FOUR ANXieties ABOUT ENGLISH

Although I originally trained as an English teacher I have spent the last twenty years working as an academic in the areas of cultural history and theory. During that time I have written a number of works on the historical emergence of English ("popular literary education") and on its present form. As this article is something like a short guide to those works I should apologise at the outset for what is really an extended blast on my own trumpet. I should also confess immediately that the view of English that I have developed on the basis of this work represents a minority position in relation to that of most teacher educators.

The distinguishing feature of the account I have developed lies in its assertion that English is fundamentally a pedagogical institution. Now at first sight it might seem odd to claim this feature as distinctive; for surely all accounts of English accept that it is a form of teaching. Things are not quite so straightforward however. In fact in all the standard accounts - from the earliest to the most recent, from the most traditional to the most progressive - the pedagogical character of the discipline is subordinated to something else.

In earlier accounts it is culture - defined as a complete or harmonious development of the faculties - that occupies centre stage, and the teaching of English is merely the means by which culture is distributed to the masses. By the time of the so-called "personal growth" period English was thought to be a vehicle for the child's inner resources of imagination and sensibility, while the classroom and the teacher-student relation were seen as necessary evils best replaced by excursions, encounter groups and open-plan activities. The 1980s, however, witnessed an apparent inversion of such views, with English being treated surprisingly roughly as an ideology designed to buy-off the working class with moral improvement instead of real social change, or as a means of absorbing class and cultural differences into a nationalist political agenda. But these radical debunkings may not be as different from the earlier accounts as they think; because they too subordinate the pedagogy of English to deeper forces (the ideological programming of the lower classes) and thereby imagine that it might one day throw off its shackles and become transparent to a higher end (the complete development of the person). Finally, we can mention those theoretical accounts where it is subjectivity and language that are held to be fundamental. In these accounts too the English classroom is little more than a setting for far more profound dramas: the formation of the subject in language, or the formation of (a socially differentiated) language in the subject.

One of the results of these attempts to treat the classroom as a shadow play for larger forces is that real but limited differences in pedagogy and curriculum undergo an unhelpful moral magnification. Under these circumstances arguments over such differences often turn into moral battles. Such are the controversies over whether a particular
pedagogy is a means of human emancipation or a vehicle for ideological repression; over whether a new curriculum promotes critical reflexivity or is the instrumental means of slotting individuals into stifling vocations. Needless to say, once pedagogical and curriculum differences undergo this degree of moral inflation the crucial work of negotiation, improvisation and compromise becomes far harder, as the protagonists feel that they are speaking on behalf of humanity rather than for particular forms of teaching and administration.

Against these tendencies to treat it as a setting for higher, deeper or wider processes, I have argued for the irreducibility of English as a pedagogical institution. I have attempted to show that - rather than being a vehicle for literary culture, a theatre for the creative child, a device for ideological programming, or a scene for the exchange between language and subjectivity - “English” is the name for a specific pedagogical milieu in which a limited but important range of literate and ethical abilities can be formed. Elsewhere I have defended this view on empirical grounds, as the sort of account necessary to do justice to the historical circumstances in which English first emerged and has subsequently been transformed. I have also argued that this view allows us to engage in the debates surrounding English with less risk of succumbing to the moral inflation and political intransigence that accompanies more principled accounts. It needs to be added of course that no-one is immune from a sense of their own importance, least of all someone writing an article defending their own work.

I Supervised Freedom

Given the stress placed on English as a special pedagogical milieu I should make some attempt to sketch its central features. This can be done through a brief comparison of two examples. The first is taken from a pedagogical handbook published in the 1850s; it concerns the role of play and the playground in what were in fact the first recognisably modern elementary schools:

A play-ground is in fact the principal scene of the real life of children ... the arena on which their true character and dispositions are exhibited; and where, free and unconstrained, they can hop and jump about, swing, or play at tig, ball, or marbles ... With such a machinery in operation, and surrounded for several hours a day by such a world of pupils, it is the province of the shrewd, intelligent, and pious superintendent, to watch and direct all their movements: and whilst he daily participates in their juvenile sports, he in consequence gradually gains a thorough knowledge of their true dispositions, which, at the proper time and season, he applauds or condemns ... (Stow, The Training System 144, 140)

What is immediately striking about David Stow’s advice on the
playground is the manner in which it combines the incitement to free expression and the imperative of close supervision. For Stow, as for the whole tradition of pastoral pedagogy on which he draws, these things are interdependent. The stress on the child's spontaneous play is inseparable from the supervised environment that transforms play into a "surface" on which the teacher can read the child's character and begin the task of shaping it. This is an historical lesson which the advocates of progressive pedagogy have perhaps yet to take to heart.

Our second example is taken from a handbook for critical pedagogy published in the 1980s and concerns the role of popular culture in the classroom. In this example two progressive teacher educators record the results of an exercise that they had set for a teacher seeking to upgrade her qualifications. The exercise involves composing a written response to a popular cultural icon (Marilyn Monroe), and for the supervisors it requires a delicate balancing act. On the one hand, such icons offer expressive possibilities to the student and hence her response must be given free reign: "such forms can be an acknowledgment of the nondeterministic subjective side of social relations... where will is cultivated, dreams dreamt, and categories developed." On the other hand, the same images can also function as stereotypes or forms of ideological domination, which means that the student's response must be carefully scrutinised: "a given cultural practice (the event of watching Marilyn Monroe's movies) may feed into existing forms of domination (in this case, patriarchy)." The result is that, like the children's play for Stow, this student's carefully elicited spontaneous response functions as a surface on which her supervisors can read the signs of her character. Indeed, their lack of hesitation in this regard is quite striking: "This teacher's paper showed that, for a young farm girl growing up amid the patriarchal relations of a traditional rural farm family, such forms [of popular culture] provide a type of counterdiscourse which is, in part, a promise of possibility" (Giroux and Simon, "Popular Culture and Critical Pedagogy" 246).

The comparison is revealing at a number of levels. In the first place it shows that the literary exercise in English takes place within the confines of a specialised supervisory relationship and milieu. Moreover, the fact that the playground and the literary response have functioned as optional and equivalent supervisory media suggests that English emerged through the pedagogical deployment of literature, rather than via the literary use of pedagogy.

Second, we can see that this pedagogy is organised around a complex pastoral relation between teacher and student. This is a relation in which discipline is achieved not through the imposition of external sanctions but through the manner in which students learn to govern themselves. The basic mechanism is one in which the teacher incites the student into spontaneous activity, not for its own sake, but as a means of opening the student's inner life to supervision and as a means of allowing the student to see their conduct through the normative gaze of the teacher. It is crucial to this pedagogical relation - and to the relation of spiritual
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guidance on which it is based - that the teacher is a sympathetic figure who cares for the student and is loved by them. Only in this pastoral milieu - which joins self-examination to external supervision - can students open themselves to inspection and “freely” take on pedagogical norms as personal desires.

Finally, given the complex and ambivalent character of this pedagogical milieu, it is small wonder that English should present such a difficult and unstable object of analysis. This difficulty is compounded by the tendency of intellectuals to reduce complex mundanity to pure principles. This is the tendency of all those accounts that wish to reduce the teaching of English to the principles of culture, ideology, creativity, language or the subject. And it is in this context that we see the appearance of a whole series of unresolved debates and unrestrained anxieties: Is English a vehicle for freedom or a more sophisticated form of social control? Is English responsible for a complete development of the faculties in the name of culture, or their one-sided “normalisation” in the service of ideological domination? Should English aim at personal growth through the teaching of literature or the transmission of useful skills through the teaching of language? Is the English teacher a “transformative intellectual” responsible for personal and social change, or an agent for the reproduction of existing social relations?

In general it is possible to say that these debates are unproductive because, on each side, protagonists seize on one aspect of a complex reality and, by transforming it into a non-negotiable principle, attempt to construct singular general theories of English. When such theories turn out to be at odds with the messy historical reality of the discipline, adherence to them can lead to intellectual intransigence. We can suggest therefore that the resolution of these problems and anxieties lies not in the discovery of fundamental principles but in obtaining a clearer view of the messy reality itself. The following remarks are offered as a contribution towards that end.

II Is English an emancipatory discipline?

Given the interdependence of freedom and supervision already noted, it is not difficult to see why this should be such a vexed question. Indeed, one can see the uneasiness involved here in the two parts of the phrase “emancipatory discipline.” On one side of this question we find those who regard English as an essentially liberatory project - one whose core was once invested in the creativity of the child and in the openness of literature, but which is today more likely to be found in the repressed potentialities of the working class or women. On the other side there are those who have observed that, no matter how progressive the English class becomes, it continues to deploy a sophisticated technology of surveillance and discipline. This see-sawing has produced some bad consciences and some desperate solutions.

Among the bad consciences are those progressives who have found
that, when it comes to problematising undesirable behaviours - such as those associated with sexism or racism - it is not enough to appeal to creativity, and that the working class may be just as guilty as anyone else. In fact the English classroom is a sophisticated mechanism for picking out such conducts as objects of moral attention and for re-setting thresholds of inhibition. The problem is that many teachers are uneasy about presiding over the process of moral training, and they are not helped by those teacher educators who see the process as a sinister form of coercion. Neither is this problem helped in the least by those intellectuals who, charged with high-voltage "dialectical" theory, presume that it can be solved by coining oxymorons like "emancipatory authority." According to this principle the teacher is supposed to be able to exercise moral power over the formation of students while simultaneously allowing their inner potential to develop without normative intervention. All that can be said for such magical principles is that their inherent implausibility is not enhanced by the odour of bad faith which surrounds them.

These problems are symptoms of the genuine difficulty that we have in understanding the reciprocity of freedom and discipline in the English lesson. This difficulty is compounded by the use of a notion of freedom (as self-determination) that may be far too metaphysical for the reality it is supposed to comprehend. We can attempt to get a clearer view of this perennial difficulty by briefly looking at an episode in which it has recently resurfaced: the use of popular culture in the English classroom. One of the rationales given for this tactic is that popular cultural texts run less risk of imposing repressive norms on students and are more open to a diversity of cultural backgrounds than are texts drawn from the high cultural canon. At the same time, teachers advocating the liberatory use of popular culture will often point to the dangers of its uncontrolled use and, as we saw with the Marilyn Monroe exercise, will routinely require students to problematise their usual modes of consumption. But this only seems to reactivate the standard anxiety: How can the use of popular texts as an incitement to free expression be compatible with their use as a means of observing and correcting conduct?

Let us consider a typical if refreshingly candid expression of this anxiety. A recent article on the use of popular culture in the secondary classroom suggests that this strategy of "starting from where the learner is at" first emerged in the 1970s. It then goes on to catalogue the worries attending this tactic and to propose a resolution:

Introducing it [popular culture] for formal classroom study raises an interesting set of caveats and bear traps. What happens to a text when it is coopted in this way? How do students' relationships with those texts come under pressure or change, if classroom study entails the harsh light of analytic criticism of what may previously have been pleasures and attitudes left unexamined deliberately? ... If the consequence of bringing such texts into the classroom is merely to teach students to disdain
and disown this part of their world in favour of something “better” the attempt is probably best never begun. . . . [A] focus on popular texts . . . ought to be more exploratory than judgmental, critical in the best sense and respectful ultimately of different reading preferences and positions. (Beavis, “On Not Being Homer” 63)

Are we right in suggesting that, for all its candour, this response has still not done justice to the problem? Let us begin with an historical point. The strategy of “starting from where the learner is at” emerged not in the progressive 1970s but in the reforming 1830s, where Stow was already insisting that teaching should give up all formality and situate itself in the playground, “the principal scene of the real life of children.” And the tactic of using popular culture to engage the interests and reveal the character of working-class children in the English classroom had received its definitive formulation as early as 1913. It was at this time that J. A. Green published an influential series of articles arguing that the teaching of classic texts to elementary school children bred only rote learning and insincerity of response. If English was to reach such children then it had to begin with their everyday language, including comic books: “The boy at school who is desperately bad in his compositions uses language effectively at home or in the playground, and his schoolwork would improve rapidly if he could be led to feel the ‘reality’ of the life he was leading there” (Green, “The Teaching of English” 204).

Such formulations have of course become second nature to us, and it is only a small step from them to today’s apparently emancipatory uses of popular culture in the classroom. All the more reason to remind ourselves that the combination of elicitation and correction, spontaneity and supervision was there from the beginning. In Green’s words:

Under its [English’s] influence new worlds are being opened out to the boys; new interests are being awakened . . . These things mean inner growth, the development of new needs which call for a more varied, a more delicate instrument of expression . . . Here the boy reveals himself . . . and the teacher may find out whether he has really reached him or no. (204)

At the same time the inner self revealed through this self-expressive exercise is typically one in eminent need of supervision and transformation:

Even a rapid perusal of these typical papers shows clearly that the great majority [of students] live in quite a different world from their teachers. Here are dwarfed little selves whose emotional life is bound up with local gossip, the excitement of football, and a humour so crude that their teachers find it difficult to see any fun whatsoever in it. (24)

No doubt there will be some prepared to smile at these last remarks for their quaintness or to denounce them for their repressiveness. But to react in either way is to misunderstand the problem. It is not any particular moral or cultural content that characterises the English lesson, but the reciprocity between self-expression and supervision that allows
students to take on new social norms "freely," by problematising themselves." Hence it is beside the point that Green disapproves of
football. Today many teachers disapprove of sexism, which may or may
not entail the condemnation of football. The objects of moral
problematisation vary, although within certain limits. What remains
constant is the pedagogical relation in which the problematisation takes
place. We have only to return to the worries raised about Marilyn Monroe
to see that even the most progressive teachers use free expression to
allow students to "reveal" themselves for supervision. And we have
only to consider the current problematisation of sexist or racist jokes to
see that Green's stigmatisation of "a humour so crude that their teachers
find it difficult to see any fun whatsoever in it" is anything but
superannuated.

To think that this problem can be resolved by being "respectful of
ultimately different reading positions" is to avoid the issue and to ignore
the form of pastoral discipline that lies at the heart of English pedagogy.
English emerged as a practice of moral training in which large numbers
of children were required to undergo moral problematisation and
transformation. To suggest that the exercise of pastoral power involved
in this procedure can be erased in favour of a process of free self-
determination simply ignores the reality of the teaching milieu.
Moreover, it fails to take sufficient note of how productive this exercise of
power has been. In assuming the persona of the pastoral guide in order
to get students to question their own conduct, teachers are not repressing
their students' inner capacities; they are forming and augmenting such
capacities by requiring their cultivation.

It is possible to say therefore that, to the degree that freedom is
identified with the capacity to govern one's own conduct, then English
has indeed functioned as an emancipatory discipline. It is equally true
though that emancipation here cannot mean free self-determination,
because this capacity is formed through a pastoral discipline that
individuals are compelled to undergo and whose cultural rarity puts it
beyond collective choice. English teachers should therefore feel quite
comfortable in exercising this sort of moral discipline. Given the anxieties
and obscurities generated by the metaphysical concept of emancipation,
however, it is probably best to drop the term altogether and concentrate
instead on the specific capacities actually formed by pastoral pedagogy.

III Is English an ideology?

Although this question has also been the subject of controversy, it can be
dealt with economically in light of the previous remarks. Generally those
who think that English is an ideology have in mind its alleged role in
forming a frame of mind that is an impediment to or a substitute for
(what they take to be) real social improvement. It was Raymond Williams
(Culture and Society) who first applied this sort of analysis to English,
arguing that the identification of humanity with a developed sensibility
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- rather than with a developed society - was a sign that English teaching had become an obstacle to social democratic change. This basic line of analysis has subsequently been elaborated by Williams' student, Terry Eagleton (Literary Theory, "The Subject of Literature"), as well as by Mulhern (The Moment of "Scrutiny"), Baldick (The Social Mission) and others.

Not the least interesting aspect of this sometimes vehement critique of English is that it has been developed by individuals who are themselves leading members of the profession. (Terry Eagleton is presently a professor of English at Oxford). It was perhaps to be expected therefore that their inversion of English should itself be inverted, by "counter-revisionist" accounts seeking to re-establish the discipline's progressive credentials. John Dixon has recently fulfilled this expectation. Dixon (A Schooling in "English") argues that its critics have overlooked the fact that English was indeed a vehicle through which marginalised groups (women, trade unions, self-improvement associations) attempted to pursue their vision of a better society, through the image of human emancipation contained in literature.

I have argued elsewhere that Dixon's redemptive account is no more plausible than the debunkings of the critics (Hunter, "History Lessons for 'English'"). But it is the common ground between the two views that is most striking given our present concerns. Both accounts presuppose a developmental model of history in which progress occurs through the reciprocal relations between an ideal of human development (culture) and the material organisation of society. They really only differ over whether English has helped to achieve this reciprocity (as in Dixon's story of marginalised groups using literature to express their emancipatory social aspirations), or has been an obstacle to it (as in the critical accounts of English as an aesthetic detour leading such groups away from real social change). Thus for Dixon (A Schooling in "English" 165, 208) the English classroom is the site where students learn to see through repressive social stereotypes and use literature to choose their own forms of development in an emancipatory environment. For Eagleton ("The Subject of Literature" 98-100), however, it is the place where students lose sight of their own social determination through the cultivation of a sensitive but vacuous aesthetic subjectivity. But this means that Eagleton concurs in seeing the English classroom as the place where subjectivity might grasp its own material conditions and put them to an ideal use (presumably if English were taught in a less aesthetic way).

In short for both Dixon and Eagleton it is not really the English classroom that forms human capacities at all. This is the task of the great dialectic between "culture" and "society" which finds in the English lesson a convenient instrument for realising the capacities (Dixon) or repressing them through the imposition of a false aesthetic consciousness (Eagleton). But neither of these options is a particularly plausible account of the pedagogical milieu that we have begun to describe. In the first place, the notion of an inculcation of "false consciousness" paints a far too negative image of the way "pastoral power" is exercised. On the one
hand we have seen that power is exercised in the English classroom not indirectly via ideological phantasms, but directly through real practices of incitement and supervision, self-examination and problematisation, carried in the pastoral relation of teacher and student. On the other, we have noted that, far from being uniformly negative or repressive, this exercise of pedagogical power appears to be productive of human abilities, equipping students with distinctive capacities for ethical self-concern and self-cultivation.

This does not mean, however, that English is the vehicle for a complete development of the human capacities. To the contrary, we have already observed that the English lesson is a highly normative pedagogical environment in which students undergo compulsory moral problematisation and supervision. Moreover, the critics are correct in pointing out that the range of capacities formed in the English classroom is actually quite narrow. In Australian secondary schools in recent times these have largely been capacities for moral and aesthetic introspection, together with the literate abilities required to respond to the literary texts used in introspective exercises.

The question of whether English is an ideology is thus not a particularly useful one to ask. It offers only two options and forces us to choose whether English blocks or realises the complete development of the human subject. It thus imagines the discipline to be both worse than it is and better than it could be. Neither option is able to do justice to the ethical and political issues raised by the existence of a large-scale system of pastoral pedagogy. On the one hand the English classroom is responsible for a dissemination of positive ethical and literate abilities to previously excluded social groups; it should therefore be acknowledged as a major historical achievement, particularly by those committed to social democracy. On the other, the scope of these abilities is relatively narrow and overly invested in the aesthetic and introspective in comparison with the spread of such capacities required by the diverse spheres of social life. All that we can say here regarding the problems that emerge at this point - problems concerning the role of English in distributing the capacities required for modern "citizenship" - is that we cannot even begin to think about them using the concepts of ideology or culture.

IV Literacy: Critical or Vocational?

The likelihood that here we are dealing with an unnecessary opposition seems perhaps clearer with this question than the first two. Yet this opposition turns out to be even more difficult to resolve because of the number of other divisions that it attracts. In fact a whole maelstrom of distinctions - between liberal and utilitarian education, between culture and ideology, and between literary cultivation and literate "skilling" - swirls around the critical versus vocational literacy debate, each distinction bringing with it the possibility of principled analysis and
intellectual intransigence. Because of this it is almost impossible not to oversimplify what is less a debate than a scatter of positions strung out between the various polarities. Accepting this risk we can begin with one of the central polarities.

At one end we find a position that continues to privilege literature (or language conceived in an aesthetic manner); extols desire and pleasure over skills and competences; and tends to view English in broadly oppositional terms as a critique of a variety of "repressive" institutions (capitalism, patriarchy, consumerism, the state). If we call this position "aesthetico-critical" it is not to identify it with literature teaching in the narrow sense; it is to capture its view of language and literacy as vehicles for an emancipatory development of human capacities and hence as critical in relation to (what is regarded as) the repressive formation of capacities for limited vocational or social purposes. Carolyn Baker and Allan Luke, for example, begin their programmatic sketch of a critical literacy with the observation that language teaching is not transparent to ideas or reality; they elaborate by noting that pedagogical literacy involves the disciplinary formation of students; and they conclude by defining critique in terms of unmasking this exercise of power which has apparently been obscured by ideological "naturalisation." Or in their own terms:

[W]e have suggested (1) that what occurs in classroom reading, writing and speaking events is inevitably some discursively based invention of "reading", "readers" and "texts"; (2) that pedagogical categories and discourses ... can be deconstructed to see how they constitute readers and reading; (3) that the preferred outcome would be to move towards events and practices that demonstrate and encourage critiques of discourses as discourses of critique. (Baker and Luke, "Discourses and Practices" 266)

At the other pole we can station a program for English that is oriented to language rather than literature and is less concerned with fostering an emancipatory reflexivity than with training students in a diverse range of literate "genres." In its official form this tendency is formulated in the language of Hallidayan sociolinguistics. And in this form it has recently enjoyed a degree of success in transforming the secondary English curriculum by expanding and theorising the range of genres; advocating a more explicit and skills-oriented mode of instruction; and re-admitting the relation between competence in specific literate abilities and the occupancy of a range of civic and occupational capacities beyond the school. In all of these regards the "linguistic turn" is a rediscovery of rhetoric - the traditional source of prestigious and powerful linguistic abilities in middle-class "grammar" schools, but now surfacing in the state system in a revamped and theorised form.

I have already mentioned that these two polar tendencies are rarely found in their pure and distinct forms. One of the axes along which they converge is provided by their shared use of the notion of ideology. Even if aesthetic critique conceives of ideology in terms of the naturalisation of power relations, while sociolinguistics tends to find it in the structural
relations between discursive forms and social backgrounds, there is room
in this sliding concept for both sides to lay claim to the title of critical
literacy. Hence we find a muting of the opposition between the critical
and the neo-rhetorical tendencies at the theoretical level. This probably
corresponds to the objective impossibility of making a clean break with
the progressive pastoralism of the state system by imposing a neo-
rhetorical pedagogy by fiat. If this conjecture holds water - and there
will be many better placed than I am to make this judgment - then it will
be necessary to rethink the relations between the critical and rhetorical
tendencies.

In the first place we must give up the idea that the critical and
rhetorical pedagogies fall into the principled oppositions between liberal
and utilitarian or emancipatory and instrumental education. Leaving
aside its self-serving character, this view fails to understand that critical
pedagogy is itself inseparable from the exercise of pastoral power. No
less than rhetoric, the use of literary texts for expressive purposes is
wedded to a particular pedagogical practice (the pastoral pairing of self-
examination and surveillance) which is governed by specific ends (the
development of introspective-oppositional aesthetic and ethical abilities).
The use of texts to foster a reflexive unmasking of their supposedly
“naturalised” underlying conditions thus remains a disciplinary exercise
supervised by teachers who ultimately assess just how reflexive their
students have been. Critical pedagogy is a version of pastoral pedagogy.

Second, there may be a sense in which both the critical and the
neo-rhetorical pedagogies underestimate just how irreducibly
“pedagogical” literate abilities actually are. This is evidently true for
the critical position which identifies the disciplinary formation of such
abilities with the eclipsing of critical thought. Through this purely
negative equation of discipline with loss of rational choice,
the “discourse of critique” imagines that exercises in critical introspection might allow
students to recover the lost capacity and freely choose the forms in which
they are to be made literate. As we have already seen this view
underestimates both the productivity of the pastoral disciplines and their
historical rarity.

The neo-rhetorical pedagogy is less prone to this kind of
utopianism because it has a healthy scepticism about creativity and sees
linguistic capacities as contingent abilities that must be formed and
maintained through explicit instruction and practice. Still, are we right
in suggesting that this pedagogy itself sometimes lacks a sufficiently
strong grasp of what might be called the “milieu-dependency” of literate
abilities? This is certainly the suspicion raised by its continuing recourse
to the notion of ideology to explain the social distribution of such abilities.
This notion identifies the distribution of literate abilities with the exclusion
of certain groups from what might be called a “language plenum”; that
is, an imagined space in which all genres are present to the human subject
who chooses among them. But this underlying image runs counter to
the view of literate abilities that sees them as positive capacities built-up
in specific regulated milieux. For, on this latter view, there is no language
plenum from which groups might be excluded, and the uneven distribution of abilities must be seen in a quite different light. Let us say that it must be seen as a reflection of the (inevitably) limited uniformity of the spread of the school as a literate milieu and of the (inevitably) variable *inclusion* of previously non-literate groups in this milieu.

Once again the challenge is to avoid being forced into binary choices and rigid oppositions. The opposition between an aesthetic literacy dedicated to critical emancipation and a sociolinguistic pedagogy dedicated to vocational programming is a theoretical caricature of a messier reality. The interaction between the "aesthetico-critical" and the neo-rhetorical models of English cannot be grasped via the principled oppositions between the liberal and the vocational or the emancipatory and the instrumental. Instead this interaction is best approached in terms of the contemporary overlapping of two historically distinct pedagogies: a pastoral pedagogy initially developed to bring working-class children into the sphere of mass moral training; and the much older rhetorical pedagogy of the grammar school, whose aim was not moral introspection but trained linguistic virtuosity. Can we say that the complex series of combats and complicities, denunciations and collaborations currently taking place between the protagonists of an aesthetic and a neo-rhetorical pedagogy - the "whole language" versus functional grammar controversy - is the inevitable result of such an overlapping? That seems to be a reasonable conjecture for further research. It is also a useful reminder that the issue will not be resolved by an intellectual knockout, but through the protracted series of negotiations and compromises, technical innovations and administrative interventions already taking place.

V What is an English teacher?

In the 1960s the role of the English teacher - together with much else - seemed clear and unambiguously progressive. Dixon's portrait of the teacher as intimate pastoral guide captures that moment:

All of us test the validity of what we have said by sensing how far others that we trust have shared our response. An English teacher tries to be a person to whom pupils turn with that sense of trust. The sensitivity, honesty and tact of his response to what pupils say will confirm their half-formed certainties and doubts in what they have said. A blanket acceptance of "self-expression" is no help to pupils and may well prove a worse hindrance to their growing self-knowledge than a blunt and limited response from the teacher. The more experienced the teacher in these matters, the more he is able to draw from the pupil the certainties (first) and later the doubts. (Dixon, *Growth Through English* 8)

The suddenness with which English teachers fell from their role as guardians of personal growth into their brief spell as agents of capitalist society should now seem less surprising. We have noted that those who cast English into the depths of ideology share the same view of its
(potential) role in human development as those who had raised it to the heights of culture. These apparently opposed accounts are really the flip sides of the same coin, differing only in how they arrange the principle of complete human development around the actually existing profession: as a halo or a noose. It is hard to say which side is more misleading: those who treat the discipline as a pure expression of the principle, or those who insist on the principle as a means of damning English for not living up to it.

In the end it does not matter. The task confronting us today is not to choose between these options but to "think otherwise." The English teacher is neither an innocent confidant nor a sinister ideologue but something else altogether: a pastoral professional invested, typically by the state, with the obligation of supervising a particular kind of ethical and literate milieu. We can discern this role in Dixon's remarks as long as we treat his portrait of the teacher as exemplary and exhortatory rather than scholarly and descriptive. There, in the delicate balancing of elicitation ("certainties") and problematisation ("doubts"), we can see the characteristic signs of the relation of pastoral supervision, which the elementary school inherited from Christian spiritual discipline and passed on to English in the form of introspective and critical literary exercises. I have already suggested that English teachers should harbour no deep anxiety regarding the authority they exercise as moral professionals. Exercising such authority is both the professional task and the civic duty of English teachers. Those intellectuals and teacher educators who have specialised in instilling such anxiety have put their own consciences and careers above the interests of the profession.

The central professional problems confronting teachers today are both more mundane and more complex than the cultivated anxieties about whether English is the agent of ideology or the champion of culture. These problems have emerged from an unplanned and still scarcely understood historical contingency: the migration of a linguistically oriented rhetorical pedagogy into the domain of the aesthetically oriented pastoral classroom. English teachers and educational administrators are already well advanced in the series of negotiations - between the linguistic and the literary, the civic and the introspective, the vocational and the personal - through which this migration is taking place. If academic theorists have any contribution to make to this process, it will lie not in the discovery of uncompromising fundamental principles. Instead, it must be looked for in the provision of unimpassioned accounts that overlook neither the complexity nor the worldliness of these negotiations.

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1 This article was originally written in response to a request by the editors of Interpretations, the journal of the English Teachers' Association of Western Australia, and appeared there in 1994.

2 Mathieson (The Preachers of Culture) offers the best account of this view of English, although her own perspective is somewhat similar.
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3 Dixon (Growth Through English) provided one of the most influential manifestoes of the personal growth model.

4 Baldick (The Social Mission) offers the most developed statement of this view, although a shorter version can be found in Eagleton (Literary Theory).

5 This is the argument of Doyle (English and Englishness).

6 This was the leading theme for the mix of semiotic and psychoanalytic theory pioneered by the English journal Screen during the 1970s. Eagleton ("The Subject of Literature") applies this perspective to the analysis of English.

7 Bernstein (Class, Codes and Control 3) offers one version of this approach, Halliday (Language as Social Semiotic) another.

8 Hence elsewhere I have argued that English should be understood not as the literary use of pedagogy but as a pedagogical use of literature (Hunter, Culture and Government 113-29; "History Lessons for "English"); that rather than signifying the moment in which the child's inner creativity breaks forth into the hostile atmosphere of the classroom, "personal growth" refers to the formation of capacities inseparable from the pedagogical relationships of the English lesson (Hunter, "Culture, Education and English"; Culture and Government; 140-53; "Learning the Literature Lesson"); and that, rather than deriving from general laws of language or subjectivity, the literate and ethical capacities associated with English are shaped by the tasks, practices and relationships of a purpose-built formative milieu (Hunter, "After English").

9 The historical construction of this pedagogy, by churches anxious to save souls and by states hungry for trained citizens, is discussed in Hunter (Rethinking the School).

10 We owe this term to Giroux ("Schooling as a form of Cultural Politics").

11 This lesson is still perhaps yet to be learned by those who have identified the critique of English with a critique of the canon. It is worth noting here that this latter critique has recently attained official status. The Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee's Report of the Academic Standards Panel, English identifies an exclusionary high-cultural canon as a major problem but fails to mention the pedagogy in which canons - progressive and conservative - are carried. See Panel (Report of the Academic Standards Panel, English 14-24).

12 See, for example, Martin (Factual Writing).

13 Green ("Gender, Genre and Writing Pedagogy") provides a typical formulation of this view.

WORKS CITED


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