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Enacting critical literacies in the subject of English – Is it possible?

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Background: Text practices in the English subject

Texts have always played a major role in the teaching and learning of the subject of English, although their role and purpose have changed throughout the history of English teaching in Norway (Bakken, 2017; Gudem, 1989; Simensen, 1987; Ørevik, 2019). When English was first introduced as a compulsory subject in the 1960s, texts were primarily intended to develop practical language skills. Thus, subject curricula for English prescribed the use of textbooks specifically designed for drilling vocabulary and language patterns inspired by behaviourist language learning theories (Bakken, 2017). Since the 1980s, however, curricula have emphasised including a varied and authentic text selection catering to pupils' mixed abilities and interests. The term “encounter”, introduced in the 1987 English subject curriculum (Bakken, 2017, p. 11), captured the new focus on young readers' personal engagement with texts, influenced by contemporary ideas of learner autonomy (Holec, 1981) and reader-response theories (Rosenblatt, 1994).

The emphasis on the pupil's agency in the engagement with text was clearly stated in the 2013 version of the English subject curriculum (ESC) and carried into the 2019 revised edition (Norwegian Ministry of Education

and Research, 2019). The 2013 version also included elements of critical text awareness, for instance, in the description of digital skills, stating that pupils should have “a critical and independent attitude to the use of sources”. Additionally, pupils were required to “distinguish positively and negatively loaded expressions referring to individuals and groups” in written texts (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2013). Pupils’ critical engagement with texts is strengthened in the current ESC because it requires pupils not only to make sense of different types of texts, to reflect and interpret them, but also to critically assess spoken and written, printed, digital and multimodal representations – to read with and against the text (Jank, 2019). The current ESC places additional emphasis on pupils’ agency in the text encounter as pupils are expected, from Year 7, to be able to talk about the reliability of various sources and to choose texts for their own use (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2019).

This chapter presents key findings from my doctoral study of teachers’ discursive practices around text practices in the subject of English. The study was conducted before implementing the LK20 and the current ESC. However, there is reason to believe that the overriding findings from the analysis of teacher interviews and English subject curricula are still relevant. The findings from this research have been treated in the four articles that make up my doctoral dissertation (Bakken, 2016, 2017, 2019; Bakken & Lund, 2018) and brought together in the Extended Abstract of the PhD thesis. However, they have not been discussed with a view to enact critical literacy education in the subject of English.

As I will return to in later sections of this chapter, the analysis of the interview material indicates that contemporary curricula requirements mattered less in the 18 teachers’ reflections than the repertoire of understandings available through the teachers’ discursive practices, which sometimes resembled more closely previous rather than contemporary curricular descriptions. Key characteristics of the 18 teachers’ reasoning about text choice and use should, therefore, be understood against a broader canvas of developments in the English subject in Norway rather than merely from one curriculum revision to the next. As Burns et al. (2015) argued, the understandings teachers express must be viewed “as a function of place and time, through interaction and negotiations with social and historical contexts” (p. 589). An important aim of this chapter is to illustrate how teachers’ discursive practices contribute

to the persistence of certain habits of thought concerning the English subject and its literacy practices and to suggest some possibilities for change.

Enacting critical literacy education in teaching and learning English means that pupils encounter a wide range of texts from different sources and are provided with the tools to engage with them critically. In this chapter, I use the plural noun “critical literacies” to capture the multiple skills pupils need to tackle such text diversity. However, while teachers at all levels enjoy the freedom to source texts elsewhere, and many seem to do so in increasing numbers (Aashamar et al., 2021), textbooks continue to stipulate, directly and indirectly, what texts are read and how they are read in many English language classrooms (Stuvland, 2016; Ørevik, 2019).

The role of the textbook

The textbook has retained a surprisingly stable role in the teaching of the English subject (Bachmann, 2004; Bakken, 2019; Ørevik, 2019), though its role may vary considerably across schools and classrooms. Some studies show that the textbook is hardly visible as a text source (Aashamar et al., 2021) or as a part of hybrid practices, including paper-based and digital learning resources (Rasmussen et al., 2014).

The conventional reading of textbook texts for vocabulary learning and content has received criticism for insufficiently providing the much-needed ability to adjust reading strategies to different purposes (Hellekjær, 2005). Nor do such routine text practices equip pupils with the multiliteracies to tackle the complex textual landscapes they navigate daily. In addition, textbook reading often comes with a traditional acceptance of and trust in the knowledge presented in texts (Rasmussen & Lund, 2015), thus positioning the reader as a recipient of information rather than a «meaning maker and text critic» (Luke & Freebody, 1999). In her study of the text cultures of the English subject, Ørevik (2015, 2019) explored exam tasks and textbooks for the English subject and their accompanying websites in two curriculum periods, R94 and LK06. She found that the most predominant genre in print textbooks was the informational text that «mediated information from a knowledge authority», whereas the reader was assigned «a receiving role» (2019, p. 229). However, while the textbooks’ digitally mediated resources resembled the informational print texts on a surface level, «genre patterns on the hyperlinked level» (2015,

p. 118) differed from the print textbooks by encouraging the pupils' active participation, thereby reflecting «the digitised text culture that characterises society at large» (2019, p. 232).

Scholarly work on alternative text practices in the English language classroom

Research shows that text choice matters. A wide selection of text types, genres, and modes many scholars maintain contributes to the development of purposeful reading strategies and stronger text awareness (Day & Bamford, 2002; Grabe, 2009; Urguhart & Weir, 2014). Alternative text choices may also challenge routine textbook approaches (Stuvland, 2016) and encourage reader agency and critical text awareness. Scholarships in English subject didactics have for some time paid specific attention to how children's literature may allow differentiated and inclusive classroom practices in diverse classrooms (e.g., Birketveit et al., 2018; Ibrahim, 2020). Some of this research focuses on the potential of picture books to develop critical literacy, critical thinking and intercultural awareness (e.g., Bland, 2023; Heggernes, 2021; Varga et al., 2020)

Scholarship in English didactics has also brought increasing attention to the «extramural English» of young learners outside the classroom (e.g., Sundqvist, 2009). The effect of these informal learning spaces on language proficiency is particularly significant for boys who sometimes read better in English than in their first language (Brevik & Hellekjær, 2018). As young people's text encounters increasingly take place on screen, through gaming, social media, films and TV series, rather than on paper, these learning spaces contribute to a «widening gulf» (Low & Rapp, 2021, p. 109) between in-school and out-of-school literacy practices. These informal sites represent «powerful learning opportunities», which Gee (2018, p. 8) argued, educators must learn to value.

However, hesitance to change in schools to implement curricular demands relies on a range of factors. It may be grounded on the teacher's personal experiences as a learner of English (Borg, 2015) or lack of subject knowledge or skills to carry out new practices (Hellekjær et al., 2014; Stuvland, 2016). With specific attention to the critical literacy skills of student teachers in the subjects of Norwegian and English, Elvebakk and Blikstad-Balas (2022) found the students struggled to identify criteria for critical assessment of texts. The authors stated

that as future teachers, they would not be prepared to teach critical literacy “if they themselves do not possess such skills” (p. 45) and called for teacher education to provide teachers with much-needed critical literacy skills.

Moreover, misalignments between policy intentions and teachers’ perceptions of their subject and its practices are not uncommon (e.g., Chvala, 2018, 2020; Kjelen, 2013; Lyngstad, 2019). Findings from the LISA project (Blikstad-Balas & Roe, 2020) show that teachers emphasised instrumental reading for content rather than encouraging analytical or critical questions. The participating pupils often answered questions about literary texts but were rarely asked to justify or explain their answers or compare the content of a book with their previous knowledge of a topic (p. 2).

Given the above context, what then is the course forward? Is simply bringing the extramural text experiences of pupils into the English language classroom sufficient to instil a critical impulse in the learner? Must the textbook be discarded if critical literacies are to be enacted in the English subject? What would it take to turn pupils’ literacy engagement within and across digital and analogue spaces into a potential for critical literacy education in the subject of English? These questions will be addressed in some measure towards the end of this chapter.

Operationalising critical literacy

According to Janks (2019), critical literacy encompasses two components. The first is *reading with the text*, which implies applying one’s knowledge of the meaning-making features of texts and how meaning is made in the text through linguistic or other resources. Reading with the text also means going along with the author’s arguments and accepting the position offered. *Reading against the text* means critically interrogating the choices of text producers and “resisting the position offered by the text” (Janks, 2019, p. 563). According to Janks (2019), critical literacy is often misconceived as the ability to critique texts, to read against the text – only. She argues that sufficient knowledge about texts and how they communicate is necessary before one can critique texts properly. Critical literacy takes literacy one step further as it involves creating awareness of the embeddedness of texts, that texts are never neutral, always situated within certain worldviews and power structures (Janks, 2019).

With the above points in mind, critical literacy education aims to empower young people to discover and resist the implicit values and assumptions in texts that shape how they see themselves and others (Janks, 2018, 2019; Mills, 2023). Linking critical literacy to metacognition, Olin-Scheller and Tengberg (2017) argued that critical literacy requires the ability to establish some distance from what the text communicates and to «distinguish between one's own everyday knowledge and the content of the text» (p. 421).

When all factors are considered, the teachers' interpretations of curricular aims and what "counts" as appropriate literacy skills for their pupils determine what types of literacies are enacted in the classroom. In the next section, we turn our attention to how 18 lower secondary English teachers talked about their text choice and use of texts for the English language classroom.

English teachers' discursive practices about text choice and use

This section presents central methodological perspectives and key findings from my doctoral work concerning the reflections of English teachers around their text practices. The overriding aim of the study was to investigate the following. 1) What characterised the 18 English teachers' notions of text choice and text use? 2) How did these notions compare with those expressed in current and earlier curricula for English? 3) How could the teachers' discursive practices be seen to help maintain or change notions of text choice and text use?

Methodological and conceptual framework

A total of 18 semi-structured interviews were conducted with lower secondary English teachers over a period of two years, from 2013–2016. Their teaching experience ranged from 1 to 29 years. The teachers came from six different schools, each with a minimum of 60 credits in English. The 11 national curricula from 1939 until 2013 covered more than 60 years of educational discourse related to the development of English as a school subject.

The analysis borrowed perspectives from CDA from Fairclough (2003) and Van Leeuwen (2008) to investigate recurrent and discordant discursive

features in both types of materials concerning text choice and text use. Juxtaposing elements that were present in one teacher's reflection but absent in another's accentuated diversity and tension in the overall interview material. Similarly, placing the curricular descriptions next to each other gave an impression of what EFL text practices were viewed as appropriate at different times and which ones were left behind by new pedagogical ideas. Thus, through the analysis of the whole material, the reasoning of each individual teacher was brought into dialogue with «a network of social practices» (Fairclough, 2003, p. 24), such as the immediately surrounding teacher discourses in collegial exchange and the more distant curricular discourses of EFL text choice and use across generations of curricula.

The representation of social actors in texts (Fairclough, 2003; Van Leeuwen, 2008) is a central concept in CDA and focuses on the degree to which human beings are «discursively empowered as intentional agents» (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 127) in textual representations. The agency of social actors may be allocated different roles and positions, for instance, promoted, marginalised, activated, or deactivated. In the context of my study, the key social actors were pupils and teachers, and so both their agencies were explored across the interviews and curricular descriptions. Exploring the degree of agency teachers allocate to pupils in their explanations of classroom text practices gave an impression of teachers' understanding of how pupils were meant to engage with and learn from work with texts. Similarly, pursuing the positioning of the pupil in the analysis of the 11 curricula sheds light on shifting views on appropriate EFL reading practices and purposes.

Findings

I will first attend to the teachers' reflections in the interviews before briefly addressing some significant features traceable across the two types of materials. The 18 teachers were asked questions about their text choices and criteria for text selection. Taking examples of texts the teachers had used in class as points of departure, they were asked to describe and explain their chosen text approaches and what purposes these were meant to serve. They were also encouraged to elaborate on their text selection processes, alone or in cooperation with colleagues.

A salient feature of the 18 teachers' explanations of text choice was a strong allegiance to the textbook, also well documented in previous research (e.g., Bachmann, 2004; Stuvland, 2016). Some teachers said they occasionally included other texts, such as young adult novels and films. However, most explained they relied almost solely on texts from the textbook. The analysis showed how competing discourse positions often recurred in the teachers' explanations of the role of the textbook in their teaching.

The textbook was often referred to as a "framework" for the teachers' individual and collective planning, both within and across subjects. As plans were typically common for all teachers who taught at the same level, some teachers argued that deviating from the textbook structure to include alternative or additional texts might disrupt the overall logistics and reduce predictability for both pupils and their parents, thus sourcing texts from the textbook represented a more viable option. At the same time, individual freedom of choice based on the teachers' personal interests was supported by most teachers. However, the teachers tended to describe alternative text choices as being based on a personal "wish" rather than as part of the colleagues' collective planning and as a "break" from the textbook. Apparently, teachers' discursive practices around the role of the textbook implied that alternative text choices were placed outside the teachers' collaborative work and left to their individual discretion and, as a result, made alternative and authentic text choices less likely (Bakken, 2019).

Descriptions of conventional text-driven text approaches, such as the collective "going-through" of textbook texts, translation, and subsequent vocabulary testing, dominated the explanations of the 18 teachers. When asked about the purposes of these text approaches, basic text comprehension and reading for content knowledge were the most frequently mentioned. Several of the teachers explained how a short story, a novel or an excerpt from a novel in combination with a film were used as a means to "cover" content knowledge or provide "information", for instance, about the English-speaking world.

A recurring element in the English teachers' reflection was a preference for spoken over reading skills, where reading a text was seen as a means to develop spoken skills. Several teachers said that spoken skills should be prioritised in the English subject, while reading was accompanied by a certain ambivalence because of the challenges related to pupils' mixed reading abilities. Some teachers distinguished between pupils who are fond of reading – the avid readers who have been exposed to books from childhood – and pupils

who come to class with no appetite for reading, which, in this line of reasoning, cannot easily be acquired at school. Some teachers argued that reading a longer text in class or asking pupils to choose their own text would be very difficult and, as one teacher said, might “stigmatise” those who are not able to read well (T14).

A couple of the teachers said fictional narratives were particularly apt for touching pupils emotionally and thus enabling identification and a deeper understanding of the lives of others. Overall, the emphasis in the text practices teachers described was on text content, while comparatively few said they brought attention to linguistic features beyond basic vocabulary work, and they very rarely mentioned the semiotic resources at work in multimodal representations. Critical views with regard to the narrative representations of, for instance, people and places elsewhere were also minimally represented. Thus, the teachers’ reflections on text use focused on learning and understanding content rather than on building awareness of language or form, the latter understood by scholars (e.g., Janks, 2019; Mills, 2023) as a prerequisite for developing critical literacy skills.

In the reflections of the 18 teachers around their EFL classroom text use, the pupils’ agency was mostly deemphasised, and pupils tended to be positioned as «beneficiaries» (Van Leeuwen, 2008) of reading processes, not in charge of them. The teacher’s role was to “make sure [the pupils] understand” (Teacher 1) the content of a text. Free reading activities (e.g., allowing pupils to choose their own book) were supported by only a couple of the teachers, while most said it would be too demanding for their pupils, time-consuming, and often too difficult to manage for the teacher. The pupils’ needs and interests were rarely mentioned, albeit with a few significant exceptions, as criteria for alternative text choices (Bakken, 2019).

The analysis across the teachers’ interviews and the curricula illustrates how previous understandings of text practices in the English subject appeared to linger in many of the 18 teachers’ reflections. Some of the discourse features accounted for above often bore a closer resemblance to the notions expressed in earlier English subject curricula than in more recent ones. A particularly salient feature in the interviews was the recurrent preference for oral communicative skills, where reading a textbook text was primarily a tool for developing practical oral skills. In this way, the discursive practices of the 18 teachers appear to carry with them a tension traceable in earlier English

subject curricula between practical spoken skills for everybody and reading for the more academically inclined, a tension that is clearly expressed in the first curricula for lower secondary education from the 60s (Bakken, 2017). A preference for spoken skill was last mentioned in the 1987 curriculum, which stated that «oral use of the language is most important» (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 1987) and made Hellekjær (2007) call reading the «forgotten skill» in the English subject.

While the reflections of the 18 individual teachers differ in some respects, the analysis illustrates a series of parallel features in their responses. This finding suggests that English teachers' discursive practices across school environments worked as «boundary maintenance» (Bernstein, 2003) of the subject and its practices. Such boundary maintenance implies that certain text practices are discursively placed within or outside the English subject's boundaries. For instance, the procedural “going-through” of textbook texts was represented as intrinsic and indispensable by most, while analytical and critical text approaches tended to be placed outside the scope of the English subject. The latter text approaches were sometimes framed as belonging to the Norwegian subject, and as one teacher put it, “There is no need to do the same job twice” (Teacher 8).

A similar boundary was drawn between what was considered intrinsic and extrinsic to the teachers' space for professional autonomy with regard to sourcing texts outside the textbook, often framed as an individual “wish” rather than collective responsibility. To most, the textbook represented an authoritative interpretation of curricular aims that few said they wanted to challenge, in this way downplaying their professional autonomy in choosing and assessing texts for their pupils as well as displaying a traditional acceptance of the textbook content (Rasmussen & Lund, 2015).

Discussion

This chapter set out to discuss the findings from my research on English teachers' discursive practices about their text practices with a view of the heightened attention to criticality in LK20 (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2020) and in contemporary educational discourse. Against this backdrop, I asked if enacting critical literacies in English language education is possible and if so, what is the course forward? The first part of the discussion attends

briefly to characteristics of the teachers' discursive practices and how they may represent a challenge to critical literacy education. The second part proposes possible paths to pursue to enable critical literacies in the subject of English.

Challenges: The persistence of habits of thought

The analysis of the 18 teachers' reflections in interviews illustrated the complexity of teachers' meaning-making when describing and justifying their choice and use of texts. As exemplified in the Findings section, several recurrent and often competing discourse elements were present in their reasoning. One such example is the teachers' continued reliance on the textbook as "an authoritative interpretation of curricular aims" (Hodgson et al., 2010) and as a framework for the teachers' individual and collective planning while at the same time emphasising teachers' freedom of choice based on their personal text preferences and interests. While several teachers expressed ambivalence with being "driven by the textbook" (Teacher 1), alternative text choices, when considered necessary, seemed to be perceived by most – with few significant exceptions – as an individual and not a collective responsibility (Bakken, 2019).

Another example is the recurrent tension between reading and speaking skills. As mentioned above, concerns for the pupils' mixed reading abilities made free-reading activities challenging. A third and closely related example is the continued emphasis on the collective reading of the same textbook text coupled with a wish to establish common ground. In this way, the teachers negotiated their text practices in the intersection between external and internal demands, for instance, between requirements for a varied and authentic text selection and everyday classroom challenges.

Characteristics of the 18 English teachers' discursive practices around text choice and use correspond in some measure to findings from research related to text practices in Norwegian subjects in lower secondary schools (Blikstad-Balas & Roe, 2020). These correspondences relate both to the preference for shorter texts and the role allocated to the pupil as a recipient of information rather than a "meaning maker and text critic" (Luke & Freebody, 1999). Thus, there seems to be a discrepancy in both language learning contexts, between the literacy skills many teachers consider appropriate and the critical literacy skills young people need as consumers of popular culture or participants in social media (e.g., Mills, 2023; Janks, 2018, 2019)

These patterns in the 18 teachers' reflections were not only traceable among colleagues at one school but recur in the interview materials as a whole, across age groups and six different school environments and between the first and last rounds of interviews, two and a half years apart. In this way, the 18 teachers seemed to engage in some sort of «boundary maintenance» that worked to sustain notions of what text practices counted as intrinsic or extrinsic to the English subject. In a similar vein, Chvala (2020) described “teacher ideologies” that “shape teachers' understanding of English and contextual meaningful English language teaching” (p. 1). In the context of my study, the collegial exchange around text choice and text use appears to have a particularly strong impact on the less experienced teachers and, as such, are part of the socialisation processes that shape newly educated teachers' sense of their subject and their teaching (e.g., Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997; Farrell, 2008). Conversely, challenging established notions of appropriate text practices means going against the grain of what is often conceived as the essence of English teaching.

Lastly, some of the text practices that dominate in the 18 teachers' reasoning appear to serve purposes that are not necessarily subject-specific but rather work as means for control. American school historian Kliebard (2004) contends that educational reform-makers often “fail to take into account the supremely contextual nature of educational practice” in which “the keeping order function” (p. 104) is particularly important. Applying this perspective to the English language classroom, the predictable teacher-driven and collective procedures (reading, translation, vocabulary testing) seem to function as indispensable tools for such control. Conversely, pedagogies that move agency from teacher to pupil, such as when pupils choose their own texts and learn to assess them, may challenge teachers' sense of control and, therefore, receive limited enthusiasm and may account, at least partly, for the continued stronghold of certain habits of thoughts concerning the subject and its text practices.

Possibilities for enacting critical literacies in EFL teaching and learning.

Considering the position of English as a global language and a language of the Internet begs the question: What other subject could take on the responsibility

of empowering pupils to tackle the sophisticated textual environments in which adolescents enact their literacies in English every day? As Chvala (2020) stated, English teachers are “uniquely positioned to equip future generations with 21st-century readiness as reality-oriented, problem-solving global citizens” (p. 1). Young people’s informal spaces for literacy enactment contribute to a widening gap between in-school and out-of-school learning. How can this gap be bridged? The last section of this discussion proposes some paths to pursue towards enacting critical literacies in English learning contexts.

One suggestion for a path to pursue is to empower English student teachers to challenge and resist naturalised understanding of text choice and use in the English subject, first by asking them to express their own. The next step would be for students to consider the origin of their perceptions, formed, for instance, through their own school experiences (Borg, 2015), and to compare them to current curricular demands.

Another path to pursue is to address the artificial dichotomy established in educational discourse between the literacy practices of the young and not-so-young and between pupils and their teachers. Forty years after the introduction of the Internet, it seems somewhat paradoxical that we still talk as if teachers themselves have not moved outside the realms of conventional textbook reading. Thus, the question is whether teachers’ out-of-work literacy practices differ fundamentally from those of their pupils. People of all ages negotiate their literacies across physical and virtual domains on a daily basis (Gee, 2018; Low & Rapp, 2021). Therefore, it is not unlikely that some of the younger teachers, at least, are familiar with the same video games, music or TV series with which their pupils engage. Can the informal text experiences of teachers or student teachers bridge the divide between traditional classroom literacy and the critical literacies needed to negotiate increasingly complex textual landscapes?

This dichotomy should be challenged in teacher education by bringing explicit attention to student teachers’ daily online and offline text practices and asking the following questions: What literacy practices do they engage in across physical and virtual spaces? What critical literacies are needed in and across these different realms? What “affinity spaces” (Gee, 2018) do they belong to and learn from? How are they themselves positioned as social actors in these contexts? Scholars in the field of English teaching and learning argue that online reading, for instance, “provides opportunities to observe and negotiate language in use” (Barton & Potts, 2013, p. 815). It is possible that both

teachers and student teachers enjoy much of the same learning opportunities in their interaction with digital spaces in English, but student teachers may not see the relevance of their own text experiences for classroom text work or know how to handle them.

While bringing out-of-school text experiences into the classroom may be one measure towards critical literacies enactment, simply introducing them into the classroom does not automatically alter conventional text practices or ensure critical literacy education. Nor does bringing everyday media into the classroom mean that one should leave the textbook behind. However, textbook texts should be treated with the same professional and critical attention as any other text. Moreover, future teachers must be empowered to choose and critically assess the myriad of texts in English available on and off the Internet if such texts are to be part of their pupils' text selection. In addition, social media, video games and popular culture often recycle negative ethnic and gender stereotypes. As digital spaces may represent a «minefield of misinformation» (Gee, 2018, p. 8.), it becomes all the more important to equip student teachers and their pupils with the critical literacy tools to interrogate such misinformation.

Thus, explicit critical literacy education is needed both for student teachers and pupils. As Elvebakk and Blikstad-Balas (2022) concluded, «Teacher education cannot assume that all teacher candidates have the necessary critical literacy competence» (p. 44) to teach critical literacy to their future pupils. Drawing on Janks' (2019) model for critical literacy education, reading with and against the text, such critical literacy competence would imply closer attention to the formal feature of texts – and provide pupils with a metalanguage (Mills, 2023) to describe and assess the choices authors, filmmakers and videogame designers use in their text production. Second, it would mean providing students and teachers with the means to interrogate the worldviews texts promote, asking, for instance, “whose interests does the text serve, who is included, who is excluded?” (p. 561). Working from the understanding that all texts are positioned and that no text is innocent, criticality should be encouraged in the encounter with any text, whether digital, analogue, verbal or multimodal – including textbook texts. One implication of my doctoral research is the need to strengthen what the shared professional decision-making educational authorities ask for (Norwegian Ministry for Education and Research 2008–2009). In my view, critical literacies cannot be enacted in

schools without the collective efforts of English teachers who themselves are able to provide young people with the tools to navigate increasingly complex textual landscapes.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has discussed the possibilities of enacting critical literacies in the subject of English against the backdrop of my research into 18 teachers' discursive practices around text choice and use in the English subject. An important implication of that research is that there is a continued need to pay critical attention to commonly accepted notions of what text practices "belong" to the subject of English. I have also brought attention to how contemporary curricular demands do not necessarily inform teachers' perceptions of relevant text practices but rather draw on strands of knowledge from previous curricula and accommodate the reality of English teachers' everyday classroom work.

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