science at The Ladybower Secondary School,

> *the Science department has virtually no autonomy, the deputy head goes down there to all their meetings, he organises their curriculum, he's the kind of pretend Head of Science. The new Head of Maths, who's really good actually, but she hasn't got a team around her, she's only got a couple of really good Maths teachers and then she's really scrabbling around trying to find a couple of NQTs in there, so I think they get some 'interference', so I'm literally, while things are going well, as long as I can justify what I'm doing, I'm allowed to do what I think is the right thing for the students*

Michael is clear that he avoids *'interference'* from SLT because *'things are going well'*, and these *'things'* appear to include an effective, established English team. Sarah, at

Thornbridge, also notes how her team affect the way the department is seen by SLT, but she includes the role of English with whole school accountability measure. She appears perplexed by the relationship between English and other subjects when discussing how English is seen by SLT,

> *Um [5 second pause] I think it's got quite low status in the school, it's odd because obviously it's a core subject, obviously crucial to everything, the results and the Progress 8 and everything…I feel in this school it hasn't got a good reputation and I don't know if that's because of who the staff are compared to other departments, I don't know if it's to do with English itself, I just don't know, but it's something that has been quite troubling and quite difficult as a department in terms of morale…I don't know if this happens in other schools, I suppose it must do to an extent, the rivalry with maths is like, not helpful*

In this quotation Sarah hesitantly highlights three elements of the professional context of English. Firstly, she identifies that English is a '*core subject, obviously crucial to everything, the results and Progress 8 and everything'*. Secondly, she appears to suggest that the professional context of English is affected by '*the staff who are compared to other departments*', hinting at a personal element to the reputation of English. Thirdly, she highlights the relationship between English and other subjects, especially in her case a perceived, *'rivalry with Maths'*. Later she describes the range of agency she is allowed by SLT, explored in more depth in Chapter 7, but in this quotation, she feels that English is not especially well respected compared with other subjects, especially Maths.

The relationship between English and Maths is a recurring theme across the data. While Sarah feels a '*rivalry with Maths*', the majority of the HoDs present a closer working relationship between the respective HoDs. Martin, as noted above (p.99), explains how the English and Maths Departments at Stanage share a dedicated staffroom, although,

> *I would like more of the chat from my teachers and the head of maths would like more of the chat from his teachers to be about how we are approaching the teaching than, you know, hot pod yoga [LAUGHS], to keep it in the work for a little bit longer, because if you're having those conversations you're wasting less money on CPD, there's such good practice in different classrooms*

Helen, at Scarsdale, also works closely with the Head of Maths,

> *every other Friday myself and the Head of Maths, the head and the deputy head sit down and do a RAG [Red Amber Green rating system], so you go through the kids and say, 'Who is going to get a particular level', and then each fortnight you give an update on that, so if you've had a mock and a kid's not done as well, gone down a level, so we get a gauge of what we can do*

The fortnightly frequency of this process, along with the direct involvement of the headteacher and the deputy headteacher and the focus on individual pupils, is an indication of the importance of English and Maths to the professional context of English at Scarsdale Academy.

5.3 External Contexts

The third element of school context identified by Ball et al. discussed in this thesis is their external contexts. Schools can feel isolated, each in a unique situation, geographically or ideologically a long way from other schools (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2019), yet they also all work within wider contexts, as noted above, 'the relations in a site and between the people and the 'things' within/on it extend beyond the material location' (Thomson & Hall, 2017, p.16). Ball et al. define the external contexts of schools as the,

> pressures and expectations generated by wider local and national policy frameworks such as Ofsted ratings, league table positions and legal requirements and responsibilities, as well as the degree and quality of local authority support and relationships with other schools (Ball et al., 2012, p.36)

Since Ball et al.'s research was completed, the school system has altered so that Local Authorities (LAs) have less influence on most secondary schools in England, being replaced in part by MATs (Courtney, 2015; Greany & Higham, 2018). Two of the schools, Clumber and Tissington, are LA maintained, while the others are academies; only one academy, Thornbridge, is not in a MAT.

5.3.1 Ofsted

Ofsted has affected how schools enact policy and 'perform', in the sense of performativity, since it was introduced in the early 1990s, often as 'a behind-the-scenes influence on schools and their management teams' (Perryman et al., 2018, p.160); in this research it is the external body most frequently referred to by the HoDs. Martin, at Stanage, had an Ofsted inspection visit three weeks before I interviewed him, and he used the positive outcome of that visit to justify how he works, *'I won't ask for data I'm not intending to use,*

which means that I have a lot less data than some people, but you know, go back to the last Ofsted report, how are we doing [LAUGHS]'. Yet he also recognises the negative effect that inspections can have on colleagues,

> *I have another teacher who is nine years into the job, who is extremely good, extremely competent, who worked in a less successful school in the area, was Ofsted-ed six ways from Sunday in that school…she's anxious, and I think that sometimes she needs picking up, but she's extremely good*

The way that he turns the noun, '*Ofsted'*, into a verb like Helen above, '*Ofsted-ed*', illustrates how, for some HoDs at least, Ofsted is a process done to schools, potentially damaging teachers' health. Martin feels that his colleague has carried her experience of Ofsted in a different school with her to Stanage, with ongoing consequences. Helen, at Scarsdale, expands on this, explaining the effect of inspections on several teachers,

> *been through that whole Outstanding, Special Measures, then RI, then back to Good, it had been through a really tough time…when the Special Measures label was put on, they were put under severe pressure, and I think that's what had been the end for a lot of teachers*

Helen's comments are another example in this data of a HoD describing their school's historically situated context, emphasizing how the school '*had been put through a really tough time'* and how this has taken its toll on colleagues. When the HoDs discuss this

context, they typically structure how they tell the story of their schools using Ofsted inspections.

Sam, for example, indicates how Ofsted inspections at Tissington shaped the development of the school with the appointment of the new headteacher as a response to negative Ofsted reports,

> *They'd had two Requires Improvements from Ofsted, they were on the last cycle of that or they were going to Special Measures, could well have been academized, so there was a whole focus on how they were going to improve the school, so Philip came in to oversee that*

Here, Sam distances himself from the previous regime at Tissington, referring to them as 'they', emphasizing how schools' contexts can change. He also refers to the perceived threat of academization, something the school was ideologically opposed to, emphasizing how while some elements of school context change, others persist. Thus, this data shows the impact of Ofsted on school as damaging teachers' health and wellbeing.

The only positive comments about Ofsted in the data are made by Helen. She notes that the *Inspection Framework* (Ofsted, 2019a) encourages schools to teach beyond the NC,

> *you know Ofsted have introduced this term now 'more breadth and depth' and I think, breadth at KS3 is a bit of breathing space, because now they've removed pretty much anything from other cultures at GCSE, and it's all very British*

She also notes that '*you know there's this new thing in the* Ofsted Framework *about cultural capital, and that is something that I agree with'*; taken with the previous quotation this suggests that she is able to use the Ofsted *Inspection Framework* to justify some of her choices of texts. However, this also serves to highlight the need she feels the rely on such validation for her choices, rather than have the confidence of her own expertise.

5.3.2 National context

Some HoDs discuss ways that other organisations external to their schools exert influence on practice in English. Viewing his pupils' attempts at the GCSE exam in the context of all other pupils across the country, Martin adapts the English curriculum from Y7 to Y11 in anticipation of the exam, *'If there are 350000 students in that year group and you haven't prepared them for it, do your job, my job is to get those students through the GCSE'*. In previous schools Martin had used resources offered, at a cost, by an organisation called PiXL[17]. Martin is very positive about PiXL, but he recognises that a commercial organisation, potentially costing schools thousands of pounds each year, is problematic,

> *PiXL have had criticisms levelled at them that they're gaming the system; PiXL at their worst might be, some of the time, but most of what happened there, people had discussions about what effective pedagogy looked like, which they probably could have been having in their own staffrooms, but because you've paid £6000 a year to be a member of the organisation you feel like you actually have to have the conversation [LAUGHS]*

[17] PiXL is an educational charity 'committed to providing practical support and strategies to make an impact.'. https://www.pixl.org.uk

Other HoDs, such as Helen, have had a different experience. When asked if her school is in PiXL she says,

> *We were [LAUGHS] I'm not a fan of PiXL, so PiXL we did for the first year of the GCSE, so we got some sort of measure of where we were, and I think most kids in the mock we sent off were two levels off what they actually ended up with, so we massively over predicted, and when those results came in that first year, we were left looking, yeah, and the kids were devastated, saying 'Why have I got a 6, why have I got a 4?', English and Maths both did it, and we never did it again, yeah, not a fan*

In this quotation Helen is explaining a process by which schools could send their mock examination data to PiXL who would then use an algorithm to predict the school's outcomes for the actual GCSEs that summer; Helen's experience is that the predictions made by PiXL were inaccurate. This indicates how some schools have attempted to mitigate the external pressures of GCSE exam results, P8 and Ofsted by paying for external support rather than trusting the expertise of existing school staff such as the HoDs. None of the HoDs discussed other external factors such as EduTwitter, although some commentators are becoming concerned about the effect of social media on the teaching of English (e.g. Elliott, 2020).

5.4 Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have presented my interpretations of what the HoDs say about factors determining the place of English in their schools. This has been structured around Ball et

al.'s framework for considering the context of schools and has illuminated a number of influences on the place of English.

Firstly, the material context of English shows how the subject is constrained by elements often overlooked in the research literature, such as the buildings, budgets, teaching time and staff. The HoDs typically feel that they have sufficient resources to teach English, although this could also be interpreted to show that they have ensured that the subject fits the resources they have been given; the extent to which resource allocation is top-down or bottom-up is contestable with the data available in this study. Secondly, the professional context presents the influence of the whole school ethos, the department ethos and the place of English in relation to other subjects. In general, they feel that English is in a good position compared with other subjects, often comparing themselves with Maths, but that such a position is contingent on achieving good examination results and having a stable team. Finally, this chapter has discussed elements of the education environment external to the schools, particularly Ofsted and the ways that other organisations can influence their teaching. Ofsted is the dominant factor, not so much because of how an inspection visit might specifically affect the English department, but because of how inspection outcomes can affect whole school leadership; there is also a degree of HoDs using the language of Ofsted to inform their thinking about the curriculum. In the following chapter I present my interpretations of what the HoDs say about the purpose of English in their schools.

Chapter 6: What is the purpose of English in the schools?

The primary aim of this chapter is to present my interpretations about how the HoDs consider the second sub-research question: what is the purpose of English in their schools? I have structured this chapter in two main sections. Firstly, I discuss what the HoDs say about the purpose of English for the schools; secondly, I discuss what they say about the purpose of English for the pupils.

6.1 English for Schools

The HoDs are clear about the major role that the subject of English plays in relation to each school's institutional reputation. For the HoDs in this study examination outcomes form the main source of reputation; this is principally evident in the relation between English GCSE examination results and Progress 8 (P8) metrics, as explained above (Chapter 2.5.3). In this section I begin by focusing on the relationship between P8 data for English and the reputation of the whole school, before focusing on the implications of this reputation for the English departments.

6.1.1 School reputation

Schools' reputations have always been important factors when considering parents' abilities to choose schools for their children (West, 2023) and one component of a school's reputation is examination data. Emma is typical of the HoDs when she highlights the importance of P8, *'I've got to ensure that our Progress 8 measures are hit; previously they haven't been and there's always a background story for that but of course that's the strive'*. Emma's language in this quotation, such as '*the strive'*, is indicative of both her passion for English and her passion for her school; she aims to do everything she can to safeguard the reputation of Elvaston. Michael also introduces emotional elements when discussing the

relationship between the work his team put in, as evidenced by P8 data for English, and P8 data for other subjects,

> *with Progress 8 we hit just slightly above zero[18] last year, even though we got 50% 5 and above and 70% 4 and above and Maths got like half that, but had a better Progress 8 than us, so you have to perform stupidly well just to be average and that's what we do, if you see how hard we are working to just be average it's fairly disappointing*

Such is his concern about the potential for reputational damage can have on his colleagues that he *'make[s] sure each group gets two teachers as well because they double count for the school; I didn't want it all sitting on one teacher's head if something went horribly wrong'*. Just as Emma safeguards the reputation of her school, Michael works to safeguard the reputation of his department and colleagues.

Recognising the significance of English for the reputation of his school and his department, Martin explains how perceived pressures to achieve good GCSE outcomes and P8 data affects pupils' experiences of English as well as his approach to leading the subject,

> *I couldn't tell you in good faith [that enjoyment is] what most students get from an English education at the minute, I genuinely couldn't, I wish I could, and giving students that is surprisingly far down the list of priorities for a Head of English and I don't think*

[18] Zero is the score indicating that a school is performing at the national average

Heads of English that tell you otherwise are doing their job right, I mean great for them if they feel they can do their job well and do that, I wish that was more what the focus is but you know, you put pressure on organisations to measure attainment, to measure progress, and that ebbs out little by little

Here is a HoD expressing regret that his role in ensuring that pupils achieve good grades supersedes wider visions of the subject. This is also echoed by Sarah,

I would really like to…broaden the scope of [English] and enable them to see the value of the subject itself, but it's really hard to get that balance right, because they will hear all the time in assemblies, 'You've got to get your English and Maths' and it just shrinks it into this, like, hurdle that they've got to overcome

Having explored the theme of reputation, I now offer my interpretations of what the HoDs say about another purpose of English for schools, the cross curricular aspect of English teaching.

6.1.2 Cross-curricular

Historically, there has been a blurring of the lines between the purpose of the subject of English in schools and the use of the English language in English schools. The *Newbolt Report*, for example, stated 'That every teacher is a teacher *of* English because every teacher is a teacher *in* English' (BoE, 1921, p.348 emphases in original); the *Bullock Report* reflected the interest in the 1970s in an integrated approach to teaching English, although it stopped short of fully recommending this approach (DES, 1975). The first version of the NC included 'Cross-curricular' as one of the five main views of English when it stated that 'English is

different from other school subjects, in that it is both a subject and a medium of instruction for other subjects' (DES, 1989, para 2.22) and this phrase is almost repeated in the current NC which states that 'English is both a subject in its own right and the medium for teaching…Fluency in English language is an essential foundation for success in all subjects' (DfE, 2014a, p.11). Few would argue with this, but the cross-curricular nature of English is infrequently mentioned by the HoDs in this study as a central purpose of English in their schools; I interpret this to indicate their focus on the subject of English rather than wider applications across different aspects of school life.

When the HoDs do discuss literacy across the curriculum, it is in the context of the specific role of Literacy Coordinator, a teacher with particular responsibility for developing literacy across some schools. Bill notes that there is a Literacy Coordinator at Clumber Community School, but '*it doesn't fall under my remit…[she] is a German teacher*', perhaps indicating that Modern Languages teachers are deemed to have more expertise in language development than English teachers at the school. Emma is the only HoD in this study identifying as being the school's Literacy Coordinator. She discusses how she conducted research at Elvaston School indicating that '*80% of our students in KS3 said that they didn't read at home, so we introduced DEAR[19], so for twenty to thirty minutes every single day as part of their study period*'. There is very limited data in this research to draw conclusions about how the HoDs view the purpose of English as a medium for learning across the schools, or their role in relation to this.

[19] DEAR – Drop Everything And Read

Having explored the purpose of English for the schools, I now turn to my interpretations of what the data indicates about the purpose of English for the pupils in the schools in this study.

6.2 English for Pupils

Most of the HoDs in this study feel that English, and the attending qualifications, helps pupils' lives, broadly in line with the Adult Needs view expressed in the original NC. Achieving a good GCSE grade in English Language and English Literature is still recognised to be central to preparing 'children for the language demands of adult life, including the workplace in a fast-changing world' (DES, 1989, para 2.2.3), but the HoDs are also clear that English is important in the way that it develops pupils' cultural and social awareness and some feel this will help challenge prevailing social attitudes. I begin this section by discussing how some HoDs see English as a passport to an adult life beyond their communities, before discussing how the HoDs use English as a tool to help develop pupils' sense of social justice.

6.2.1 English as a passport to adult life

A number of HoDs suggest that the primary purpose of English for pupils is to, '*Betray my own kind here, to get them out of the area, to give them the opportunity to be somewhere else'*. In this quote, Martin at Stanage depicts English as a passport to greater opportunities than the school's immediate community can offer. Michael echoes this, noting that English qualifications,

> *give people a choice, because even if they've not been particularly good at English, they've achieved, so they've got the kind of potential if they want to, to move on and*

do other things with it, if not they've got the potential to stay and do something else, I just feel we do give a lot of our students a choice, a lot do go to university, a lot do go to 6th form here, a lot go to the local FE [Further Education] college, you know, every morning I wave to my bottom set Y11 lads as they go to college, and you know they want to be a bricky or they want to be an electrician or whatever, and you can see it's the best thing and they're absolutely happy as, and you know they had a choice

Here, Michael explains how a good GCSE pass, usually understood to be a Grade 4 or above, offers pupils more choices about their futures. Like Martin, Michael links achievement with the pupils moving away from the area, but he also recognizes that those pupils who stay in the area do so as a positive choice, a choice partially enabled by an English GCSE.

Bill's views about the teaching of English Language, including the teaching of speaking and listening skills echo concerns about the quality of spoken English raised during the heyday of the mining industry in the 1920s (Sampson, 1925),

in terms of language again, the speaking and listening side of things, developing that, we're doing a lot of work in a mining area, some of the language that's used, you don't know it's English sometimes, and it's all about preparing them for the real world and explaining to them why and how, what they're doing fits into it, and using language, using punctuation, speaking and listening, seeing language used in its finest form, is all going to go towards your final experience when you're putting your

CV together, or when you're in a meeting, or you're looking at some documents and you've got to make a decision based on the information you're provided with

Working in the only school in this study to overtly celebrate its industrial heritage, Bill is the only HoD in this study to specifically link mining with how the pupils perform, echoing Ofsted (Ofsted, 2014) in suggesting that the industrial heritage has an ongoing negative effect on pupil performance in the context of both the GCSE examination and in the context of employability skills. I return to this quotation later in this thesis to illustrate one element of the production of English (7.2.4).

Peter, at Dovedale Academy, also acknowledges the importance of English for employability, but he goes further than other HoDs, discussing how English enables pupils to develop critical literacy skills necessary for participation in society, echoing the Cultural Analysis view of English (DES, 1989, para 2.2.5),

kids are exposed to English all the time, and that's probably become more true than less so, you know, they've got advertising coming at them, they've got political stuff coming at them and it's all done through language, and a greater awareness of how language is being used and what is being done, it's just like what I was saying the other day to Y8, we were doing persuasive writing and I said, 'if you want to present an opinion as if it's factual, put in front of it the phrase "the fact is", it's not a fact, it's an opinion, and look out for that because politicians do it all the time.', so it's that kind of thing, you know, they are exposed to English all the time, and they need to be aware of it;

However, while Peter is keen to emphasise what English has to offer the pupils in terms of being well-equipped to lead successful adult lives, he is pragmatic in terms of his position as Head of English, as he reminds his English teaching team,

> *I say to them, 'Look, the bottom line is the same as when you were at school, in a sense, it's all about getting kids to pass exams as well and we've got to bear that in mind, we can't just think of it as some annoying imposition on our poetry circle'*

English, then, and specifically the English GCSE is recognised as a passport to a life beyond school and, potentially, a life beyond the schools' communities as Wendy says,

> *…whatever words, however you like to dress it up, we're still driven by the requirements of the exams, so my responsibility to those students is to give them the life chances that allow them to do anything else*

However, several HoDs in this study are also interested in ways that English can help pupils understand that their home communities are only one iteration of national identity. One particular point of difference between the communities in the ex-industrial communities in this study, and many other parts of the country is ethnicity, as discussed earlier in this thesis (p.26).

6.2.2 English and society

Several HoDs in this study discuss ethnicity. Helen, at Scarsdale Academy is particularly illuminating about the relationship between English, ethnicity and community in the town of

Scarsdale. The town has an historic association with racism; the extreme right wing British National Party experienced some success in local elections in 2008 and Helen, who grew up in the town, believes that such attitudes remain. She links ethnicity and social class to explore how she uses English to challenge locally held attitudes,

> *I went to school with their parents…it* is *white, it* is *working class and there was a lack of aspiration, and I think that's something that has changed and that aspiration in the school is bleeding out into the community more and more, so many parents are on board, I think giving them an insight into life outside of this community, which is a good place, but you know, like things from other cultures, like racism in Scarsdale was a massive issue, and is a massive issue, but I feel a lot of it was racial ignorance, like the kids don't know when we study poetry from other cultures, or any, like we still do* Of Mice and Men *lower down the school, if they have to use the word 'black', they're like, 'can I say that?', they've got no, you know it is more of an ignorance for them, it is uncertainty, if that's something that we can do in English and send them out at 16 having a bit more of like a moral purpose*

In this quotation, Helen shows her understanding and sympathy for the pupils, acknowledging their funds of knowledge, but unafraid to challenge these when she feels it is required. Helen shows how she feels the teaching of English at Scarsdale Academy is beginning to make a difference in a town which has a history of explicit racism.

Karen, whose school is in Minetown, also refers to *Of Mice and Men* as well as '*poems from other cultures'* in the context of teaching KS3,

> *our students aren't necessarily very outward looking, beyond Minetown. The students can access it, and interestingly even though we've picked a lot of poems that were traditionally GCSE, so things like* Blessing*, the students really enjoy that, it's something different for them to focus on, it's not just based in and around Minetown, they like the knowledge, you have to teach them the background to the poems before you teach them the poem, because they don't know where these countries are, they don't understand why it's like that, things like,* Nothing's Changed*, they've got no perception of what apartheid was, or where it was, or why people were treated in that way, because for them their world, a lot of them, their world is in and around Minetown*

The choice of poetry and novels such a *Of Mice and Men* indicate conscious approaches to using literature in ways that challenge prevailing social attitudes held among some of the pupils; this is redolent of Goodwyn's revised version of Cox's Personal Growth view of English (Goodwyn, 2019c). However, the reliance on well-established texts, including the poetry from other cultures is problematic in ways discussed in the following chapter (7.2.3).

As well as racism, some HoDs discuss sexism and misogyny in the community and the potential of English to challenge such views. While discussing the ways in which pupils respond to *Of Mice and Men*, particularly the treatment of Curley's Wife, Karen says,

> *The boys are very old-school traditional on the side of Curley I think…there's a lot of very traditional views with students in Minetown that have been passed down from*

> *that kind of working-class background, you know, their parents and their grandparents grew up in, that haven't changed…the majority of our students are middle to working class, and they've got very fixed views, which, you know you have to as a teacher, of any subject, you want to change, so we try to expose them to as many different texts from different areas and cultures as we can*

Martin takes a similar when choosing Shakespeare plays, '*I'd rather have* Romeo and Juliet *as the final text…because it lets me challenge the misogyny in the areas that we're teaching in*' Such views have implications for how the HoDs construct their curriculum models, as I explore later (7.2.3). None of the HoDs discuss the experiences of Black or global majority students, and none discuss pupils with other protected characteristics, but they do mention choosing texts such as *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, which focuses on a protagonist with Asperger's Syndrome[20], *Wonder*, which focuses on a protagonist with Treacher Collins syndrome and *A Monster Calls*[21], which *'deals with issues like cancer, which lots of our kids have had to deal with and can relate to'* as Helen comments.

Sarah is the HoD who expresses the most principled stance about the choice of texts in KS4 in particular, '*the fact that they're nearly all [written by] dead white males, that's problematic, I find that really difficult…I refuse to have* Lord of the Flies *here because there's no women in the text at all,* Jekyll and Hyde (sic)*, one screaming maid, it's not good enough*'. However, she feels restricted in her ability to teach texts beyond the limits of the GCSE specification, noting that she cannot teach additional texts, *'not with things as they are, we*

[20] While this phrase is not used today, it is the phrase used by the author of the novel
[21] Patrick Ness

haven't got the scope. If we were in a position, perhaps where the results were more secure we could' emphasizing that GCSE results have priority over other issues. Sarah's comments illustrate how the impact of English on schools' and teaches' reputations, discussed above (6.1.1), work towards circumscribing the nature of the English curriculum at her school.

Karen is interested in how English can further develop pupils' awareness of local social issues. At the time of data collection Minetown had been experiencing an influx of rough sleepers and Karen took the opportunity to use literature in KS3 to challenge pupils' thinking,

> *We do a lot of work on homelessness, obviously we start with* Stone Cold*, but we look beyond that to homeless charities to give them that wider cultural capital. They talk about people in Minetown begging, and they're like 'Oh they're making a fortune, they're not really begging, they're not really homeless' and trying to change those views is, I feel, part of our job as well, to give them more of a wider cultural experience through literature, that's part of the joy of teaching English, as we do try to get that across; and we do try to pick texts at KS3 that will open up those discussions*

Although Karen does not feel she has as much scope in KS4 to discuss such issues as she has in KS3, there remains some space to discuss ideas raised by texts beyond the confines of the GCSE syllabus. When asked if she has the capacity for wider discussions in KS4, Karen comments,

> *Not as much as we could, we do* Animal Farm *and we look at things like the ideas around, obviously we look at it from a text point of view, so we look at communism, but we talk a lot about politics and experienced teachers like myself can easily get taken off, like last year especially we were looking at Brexit and democracy, and it allows you to bring in those conversations to a certain extent*

Not only is this an example of a HoD discussing how political issues can be legitimately raised in English lessons, this quotation also draws attention to the role of '*experienced teachers'* as well as the ways that such curriculum content is not fixed; Brexit was a topic '*last year especially'*, implying that it is no longer such a live debate in Karen's classes. Sarah, also working in Minetown, also talks about how she has used non-fiction texts to challenge pupils' thinking,

> *I think that, yeah, that is part of the scope of English showing them fact-based articles, you know, fact and opinion really does feed into that debate, so getting them to be a bit more critical about some of the things they read I think that is part of it, so yeah. I think the way that you phrase your opinions, I might ask questions that you don't really answer, but it's putting thoughts out into the room, I think that's one way of doing it. But it is really hard, if someone says something that's just wrong like to not just say, 'Look, have you really thought about that?' I think that is important for some of them to hear, but obviously our role is to not politicise this, it's difficult if you know that they're just, you know, regardless of what opinions they're picking up they're just not questioning the things that they read and that's not a helpful, it's not helpful to just ignore that and let them go off into the world and let*

them think they can just believe everything without questioning where it's come from and what's behind it

Here, Sarah indicates her belief that her classroom is a place where pupils are allowed to express things that are in her view '*just wrong*', that they have the confidence to do so, and that she has a professional responsibility as a teacher to help her pupils move into the world with a more critical attitude. In this case Sarah challenges locally held attitudes, and this is clearly important to her. Later, Sarah discusses how she uses some of the English Literature texts,

Animal Farm*, like we've talked about, gives you lots of scope to talk about things, even* A Christmas Carol*, I'm not a huge fan but even that there's sort of inequality on society that you can bring in so it depends how you teach these texts and which one you choose.* Frankenstein's *got lots of scope to talk about science and you know the ethical debates around that, and you know* Macbeth *has got lots that's really political*

Wendy gives further examples of how English can develop pupils' understanding of social issues. During a Y10 lesson about *An Inspector Calls*, Wendy moved beyond teaching the socio-cultural history of the play to link it with current society,

so I was the language teacher for this group and we were talking about poverty in the UK, so let's look at this graph, what does it mean, and we worked out that it meant that if you were male and you lived in Kent you would live 10 years longer

than if you were a male who lived down the road, and they didn't believe me, just couldn't, you know what I mean, so the cultural capacity that we've got in English to start tackling, but anyway, so we started and one of the kids at the end of the lesson said to me…'We should do more of this', and I just thought 'Bless you, that was important that', we didn't write a scrap in the lesson, we read some stuff, we talked about it a lot, didn't write a scrap

This is an example of how an English teacher uses the GCSE English Language curriculum to deepen pupils' understanding about the world in which they live in a way which is meaningful and engaging for the pupils and teacher; this also shows how teachers can move beyond the type of lessons characterized by PEEL paragraphs when they have the confidence and agency to do so (Gibbons, 2017).

6.2.3 English and cultural capital

While the views above show how English is used in the schools in this study to broaden pupils' understanding of social issues, Sam explains that the main purpose of English for the pupils at Tissington School is to expose them to as wide a range of literature as possible in order to broaden their perspectives on life outside of the immediate community. Sam is the only HoD in this study who describes his school as being located in a middle-class area, but he feels that the position of Tissington means that his pupils have a limited worldview which English can expand,

I do feel that we've been able to keep as broad a variety of texts and authors as we can manage each year practically and also sort of to allow the students to get an insight into different cultures, different worlds different ways of life, because as I said

> *to you before Tissington is a very middle class suburby [sic] place, outskirts of a small city, looks inward rather than outward*

Other HoDs in different communities also discuss this theme. Emma, for example, works at a school situated in a busy village, serving a geographically wide catchment area. She says, '*if I'm thinking of schools in this area we have students who don't have that cultural awareness*' and, like Sam, part of her role as Head of English is, '*to ensure that those students are exposed to anything beyond their community and their own experiences*'. Emma is not only concerned with the innate moral purpose of developing pupils' cultural awareness, she also understands that when pupils do not have such cultural awareness this can affect their examination outcomes. Giving an example of an English Language GCSE exam which required pupils to read about the Glastonbury Festival, Emma says,

> *they had no idea what the* Glastonbury Festival *was so if we're trying to bridge that cultural gap with them then they will be exposed to it in their language exams in the extracts they're required to read, if we don't do that through literature texts where else would they get that?*

She notes, '*our students in this community they don't read at home'* and goes on to discuss the effects of this lack of reading both in terms of school achievement, and in terms of their personal enjoyment,

> *I think it's deeply worrying that they don't have that opportunity, but that they're missing out on that enjoyment because the fact that when we have such open*

conversations and really detailed and thorough analysis of those characters and the texts, they play such a huge aspect in every part of life that they enjoy it so much in school, it has to happen in school, because they don't have those experiences elsewhere I think in terms of their cultural awareness they have not much

A number of HoDs echo Emma's deficit view. Helen notes that

for some of the kids in this type of community [school] might be the only chance they get to experience some of these things, because once they leave they're perhaps not going to open another book or read another poem

while Bill says, '*there is nobody out there in this community that is going to be exposed to Shakespeare of Dickens unless we expose them to it*'. In this way, the HoDs tend to see part of the purpose of English in their schools as working in the Cultural Heritage model, but they do not feel appear to feel particularly attached to it; they are more concerned about broader concepts of cultural capital.

6.3 Chapter Summary

This chapter has focused on the purposes of English in the schools in this study. For schools, English helps to construct their reputations, particularly in terms of GCSE examination outcomes. This, in turn, has an impact on the reputations of the English departments and teachers. English also has a distinct purpose for the pupils, which according to my interpretation of the data includes as a passport for adult life, especially in terms of employment both through achieving a good GCSE grade as well as being able to use the

skills of English to thrive. However, English is also seen to be vital for helping pupils develop their sense of society and to challenge locally held attitudes, whether these are about ethnicity, gender or social class, or whether they are about broadening pupils' cultural awareness. Yet, while the HoDs are drawn to helping pupils develop their sense of society, this is often done in a way which emphasises social problems; the HoDs tend to take a deficit approach to their schools' communities rather than help pupils develop their sense of belonging, their sense of *cynefin*, as is being encouraged in the Welsh curriculum (see 1.2.1).

In this chapter I have discussed the purpose of English in schools in ex-industrial communities of the East Midlands of England. I now turn my attention to discuss my interpretations of the HoD's view about the factors influencing the production of English in their schools.

Chapter 7: What factors influence the production of English in the schools?

This chapter analyses the interview data using Henri Lefebvre's triadic theory of spatial practice, introduced in his 1974/1991 text *The Production of Space* (Lefebvre, 1991). Initially I outline Lefebvre's theoretical framework in relation to the production of English as a school subject before exploring the interview data in depth. I then use the themes identified in the Methodology chapter to understand factors influencing the Heads of English departments (HoDs) and their role in the production of English.

Lefebvre's theory of spatial practice has been introduced above (1.2.1). Here, I explain in more detail how the three spaces, *conceived*, *perceived* and *lived*, relate to the production of English in English secondary schools. Lefebvre is clear that *conceived* spaces are the 'dominant space in any society' (Lefebvre, 1991, p.39) and in the context of English teaching such the conceived space includes the National Curriculum (NC); the academisation programme; different assessment tools such as the GCSE examination; and different accountability measures such as Progress 8 (DfE, 2018). However, while Lefebvre foregrounds the dominance of conceived spaces, he is also clear that perceived and lived spaces are also vital elements, all constantly interacting to produce everyday life. Through a focus on these spaces, I have identified four central codes influencing how the HoDs help to produce English: *Curriculum, Assessment*, *Organization of English* and *Agency and Leadership*. Within these major codes, several sub-codes are presented to add clarity and structure.

7.1 Curriculum

The curriculum comprises multiple elements (Kelly, 2009); here I am focusing on three in particular: content, assessment and organization. In this section I present my interpretations of how the conceived space, including the NC, accountability measures and the reformed GCSE examinations, interact with various elements within the HoD's perceived space, including available resources, which lead them to work within the lived space to produce and re-produce English. An important theme of the interviews is how the HoDs select what they teach, and there are various factors which I now discuss.

7.1.1 Time pressure

A major theme for the HoDs is the pressure they feel to maximise examination results with the time available to teach the subject, and this is keenly felt in KS4. An illustrative example of this is Helen's choice to teach Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. The choice of this as a GCSE text to be studied is dominated by the conceived space of the exam syllabus specification, but it is also influenced by the perceived space of the limited available time to teach, discussed earlier in this thesis (5.1.3); as Helen notes, '*we're not necessarily reading* Jekyll and Hyde *to enjoy it, we're reading it because it's shorter*'. Below, I explore some of the ways that different HoDs arrange the curriculum over the five years of KS3 and KS4 to best prepare their pupils for the GCSE (7.4.1).

7.1.2 Pupil Engagement

Another issue discussed by HoDs in this study is the difficulty engaging pupils, particularly boys, with the English curriculum. Bill, for example, expresses fatalism about the boys at Clumber,

> *realistically some of the boys who are difficult to engage, they know they're not going to do tremendously well in their exams, they know there's probably a job out*

there in a warehouse…how are they going to get engaged with Macbeth*, and why should they?*

Here, Bill makes a link between the perceived space of readily available, local, low-paid, low-skilled employment and the conceived space of the English literature curriculum the boys are required to follow if the school's reputation is to be maintained. He feels that the current curriculum does not suit the boys at Clumber School; in his lived space he would like to see the conceived space of the curriculum *'modernised, I'd like to see something where the kids aren't going to hate you when you say we're doing* A Christmas Carol'. Although Bill has chosen to teach these texts because they are felt by the department to maximise the chances for good pupil outcomes, as discussed above (Chapter 5.1.4), the emotive language, such as *'hate'*, illustrates how strongly Bill believes his pupils feel, even if there is a touch of hyperbole about his words.

When HoDs do alter their curricular models to engage boys they tend towards a particular type of text. Helen, for example, notes that the text choices she originally made for KS3 disengaged the pupils *'so we thought about it all the way through [from KS3 to KS4], what is going to engage our boys?*'. The curriculum was then changed to study *Power and Conflict*[22] poetry for the GCSE, rather than *Love and Relationships*, and *War Poetry* in KS3. Later *'we teach them* Romeo and Juliet *in Y10, and the boys love it actually, it starts with a fight scene which is brilliant*'. There is an assumption, echoed by other HoDs, that boys will be engaged by texts containing violence, or what one of my PGCE student teachers termed the 'Warrior

[22] *Power and Conflict* and *Love and Relationships* are thematically linked poems chosen by the GCSE examination board; pupils must study one group for the examination.

Curriculum'. Karen comments that *'our Y9, it's like the Year of Death [laughs], we changed the texts to suit the boys'*, the texts include *Macbeth*, *Lord of the Flies*, and *Blood Brothers*, all of which are known for their violence. Yet, it is also important to consider what the schools do with the texts, such as the example above of Karen and Martin using texts to challenge locally held social attitudes (6.2.2).

It is also important to recognise that several HoDs indicate how much their pupils enjoy English. Emma notes that '*our students love the literature element so much…we are able to really drive their enthusiasm and passion for the subject*' Such examples suggest how the HoDs have used their creativity in their lived spaces to produce new conceived spaces of their school curricular models in ways they feel suit the needs of their pupils. The HoDs remain within the framework of system-level conceived spaces, primarily the GCSE, but they are able to use a degree of agency to also work within the perceived spaces of their community as they understand it; the extent of HoD's agency is discussed in detail below (7.5).

7.1.3 Social Justice

A third sub-theme influencing curriculum content, especially in KS3, is social justice, with texts being chosen to encourage pupils to look beyond their own lives and experiences, 'to read not so much about different people but to read about people differently' (Meek, 1988, p.29). Sarah, for example, is very principled in her choices of texts to teach, *'I refuse to have* Lord of the Flies *here because there's no women in the text at all*'. I have shown above how Helen is particularly concerned with community attitudes towards specific groups, focusing on ethnicity in particular, and the following quotation explores this in more depth,

Ofsted have introduced this term now 'more breadth and depth' and I think, breadth at KS3 is a bit of breathing space, because now they've removed pretty much anything from other cultures at GCSE, and it's all very British. In KS3 we try to look at more modern texts, when it comes to poetry we try to do poetry from, especially female writers as well, and poetry from other cultures, because that's all gone out of the GCSE spec, you know we are supposed to prepare them for the GCSE and we want to get them good results, but at the same time, for some of the kids in this type of community it might be the only chance they get to experience some of these things, because once they leave they're perhaps not going to open another book or read another poem

Helen shows how she works within her lived space to manipulate the conceived space of the Ofsted regulatory framework in an attempt to resist the narrow nature of a different conceived space, the GCSE curriculum. She is also conscious of the perceived space of her community where *'they're perhaps not going to open another book or read another poem'*, so she wants to ensure that the pupils read texts from other cultures while they are with her. Here we can see how a Lefebvrian analysis of spatial practice reveals one aspect of how one HoD produces English in her school.

However, deeper analysis of Helen's language hints at hidden restrictions, existing within her perceived space and which are contingent on her lived space. For example, she talks about *'poetry from other cultures'*, the phrase used in previous iterations of the NC to describe poetry not written by British poets. Helen might be using this phrase knowing that I, as an ex-teacher of English, will be familiar with it. However, the phrase *'Poetry from*

Other Cultures' explicitly others and distances such poetry, prohibiting it from being admitted into the conceived space of the traditional English literature canon, even though these poems have entered the lives of millions of British people through their experiences of education. I suspect she is also using the phrase to refer to a narrow range of poets and poems, such as *Blessing* by Imtiaz Dharker, *Nothing's Changed* by Tatamkhula Afrika or *Island Man* by Grace Nichols, poems included in multiple school anthologies since the 1990s.

My interpretation of the data is consistent with long-standing concerns expressed by English teachers about '*poetry from other cultures'* (e.g. Dymoke, 2002) and supports Elliott's more recent view (Elliott, 2020). Elliott argues that there is a risk that the range of texts voluntarily chosen by schools to be taught under this banner is as narrow as the range of texts and authors encouraged by macro-level conceived spaces such as the examination specifications. This risks simply replacing one canon with another; ways need to be found to enable teachers of English to see beyond such conceived spaces, and indeed such perceived spaces, so that the curriculum they can imagine in their lived spaces can be fully realized. There are some examples of this in the research literature, such as Yandell's work with student teachers which not only found more diverse literature being taught than might be commonly seen, but also a more diverse approach to pedagogy than is often reported (Yandell, Mahamed and Ziad, 2022). Yet Helen's comments are representative of the HoDs in this study who typically use the phrase *poetry from other cultures* as shorthand for diversifying the curriculum, particularly in KS3.

I am not intending to criticize Helen or the other HoDs in this account. Helen has little choice but to work with the perceived spaces of her own experience, both as a teacher and as a pupil at the school; she is of an age where she would likely have been taught *'Poetry from Other Cultures'* as a topic. She will also have to contend with the perceived spaces of available stock; new novels can be expensive to purchase, while poems can be more readily downloaded and photocopied. She also has to work within the conceived spaces dominating the curriculum such as the NC and GCSE exam specifications. This illustrates how perceived and conceived spaces interact to either broaden or, as in this case, restrict lived spaces. I interpret this as an example of how everyday life is dominated by the vision of those who produce the documents in the conceived space, which is consistent with Lefebvre's thinking (Lefebvre, 1991, p.39). This shows how HoD's reliance on the perceived space can have unintended consequences and re-produce curricular models, even when a HoD such as Helen is attempting to do something more socially just. I argue that this is particularly dangerous for society when school curriculum models are built on ideologically contentious foundations, such as with the National Curriculum (Eaglestone, 2021; Hodgson & Harris, 2022).

7.1.4 Speaking and Listening

A further sub-theme is the position of Speaking and Listening (S&L) in the English curriculum. This is contentious for the HoDs because while the NC emphasizes the importance of S&L, insisting that it is assessed at GCSE level, the assessment itself does not contribute to pupils' overall grades. Wendy says, '*I'd like Speaking and Listening back please, because I think it was always a travesty that it was never assessed properly'*. The removal of S&L has led to some of the HoDs re-evaluating how they include it in their curricular models. Sarah comments that,

> *I feel quite resentful that we have to do the whole speaking and listening task that doesn't count towards anything, that is a logistical faff to get done and then it doesn't count towards anything but I do definitely see the value in it; I don't know [if it should be part of the GCSE like it used to be] I think for this area it was really difficult, all of the things like using Standard English it didn't really benefit them*

Sarah resents the need to assess a task that does not contribute to overall grades, but she clearly feels that there is a benefit to teaching S&L. Her irritation with the bureaucratic demands of the conceived space of the NC is clear. Sarah develops the idea that for pupils from *'this area'* Standard English (SE) is a difficult dialect for them to use. The influence of the perceived space of the school community is interesting because it suggests that pupils from *'this area'* find SE too difficult to learn and that it is not much use to them. This suggests a deficit view of the pupils' abilities, and it also suggests that the dialect of SE does not hold significant cultural capital in this ex-industrial community. Sarah's ideas contrast with the literature about SE which emphasizes the importance of the dialect for pupils as they enter workplaces beyond their own communities (Dixon, 1975; Mohamed, 2020) and it could be argued that Sarah is unintentionally limiting her pupils' life chances. However, I would argue that within her lived space Sarah imagines a curriculum model of S&L which has *'value'* for her community, including a broader definition of dialect, not only SE.

Bill takes a different perspective. He stresses that the English curriculum at Clumber has been altered to include more teaching of S&L, and like Sarah, this also comes from a deficit view of the local community. As briefly noted above (p.130), Bill is concerned with the

standards of spoken English at Clumber, '*the speaking and listening side of things, developing that, we're doing a lot of work in a mining area, some of the language that's used [by the pupils], you don't know it's English sometimes'.* Bill appears to be more accepting of the conceived space of the NC than Sarah, but he also illustrates the influence of the perceived space of the local *'mining area'*. Bill feels that part of his role is to close the apparent deficit gap between local use of language and the use of SE. There is no acknowledgement of the value of Funds of Knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2005), nor the value of local and regional heritage, emphasized in the *Newbolt Report* (BoE, 1921) and highlighted in socio-linguistic studies identifying that the local dialects have remained similar to those represented in texts such as D. H. Lawrence's East Midlands-based *Sons and Lovers* (Hillier, 2013).

Taken together, both Sarah and Bill are developing their curricular models to include more teaching of Speaking and Listening, but they approach this from different directions. Sarah challenges the cultural capital of SE for her community while Bill challenges the cultural capital of his community's heritage. Either way, both HoDs want more S&L in their curricular models.

7.2 Assessment

The importance of assessment in the curriculum is not a new phenomenon, as discussed in the Literature Review, and it is clear from the data that the HoDs in this study remain concerned about the relationship between assessment and the subject. However, their responses to the introduction of the fully terminal examination were not what I expected.

7.2.1 Closed Book Examination

As discussed above, the reformed GCSE moved away from coursework to fully terminal, closed-book examinations (Gove, 2014a; Marsh, 2017; Stock, 2017). However, any concerns felt by the HoDs in this study were short-lived. Sam is typical,

> *you know from what I feared when they brought in those 100% exam those fears haven't been [realised], if anything it's actually benefitted us and our results for the last two years have been the best progress we've ever had as a faculty*

Other HoDs saw that the pressure placed on departments and pupils to redo coursework was ethically unsound. Sarah notes that,

> *I think at KS4 for the first half of my career, all we really did was course work forever, and it didn't prepare them for the exams and some of what we did was on the boundary of what you were supposed to be doing with coursework*

With the conceived space of coursework, however, it appears that some schools were using their perceived spaces of curriculum time to re-do pupils' coursework until it reached the required standard. The HoDs in this study recognise this and are happy to move away from this position. As Helen says,

> *it's good to have more time just teaching, because I think so much went into the coursework and then controlled assessment, and even though we weren't supposed to draft, we drafted and whatever else happened, so I think in that way it is putting*

> *more onus back on the kids as opposed to, especially in some schools where essentially coursework was written for the kids, so I think it's better in that way*

Helen's phrase *'we drafted and whatever else happened…essentially coursework was written for the kids'* hints to me that the school was not entirely ethical in its approach to pupil reworking coursework.

Helen's point about having *'more time just teaching'* is diluted by the increased emphasis on the final exam in the reformed curriculum. Bill is typical of the HoDs, describing the GCSE as a *'memory test'* with a detrimental effect on pedagogy,

> *It's embedding that knowledge, not just going through it, but embedding it, two exams on each GCSE, closed book exams, you know we're just doing our mocks now on Literature Paper 2, just marking them and you see that some haven't used a few stock quotations, and you think, 'well, how now between September and May am I going to embed those quotations', so they go in and they will remember them*

For Bill, subject 'knowledge' about English Language and English Literature has been reduced to whether or not his pupils can remember key quotations, reminiscent of Arnold's concerns from the nineteenth century discussed in the Chapter Two (p.55); pedagogical 'knowledge' has been reduced to how his team will ensure that the pupils can remember the right quotations and use them in the right way to achieve a good GCSE grade. This implies that the perceived space of time available to teach new content has been reduced so that it can be used for exam preparation, ensuring that taught knowledge is *'embedded'*.

According to the HoDs, much teaching time was lost under previous GCSE models to re-doing coursework, but under the current conceived space of the GCSE assessment framework, the perceived space of teaching time is now similarly directed away from teaching English content to teaching exam-skills content. This illustrates how some HoDs in use their imagination in their lived space to create a meso-level conceived space of department-level policies designed to maximise pupils' chances of success in exams conceived at the macro-level. This is another example of the dominance of conceived spaces discussed by Lefebvre (Lefebvre, 1991, p.39).

7.3 Organization of English

The reforms to the conceived space of the GCSE have focused English departments on preparing their pupils for the final examination, as discussed above, and this has implications for how the English curriculum is conceived and organized in these schools. The organization of English can be considered in three ways. Firstly, the relationship between KS3 and KS4; secondly, the relationship between English Language and English Literature managed; finally, the organization of teaching groups. Different schools offer different solutions to these three issues, indicating that they can exercise a degree of agency and responsiveness to their local contexts. The following analysis reveals the extent to which system-level conceived spaces dominate the production of English, including the influence of Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs).

7.3.1 KS3 v KS4

The ways in which schools distinguish curriculum content between KS3 and KS4 differ across the schools, but it is also apparent that their views are not always fixed. Martin, at Stanage, discusses how he has adapted KS3 to explicitly prepare pupils for the demands of the GCSE taken at the end of KS4,

we have focused our curriculum but I don't feel that we've unnecessarily narrowed it…my job is to get those students through the GCSE so they have the most possible freedom afterwards, if that involved narrowing or focusing the curriculum a bit at KS3, so be it, I can sleep easily at night knowing that, so for us, I've tailored everything to an aspect of the exam, I freely admit that

In this quotation Martin explains how the conceived space of the English curriculum at Stanage has been *'focused'* to meet the demands of another conceived space, the GCSE specification, so that the pupils have *'the most possible freedom'* after their education. Yet his language, *'I can sleep easily at night…I freely admit that'*, suggests that his lived space admits that other HoDs will take different approaches, implying that he feels his approach is perhaps at odds with the views of his peers. Helen also illustrates how the curriculum at her school, Scarsdale is geared towards the GCSE from the start of Y7, *'every assessment was a GCSE question, so you might study a novel in Y7 and then the question at the end would be linked to a GCSE'*, but she also feels that *'I think we've probably gone too far'*, illustrating that the curriculum is not a fixed entity and can be altered.

A different example of schools' responses to system-level conceived spaces, such as the GCSE specifications and accountability measures, is the curriculum developed by the MAT to which Ladybower School belongs, and the school's response to the MAT. Michael, the HoD at Ladybower School, says that the MAT introduced *'a secret five-year GCSE curriculum'* in which pupils from Y7 onwards would *'attempt GCSE style questions'*. The fact that the MAT developed a conceived space of a five-year curriculum is not especially surprising, and there

are other examples of a similar approach at schools within this study such as Stanage Academy, above. However, the idea that the five-year curriculum envisaged by the MAT should be *'secret'* reveals a sense of unease about their curriculum, appearing to originate from the MAT itself, concealing it from a wider audience. The audience could include parents and, perhaps, other schools and MATs, but it would also include Ofsted whose *Inspection Framework* constitutes part of schools' conceived spaces.

Ofsted are part of the system-level conceived spaces dominating schools in terms of accountability and thus their approach is important for schools. The explicit view of Ofsted regarding the curriculum is that 'there is no 'preferred length' of KS3.' (Harford, 2020), but they do want to see a 'rich, ambitious and well-sequenced' (ibid.) curriculum across KS3. Ofsted have suggested that 'In the *worst-case* scenario of a three-year KS4, a school will simply pull GCSE teaching forward, stretching a two-year course over three' (ibid., emphasis added). Ofsted's use of the phrase 'worst-case scenario' implies that anything other than a two-year model is not what they would ideally like to see in schools, contradicting the idea that there is no preferred length of time for KS4. Ofsted cannot imagine the five-year model suggested by Ladybower's MAT within their lived space, and it appears that the MAT want to keep such a model concealed from the gaze of regulatory bodies such as Ofsted. This indicates how schools and MATs experience the domination of system-level, hierarchical, conceived spaces implemented in a top-down manner (Ball, 2003; Perryman *et al.*, 2018). While all parties share the same goal, to maximise GCSE outcomes, the MATs, individual schools and school leaders in this study, do not feel sufficient agency to openly celebrate their 'academy freedoms' or to overtly resist system-level conceived spaces which do not

work for them. However, within their lived space, some HoDs offer covert resistance (Fuller, 2019).

In the case of Ladybower School the governing MAT resisted the intentions of the NC and Ofsted by devising the *'secret five-year GCSE'*. This suggests that the MAT prioritised the publicly available Progress 8 data over the broader intellectual experience for pupils conceived by the NC and Ofsted; such data informs the perceived space of the school context, including the school's reputation. However, in an example of the difficulties of policy implementation (Ball *et al.*, 2012), Michael's lived space recognised that the '*genius*' five-year GCSE English curriculum was not 'rich, ambitious and well-sequenced' (Harford, 2020). Rather, in his words, *'it was just awful…what Y7 get now is a rubbish version of GCSE [LAUGHS] so they attempt GCSE style questions that they're not very good at and they just do that for five years'*. Michael then, in turn, covertly resisted the conceived spaces of the MAT.

I will discuss what this example suggests about teacher agency later in this chapter, but for now I want to concentrate on another aspect of subject organization, the relationship between Language and Literature.

7.3.2 English Language and English Literature

A significant choice made by HoDs is the approach they take to whether to teach the English Language GCSE and the English Literature GCSE as separate or integrated subjects, and school adopt different positions. Sarah at Thornbridge, for example, teaches Language and Literature in an integrated way, *'because there are lots of transferable skills between the two courses'*, while Peter at Dovedale teach the subjects separately in part because *'it*

makes timetabling easier'. Michael is more conscious of the effect of GCSE outcomes on his colleagues' professional reputations (see 6.1.1),

> *We divide them [LANG AND LIT] out and I make sure each group gets two teachers as well because they double count for the school I didn't want it all sitting on one teacher's head if something went horribly wrong, if someone went off or that class didn't pass*

Michael reveals the extent to which he is concerned about the ways that accountability measures linked with GCSE performance can affect teachers' careers. This implies the influence of a further set of conceived spaces in the production of English, including Performance Management policies and, perhaps, the *Teachers' Standards* (DfE, 2011). This suggests to me that these policies are deeply embedded in school practice, and that the influence of these conceived spaces on the perceived spaces of everyday school life is unquestioned.

7.3.3 Teaching Groups

Having explored how the Key Stages and the subjects are organized I now explore how individual teaching groups are organized. I have shown how Sarah at Thornbridge organizes KS4 English as an integrated subject, with Language and Literature taught in the same lesson. Sarah has also re-organized how individual English groups are constituted in KS4. Sarah has dismantled the 'ability groups' traditionally used at the school in KS4, replacing them with 'mixed-ability groups'. She has not re-organized the groups in response to the evidence about the propensity for 'ability groups' to exacerbate social divisions in a form of

segregation (Francis *et al.*, 2017). Rather, Sarah has produced her new conception of grouping pupils to improve their behaviour and their engagement with lessons,

> *I got to a point where I thought there are three groups, both in Y10 and 11 that need to be broken up, you know they're just not teachable at the moment…the relationships in there, who the kids are, it's exacerbated because they've not had permanent teachers*

In the phrase *'they're just not teachable'* Sarah emphasizes the divide between pupils and teachers, hinting that the responsibility for being *'teachable'* rests with the pupils. She mitigates this by explaining that the perceived space of her department was dominated by temporary supply teachers because of problems recruiting permanent staff; this led to a breakdown in relationships between pupils and teachers rendering the lessons ineffective. Later in this thesis I discuss how the relationship between conceived spaces, such as policies, and perceived spaces, such as available teachers, is more influenced by the perceived spaces than Lefebvre appears to acknowledge. Sarah's situation also illustrates how schools can alter either the conceived spaces or the perceived spaces, or both. In Sarah's case she altered the conceived space of her previous policy around setting teaching groups to suit the perceived space of the time, before eventually altering the perceived space of the English department by recruiting permanent teachers or English. This indicates that Sarah has a degree of agency to work within her lived space, conceiving a curriculum she feels is appropriate for the perceived spaces of her school environment.

Ultimately, however, Sarah's decision to move to mixed-ability groups is an extension of the debate about how to maximize pupil progress. Sarah's analysis was that the pupils were not making sufficient progress because of their lack of engagement and that the lack of engagement was because of the mix of the pupils in the groups and their lack of positive relationship with a revolving door of supply teachers. While the staffing situation has stabilised at Thornbridge, Sarah clearly felt the need to break up the groups rather than see if they could develop more positive relationships with her new, more stable team of teachers. My interpretation of her reasoning for this is that at the heart her decision-making is the desire to maximize pupil engagement with a view to maximizing examination outcomes.

7.3.4 English Departments

The ways in which department staffing, part of schools' perceived spaces, is constituted is important for the ways in which conceived spaces are enacted. All the HoDs discuss their teams, typically noting that they have a mix of new teachers, but also very experienced teachers including several colleagues who had previously worked as HoDs and whose experiences help to produce English in their schools. Bill works with the ex-HoD from a nearby school, *'so I'm getting a lot of advice from him as well, pulling from his years of experience'*; Martin's second in department is the ex-HoD at Stanage Community School who *'is very good, in terms of her wider role in the school I think she is very holistic'*, perhaps providing a counterpoint to Martin's focus on GCSE outcomes. At Dovedale, not only is the second in department an ex-HoD from a nearby school who *'decided that he just didn't want all the pressure anymore'*, but the Head of Media is also an ex-HoD, this time from an inner-city school. Such colleagues offer a mix of pedagogical and leadership experience to the apparent benefit of the wider team.

Other English departments also include colleagues with senior leadership roles across the school; Martin has the school's Deputy Head, while Sam also has a Deputy Head and an Assistant Head; Wendy even has the Headteacher who teaches Y11. While it can be an advantage to have members of SLT in a department it also means that these colleagues tend to have a reduced teaching load, as discussed above (5.1.4), sometimes leading to classes split between teachers which inevitably affects how English is taught. This analysis challenges the idea of 'the English department' as a homogeneous entity as it can be presented (Furlong & Ogborn, 1995). The HoD obviously has a major role, (Leithwood, 2016), but the rest of the team do as well, in ways that are unique to their perceived spaces.

7.4 Agency

The responses of the HoDs to the system-level conceived spaces of a reformed curriculum, reformed assessments and reformed accountability structures indicate that the HoDs feel a sense of agency. I am using 'agency' following Priestley et al. (Priestley *et al.*, 2012), which has been successfully used elsewhere (e.g Watson *et al.*, 2022). Building on the work of Biesta and Tedder, Priestley et al. define agency as 'a matter of personal capacity to act, combined with the contingencies of the environment within which such action occurs' (Priestley *et al.*, 2012, p.196), and agency is bestowed by ecological factors 'including social structure, cultural forms and the material environment' (ibid., p.198), alluded to in Chapter 5.

7.4.1 School level opportunities and constraints

Wendy, at Peveril, highlights her sense of agency, regarding pedagogy. Wendy encourages her team to work within their lived spaces to imagine and enact innovative ways to make lessons more engaging. She illustrates this with the example of one of the English teachers who encourages colleagues to teach with physical props such as playing cards and poker

chips to engage the pupils. This is one example of how the department feels it has the agency to use pedagogical approaches not often seen in the discourse about the prevalence of a narrow range of techniques (e.g Gibbons, 2019). This example also reflects a school-level conceived space bestowing such agency, as well as a department level perceived space incorporating the resources to teach in this way; these perceived spaces include the ITE coordinator himself as well as his experience and mindset coupled with colleagues' willingness to experiment with pedagogy.

Yet, while the school-level conceived space of policies regarding pedagogy enables a degree of pedagogical agency for Wendy, the extent of such agency is

> *still driven by exams, ultimately, whatever words, however you like to dress it up, we're still driven by the requirements of the exams, so my responsibility to those students is to give them those life chances that will allow them to do anything else*

Here, Wendy expresses how the system-level conceived spaces of the assessment system continue to dominate the production of English, including the leadership of the subject. Wendy can use engaging approaches towards pedagogy as far as allowed by the system-level conceived spaces of assessment and curriculum, and the school-level conceived space of policy regarding pedagogy. As noted earlier in this thesis, Michael also comments that he is trusted '*to do what I think is the right thing for the students*' as long as the results are the right ones for the school, with the implication being that his room to 'manoeuvre' (Priestley et al., 2012) would be curtailed if the results dropped or he cannot recruit a good team, as has been the case for Science and Maths in his school (see 5.2.3). Recent research indicates

that some schools allow much more limited agency regarding pedagogy than is the case in some of the schools in this research (e.g. Gilbert, 2022), but it is clear that the HoD's agency remains circumscribed and dominated by conceived spaces, particularly around the relationship between examination results and schools' reputations.

Sarah takes a different approach to this theme. As noted above, Sarah had recently re-organised teaching groups in KS4 from being set by ability to being mixed ability,

> *I think the headteacher had a lot of doubts about them and he did raise that several times and continues to raise them now and will continue to, which is fair enough but ultimately I have done it, it hasn't stopped me or told me to go back or anything like that, if the results don't come through then we probably would, but then I'd be looking at that myself anyway if they'd had an effect on results. So, in fairness, I think we have a lot of autonomy*

This highlights Sarah's sense of agency, '*ultimately I have done it*', but this also suggests that Sarah feels this is bounded by performativity measures such as exam results, echoing Wendy's comments. Sarah also suggests that she has internalized the link between metrics and leadership behaviours, *'if the results don't come through then we probably would [return to setting by ability], but then I'd be looking at them myself anyway if they'd had an effect on results'*.

A further constraint on the HoD's agency is the influence of a developing school system, particularly the relationship between schools and Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs), which I now discuss.

7.4.2 System level opportunities and constraints

The ways in which the school system has evolved since the education reforms of the 2010s have led many schools to alter the ways that they work with external partners, and the extent of their influence (Greany & Higham, 2018). One way that some MATs work with their schools is through an emerging role, sometimes known as Subject Director. This role operates in different ways in different MATs, but is often similar to a Head of Department operating across the different schools in a MAT, sometimes with executive powers over individual schools (see Goodwyn, 2023). Three HoDs in this thesis discuss their MAT's Subject Directors for English. Helen's attitude towards her Subject Director is positive,

> *she's been brilliant really…she's kind of the same [as me], she's almost a kind of knowledge base really, she marks all the GCSE papers, she always feels like she's ahead of the game, like, "We need to do this, we maximize results if we do this"*

The Subject Director worked with Helen to help raise academic outcomes for the pupils in terms of GCSE results; however, there is no indication that they worked together to help Helen develop the KS3 curriculum which is so important to her, as noted above. Like the HoDs discussed above, Helen feels a sense of agency, but I infer from her comments that it is the serious business of GCSE results that 'really matter' (DfE, 2010, p.3) for the MAT.

Emma, however, at Elvaston School, is disparaging about Subject Directors in her MAT. She emphasizes the transient nature of the post-holders, *'I've seen two…subject directors in the post who haven't lasted long, who haven't had a huge impact in terms of supporting me or this school or the students'* and she is *'sceptical'* about the appointment of a new Subject Director *'that would raise some anxieties because I've got no control over that, I don't know what's happening with it and that would make me feel a little uncomfortable with it'*; this highlights how in Emma's lived space she imagines a problematic relationship because of her experiences and her desire to maintain as much professional agency as possible.

The example of Michael, the HoD at Ladybower School, is illuminating in what it suggests about the relationship between the different levels of conceived spaces and one HoDs perceived and lived spaces. Ladybower is a member of the same MAT as Elvaston School and I have briefly explained above how Michael resisted the MAT's drive for a five-year English curriculum (p.155). When discussing how the MAT-designed curriculum was introduced during a meeting, Michael says *'everyone [was] very polite, so the first meeting we all politely said we'd do this, then went home and did our own thing'*. This indicates to me how Michael, a HoD with over thirty years' experience teaching at the same school, resisted the drive by the MAT, which can itself be seen as an act of resistance against system-level policy, in this case the traditional three-year/two-year split for KS3/KS4. While the MAT devised a curriculum meant to be kept a *'secret'* from Ofsted, Michael concealed his curriculum from the MAT itself. He justifies this by referencing the perceived space of his experience as HoD at Ladybower School allows his sense of agency and creativity in his lived space to stick to a curriculum which he feels is best for his pupils, *'you know, I'd carefully*

chosen what I thought was best for our students, you know I thought, unless you can show me some better results or some better resources I don't want any part of it'.

Michael's words can be recognised as 'covert resistance' being made 'overt' (Fuller, 2019) in the context of the interview; they can also be an example of a research participant feeling that he could make controversial comments to me, perhaps recognising a fellow middle-aged (ex-) Head of English whom he assumed would share his values. Perhaps he saw in me a potential fellow conspirator, sympathetic to his willingness to quietly disrupt the power of the MAT, even if the MAT seems to have considered Michael to be a fellow conspirator in their own plans to conceal their practice from the power of Ofsted. Ultimately, both the five-year curriculum of the MAT and Ladybower's own English curriculum, which was actually more in keeping with Ofsted's conceived space of a two-year GCSE curriculum, were attempts to develop an education system predicated on the dominant model of 'what really matters' (DfE, 2010, p.3): maximizing examination outcomes.

Thus, there are layers of concealment, but each party is ultimately moving towards the same aim: meeting the demands of system-level conceived spaces so that improved GCSE results lead to improved P8 performance, leading in turn to a higher school reputation influencing parents and, perhaps, Ofsted. Even though Michael's curriculum was concealed from the MAT, just as the MAT concealed the nature of the five-year curriculum it envisaged, the approaches of both the MAT and the HoD were geared towards improving GCSE results. The fact that both parties felt the need to conceal their practice indicates the degree of anxiety they felt about being overt to their respective higher authorities (Ball, 2003).

Yet it also suggests that they both felt sufficient agency to implement their own curriculum models (Priestley *et al.*, 2012). Michael felt that he could continue with his own curriculum as he had the full support of his headteacher who *'assured me from the start, "You're great, just do what you want."'*. This simultaneously indicates the headteacher's ambivalent attitude towards the MAT in this respect while also offering an example of how a headteacher supports their middle leaders. Here Michael uses his experience and agency, where his perceived and lived spaces interact, to develop and implement a school-level conceived space, in this case the English curriculum, which he feels is most appropriate to meet the requirements of the system-level conceived space of GCSE results. He also has agency bestowed on him by his headteacher, reminding us that agency can be recalled as well as bestowed and it is not Michael's exclusive property (ibid.).

This degree of control, and the ways that it has become embedded in the everyday professional life of the HoDs in this study, has the effect of distancing the government from directing schools, shifting the focus to MATs and enabling schools to direct their attention away from centralized control. Central control remains very strong even when it is obscured by new layers of management in the form of MATs (Innes, 2021). HoDs' degrees of agency, most clearly in in respect to KS4, is very weak. Michael implies that he has more agency over KS3, and he gives examples of new texts, such as Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Road,* which he is introducing, not previously on the curriculum. Yet even here, there is a sense that he was more influenced than he would like to admit, which is in line with previous research (Watson *et al.*, 2022).

He talks about having a five-year GCSE curriculum, introduced by the MAT, the '*genius plan*' explored above, but which has since been abandoned. It seems that at the beginning of the relationship with the MAT, Michael was more compliant than he would like to be seen by me, but now, in the context of constantly changing Subject Directors, he is more confident to revert to the previous model developed in the school. He is confident in expressing his sense of agency, emphasizing how the perceived space of his experience is more important than the conceived spaces of the MAT. Yet he remains committed to meeting the needs of the conceived spaces of the government. Both the MAT and the school are journeying to the same destination, albeit on slightly differing courses.

7.5 Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have analysed how English is produced in secondary schools using Lefebvre's triadic framework of spatial practice. I have shown how the production of English is dominated by conceived spaces of system-level policy such as the National Curriculum, Progress 8, examination specifications and Ofsted inspection frameworks. Such policies dominate and regulate both the content, the assessment and the organization of the subject, seeking to control what is taught and how it is taught. The HoDs in this study are able to work in their lived spaces to a degree, using their imaginations, values and experience to resist control to an extent, and there are some clear examples of the HoDs being allowed by headteachers the agency to act in the ways that they feel are best for their pupils. However, the fact that such agency is allowed indicates that the HoD's ability to act is circumscribed by higher level conceived spaces, with the system-level being central government; this regulates their capacity to lead.

This study also suggests a limitation with Lefebvre's framework. While he was clear that conceived spaces 'dominate space in any society' (Lefebvre, 1991, p.39), I argue that this study suggests that a greater degree of significance could be afforded to perceived spaces than Lefebvre allows. It is notable, for example, that Sarah has to re-organize the teaching groups because of problems caused by the perceived space of which staff she has available to teach. Wendy, along with several other HoDs, highlights the roles that the experience and attitude of the perceived space of her team have in developing pedagogy. Other HoDs highlight the influence of the perceived space of available texts in determining what is taught. I argue, then, that while it remains the case that conceived spaces are indeed the dominant spaces in the production of English as Lefebvre suggests, the influence of perceived spaces perhaps takes a greater prominence in the production of English than previously thought.

In the following chapter I conclude this thesis by drawing together the three research questions and suggesting how this research can be further developed.

Chapter 8: Conclusion and Recommendations

8.1 The Position of English

According to my interpretations of the data presented in this thesis, English has an influential, but uncomfortable position in secondary schools in ex-industrial communities in the East Midlands of England. Following the data in this thesis, I argue that English does indeed have a 'pre-eminent place' in secondary schools (DfE, 2014a, p.14), but this position comes at a high cost, determined by the importance of English for its influence of schools' reputations and its role as a passport for pupils into the workforce. This limits English and it now lacks the broader purposes identified by earlier thinkers. High-stakes qualifications, testing propositional, scientific-like knowledge dominate a subject which has been seen as a means for developing personal growth and cultural analysis (DES, 1989; Dixon, 1975). Yet, this thesis also demonstrates how some Heads of English use what limited agency they have and resist the pressure they feel to solely focus on exams so that English can remain a tool for social justice.

In this concluding chapter I outline the answers to my research questions, demonstrating how this thesis make some original contributions to the field of research into English education. I make four main recommendations resulting from my findings, before suggesting avenues for further research. I finish with a personal statement about this thesis.

Chapter 5 illustrates the important place of English in the schools. The HoDs feel that English is often prioritized over other subjects; it is well staffed and generally respected by Senior Leadership Teams (SLTs); material resources such as books and money are felt to be sufficient to maintain standards. However, while English classrooms are functional, the teaching environment feels tired and dated. While the HoDs are outwardly positive in their

outlook it also feels to me that they are materially making the most of what they have rather than always making the most of what English can be.

Chapter Six shows how the HoDs feel that for the schools English is inextricably linked with how accountability measures such as Progress 8 (P8) affect institutional reputations and there is an underlying frustration apparent in several interviews. Martin, for example, describes the sense that they are forced to '*betray*' English in the name of performativity; they are constantly conscious of the impact of their work on an Ofsted inspection, and how this might affect the reputation of their schools and colleagues.

The HoDs feel that the purpose of English for pupils is primarily as a passport, using GCSE qualifications *'to get them out of the area, to give them opportunities somewhere else*' as Martin says. While schools make more pupils than ever study both English Language and English Literature GCSEs, pedagogy has become principally directed towards examinations rather than the subject itself. English qualifications are vital, but assessments rarely encourage a love of language or literature. Pupils experience English as a *'memory test'*, full of examinable facts, but, as Michael comments, lacking in engagement, *'with the new GCSE the students don't love it as they used to'*; this is reflected in the decline in the numbers of pupils studying English post-16 (Ofqual, 2022).

Yet this chapter also shows how some HoDs are working within the confines of their contexts so that English retains, in part, a wider purpose in promoting a socially just curriculum. Several schools take the opportunities afforded by the revised NC to teach complex issues including ethnicity, gender and social class, primarily in KS3. This resonates

with international research into the teaching of English, and how it is rooted in social justice and personal growth (e.g. Elliott & Hodgson, 2021; Goodwyn, 2019c; Yates et al., 2019).

Using Lefebvre's triadic framework of spatial practice (Lefebvre, 1991), Chapter Seven highlights factors influencing how the HoDs produce English. This analysis shows that conceived spaces dominating the production of English include the NC and accountability measures, particularly P8 and Ofsted. These influence approaches to the content, pedagogy and organization of English lessons. The production of the subject is also influenced by the HoDs' sense of agency and leadership. The HoDs enjoy their limited agency to choose appropriate content for the pupils, but this thesis confirms recent research in English schools showing the limits of their agency (Cushing, 2023a; Gilbert, 2022; Watson et al., 2022). Sometimes HoDs feel that they need to resist the influence of MATs, and confident, experienced HoDs can do this, working within their lived spaces to use perceived and conceived spaces to produce a curriculum appropriate for their schools. This furthers what is known about the everyday factors experienced and used by middle leaders to produce curriculum models in English secondary schools.

8.2 Claims to originality

One original element of this thesis is that it illuminates the place, purpose and production of English in secondary schools in ex-industrial communities in the East Midlands of England; such schools are rarely represented in contemporary research into the teaching of English across the country. There is much valuable research into English in urban schools, with London particularly well represented, but schools in the communities of the East Midlands of England which I have focused on have different characteristics to urban schools and this

research makes a new contribution to how English is understood. An example of how these communities contrast with urban schools is the proportion of adults identifying as White British; this is much higher in the schools studied in this research than in urban contexts (see 1.4) and this research shows how schools in both, very different contexts recognize the importance and urgency of diversifying the English curriculum. Schools in multicultural contexts are attempting to diversify the curriculum, in part, so that their pupils can see themselves in the texts they read; the schools in this study are attempting to diversify the English curriculum, in part, to challenge prevailing local attitudes so that their pupils have a greater chance of understanding the rich diversity of the world, so that they 'can read people differently' (Meek, 1988, p.29).

Another contribution made by this thesis is to show how middle leaders can use their limited agency to adapt the English curriculum to their local contexts. The voices of Heads of English departments are not often heard in educational research, and when they are they can be shown to act against younger staff members' attempts to resist the current curriculum (e.g. Cushing, 2023a). This thesis makes an original contribution to both the literature about middle leadership and the teaching of English as it shows how some HoDs are concerned about their pupils' social attitudes and values, adjusting their curricular models accordingly. There are also examples in this thesis of HoDs actively encouraging colleagues to innovate, both in terms of subject content and subject pedagogy. This research also highlights the differences between individual HoDs, who can be treated as a homogeneous group in the literature about middle leadership.

A further original element of this thesis is how it illustrates some ways that MATs and middle leaders attempt to resist centrally imposed policies in the day-to-day production of curriculum models. One MAT in this study initially resists the NC model of a three-year KS3 and a two-year KS4, while the HoDs resist this approach in favour of locally held understandings of their schools' perceived spaces. Ultimately, however, both the MAT and the HoDs work towards the needs of the dominant conceived space of the NC, confirming that schools can be 'outmaneuvered' (Goodwyn, 2019c; Priestley et al., 2012) by system-level policies. This thesis, then, makes an original contribution to research into how schools produce curriculum, including the role of middle leaders and MATs.

In terms of theory, this research makes an original use of Lefebvre's triadic theory of spatial practice. The 'spatial turn' has been used in many fields since the 1990s, including education. Previous research has used Lefebvre's work to analyze the NC before it was actually taught (Mansworth, 2016), while other studies have used the triadic framework to explore pupils' experiences during a school day (Thomson et al., 2010). As far as I am aware, however, this is the first research that applies Lefebvre's triadic framework to explore how a subject, i.e., English, is produced in the everyday life of English secondary schools.

This thesis also extends the thinking about Lefebvre's triadic framework by giving greater emphasis to perceived space than is typically the case; an example of this is how the HoDs use the perceived spaces of colleagues' experience to help produce the curriculum. Events since data collection, such as Covid, raise further questions about the dominance of conceived spaces in the face of circumstances requiring the unplanned, physical closure of

school buildings; further research is required to understand the relationship between conceived, perceived and lived spaces in such circumstances.

8.3 English – problems and recommendations

This thesis highlights four central problems facing the teaching of English in secondary schools in ex-industrial communities in the East Midlands of England. Firstly, the version of English represented in the NC is built on ideologically questionable foundations (Hodgson & Harris, 2022), contested since they were first proposed by Hirsch in the 1980s (e.g. Cox, 1991; Scholes, 1986); it represents a very narrow range of English society (Elliott, 2020; Mansworth, 2016; Nelson-Addy et al., 2019); it is unengaging for many pupils. The NC encourages a simplistic version of 'powerful knowledge' and 'cultural literacy' (Nightingale, 2020) rooted in a centrally imposed view of what constitutes 'the best that has been thought and said' (DfE, 2014a; Eaglestone, 2021), rather than encouraging young people to engage with 'the best that has been thought and said in the world' (Arnold, 1869/1993, p.190; Perry, 2022b).

Secondly, the mode of assessment for pupils is now a fully terminal, closed-book examination described by the HoDs as a '*memory test'* and prepared for over years. English pedagogy has thus been altered to predominantly focus on teaching facts and exam skills preparation. The removal of Speaking and Listening from the assessment system has led to a reduction in the opportunities for pupils to explore language and literature and is considered by some to increase authoritarianism in schools (Gilbert, 2022). Coupled with the nature of public examinations, long identified as problematic for assessing young people's understanding of literature (BoE, 1921; Goodacre, 2023), it is apparent that the

assessment system does not encourage engagement with English. The HoDs report that pupils, particularly boys, are less engaged with English than in previous years, and this requires addressing before the decline in the number of pupils taking A-level English, as discussed below, becomes terminal for the subject.

This is linked with the third issue: the extent to which high stakes accountability measures, particularly P8, dominate the curriculum. These ensure the central place of English in the schools in this study, while simultaneously reducing it to a vehicle whose main purpose is to achieve good GCSE grades. P8 measures are particularly problematic for the teaching of English Literature. Since it was included in the metrics, the number of GCSE candidates for English Literature has increased by over 50%, but the number of A level English students has fallen by nearly 30% (Ofqual, 2022). Not only does the decline in the study of English have worrying implications for the future of the discipline, it also has worrying implications for the future reading habits of the country, habits often laid down in classrooms with the help of English teachers (Taylor, 2019).

The final problem identified in this thesis is the role played by Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) in the production of English. From this research it is apparent that some school leaders, including HoDs and headteachers, expend covert energy resisting the impositions of MATs on everyday practice in schools. This is energy which could be put to better use.

The challenge for this thesis, then, is to suggest how English can be reformed to become more inclusive, more engaging and more relevant for the 21st Century, while maintaining its

influential position in schools. Below I make four central recommendations to address this challenge.

8.3.1 A New National Curriculum for English?

To address the first problem identified in this thesis, my first recommendation is to reform the National Curriculum (NC) for English so that it returns to a more suitable epistemological position for the subject. A good reference point is the 'Cox Model' which informed the original iteration of the English NC (DES, 1989). Cox's five views of *personal growth*, *adult needs*, *cross-curricular*, *cultural heritage* and *cultural analysis* developed previous generations' work, particularly Dixon's work on personal growth and have been further developed by Goodwyn (Goodwyn, 2019c); my work extends Goodwyn's thinking. Since the first iteration of the NC, English has become increasingly focused on a narrow interpretation of *cultural heritage* and *adult needs*; *cultural analysis* has been discarded, and there is little macro-level interest in the *cross-curricular* or *personal growth* views of English. Following the analysis of the data in this thesis, including the Literature Review chapter, I recommend that Cox's five views are revised to reflect the potential of English to be a genuine force for social justice as well as meeting other needs as shown in Table 9. These can then be used to inform the next version of the NC.

View	Original	Revised
Personal Growth **Personal Growth and Social Agency (Goodwyn)**	Focuses on the child: it emphasises the relationship between language and learning in the individual child, and the role of literature in developing children's imaginative and aesthetic lives;	Focuses on the child: it emphasises an emancipatory view of English and focuses on developing nascent and maturing individual agents, constantly fostering their growing critical powers. It emphasises the relationship between language and learning in developing reflexive individuals, enabling stimulating interactions with culture, especially literature. It develops the social, imaginative and aesthetic lives of children;
Cross-curricular	Focuses on the school: it emphasises that all teachers (of English and of other subjects) have a responsibility to help children with the language demands of different subjects on the school curriculum; otherwise areas of the curriculum may be closed to them. In England, English is different from other school subjects, in that it is both a subject and a medium of instruction for other subjects;	Focuses on the school: it emphasises that all teachers (of English and of other subjects) have a responsibility to help children with the language demands of different subjects on the school curriculum; otherwise areas of the curriculum may be closed to them. In England, English is different from other school subjects, in that it is both a subject and a medium of instruction for other subjects; **this also recognises the central role language has in the learning process across the curriculum;**
Adult Needs	Focuses on communication outside the school; it emphasises the responsibility of English teachers to prepare children for the language demands of adult life, including the workplace in a fast-changing world. Children need to learn to deal with the day-to-day demands of spoken language and print; they also need to be able to write clearly, appropriately and effectively;	Focuses on communication outside the school; it emphasises the responsibility of English teachers to prepare children for the language demands of adult life, including the workplace in a fast-changing world. Children need to learn to deal with the day-to-day demands of spoken language, print **and evolving online materials**; they also need to be able to write clearly, appropriately and effectively **across a range of forms including social media**;
Cultural Heritage **Cultural Growth**	Emphasises the responsibility of schools to lead children to an appreciation of the works of literature that have been widely regarded as amongst the finest in the language;	Emphasises the responsibility of schools to lead children to an appreciation of **a wide, diverse range** of literature, **including contemporary literature, as well as texts teachers regard as important for understanding the evolving state of literary arts. Children should have insights into the creative process, including opportunities to create their own literary pieces. English in schools should help children grow their knowledge and skills so that they can independently choose and enjoy literature outside of the school context;**
Cultural Analysis	Emphasises the role of English in helping children towards a critical understanding of the world and cultural environment in which they live. Children should know about the processes by which meanings are conveyed, and about the ways in which print and other media carry values.	Emphasises the role of English in helping children towards a critical understanding of the world and cultural environment in which they live. Children should know about the processes by which meanings are conveyed, and the ways in which print and other texts, **including evolving online and social media,** carry values.

*Table 9 Revised version of Cox's Five Views of English (my additions in **bold**)*

The new model has several advantages over the current NC. The centrality of Speaking and Listening is restored; there is a greater emphasis on the role of language in learning; and I have emphasized the role that the study of texts can have in helping pupils comprehend

their worlds, including their online worlds. Underpinning this is the idea that teachers and pupils should have the agency to select and study texts more rooted in their communities, helping them develop a sense of place, a sense of *cynefin*, missing from the current NC. There would need to be a degree of locally agreed consensus about what is read, and, ultimately, teachers would have to maintain authority about text choice, but this would go some way to re-recognizing teachers' expertise. Clearly there are implications for how *perceived spaces* such as budgets are arranged, but it is critical that we help children develop the skills of how to choose a text for themselves if we want them to fully engage with the subject and develop life-long reading habits.

The most significant revision is to change the *cultural heritage* view to a *cultural growth* view. This enables greater opportunities to diversify and decolonize the range of texts available to study and allows pupils to make their own cultural contributions. Changing *cultural heritage* to *cultural growth* relies on recognizing *culture* as both a verb and a noun. In the *cultural growth* view I propose, children's sense of culture would be nurtured and nourished, enabling them to understand that culture is constantly evolving and that they are a part of that growth and evolution.

The recommended revision of the NC for English would not only help towards decolonizing curriculum content, it could also move towards decolonizing pedagogy. The current curriculum encourages didactic pedagogies and the revisions I am suggesting move towards a more democratic, learner-centred approach, giving more agency to young people. While this is not complete agency, it is more in line with a socially just curriculum than the current NC, and is more consistent with how English teachers want to operate (Marshall, 2000).

8.3.2 Revised Assessment Methods – a portfolio approach?

My second recommendation is to reform the nature of assessing English. The current system encourages schools to '*teach to the test*' but, following comments made by HoDs in this study, I do not suggest reinstating coursework in the old style. Several HoDs mention that there was a degree of '*gaming the system*' with coursework, and it appears to have been a burden for them. Since the data was collected the development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) software has made it increasingly challenging for teachers to have confidence that coursework submitted by pupils is their own independently produced work (Milmo, 2023). However, it will become increasingly important to help pupils learn to use AI positively and opportunities need to be found enabling them to learn how English can be enhanced by such technology in a safe, ethical way. My recommendation is to replace the terminal examination with a portfolio of different types of work produced throughout KS4 such as creative writing, online texts, spoken tasks or traditional responses to literature. Some work would be created individually, while other work would involve collaborative group work; there is the potential to use AI, although a lot of thinking needs to be done about this, which could be the focus of future research.

Such a multi-genre, portfolio approach to assessment would demonstrate pupils' aptitudes for skills such as communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity as well as digital skills valued by employers (van Laar et al., 2020). This approach would also be consistent with alternative approaches to curriculum, such as 'orature' (Thiong'o, 2012), discussed below in a slightly different context. This might prepare pupils more effectively for contemporary society than the current, closed-book, handwritten examination.

8.3.3 Reviewing Subject Organization – a single subject?

Elsewhere I have recommended decoupling the English Literature GCSE from the Progress 8 metrics (Perry, 2022a). Returning English Literature to an optional subject would mean fewer pupils studying the subject, but this could be a good thing. If the pupils studying English Literature at GCSE level have actively chosen to do so, then they may well will be more engaged with the subject than is currently the case. However, if the recommendations in this thesis described above were enacted then I hope pupils' experiences of English would become more positive and engaging. To remove English Literature would mean that its place in schools would be weakened and I now feel that English Literature *should* remain as part of the P8 metrics, while such metrics remain in place. P8 is problematic (Leckie & Goldstein, 2017), but it is difficult to envisage a system with no way of measuring pupil progress, so it is better for English to make use of this to consolidate its position in schools. However, maybe consideration could be given to revising the whole approach to the English GCSE subjects, such as the development of a single, English GCSE combining Language and Literature, perhaps afforded the same weighting and curriculum time as the current Science GCSE, such as being considered in Wales (Qualifications Wales, 2023). Such a move would allow teachers to be more flexible with their curricular models, breaking down the current siloed approach seen in several schools in this study.

8.3.4 Greater Support for Curriculum Leadership

As well as recommending changes to the NC and the GCSE, I also recommend changes to the ways that MATs operate. MATs need to ensure that there are sufficient structures in place to take greater account of schools' specific contexts. While many MATs are keen to establish a market identity (Greany & Higham, 2018), this research illustrates how they need to be careful about imposing inappropriate curriculum models across all of their schools.

MATs should not assume that what works in one school will necessarily transfer to other schools, as has been the case for some of the schools in this study.

The data presented in this thesis about Subject Directors suggests that while some are considered to be effective, others are seen as barriers to progress. This research shows that an important factor in determining how well received Subject Directors are in schools is their understanding of a school's context; this suggest to me that Subject Directors need to be supported by their MATs in developing a strong contextual understanding of all the schools they work with. When the support of Subject Directors works well, such as Scarsdale Academy, then it is felt to work very well. When the Subject Directors do not understand schools' contexts then their work is at best ignored, and at worst hinders development.

Similarly, schools should also consider how to support newly appointed HoDs who do not know the school, such as Martin. I feel that there is a marked difference in how he speaks about his pupils compared with HoDs who have a more established understanding of their schools' contexts. Helen, for example, who intimately understands Scarsdale's context because she grew up in the community and attended the school as a pupil, can adjust her curriculum to meet local needs in ways that Martin cannot at the time of data collection because he had only recently moved to the area. More contextual understanding of schools and their communities might help new HoDs develop their curricular models to suit the specific needs of their pupils more rapidly. Just as my recommendations for the teaching of English would help students develop a stronger sense of place, my recommendations for the development of Subject Directors and HoDs would also help them develop their sense of the place of the schools' communities they serve.

The process of completing this research has also emphasized for me how important it is that teachers entering the profession, such as my PGCE students, understand that the NC does change, and that the version they experienced as pupils, which they now see operating in schools, will not last forever. Change is happening, as evidenced by the ways that the GCSE specifications are slowly shifting towards more diverse texts, as discussed above, and, perhaps, in the ways that creativity in English is becoming more talked about (e.g. Smith, 2023). Within a few years some of these new teachers will take on leadership roles, perhaps becoming Heads of English themselves, and they will need to introduce new versions of the NC and develop new curricular models in the contexts of their schools. The version of English these students bring to the profession from their time at school is the version discussed in this thesis, a version based on a very limited conception of the discipline and the subject as discussed above. It is more vital than ever that ITE courses, such as the one I work on, ensure that all new teachers have considered English in its many forms, rather than only the version offered by the NC, so that they can help produce English in the future.

I believe that these changes could achieve five important things. Firstly, the nature of English in secondary schools would be reformed. The current model of knowledge in the English NC, *episteme*, would be moved more towards *techne* and *phronesis*, as advocated by Eaglestone (Eaglestone, 2021). This would be achieved by allowing greater choice over curriculum content, pedagogy and assessment, encouraging more democratic approaches to the teaching of English (Aly et al., 2022; Apple et al., 2022) which are more sympathetic to personal growth (Cox, 1995; Dixon, 1975; Goodwyn, 2016) than the narrow, colonialist models of cultural capital (Hodgson & Harris, 2022) dominating the current curriculum. Secondly, the curriculum could become more engaging, encouraging more pupils to study

English post-16. Thirdly, all pupils could develop more effective skills for contemporary living, particularly of speaking and listening; this might help them succeed in adulthood more than the current suite of traditional examinations. Fourthly, all pupils would have the chance to develop a greater understanding of the connections between English and place, to develop their *cynefin*. Finally, reforms to how MATs operate and how HoDs are supported might help the school system to support schools more effectively than is currently the case.

8.4 Future Research

This research has been necessarily concentrated to meet the demands of a Professional Doctorate in Education; I have had to work within the conceived space of university regulations, to use Lefebvre's terminology. I have deliberately focused on a single subject, a single group of schools, and a single classification of teachers, Heads of Departments. However, there are multiple ways that this research could be developed, both in terms of helping understand the place, purpose and production of English, and in developing the use of Lefebvre's triadic framework of spatial practice.

My research has concentrated on the position of English in the specific contexts of ten secondary schools in ex-industrial communities of the East Midlands; further research is required to understand the position of English in schools in other contexts. It would also be interesting to return to the schools from this thesis to understand how their contexts have shifted in the time since data collection and if that has altered the position of English. During the time taken to complete this thesis, 2018-2023, there has been significant political and societal change. Four Prime Ministers, seven Secretaries of State for Education, as well as Brexit, the Covid pandemic, the first major European war in my lifetime and societal issues

including the resurgence of identity politics, have all altered society in ways difficult to foresee at the start of this research. I am conscious that movements such as Black Lives Matter have influenced emerging research into the teaching of English during the writing of this thesis, some of which has helped shape my analysis (e.g. Nelson-Addy et al., 2023). My experiences going into schools and speaking with HoDs and teachers of English since data collection suggest to me that such events and movements have also affected school's thinking, and it would be helpful to understand the detail of this.

Looking further afield, I am interested in exploring the place, purpose and production of English in other countries to see if we can learn from them. I have drawn particular attention in this thesis to the Welsh concept of *cynefin*. *Cynefin* appears to be gaining traction as an educational theme in Wales (Davies et al., 2023) and there is emerging research into how it is being embedded in Welsh primary schools (Chapman et al., 2023, p.1225). I am not aware of research into *cynefin* in the context of secondary schools, but I am making arrangements to begin such research in 2024 with a school in an ex-industrial community of Wales; this would offer an interesting comparison with the schools in this thesis. It would also be interesting to explore the place, purpose and production of English in other English-speaking countries, such as the USA, Canada, Australia or New Zealand (e.g. Marshall et al., 2019; O'Sullivan & Goodwyn, 2020; Yates et al., 2019). I have begun to seek to understand the experience of HoDs of English with colleagues in Australia (Perry & Roberts, 2021), but more work could be done.

Across the English education system, it would be helpful to research a wider range of people than the HoDs. The HoDs in this study speak as if they know how their pupils feel about

English. However, it would be valuable to research pupils and parents about English. A specific group of pupils could be Y11 pupils who considered taking English subjects for their A-levels, but ultimately chose not to. As the number of A-level entries fall it would be helpful to understand why these students chose not to study English so that measures could be considered to reverse the decline.

It is also important to understand how staff other than HoDs feel about English. While the HoDs in this study tend to feel that they have a degree of agency, at least while exam results are going well, is such a sense shared by classroom teachers? OECD data suggests that this is not the case; while school leaders feel that they have a good degree of autonomy, only '62% of teachers report having control over determining course content in their classes, compared to 84% on average across OECD countries' (OECD, 2020, p.5). Senior Leadership Teams' views of English, as well as colleagues in MATs such as Subject Directors or Chief Executive Officers could also be explored; there is emerging data about some of these roles (e.g. Goodwyn, 2023; Innes, 2021), and further research would deepen understanding. Ultimately, I am keen to understand how system-level policy makers really feel about the position of English, although I am not naïve about the difficulties accessing such potential research participants.

An alternative way to develop this research would be to focus on middle leadership in greater depth. There has been a lot of research on school leadership, but this has diminished over the past decade (Harris et al., 2019). There is limited research into the practice of Heads of English, although there is emerging research into the roles of Subject Directors (Goodwyn, 2023). This appears to support the findings of this thesis that such

professionals can act as barriers to progress, but research is required to understand how they influence everyday practice of schools.

In terms of theory, it would also be of interest to analyse the data from this thesis using different theoretical lenses. I am particularly interested in making use of postcolonial theorists to explore what the data suggests about a very colonial curriculum. In the context of an English curriculum criticized for its lack of diversity, it becomes important to diversify the theoretical frameworks used for such analysis. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's work on decolonizing thinking about literature in society, including a reevaluated approach to oracy, or more accurately 'orature' (Thiong'o, 2012), could be a helpful place to begin; this could support the multi-genre, portfolio approach towards assessment I suggest above (8.3.2). Working with the ideas of global south thinkers would also help towards decolonizing the canon of theorists traditionally used to think about English education. I am conscious that by utilizing the work of Lefebvre this thesis adds to that canon, and I am equally conscious of my own position as a white, male, middle-class academic; in future work I intend to actively seek out postcolonial and global south thinkers to broaden my own thinking and I would like to collaborate with a more diverse range of academics.

8.5 Personal Statement

My challenge now is to identify my next steps. The possibilities are enormous, and I have outlined an ambitious range of potential research above, but my time is limited. When I began this thesis, I was professionally entirely focused on Initial Teacher Education (ITE), particularly the Secondary English PGCE. Through this research I have become more conscious of the multiple contexts in which schools, departments, teachers and pupils work.

Although I had known such contexts intimately during my school-teaching career, the experience of writing this thesis has allowed me to think about the relationship between these contexts in greater depth and, perhaps, with less emotion than the everyday reality of working in schools allows. This has allowed me the space to develop my professional knowledge in how I approach ITE, both in terms of changing the taught content to include more about the contexts of schools and curriculum production, and to think more about the wider contexts of ITE and my current students as discussed above (8.3.4).

Since beginning this thesis, the production of the ITE curriculum itself has become more tightly controlled than ever via policies such as the *ITT Core Content Framework* and the *ITT Market Review* (DfE, 2019b, 2022a), policies seen by some as threats to the professionalism, independence and effectiveness of teacher education in England (Brooks et al., 2023; Cushing, 2023b). The work for this thesis has enabled me to think about such developments in a systematic way, encouraging me to work within my lived space and develop creative approaches to ITE. Hopefully, this will enable our students to not only succeed within the conceived spaces of dominant policies, but to also see beyond the current system and imagine new possibilities.

The research for this thesis supports my new professional role, focused on helping academic colleagues develop new curricular models for Masters courses, and it would be interesting to use Lefebvre's triadic framework to help shed new light on these. Yet, exciting and challenging as this new role is, this thesis has reminded me that my work now takes me away from the English classroom and the schools where I have spent the first half of my career; it has also served to remind me that I love English.

I do not want to lose sight of English. I have been a teacher of English for over thirty years and I believe in it.

This research has shown me that while there is a degree of optimism about teaching English, it has also been pulled from its potential as envisioned by generations of educators (Cox, 1991; Dixon, 1975; Gibbons, 2017; Goodwyn, 2019b; Marshall, 2000; Mathieson, 1975 / 2018). English is now more endured than enjoyed by most pupils. Teachers are clear about need for good qualifications, but they also know that English is more important than that. At its worst, English in the secondary schools in this study focuses on science rather than fiction; at its best, English is transformative. This thesis has shown me how, in the hands of confident HoDs, English remains a quicksilver, powerful subject, capable of much more than transmitting existing knowledge or training pupils for high stakes exams - it can make a difference.

I hope that the recommendations I have made, following the research I have presented, can help develop a vital, engaging and socially just approach to English. I hope this will help teachers to teach and pupils to learn in ways which allow all of them/us to live more meaningful lives, lives we determine for ourselves.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Information for Participants & Consent Form

What is the place and purpose of English as a school subject in English secondary schools?

Researcher: John Perry (john.perry@nottingham.ac.uk)
Supervisor: Professor Christine Hall (christine.hall@nottingham.ac.uk)

Purpose of research

We are researching the place and purpose of English as a school subject in a selection of secondary schools in the East Midlands. This is important research because English has a highly significant place in schools for a variety of pupil-centred reasons including the development of their language skills, as well as the development of their cultural awareness through the study of literature. However, there are other school-focused reasons for the important place which English occupies in schools, including the significance of English Language and English Literature GCSEs for the Progress 8 measures.

We are intending to work with Heads of English to understand how they view the place and purpose of the subject, and how it has changed during their careers. We want to work with Heads of English because they have a very particular place in schools as middle leaders, as well as having extensive experience of teaching the subject.
The schools we are working with are all comprehensive secondary schools in rural areas of the East Midlands. They are all in ex-industrial areas, which tend to be overlooked in existing research. All of the schools are currently rated 'Good' by Ofsted, and while some are academies others are Local Authority maintained.

The key outcome from this research will be a series of interviews with Heads of English about how they view the place and purpose of English in their schools, and how this has altered during their careers.

Each Head of English will be interviewed by the lead researcher, John Perry, who is an Assistant Professor at the University Of Nottingham and the lead for the secondary English PGCE / School Direct programme. John is an experienced teacher of secondary English as well as an ex-secondary school headteacher.

Interviews will take about an hour, and will typically take place in the Head of English's school. They will take place at a mutually convenient time. The resulting data will be securely stored on encrypted computer drives. The data will be presented in ways which minimise the risk of individual Heads of English, their schools or their colleagues being identifiable.

The findings of the interviews will be analysed and the researchers will make their own conclusions about the data. This will then be presented as a Doctoral Thesis. It is possible that the research will also be presented at relevant conferences and in relevant publications.

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Project title: What is the place and purpose of English as a school subject in English secondary schools?

Researcher's name: John Perry

Supervisor's name: Professor Christine Hall

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.
- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.
- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential.
- I understand that I will be audio/video recorded during the interview.
- I understand that data will be stored electronically on encrypted storage devices. The data will be accessed by the researcher and supervisor (s) only.
- I understand that I may contact the researcher or supervisor if I require further information about the research, and that I may contact the Research Ethics Coordinator of the School of Education, University of Nottingham, if I wish to make a complaint relating to my involvement in the research.

Signed …… (research participant)

Print name …… **Date** ……

Contact details

Researcher: *John Perry (john.perry@nottingham.ac.uk)*

Supervisor: *Professor Christine Hall (christine.hall@nottingham.ac.uk)*

School of Education Research Ethics Coordinator: educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk

Appendix 2

Interview schedule

Introduction

- How long have you been teaching?
- Where did you train?
- Where have you taught?
- How long have you been Head of Department?
- Can you describe your role in the school?

Current position

English department

- Can you tell me about the English department?
- How many teachers / staff – FTE and actual numbers?
- What experience do they have?
- What are their specialisms?
- What responsibilities do they have?

Resources

- What resources does English have?
- Rooms?
- Curriculum time?
- Texts?
- Budget?

Linked subjects

- Where do Drama and Media sit in the school?
- Do you have formal links with any other subjects?
- Library?

Texts & Exams

- What do you teach?
- Key texts?
- Exam board? How do you choose exam board?
- Texts beyond the exam or National Curriculum?

Changes

- How has English changed since you have been Head of Department?
- How do you think English will change?
- How would you like it to change?

Purpose

- What is the purpose of English as a school subject?
- What is the purpose of the subject for your school community?

Appendix 3
Example of interview transcript

(all transcripts available on request)

Wendy

Interview Question: How would you like English to change?

I'd like Speaking and Listening back please, because I think it was always a travesty that it was never assessed properly, so yeah that would be an improvement. I'd like more choice within the texts that we study, I think having very white [LAUGHS] so, I'd like some choice on that, I'd like to explore other areas, I'd like to explore studies of literature that are more than 'let's just teach the guff', but genres, connections across different authors, you know, author webs and stuff like that fascinate me, you know who influenced who to write what across time and how that translates into a canon that we've got, and what does that mean to be a part of that, I mean we've got, in this school, cultural, I don't know what the word is I'm looking for, but a lack of it, a lack of knowledge about the world, so again, back to ensure that we have the time to develop those projects that ensure we make those connections, a lot more. I go back to working with David Crystal all those years ago and my dissertation was on the integration of Language and Literature study which led to, we didn't have a combined Lang/Lit A level, we do now, and I like to think that in some little way, that was my idea, and it was like the idea of having that integrated study, you know you can talk about the greats of literature and the canon and stuff like that, but how do they speak to you, how do they use their language to make a point, so yeah I think we can do it through lit, but also through being aware of how our language has changed and influenced, and all that kind of thing. I know some of the department are really into media, social media and all that, those influences upon our spoken and our written language, bias and all those

connotations, which you get to do if you do English Language A Level, but has been, decimated, gone, I mean it was all a bit of lip service to be fair within the old GCSE, you know, 'presentational features' and all that malarkey, but the study of that and the way in which we communicate are completely flipped within the last 10 years, well how is our curriculum reflecting that? It doesn't at all, so you know, doing things like podcasts and even School Reporter now, which is a fantastic thing to do but is confined, which is stupid, because what are we teaching our students about modern ways of communicating and the dangers of that and the benefits of it, it gets very narrowed down; I was thinking about a Y9 student, I mean I love the fact that they care, but we were talking about poverty actually, there was a study that had just come out, we were doing *An Inspector Calls*, and we were doing class differences etc, in 1912, whatever, because I separate, another thing I do with the curriculum, we have a language teacher and a lit teacher, so in Y9, Y10 they have 2 teachers, so communication is vital, so I was the language teacher for this group and we were talking about poverty in the UK, so let's look at this graph, what does it mean, and we worked out that it meant that if you were male and you lived in Kent you would live 10 years longer than if you were a male who lived down the road, and they didn't believe me, just couldn't, you know what I mean,

Appendix 4

Tables used in thesis