

***The Teaching of English in England* through the ages: how has the Newbolt Report been interpreted at different times?**

Abstract

Since its publication in 1921, *The Teaching of English in England*, otherwise known as the Newbolt Report, has informed both the shape of English as a school subject and the discourse about the teaching of English in England. The 1960s saw the report as promoting a cultural heritage rooted in outdated social values; the 1970s explored how it encouraged a version of personal growth through a love of literature. The 1980s returned to issues around social class, which were further developed in the 1990s. More recently there has been a limited reappraisal of the Newbolt Report, crediting it with introducing the modern discourse around English teaching. This paper argues that a deeper understanding of the Newbolt Report would allow teachers to become more engaged with the discourse about English teaching and re-connect this with their values.

Keywords:

English teaching

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History of English teaching

Education policy

Introduction

The history of teaching English in England is also the history of *The Teaching of English in England* (Newbolt 1921). A government-sponsored response to deeply

felt concerns about the purpose of English in schools in a climate of national uncertainty, the Newbolt Report, as it is more often known, identified key tensions that exist to this day about the place and purpose of the subject in English schools. Commissioned with the intention of exploring ‘the position of English in the educational system of the country’ (Newbolt 1921: 4), the report remains one of the foundational texts for the school subject of English. Its relevance persists, as today’s teachers of English ‘should have knowledge of the past and use that to inform and build a better future’ (Gibbons 2017: 4).

The purpose of this paper is to explore how the Newbolt Report has been interpreted over the years since its publication after the First World War. This is important for at least two reasons. Firstly, the Newbolt Report effectively built the scaffolding for the school subject of English as we know it today; secondly, it helped to establish not only the discourse around the teaching of English in the English school system but also the discourse about education itself (Doecke and Mead 2017). The discourse around the teaching of English in the English school system has been characterised by discussions about the relative significance of Language versus Literature; whether English is a utilitarian subject, or a creative one; what is the place and purpose of grammar; what is the relationship between English and assessment; who teaches English; and the relevance of the curriculum to pupils and other interested parties. The report was the earliest comprehensive expression of the range of tensions still felt in schools and society about the teaching of English.

It is particularly important during the final years of the 2010s to reflect on how the report has been interpreted over time. Both society and the place and purpose of English as a school subject are shifting. I do not want this paper to work only as a historical overview; I want to use these ideas to help guide the next direction(s) of

English as a school subject in the English school system. A great deal can be learnt from the study of expert views, and we have not, actually, ‘had enough of experts’ (Gove 2016), as some highly influential policy makers have claimed.

There are many reasons why this is a good time to focus on the Newbolt Report. Most obviously, it is one hundred years old, an anniversary which is often taken as a moment to reflect, review and then predict. Another good reason can be found in the context of the report: it was written in the aftermath of the First World War, with all the national and international soul-searching which those traumatic years caused. This was a politically unstable time in the UK, with parallels to contemporary political issues.

Context of the Newbolt Report

The place of both English Language and English Literature is currently firmly established in the English secondary school system. Policy developments such as Progress 8 (DfE, 2018) have ensured that English is a critical measure of every school’s success. However, the position of English as a school subject has not always been so secure. In the nineteenth century it was often positioned as a poor adjunct to the Classics, before developing as part of the nascent, Local Authority maintained school system in the very early 1900s. Multiple accounts and histories make it clear that the value of the subject was contested until relatively recently, and that both the quality of the content and the quality of the teaching have often been poor (Arnold 1910; Shayer 1972). Indeed, Government reports at least until the 1970s were clear that English in schools was a second rate, poorly resourced subject (Bullock 1974). While there are clear issues with the place and purpose of English in today’s English secondary schools, the subject has at least a secure place at the heart of the school system (OfSTED 2013; DfE 2014).

The 1920s were different. The report was commissioned by Sir Herbert Fisher, the Education Secretary in the Coalition Government, at a time of social and political uncertainty. England was reeling from the devastation of World War One; the government was unstable, there was revolution in Russia and the first wave of feminism presaged social change. It was against this backdrop that the Coalition Government recognised the importance of English as a school subject. It is difficult to imagine current politicians enjoying the same insight, or to imagine their commissioning Sir Henry Newbolt, a well-known poet and Chairman of the English Association, or Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, a famous Cornish anthologist, to be involved with such work. These people had a deep personal investment in language and literature. Today it can be difficult even to find out who writes government policy, but it is unlikely to be writers or poets.

Changing interpretations of the Newbolt Report

Educationally and pedagogically, the 1920s was a period of experimentation. Developments such as the introduction of Steiner schools and (more importantly for the present article) the work of Caldwell Cook (1917) aimed to bring a clear sense of creativity and self-expression to English teaching in schools. These experiments now seem quite radical, but they were consciously operating in the cultural and scientific environment of their times (Lester 1926). Yet, although such experiments have been described in some depth (Abbs 1982), they were very limited in scale; the vast majority of English teaching continued to follow the traditional models which had been heavily criticised since at least the 1850s (Arnold 1910). This is made clear by government advice such as the conservative *Some Suggestions for the Teaching of English in Secondary Schools in England* (BoE 1924), and the fact that the Board of

Education itself was turning down funding requests for such projects in the 1920s (Bolton 2007). Other advice for teachers at the time focused on traditional approaches to grammar and literature, the latter being treated almost as an extension of history (Blyton 1926). This raises the idea of English as a vehicle for transmitting 'cultural heritage', which has recently been revisited in reference to ongoing debates about the nature of literature taught in schools (Belas and Hopkins, 2019).

What, then, did the Newbolt Report establish? It took evidence from over 100 witnesses and set out over 100 conclusions and recommendations. It is notable that the Newbolt Committee were allowed and funded to pursue such a broad avenue of inquiry, suggestive of the scale and scope of post-war Government ambitions.

The report notes that there was an 'inadequate conception of the teaching of English in this country' because of

...the failure to conceive the full meaning and possibilities of national education as a whole... due to a misunderstanding of the educational values to be found in different regions of mental activity, and especially to an underestimate of the importance of English language and literature. (Newbolt 1921: 4-5)

The authors were clear that English teaching was poor because the purpose and potential of education and schooling were not fully understood.

Taking an explicitly humanist and liberal approach, the authors decried the distinction between state schools and private schools, invoking Matthew Arnold to claim that 'a system which disunites classes cannot be held worthy of the name of a national culture' (p. 6), noting the irony that private schools were originally

established to provide education for the poor. The report was clearly motivated in part by a belief in social justice, rather than by a focus on performativity, as would likely be the case today. The authors clearly believed in the possibility and potential of 'a liberal education for all children whatever their position or occupation in life (p. 14). Yet they also accepted the idea of a 'national culture' in an unquestioning manner, hinting at the fixed nature of occupations and positions in life, rather than espousing a belief in social mobility. Such views may reflect concern about the impact of the Russian Revolution and the perceived threat of Communism. Although this is expressed more overtly in George Sampson's personal take on the report, it is also clear that the authors of the report were deeply troubled by a concern that Europeans were more educated, as reported by the Chaplain of Poperinghe, who was clearly concerned about the lack of character in British soldiers during the war (p. 17). This reveals one of the central tensions inherent in the report: rooted in liberalism and humanism, the report asked society to look toward an education system which prepares children to become encultured into a single model of British culture. It did not conceive a view of society more complex than a relatively simplistic notion of social class.

Good teaching of English language and literature were seen as the key drivers of this movement, as long as they were taught by skilled teachers. This included the teaching of Standard English, although not at the expense of regional dialect, as has sometimes been claimed. The report does not 'suggest that the suppression of dialect should be aimed at', but that children should be taught to be 'bi-lingual' (p. 67) in Standard English and their own regional dialect. The focus on Standard English is seen in practical terms as allowing communication and thus learning beyond one's own, immediate geographical context.

The authors identified English language as a 'keystone' of all learning - 'It is itself the English mind, the element in which we live and work' - and they identified an education in English literature as central to the development of character (p. 20). However, it is often overlooked that the authors of the Newbolt Report were committed to the use of contemporary literature in schools. Following Romantic ideas, especially Wordsworth's interest in poetry contemporary to his own work, the authors of the report are clear that a school student should be exposed to literature which reflects on 'experience of time and circumstances more nearly related to his [sic] own' (p. 19). Not only is this at odds with the way in which the Newbolt Report has been interpreted by some commentators (e.g. Eagleton 1986/2008); it is clearly at odds with current Government policies rooted in Hirschian conceptions of 'knowledge'. In effect, this lays the foundations for the personal growth model (Dixon, 1967) which remains influential for English teachers (Goodwyn, 2012).

It is beyond the scale of this paper to summarise all of the conclusions and recommendations of the Newbolt Report, but I will draw attention to the first three recommendations which have been revisited over the subsequent decades:

1. That our national education needs to be perfected by being scientifically refounded as a universal, reasonable, and liberal process of development
2. That for such an Education the only basis possible is English
3. That every teacher is a teacher *of* English because every teacher is a teacher *in* English (p. 348, italics in original)

Thus in the 1920s we see calls for what we would now term an evidence based approach to education, motivated by liberal values, enabled by a strong grasp of English language and literature. We also see the recognition that a capacity to teach

English is not only a requisite for all teachers, but that it is also a specialism which requires specialist teachers. The report is highly critical of the skills and knowledge of the majority of teachers and notes that much English teaching was carried out by non-specialist teachers, often teachers of Classics who employed inappropriate methods of instruction. However, the authors are clear that this is a system level problem, rather than problem with individual teachers. The report is also critical of teacher pay as well as teacher training; *plus ça change!*

Having briefly summarised the context of the Newbolt Report and its key points, I will now turn my attention to how the report was subsequently interpreted, and what such interpretations can suggest about the nature of English as a school subject. I have chosen to begin in the 1960s, which saw the first detailed comments about the report in John Dixon's *Growth Through English* (Dixon 1967).

The 1960s: A partial re-discovery of the Newbolt Report

In the years between the Newbolt Report and the 1960s, the world had experienced the previously unimaginable horrors of the Second World War, the beginnings of space travel and rock'n'roll. In education terms, this was also the period which saw the beginnings of comprehensive schooling, whereby every child had the right to a school-based education covering a relatively broad range of subjects, including English. The place of English in schools had continued to evolve, with policy moving towards a prioritisation of Language over Literature (Spens 1938), and the inevitable backlash from interested practitioners (Boas 1939). These debates were often played out in the emerging English teaching associations, particularly the London Association for the Teaching of English and its successor NATE.

The dominant debate regarding the teaching of English in the 1960s echoed the Newbolt Report's concerns for social justice, although the new debates took a

different focus. Writers such as David Holbrook (1964) as well as government reports (DoES, 1963) focused on ways in which English could improve the lives of disenfranchised young people. Yet there are few references during this period to the Newbolt report. While it is true that all commentaries on the teaching of English in England implicitly comment on the report, there is little explicit reference to it until John Dixon's (1967) highly influential text.

Reflecting on the Dartmouth Seminar of 1966, Dixon famously identified three models of English: *skills*, *cultural heritage* and *personal growth*. He was clear that he was working in the context of the third model, which he saw as the central purpose of English. It is the second model, cultural heritage, to which Dixon most clearly links Newbolt. Correctly placing the views of Newbolt et al in the tradition of Arnold, Dixon established a central criticism of the report. While comfortable with teaching literature to enable children to access the 'best in national thought and feeling', he argued that reliance on an established canon of literature pays insufficient attention to children's own experiences (Dixon 1967: 3). This reflects the interest during this period in allowing pupils their own voice, and developing increasingly strong links between the English curriculum and children's own, lived experiences, which is most clearly demonstrated in textbooks such as *Reflections* (Clements et al 1963), an anthology Dixon helped to edit. However, such a view downplays the fact that the report encouraged the use of contemporary literature, and poetry in particular, in schools. This error has persisted through subsequent decades.

Dixon also criticized the report for its emphasis on the written over the spoken word in classrooms. The report in fact discusses the importance of spoken English at some length; the authors stress the importance of all children learning Standard English, and are clear that this should not be at the expense of a child's own dialect

and accent. Nonetheless, the 1960s should be seen as the period that recognised the Newbolt Report as a core text in the development of English teaching. There was a renewed interest in the importance of English as a school subject which heralded a fresh exploration of the place and purpose of English, and, indeed, of education. Yet, through the lens of the socially progressive 1960s, the report was seen as significant but flawed, enshrining a very particular canon of literature. Such a view proved to be very influential for writers during subsequent decades.

The 1970s: Developing influence of the Newbolt Report

The relative maturity of English as a school subject led to a heightened interest in the history of the subject. This may well be related to developments in Initial Teacher Education (ITE), which became an all-graduate profession following the James Report (DoES 1972), and the growth in university courses such as the Post-graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE). However, reactions against the perceived excesses of creative approaches to teaching English were gathering pace in the popular press and imagination. Most famously expressed in Cox and Dyson's (1971) *Black Papers* and later in Prime Minister James Callaghan's (1976) 'secret garden' speech, there was a strongly voiced desire for a return to a clear focus on improving children's standards of written and spoken English. One of the outcomes of this lively debate was the growth of interest in the history of English as a school subject.

Two books stand out during this period. David Shayer's (1972) *The Teaching of English in Schools, 1900 – 1970* and Margaret Mathieson's (1975 / 2017) *The Preachers of Culture*. Their titles point to their different purposes and perspectives, but both are important for understanding how the Newbolt Report was interpreted during the 1970s.

Shayer was cautiously impressed with the report. It is true that he emphasised the ways in which the report made compromises over issues such as the teaching of grammar, and bemoans that 'it relies too much on 'official' (i.e. Board of Education) advances and ignores the contributions of talented individuals'. However, he was also pleased that the report was 'carefully progressive', which he clearly believed to be a good thing (Shayer 1972: 71). Then, as now, 'progressive' was a contested phrase in educational discourse, and Shayer leaves his readers in no doubt about what constitutes good English teaching. He approves the report's facing away from a utilitarian approach to the teaching of English towards a more 'character-forming' attitude. This is an area which Dixon discusses, but Shayer moves the discourse about English teaching away from the Personal Growth model towards a more pragmatic vision.

Yet there are weaknesses in Shayer's account of the report. He pays little attention to the contexts in which the Newbolt Report was written, and while he commends the report for effectively cementing the place of English in schools, he misses a key point about the organisation of teaching. Too often, the report finds, the teaching of English is left to non-specialists in ways which would be unthinkable for Mathematics, Science or History.

Margaret Mathieson (1975 / 2017) takes a different approach. Writing in the middle of the 1970s, while the Bullock Report (1974) with its focus on language was being compiled, Mathieson pays significant attention to how the Newbolt Report encouraged schools and teachers to focus on literature. This is in strong contrast to the contemporary public debate around standards of literacy. She stresses that the report envisions English teachers as 'missionaries', which is reflected in the title of her own book, and that the teaching of literature is fundamental for society and the

development of a much greater sense of social unity. She pays much more attention than Shayer to the historical context of the report; she uses this to emphasise the influence of the Romantic Movement, and later writers such as F.R. Leavis, on concepts of social justice. She notes, for example, that both the Newbolt Report and Sampson (1921) 'embody attitudes which, together, have had the effect of strengthening the notion that English has the unique power to improve the character and to transform society' (Mathieson 1975 / 2017:79). She goes on to link the report with that of the Newsom Committee (DoES 1963) in the mid-1960s, which also saw the teaching of English as contributing to social improvement..

In terms of pedagogy Mathieson identifies the Newbolt Report as indicating that 'progressive theories of education had gained acceptance at an official level' (Mathieson 1975 / 2017: 79). Yet she also acknowledges that the authors of the report recognised the lack of highly qualified English teachers in schools; the 'missionaries' were few and far between in the 1920s. It is worth remembering that Bullock was as damning of the number of skilled English teachers in the 1970s as the Newbolt Report was in the 1920s.

The 1970s, then, can be characterised as viewing the Newbolt Report in a more detailed way than before. The publication of two major studies of the history of English teaching during the decade, along with a major policy statement, demonstrates that English teaching and its history were now seen as a topic of serious study in themselves. Although Shayer and Mathieson offer differing shades of emphasis on the report, both acknowledge its significance and influence. Taken together they suggest a period which was encouraging of creativity, particularly through the power of literature. influenced perhaps by the work of socio-linguists

such as Halliday, they argue that spoken English is given insufficient emphasis by Newbolt.

The 1980s: Ideological critiques

The 1980s witnessed a step change in education policy in England, with an enormous impact on *what* was taught in schools, as well as *how* it was taught, culminating in the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1989. Peter Abbs (1982) presented a very strong case that the discipline of English should be thought of as one of the arts, and wrote in some detail about the history of English as a subject. Yet he paid little attention to the Newbolt Report. He suggests that the report was confused about the role and purpose of grammar in classrooms, echoing a point made by Shayer ten years earlier. Yet although Abbs anticipated the more overtly political discourse which came to dominate the 1980s and 1990s, he was consciously writing against the direction of travel for English.

Such an 'anti-establishment' tone was also present in the work of Terry Eagleton, whose highly influential *Literary Theory* (Eagleton 1983/2008) remains one of the cornerstones of the academic study of literature. Eagleton was very interested in the development of English as an object of study, and he was clearly unhappy that 'the author (sic)' of *The Teaching of English in England* 'was none other than Sir Henry Newbolt, minor jingoist poet and perpetrator of the immortal line 'Play up! play up! and play the game!'' (Eagleton 2008: 25). Perhaps Eagleton and others read into the Newbolt Report the tone of 'petty jingoism' which was being played out in the national consciousness at the time, must succinctly expressed by *The Sun* newspaper's (1982) infamous headline during the Falklands War, 'Gotcha!'

Stephen Ball (1985) briefly touches upon the report while setting the context for his argument that the English Association was the major influence on the teaching of English during the 1920s and 1930s. He returns with colleagues (1990) to suggest that the report had a fairly simple mission that was almost exclusively built around a Romantic interpretation of literature. The authors contend that Mathieson (1975/2017) agrees with Newbolt that 'National identity was to be restored based not on social equality but on 'everyone forgetting that classes existed' (Ball et al 1990: 52). This was not the case for the report, nor was it the case for Mathieson. They both recognised that social unity was desirable, but believed that access to high quality education about literature was a way of developing social understanding across and between classes. Here, arguably, in the 1920s, lay the seeds of a National Curriculum.

Yet there were few references to the Newbolt Report during the 1980s. The principal discourse around the teaching of English understandably focused on the 1988 Education Reform Act, and the introduction of the National Curriculum. There are many accounts of this period, including the vivid work of Brian Cox (1991/1995), who places the Newbolt Report in the discourse around declining academic standards which has been a hallmark of all Conservative governments since the Second World War. While it is possible to see echoes of the report in the concept of a national curriculum, and it is also possible to see echoes in Cox's (1989) five purposes of English, there was little engagement with the report itself.

The 1980s saw the beginning of a discursive shift around English teaching from academic and practitioner theory to governmental policy. Government interest was trained on the introduction of the National Curriculum, and the Thatcher administration was clearly more interested in language than literature: Thatcher had

commissioned the Bullock Report *A Language for Life* (1974), and it was under her leadership that the language focused Kingman Report (1988) was commissioned. The Newbolt Report did not fit the instrumental view of language education that led to the governmental banning of Carter's report on *Language in the National Curriculum* (LINC) (1991).

The 1990s: Changing Discourse

The 1990s, like the 1980s, were dominated by political and policy discussions. The National Curriculum was becoming embedded, albeit with serious controversy (Cox, 1995), including the SATS boycotts organised by NATE and the ill-fated LINC project (1991). The dominant discourse focused even more loudly than the 1980s on 'back to basics' literacy, rather than 'English' (Lankshear, 1998). While the government changed from Conservative to Labour, policy continued to focus on literacy (DfEE, 1998), grammar (QCA, 1999) and boys' lack of educational success (QCA, 1998). However, this was also a decade which saw a significant growth of academic research into teaching, including the teaching of English. Perhaps because of the increasingly rigorous approach to the research process during the 1990s, it is understandable that most of the research interest was about pedagogical practice, rather than historical perspectives.

Discussions about the Newbolt Report itself are most obvious in book chapters aimed at trainee teachers, including the popular *Learning to Teach English in the Secondary School* (Davison and Dowson, 1998), now in its fourth edition. The authors write about the history of teaching English and devote several pages to the report in a chapter now titled 'Battles for English 1894-2014' (Davison, 2014). Echoing Eagleton, and Dixon to a lesser degree, Davison takes a largely negative

view towards the report. He highlights how the report appears to attack working class dialect, and favours middle class values, a theme to which he returns some years later (Davison, 2011). There is degree of truth here, but this view misrepresents the text of the report. The authors of the Newbolt Report were clear in their respect for all dialects whilst recognising that some dialects will help children more than others when they came to enter the workplace.

It is difficult to gauge the influence of texts such as Davison's, or the slightly later *The Complete Guide to Becoming an English Teacher* (Clarke et al. 2004) which also briefly mentions the report. My experience of working with the target audience for these books is that student teachers are more concerned with practical advice about pedagogy than engaging with the history of their subject.

The 2000s: The decline of ideological discourse

The years since the turn of the Millennium have begun to see a slow shift in discourse about English teaching. As neoliberal reforms have taken hold in schools, teachers and school leaders have become increasingly focused on the way in which their teaching helps with multiple performativity measures. This has led to increased attention on classroom practice, but in a relatively narrow, and functional sense. The central function for developments in English teaching, and indeed most teaching in the English school system, has been to meet the perceived requirements of the National Strategies, Ofsted (the government schools inspectorate) and the various examination boards. Teachers have become understandably concerned about how their teaching is viewed by their line managers, so that their schools and own careers can be as successful as possible as defined by Ofsted criteria. Although Ofsted themselves may well contest such a view, it is undoubtedly the reality in

many schools and Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs), and this is behind the rise of organisations such as PiXL (PiXL 2018) who exist to support schools with practical practices aimed at maximising school outcomes. The increased focus on classroom practice, however, has rarely been underpinned by rigorous academic research. Another notable aspect of the years since the Millennium has been the increased denigration of university-led research, most clearly expressed by the ex-Education Minister Michael Gove and his loud comments about the educational establishment. What, then, has been the influence of the Newbolt Report in the ‘performativity era’? Discussions have tended towards a return to an interest in the place of literature. Marshall, for instance, argues that both the report and Sampson’s parallel text *English for the English* are motivated by a ‘democratic urge’ and that one of the key purposes of ‘English was to allow for the personal growth of the child through an encounter with art (Marshall 2000: 23). The role of literature in the report is also highlighted by other commentators (e.g. Goodwyn 2011; Green and McIntyre 2011). During this period there was a growth of interest in literature in schools. This was partly motivated by a flowering of popular literature for young people, such as the *Harry Potter* series, but I would argue that this is more recently motivated by school leaders using the English Literature GCSE as a vehicle for maximising assessment scores. It is this last point which has now firmly established the place and purpose of English Language *and* English Literature in the secondary school curriculum because of the most recent accountability measures (DfE, 2018). Yet, the model of literature promoted by recent revisions to the National Curriculum are some way from the model of literature promoted for school use by the report.

However, it would be a mistake to characterise the years since 2000 as being filled with ideological debates. Rather, there has been a deepening interest in how English

teachers can best respond to the enormous government-led system level reforms which have been enacted over the last few years. Most attention has been paid to the ways in which English teachers can adapt their teaching to the simultaneous challenges of a demand for ever-better outcomes and a new style of assessment following the demise of coursework. English teachers have had to adapt to a new GCSE framework, as well as first learning to live with Assessing Pupil Progress tests in the mid-2000s, and then learning to live without such tests. This created a curriculum vacuum which many schools are filling with Key Stage Four style work in Key Stage Three. While there has been recent, renewed interest in the history of English teaching (Gibbons 2017), there has been little reference to the Newbolt Report itself until quite recently.

Is this because everything of importance about the Newbolt Report has already been said? The growth of interest in the report during the 1970s, particularly with Shayer and Mathieson, made it clear that the report was of great value to the establishment of the school subject of English, largely inspired by a deep sense of social justice after World War One. Such a view began to be challenged in the 1980s and 1990s by drawing attention to the class divide which the report arguably, if unintentionally, perpetuated. Yet, as society and education continue to evolve, there has been a developing interest in the Newbolt Report. University symposia on the legacy of the report (Brunel 2018) demonstrate that there is an appetite for lively debate about English teaching. Brenton Doecke (2017), for example, has reframed the report in light of debates around the so-called 'Knowledge Curriculum', concluding that the report has much to teach us about what 'knowledge' looks like in the context of English as a school subject.

Conclusions

A century after the Newbolt Report was first published, it is clear that it established the continuing discourse about the teaching of English. While earlier texts, such as those of Arnold, highlighted particular aspects of English teaching, the Newbolt Report covered every aspect of the subject from teacher training, through classroom practice, to the importance of university level English. This was the first comprehensive report into the teaching of English, and arguably the first comprehensive report into education in England. The report strongly encouraged widespread engagement with English literature in schools, including contemporary literature; and it held that the study of spoken English was important for all pupils, especially those from poorer backgrounds. Clearly these remain areas of interest today. It is common to hear English teachers challenge the role of a very particular type of English Literature in the National Curriculum, for example. The place of spoken English remains problematic, and the question of ‘whose spoken English is it anyway?’ remains. Perhaps the largest contemporary issue for English teachers is the place and purpose of assessment. How can a subject which is largely subjective be objectively assessed; indeed, *should* it be assessed (Child et al 2015)? It might come as a surprise to many English teachers that, while (unlike Matthew Arnold) the Newbolt Report supported examinations, the authors were ‘conscious of the deadening effect of too much uniformity’ (Newbolt 1921: 299). ‘It is, we think, a real misfortune when examinations dictate the whole syllabus of study for a school’ (Newbolt 1921: 303).

The current discourse about English teaching in England has become diminished. Current debate tends to focus on either pedagogy or assessment (e.g. Marshall et al 2019). These are important matters, but the lack of deep discussion about the purpose of English as a subject is concerning. We can do much worse than look

back to the report, and the ways in which it has been interpreted in different ways over the years, to help us look forward to a period when both the place and the purpose of English Language and English Literature are more clear. Such debates and discussions will enable all of those who are professionally involved with the teaching of English in the English school system to re-connect with their values. Not all professionals will share the same values, and they will, at times, disagree. Yet this is one of the hallmarks of a mature democracy: it is the debate which is key. English teachers will be able to engage in the debate more powerfully when they have a rich understanding of the Newbolt Report and the ways in which it has been interpreted.

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Notes on Contributor

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Table 1. Citation Analysis

Date	Author	Google Scholar Citations	Years since publication	Citations per year
1921	Sampson	175	94	1.9
1967	Dixon	84	52	16.2
1972	Shayer	123	47	2.6
1975	Mathieson	220	44	5
1990	Ball, Kenny, Gardiner	156	29	5.4
2000	Marshall	95	19	5
2017	Gibbons	10	2	5