Professional Memory and English teaching

PAUL TARPEY
St Mary's University College, Twickenham

ABSTRACT: This article concerns the way that research into Professional Memory (PM) in English teaching might re-connect the school subject with constituencies – the individuals, communities and social values – it once served. By PM I mean the collective memories of a generation of English teachers which, when brought into conjunction with existing histories, could offer critical perspectives on English today. In this article I will try to show how PM and the wealth of collective representations might afford much needed perspectives on the purposes and practices of secondary English in the UK.

KEYWORDS: Professional Memory, collective memory, history of English teaching, "progressive" teachers, life histories.

I started as a newly qualified teacher in the late nineties in a school where a new head teacher had recently taken over. It didn't take long to see that it was fast becoming an ideological battlefield. The new head arrived with a "corporate" (her word) agenda. Soon there was tension among the senior staff. In particular, there was tension with the Head of the English department, who belonged to a different generation of teachers. I was struck by way that an older generation seemed to operate in a different ideological universe. They showed their concern for children, for developing the curriculum and for social justice. Teacher-accountability, standard assessment tests (SATs) and school league tables were secondary considerations. This was an all-girls secondary school in London, where many of the girls came from working-class and ethnic-minority backgrounds. Curiously, I found myself drawn to this group of older teachers, as well as to the methods and values they defended so vehemently. But what were these methods and values? And why were they so vehement?

THE STUDY AND ITS HISTORICAL CONTEXT

This experience has prompted me to find out more about the older generation of English teachers' ideas and experiences. I am currently investigating the professional lives of six secondary English teachers who began their careers between 1965 and 1975. To grasp what actually happened to English teaching in London in this decade I have been concentrating on oral testimonies. My guiding assumption is that the memories of English teachers are interesting for what they can tell us about how the subject has changed, as well as for what they might contribute to discussions about English curriculum and pedagogy. They also tell us about the ways that teachers talk about their work. Much work on teachers' lives (Goodson 1992; 2003) tends to focus on individuals recalling personal and professional events over a career in teaching. What seems to be missing from such studies is an analysis of the collective dimensions of memory. I am working towards producing a Professional Memory (PM) of English at a particular moment in the history of the subject.

The six teachers were not chosen for their representativeness. Rather, I chose people who might describe themselves as "progressive", "radical" or even "revolutionary" practitioners. I aim to use their oral testimonies to assemble a collective sense of what certain "progressive" or "radical" teachers thought they were doing at the time and how they talk about it in retrospect. I am particularly interested in how the circumstances that led to curriculum and methodological developments came about within my chosen period. Additionally, I am curious to know how some of the teachers who worked in certain concrete circumstances – what I shall be calling "conjunctures" – attempted to democratise secondary English. Ivor Goodson (Goodson, 2004) describes "conjunctures" as intersections of events and circumstances that can effect change:

> The most interesting points of inquiry and investigation are when the different layers of historical time coincide; for it is at these points that inclination towards, and capacity for, change and reform are strongest. Such co-incidences or conjunctures can be seen in key moments of educational history and change (2004, p. 17).

The change that occurred in secondary English between 1965 and 1975 was profound, not only in terms of pedagogic practice, but also in terms of the very conception of what and whom the subject was for. In this article I shall be discussing what the teachers say about their sense of who they were teaching – in most instances, working-class, London children from strikingly diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. I shall also foreground a strong sense of their own local agency in changing and developing the curriculum.

First, I need to lengthen perspectives to suggest that these teachers were in fact building on already existing traditions within London English teaching. Following the Second World War, the remit of the English curriculum was broadened. For some English teachers – a minority – each and every social and cultural context of language use became a potential focus for classroom inquiry. Many "progressive" English teachers took as their starting-point the children's own social and cultural circumstances. Indeed, one of the defining features of the "New English" was teachers' positive response to vernacular speech. They encouraged children to talk about their ordinary lives and experiences. Unsurprisingly, such approaches provoked fierce debates about the purposes of English.

Secondary English in the UK was a lottery in the immediate post-war period. The 1944 Act implemented a "tripartite" system into British schools.[1] A grammar school education held out the promise of university and professional careers. No surprise, then, that many working-class parents wanted their children to attend such schools. But all too often they were disappointed. In reality, of course, the relatively small number of grammar school places went to children from families whose cultural, linguistic and financial resources gave them a marked advantage when it came to displaying the types of "aptitude" required. In sum, the tripartite system worked to

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[1] The Tripartite system resulted from the 1944 Education Act (Also known as the Butler Act). Although the Act made secondary education available to all children, it imposed three types of school – Grammar, Technical and Secondary Modern. Eligibility for entry to Grammar school was decided through the "eleven plus" test, which apparently tested levels of "fixed" intelligence. Grammar schools and Secondary Moderns were supposed to have "parity of esteem", but this was never the case, and the Secondary Modern became associated with "failure", as they catered for children who had "failed" the eleven plus.

reproduce class divisions in a stratified class-ridden society. It also perpetuated the damaging myth that working-class children were generally of lower intelligence than their middle-class peers. Raymond Williams suggests the 1944 Act produced "a new system of grading" (1961, p. 171).

This system of grading children was predicated on the notion of innate, fixed intelligence. Further, deficit models of working-class culture and language were used to justify selection and, ultimately, and implied that social stratification was a "natural" outcome of measurable difference in intelligence. Some teachers, who were deeply dissatisfied with such unfounded assumptions, sought to defend working-class culture and language and its place in schools. Culturally salient indices of working-class identity (skilled employment, trade unionism, class politics, and so on), along with the gradual introduction of a more equitable "comprehensive" school system, inspired small but influential groups of pioneering teachers to change the English syllabus in schools.

These developments occurred against a backdrop of wider social change. Roy Lowe (2007) argues that increasing affluence in the '50s and '60s meant more disposable income, a prolonged adolescence and dramatic changes in social attitudes. He suggests that: "It was hardly a surprise then that what went on in the schools should be seen to be changing swiftly and to be particularly controversial at this time" (p. 40). Lowe also points out that the social reality that lay behind the popular stereotype of radical change and innovation in the 60s/70s was not as widespread as is often suggested. In fact, it was the stereotype of rapid change itself that led to increased impetus for centralised government to take greater control over state schools and curriculum. Yet, what cannot be denied, is that for the first time some working-class children were given a "voice" in schools; some classrooms and curricula became genuinely "child-centred"; and some teachers paid fresh attention to the particular needs of local constituencies.

The foundations for change had been laid earlier. After the war, a few English teachers started to direct local curriculum change themselves. To give just one telling instance, John Hardcastle (2008) suggests that *Reflections* (1963) by Clements, Dixon and Stratta, was perhaps the first English course-book to manifest an explicit concern for the social realities of working-class children in South London. The course-book was the product of ways of teaching working-class children that were developed in Walworth School in the 1950s. Students were positively encouraged to make meaning for themselves. The authors of *Reflections* were teaching at an inner-city London school, fully aware that the life chances of the students there were restricted along class lines. As one of them, John Dixon, said of the time, "The taken-for-granted structure of education, you might say, was an echo of the class structure." (Dixon 1991, p. 149) And the production of such texts was an attempt to level the balance.

But what was it about this particular time in the 1950s that meant conditions were right for such ventures? What were the specific conjunctures? Dixon continues:

> These were heady days intellectually, for the young in spirit – and also for the combative, rebellious and iconoclastic: for respected authorities were challenged, of course (1991, p. 175).

Dixon recognises that various factors came together in the postwar period to create favourable conditions for "change": a young generation fresh out of university, engaged in political debate, immersed themselves in popular cultural movements in music, art and film. In a post-war climate of optimism, they were responsive to new theoretical perspectives on language and literature. Thus, critically alert young teachers pioneered methods aimed at giving working-class children both a greater sense of their own *agency*, as well as improved tools for improving their life chances.

Following to some extent in the path of *Reflections* a new generation of publications emerged. Notable developments included the launch of the magazine *Teaching London Kids* (TLK), which began as a series of seminars in 1971 and 1972. TLK had a broader set of concerns than English teaching and one distinctive feature is that it concentrated on issues of social class. Resources and teaching ideas were developed by teachers themselves at *The English Centre,* which was established by the Inner London Education Authority and which exists today as *The English and Media Centre*.

The complicated factors that shaped the developments and conjunctures I have been sketching are important and they deserve further analysis for what they can tell us about the way secondary English evolved. However, my focus here is on a group of teachers who entered the profession in the late-sixties and seventies. They were born during or just after the war. By gathering their testimonies, I hope to help generate a better understanding of the circumstances in which lasting change occurs. In what is to follow, I shall draw on data from semi-structured interviews. My intention is to look closely at the collective dimension in their testimonies and to begin to put together a "Professional Memory" of the subject.

STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Of the six teachers interviewed, four are male (Steve, Shaun, Michael and David) and two female (Ann and Liz). They are from various social and educational backgrounds. These range from working-class to upper-middle class families; from a secondary modern school to a private boarding school; from teacher training college to Oxbridge. Each of the informants was asked exactly the same questions. These were divided into three groups: firstly, questions about their initial schooling in English; secondly, about their professional development (teacher training and early professional practice); and thirdly, questions about their "current outlook" and their attitudes towards the profession now.

It needs to be pointed out that this research is framed within a larger investigation into English teachers' lives. For the purposes of this article, I will concentrate on four questions that will enable the drawing together of the collective elements of PM:

1. Would you say methods of practice changed in the '60s and '70s?
2. How important was the issue of children's empowerment or agency in your teaching? How did you try to engender it?
3. Do you think of yourself as being from a particular "generation" of English teachers?

4. Many of the techniques and methods developed between '65 and '75 are common or even "standard" practice today. Do you think it would be useful for current generations of English teachers to understand or appreciate how and why those ideas developed?

I was immediately struck by the way that the informants referred separately to broadly similar events in their lives and careers. For example, they suggested that the classrooms in the schools that they had attended as pupils were silent, restrictive spaces and that lessons were repetitive, formulaic, lifeless. (Evidently, the changes associated with postwar English teaching were not so widespread as I had imagined.) But there were also exceptions to the picture of moribund practice, and occasionally one or other teacher or lesson was made to stand out vivdly. The informants' accounts of their experiences of teacher training were generally viewed positively, but they all suggested that most learning was actually done "on the job", rather than on "official" courses. There was a marked emphasis in the accounts on the place of reflexivity, creativity and innovation in English teaching. Above all, there was an overarching sense that something important has been "lost". In some instances, informants' memories of their own time in secondary school shaped their ideals and intentions. Some of them insisted that they went into to teaching "to do a better job" than the teachers who had taught them. It may well be the case that the experiences that individual teachers referred to were remarkably similar. Of course I'm interested in what they tell us about historical realities. But my interest lies additionally in the manner in which they talk about these realities. These testimonies constitute instances of PM that extend well beyond the recollections of the individuals concerned.

I need to say something more about where my notion of PM comes from. Building on the pioneering work of early, twentieth-century French sociologist, Maurice Halbwachs on "Collective Memory", Middleton and Edwards (1990) suggest that memory, far from being purely individual, is in fact constructed through various multi-layered, social-dialectical processes. Indeed, it is one of my contentions that the construction of memory is intensely ideological. When we give our testimonies and narrate our stories, we do so from certain perspectives, certain value positions, certain assumptions. Shotter (1990) puts it like this:

> … our ways of talking about our experiences work, not primarily to represent the nature of those experiences in themselves, but to represent them in such a way as to constitute and sustain one or other kind of social order (pp 122-3).

What kinds of "social order"? And what versions of "self"? Exactly how much influence do "shared ways of talking about experiences" have on the memories of those who lived through the period? Eventually, by placing the generic, collective elements of the teachers' narratives alongside existing histories, I hope to draw a clearer picture both of what went on, as well as how the participants wish the historical events and the personal events in their professional lives to be remembered.

Would you say that methods of English practice changed in the '60s and '70s?

Respondents appeared unanimous in their assertion that methods changed for the better. In general, respondents claimed that there was a much greater emphasis on talk

in the classroom than when they were at school. Steve recalled somewhat ambiguously that he would simply "talk to the kids", but with a clear focus. Ann suggested, "The expected basis for work was oral exchange . . . and writing came out of that, and presentations came out of that . . . and exam coursework came out of that." Liz was trained in Drama and used it to teach English with her classes. Shaun recollected getting students to speak about their lives into a cassette recorder. He used transcripts as a basis for drafting autobiographical writing. These practices seem to be a far cry away from the "endless parsing", "composition", "comprehension" and grammatical "box analyses" that they claimed that they were exposed to at school in the Sixties.

Ann pointed to innovative practices in her school:

> We did units of work which we planned a half term ahead of what we were currently doing. It was very exciting. We had open-door policy both for ourselves, you know, so we could go in and out of lessons and kids had options to go, not with one teacher or another, but to go with one aspect of the work or another.

As well as references to changes in English methods, there was common agreement that the curriculum and syllabus fostered higher expectations of students than is the case today. Michael referred to the freedom teachers had in being able to write their own syllabus for the Mode 3 CSE examination, which teachers controlled locally and which had up to 100% coursework:

> Obviously our syllabus had to be passed, but nevertheless, we did what we wanted for our boys. We wrote it and we marked it and, you know, obviously it was moderated. And what is surprising looking back on it now, and I realise it was quite tough, we wanted classes . . . to read five novels in a two-year period! Now, you know, you can get away with much less now, but our value, er, we placed on reading was very high.

Shaun refers to the same syllabus:

> It was nothing like today, I mean I, for example, the mode, er, the Mode Three CSE, er, where it was a hundred percent coursework, it's interesting because people think "oh, that must have been a doddle"! But the students produced folders of *ten* units of coursework! I mean they were *phenomenal* portfolios, an achievement, you know.

The "Mode Three" CSE was introduced in the first instance for lower-ability students. A key feature was the amount of coursework it allowed and the informants were unanimous in their claims about the substantial academic demands it made on their students. However, the terms in which they made such claims is also revealing for the way that the informants represented themselves as particular kinds of English teacher.

Thus, in connection with Mode Three, Michael described himself as a "radical", whereas Shaun balked at the term, "radical", preferring to describe himself as a "revolutionary" teacher. Either way, their comments represent a view of themselves as teachers who were committed to curriculum change that was designed to enable so-called weaker students to succeed in what was a patently unfair and ungenerous system. Further analysis reveals that the informants' accounts contain a marked awareness of the political issues surrounding language and class and their place in education. Steve reflected:

> We very much believed that you took people's speech and communicative, communicative culture, brought it into the classroom and developed it and sustained it. So language was always there.

This type of approach was presented in direct and deliberate opposition to "traditional" versions of English teaching. Here Steve describes how he challenged what he took to be prevailing attitudes towards "language" in English lessons:

> And the underlying message was that we're going to teach you why it's the best language in the world! So it was essential that we learned the structure, and then you learned the *correct* forms! And so a lot of English teaching was corrective and remedial, *attacking* the native and regional localised speech forms! And then we came in and said that we want those forms sustained and brought into the centre of the classroom! So you're hitting the ideology.

Steve described himself as an "ideological Marxist", but not in a dogmatic way. We have an instance here of genuinely reflective practice. He shows his understanding of historical configurations of English, punitive methods of teaching, as well as the wider social and cultural implications of the way that he was taught as a pupil. His insistence on changing practice highlights an effort to democratise English and make it relevant to the particular constituency he taught.

Peter Cunningham (2007) suggests that popular interpretations of the impact the Plowden Report[2] ostensibly had on teachers do not necessarily hold true when individuals recall what it meant to them in practice. There are tensions and contradictions between individual and collective memory. Further, he claims that in order

> To improve the future, we must strive to learn from the past, a past that is not a simple narrative of policy but also a complex layer of individual and collective memory (p. 30).

What I am calling Professional Memory is part of collective memory. In essence, the teachers here are recalling their individual commitment to defending students' agency. Sometimes they take care to describe what distinguishes their own particular political allegiance. However, it appears to be the case that their individual recollections reveal a PM of *common* ideas, values and commitments.

How important was the issue of children's empowerment or agency in your teaching? How did you try to engender it?

David discussed the importance of exposing children to many discourse types:

> I think there was the opportunity to er, [pause] to encourage kids to debate issues of importance to them, and I think there was a definite move to use English as er, to empower kids, I mean you can't . . . this notion of, unless you've got a grasp of the

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[2] The Central Advisory Council for Education report, "Children and their primary schools", was chaired by Lady Bridget Plowden and published in 1967. With its insistence that "at the heart of the educational experience lay the child", it helped to legitimise "child-centred" and "progressive" conceptions of classroom practice in primary schools. In some schools, the issue of children's *agency* became a real concern.

sort of language that you use in that context then you haven't got any power, so the argument was, you know, we need to empower kids in standard English so that they could take part in these debates. Discourse, that's the word . . . you can't take part in this discourse unless you've got the tools to do it.

Ideas about language and discourse also link back to the issue of class. Shaun and Michael were explicit in their political concerns with the education of working-class students. Michael:

Well, I think, er, quite a lot of us at that time as English teachers were interested in, er, giving voice to our mainly working-class students….we were publishing children's work, children publishing their own work. So that actually we used to have, I mean, I remember thinking "well what can we do to make this work real?" to really make kids have real audiences and so on….all the lessons were really thinking about ways of making them active and giving them a voice.

Shaun was clear about his intentions and is also aware of the wider context:

Er, the good things were always to encourage debate, always seek to, er, I don't necessarily like the word, empower, always seek to encourage students to say what they think, to gain confidence through discussion, er, to respect other people's views….But also that, er, while I went into teaching very deliberately, because I wanted to work with working class kids, er, I wanted to become involved in a union and in working class struggle, if that doesn't sound too grandiose!

The informants referred specifically to a notion of developing students' confidence in their *own* language, heritage and abilities. "Giving voice" to students was an important principle, both in theory and in practice. Their child-centred concerns as well an unassailable belief in working-class children's abilities defied "deficit" models of language and intelligence. Steve illustrated the link between children's empowerment and curriculum content succinctly:

Well we thought obviously that children have rights. And that's based on an idea that a person grows and develops and they're *free*! And that it was wrong for schools to imprison and to structure and to limit people, and schools needed to be liberative! So that means that when we chose a piece of literature, it was because we thought that it had some potential for that.

Do you think of yourself as being from a particular "generation" of English teachers?

Responses to this question indicated a remarkable similarity among the informants in the way that they represented their professional selves. In what follows, I am trying to understand how the historical, the collective and narrative representations converge in ways that constitute what I'm calling PM. To give a sense of convergence, I present substantial extracts from the testimonies of all six informants.

David: I was in the classroom from '69 to '84….I think there were more opportunities then, there was more flexibility. We weren't so answerable….I think we got wrong footed, if we were a generation, when sort of Thatcher and the National Curriculum ….We'd been left alone for so long we hadn't bothered to structure out theoretical arguments. We didn't have the arguments; we were caught out.

Ann: I think I come from a generation of English teachers who had certain precepts, who stood for certain values and had certain priorities. And they would make trouble, in the context of work, if they couldn't have what they wanted – for a example, mixed ability, that was a very strong suit indeed….we defined ourselves as, well a movement sounds preposterous, you know, but as part of a movement in English teaching, I think we did identify ourselves.

Steve: Yes I do! The late '60s and early '70s was a time when a lot of socialists got together and decided to do something positive. We were inspired by revolutionists like Che Guevara, the Cuban example….we didn't just have a bit of politics and then our job, we thought we'd lead a life that's useful. And we played Jimi Hendrix, we politicked hard and we talked hard. And it was all one thing, and the word we used for our music and politics and our teaching was *progressive*….And so there's definitely a sense of belonging to a distinct generation, and we need to find a way of getting that history back on the agenda again.

Liz: Yes I do! Well I'm very glad to have come from the second half of the '60s. Because it was, because we really tried to make English *fun*, and de-acad, oh, what's the right word? Make it non-academic? Get away from traditional, get away from the canon. Celebrate ordinary lives I think. Doesn't that sound cheesy, but yes….That's where it was, and it's all gone!

Shaun: Well, funnily enough, I found this question strange in a sense, because obviously I am from a particular generation because of my age. I'm fifty-eight. I started teaching in '72, so, by definition, I'm from a different generation….the way I would sum it up is this – it's that I'm working with colleagues now, the most experienced and the best of them embody and have retained the best traditions of the ILEA[3], which don't forget [laughing] was abolished in '89, and….have sustained the best practices that we developed in those years of experimentation.

Michael: Well, you know, I'm sure that you can write, that you could write this up using all the….theories and historical understandings about what was actually happening in that….decade you know. There was the rise of the comprehensive school, and radical teachers coming together….The '60s generation is a very, very important generation that…enriched public life and still does because all these people are now working in the system, you know, they're all there….But other messages are so strong that they're being drowned out….[But with] Blunkett and all the subsequent secretaries recognising that you can't force…the coercive model of change which they adopted and which has proved…to be wrongheaded, is not working, and they're floundering around, looking for ways to revive things that modify it so now "creativity" is back on the agenda but what does it mean? What does it mean if it's drowned out, if you have to spend your time coaching kids for SATS? It's marginal rhetoric.

There is a strong sense of collective identity here. The informants mostly refer to themselves using the collective pronoun "we". Further to this, there is a suggestion of thematic convergence in the way they refer to what they believe is "best" for working-class London kids. Above all, however, they speak of a clear and purposeful sense of professional freedom and autonomy, as well as their strong commitment to a struggle to establish what is to be deemed "professional" – the standards and values of English teachers. They express various levels of political opposition to the present system,

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[3] The Inner London Education Authority had responsibility for education provision for the twelve inner London boroughs between 1965 and 1990.

which seeks to impose criteria of professionalism and "professionality" from the outside (Whitty, 2000). As they look back, there is a powerful sense that something has been lost over the years and that their earlier concerns need to be put "back on the agenda". Indeed, there is an overarching, *collective* sense that the work that their generation accomplished was of lasting value. And they show a *collective* awareness that their innovations were radical at the time and provided templates for future professional practice.

Thus, each of the teachers contributed to a collective picture of what their generation achieved. These achievements are expressed in specific terms. For example, Shaun pointed out that "the best of them [achievements] embody and have retained the best traditions of the ILEA". David lamented the loss of "opportunities" and "flexibility". Ann suggested they were a "movement" and that they would fight on issues that affected how they worked with children, "for example, mixed ability, that was a very strong suit indeed". And Liz struck a characteristic note when she suggested that her generation tried to "celebrate ordinary lives". Initiating curriculum change, she said, to give "ordinary" children the opportunity to consider their own situations and problems was a key characteristic of this generation of "progressive" teachers. Steve went further, suggesting they [the generation] "decided to do something positive", and "thought we'd lead a life that's useful". Above all, they recalled the past in order to provide a vantage-point from which to reflect critically on current arrangements. Thus Michael criticised current appropriations of progressive ideas: "…now creativity is back on the agenda again, but what does that mean…if you have to spend your time coaching kids for SATs [Standard Assessment Tasks]? It's marginal rhetoric."

Many of the techniques and methods developed between '65 and '75 are common or even "standard" practice today. Do you think it would be useful for current generations of English teachers to understand or appreciate how and why those ideas developed?

Michael suggested that exposure to earlier forms of English teaching might raise critical awareness among teachers today:

> It's a *really, really* interesting question.…But to talk to teachers now, who have been recently trained in the last two or three years, it would be really, really interesting to try and sort out exactly, because they are *not* joining associations, they're not going to meetings.…I've been working with a group of teachers, and a really good teacher, or she seems to be, and in her report of the thing we've been looking at, boys and writing, she said: "I don't know whether I dare not have a writing frame if an inspector came into my classroom." …So somehow or other, it's intelligent teachers who have got hold of the idea that, if you are seen, er, you know, if you get that, er, when we've tried to wean them away from objectives, you look through these exercise books of some of these kids, and they're really nice teachers, and you can't work out what the task was!

Steve puts the case for looking at the history of English practice more forcefully:

> I have a major criticism of teacher training institutions at the moment, is that there simply is not enough *real* history of education. [We need] a series of recommendations and one of them should be to structure reflective interaction for younger would-be English teachers with people in their thirties, fifties, seventies. And

actually expose them to reflective things like we're doing, to get them to think. What we would find now, most interesting, is that a lot of the intuitive feelings of younger teachers who are now eighteen, nineteen, twenty, twenty-one will closely reflect what my generation was doing, because, of course, they are now wanting to react against the prison that's been put in place in since '88….So, there'd be a real purpose in institutionalising the sort of things that we're doing here.

Steve's response begs the question to what extent "institutionalising" inter-generational, discussions about past and present practice might benefit new teachers. Interestingly, professional development in other disciplines (law, medicine) views historical case-study work as a necessity. Miriam Ben-Peretz (2002) makes great claims for "learning from experience" in the development of professional practice. In particular, she urges a conscious recognition of gaps or lapses in knowledge and understanding:

> The accumulation of experiences leads to growth. Sensitivity to failures plays a cardinal role in this process. Awareness that something is missing, a sense of dissonance between expectations and reality, seem to be prerequisites for conscious and explicit learning from experience in order to improve one's practice (p 318).

Many would agree with Michael, when he suggests that the current generation of English teachers in the UK is well trained, creative and committed. However, it is questionable whether the sense of identity and history currently shared among English teachers figures in the same way that it does for the teachers interviewed here. These teachers spoke about themselves as social agents for change. Specifically, they declared a progressive commitment to developing English as a subject that would enable children in their constituencies to assess their own life chances and to be able to act upon those assessments. What constitutes professional behaviour for the present generation of English teachers is defined *with reference to* the prescriptions of centralised policy. It is largely external to the goals that teachers set for themselves. Indeed, today, standards of professionalism are measured by performance matched to official criteria quite removed from local responsibilities.

How has such a change come about? And how is it to be understood by teachers themselves? What alternatives are available for discussion? It is my contention that PM could help current and future generations to understand the historical components that make up the "conjunctures" that constrain them. PM analysis might also help teachers to recognise the kind of "dissonance" that Ben-Peretz refers to in the expectations placed upon them, their students, and the realities in which practice is forced to operate. By understanding historical precedents and developments in English teaching, current practitioners may be able to construct an "awareness that something is missing" through their own and others' experience. Ben-Peretz continues,

> Learning from experience does not necessarily mean that we continue to act in ways that proved to be successful in the past, or refrain from repeating unsuccessful actions. It may just as well mean that we view our experience from new perspectives (p. 322).

Professional Memory might prompt English teachers to evaluate their practice by providing a channel though which core traditions, standards and values that teachers

forged in contact with the constituencies they serve are passed down from one generation to the next and held up for scrutiny? Thus accounts of English drawn from PM have the potential to provide alternative ways of seeing the subject in a way that provokes critical discussion among teachers about present and future responsibilities.

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