Possibility in impossibility? Working with beginning teachers of English in times of change

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Abstract

Beginning teachers of English are entering a profession in which their subject is increasingly framed according to prescriptive models of literacy. This is happening at a time of shift away from university ITE provision towards school-led training. We offer a spatialised theorisation of the ways in which beginning teachers of English have drawn from the balance of practical and theoretical approaches encountered in their qualifying year to engage with tensions between policy and practice. We suggest that university ITE provides important interstitial spaces in which they can explore some of these tensions and navigate pedagogies, principles and values. In doing so, they are negotiating alternatives, which, we argue, represent powerful potential for their future within the profession.

Keywords

TE, English, space, policy, change

Introduction

> *Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our own growth and our freedom.*
> > Viktor Frankl, Man's Search for Meaning

In our work across a range of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) routes, we perceive there to have been a shift in what it means to be a beginning teacher of English. At the same time, we reflect that our roles within teacher education are also

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evolving as a result of – and in response to – a changing policy landscape within ITE. In this article, we argue that English has had to bear the brunt of policy within this particular socio-political epoch and that this has meant that the work we do as teacher educators - and that which we are educating our beginning teachers to do – is under attack. Subject content is being reduced to sets of measurable skills and outcomes. Subject pedagogy increasingly serves assessment-driven directives and the narrowing and reformulation of teachers' work is driving out the heart, life and soul (Ball 2003) of what it is to be an English teacher. Reactions to this are captured in a range of social media, reflecting anger and resistance within the English teaching community; there seems to be some resignation, too, that nothing can be done (eg Bennett 2013).

Experience would suggest that, within English teaching, change is a constant. At this particular point, however, we feel that the beginning teachers with whom we work, and who may be living these circumstances for the first time, are surrounded by a rhetoric particularly dominated by change. With attention to what is at the heart of good English teaching, we argue that university ITE offers a means by which beginning teachers can be supported to negotiate such change, whilst still retaining a sense of passion, agency and a sustainable model of practice, which can also respond to future changing contexts.

Drawing on data from a small sample of beginning English teachers reflecting on their experiences within English classrooms, we explore the ways current debates are enacted and how individuals negotiate these. The data comprised 18 interviews, conducted by the authors with current and former ITE students who had been on both employment-based and traditional PGCE routes. These semi-structured interviews asked about why the respondents wanted to teach English, their experiences of teaching the subject during their ITE year and their (sometimes developing) perceptions of different models of English (in and out of school). The interviews were originally intended to inform our own practice and the on-going development of our ITE English curriculum. Transcripts of the interviews were analysed and emerging themes became a focus for our conversation as we continually revisited debates about our work within a context of renewed policy level change in terms of ITE, the English curriculum and the nature of the profession. Given the opportunity to engage with the focus of this special edition, we revisited these interviews and found that a spatialised reading helped us to make sense not only of the current context, but also of potential ways forward for those working with beginning teachers at a time where our very existence is in state of 'unpublicized crisis' (Brighouse 2013). Brighouse is referring to the reduced allocations of teacher training places to university-based ITE courses. At the time of writing, within England there is a shift towards school-led ITE provision with universities potentially having a significantly reduced role in the education of new entrants to the profession. This has led to the closure of some PGCE courses as beginning teachers are encouraged to apply for school-led provision.

We first establish what we see as the focus of current debate around change within English and English teaching. As will be demonstrated, common themes have been the subject of debate over decades. By engaging a spatialised theorisation, we then explore the ways in which our beginning teachers of English have experienced contemporary classroom contexts and the role of ITE in supporting them to become empowered to respond not only to the current discourse, but also to a context where change is a constant.

Changes to English and to English teachers' work

Debates about the nature and role of the subject English have raged since its origins within state education, with the English curriculum continually reconstructed as a social and political project serving successive ideologies (McIntyre and Green, 2011). These debates have focused on both the content of the subject as well its pedagogies. From an ITE perspective, where we work alongside those who are embarking on their part in the history of English teaching, we see how debates are enacted differently across school contexts and how this has an impact upon the evolving identities of those who are learning to teach English.

For the purposes of our current discussion, we limit our illustrative examples to changes since the introduction of a National Curriculum (NC) in English in 1988. Focusing first on subject content, the changing role of Speaking and Listening provides a useful example. Speaking and Listening was given a prominent position in the original NC Orders for English (DES 1989), when teachers were supported in their approaches to talk through the materials and work of The National Oracy Project (NOP) (Norman 1992), where holistic conceptualisations of language promoted understanding of the role of oracy from a sociolinguistic perspective. However, with the introduction of the English SATs, Speaking and Listening quickly came to be viewed as the 'Cinderella' of the English Order, losing out as Reading and Writing were given more attention in tests. Talk was omitted from the primary national strategy documentation in 1998 but by 2003, Speaking and Listening was again given some prominence in the secondary literacy strategy documentation (DFES 2003a) and in QCA materials promoting the role of classroom talk (DFES 2003b), although 'control of the agenda for classroom talk was something that the National Strategies were determined to retain' (Alexander 2012:8).

Despite an increased understanding of the importance of oracy, the content of English at Key Stage 3 became largely determined by what was being tested as literacy test scores became a key factor in a school's accountability. This led to a reduction in opportunities for talk in the lower secondary years, with talk re-emerging in English classrooms at GCSE, where it featured as part of the assessment. Study of spoken language is a recent addition to the GCSE syllabus and talk enjoyed a brief resurgence before the recent English 'grade debacle' (Woolcock 2012) was attributed to teachers' apparent inflation of Speaking and Listening grades (Burns 2013), leading to the proposed removal of Speaking and Listening from the assessment of English language and literature GCSE

grades (Ofqual 2013). Thus 'appropriate' content and pedagogies associated with Speaking and Listening have undergone many permutations since the introduction of the NC, with talk variously reclaimed by those in power.

Arguments about the repositioning of Speaking and Listening have also encompassed debates about appropriate pedagogies. Wider performative cultures can be seen to have led to increasingly assessment-driven classroom practice. An example of this is the teaching of grammar. The introduction of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) overtly brought to the fore for the first time government influence not just on *what* should be taught, but *how* it should be taught. Thus grammar-based starter activities emerged as prominence was given to word level language exercises. This challenged the work done in the years immediately following the NC when the LINC project argued for the importance of pedagogies which incorporated teaching language and grammar in context (Carter et al. 1991). Lately, grammar has dominated English teaching at Key Stage 2, where a high stakes test assessing the naming of parts has replaced the writing test. Similarly, at secondary level, responses within English classrooms to the raised status of the English GCSE grade in school league tables has also led to many examples of pedagogies in which exam preparation skills are overly represented (Office for Standards in Education [Ofsted] 2012).

This history of performative, mandated practice has had an impact on how English teachers view their work. This is compounded by changes to standards by which teachers' performance is measured and by overt external mechanisms for measuring performance of teachers and their work, such as Ofsted. The situation in England echoes other neoliberal regimes internationally. Writing in an Australian context, Comber (2012) acknowledges the reorganisation of teachers' work through mandated literacy and its link to performativity. Similarly, Ravitch (2010) presents the situation in various US states, where high-stakes testing and the publication of individual teachers' class test scores has had a huge impact on the ways in which English and other subjects have been reformulated through test-driven pedagogies. Stephen Ball has written about the impact of such a context on the 'souls' of experienced teachers (2003).

Our work as teacher educators has led us to consider the impact of these mechanisms on the experience of those new to the profession and we have increasingly reflected upon our role and responsibility in supporting them in their negotiation of current debates, and in locating them in a broader historical, social and political context so that they are prepared to teach beyond the most immediate discourse about their work. This has led us to consider the significance to teachers of English of ethical professional and personal identities (Pike 2011). Whereas current discourse and changes to the subject in schools can be seen to reduce English to a body of skills and knowledge to be transmitted by the teacher, Pike argues that 'being an ethical and professional teacher of English requires more than technical craft of the classroom skills; it rests upon particular values' (p. 227). Unlike a technicist model, which

removes professional subjectivity, Pike's description of what it is to be a teacher of English retains a central focus on the way in which the teacher draws upon resources of subject knowledge and subject pedagogy to establish within their classroom a learning experience which is reflective and responsive. We see this, essentially, as a process of the negotiation of practice and of policy. It is this process of negotiation, which, we argue, holds potential for those who are entering the profession in these challenging times.

Our focus on the enactment and experience of links between policy and practice suggests to us that a spatial reading can offer a powerful tool to understand the context we describe above; as Sheehy and Leander state: 'space is the product of socially dynamic relations' (2004: 1). In what follows, we outline how we have mobilised a spatialised analysis to conceptualise the experience of the beginning teachers with whom we have worked, as they negotiate the policies and practices they encounter in their first years of teaching, their own 'particular values' and their understanding of what English teaching could or should be.

Space and the teaching of English

There has been increasing emphasis in recent decades on space as a discursive model in relation to social and cultural practice. Given the context we outline above, and its ideological roots, we have found Lefebvre to be particularly helpful as a focus for our spatial analysis as, according to Soja (1996:156), his work is 'an assertive foregrounding of an explicit political project'. We begin with a brief outline of what Lefebvre (1991:27) describes as 'the social character of space'. He offers a trialectic of ways in which social realities are produced and interconnected. For Lefebvre, the physical embodiment of society around us is the *perceived space.* This includes the urban manifestations of spaces designed and assigned as places for work, private life or leisure. In our context, this might be a university, school, classroom, staffroom, or English departmental workspace. *Conceived space* is a representation of space that shapes daily realities and this is 'the dominant space within any society' (p. 39). Conceived space in our context would be produced by policy makers and would take the form of, for example, a PGCE course, the National Curriculum, the Teachers' Standards and Ofsted's framework. The final aspect of the trialectic is *lived space.* This is how conceived space is experienced: 'the space of "inhabitants" and "users"' (p. 39). The relationship between producers and users of social space is, according to Lefebvre, one of dominance. For some, this is experienced passively, where hegemony offers a logical model for their lived experience. However, lived space also offers the potential for imaginative appropriation and symbolic use of its objects. This potential is created by the fact that conceived space, for Lefebvre, is contingent upon 'a system of verbal (and therefore intellectually worked out) signs' (p. 39). The idea of 'lived space' seems to us, therefore, to be the site of possibility because it is open ended and has the potential for transformativity.

Conceptually similar themes have been explored in the literature on 'third space', where there is recognition of the complexity of interactions between spaces, with

an emphasis on non-dominant and counter-hegemonic practices (eg Moje et al. 2004). In particular, Bhabha's (1994) notion of third space emphasises the possibilities suggested by the 'inbetween' of symbol and culturally assigned meaning. The existence of this space suggests the impossibility of fixed meaning. This space is open to appropriation and, hence, the possibility of negotiation.

Examples from our data are presented below to offer some different interpretations of English as lived space in contemporary classrooms. We present some of the ways in which beginning teachers of English have been able to negotiate this space and to engage with its symbolic systems. It is the flexibility offered by this space that we argue offers a potentially hopeful reading of current contexts and the role of university ITE within this.

Negotiating space in English classrooms

The context of English in contemporary times is an example of the way in which conceived space is irrevocably linked to dominant ideologies. Recent changes to English are fuelled by a broader neoliberal agenda, which reconceptualises education as a marketplace (Salhberg 2010) within which literacy 'problems' are a regular feature (Larson 2001). This results in highly performative curriculums, pedagogies and practices. Surveillance is a natural by-product of this and beginning teachers are entering a profession which is under constant scrutiny, from outside as well as from within.

Even within individual institutions, conceived spaces, produced by policy makers both at government and school level, dominate practices as experienced by teachers and pupils. One example of a dominant practice is the way in which progress within English is tracked and scrutinised according to a grid which determines how to Assess Pupil Progress (APP), broken down into a series of Reading, Writing and Speaking and Listening Assessment Foci (RAFS, WAFs and SAFs). These are further broken down into levels and sub-levels of attainment.

We asked our participants to reflect on their observations of English as they understood it to be experienced by their pupils, colleagues within their teaching placements and themselves. Their perceptions are reflective of what both young people and colleagues told them; and they indicate the ways in which the conceived space of the subject English is experienced by pupils and beginning teachers in schools. Ed reflected on the experiences of the pupils in his school as '*one long line of assessments*':

> *I think they now perceive English as a series of milestones rather than as something that is particularly coherent or, dare I say it, enjoyable.*

This response was not atypical. Will described his year 9 pupils as having 'absolutely no idea of English outside the assessment focuses.' For Hannah, this

was manifested in the repeated cycle of entering pupils for GCSE exams until they achieved the 'hallowed C'. Alice's observations were that this reduced opportunities for many of her pupils:

> *This 'all they need is a C' is a nonsense. There are some kids who get an A but there is no political incentive for them to do so.*

The model of English here is clearly reductive and the reductions lie not only in the range of experiences offered by the subject, but also in the opportunities for pupils to realise their potential. The beginning teachers we spoke to saw that other teachers experienced the conceived space of English passively whilst they, partly through conversations with us, attempted to negotiate an alternative potential for their lived space.

In addition to this narrowing of the subject, there is also a narrowing of pedagogies, which become increasingly assessment-driven. Heidi was advised by her mentor that teaching at GCSE needed to be devoid of creativity – to be '*grey*' – in order to ensure that all assessment criteria were covered.

Since changes were made to the continual assessment element of English at GCSE, students are required to complete a series of 'controlled assessments', which they are prepared to undertake in exam conditions within the classroom. This is one way in which the English curriculum is routinely reduced to an autonomous model of literacy (Street 1984).

> *For my Y10 [...] nothing is taught merely for fun or interest, everything has a catch and their groans got louder with each new controlled assessment.*   Sally

Ed's description of how the study of Shakespeare has been reduced adds to the picture of pupils and beginning teachers experiencing what Thomson et al (2010:651) term 'a pedagogy of under-attainment, ironically badged in policy as the reverse.'

> *There are so many different ways they can engage with [Romeo and Juliet] [...] and yet I taught them a question about pride and honour and I gave them this quotation sheet, that quotation sheet and we went through the question and that was it. It was done within two weeks, which is almost unforgivable, but that's the pressure, I think, of the discourse.*

Training teachers are in a unique position as classroom practitioners who are, as yet, formally outside the profession. In some cases, we shared moments of reflection with our participants where they explored what this meant for them. Alice recognised '*the ground down day to day realities of how English is organised, managed, delivered day to day in a classroom to meet league table*

objectives'. Will described being in the '*fortunate position of being able to sit there and watch people going about their work*'; he saw how '*people take it as read that this is the correct way to do things.*' Will's observation of teachers echoes Lefebvre's point that users of space 'passively experienced whatever was imposed upon them in as much as it was more or less thoroughly inserted into or justified by their representational space' (1991: 43).

Thus Will describes a system whereby laminated cards were issued to students in order for them to memorise assessment foci for each part of the English curriculum on offer. This was APP driven and the subject was divided into 'SAFs, RAFs and WAFs'. The objective within lessons was to ensure that students were able to '*recite*' these in order to demonstrate their understanding of their current level in each area and how they could move on to the next. The recitation was important because of a perception that this would be a desired outcome should an Ofsted inspector be watching. Will was able to see palpable effects on his colleagues as a result of their attempts to negotiate the realities of life in their classrooms within this context.

> '*Can my child recite their WAFs or do I lose my job?*' That's a rhetoric that's made very clear [...] it would be a very brave member of staff who would try to do things differently.

Doing things differently

We also asked our beginning teachers to talk to us about what they thought English could or should be. Their responses to this question suggest the possibilities of engaging imaginatively with lived space and making 'symbolic use of its objects' (Lefebvre 1991: 39). One example of such a symbolic object within English classrooms is the 'PEE' paragraph, a formula for an analytical response which we see as widespread representation of not only the content of English, but also of pedagogical expectations. PEE reduces a pupil's response to any text to a three staged frame: Point, Evidence, Explanation. Originally conceived as a scaffold to support 'weaker' writers, our experience of a wide range of English classrooms shows that this is dominant and perceived to be the desired model, although Ofsted has questioned the desirability of its ubiquity (Office for Standards in Education [Ofsted] 2012). In spite of huge pressures to reproduce this pedagogy, many of our beginning teachers questioned its validity for all children in all contexts. Will described an exchange with one of his students who asked, '*Do we have to write it as a PEE paragraph?*' Will's laconic response – '*I will throw you out of the window if it is a PEE paragraph*' – could be seen to illustrate his appropriation of dominant structures through his subversion of the expected teacher response.

Whilst Will did this subversively within his classroom, away from the gaze of his department, others were more overt. Keira describes her department's aversion to innovation, despite a successful innovative approach with her pupils:

> *I think if [...] they are enjoying it and they are talking about it at lunch time and they are sharing ideas, then it is working and I said to my head of department: 'you are discouraging me from being creative and taking risks because you are so scared that that might have a detrimental effect on their results that you don't trust me. And you don't trust me to try new things. You want everyone to do the same thing so that there is no risk'.*

We were somewhat surprised by what constituted 'risk' within participants' accounts. These 'risky' endeavours, however, are illustrative of the limitations of the ways in which conceived space was being represented in schools. Heather told us that her placement was not:

> *an environment where I felt it was safe to take risks. I still did, but there wasn't that support when it did go wrong. They were, like, 'well, we told you so. Here is the text book.'*

She describes one particularly 'risky' strategy to help her students engage with the play they were studying, '*I've taken kids to the theatre.*' The risk came from the fact that within her department:

> *They have never taken any kids to the theatre before. I think they see it as 'we are going to read this play because they are going to sit the exam on it', not that students need to see it as a wider thing. [...] But now it's been a success and when I organised it, it was, like, 'oh that's Heather again. If it goes wrong, it'll be one other thing that Heather has done'. But now they are coming round to the idea and want to do more and that's nice.*

When Heidi reflects on her experiences of becoming an English teacher, she describes feeling '*hugely stifled*' in the early stages, especially when her mentor advised that her plans '*look[ed] great, but can we now cut all the crap and put in the mark schemes?*' Heidi observed that:

> *it is only later with my own experiences and my own confidence to be the teacher that I want to be that I've felt that I can stand and say I actually don't agree. This is what I want the scheme of work to look like... I am going to do it my way. But I couldn't do that at first.*

The above examples (and others which echo throughout our data) illustrate how, for some, the reality of the English classroom is dominated by passive representation of systems, structures and symbols which derive from a reduced model of the subject and its pedagogical possibilities. However, as Bhabha (1994) has argued, such symbols have culturally assigned meaning and the 'interstitial space' between symbol and meaning is open to

negotiation. The very existence of this interstitial space prevents fixed meaning. We argue that encounters such as those described by beginning teachers above are suggestive of such interstitial spaces. These beginner teacher experiences are stories of possibility as they demonstrate the ways in which training teachers have exploited these interstitial spaces adeptly and courageously. At a time where policy demands may predicate fixed and reduced meanings on the content of the subject, its pedagogies and what it means to be a teacher of English, we argue for ITE in English as a site for a (re)focus on possibility in impossibility.

Possibility within ITE in English

As we outlined earlier, an ITE programme can, of course, be seen as a conceived space – an ideological representation. In exploring the impact of policy on practice, we cannot ignore our own negotiation of this space and the way in which we have brought our own philosophy to the courses on which we work; all ITE courses will be the enacted result of such negotiation. We believe that our curriculum remains open and characterised by possibility rather than a reduced notion of what English teaching could be. Across many HEIs, beginning teachers will be encouraged to imagine the possibilities of literacy as 'ideological' (Street, 1984) rather than functional. Beginning teachers are asked to engage critically with dominant subject pedagogies and explore alternatives, and to continually revisit the question of what it is to be an ethical professional English teacher. We cannot claim that the views of the teachers we interviewed are representative of all beginner teachers with whom we have worked, but it seems that, for some, the experience of the course and the opportunity to work with a cohort as they develop similar ideologies has opened up possibilities in what may seem to be impossible contexts. Reflecting on his experiences of the course during his first term as an NQT, Ben sums this up:

> *My first experience of teaching wasn't just [me] and the students. There is a huge jumble of factors that come together to make up the work – it's government policy influences, it's your local authority, influences from your headteacher and your head of department and suddenly there's lots of paper coming in – 'this is what you have to do' – 'this is how much progress you have to make'. It hasn't disillusioned why I love teaching, but it is something that I put up with. So my opinions did change [as to what English teaching is]. It was all the wonderful things I thought it was but there were gremlins in that world that I hadn't thought about.*

To explore further the role of an ITE programme in offering a space to explore these '*gremlins*', we draw more fully on the experiences of one beginner teacher of English. As has been demonstrated by Thomson et al. (2010: 246), such a small-scale focus can 'illustrate the possibilities of a policy analysis which

works outwards from a single instance.' Dylan's negotiation of English as a conceived space began during his own schooling:

> *My passion has always been English […] English, I believe, requires an emotional and intellectual response and there is a richness in the subject that I wanted to explore.*

Dylan began the PGCE course in the autumn of 2011 after spending some time out after his undergraduate studies. Dylan's experience of studying English at school was both rewarding and frustrating. A bright student with a clear aptitude for English, Dylan's frustrations were largely linked to the ways in which he felt that the subject in his secondary school was devoid of creativity with a focus on exam grades. The rewards came in the form of teachers who circumvented some of this and provided opportunities for creative expression.

Dylan's own educational experiences were a motivating factor in choosing to become a teacher:

> *I developed an ideology as a person in terms of what the world should be and I think that this course and being a teacher allows me to do that. It's motivating me.*

For Dylan, English teaching is profoundly personal and political – motivated by a desire to connect with his pupils, to share his passion, to teach a subject that is emotionally and politically relevant to individuals' lives and experiences. Dylan's reflections on his decision to teach return to themes of social justice, viewing studying English as an empowering act as well as an outlet for his own creative pursuits. He describes the PGCE course as an important component in helping him negotiate his ideological approach to teaching.

Dylan's emerging philosophy was tested during one of the teaching practice placements when he was required to spend a significant amount of time in a department and school with approaches and philosophies that appeared to be in conflict with the ideological stance he felt he had developed:

> *English at school X is secondary to the qualification… [It is] just facts…everything is related to assessment criteria…just drilling children.*

In this school context, Dylan's perception was that too much time and attention was spent on short-term fixes to a problem the department faced in terms of reaching targets in departmental tracking data. Dylan found this an extremely challenging period in the course as he worked to rationalise what the department was asking of him and the ways in which he felt this was affecting his pupils' experience of English teaching.

Throughout this placement he grew to view the tutor visits as an important aspect of his reconnection with the idea of the kind of English teacher he wanted to be:

> *I found that the tutor visits prevented me from slipping away and losing touch with what I believed.*

As he spent more time in the department he felt more able to introduce, at times by stealth, some of the approaches he had developed in the ITE teaching sessions:

> *From the course I've gained that I can interpret things through a different lens. So on placement when I've been asked to do things I'm able to reflect on why they are asking that and to try to change it.*

In his second school placement Dylan felt he was part of a department of like-minded individuals:

> *What I saw at school Y was fundamental in terms of formulating my ideology and I can't narrow it down to a specific thing. It is about relationships...here it is about English and what English means to people.*

He could see that there were plenty of opportunities for him to develop and flourish and to begin to realise some of the ambitions he had for his role as an English teacher in terms of empowering his pupils. In this second placement he felt he could utilise the approaches and strategies that had been so appealing to him in the university-based elements of the course.

These two experiences helped Dylan gain a sense of the kind of English department he wanted to work in and he was very selective about the jobs he applied for as the course progressed, openly seeking opportunities to explore his understanding of philosophies he encountered through informal dialogue with us. He considers himself fortunate to be working in the school in which he spent his happier second placement. He is now juggling the demands of his NQT year with studies for an MA in Education. He is a member of English Space, a group of practitioners across different stages of their careers who meet at the university to discuss issues related to the teaching of English.

Dylan's story is an example of the ways in which conceived and lived space have been in constant negotiation. His experience echoes through the rest of our data set as participants describe their development over the course of their ITE year. For many, the role of the university was significant and we conclude by exploring what this suggests about the role of universities as the landscape of ITE continues to evolve.

Possibility in impossibility?

To support the development of critically engaged teachers and pupils, practices across universities and partnership schools need to frame English teaching as a passionate endeavour. We would argue that one responsibility of university educators is to provide opportunities for beginning teachers to articulate their passions, values and beliefs about what English could and should be within safe spaces in which open discussion and negotiation of emerging beliefs can take place. Within these spaces, university educators should also discuss how the subject has evolved over time so that new entrants can better understand its inherent enduring qualities as well as developing an understanding of the perpetually shifting nature too. In this way, through standing on the peripheries of school spaces, we suggest that university ITE has an important role to play in helping individuals understand current contexts and be able to negotiate their model(s) of English within this. Beginning English teachers entering contemporary classrooms often find their ideals challenged by reductive models and Sally effectively highlights the dangers inherent in this:

> *An individual teacher can make English teaching what it should be, but it is risky and takes a lot of effort and time. [...] Whilst a school continues to be a marketplace, its soul will have to stay on the shelf.*

However, Lefebvre emphasizes that lived space is one which 'imagination seeks to change and appropriate' (1991: 38). As such, lived space can represent the ways in which people's daily realities differ to the dominant spaces imposed upon them and lived space can become a space where such dominance is challenged and negotiated. The dynamic potential of English, as well as its political context, allow for possibility within seeming impossibility, as is suggested by Hannah:

> *The nature of English and assessment priorities are open to endless change, forcing teaching of English to remain dynamic and responsive.*

Because of this, there is hope within the nature of the subject itself. However, people still need to feel empowered to challenge the systems that are imposed upon them and this is where we feel that universities embody an interstitial space for negotiating possibilities. While some schools offer a particular representation of English teaching for beginning teachers during their ITE year, we can offer discussion of the culturally located meanings of these systems and symbols. This explicit acknowledgement of plurality of meaning is a powerful tool which can equip a practitioner to not only negotiate the current context, but also to remain open to the interpretation of future change.

For us, as teacher educators, the teaching of English is rooted within a dynamic understanding of the subject and its pedagogies. Central to both of

these is a strong sense of the kind of English teacher a beginning practitioner wants to be. Sally conveys the importance of this in the current context; we end with her words, which signal hope for her capacity to continue to find possibilities: '*If your model of English is strong enough, the red tape is slightly more flimsy.*'

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