The love that dare not speak its name?
The constitution of the English subject and beginning teachers' motivations to teach it

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ABSTRACT: *Why do beginning teachers say they want to teach English in the primary or secondary school? This article considers the results of a survey of 339 beginning teachers in the context of a discussion about the constitution of the subject and teachers' professional development. The three year project for which this survey was the opening move is outlined. Beginning teachers' "love" of the English subject – and especially a "love of literature" – are suggested to be their strongest motivations and this is contrasted with findings from other surveys of beginning teachers' motivations which indicate that the subject is a weaker motivation. The article concludes by suggesting that claims to the constitution of English that focus on its content alone – albeit motivated by the desire to transform English and make it "relevant" – omit the vitally important dimension of pedagogy. The work of transforming the teaching and learning of English in schools must start by working with the "loves" beginning teachers bring rather than seeking to erase or deny these subjectivities.*

KEYWORDS: *Beginning teachers, motivations, initial teacher education, English, literature.*

> "Sweet youth,
> Tell me why, sad and sighing, thou dost rove
> These pleasant realms? I pray thee speak me sooth
> What is thy name?" He said, "My name is Love."
> (Douglas 1894/1983)

INTRODUCTION

Over the last few years, I have become interested in two ostensibly separate issues and how they might be related: the retention of English teachers within the profession and challenges to the constitution of the subject. Those familiar with the current state of education in the United Kingdom will be aware of the recruitment crisis (there is only a tiny net gain of new teachers entering the profession every year for a rising population of school-age children). It is also becoming more difficult to sustain teachers' enthusiasm for the job and to retain them within the profession, especially in an economy of near full employment. Of particular concern is the rate of attrition of early career teachers – those who leave only a short time after qualifying; figures from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) show that one in five newly qualified teachers leave the profession within the first three years (Ofsted, 2001, p. 386). A recent survey for the General Teaching Council for England suggested that a third of all teachers expect to leave the profession within five years (MORI, 2003, p. 4).

At the same time, the last few years have seen continued interest in the constitution of the English subject with competing claims on its "subject knowledge" from a variety of sources. Andrews (2002) described some of these in the inaugural issue of *English Teaching: Practice and Critique* and – in England – they are undoubtedly associated with recent initiatives by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (the "guardians" of the National Curriculum at one remove from the government) and the National Literacy and Key Stage 3 English Strategies – more recent moves from the centre of the government to specify in minute detail the content of the curriculum and the approved teaching routines (DfEE 1998, 2001). With reference to the constitution of the subject, these claims can be characterised as conservative with an emphasis on the atomisation of linguistic "subject knowledge" and a fragmented and decontextualised approach to text.

Andrews' article was also interesting in that it referred to some of the other challenges to the constitution of the subject English, namely from the arena of research. These more radical claims propose greater attention to visual media, for example, and to the technologies of ICT, with less proportionate attention to the study of literature. There are many examples of these claims being disseminated widely and of sporadic, polarised debates in the press about just what English should be (for example, Kress 1998, Buckingham 2003). These debates have often described English teachers pejoratively as "literary" and "bookish" (actually I'm not sure "bookish" can be used in any other way). Indeed, this was a feature of two articles in the inaugural issue of this journal – Andrews himself using the pejorative in his argument for "media studies to be at the centre of the curriculum" (Andrews 2002: pp. 5, 10) and Goodwyn, in a piece entitled "Breaking up is hard to do: English teachers and that LOVE of reading", asserting that this love of reading is "a very real issue that need[s] attention" (Goodwyn, 2002, p. 66).

In my own experience as a teacher educator, I knew that a "love of literature" was very often expressed by those being interviewed for a place on an initial teacher education course in English as their primary motivation to teach. I have wondered – like Goodwyn – whether this is a good enough reason but I have also wondered whether the subject, as constituted in the arena of policy and as contested in the research, proves to be fertile ground for new teachers. I wonder whether the competing claims to the constitution of school English are as engaging and as productive as the versions they have experienced in higher education, for example. I also wonder whether beginning teachers' relationships with English as constituted in schools is a factor in decisions to remain within the profession (and perhaps seek promotion) or, in fact, to leave the profession. In this way, I began to hypothesise that the two ostensibly separate ideas may in fact be inter-related. If school English becomes a place where your "love of literature" dare not speak its name, do you decide to do something else?

Late in 2001, I planned a research project with two others that would eventually be funded by the National Association for the Teaching of English (NATE). As a group, we had existing interests in how the changing policy context for English and literacy education in the UK seeks to position teachers and how they construct and reconstruct their identities as professionals in this context. We were also interested in how changing conceptions of professional identity may impact upon retention in the broader context of changing patterns in teachers' professional roles, responsibilities

and practices and how this relates to the membership profile of organisations like NATE and participation in conferences, in-service training and other professional development.

With these concerns in mind, we commenced research in the autumn term of 2001 to investigate these issues in the primary language and secondary English fields. We planned the project over three years to investigate beginning teachers' relationship with their subject and their professional development, choosing the three-year timespan to match the period Ofsted had identified as a key milestone in terms of the retention of new teachers. In the initial stage of the project, we were interested to find out the processes by which people decided to apply for initial teacher education in English, the influence of the government's teacher recruitment initiatives (including the training bursary) on this decision and the motivations student teachers express for wanting to become a secondary English teacher or primary language specialist. A full report on this first stage in the project was published by NATE (Ellis, Furlong with Grant, 2002)[1]; for the second stage currently underway, I am working with Elaine Millard of the University of Sheffield.

In this article, I will focus on the motivations beginning teachers of English express for wanting to join the profession. I will do this in the context of a discussion about the constitution of English as a subject and will endeavour to make some comment on the implications as I see them for teacher education and professional development.

CONCEPTUALISING THE RESEARCH

Our research project was designed to investigate beginning teachers' investments in or attachment to the subject English, how this relationship develops over the first three years of the career and how this relates to their professional development and retention within the profession. My colleagues and I were keen to design the project on two levels: the first, dealing with as large a sample as possible of prospective English teachers; the second, dealing in more depth with a sub-set of this sample. We regarded these two levels as complementary and inter-related, with work on one level informing activity on the other. In addition, we hoped eventually to realise a third level in which our work with beginning teachers would be perceived by them as an opportunity for reflective professional development.

The first stage of our research, however, was a questionnaire survey. I am not going to pantomime here the usual distaste to be found for a quantitative dimension to research in this field: I do not support the false opposition between quantitative and qualitative methods (although I would obviously *distinguish* between them).[2] From the outset, we were aware that some aspects of this research project – especially in these early stages – would be situated within the tradition of what Pring (2000) calls "political arithmetic" and we anticipated that NATE and others would be able to exploit this

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[1] The first year of the project was marked by the death of Terry Furlong, NATE's Research Officer and co-researcher. Many readers will be aware of the important contribution Terry made to English teaching in the UK and internationally. I would also like to acknowledge the work of Gail Grant of the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Southampton, during the latter part of the first year.

[2] For a discussion of "false dualisms" in the philosophy of educational research, see Pring (2000), Chapter 3.

aspect of our work with as large a sample of prospective English teachers as possible. Inevitably, for this kind of work, size does matter. We were also satisfied that a largely "open-ended" questionnaire would be an appropriate initial investigative tool for the longer-term project. And we acknowledged that – in choosing this research instrument – we would have to address the same questions of validity, reliability and "objectivity" as we would within a wholly qualitative approach. In other words, we identified the significant limitations to this research design.

Limitations of the research design

The survey was carried out on a "catch all" basis, in that questionnaires were sent to universities, colleges and schools responsible for initial teaching education ("training providers"[3] in the current vocabulary of UK teacher education policy) with a request to distribute them to student teachers for completion. Training providers who required more forms were permitted to produce extras by photocopying. No data were collected indicating how many student teachers were studying at each training institution and no data were collected to indicate how many student teachers, of those requested to do so, actually responded. Hence, response rates cannot be calculated. This means that we cannot state that the response is either representative (of the population of student teachers) or generalisable (to the population of student teachers), since we cannot rule out the possibility of bias.

Additionally, the question about motivations for becoming a secondary English teacher or primary language specialist was first on the questionnaire and was an "open" question (it invited student teachers to give up to four motivations). This presents an important issue of reliability in that the data were "post-coded" (that is coded at data entry, so that answers had to be read and interpreted, then allocated to a category). The coding will therefore be subjective, in that the coder will have read meaning into the response. Even if the coding is all done by the same person (as in this case) it is difficult to remain consistent over the coding period.

It is also worth considering the question of how far this research approach coerced the student teachers into saying what they thought we as researchers wished to hear – of responding, as Goodwyn puts it, with "what *one ought to say*" (Goodwyn, 2002: 67). It is possible that our respondents' perceptions of what is expected of a community of English teachers may have cast a shadow in their expressed motivations. On one level, this would be an interesting response in itself and one worth investigating. On another, I would suggest that the likelihood that the responses are "straightforward" is greater within this approach than they are when working with one's own students in an assessment context – the approach adopted by Goodwyn (2002). Whatever the approach taken and whatever research instrument used, however, the question remains, "How far do we take people at their word?"

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[3] The introduction of the concept of "training providers" to describe university and college departments of education has been one aspect of the work of the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) in the marketisation of teacher education in England and Wales. The TTA is a UK government agency with responsibility for the funding of teacher education and, since its inception in 1994, it has sought to create competition in the market for teaching qualifications by using the inspectorate (Ofsted) to grade training providers differentially against compliance with its national standards and then using this grading as the basis for funding. For further discussion of the TTA's role in teacher education , see Graham (1997).

Finding the beginning teachers

In September 2001, we wrote to the course leaders of all primary (5 – 11) Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) and BA/BEd courses in the UK asking that they target those student teachers (in their final year, in the case of the undergraduates) who were specialising in primary language. We also wrote to the course leaders of all UK PGCE Secondary English (11 – 16/18) and BA/BEd Secondary English courses asking that they distribute the questionnaire to their student teachers (again, final year student teachers, in the case of the undergraduates).[4] To each course leader we sent ten copies of the questionnaire with the invitation to produce more if necessary. The final deadline for the return of completed questionnaires was 28th February, 2002.

Three hundred and thirty nine (339) student teachers from 26 training providers took part in this survey and returned completed questionnaires. This was felt to be a good response given that the questionnaire covered two sides of A4 and contained largely open-ended questions. Before looking in more detail at the motivations expressed by this sample of beginning teachers, it is worth noting some of their characteristics.

Some characteristics of the sample

Age and sex
Nearly 80% of respondents to this question were 30 years or younger. Ages ranged from 20 to 52. Data was missing for 5 respondents for the "sex" category. Of the remainder, 82% were female and 18% male. This imbalance in the distribution of respondents by sex is startling but does reflect a similar imbalance in the population of student teachers (DfES 2002).

Primary/secondary distribution
The number of primary and secondary student teachers in the sample is shown in table 1 below.

Table 1. Distribution of primary and secondary student teachers

Phase	Number	Percent
Primary	51	15.0
Secondary	283	83.5
Total	334	98.5
Missing data	5	1.5

There is a marked difference in the number of primary and secondary student teachers in the sample, even though course leaders of all UK primary and secondary English initial teacher education courses were provided with copies of the questionnaire. One possible reason for this could be to do with the relative importance of (and provision for) specialist English/literacy training in the primary course (where English/literacy will be just one of many concerns). Equally, it could be related to the enormous

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[4] Recent statistics from the Department for Education and Skills show that in England the PGCE continues to be the dominant route into secondary English teaching (97% of new entrants in 2000) and a reduction in the numbers entering primary teaching from the BA/BEd route (from 61% of new entrants in 1997 to 54% in 2000) (DfES, 2002).

pressure in terms of time and workload for student teachers on primary courses, the relative strength of attachment to a subject specialism felt by primary student teachers or their lack of identification as specialist teachers of a subject.

Student teachers' higher education backgrounds

Perhaps unsurprisingly, "English" was the most frequent main title of the first degree for the student teachers in our sample, accounting for nearly 40% of cases. This was followed at 32% by "English plus another subject". At this point, the cumulative percentage was nearly 72%. "Drama" accounted for nearly 3% of cases, so that the cumulative percentage of the above three categories was nearly 75%. The number of cases in the not applicable category was 6.8% and this corresponds to the number of respondents in the final year of the BA/BEd. The range of first degrees other than English/English plus another subject/Drama held by the respondents in our sample were: Law, Media and Communication Studies, Modern Foreign Languages, Philosophy, American Studies, East European Studies, Politics, Psychology, Sociology, Cultural Studies, Combined Studies, Humanities, Marketing, Classics, Linguistics and Education.

Of the 339 respondents, 30 did not answer a question about higher degrees or additional qualifications. Of those who responded, 15% had a higher degree.

Training and training providers

The 26 training providers that cooperated in the survey consisted of two School-Centred Initial Teacher Training Schemes (SCITTS – organisations that offer an entirely school-based course), 10 "new" university Departments of Education (i.e. departments based in universities that were designated as polytechnics or colleges of higher education prior to 1992) and 14 "old" university Departments of Education. Student teachers based at training providers in the four countries of the United Kingdom were represented in the sample but with the majority of these providers (23) based in England.

In the next section, I discuss the results of our survey specifically in relation to the respondents' expressed motivations for becoming a secondary English teacher or primary language specialist.

BEGINNING TEACHERS' EXPRESSED MOTIVATIONS TO SPECIALISE IN ENGLISH

It is important to note that there were an enormous variety of motives expressed within the sample of beginning teachers. Some were impossible to assign to an existing category and were placed in the "other" category. Generally, the "other" category is used to contain a few responses not covered by existing codes. However, at data analysis it was clear that this category was the largest, both in terms of percentage of responses and percentage of cases (each representing a respondent). This could be seen as highlighting a disadvantage of the open question. It does, however, tell us that there are a *wide variety of factors* which influence people to train as teachers specialising in English or primary language. We were satisfied that our

questionnaire format did at least allow respondents to freely record their own thoughts as opposed to ticking boxes alongside categories chosen by the researchers.

The next largest category corresponded to "love of/enthusiasm for the subject English", with 55.8% of cases. If this category is collapsed with the categories "love of literature", "love of language", "love of drama", "love of creative writing" and "love of poetry", this new category then represents approximately 75% of cases; that is, about 75% of respondents wrote one of these in response to the motivation question. It was interesting to find during the analysis of the questionnaires that "love" or enthusiasm was most often expressed for the subject English rather than a discrete element of it. Although "love of literature" was a significant motivating factor, something even more powerful seems to be offered to these beginning teachers by the figure of "English". The following examples of responses to the question about motivations to become a teacher of English give some sense of the language the beginning teachers used to describe their attachment to or investment in the subject:

> *I am absolutely passionate about English and I want to share this with children.*
> *I just love English and want to pass this on!*
> *English is very special to me.*

Table 2 below shows the significant motivations for the student teachers in our sample in becoming an English teacher or primary language specialist. We are defining "significant motivations" as those that were mentioned by more than 10% of respondents.

These results from our survey of beginning English specialists are significantly different to those of previous investigations of beginning teachers' motivations to teach. A study of secondary PGCE students across all subjects by Reid and Caldwell (1997) reported job satisfaction (what was seen as the rewarding nature of teaching) as the primary motivation, with the prospect of working with children as secondary. Studies of specialist student teachers of Physics (Stewart & Perrin, 1989) and ICT (Hammond, 2002) report job satisfaction (Physics) and previous teaching (or "teaching-like") experiences (ICT) as primary motivations. Kyriacou and Coulthard's (2000) survey of undergraduate prospective teachers found that they were attracted to teaching by the prospect of making a contribution to society. And the recent MORI survey of members of the General Teaching Council for England (2003) asked teachers to reflect on their motivations for becoming a teacher and found that the opportunity to work with children and the likelihood of job satisfaction were recalled as the strongest motivations. All of these studies consistently report the attachment to a specialist subject as being less important. So the question arises, are English teachers (secondary and primary language specialists) differently motivated? For the moment, however, I will turn to an analysis of differences in motivation within our sample.

Table 2. Significant motivations for becoming an English teacher/primary language specialist

Motivation	Mentioned by % respondents
Love of/enthusiasm for the subject English [collapsed to include "love of/enthusiasm for the subject" (55.8%), "love of literature" (21.5%), "love of language" (5.1%), "love of drama" (2.1%), "love of creative writing" (1.5%) and "love of poetry" (0.9%)]	74.6
Want to work with children	34.9
Want to make a difference/contribute to society	16.7
My own English teacher inspired me	14.0
Want to pass on my enthusiasm/knowledge	14.0
Have an English degree	12.5
The importance of the English language	11.6
Want to teach	10.1
_____	_____
"Other"	56.4

Looking for differences in motivation within the sample

We wanted to find out whether there were any significant differences in motivation between the various categories of student teachers within our sample. We tested for this using the chi square test in cross-tabulations, a standard statistical device for determining significance. We were able to determine that at the 5% level there were no statistically significant differences in motivation between male and female student teachers in the sample and no significant differences between those student teachers with higher degrees and those without. Importantly, and for us surprisingly, we were also able to determine that there were no significant differences in motivation between those student teachers with a degree in English and those with a degree in another subject.

We did, however, identify a number of significant differences which are worth noting here. We found that primary student teachers were more likely to say they were motivated to teach by a "love of literature" and "the importance of the language" and secondary student teachers were more likely to say that they were motivated by the desire to "make a difference/contribute to society" and with the comment "my own English teacher inspired me". Student teachers aged 29 and under were more likely to say that they were motivated by a "love of the subject" and the desire to "make a difference/contribute to society". And we also found an interesting difference in the motivations of those student teachers on courses at "old" and "new" universities: those based at the "old" universities were more likely to say that they were motivated

to teach by the desire to "make a difference/contribute to society" than those at "new" universities. Given what is frequently assumed to be the more socially inclusive mission of the "new" university sector (the former polytechnics), it is perhaps surprising to find that it is the student teachers at the "old" universities who were more likely to espouse social justice as a motivation. Although this difference is statistically significant, however, we might ask the more difficult question "is it reasonable"?[5]

SO WHAT?

The results from this initial questionnaire raise a number of important questions for me – both as a set of possible "findings" and in relation to competing claims to the constitution of English. Although I accept that statistical significance should not simply be taken at face value, I would contend that a picture of motivation emerges from this particular sample of beginning teachers that suggests that the English subject offers something that they wish to sustain over a period following their own formal education. It would appear to be the case that this motivation is felt even by those (postgraduate) beginning teachers who did not themselves study for an English degree and it would also appear to be something most strongly associated with younger people (who represent the vast majority of the population of beginning teachers as a whole). Moreover, in relation to other studies of the motivations of beginning teachers generally – and studies of Physics and ICT beginning teachers in particular – it may be the case that English specialists are indeed differently motivated, with their "love" of the subject being the strongest motivating factor rather than the appeal of working with children or experiencing "job satisfaction" (although it is of course the case that all these may be inter-related).

It is also worth noting that it was the "love of [the subject] English" as a whole rather than a "love of reading" or a "love of literature" that was most often expressed as a motivation, although it is most likely that these "two loves" are part of the former. What is it that this subject offers? What is its peculiar appeal such that prospective teachers (from whatever degree background it seems) express their attachment to or investment in it with the language of *eros*? Is it simply the appeal of a mode of liberal humanism that anoints them as "preachers of culture" (Arnold, 1882/1993, Mathieson, 1975)? Does English merely provide prospective teachers a cosy opportunity to identify with a comfortable and inherently conservative form of social justice (Leavis, 1972)? And what happens when what some would call this "naïve love" is confronted with different views of the subject that propose, for example, that English is just a "moral technology" (Hurley, 1990) or that it "lags behind development in the real world" (Andrews, 2002, p. 11)?

The alternative models of the subject which have challenged (and, indeed, perhaps motivated) us over recent years sometimes share an irritating predilection for fiddling with the content at the expense of an analysis of practice. My own view is that, as experienced by the youth in the Alfred Douglas poem I indulgently quoted at the head of this piece, some of these alternative models engender feelings of shame and self-loathing in the English teaching profession, where a "love of literature" or a "love of

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[5] For a full discussion of these differences, see Ellis, Furlong with Grant, 2002.

reading" is simply not something one owns up to. This (to my mind, equally naïve) view is often promoted in professional publications and conferences with the assertion that literature does little more than teach people to be middle class. Thus "bookish" and "literary" become pejoratives. And although those who promote this view are right to identify the "governmental" function of a literary education (Hunter, 1988; Alibhai-Brown, 2001), they confuse the functions of schooling with the practices of reading literature, as Jonathan Rose's book on the intellectual lives of the British working classes so enjoyably demonstrates (Rose, 2002). This furtive fiddling with the content of English has led to guilty sublimations of the literary subject that would erase long-standing critical traditions that have sought – after Engels – to conceive of the study of literature as an opportunity to interrogate capitalist "realism" (Engels, 1888/1963). And to make matters worse, this fiddling is often accompanied by the uncritical embrace of the Media Studies subject and new ICTs as if these preferred technologies of schooling were somehow ideologically neutral.

It would seem to be important that beginning teachers of English as they develop – indeed all teachers of English – shouldn't feel ashamed or guilty if they are to develop transformative curricula for young people. Rather than suggest that the answer lies in the content of the subject alone, however, or indeed blithely proposing "the disestablishment of schooling" (Andrews, 2002, p. 11), it is – as Peim suggests – time for "a rethinking of pedagogy and all the devices that go along with it" (Peim, 2003, p. 33). In the context of theorising a more critically democratic schooling, the New London Group proposed a notion of "Design" which builds on this form of critical pedagogy:

> The role of pedagogy is to develop an epistemology of pluralism that provides access without people having to erase or leave behind different subjectivities. (New London Group, 1996, p. 72)

Quite. In relation to the education and development of teachers, I am suggesting that any work to transform the teaching and learning of what we call English will be undermined if we don't acknowledge and *work with* the models of the subject that motivate people to teach in the first place.

CONCLUSION: LOOKING FORWARD

The final section on the initial questionnaire invited respondents to participate in the next stage of the project. Two hundred and seventy (270) student teachers responded to this request and volunteered to take part. Over three years, Elaine Millard and I are following these new teachers through the completion of their training and into their first year of teaching and beyond. Towards the end of each year, we will survey our participants to elicit their reasons for remaining within or leaving the profession, in addition to asking questions about the development of their initial motivations to become teachers. The first of these follow-up surveys is currently underway. Through this process, we hope to discern larger-scale patterns about retention within the profession and developing relationships with the subject English. Additionally, on the basis of the responses to last year's questionnaire, we identified a small sub-set with whom we are working to produce individual case studies of teacher development. We hope that the beginning teachers with whom we are working look upon this project as

an aspect of personal and professional development. By working in these ways and on these levels, we hope to make some contribution to the available knowledge about retention, teachers' professional development and their relationship with the subject. To return to the focus of this article, just how enduring will this "love of English" prove to be?

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