



The National Association for the Teaching of English

New Publication

text : message

The Future of A Level English

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As the country debates the future of 14-19 education in the light of the Tomlinson report, this timely publication reflects on the current state of A Level English, presenting a critique of current arrangements, giving an account of alternative models, and proposing a new model that takes account of change: change in English Studies, in A Level students and in the wider world of discourse.

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Text : Message – the Future of A Level English *NATE Post-16 Committee*

When A Level English was introduced, about seven per cent of the age group took Advanced Level qualifications. The exam was seen as a selection process for university, and pupils took A levels that anticipated their future studies. In the wider world of communication, television offered one channel; a household telephone was a sign of status; and the *Daily Herald* had not yet become the *Sun*.

The world has changed since 1951. The majority of students stay in school or college till 18, and by the end of the decade it is expected that 50% will be in higher education of some kind. Young people today inhabit a cultural and media sphere utterly different from that of the 1950's, and have to orient themselves in a multi-channel world of the internet and global television.

During this time, English studies changed too. The theory debates of the late twentieth century transformed literature in HE into a cultural study of the power of discourse in shaping perceptions of the ambient world. But such challenging and profound approaches had little effect on English studies in British schools. The introduction of A level courses in *Language* made an important difference, and Curriculum 2000 has brought the promising development of combined or integrated *Language and Literature* courses. But a large minority of students still have no effective choice of English subject at A level, and take courses that offer little more than the study of a handful of set books - the pattern set in the 1950's.

Since the introduction of Curriculum 2000, the NATE Post-16 Committee has been monitoring the new specifications and their implementation in schools and colleges. Two years ago we conducted a survey of NATE members teaching A level. The results of this survey reflect current A level English practice in a range of institutions, and teachers' evaluations of the work they do.

We have also surveyed alternatives to A Level English in its current form. We have made detailed evaluations of the International Baccalaureate; English in the Australian post-16 Certificates of Education; English in Higher Education; the Advanced Extension Awards; Media, Drama and Communication Studies; and also the many alternative syllabuses that have been proposed and practised (often by NATE writers) since the mid-seventies.

Our new book, *Text : Message - The Future of A Level English*, distils this research and makes proposals for the future. The Tomlinson Committee has recommended considerable changes in the structure of 14-19 education, and our book proposes changes in the structure and content of English. We directly address Tomlinson's concerns about the nature and purpose of assessment. We envisage a curriculum that takes account of change: change in English studies, in A level students, and in the wider world of discourse. A level students are entitled to knowledge that is not the exclusive prerogative of "Language" or "Literature", and subject options must take account of this.

We hope that *Text : Message* will make a significant contribution to the debate about the future of English at A level, and that it will help create an advanced studies curriculum that is truly fit for its purpose.

Dear Colleague

Subject

Text : Message - the Future of A Level English

I'm writing to let you know that NATE have just published *Text : Message - the Future of A Level English*. The book will be launched at our annual conference next weekend.

In this new book, the NATE Post-16 Committee evaluate A Level English in the light of modern approaches to English studies. Basing our case in part upon teachers' evaluations, we argue that neither the structure nor the content of the current A Level English curriculum suits current needs. We provide detailed critiques of each English subject, and survey alternative curricular models that have developed in Higher Education, overseas, and in other disciplines. We consider appropriate modes of assessment in English. Finally, we propose approaches to A Level English that draw on best theory and practice, and suggest ways in which these might be delivered.

The NATE Post-16 Committee have brought diverse experience to this task. The writers currently work in 11-18 schools, in further and higher education, and in teacher training. We are engaged in research into literacy and the English curriculum, and have responsibility as senior examiners and moderators in English.

. : please see the attached flier for details.

With good wishes,

Yours sincerely,



JOHN HODGSON

Chair, NATE Post-16 Committee