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# Good and serious readers: The place of reading in the secondary English curriculum

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*ABSTRACT: This article explores three different areas connected to how trainee English teachers approach teaching fiction in early secondary classrooms in the UK. It begins with exploring the prior knowledge and experience trainee teachers bring to the training year and details some of the training experience they encounter in one particular course. The article progresses with a brief analysis of different philosophies for teaching reading: the central government strategy for raising standards in literacy, and an experiential model of teaching reading which allows for submersion in narrative without study. The latter position is not a pedagogic one so much as a discursive one offered by prominent authors and framed by the national press. Despite its detachment from government strategies, it is a powerful discourse in terms of the way English teaching has been argued for and shaped in the past. In two case studies at the end I detail how trainee teachers negotiate their approaches to teaching texts between all of these positions and leave open for debate what the future of teaching reading in English classrooms might be.*

*KEYWORDS: Children's literature; secondary English teachers; Framework Strategy; reading.*

## INTRODUCTION

This article begins by looking at how candidates bid for a place on an initial teacher training course to become secondary English teachers. I argue that the profile of English teachers as avid lovers of English literature is in flux and that what we are seeing is a different constituency of new English teachers with a broad range of reading experience beyond literature. Later I explore how trainee teachers have to negotiate their practice of teaching reading viz-à-viz the constraints of the curriculum set down by central government documentation and the practice evident in particular school contexts. Ultimately I am interested in showing that despite a move away from literary study as a primary starting point for the contemporary English teacher, a personal love of reading is fundamental to negotiating how reading, in all its broad forms, can be sustained in the secondary English curriculum.

## RECRUITING ENGLISH TEACHERS

Though relatively new to Initial Teacher Education lecturing I share with other colleagues in this journal the experience of recruiting new candidates to the English teaching profession. Andrew Goodwyn (2003) details the identification of new English teachers with the prevalence of reading. Where I teach, most new candidates certainly want to showcase their identity as good readers and serious readers in the selection process. Most who attain a place on the course are able to give a carefully

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prepared mental list of texts in reply to the question as to why they want to teach English. The list they provide is predictable – very National Curriculum in tone. Most cite Shakespeare; plenty cite some approved version of the nineteenth century novel; there are rarer bold assertions of loving Chaucer or Donne. Our English teachers want to show us they are competent readers and that they know the agenda for reading in the National Curriculum – good texts, big texts and ones written by dead people in the main. F.R. Leavis would feel vindicated.

Whilst this is an oft-performed ritual in selection interviews, the performance does not accurately reflect where our trainees come from. Every year there are fewer applicants with pure literature degrees. Most of our applicants have joint degrees (some with Film or Media; a few more have Linguistic backgrounds). The ubiquity of critical theory as the centre point of any Humanities Degree in higher education has had an effect on the content and structure of English degrees. Nick Peim details the breadth of possibilities in Higher Education English study when he states that it is possible "to explore modes of reading, viewing and critical analysis broadly informed by an attention to questions of history, intertextuality and theory – all organised around major conceptual themes including geographical and political space, nationhood, colonialism, identity and subjectivity" (Peim, 2003). The students who arrive on PGCE courses from recent study in higher education have been encouraged to embrace a wider definition of "reading", more than the words between two covers of a book.

If one of our criteria for selecting candidates to teach is sufficient subject knowledge from prior study then this diversification in "English" degrees should be viewed as welcome. An English Literature degree was once considered best prior training for emergent English teachers when "personal growth" and "cultural heritage" defined what English was, but the new expanded definition of school English includes ICT, Media, and a strong focus on language, and it means that candidates with broader Higher Education experience of "reading" and "writing" texts compete equally well with traditional English scholars. Our English graduates arrive on postgraduate teacher training courses equipped with knowledge of critical theory, experience of writing using ICTs and, in many cases, practical experience of reading media and writing media using video. Though they often express a primary love of literature they are, in the main, multi-skilled readers and writers. They are "critically literate" rather than literary critics.

Consequently, I have agonised far less than my colleagues in this journal about the expression of a love of reading as a bid to secure a place on the course. I am much more interested in how to call on their positive relationship with reading to inform the decisions they make about teaching. I am interested in looking beyond the naïve statements of wanting to "pass on" the love of literature and to assess how they draw on their broader reading experiences to shape the teaching of reading and in that process the extent to which they can contribute to a changing definition of literacy in schools. Can the trainee teachers develop an understanding of "literacies" in the way Meek (1991) describes, "as literacy practices that match new contexts and behaviours prevalent in modern societies" (p. 230).

One of the objectives for preparing trainee teachers for the classroom is to connect them to debates about subject identity and to help them to form a strong identity for

themselves as English teachers. The strong assertion many English trainees make for reading seems an interesting starting point for their learning – how have they read? What do they know about how children read? And what part does their prior experience and idealism play in how they prepare to teach reading in the classroom?

## CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

My taught course opens with students reflecting on and evaluating their reading habits: they write a reading time-line; they share their reading experience through the Subject Knowledge Audit[1] and they work in study groups on a selected list of contemporary Children's authors to satisfy a hole in subject knowledge they all share. These initial experiences – reflection, reading new fiction, preparation for teaching – are assembled because I am concerned to identify a distinction between their reading history (which is often linked to positive attainment, that successful study of literature) and their reading memory, which is more personal and may recover some of the emotional response to reading. When trainees focus on their history they seek to account for the reader they are as evidenced in their achievements. The attempt to get at "memory" is to try to focus on the "reader they have been". Whilst canonical texts exist in memory as study texts primarily, there is a whole area of childhood/teen reading that is not about study but about pleasure. To remind trainees of the variety of reading children are engaged in seems necessary preparation for one of the key roles an English teacher can play in students' lives – someone who can advise on and further the reading habit of the children in their care.

At the beginning of the course, trainees work in groups focused on a contemporary children's text. (In 2002: (*Skellig* by David Almond; *Holes* by Louis Sachar; *Maphead* by Leslie Howarth; *Make Lemonade* by Victoria Euer Wolff; *Kit's Wilderness* by David Almond; *Stone Cold* by Robert Swindells.) The only direction they are given for the first reading is to read and review the book for a teen audience. They meet later in the first term to draw up a teaching sequence for the book and they prepare a short extract of teaching to demonstrate to the PGCE[2] group. The work supports their knowledge of what children may read and it helps them to work through issues for teaching a whole text. The process of reading and planning established here does draw out a variety of responses in the group. It is one of the first points in the course of seeing the different potential of the trainees for negotiating their own identity as an English teacher.

At the first reporting of reviews, many trainees say they are shocked by the subject matter of the books – threat of death (*Skellig)*; incarceration of boys (*Holes)*; homelessness and a murder threat *(Stone Cold)*. Those in the group who read avidly as children are less shocked, they make connections between their reading and the potential of these texts to excite teen audiences. They are focused on the potential of the story, the power of the narrative. For those who had less of a reading habit as children, but have achieved success as readers through formal literature study, the experience turns into a different quest for the potential of teaching the books formally.

[1] Many PGCE courses in Britain support the development of wider subject knowledge over the course of the year via an Audit of prior knowledge and target-setting for improvement.
[2] Postgraduate Certificate in Education – the one year course necessary to qualify as a teacher after degree study.

When they work together to plan a sequence of teaching, the first differences of what reading might mean emerge.

In the early stages of the course the process of teaching is largely hypothetical for new trainees. Their initial forays into teaching are shaped by ideals and false assumptions about what children may be able to do. Their learning curve in the PGCE year is to marry up the theory of teaching with the realities of learning in the particular contexts in which they are placed. Applied to teaching reading, this means that trainee teachers have to learn to accommodate a wide range of reading abilities by adopting a repertoire of strategies. The time they spend in schools enables them to look at the various factors involved in shaping reading ability. They learn about the bands of expected attainment, they learn about the ways in which book borrowing/reading is supported in schools and home. Through wider reading, they connect with concerns about reading attainment, particularly well-documented amongst boys (Millard, 1997).

By the time they have "got up to speed" in terms of the issues facing them, they have also usually become aware of the particular constraints to teaching and the current and preferred methods in their Departments. Nick Peim (2000) argues that teachers face considerable pressure to adopt existing working models and to suppress their beliefs in teaching to strive for classroom competence and curriculum conformity.

## TEACHING READING

The introduction of the *Framework for teaching English: Years 7,8 and 9* in 2001 has fundamentally changed the ways in which English is organised and taught in the majority of secondary schools in England. Though the *Framework* is non-statutory, LEA advisors have claimed that schools need to demonstrate they do have a strategy for raising standards if they do not deploy it. The success of the *Framework* might, at one level, be simply judged by its ubiquity. In my region it is far more rare to discover a school that does not pay heed to the advice in the framework than it is to find schools that do. The resources put behind its effective implementation means that the *Framework* does indeed dominate the organisation of reading in schools. ITT[3] providers must give support to trainees in using the *Framework* to shape their teaching; schools provide the experience of delivering the learning objectives to pupils.

It would not be prudent to detail all the issues the *Framework* raises here; these are too various and too complex for a fair assessment. But for the purposes of this article I want to draw some attention to the ways in which the *Framework* finds a place in the repertoire of new trainee teachers.

The *Standards and Effectiveness Unit* asserts that the strength of the *Framework* is in balancing range with progression. The key mantra to the adoption of the *Framework* principles is that reading has to be "taught, not caught". The newest publication from the strategy, *Teaching Reading* (June 2003) sets out an initial activity in a programme to improve reading: "What makes a good reader". The conclusions expected from

[3] ITT = Initial Teacher Training

such a discussion read: “Good readers do not always read continuously; they alter their reading according to the type of text (scan, skim, close read, read continuously); they read back and forwards when they don't understand; they ask themselves questions as they read; they try to make sense of the text; they connect what they are reading with what they already know; they ask themselves questions while they are reading and before reading” (p. 7). A strong emphasis is placed on meta-cognitive approaches to reading. In order to learn to read fluently there is a series of steps to take. Reading a whole text is an end result of working through reading many fragments.

A vast body of research into reading has been drawn upon to inform the *Framework*. *Cognitive* strategies have guided how to support pupils” access to texts: activating prior knowledge, predicting events, DARTS[4] activities, summarising, questioning and clarifying. *Interpretive* strategies, many of which are based on active learning, exist to help pupils comprehend material: imagining how characters feel, drama activities that support the knowledge of character attitudes or behaviours. The *Framework* significantly places value on the use of *semantic* strategies to increase access to texts and understanding through the provision of lists of vocabulary or tracking word patterns through texts. The *Framework* is a bank of strategies designed to increase the attainment in reading of many children who do not naturally read.

There is evidence from the degree of complicity with the implementation that many English teachers have found aspects of the *Framework* helpful in structuring lessons and meeting objectives for learning. English departments who have produced their long-term plan using the *Framework* can account to external bodies for what they are teaching and their ability to set targets for progress. The reliance on strategies for teaching reading, above the experience of reading, has created divisions amongst English teachers and English teaching about how to sustain reading.

Our trainee teachers all claim reading is important. The National Curriculum for English provides a list of the desired range of reading in the Secondary Stages. However, the implementation of the *Framework* in certain contexts militates against the continuance of reading.

> There is clearly a balance to be achieved between providing classroom time to support the reading of longer texts, and the imperative to secure progression. The aim is to provide enjoyable encounters, which serve the objectives well but do not demand a disproportionate commitment of time (DfEE, 2001, p. 15).

The main impact of the *Framework* in its early years of implementation has been that English departments have been very busy re-designing schemes of work to fit the sequence of objectives proposed in each year for progression. The number of objectives (78 in Year 7[5]) alone has directed a lot of attention away from learning and onto teaching. Teachers have had to learn new teaching skills – modelling, guided reading and writing. The effect of the reforms has been overwhelming. In my region this possibility of teaching shorter extracts has meant that three out of twenty-eight

[4] DARTS – Directed Activities Related to Texts (e.g. prediction, sequencing).
[5] Year 7 is the usual starting point for secondary pupils in UK – aged between 11 and 12.

schools we work with no longer teach whole texts in English at KS3 or KS4[6] even when teaching Literature! These schools have also abolished private reading time and directed the resources (teaching time) to raising standards in reading, without reading whole books. The move away from teaching whole books is not dictated by the *Framework* but it is easy to see how such a move might happen.

If teacher training acknowledged that departments have moved away from reading whole books it could turn the process of training into a cold and clinical exercise where trainees simply learn to teach their classes according to the objectives and to the different modes of delivery and forget about any broader purpose for studying English. For ITT providers the tensions exist between our agenda for training, which is one where trainees both become competent and find a voice for themselves in the subject, and school-based mentors who have their practice shaped by powerful external forces. Our trainees have to learn to negotiate at this point. Ideally, this negotiation should not entail them abandoning their ideals for reading to embrace the *Framework* in the form it has been embraced in one particular school. As Jo Westbrook notes, “the greater the flexibility of the NLS[7] at secondary schools, and the encouragement to maintain existing good practice in English classrooms, ensures that a pedagogical debate around the nature of English teaching continues, and that the “sparkle” in the English classroom is not lost (2003, p. 84).

The implementation of the *Framework* does not have to extinguish the reading of whole books as part of the secondary English experience. The fact that some schools have chosen to embrace “strategies” above “experience” does not do justice to the mixed practice that is still evident in most schools. Nevertheless, the prospect of English as a subject moving away from the apparently more magical elements of the subject – storytelling, joy of narrative – has provoked an ongoing public debate about the role of reading.

As I write this, Reading University is preparing to host a conference where contemporary Children's Fiction writers present their perspectives on the National Literacy Strategy. Five prominent children's authors have published their discussions with a government minister. One of these writers, Philip Pullman, has published a damning assault on the “teaching of reading” in a national newspaper (*The Guardian*, September 30th 2003). In it, Pullman argues that “literacy has both a public and private pay-off. The first empowers us in society; the second enriches us as individuals and encourages us to think for ourselves” (p. 2).

Pullman's voice finds support among other prominent children's writers, notably Michael Morpurgo, the Children's Laureate, who has argued that reading is “over-controlled” and classrooms don't give over sufficient time just for reading (2003, p. 5).

The authors currently receiving a wide readership amongst children object to the processes of reading being promoted by those that shape how reading is done. Those being read are arguing against the wisdoms of how reading takes place. Pullman

[6] English NC is divided in to two key stages in the secondary sector – KS3 is Yrs 7-9 (pupils 11-14); KS4 is Years 10-11 (pupils 14-16)

[7] NLS refers to the National Literacy Strategy which is how literacy is organized in primary school. As extended to secondary schools, the NLS becomes the *Framework Strategy.*

(2003) waspishly pointed out that he could find 71 verbs to describe reading in the National Literacy Strategy, of which not one was enjoy. The counter-response to such criticism is that reading standards need to be raised. David Milliband, the school standards minister, responded to Pullman's piece with, "Fulfilment is beyond reach without an entitlement to techniques of successful reading" (2003, page number not found).

Whilst the *Framework* argues that good reading is about making children aware of strategies (scanning, skimming, close reading), Pullman argues it is much more experiential. After immersing children in books, art and music he argues,

> …we mustn't fret them continuously to talk about everything and discuss it and write about it and say what they think and feel about it….something will remain and have an effect, but we can't possibly predict what, or when, or how, or on whom, or why. All we can say is that if it's there, it will, and if it isn't, it won't (Pullman, 2002, p. 19).

For Pullman the process of reading for pleasure has some unknowable outcomes. Trainee teachers' memories of reading conform with his assessment. Reading, in their memory, was about pleasure, it was sometimes about getting lost in another world, or connecting with other characters. Most books they read as children and teenagers weren't studied or deconstructed in any formal way at all. The experience of reading one book led them to read another. The formal study of texts – literature study – was enhanced by what they understood about how books work from the less formal context of reading for pleasure. Francis Spufford (2001) epitomises this position when he describes his first attempts at *The Hobbit* at six years old. He reports finding much of the language impossible to get his tongue around and many of the ideas completely out of his range of understanding. Yet he did get some handle on the book being about other worlds and other beings and he gained some pleasure from the engagement with *The Hobbit* as a story. His imagination filled in the gaps in his repertoire of skills.

The current debates around reading are concerned with this tension between the "knowable" and "teachable" and the value of the less obvious learning gains that come from private reading and from shared reading. Pullman argues that there are private "pay-offs" to reading, which should not be undermined by the apparent public gains of rising standards.

The debate this has stirred in the pages of the national press posits the taught methods against the caught as if they are mutually exclusive aims. The reality for teachers is to attempt a balancing act between compulsory frameworks and ideals for the subject. English teachers move among explicit class teaching, monitoring and group work, practical work and monitoring individual development. All of these established practices are congenial to a more inclusive approach to textuality and language (Peim, 2000). It is in the multi-faceted approach to teaching that opportunities for the caught may be interwoven with the taught.

What follows are two case studies based on observations and interviews of two trainees in the academic year 2002-03. The case studies reveal how the personal values of reading become interweaved with assessment imperatives and curriculum constraints and show what can emerge when a strong, personal voice finds its place within an over-controlled curriculum.

## CASE STUDIES

### Case study one

There were thirty students on the PGCE Course in 2002/03. For the purpose of looking at how their reading experience translated into teaching reading in school, I offer just two accounts of teaching from the group.

Sophie was a well-educated graduate, with a joint degree in Literature and Language. She had placed a high value on reading, but not particularly on the study of literature. She was quite passionate about language and language learning.

Sophie was asked to teach Louis Sachar's *Holes* (1998) to a group of underachieving Year 8 boys. Prior to teaching she assessed that, "Many of the boys stated that they were 'not good' at English because they struggled with the surface features of spelling, handwriting and punctuation. However, they all showed impressive imagination and skill in telling stories, arguing over ideas, expressing opinions and discussing life experiences."

> It was my aim to encourage an environment that would raise the self-esteem of the pupils and in doing so create a "culture of success" where pupils believed that they could achieve regardless of the "levels" and previous grades.

There were thirty-four boys in the Year 8 class and their current NC attainment levels ranged between 4c (below average) to 5a (above average).[8] Ten of the boys were identified as having special educational needs and received additional literacy support. Several of the boys were in care. Added to this was a high rate of truancy and absenteeism. Staff turnover in the school was high. This class had not had a permanent teacher for six months. Consequently, Sophie faced problems of motivation and low expectations about attainment. The background of a significant number of the boys in the class meant they had little experience of being read to, and little attachment to whole books as a reading habit. Some claimed that reading "was a waste of time" and they would rather develop ICT skills and become a computer programmer where "you don't have to read".

The negative attitudes of the boys to reading was made more difficult for her by an indifferent response to addressing reading more generally in the school. The pressure on space in the school meant there were few dedicated classrooms for English. Consequently there were few identifying features of an English classroom in evidence. There were no fiction books on display. There were no book reviews available. The lack of display of reading is not unique to this school. John Hardcastle's (2003) [9] analysis of classroom displays shows a gradual shift away from the use of display as encouraging reading or interest in language, onto attainment. It is

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[8] Year 8 is the second year of Secondary School – aged between 12 and 13; Level 4 is the expected level of achievement at the end of Year 6 (aged 10-11).

[9] I am quoting Hardcastle from a seminar at the Institute of Education in June 2003. His analysis of classroom display forms part of a larger project "The Production of School English Project" funded by the ESRC and completing in October 2003. Research team: Jill Bourne (University of Southampton), Ken Jones (University of Keele) and Anton Franks, John Hardcastle, Carey Jewitt, Gunther Kress and Euan Reid (all from the Institue of Education, London).

much more common to see display boards in classrooms used to detail how to improve a skill or cross a grade boundary than it is to highlight an authors craft or an interest in a style of fiction.

The library had become a site of conflict in the school and was closed at lunch-time and break-time. The English Department at the school held the view that "our boys don't read". There was an apparent despondency with the lack of proficiency and enthusiasm under-achieving boys bring to reading fiction. Sophie was presented with a crucial dichotomy. Is boys' under-achievement in reading linked to their lack of connection to a reading culture fostered from home and good primary/home links? There is plenty of evidence to support the view that it is (Millard 1997). And were there any learning advantages to trying to confront these views and recreate a "culture" of reading fiction? These questions informed how Sophie planned her scheme of work on *Holes.*

Before summarising some of what Sophie attempted in teaching this unit of work, it is worth returning to one of the central concerns this article began with. Many trainee teachers identify themselves as strong readers above any other prior skill they may bring to teaching. Some providers interpret this as their need to ally themselves with a "cultural heritage model" of teaching and wonder whether this shows an inability to embrace all that English is (Peim, 2000, Goodwyn 2002). The problem with defining English teachers by models is the danger of over-prescription of style to one philosophy. If imparting a love of reading is seen as one naïve aim for teaching English it is not always asserted at the expense of other approaches. Contemporary English teaching does require an ability to deploy strategies from different models or identities of English .

As a trainee teacher Sophie was *told* to prepare the teaching of a novel with a series of teaching and learning objectives designed to ensure progress in certain skills was made and attainment improved. To achieve this she drew on the wide bank of strategies available to encourage engagement and response – some of which are detailed in the *Framework*. But she did call on a wider definition of reading to encourage a stronger, personal response from the boys. To do this she drew on her other strengths as a trainee – a confident ICT user, someone who is good at language and an enthusiastic consumer of film and media. Though she believed reading was important and could be enjoyable, she did not assert the primacy of literature in the teaching of English. She was never only a good reader of fiction, she was a general reader with other competences.

One of the most controversial strategies Sophie imported was whole class reading where she read to the class on a number of occasions. The *Framework* strategy has promoted a number of different shared reading strategies – group, guided reading – which have moved away from the whole class experience of reading a text. Sophie's adherence to the whole class approach grew from a belief that for some of the least able boys the reintroduction of being read to would secure their interest in the story. She was aiming for whole-text understanding, rather than a fragmented language study approach. She read to them and examined their understanding via short tasks: they wrote a text message summary of the story so far and sent it to another Year 8 class; they created a newspaper front cover, using ICT, from the back story about Kissing Kate Barlow and the missing treasure; they designed a storyboard trailer for

the forthcoming film. Sophie observed the ways in which these activities created further dialogue and story re-telling both in the class and beyond. This class began to communicate with another class about the book. She observed learning beyond the classroom.

Joan Goody (2001) has stated that reading a whole novel together as a class is a unifying experience (p. 17). Sophie's reading strategy – collective, shared reading – reflects what Goody argues for but the responses that Sophie encouraged were less literary in intention and more closely connected with some of the preferred learning modes the boys had stated at the beginning of the work. Sophie's own evaluation of her work with this class reads:

> At the beginning of my PGCE course I was unfamiliar with contemporary children's literature and consequently unfamiliar with ways to teach it. However, through this scheme of work I have developed a range of active learning methods with which to increase under-achieving boys" understanding of, and pleasure in fictional texts. I have learnt how to counter issues such as teaching a text to a class that struggle with reading as well as finding a range of tasks to give to a class that are resistant to written work.

Sophie's success lay in her consideration of supportive reading strategies to make broader gains about pleasure and personal response. She was concerned about how to motivate boys; she was concerned that they opt in to reading, even if only temporarily; she gave them active approaches to know the text and to change it: to rewrite it, talk about it, re-design it as a film or recount it in a text message; she was not so wedded to literary approaches but she was committed to the value of reading collectively and sharing stories. A combination of memory and experience of a broader definition of reading than the literary model helped her to achieve this.

**Case study two**

This second case study explores what happened when a less confident reading trainee – Helen – was placed in a school with a strong, independent tradition of reading and which is still working without recourse to the *Framework*.

Central to the reading strategy at this North Hants School was the insistence that all children carry a book with them to each lesson. Every English lesson (in years 7-11) began with children reading independently and in silence for between 5 and 10 minutes. This was a largely cooperative constituency of children and the strategy was wide-reaching and successful. Children wrote reviews and these were shared in anthologies in the library and kept in classrooms. This school boasted the "most borrowed books in the county from a library" and a well developed reading policy where teachers worked as librarians and counsellors. The school ran a home-school reading policy more akin to those operating in primary schools where parents were asked to comment on, and support further, the reading of their child through regular dialogue. Children were guided by their English teachers to move from Children's /teen literature at KS3 towards "adult" literature in KS4. Year 11 boys' more restricted range of reading was satisfied by plenty of John Grisham and John Le Carré novels on the library shelves. It was simply not an option to adopt a non-fiction reading habit.

This school valued the imaginative possibilities of reading in the classroom. Whole books were commonly integrated into English teaching and shared class reading was a highly valued strategy.

Helen's confidence as a reader was significantly challenged by this approach. She had not been an avid reader as a child though she was a competent reader, gaining advanced level and then degree level qualifications in English. She did not enjoy the challenge of reading aloud and did not initially see much value in other children reading aloud. Helen had claimed to love “literature” but this was a different claim to loving reading when she was faced with the prospect of advising students on the next good read. Her experience of a “higher order” reading strategy at her placement school recovered memories of her own struggles and difficulties with “keeping up” at school and being somehow “locked out” of that “culture of reading”.

Though Helen had a good relationship with her mentor she could not identify with the particular optimism about reading espoused by the Department. Helen poured herself into teaching reading via the *Framework Strategy for Teaching English* and by setting objectives. Like Sophie she was not entirely conforming to the expectations for teaching her host Department held for her. She gained confidence in teaching English through a rehearsal of the “taught” approaches. The over-reliance on “taught” strategies and lack of connectedness with other ideals for reading saw her teaching initially founder because she could not find ways of accommodating the students' needs to connect their understanding in lessons back to their wider experience, and in many cases, their wider reading. Many of the students she taught saw beyond the activities set and talked confidently about the relationship between texts, and connections between texts studied and ones they had encountered elsewhere. Helen found it hard to manage these unplanned for responses.

Helen was the kind of teacher who will improve by being specific about teaching and learning objectives, and the evidence from her practice last year suggests she will become even more accomplished in doing this. But there was something missing from Helen's practice. She was “teaching reading” without understanding very much about “where students were coming from” or responding sufficiently well to the diverse experiences children come to classrooms with. Peter Benton (1996) argued that teachers will be at a disadvantage if they do not possess “at least some understanding of, and interest in, the reading and viewing culture that adolescents are busily constructing and reconstructing in their everyday lives” (1996, pp. 77-78). Benton's call is for teachers to recognise the wide-reaching possibilities of reading – beyond books. But in this context it could equally well apply to Helen's need to include in her preparation the detail that these children were well read. The question of pleasure was absent from any criteria for planning Helen had. She was fairly certain that skills could be advanced by working through the objectives for reading step by laborious step. She did not value the implicit learning gained in a well-developed reading habit. Her reliance on the taught and rejection of the caught limited her understanding of reading and one of her key roles as an English teacher – how to progress it.

## CONCLUSION

The standards to reach QTS[10] require that trainees submit evidence for their competence. And those of us bound to measure our trainees against the list of standards will find plenty of evidence on paper, in files and through observation that show emerging competence and confidence with teaching English. But there are elements of excellence in trainee teachers and in practising teachers that come from beyond the ability to work to Frameworks and adhere to a written set of standards, and indicate a stronger role for the teacher than that of effective functionary.

English is being re-thought as a subject. There is a distinct move away from experiential learning towards teacher-centred strategies. The new negotiations over textual study in contemporary classrooms may take the debate forward. Instead of arguing between the taught and the caught, a false opposition indeed, it may be possible to argue for a broader definition of reading beyond the literary model. Rather than viewing that love of reading as “a severe limitation” as Goodwyn does, I believe it is fundamental to opening up the broader definitions of reading that younger trainees have both experienced in their learning and are able to act upon in their teaching.

The government agenda for raising standards is about identifying all the means by which learning takes place. That agenda needs to include prior learning and outside experiences. There are occasions in our memories and I hope there will be in this generation of children's memories of rare experiences given by a teacher where a story makes an impact, where a learning experience stays in the mind. It's the stuff of Teacher Training Agency Advertising Campaigns.

If our trainee teachers can open their minds to the potential of some of the taught elements of the *Framework,* then the advisers of the Strategy need to make it a priority on insisting that schools maintain some aspects of experiential learning, including reading for pleasure. Ellis (2003) has questioned whether teachers who find their “love” of literature stifled in schools won't look to do something else. Many teachers who enter English teaching with a love of reading will find it hard to take up residence in schools where reading has become a series of strategies and not a goal in its own right. Sophie's experience suggests that reading for pleasure can sit easily within strategies to raise attainment and work with preferred learning styles. What may begin as a declaration of a love of the written word can be reconfigured through reflection and experience to embrace that wider definition of reading with which an effective English teacher needs to work. English may not be solely about a love of literature anymore, but it does not have to abandon that love of reading.

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[10] Qualified Teacher Status is determined by teachers showing evidence through study and practice of meeting a range of different Standards.

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