

Articles

Humanities Degrees in Writing-Intensive Professions

Dr Tory Young of Anglia Polytechnic University surveys the Speak-Write Programme which researched the needs of graduates working in writing-intensive professions and addressed the teaching of advanced communication skills to humanities students.

Background: the Speak-Write Programme

The Speak-Write Programme is based in the English Department of Anglia Polytechnic University, Cambridge. Its aim is to create research-based teaching resources for use in developing advanced communication skills in the HE and business sectors.

Originally funded by HEFCE, the Speak-Write programme was established in 1997 by Rebecca Stott, who continues to co-direct with Tory Young. The original team of Rebecca Stott, Simon Avery and Cordelia Bryan investigated claims that standards of oral and written English were declining amongst undergraduates. The team researched the capacities and limitations of first-year students with regard to the use and analysis of written and spoken English in universities across the sector, collecting examples of good teaching practice in this area. They then developed and piloted a range of innovative teaching materials. The resulting advanced writing and oral presentation resources were published by Longman in the form of four textbooks in January 2001: *Grammar and Writing*, *Writing with Style*, *Speaking Your Mind: Oral Presentation and Seminar Skills* and *Making Your Case: A Practical Guide to Essay Writing*. The materials and research have also been disseminated through a series of conferences, symposia and workshops.

Continuation funding from the Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning and now the English Subject Centre enabled a consultancy service to be added to the programme. As Curriculum Consultant, Tory Young has tailored Speak-Write materials for colleagues considering integrating the books into their

degree programmes and continues to advise departments across the sector. The Speak-Write Programme Office has come to be regarded as a store of practical advice and information on teaching advanced communication skills. The team continues to monitor developments and initiate debate about trends in the teaching of writing in Europe and America, particularly in its recently established partnership with the Cornell Consortium for Writing in the Disciplines.

The research project

Having completed the four books designed to enhance the oral and written skills of undergraduates in 2001, the Speak-Write team sought to explore ways in which high-level literacy skills could be honed for professional purposes. We were aware of a number of media reports in which employers expressed dissatisfaction with the writing skills of graduates; we sought to explore the validity of such views and to examine the precise nature of the complaints. The phrase 'poor grammar' – often equated with 'poor spelling' – appeared frequently and we aimed to clarify the meaning of this phrase.

Our research and report has been written at a time of national enquiry into graduate 'employability.' The 1997 Report of the National Committee of Enquiry into Higher Education (the Dearing Report – see <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/ncihe/>) stated that:

Higher education needs to reflect key aspects of such changes in the UK labour market. It will need:

To equip graduates with the skills and attributes needed to be effective in a changing world of work and upon which to found

and manage a number of careers. [...] The balance between specific subject knowledge and a broad educational base and between initial and subsequent higher education qualifications will change. (4.22)

The *Dearing Report* has resulted in initiatives designed to encourage and support graduates to develop skills for working life: the Department for Education and Employment regularly funds development projects on the theme through the Higher Education and Employment Development Programme. Within the HE community Subject Centres are investigating the ways in which particular disciplines and 'the various abilities, competencies, and skills they incorporate are being profiled, both within awards, and in other contexts such as the Benchmarking Statements.'

We intended that our research into employers' expectations of current humanities graduates could usefully contribute to the longstanding national debate about the purpose of a degree and the role of universities within society. We wanted to discover why employers appoint graduates as opposed to those without HE qualifications and how they perceive the difference. We aimed to consider attitudes of graduates and employers to 'vocational' and 'academic' degrees but without seeking to 'justify degrees through promotion of practical aspects' or to become reductively trapped in the 'terminology of skills.'¹ Instead we aimed to evaluate how aptitudes developed at university were employed by humanities graduates in the workplace.

Research objectives

As the Speak-Write project is concerned with literacy we focused our research on written communication skills in the workplace rather than other transferable life skills that may have been acquired at university. Consequently the professions we sought to examine were those usually entered at graduate level and which demand an aptitude for writing. We have defined as 'writing-intensive' those careers in which employees undertake substantial, often formal, writing tasks on a daily basis, rather than those in

which writing was a minor concern, for instance when performed only as a means of internal, informal communication.

The aims of this research were:

- to evaluate the relevance of humanities degrees to writing-intensive careers
- to determine which skills are widely used in writing-intensive careers
- to discover which writing tasks are commonly undertaken in writing-intensive careers to suggest ways in which HE departments can optimise their teaching of writing to undergraduates intending to establish careers in writing-intensive professions.

Research methods

Over a twelve-month period from January 2001 to January 2002, 26 individuals working in 10 writing-intensive professions were interviewed. They came from career areas such as marketing, politics, publishing, legal advice work, local government, film production, education and research. We selected interviewees from two distinct groups in these career areas: employers at management level and recent graduates who had just started their careers. The recent graduates had completed a range of humanities degrees, including History of Art, English Literature, Film, Media Studies & Psychology, History, English & Philosophy, Modern Studies, Humanities & Social Studies, and English & German. The interviews were taped and transcribed. All interviewees were asked:

- how important is writing to your profession?
- what kind of writing skills do you use?
- what kind of writing tasks do you do?
- how useful is a degree in preparing an employee for this work?
- what could be taught in humanities degrees which would better prepare graduates for this work?

¹ Rylance, Rick and Simons, Judy. 'The really useful company: Graduates, employment and the humanities.' *Critical Quarterly* 43.1: 73-78

Limitations

This report deals with a sample of writing-intensive careers and does not claim to be comprehensive.

Although electronic publishers were interviewed, they tended to focus on the paper-based side of their business, and so the team was able to collect less data concerning e-writing skills than expected.

Some interviewees knew that the team had previously written the Speak-Write textbooks, including one entitled *Grammar and Writing*. As a result, several interviewees perceived that the team's aim was to discuss grammar, and equated writing skills with knowledge of grammar in their analysis of education.

Findings

We asked all the professionals we interviewed to estimate the amount of time they spent each day writing, considering it in all its varieties from informal, internal emails to large-scale public reports. All spent the majority of their time in the workplace writing: they estimated between 50% and 80% of their daily tasks involved writing of some sort. Perhaps surprisingly many employees – with the obvious exception of those involved in journalism – had not anticipated the volume of writing they would undertake, nor had they perceived their writing as a strength upon entering the workplace. Furthermore it was rare for an employee's writing skills to be formally tested or analysed prior to taking up the appointment – again journalism was the obvious exception to this.

Most employees were writing on their individual personal computers. Some interviewees felt that the advent of the PC itself had contributed to the amount of writing they were expected to do as part of their job, and as a consequence, higher level writing skills were expected of them than might have been in previous years. One local government manager commented:

When I started 11 years ago you tended to do a rough draft by hand and a typing pool would produce it. Now everybody has their own PC and they do their own minutes.

In general, the higher an employee's status at work, the less writing s/he was expected to undertake. Instead, the focus was often on supervisory or managerial tasks, such as commissioning or commenting on the writing of others. However, the majority of managers we interviewed were communicating to their teams and clients in writing. Managers reported a change in the preferred mode of communication: memos were seen as a thing of the past, replaced by e-mail as a form of internal correspondence. The only exception to this was in secondary education where lack of PC access meant that e-mail was not suitable for team communications.

Skills used in writing-intensive professions

We asked all interviewees what they thought were the writing skills they used most in their daily work. We did not offer a list of suggested skills, as we were interested to discover the perceptions of those we spoke to.

For half of our sample of people working in writing-intensive careers, the most important writing skills were concerned not with writing from scratch but with editing existing material. Fifty per cent of our interviewees specifically mentioned editing, while 33% spoke of selecting information in the form of existing text to use in writing – often using the phrase 'cut and paste' – a term given currency by the PC itself. Twenty-seven per cent of people we spoke to frequently engaged in the processes of redrafting and rewriting in order to improve writing or adapt existing text for new purposes. The skill of summarising a large body of text to make it accessible to a reader was referred to by 27% of interviewees. Another 30% regularly adapted writing for a given purpose – to inform, promote, entertain, argue, and so on – and spoke of the skills needed to do so effectively.

Our interviewees were as concerned with the skill of **writing appropriately** as with editing. Fifty per cent of them stated that they spent time each day concerned with finding an appropriate tone or register for their writing, and some also commented that this was a skill that newcomers to their professions sometimes struggled with. Despite this, very few organisations recommended existing manuals to their employees or wrote their own

guides to appropriate register and house style – the exception being the creative director of a free local listings magazine whose handbook specifically urged an irreverent tone. We found that new employees usually discovered appropriate register through a process of trial-and-error, submitting work to their managers to be commented upon during the first few months of employment. Inevitably this often led to the style and lexis of the individual manager being regarded as the ‘correct’ one. In some professions that rely on a transitory workforce of interns and students on work placements (for instance the media and film industries), employees were explicitly encouraged to write in this way, adopting the style of their manager so that the writing could be sent out in her/his name.

The aim of all those we spoke to was to **write concisely** and clearly avoiding complex language or jargon. Thirty-six per cent said it was necessary to write succinctly and with clarity in order to make the experience of their readers as easy as possible. The majority of types of writing being done on a daily basis were those where a large volume of information had to be communicated in as few words as possible.

Twenty-seven per cent of our sample group saw **proof-reading** as an important writing skill. Many were concerned not to dispatch writing which contained errors to clients and colleagues and felt that the checking of work was a vital part of the writing process which less experienced colleagues omitted at their peril.

Tasks undertaken in writing-intensive professions

The most common writing task referred to by interviewees was **e-mail**. For 50% of them it was the main method of communication with colleagues and clients and was perceived to have replaced the memo and often, the letter and the telephone call. The proportion of time spent each day writing and responding to e-mail was reported as high, with one individual who worked in publishing estimating that it took up 80% of her day. Some companies were sending their employees on courses to enable them to use e-mail more effectively; course content included the importance of a succinct

and relevant subject line, the need to employ an appropriate tone and the possibilities of other communication modes being more appropriate in some cases.

In addition to the extensive use of e-mail, 40% of the group interviewed still regularly wrote **letters** as part of their work. Letters were written for a variety of purposes: to complain, to persuade, to inform or to solicit business. Employees often write or draft letters on behalf of their employers and have to adapt their own styles accordingly. Several recent graduates stated that they had no experience of writing letters prior to employment. They had been given a model business letter whilst at school which had become outmoded in the intervening period and thus needed to update it in their first job, particularly in organisations with a well-defined house style.

Forty per cent of interviewees were regularly involved in writing some sort of **report**. The range of reports written included:

- reports on issues, e.g. a local council report on an issue for public readership
- feasibility studies, e.g. considering the possibility of a local company going regional
- reports on people, e.g. in an educational context on their progress and achievement
- script reports, e.g. analysis of the suitability of a submitted script for filming

The consensus was that reports should be written in a formal and well-structured manner. One interviewee working in marketing adopted a process for drafting reports which involved starting with a series of points and developing each into a section of the report.

Just over 25% of the sample said that they wrote notes as part of their job. These were rarely the final written product, but were part of a process of recording information to be used in a piece of writing to be done at a later stage.

Perceived usefulness of humanities degrees to these professions

Managers and employers were universally positive about the advantages of a humanities degree. When asked to define the difference between a graduate and a non-graduate, employers tended to discuss a range of skills and aptitudes that are not explicitly linked to writing, but do impact upon written skills. In particular they praised graduates' initiative, willingness to take decisions, ability to source and assess information and to structure arguments. The skill of distilling oral and written texts into an accurate summary or series of pertinent points for future reference is one that is particularly developed in undergraduate study in the humanities.

[Graduates have] the ability to put arguments together in an extended way: an ability to reason and argue.

Product Marketing Manager

Essay writing is a key skill; the ability to structure and develop an argument.

Legal adviser

Most employers did not feel that linguistic ability had declined in graduates over recent years. Despite the media concerns about poor writing skills that had initiated this research, only one of our interviewees expressed strong concern at the grammar of contemporary graduates. One magazine editor noted that:

A lot of people like to think that modes of writing are fixed when in fact they are like modes of speaking and change. This is a major factor behind the complaints.

There were contradictory opinions about spelling and grammar. Many employees were forgiving of minor spelling errors or typos. The very poor spelling and grammar skills of one recent graduate in our survey had not prevented him from securing a high-profile job and achieving a first-class degree from Oxbridge. Most employers stressed the importance of correct layout, good grammar and spelling, however, and pointed out that such errors have a damaging impact on the reputation of the company when sent to the outside

world. Several employers also pointed out that a covering letter with as few as three errors would provide reason to eliminate that applicant in a competitive job market where other letters were impeccable. Curriculum vitae and application letters were the most common contact employers had with recent graduates and much of their analysis of graduate skills was based upon them. Several commented that in writing-intensive professions, employers were inevitably more able to recognise grammatical errors. There was however, no general consensus and even some vagueness as to what the term 'grammar' actually referred to.

In our sample all the employers and recent graduates who expressed a preference favoured academic over vocational degrees. In part this seems likely because the aptitudes they value – the ability to study independently, gather, evaluate and synthesise material into a written form – are those taught or acquired during the conventional staple of humanities degrees, the essay-writing process. On the whole however, whilst employers recognised the advantages of humanities degrees, recent graduates tended to perceive them as unrelated to their activities in the workplace. One clear trend can be discerned in our sample: the more time that had elapsed between the interview and graduation, the more positive interviewees were about the value of their degrees. The most recent graduates did not seem to recognise the transferability of skills developed during study, instead they regarded degrees as distinct from their experience of the workplace because their specific subject expertise was not called upon on a daily basis. Most felt that their writing had improved whilst at university but could not always define the improvements. Recent graduates tended to be more articulate about the skills they had learned at school; they were more able to analyse what they were taught there and how useful it is to them in the workplace. This seems likely to be a consequence of the fact that at school writing skills are explicitly taught, rather than incidentally commented upon as so often happens during degree study. Furthermore, the graduates we interviewed tended to focus upon the tasks undertaken rather than the skills gained and thus, for instance, could not relate the relevance of essay-writing about their degree subject to the writing tasks of their career.

Most interviewees noted that nowadays a degree is almost a compulsory qualification; many of the recent graduates were employed in positions that would have been formerly undertaken by school leavers. Consequently, upon entering the workplace, many new employees have different skills to their predecessors, and the nature of their jobs is changing as a result. One senior commissioning editor described this situation:

It's noticeable that people's educational qualifications are rising because the kind of person who would have applied for the job [of assistant] 10 years ago would maybe have been a bright girl, usually, leaving school at 18 going on to a secretarial and possibly computer qualification [...] and this would then be a second job. That sort of person doesn't really exist any more. That kind of person is going on to do a degree and getting a broader education and a more imaginative education, but not the traditional secretarial skills.

When asked what universities could usefully do to improve the writing skills of graduates for the workplace most of our interviewees expressed the opinion that detailed training relating to specific professions was not an appropriate function of universities. They felt that professional writing skills were too specific to particular jobs and even particular organisations within those professions to be effectively taught at university. Most of the graduates in our sample had gone on to take professional qualifications or postgraduate work after completing a non-vocational degree and felt that this was a more appropriate place to hone specific skills. Those without such vocational training had acquired their skills within the particular context of their workplace.

However, it was clear that both employers and recent graduates felt that a university education should improve an individual's writing skills. Most recent graduates had embarked upon HE with the intention of advancing their communication skills. Both groups in our survey favoured the idea of such skills being taught more explicitly within the disciplines. The value of the transferable writing skills we identified above such as editing, awareness of appropriate language for specific audiences and purposes, writing with concision and clarity, was recognised by employers as something which could be emphasised more explicitly within HE. Some recent graduates were also in favour of optional modules on grammar:

I often wish I'd been taught [grammar] at school or even university. I would have liked the option to study grammar at university. I think it would be very useful.

Many thought that their IT skills could have been enhanced during undergraduate study and one felt that some training in writing for presentations would have been helpful.

Recommendations

It was clear from our survey that many recent graduates are unable to articulate or are even unaware of the transferable skills they refined at university which are essential to their professional lives. We strongly recommend therefore that students are encouraged to reflect upon the aptitudes they have developed in HE and their relationship to the workplace. Such reflection could take place within a synoptic review, in which students are asked to analyse the development of their written work from the first year to their finals. Moreover, it is worth noting that the recent graduates we interviewed were all in high-level employment; it seems likely that there are unemployed graduates who would particularly benefit from explicit assessment of their expertise. Synoptic reviews should take place within specific disciplines rather than as part of a generic university-wide programme that students find hard to relate to their own programme of study.

At present grammar is taught and corrected in an ad hoc way in most HE institutions. Some tutors correct grammatical errors in a student's essays whilst others read for content alone. This variation in response to this aspect of undergraduate writing sends confusing messages to students about the status of their writing and the importance of grammar itself. Clearly the teaching of grammar in HE is a contentious issue, unlikely to be resolved in agreement by the HE sector as a whole. Whilst some feel that grammar should be taught at school – and thus if undergraduate grammar is poor it is because schools have 'failed' – other institutions recognise that writing development is a lifelong process. This problematic issue is not going to disappear and needs to be addressed by individual universities and departments in order to implement consistent policies within them that will improve student performance.

The Status of Writing in the University

Carson Bergstrom of Salford University presents his case for the centrality of writing skills in the undergraduate degree. This paper is based on one presented at 'The Condition of the Subject' Conference held at the University of London in July 2003.

That a problem with student writing skills exists few would doubt or question. More worryingly, an inability to express themselves raises the question of whether students have really understood the concepts, the theories, and the relevant knowledge and information which it is the purpose of the module or the course to provide. Yet in most institutions in the UK, the solution to this problem rarely goes much beyond hand-wringing, brief advice on essay-writing in programme handbooks, or hastily designed and not particularly helpful web pages.

In general, then, if we ask about the status of writing in the university, the answer can be summed up in a brief phrase: status, what status? Such an answer, of course, smacks of facetiousness, especially since there are many university staff who are trying to address the problem of weak writing skills, and there are institutions which are taking the problem seriously. Indeed, my own institution, Salford University, has embarked on a process which may, eventually, lead to improved writing skills for many of its students, while departments, schools, and even whole institutions are making efforts to tackle the problem: for instance, Anglia Polytechnic University has developed its *Speak-Write* programme (see the paper on page 4), while Wolverhampton University and Liverpool John Moores University both employ Lecturers in Writing. Even so, the reply "status, what status?" is still a valid response to the situation *in general*. *In general*, the scandal of weak writing skills does not play a major role in how UK universities conceive of their mission as providers of education: *in general*, the problem of weak writing skills does not inform those policy decisions which show that universities are fulfilling their educative responsibilities. *In general*, what, if any, resources targeted at solving this problem are minuscule in terms of overall budgetary commitments—and commitment of resources offers the best available indicator of status.

Our scenario, however, tells us that improving student writing skills should be an urgent university priority: the status of writing should be at the forefront of university thinking and university policy, not low

down on the agenda or effectively invisible. The status of writing skills should be urgent for two reasons.

First, and as this conference demonstrates, the student entering a university programme today must in order to succeed assimilate concepts and theories virtually nonexistent as elements of an undergraduate course of study only 20 or 25 years ago. Indeed, the difficulty and complexity of the concepts and theories which an undergraduate must nowadays "master" marks a sharp boundary between university study 20 or 25 years ago and now. Theory, particularly in the humanities and social sciences, now informs teaching to such an extent that not only the syllabus but the methodology of study itself bears almost no resemblance at all to programmes of study two or three decades ago. Indeed, the advent of theory means that students must *de facto* be able to work in an interdisciplinary way. The design of modern programmes of study means that students immediately encounter theory and theory-issues; advancement through a programme implicitly requires that a student gain an ever wider and deeper understanding of theory, the aim of which is to develop and display evermore greater facility in the application of theory. In short, students learn to think about issues in terms of theory, and they learn to read their texts from theoretical perspectives. They become, so to speak, theorised.

Whatever reservations some may feel about the extent to which theory permeates modern university study (and many of the reservations deserve consideration because they ask important questions about what we do as teachers), theory in fact serves and supports the key ideals of university study. Clearly, theory encourages conceptual sophistication and terminological complexity (it makes the brain work) but it also demands the accumulation of appropriate knowledge applied with intellectual rigour. At its best, theory motivates questioning and investigation, and it thereby initiates discussion, debate, argument – the taking and defending of positions. Theory aids the construction of, to use a theory term, subject positions, and the importance of that construction for a student's intellectual development and progress cannot be

underestimated. In an obvious way, theory helps the student to discover what he or she wants to say. And student “saying” at university means writing.

Here, then, is the rub. Theory demands sophistication in writing for the student to “prove” that he or she has assimilated the theory and can apply it, high levels of written expression must be achieved. Thus, since there is no likelihood of going back, no possibility that we can abandon theory in favour of some older model of university study, we must address the issue of poor writing skills. Indeed, since we demand that students attain theoretical sophistication in order to obtain their degrees, we must help them to improve their writing skills. Arguably, a virtuous relationship can be seen to exist between improving writing skills – better expression – and the successful engagement with theory: the search for clarity and coherence in writing feeds into the thinking processes required to master theory. When the student can actually express ideas cogently and clearly, can apply theory in recognisably appropriate ways, then we can claim that they have fulfilled the course requirements. If this condition is not met, we have failed the student and that should be sufficient impetus to raise the status of writing skills as a matter of urgency.

The second reason why we need to make the status of writing an urgent matter for university policy involves a more complex set of issues – some related, some not. Taken together, the impact of these issues should bring the status of writing into the orbit of policy consideration. Indeed, they are already doing so.

As every academic knows all too well, important and far-reaching changes have been occurring in higher education as a consequence of a wide range of government priorities and policies (priorities and policies which do not appear to be distinguished by the labels of left or right). These priorities and policies directly altered the structures and ethos of university management, and of course those alterations have impacted on the nature and provision of programmes;

in the longer-term they are forcing change to the identity of the university as an institution. I have no intention of rehearsing these developments here, nor will I lament the effects of these changes though lamentable I do find most of them. I will, therefore, only focus on issues which relate most specifically to the status of writing.

The most momentous change for UK universities began in the late 1980s when the government gave the green light for universities to increase student numbers, which universities did with speed because there was an initial promise of increased funding. The late 1980s, then, began the move towards a mass-education university system. The current government is pursuing a policy of widening participation, the stated aim of which is to increase the number of students graduating with ‘A’ Levels going to university to 50%. Implicit in such a change “whether for good or ill” is the fact that many universities no longer maintain their previously strict entrance requirements, and many institutions, of course, have lowered their requirements considerably. Schools and departments struggling to meet recruitment quotas will rely on the clearing process to make up numbers; faced with such pressure, a cavalier attitude toward the qualifications of potential students will rule decision-making. In fact, there simply are not enough students with three A grades or two As and a B to go around. Progression figures for 2000 tell a sobering story: only 36.9% of eighteen-year olds were in full-time education, and that is the pool from which the higher education sector traditionally draws its students.¹ Thus, many students who in the past would not have been considered for a place on a university degree are now being offered a place indeed, in the current market conditions such students are wooed and courted.

Filling quotas may solve a temporary budget shortfall, but students entering their first year of study with poor qualifications and subject backgrounds will in all likelihood possess weak writing skills, too.

¹ Claire Phipps, “Back to bac?” *The Guardian* 15 July 2003, Education sec. : 1.

Arguably, those with higher entrance grades might be expected to improve their writing skills more readily than those with lower qualifications, but the poorer students need support if they are to attain acceptable academic standards of expression. In short, we must recognise that the general unease about poor writing skills obstructing student progress and achievement has arisen concurrently with the expansion in student numbers. Moreover, the focus on weak writing skills has sharpened now because the move towards a mass-education system has been occurring at the same time that theory has become central to teaching: theory's need for higher levels of expression is driving concerns about poor student writing skills.

Equally relevant to the issue of the status of writing skills are policies to encourage lifelong learning and increasing adult access to higher education. These policies are part of a response to the recognition that in the new knowledge economy people must constantly improve or upgrade their communication skills. Clearly, these policies grow out of the government's determination to meet the need for people to possess applicable skills which can be exploited in the workplace – a policy emphasis which is going to get stronger, not weaker, in the future – and these policies help to cement a general government attitude that a university education must prepare students for employment. Recent comments by Charles Clarke, the Education Secretary, and Patricia Hewitt, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, and Minister for Women and Equality, indicate that government expects a university education to lead directly to employment. As a spokesman from the Department for Education and Skills said, defending Clarke's remarks about the ornamental status of Medieval History departments, "The secretary of state was basically getting at the fact that universities exist to enable the British economy and society to deal with the challenges posed by the increasingly rapid process of global change."² Faced with the competitive pressures which are implicit in all talk of "global change", government can argue that it

has no choice but to fund universities courses which carry a "clear usefulness" label. Thus, at the same time as government has been pushing for greater student numbers and wider access, universities are expected to be able to show that their programmes provide skills which make students more employable: in other words, we have to show that we provide key skills. Presumably, unless we can show that university students are graduating with practical skills of use to business and the economy, we fail the all-important, though vague, criterion of value-for-money. Since one of the persistent and key complaints of businesses about their employees relates to their poor writing skills, if we can show that we do indeed provide this key skill, it will allow us to claim that we do in fact provide value-for-money.

The development of a mass-education system thus has serious implications for the future of the university sector. The demand that university courses provide skills which make students more employable will inevitably alter the traditional identity of the university as an institution which teaches only those capable of achieving the highest intellectual goals; it is also going to alter the identity of academic staff who typically do not see themselves as "skills" teachers. Clearly, all disciplines are going to need to nurture vocationalism in some form or another. It would seem that such nurturing would be a matter of urgency for Medieval History departments.

Yet the move toward a mass-education system need not be seen as an obstacle to maintaining high standards of learning, nor need we conclude that mass education will bring about an insidious lowering of academic standards. Instead, the development of a mass-education system should be regarded as an historic opportunity for universities to tackle a basic educational objective and a key educational: ideal to give students the power to express themselves logically, cogently, and coherently. Initially, we might have to confess that these objectives and ideals received more

2 Will Woodward and Rebecca Smithers, "Clarke Dismisses Medieval Historians," *The Guardian* 9 May 2003: 7.

lip service in the past than we would like to admit, that most undergraduate students (those large cohorts of 2.1 and 2.2 students) never achieved such powers of expression. Indeed, we might need to confess that poor writing skills were the norm before the move towards a mass-education system. However, in the past, when final examinations determined degree classification, poor writing skills did not receive the same attention which they do now because essay writing now forms a larger element in degree assessment. In fact, now that the essay forms a significant element in assessment, some markers are beginning to question the conventional value of the essay as a teaching instrument. If students persistently do abysmally in their essays, the argument goes, perhaps they should not be made to write essays. Solutions to this problem such as that put forward by Richard Winter in a recent *Education Guardian* opinion column register the anxiety and frustration of markers forced to read poor writing, though Winter's solution does not in fact confront the key problem for student writers: making students write shorter, less formalised pieces of work, rather than long academic essays, will not actually address the problem of fundamentally weak writing skills.³ A better solution would give students the writing skills that would enable them to undertake the tasks that we set them.

Managed correctly and "sold" to government convincingly a policy of improving students' writing skills could help to focus and make sense of a wide range of disparate policies and practices. Widening participation and retention issues, for example, feed into calls within the university to develop effective writing skills programmes for all. When students with widening participation profiles enter the university, support for them must go beyond a pamphlet of advice handed out during induction week. Students who find their initial months at university difficult and confusing because they suffer from insecurity about their ability to succeed often need practical solutions to help them build confidence: an exhortation from a tutor to keep trying may well not be sufficient to keep

them at university. The money saved through retention could help to offset the costs of a writing programme, and the university would realise two other important benefits: students would appreciate a university's investment in them; by giving students the skills for effective written communication, universities would win government and business over to the way that they design and teach their programmes. Other benefits would undoubtedly accrue.

Thus, the time is ripe for an improvement in the status of writing, but several obvious problems need to be admitted. First, the ever-present problem of resources. Few institutions in Britain can at present afford to develop extensive writing programmes: no amount of good will can ignore the fact that current funding regimes make it unlikely that many university management teams will give a green light to a large writing programme. True, money might be found in "initiative budgets" from widening participation and retention funds, for example, or other short-term funding might be found to make it seem as if something is being done when, in reality, a bandaid is being applied. Second, even if funding is found, there is little history of such programmes at British institutions. Accordingly, there are not many teachers available who could or would do such teaching. Unlike the university sector in North America, where freshman composition courses have long been the norm, British institutions would need to develop writing programmes from scratch; a daunting prospect, to be sure, and staff would need to be found who could accomplish this task. Moreover, simply adopting the North American model would not solve the problem of poor writing skills in British universities. Indeed, for all the resources pumped into writing programmes in North America, the results are less than one would expect. As always, aim and design need to be considered carefully. Those, however, can be considered after the most important task has been accomplished: bringing writing skills to the top of the agenda.

3 Richard Winter, "Opinion," *The Guardian* 10 June 2003, Education sec.: 15.

Digital Resources for Teaching and Discussion: three approaches C & IT in English

Dr Christie Carson, English Subject Centre Project Officer for C & IT, reviews her work in developing technology-based approaches to teaching.

Over the past year my post has caused me to meet and work with a wide range of colleagues in English who are addressing the issues surrounding the impact of digital technology in the curriculum. During my secondment in the English Subject Centre from the Drama Department at Royal Holloway I have been working to understand both the concerns of the discipline and the hurdles which stand in the way of change for many colleagues. I am now nearing completion of a large digital project which I hope will open up discussion of some of these issues. My background in Drama has perhaps defined, to a large extent, the approach I have taken in that the outcomes I will describe are collaborative, exploratory and practice-based. Working with colleagues in English has, however, forced me to consider a wider range of theoretical issues than I had at first anticipated.

The task defined

While a great deal has been done in the English Subject Centre to create a context for teaching, including a number of case studies, I was presented with the task of working towards creating the first teaching resources that might be both used and discussed by the community. In response to this significant challenge I have taken a three-pronged approach which I hope will not only provide teaching materials and examples of possible ways of working, it will also put in place a structure that will facilitate further development work in this area by the English Subject Centre.

'Digital Resources for Teaching and Discussion' is a new area of the website which will help to answer questions but also instigate discussion about the potential use of digital resources for the teaching of English (the website can be found at

<http://www.english.itsn.ac.uk/designshake/index.htm>).

It is formed of three sections each of which assume different levels of expertise and levels of commitment to a change in the curriculum. The first section to be completed, then, has been created assuming a collaborative relationship between the English Subject Centre and individual academics working towards creating materials for a particular course in their own departments. The second section, which has just been put online, involves a different level of English Subject Centre involvement in that we have acted as the observers and documenters of a specific programme through the creation of a digital case study. The third section, which is still under construction, will simply present examples and guidance online, more in line with the traditional publications the English Subject Centre has produced in the past. In developing this three-pronged approach I hope to point out the various models that are possible for colleagues both in terms of form and content of digital resources but also in terms of the way in which individual academics and departments can interact with the English Subject Centre.



Digital Resources for Teaching and Discussion

Designing Shakespeare | Linking Teaching & Research | Completed Projects

Welcome to the new collection of learning and teaching resources developed by the English Subject Centre. These resources present a number of ways in which digital resources can assist learning and teaching and are designed to stimulate discussion about the use of digital resources in the discipline.

Designing Shakespeare	Linking Teaching & Research	Completed Projects
This area of the website offers three examples of resources that have been created using the Designing Shakespeare digital collection , an archive that provides a range of materials which are freely available for educational use through the Performing Arts Data Service at the University of Glasgow. The resources presented have been created by the English Subject Centre Staff and are designed for use in the classroom. These resources have also been created to show, in a more generic sense, the potential for reuse of	This section of the website contains a Case Study of the MA in Shakespeare Studies entitled Text and Playhouse that is jointly taught by the Birkbeck College London and the Globe Theatre . The Case Study forms part of a larger project instigated by the ITSN Generic Centre aimed at showing how research and teaching are linked in a range of disciplines. The aim of the English Subject Centre's contribution to this larger project is to, on the one hand, present an in-depth study of a particular programme that links teaching and research in a practical way, and on	This section of the website contains a growing collection of digital resources that have been created as a result of the collaboration between English Subject Centre staff and members of the discipline. At present there are only two of these resources available but it is our hope that this will be an expanding area. The English Subject Centre is happy to accept proposals from members of the community who would like to develop resources in this way. The aim of this initiative is to increase the use and understanding of digital resources creation

The context

My approach has been to try to address the wide range of concerns across the discipline from a generic point of view, while remaining true to my own subject area, contemporary Shakespearean production. While working as Director of the Centre of Multimedia Performance History in the Department of Drama and Theatre at Royal Holloway I was responsible for the development of two large digital research projects in this area. The first, *The Cambridge King Lear CD-ROM: Text and Performance Archive*, which I co-edited with Professor Jacky Bratton, aims to combine the concerns of textual studies and performance studies. *The Lear CD* attempts to give general access to textual and performance materials which have formerly been available only to private scholars working in restricted reading rooms which are geographically spread across North America, Australia and the United Kingdom. By, on the one hand, drawing together the primary materials of concern for two related, but largely unconnected disciplines, and on the other hand, providing access to those materials for a wider range of people through digital technology, an opportunity for new kinds of teaching and research to develop was created. This project also introduced a new way of displaying information about parallel texts by creating a colour-coded finder or enfolded text.

The second project for which I acted as Principal Investigator, by contrast, developed a body of information to facilitate a visual approach to the study of Shakespeare in performance which is presented in a flexible way on the web. The aim of this second project, *Designing Shakespeare: An Audio-visual Archive 1960-2000*, has been to create and collect performance-based materials which have not formerly been available and which are focused on the temporal and spatial aspects of theatre production. The archive is made up of four databases that include: credits and review extracts for all productions of Shakespeare in London and Stratford from 1960-2000; pictures of these productions in performance; interviews with designers and 3D models of the theatre spaces where

Shakespeare is most often performed. This collection of four databases is housed by the Performing Arts Data Service at the University of Glasgow and is freely accessible on the web (<http://www.pads.ahds.ac.uk> click on 'browse' and then 'Theatre Resources').

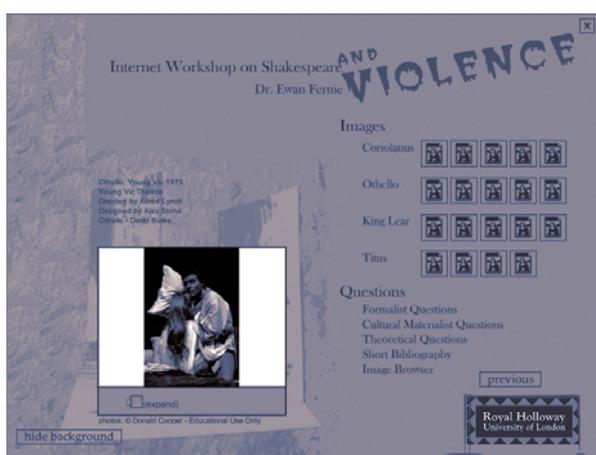
Through both of these projects it has been my aim to raise questions about the use of new technology for research in this field. However, it has also been my aim to develop new kinds of materials to facilitate new approaches to teaching. One of my objectives in joining the English Subject Centre was to have the opportunity to look more closely at the ways in which these resources might be used in teaching. Having spent seven years collecting these materials I was anxious to see if they were going to be useful in the classroom as well as in research.

English and IT: the current position

Over the last year I have developed a stronger sense of the concerns which face academics who are interested in adding digital resources to their teaching. The general picture is a lack of time, skills and support. What has become clear is that there is a great range of interest in and understanding of the use of digital technology across the discipline. While colleagues interested in language have used computers for many years for detailed studies of large corpora, those studying literature have not, until quite recently, embraced digital technology at the same rate or in the same way. What is exciting to discover is that this situation is changing quickly. Increasingly, there are pockets of very interesting and forward-looking activity all over the country. Many of these individuals are, however, working in isolation and without support or encouragement. My initial vision, therefore, was to create a centralised point of contact where the issues could be discussed, connections could be made and a sense of community might develop.

Completed projects: 'Images of Violence'

My discussions with colleagues led me to understand that any work I undertook had to take for granted that the average academic was overburdened even if enthusiastic. With a presentation at the 'Condition of the Subject' conference just four months away it was my aim to see if we could use the resources of the *Designing Shakespeare* project to develop an example of a teaching resource for a particular course, an example for discussion so to speak. Dr Ewan Fernie of the English Department at Royal Holloway quickly saw the potential of this approach and devised a plan for a teaching resource entitled 'Images of Violence in *Titus, Lear* and *Othello*'. With the help of a web designer, Nicholas Watton, this resource was created for use in the Shakespeare MA programme and was based on the assumption that students would be assigned images to view along with questions to consider in preparation for a seminar class. A group of images, selected by Dr Fernie, therefore appears at the beginning of this digital resource. The students are then given three sets of questions to consider in relation to those images. The 'Images of Violence' resource can be viewed at <http://www.english.ltsn.ac.uk/designshake/completed/index.htm>



Throughout the process of development one issue that we tried to address was how we could make a resource that was both specific to Dr Fernie's needs but also flexible. Perhaps the most exciting part of this

resource was the development by our web designer of a media browser which allows the students to review not only the images that were selected by the lecturer but also all of the images available from the productions under discussion. Using the browser the student is then free to make a personal selection from the images available which could be used as the basis of a seminar discussion, a presentation or an essay. The media browser also gives other lecturers the opportunity to disregard the framing context which Dr Fernie has applied by facilitating the selection of a different group of images to pursue another line of enquiry. The great advantage of this resource then is that it allows for a flexible approach to a visually based discussion which is not relentlessly linear, as programmes such as Powerpoint tend to be.

Completed projects: 'Performance Approaches to King Lear'

The second resource which I developed with Nicholas Watton's help is entitled 'Performance Approaches to *King Lear*'. This resource (which can also be found at <http://www.english.ltsn.ac.uk/designshake/completed/index.htm>) combines not only images but also textual resources from the *King Lear CD* and sound recordings of designers interviewed as part of the *Designing Shakespeare* project. This resource involves three sections; one on Designing *Lear*, one on Directing *Lear* and one on Acting *Lear*, which pose questions about the play and present images of performance for consideration. The advantage of this resource is the ability to juxtapose images of different productions side by side. This comparative approach is something that I always hoped to facilitate through my work but which I came to realise is actually quite difficult to achieve from the Performing Arts Data Service site. The three sections of this resource can be used in any order or can be used in isolation. The final section brings the acting, directing and design perspectives together in an analysis of a single production directed by Helena Kaut-Howson and starring Kathryn Hunter. Again, if the framing context which I have used seems inappropriate or unhelpful the media browser offers over 150 images of *King Lear*

in performance over the past four decades which can be used to pursue any number of other lines of enquiry or argument. Both of these resources also include external links that point to the richness of resources on the subject that are now freely available on the web.



The aim, then, of this initial venture was to see what we could create in a very short period of time using existing materials to develop resources for use in established programmes. The two resulting teaching packages were made available on CD to the attendees of two papers I delivered over the summer, first at the 'Condition of the Subject' conference in July and then again at the British Shakespeare Association conference at De Montfort University in August. Initial responses to the work were very enthusiastic but I fear this resulted rather more from gratitude for making the resources feely available than from an engagement with the issues at stake.

Linking teaching and research: The King's/Globe MA Case Study

The second prong of work has taken a slightly different approach. It has been aimed at tackling a larger, more generic problem, of curriculum development and has involved the creation of a digital case study. Again the resulting resource (which can be found at <http://www.english.ltsn.ac.uk/designshake/linking/index.htm>) can be seen to be both a specific example of curriculum development and a template for the way

in which information about pedagogy can be collected and distributed digitally. This resource has been designed to form part of a larger project that has been instigated by the LTSN Generic Centre to look at the link between teaching and research. The objectives of this case study exercise are to document the development process of this innovative programme, to illustrate the concrete links made between teaching and research and to interrogate the usefulness of this approach for others working in the discipline of English. Therefore the case study presented is designed to illustrate, in detail, the success of one particular programme which brings the practical application of research into the classroom. The digital dissemination of this material is designed to illustrate a useful way in which research in teaching and curriculum development can be stored and distributed.

The subject of the case study, The Text and Playhouse Shakespeare Studies MA, taught jointly by King's College London and the Globe Theatre concentrates on Shakespeare's dramatic texts, and the manner of their performance at the Globe Theatre. This MA programme combines two areas of scholarly research, textual studies and performance practice, to give students a very practical experience of these two subject areas. By working with a leading theatre company in London the students have a chance not only to learn from practitioners but are given the opportunity to test their own textual theories on the Globe stage.

The King's/Globe MA Case Study involved in-depth video interviews with the two convenors of the course at King's College London, Dr Gordon McMullan and Professor Ann Thompson; the Globe Education Lecturer, Dr Gabriel Egan; the Director of Globe Education, Patrick Spottiswoode and two former students, Abigail Rokison and Madeline Knights. It also contains an edited film of a class, as it was taught on the Globe stage by one of the theatre's musicians, plus the immediate response of four current students. Finally, the study contains a wide-ranging discussion about the links between teaching and research in which Dr McMullan, Professor Thompson and Dr Egan convey their personal experiences of the programme. While all of the interviews are available in

full (nearly six hours in total) the case study directs the user through the development of the MA course drawing on responses from each of the speakers to key questions. A variety of responses are offered to each question and the user can choose to view any or all of these answers before moving on to the next question. As a result, the programme provides both a digital archive of material that can be used for a variety of purposes and a clear argument about the development of the MA programme which can be viewed in either a linear or non-linear fashion.

In all three of these projects a framework has been developed as well as a working relationship which combines the resources of the English Subject Centre with the resources of particular academics working in particular Departments. The two Departments which were chosen in the first instance were the host Departments of the Subject Centre, however, two different models have now been developed which can be employed working with other academics in other Departments across the country. The two teaching packages appear in the Completed Projects section of the website (<http://www.english.ltsn.ac.uk/designshake/completed/index.htm>), an area of the site designed to house an ever-expanding library of resources that are open to anyone in the community. The larger and more complex case study, appears on the website under the title Linking Teaching and Research (<http://www.english.ltsn.ac.uk/designshake/linking/index.htm>), providing an example of how the curriculum development process of an entire programme can be documented as well as examples of specific teaching approaches. This section of the site can also expand to hold any number of further case studies. These first two prongs of the approach assume that the resources of the English Subject Centre can be used to aid one Department specifically but others indirectly both by example and by the creation of a working model and a template for further work.

The final stage of the project: adapting digital resources

The third prong of the approach is designed for the academic or Department who would like to create digital resources independently and would like to turn to the English Subject Centre for ideas and advice rather than direct involvement. This final section, which is still under development, will both provide teaching resources that use existing materials and will show how these resources were created, providing recipe cards or 'how to' guides. The collaborative model demonstrated in the first two projects is not practical for every Department therefore it seemed essential to provide a guide to aid colleagues developing resources in their own institutions. The aim of this section of the Digital Resources site is to present three quite simple resources again drawing on the materials collected as part of the *Designing Shakespeare* project. The three resources planned are based around the following areas: a) Character and Representation – looking at transgendered casting in Shakespearean production, b) Politics and Performance of Place – looking at a range of productions of *Julius Caesar* set in different periods and c) Audience, Actor and Space – looking at four performances at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre. These examples will show how freely available digital materials can be brought together in a simple but useful way for teaching.

Colleagues will be encouraged to use these resources as they appear but also to offer feedback and use the examples presented as a source of ideas for their own work. The aim of this part of the Digital Resources initiative is to show ways in which individuals, without a great deal of time or expertise, can develop teaching resources that suit their own needs. One of the things that has been most striking for me in developing the teaching materials we have already created has been the realisation that new resources are being made available online everyday. For example when creating the *King Lear CD* it was necessary to license the reproduction of each page of the Folio and Quarto individually, however, now the entire Folio and Quarto can be accessed online through the University of Pennsylvania. As a result, for 'Performance Approaches

to *King Lear* it was possible to simply make links to these pages. Similarly for the '*Images of Violence*' resource Dr Fernie wanted to refer the students to an image from the surrealist film *Un Chien Andalou* which again we found online. In addition we were able to find three separate interviews with the Director Julie Taymor discussing her approach to the visualisation of violence in her film *Titus*.

The aim of this section of the website is to encourage colleagues to take a step in the direction of including digital resources in their teaching even if it is only in the form of a links list. However, basic questions about copyright and resource creation will also be addressed for those colleagues who would like to begin to take the process of creating their own resources a step further.

Conclusions

The overarching project, then, of 'Digital Resources for Teaching and Discussion' has several aims. It has been designed to show how existing resources can be developed into both simple resources and complex resources for teaching. It has been designed to create several templates for the development of more specialised projects of this kind and several kinds of examples of collaboration between the English Subject Centre and individual academics. It has created both an example of and a template for a case study of curriculum development. It has begun a library of flexible resources that can be used by any academic in the country. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it has tried to map out some of the issues that are at stake, as well as some of the opportunities that are available, as a result of digital technology.

This work has made me increasingly aware of the many hurdles which exist when trying to bring digital resources into the classroom. They include lack of time, expertise and physical infrastructure to support the lecturer who would like to move in this direction. Like many advances in teaching, the development of the sophisticated use of digital technology in the classroom is being hampered, on the one hand, by practical concerns and, on the other, by limitations of

the imagination in terms of thinking of creative new ways of working. 'Digital Resources for Teaching and Discussion' aims to address these issues in a positive way.

However, there seems to be another, perhaps more fundamental, issue at stake which had not occurred to me before I began my work in the English Subject Centre. I have witnessed again and again a profound wariness in addressing a new communications medium that we know so little about. I am strongly of the opinion that digital technology provides a wide range of new communication channels that should be incorporated into the curriculum both from a theoretical point of view and from a practical point of view. This is undoubtedly the bias of my Drama background, a discipline that insists on the integration of practice and theory. I have come to understand, however, that a serious question must be not only how will digital resources be incorporated into the traditional areas of study within English but how and when will this communication technology also become a significant subject of study in itself? It is this question which is increasingly of greatest interest to me as a subject of research, teaching practice and theoretical speculation. It is a question which the current project does not address directly in its content but I believe does address, to some degree, in its form through its multiple approaches.



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Resisting the Resistance to Reading

In a version of a paper presented at 'The Condition of the Subject' Conference in July 2003, Dr Katharine Cockin, Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Hull considers the act of reading and its place in higher education.

In *The Radical Aesthetic* (2000), Isobel Armstrong considers various models of reading implied in varieties of criticism, seduction and mastery, and explores the possibility of 'a new definition of close reading', which would resist the binary of feeling and thought and the distancing effect where the 'text is seen as other' and the reader is 'a Kantian subject who stands over against the world in a position of power' (p. 87). In teaching first-year students of literature, there are very urgent questions, sometimes not explicitly asked, which emerge in the seminar situation about how to read literature. The texts being read in this context can often seem very distant and inaccessible at this level, particularly in one of the modules I convene, which is 'Introduction to Modernism'. If the modernists have their way, their readers – first-year undergraduates at the University of Hull – will be shocked, defamiliarised, battered and bewildered by the time they reach the last page.

Reading for a degree at a university and being responsible for setting the reading are fundamentally different positions and yet, I believe, the endeavour is to meet at a point where the activity of reading, interpretation and analysis becomes active, productive and transformative. However, both positions are institutionally defined and the institutional context is fraught. 'Introduction to Modernism' has developed over the last few years, responding to the demands for learning outcomes, module specifications and more closely defined reading lists. One beneficial aspect of the market-driven university is that it forces the institution to acknowledge the inescapably material situation of reading. Reading has its costs. There are therefore concerns about finding a cheap edition which students can afford, and about ensuring that books are accessible in the short loan section of the library but not all of them, since this would disadvantage students living at some distance from the campus. The financial burdens on students affect their attitude to reading and tend to promote a more functional approach: not just what should I read on this topic, or what book should I read, but which chapter in the book? In describing this common feature of reading for a degree I am not claiming a generational difference or positioning myself

outside this process. I am implicated in it too and even find my own hard-pressed time affecting my choices in keeping up with the reading for the degree I teach. Conferences are good places to find out which book, which article will help to alter your thinking on a topic. The melancholy conclusion is: it is not possible to read everything and, there is a price to pay for whatever there is time to read. But the price – time, money, deprivation of other pleasures – is, of course, often worth paying.

My institution has addressed the need for advice and support in study skills by setting up Study Advice Services, operating in the library and offering a drop-in facility, individual consultations and producing leaflets, one of which is entitled 'Effective Reading'. This leaflet, aimed at all students, not specifically literature students, has a functional approach to reading, with references to reading speed, memorizing and, for instance, the SQ3R technique. The assumption is that all reading should have a purpose but also a time limit. In the leaflet, a prominent quotation states, 'Books have a habit of sucking in the unwary and wasting their time' (Habeshaw et al.). In the University of Hull's English departmental student handbook there is a section on essay writing and study skills, with an excerpt on reading from Alan Durant's and Nigel Fabb's *How to Write Essays...* (1993). However, the coverage on reading in this, like many study skills books, concerns approaches to critical sources rather than what are ominously called 'primary texts'.

The integration of study skills into Introduction to Modernism – most visible in the unassessed practice essay in week four – makes it possible to use the seminar as a space to debate the difficulties of literary analysis through the variety of responses to modernist writing and by using the problem of reading as a focus for discussion. The defamiliarising effect of modernism and the alienation of the reader create a productive space where dialogue can begin about reading literature. In the first lecture I read the first paragraph of a realist, modernist and postmodernist novel, the latter being Italo Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveler* (1981) which begins: 'You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel, *If on a winter's night a traveler*. Relax. Concentrate. Dispel every other thought. Let the world

around you fade. Best to close the door; the TV is always on in the next room.' It provocatively hails the reader, at once free to read the novel in whatever way and controlled by the specificity of the narrator's repertoire of imagined situations. Bemused responses to this passage and the occasional hostility to *The Waste Land* or *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, precede the planned discussions about the concept of misreading, authorial intention and the death of the author. *Heart of Darkness* prompts a discussion about narrative and reading literature generally. Is story telling a hazy process or reading like getting to the 'kernel' of a 'cracked nut' (p.30)? Over a decade ago, I asked a group what they thought reading literature involved. It was about 'getting to the meat of the text' one student replied, clearly a carnivore and not readily amenable to Conrad's vegan metaphor for meaning.

These situations in which reading forms the basis for a creative exploration of the meaning of reading and of meaning itself, all take place in an institutional context, within the framework of a module with its weekly schedule, heading unswervingly towards assessment. There are limits, goals, rewards and penalties, all of which impinge on the kinds of reading taking place but, nevertheless, reader and text can be brought into an exchange which is neither to do with mastery nor the consumption of seduction, but is active, productive and pleasurable. The problem with the rebirthing of the reader in Barthes' 'The Death of the Author' is that it is based on the lifecourse, bound within a generational relationship which feels like family bereavement. The revolutionary release of the reader is predicated on what seems to me to be the unnecessarily melodramatic tragedy of the author. In Calvino's postmodernist novel, the active reader with so many choices becomes a joke.

My observation that the pleasure of reading seems to be on the increase is based on my current interest in chick lit and lad lit – preparation for two forthcoming MA seminars – and concurs with Wren Sidhe's contribution on 31 January 2003 to the discussion list on reading on the English Subject Centre website. There is a lot of reading going on for pleasure outside the educational institutional framework. However, it seems to be significant that there is increasing evidence of the need to share that pleasure, through the

formation of Book Groups and websites like www.chicklit.com. It is even possible to read advice books, such as Rachel W. Jacobsohn's *The Reading Group Handbook* (1998), on how to set up your own reading group. Within the university context, a consumerist approach will tend to generate a pursuit of directed (itemised) reading and thinking (the shopping-list approach of Peter Barry's *Beginning Theory*) but even these demands for shortcuts can be forestalled; detours can redirect that impatience into excitement about the possibilities of wider reading.

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Active Reading: an interim report

The National Teaching Fellowship (NTF) Project 'Active Reading' is but one of the initiatives developing in the interstices of literary studies and creative writing. But given the potential interest in the expanded NTF Scheme (see boxed item p. 24), this article by Ben Knights, Director of the English Subject Centre and Chris Thurgar-Dawson of Teesside University may serve also as an example of a discipline-related project.

The following is an extract from the original proposal (2001):

Active Reading is a structured process of imitation, variation and experiment: students learn and understand cultural discourses by practising them. This project is addressed to an urgent situation in English Studies. The discipline faces a number of challenges: the increasingly plural and diverse cultures of the student body, the rise of A-level English Language, and the soon to be apparent effects of Curriculum 2000. The subject confronts the loss of a taken-for-granted 'common core' of reading, and the narrowing of the band of 'high' readers during a simultaneous explosion of powerful cultural industries: 'English' now takes place in a highly mediated society. In HE, English is in danger of splitting between 'high status' critical knowledge and theory and 'low status' practice. Alongside the current expansion of creative writing programmes, there is a real need to foster dialogue between writing as expression (or as pragmatic communication) and writing as medium for analysing and historicising texts. This project seeks to circumvent such divisions by working across the implied boundaries.

In these overlapping contexts, Active Reading equips students to take on productive roles within their culture. The project responds to the need to enhance dialogue between English in School and in Universities. In my own university context, widened access brings in students who need considerable academic support in 'finding a voice' (literally as well as metaphorically). In such situations, the teacher remains an essential guide and mentor on the road to autonomous learning...

By building on my existing work with structured re-writing, I will research with students ways in which they might through the transformation of texts attain deep knowledge of cultural diversity and the resources of the cultural past. The project seeks to overcome the stark dichotomy between 'critical' and 'creative' activity, or between 'self expression' and impersonal knowledge. It does not concern creative writing as such: rather its originality lies in enhancing linguistic inventiveness. It supplements – rather than supplants – conventional forms (analytical prose: essay, dissertation) with the portfolio of re-writings and creative 'translations'. It examines the sharing and constructive criticism of students'

drafts as a basis for developmental dialogue in what Robert Scholes calls the 'craft of reading'. It addresses a further question concerning the methods and criteria for assessing this kind of work. Its wider intention is to facilitate both the passage from School/Access to HE, and then later the passage from HE into 'lifelong learning'. The packaging of learning that comes with the territory in HE today often breeds a paradoxical dependency and lowered self-expectation. So to achieve its aims the project needs to explore with students (and in precise detail) the stance towards their own learning necessary to reach out towards the autonomy advocated by contemporary L&T strategies.

The project is based on over twenty years of my own research on teaching, rooted in long-held convictions about the inter-relations of pedagogic and subject knowledge... The ideas underlying the proposal have been successfully trialled in my own experimental modules Writing for Reading, Making Sense and other modules (e.g. Introduction to Writing) within the Teesside programme and in workshops elsewhere. Further, I would like to test the hypothesis that transformative re-writing provides an enabling matrix for cross-disciplinary developments (English – Media Studies/Cultural Studies/History). The project will build on the pioneering work of DUET (in which I was active for many years), and will productively complement the different emphases of 'Speak Write', and Rob Pope's current NTF project on 'Textual Intervention'.

Aims

Through the Active Reading project I hope to –

- enable understanding of texts and theory through production (re-writing, translation)*
- develop bridges between A-level/Access and HE as Curriculum 2000 unrolls*
- promote an understanding of culture as dialogue including dialogue between generations*
- support students during exposure to unfamiliar or threatening cultural materials*
- challenge a widespread perception of HE as purely instrumental*
- evolve the reflective portfolio as simultaneously a method of students identifying their own learning needs and as a mode of assessment*

- *involve students in implementation and evaluation*
- *build pedagogic bridges between English/Literary study and other cognate disciplines*
- *explore the European dimension of intellectual mobility between cultures.*

All this was clearly ambitious enough, and the project has only got as far as it has through the devoted efforts of Chris Thurgar-Dawson as project assistant, (and since 2002 as the principal module leader). One major achievement has been the continued life and evaluation of the modules concerned, modules which now include a third level independent study (limited by pre-requisite to students who have studied the module at level two). Another has been the continued development of a bank of course materials, techniques, activities. We have individually and on occasion together engaged in dissemination (not in the context an adequate word) through workshops, conferences, and ILT forums. We have not yet solved the problem of what to do with or how best to share the materials generated, though we are well on the way to having a website. As English-based academics, we still hanker to 'write the book'.

In one sense, the objects associated with the aims have become sharper. For example, to:

- foster a productive relationship to language
- endow students with a sense of cultural agency
- deepen their awareness of linguistic and literary process
- license creative and experimental working, thus leading to increased confidence
- develop craft understanding and sensitivity to effects of stylistic choices
- promote values of curiosity and cultural alertness
- introduce variety into working practices
- provide alternative models of the quadrilateral relations between individual student, other students, text, and teacher.

A sample of the kind of activities we use could include:

- Turning simple into more complex poetic forms (and on occasion vice-versa)

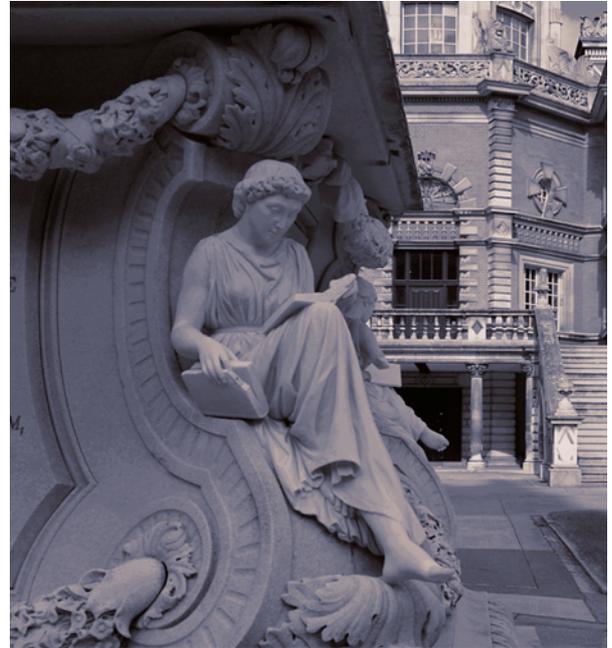
- Pastiche as sharpening of local awareness
- Transformation of styles
- Transformations of genres
- Transformations of point of view, focalisation, perspective
- Heteroglossia: unearthing and activating hidden or marginalized voices
- Exploring the spectrum between minimalist and garrulous narration – degrees of narrative management of material or of reader
- Activities to elicit reciprocity between text and reader, making explicit the reader's role in the process of making meaning.

Assessment is by portfolio, a selection of work which must include evidence of drafting and a reflective, self-critical element which some students choose to integrate with their text.

The nature of the project is enabling us to collect evidence for outcomes which were previously a matter of hunch or anecdote. We have a more firmly-grounded sense that at programme level students return empowered to literary critical modules – more confident and with a wider repertoire of response. Since we are also clear that we owe it to students to theorise what we are doing and do not want to encourage naïve expressivism, we are also interested in the ways that productive work in writing – making sense made visible – can be theorised and feed back into student work on theory. At an individual level, some students have started on (or returned to) their own writing. At the level of the teacher or professional, we are exploring a CPD-type writing activity for staff development workshops, thus building a bridge to a form of practice increasingly in favour among health and social care professionals.

Perhaps most excitingly, the whole project has a bearing on access and widening participation: confidence-building, encouraging experiment with language, reinforcement for analytical and critical writing in other assessment genres. Some of the most interesting material to arise from the evaluation interviews with students concerns their comparative perception of the 'Writing for Reading' strand in the

context of the rest of their programme. In relation to access and widening participation one potential barrier to access derives from the traditional expectations entertained about the English Studies student – wide linguistic and cultural repertoire, pleasure in irony and multivalence, free movement between levels of discourse. We believe (and are now collecting supporting evidence) that units like these provide a space within which the less culturally secure can learn to play in language.



National Teaching Fellowship Scheme

Nine of the existing National Teaching Fellows work in or stem from the discipline of English, and their varied projects are in the process of feeding into the way the subject is taught.

The existing fellows increasingly act as a network, and it would be exciting were there to be further English-based NTFs in the next round. Nominations are made by individual institutions, and the Scheme has been expanded and modified in line with last year's White Paper on Higher Education. This year the number of fellows in the 'experienced' category has been raised from 20 to 30, and two new categories introduced – for the less experienced (10) and those involved in learning support (10). Winners receive £50,000 each to spend over three years on a project of their own devising. The closing date for entry for the experienced competition is 5 March, so that if you are interested it is not too late to talk to your institution about nomination. You would normally be expected to have received some form of teaching award from your own institution. Full details of the revised scheme for 2004 can be found on the NTFS website (<http://www.ntfs.ac.uk/>).

The National Teaching Fellowship Scheme is part of an overall programme to raise the status of learning and teaching in Higher Education. It is the individual strand of the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund. It was set up by the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) in Northern Ireland and is managed by the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education. This high profile scheme celebrates excellence in teaching by recognising individuals who are outstanding as teachers and promoters of learning.

The Origins of the Reading Public 1830-1870

This paper is an edited version of a report written by Professor John Simons (Edge Hill College) and Professor Brian Maidment (Salford University) on their departmental project sponsored by the English Subject Centre. Dr Margaret Forsyth was a research assistant on the project.

This project, centred on the writing, validation and teaching of a semester length module to run concurrently in two collaborating HE Institutions with shared teaching materials, was carried out over the course of the academic year 2002-2003. The module was called 'The Origins of the Reading Public 1830-1870' at Edge Hill and 'The Origins of the Popular Press' at Salford and introduced students (drawn from various programmes but based in English departments) to the social history, technological development and cultural contests over mass literacy as exemplified in the development of periodicals and magazines in the mid-nineteenth century.

This project was designed primarily to explore three questions:

1. To what extent would it be possible to develop curriculum at level three by asking students to work in what would be, essentially, a research mode?
2. How could an advanced course in Victorian popular literature be taught in the absence of accessible or affordable print resources?
3. How could issues of regional collaboration between HEIs be addressed between institutions with different missions, credit frameworks, academic structures and time tables?

The project was also aimed at exploring these issues through a subject-focused rather than a generic teaching and learning approach.

The project began with the construction of a database which contained hundreds of images scanned from a range of Victorian popular texts. These included full text versions of various magazines and chapbooks as well as sample pages containing engravings. These were then organised into thematic sections and accessed via WebCT. Students could thus follow a programme of reading using, if they so chose, virtual versions of primary materials.

Further, the tutors concerned made available primary texts drawn from their own collections of material and such library resources as were available. One major issue raised by work of this kind is how far electronic resources, however sophisticated, can suggest the materiality of texts. One of the great pleasures of the module is

undoubtedly the interest taken by students in the material presence of primary material – a better example of what Benjamin calls 'aura' would be hard to imagine. Despite the many virtues of the website and database, much more development would be needed to offer students something comparable to what can be assembled from collections and libraries. It would be extremely interesting to try to write up further what we saw as the strengths and weaknesses of using electronic as against 'actual' texts. Such issues of course also link across to the research interests of the staff involved. Brian Maidment's work, for instance, is now making extensive use of collections of graphic images on such websites as the Guildhall Library, the John Johnson Collection and the Lewis Walpole Library. These kinds of online image sources will have a profound effect on what may be taught on 'popular culture' or 'cultural studies' modules, and our experience on this project gave us a glimpse of what might be achieved. John Simons is continuing to develop critical editions of chapbooks and other popular texts. Margaret Forsyth is extending her work in popular culture and is currently preparing a critical anthology of nineteenth-century working-class women's poetry for publication.

A lecture and seminar programme was agreed between the two participating institutions (Edge Hill College of HE and Salford University) but no attempt (beyond informal discussion) was made to collaborate on teaching beyond the agreement to deliver classes on similar materials in the same week. Nonetheless, all three tutors concerned with the delivery of the programme remained in weekly touch with each other, and a lot of informal sharing of ideas and teaching material took place.

The students were provided with two interactive facilities: one synchronous and one asynchronous. This was designed to enable collaborative learning and to facilitate inter-site discussion between students working on similar issues at much the same time. Thus the course was centred on collaborative learning rather than collaborative teaching. Both institutions recruited a single seminar group (16 at Edge Hill, 23 at Salford), using the normal processes of option choice. About half of the Salford students were Journalism and English students, and the module had been particularly written to embrace their needs. Few of these students, however,

had formal skills or experience in reading texts of this kind.

Set texts were something of an issue. It was felt that some kind of primary reading available in conventional print form was necessary. We used the Penguin selection of Dickens's journalism¹ (which was fine, even though it concentrates on post-1850 texts – so none of the early sketches were included) and Margaret Beetham and Kay Boardman's recently published anthology of writing from Victorian women's magazines². In practice students preferred to work with the available primary material and the website than these supplementary texts, but some students wrote assignments on Dickens and others made use of the anthology in their essays. The Beetham and Boardman anthology was specifically designed to serve as a textbook, and is pioneering in this respect. It would be interesting to know if other modules are making use of it in this way.

Web CT resource base

The Web CT was set up to include a resource base and an interactive facility to enable students across the two institutions to make use of e-mail and a discussion page and chatroom. As course tutors we selected a range of nineteenth-century periodicals, magazines, illustrations and journals, as the basis for the primary resource base as it was agreed that students needed access to a fairly wide range of materials representative of the period.

Some complete copies of periodicals such as *The Penny Magazine* were made available while sample pages and illustrations were selected from others. The material was organized by genre: Chapbooks, Religious Tracts, Songbooks/Songsheets, Journals, Literature of The March of Intellect and Novels. There were further subdivisions in each category containing representative texts from each decade between 1830-1860.

One of the key issues for the web designer was achieving a balance between download times and clarity of text. While every effort was made to strike a realistic balance, generally speaking download times were given priority although visually, the texts were considered clear enough to fulfill students' needs on the course. It was felt

that while access to the Web CT through the intranet at Edge Hill was relatively quick, students accessing the same information externally would experience longer download times.

Students received training in the access of Web CT at both institutions and were encouraged to make use of the interactive tools. However, for a variety of reasons, this element of the course was not as successful. One of the tools was designed as a chatroom, which depended on students entering it at particular times. Similarly, the discussion tool required students to plan ahead and access the site at specific times. This was problematic as the demands of student timetables and access to computers across the two institutions couldn't really be synchronized successfully.

Student feedback

Students did, however, make full use of the primary resources and bibliography, finding the Web CT invaluable for their research, particularly the illustrations.

Student feedback on the Web CT raised the following issues:

1. Students would prefer longer download times and clearer images, particularly for text. Illustrations were felt to be reasonably clear but that further improvements could be made.
2. Students valued the range of resources available on Web CT but felt that this should be expanded even further with more 'runs' of periodicals, journals and newspapers made available. It was felt that the categories could be expanded to include more texts aimed at women readers and family reading.
3. Some students felt that the resources available on Web CT should be opened up and made available to other modules relating to nineteenth century literature/history.
4. Students would have been more likely to make use of the synchronic/asynchronic facilities if there had been an initial 'face to face' meeting between the two groups.

Teaching

While students responded well to the demands of the course overall, the level of tutor support was higher than anticipated. Initially, students needed greater tutor input specifically in defining the cultural, historical and social framework of the period. This need was met by increased use of lectures and tutor-led workshops. By week 6, students were noticeably more independent and had a clearer sense of their areas of research. After this time, students engaged with their individual projects with specific hours allocated for student-tutor advisory/progress meetings.

Student feedback

1. Students felt that a high level of input was needed initially but that once the framework had been established, working in a research mode was both stimulating and challenging. Students appreciated the intellectual and academic freedom of designing their own research project.
2. There were some concerns relating to the Web CT (outlined under Web CT Resource Base) and the visual quality of resources but generally students appreciated the range of primary materials made available and felt that they should be expanded and opened up to other courses.
3. Students needed more practice in reading and interpreting illustrations as this was a new approach to texts (and one of which they had little previous experience).

The Salford student feedback forms show in general a high level of satisfaction.

Conclusions and outcomes

1. The project was an extremely valuable one in terms of curriculum development in both institutions. The module has stayed on the books of both institutions and was taken by good numbers of students in semester 1 of 2003.
2. The project was extremely valuable in providing students for the first and only time in their undergraduate programme with some sense of the issues involved in approaching non-canonical texts through the sociology of literary production and the materiality of the texts. Students did develop valuable new skills in analysing the nature and ideological structure of mass circulation literature.
3. The project was extremely valuable as a form of staff development and as a means of increasing awareness of teaching and learning issues, especially those posed by the use of electronic resources. Apart from the very obvious and immediate skills developed by Dr Forsyth in preparing, organising and deploying teaching material on an electronic database, all the staff concerned learnt a great deal about the strengths and limitations of electronic databases and about using primary material within undergraduate teaching.

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1. *Selected journalism/Charles Dickens* edited by David Pascoe. London: Penguin, 1997.
2. *Victorian women's magazines: an anthology* edited by Margaret Beetham and Kay Boardman. Manchester: University Press, 2001.

Building Bridges: traversing the secondary/tertiary divide

Professor Ben Knights, Director of the English Subject Centre, examines the nature of, and the reasons for, the secondary/tertiary divide in English studies in the UK

Relatively few areas of the work of a Subject Centre lend themselves to immediate outcomes or successful six-monthly reporting. This is certainly true of what from now on will be one of the core preoccupations of the English Subject Centre: the perceived and growing gulf between English as practised in school under the influence of National Curriculum, National Literacy Strategy and Curriculum 2000, and that practised in Higher Education. A number of individuals and groups are already concerning themselves with this gulf, and the Subject Centre is in the process of entering into dialogues with some of the relevant agencies – for example the English Association, and the National Association for the Teaching of English, as well as English lecturers within university education Departments.

One far from universal refrain of university English teachers concerns students being less well-prepared. This frequently becomes a lament over a widespread inability of even well-qualified students either to undertake strenuous reading or to recognise historical, mythological or religious allusion. At which point it is well to remind ourselves that the decline of high literacy has been a recurrent theme. Already in 1971 George Steiner was lamenting the demise of classical literacy, the inability to read older texts that were not presented on stilts of annotation. Over a generation earlier, analysing his 'Practical Criticism' protocols in 1928, I.A. Richards noted 'lack of reading' among the explanations for a widespread deficit in the ability to read poetry on the part of his Cambridge subjects:

A large number of writers showed clearly... that they had hardly any reading at all to serve them as a background and means of orientation.

None of which should lead to the complacency of 'we've been here before', or elide the specificities of our own moment. (What would Richards let alone his pupil Queenie Leavis have made of the National Literacy Strategy or the aggressive global marketing of anthologies?)

Sixth form teachers traditionally perceived themselves as part of a common project with university teachers, and in the mid to late 1980s, in the era of Literature/Teaching/Politics, of DUET and of the Verbal Arts Association, there were signs of a growing convergence between activities cross sector. But in fact the Cox Report and Ron Carter's Language in the National Curriculum project may represent the last occasions on which senior subject academics were charged with shaping the National Curriculum for English, and the fate of both reports is instructive if depressing. School and university teachers have since 1989 been driven apart by the immediate preoccupations of their own community – in the case of school teachers the unrolling of all that followed from the National Curriculum and its statutory instruments, and in that of university teachers a collective determination to make literary and English studies as different as possible from the derided 'common-sense' assumptions of other reading publics. The result has been the emergence of two discrete tribes, each entertaining stereotypical views about the work of the other, instanced in the overheard exhortation to first years on the lines of 'you're not in the sixth form now'. Perhaps university lecturers should spend more time with the National Curriculum and QCA websites as a preparation for engaging in dialogue with their beleaguered state school colleagues.

But we need to look beyond the experience of that minority of AS/A2 students who come to university to read one or other variety of English honours. The procession of policies, strategies, and instruments that marched through the 1990s entailed major epistemic and cultural consequences. Between them they enact a fundamental shift towards prescription; the enhancement of the extract culture, and a shift in reading practices – the literacy strategy itself perhaps oddly collusive with the visual and aural culture occupied by the majority of students. We are talking, as Bethan Marshall argued in her address to the Condition of the Subject Conference (a transcript of

which is reproduced here on page 30), about a paradigm shift in secondary English studies.

At one level, the rhetoric is all in favour of adventurous readers and learners. The National Curriculum announces of pupils at Key Stage 4: 'They are keen readers who can read many kinds of text and make articulate and perceptive comments about them.' But the theories in use which students adopt to manage their own learning are perhaps analogous to creoles - hybrid forms adapted at the borders of two language communities. What students internalise, from the mechanistic matching of inputs and outcomes, may well be a distrust of uncertain outcomes and an understanding of knowledge in terms of information, a cognitive disposition which sits particularly uncomfortably with the objects of the English-spectrum disciplines. From the experience of non-stop assessment regimes they have extrapolated, many of them, the need to demonstrate 'knowledge about' rather than, say, that propensity to 'weigh the importance of alternative perspectives' or 'handle information and argument in a critical and self-reflective manner' recommended by the English Benchmark. The unitised model of cognition (visible

paradigmatically at the level of the dominance of anthology and extracts, and syntagmatically at the level of narratives of learning) is at odds with the sophisticated pattern making and cognitive risk taking which higher education should foster. At the least, learning to learn in prescriptive formulae is a poor foundation for an HE committed (at least in the rhetoric of qualification framework and level descriptors) to the development of autonomous learners. For a subject preoccupied by perspectives, audiences, and multiple meaning, the unitisation of learning represents a form of modernity. It provides security and a narrative of linear progress (neither of them, needless to say, contemptible properties) at the cost of experimentation or the tolerance of uncertainty. Such an incremental, 'safe', but ultimately constricted protocol for knowing has radical implications for English-related subjects.

As indicated above, many groups and individuals are working to re-open the pathways between English at different educational levels. It is very much part of the brief of the English Subject Centre to lend its support to that necessary adventure.



Literary Conferences Website

<http://literaryconferences.britishcouncil.org>

A directory of UK and overseas literary conferences about UK and Commonwealth literature. Searchable by author, title, subject, institution, date and region. Conference information consists of dates, conference title, conference description, proposals for papers, level of participants, fees, contact details, accommodation, and venue.

Conference organisers can post details online at <http://literaryconferences.britishcouncil.org/update>

Add your conference details to the site for worldwide promotion. The website is available to all and will be actively promoted by British Council offices overseas in 110 countries.

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<http://www2.britishcouncil.org/arts-literature.htm>

<http://literaryconferences.britishcouncil.org>,

<http://www.encompassculture.com>

<http://www.contemporarywriters.com>

English in Schools: death by drowning?

This paper is an edited transcript of a presentation made by Dr Bethan Marshall of King's College, London as part of the panel on English Futures at 'The Condition of the Subject' Conference in July 2003. The Panel was chaired by Professor Philip Martin, De Montfort University and included Professor Drummond Bone, University of Liverpool and Professor Martin Kayman, Cardiff University.

Since 1990 there have been three incarnations of a national curriculum for English in school. The version we currently have, Curriculum 2000 (in fact introduced in 1999), was seen as somewhat loose and woolly by the new Labour government, keen to stamp their mark on the English teaching fraternity. The vague level-descriptors were replaced by a literacy strategy, closely followed by a literary framework. These could be number-crunched to give measurable targets and this is what governs schools at the moment. We now have an extraordinary situation of teachers teaching something they thoroughly disapprove of, but have to teach because Ofsted comes calling.

Subsequently, there has been a subtle shift in the nature of knowledge in the English Curriculum. This is particularly prevalent in secondary schools. In primary schools English has become a discrete subject and is more literacy based. What has happened in the secondary sector is that any notion of English as an arts subject is evaporating. There was at one time a broad consensus that English was an arts subject: what was the basis of subject knowledge in English was the idea that somehow there was a relationship between language and art and life. There was a framing of life within the art of language. That was the goal English teachers aimed towards. English lessons were, in an odd sense, as much about life as they were about the books they were studying or the way you were encouraging children to write. This idea, that you were empowering children to escape, articulate, to gain space and language to think, was what English teaching was about. If you taught a book, you had discussion arising from it. One's task as an English teacher was to regulate this learning by steering them through this process and give them a language of articulation.

What is happening now is that, because of the literacy framework, there are numerous "lists". Children are expected to gain up to 300 competences by year nine. You cannot argue against the individual competences within the lists (all children should know how to use a semi-colon, for example), but the way in which it is itemised gives a completely different image of what knowledge actually looks like. What happens now, because Ofsted comes in and people are very keen on these learning objectives and learning outcomes, the basis of a lesson will be the acquisition of a piece of knowledge or a fact. The lesson is now a strict regimen beginning with "This is your learning objective" and ending with "What have you learnt?". It is a very particular form of descriptive writing that is being pushed. This has created a shift whereby English is becoming like maths teaching. You are acquiring vast bodies of knowledge which do not necessarily improve children's quality of writing. Instead of reading a horror story in the dark with a torch, you now learn the generic features of the horror story. The children are taught to remember the formula of a horror story, without the sense that the point of a horror story is to alarm and frighten people. They don't realise that if it does not do this it has failed, even if you have covered all the generic features.

We have changed the nature of knowledge and if this is what the English curriculum is about, we need to unite as a profession. There should not be a split between universities and schools where the DFES writes the curriculum. We should say collectively that this is not what we are about and provide a unified voice against this: in schools we are being drowned.

English and Philosophy

Mark Addis is a lecturer in philosophy and critical theory in the School of English at the University of Central England. Here he considers the current and potential relationships between English and philosophy in higher education.

The institutional context of the humanities is undergoing major change due to the increasing demands that higher education be accountable, cost effective, and vocationally relevant. Understanding the current organisation and academic state of English and philosophy is important when assessing the actual and potential interactions between them. The steady growth of English in the recent past ensures that its institutional presence is very much stronger than that of philosophy. This situation probably will not change as English undergraduate recruitment is likely to remain at something like its current high level. Another aspect of English which has reinforced its dominant position within the humanities is the attitude which its practitioners take towards its definition as a subject. Some would view it as a collection of parts and struggling with a crisis about its identity whilst others would see it as a subject which has sufficient structural and cultural flexibility to incorporate a wide variety of different elements. Neither view would regard English as having the rigid disciplinary boundaries which would obviously preclude interaction with some other areas of the humanities and even some areas of the social sciences. This flexible attitude on the part of its practitioners has facilitated the incorporation of broader approaches to literary and cultural criticism. As the institutional strength of philosophy and sociology has been eroded, areas which traditionally came under their remit have been embraced by theorists in English. Philosophy and other small (in terms of student recruitment) humanities subjects, such as theology and classics, are severely beleaguered by the present institutional framework. The emphasis on student numbers and vocational relevance has placed these disciplines in a very difficult situation and the introduction of top up fees will simply exacerbate their problems. The institutional weakness of philosophy is compounded by a problem it shares with a number of humanities subjects, namely, the failure to communicate its value to the wider academic community and general public

as effectively as it should. One of the most pressing challenges confronting philosophy is to provide more persuasive articulations of this worth, and success in this endeavour will require strategic thinking about the place of the discipline within the panoply of humanities.

Arguably, English is an essentially contested concept¹, which means that there is continuing debate about its use, and this has the consequence that the relationship with philosophy cannot be precisely defined in a way that would be acceptable to virtually all its practitioners. One way of approaching the connections between English and philosophy is via consideration of some issues raised by the finely expressed presentation of the quarrel between poetry and philosophy in Plato's Republic [Book X, 607b]. His treatment of this question exemplifies two key themes which shape the interaction between English and philosophy. One is that of philosophy competing with literature and the other is philosophy displaying some of the significant characteristics of literature. Very broadly speaking, the former idea finds favour in analytic philosophy and the latter notion is endorsed by continental philosophy.

In philosophy departments analytic philosophy is still heavily preponderant. This is reflected at degree level in both the approach to philosophical problems and the usual manner of studying the history of philosophy (which starts with Greek thinkers, continues with philosophers from Descartes to Kant, and then proceeds to the creators of analytic philosophy). When analytic philosophy was founded, a central feature of its approach was the close connection with mathematics and science, and lack of interest in aesthetics and ethics. There has been a gradual turn from this original emphasis to one with language and the mind. Despite this change in focus, the view of philosophy as a kind of science has been the ideal for most in the analytic tradition and main method used has been the practice of conceptual

¹ In Gallie's sense (see W.B. Gallie, [1956] 'Essentially Contested Concepts', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 56, pp.167-98).

analysis. A widespread position amongst these philosophers is that philosophy and literature are diametrically opposed because literary expressions of philosophical notions are deleterious to clear thinking. The strongest link between English and analytical philosophy is the contribution which the philosophy of language² makes to English conceived as the study of language. Major topics of concern in the philosophy of language are the nature of meaning, the relations between words and objects, different theories of language learning, and the distinction between the literal and figurative employment of language. These issues evidently have a role to play in shaping the theoretical frameworks of linguistic study. For instance, the confluence of philosophy of language with empirical linguistic studies has produced some interesting recent work, such as the use of H.P. Grice's ideas in Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson's *Relevance*. Furthermore, research of this kind raises the question of whether the philosophy of language ought to have a significant part in the theoretical constructs of descriptive linguistics. It is worth noting in passing that there are some other less important and systematic connections between English and analytic philosophy than those embodied in the philosophy of language. A currently popular case of this is the employment of the notion of intention from the philosophy of mind in the debate about an author's intentions in creating a literary work.

The continental mode of philosophical discourse is predominant in Europe and increasingly prevalent in literary studies in the Anglo-American sphere. Philosophers generally assume that the analytical and continental attitudes to philosophy differ very substantially.³ This presumption underlines the import of the definite movement in Britain in the field of philosophy away from traditional analytic and towards continental philosophy that has arisen from a feeling of disillusionment with the analytic approach. In general terms continental philosophy foregrounds concerns about human life and the existential condition as well as accepting the affinities between

philosophy and literature. Given this orientation it is not surprising that the most active interaction between English and philosophy is in the field of continental thought. Arthur Danto's [1987] distinctions of philosophy as/and/of literature are helpful in characterising the nature of this complex relationship. He differentiates between the scientific ideal of analytic philosophy and the conception of philosophy as having literary attributes. As philosophy has aspects which are identifiable from literature it follows that analysis of the rhetorical and stylistic features of philosophy is a potentially promising endeavour. From this standpoint, it is noteworthy that a considerable number of classic philosophical works display exceptional literary quality and many philosophy degrees devote considerable attention to teaching writing skills. Literature may contribute insight into questions that are frequently deemed philosophical. A number of philosophers, such as Sartre, have produced literary works which evidently have philosophical ambitions and authors can further philosophical understanding. For example, Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* may help to deepen appreciation of moral problems and it exemplifies the role of literature in developing ethical thinking. A different kind of case to this is the literary representation of a particular philosophical school, like the presentation of existentialist ideas in American literature of the 1960s. Philosophy augments the insight which is derived from literary works by offering general conceptions within which questions about literature can be framed and elucidated. The prominence which several schools of literary theory, such as Marxism, feminism, and hermeneutics, have achieved should not obscure the nature of the fundamental issues raised by literary works. An awareness of the history of philosophy is important for understanding the development of these philosophical concerns about literature. The questions are closely related to areas as diverse and wide ranging as aesthetics, ethics, political philosophy, the philosophies of language, logic and mind, epistemology, metaphysics, and the philosophy of

2 Philosophical logic and philosophy of mind are also relevant to this but their role is less significant.

3 Arguably Wittgenstein seems to be almost alone in being appreciated by philosophers of both persuasions.

religion. For instance, the philosophy of religion and literary treatments of religion cover many of the same topics like the nature of faith and the status of religious language.

A major area of common ground is that English and philosophy develop some of the same transferable work skills. These abilities are general problem solving capacities, communication skills, persuasive powers, and writing skills. A higher level of interaction would help both disciplines to provide more effective explanations of their intellectual and economic value to the wider academic community and general public. The richness and depth of English would be improved by greater input from philosophy, and the understanding of philosophical questions would be augmented by reflection on English literature. The institutional presence of philosophy and its integration with other humanities subjects would be significantly reinforced through increased connections with English. Furthermore, it seems likely that English

studies would have little to lose from this interaction. Academics in English and philosophy should seek to develop the points of disciplinary intersection so as to better withstand the challenges and pressures of the current institutional context of humanities scholarship.

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Literature Online – new edition released

Many readers of this Newsletter have access to Literature Online, Proquest's database of literature and criticism, through institutional subscriptions. A new edition of Literature Online was launched in January 2004.

The biggest change in the latest edition is the interface re-design. Literature Online now includes a Quick Search box – the most frequently-requested enhancement – allowing users to cross-search the entire contents of the database, including primary works and secondary reference materials. Other new features include:

- Durable URLs for easier bookmarking
- My Archive for saved searches and building course packs and reading lists
- Typographical variant spelling searching for Early Modern texts
- More flexible wildcard searching
- Enhanced table of contents including easy-to-browse lists of all primary works and criticism and reference materials
- Email content alerts pointing users to the most current information about authors as more resources are added to the database
- Easier results navigation with linking from primary works to criticism and reference materials, and vice versa
- Dedicated resource areas for academics and students, with each section containing tailored information and help. The academics area includes case studies, sample searches and in-depth information on editorial and text conversion processes.

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