Literature of the Miners’ Strike

The Subject Centre experiment

Joint Honours – why students choose it

Parliament's debt to arts and humanities

Teaching rhetoric, studying Obama

When ‘toomanycooks’ are a good thing
WordPlay has been published twice a year since 2009 by the English Subject Centre, part of the Subject Network of the Higher Education Academy. The English Subject Centre provides many different kinds of help to lecturers in English literature, Creative Writing and English language. This is our final issue. Details of all of our activities are available on our website www.english.heacademy.ac.uk

Inside WordPlay you will find articles on a wide range of English-related topics as well as updates on English Subject Centre work, important developments in the discipline and across higher education.

Views expressed in WordPlay are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of the English Subject Centre.

Website links are active at the time of going to press.

Available online at www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/wordplay.

If you would like extra copies, please e-mail esc@rhul.ac.uk by 25 July 2011.

The English Subject Centre
Royal Holloway, University of London
Egham TW20 0EX
T 01784 443221
F 01784 470684
E esc@rhul.ac.uk

www.english.heacademy.ac.uk

Design: John Gittins
Cover photograph: © MuseumWales
Starters

02 Welcome
04 News
06 IT Works!

Features

10 Literature and Politics: (re)writing the 1984-5 Miners’ strike
14 Pedagogies visible and invisible: reflections on the Subject Centre experiment
18 Joint Honours English Students: what are they thinking?
22 Humanities High Achievers

Creative Pedagogies

26 Too Many Cooks: a Royal Holloway project
30 Teaching, Technology and Obama
34 Transition to HE in English Studies
38 Dive into…The Pool

Student Perspective

40 Student Competition
44 On being a student, again!
46 What do I learn?
   A simplified Benchmark

Book Reviews

48 Janeausten.co.uk

Endnotes

50 Desert Island Texts
52 The Next Stage
Welcome
Nicole King

Welcome to the final issue of WordPlay. As spring makes way for summer we find ourselves not only confronting the end of the academic year but also the formal end of the Subject Centre network and this publication. For us, as for many colleagues and students in HE, the future is not clear and many questions remain. Nevertheless much of the English Subject Centre’s work initiated 11 years ago will continue under the auspices of other organisations, the HE Academy and through our websites (see p. 56 for more details). In the meantime we have made every effort to leave you on a high note and we hope WordPlay 5 will provide you with stimulating ideas to consider over the summer as you plan your autumn teaching.

Politics, literature and teaching

Our lead article addresses the role of politics in literature and the teaching of political literature. Author Katy Shaw (University of Brighton) discusses how and why she teaches the poetry of the 1984-5 Miners’ Strike (p.10). Not surprisingly, her module helps students connect the seemingly long ago era of Thatcherism to the politics of today. The theme of politics and literature recurs throughout this issue. It is picked up again in research carried out by Jane Gawthrope and other subject centres investigating the career destination of humanities graduates. The number of MPs who hold degrees in arts and humanities subjects may surprise you given the emphasis that the current government has placed on science and technology (p. 22).

Meanwhile, our 2011 student essay competition winners Cila Warncke and Robert Yeates, (from the Universities of Glasgow and Leicester respectively) offer articulate rebukes to those in government who believe the arts and humanities in HE need to be more utilitarian (p.40). In answering the question, ‘What do literature or Creative Writing have to offer an age of austerity?’ they argue with elegance and passion their understanding of why we need literature, Creative Writing and the humanities now more than ever and not necessarily in thrall to ‘industry partners.’

While it is difficult for me (and my colleagues) not be saddened and frustrated by the closure of the English Subject Centre, Ben Knights, our Director, responds in print with a vibrant history of our work (p. 14) while also providing some background to the 11-year old Subject Centre network. He writes about what lies ahead and specifically what you as individuals, departments, and research clusters can do to move our pedagogical practice forward and to continue to enhance the learning experiences of all our students. As a small contribution to that work we have re-written the English Benchmark Statement to make it more accessible to students and parents, who will be even more curious and eager to know what to expect from an English degree under the regime of higher fees (the NAWE Creative Writing Benchmark Statement is a good model too). Have a look (p. 46) and then why not customise the Benchmark statement with specific examples of modules and options from your programme and post it on your departmental website?

Creative teaching and learning with digital technologies

Brett Lucas starts off this issue with his regular round-up of the software and technology we should keep an eye on to help with and enliven all that we do—from research to assessment (p. 6). Later on in the issue (p.38) he introduces a brand new open educational resource, The Pool, designed by English Subject Centre staff for our communities. The Pool is one of the ways our work (and yours) around the enhancement of teaching and learning and the exploration of different pedagogical approaches in our discipline(s) will continue even after the Subject Centre itself is closed.

Whilst the idea of graduate employability is a charged topic on campuses, there is agreement that we can do more to improve our students’ understanding of the skills they acquire from English and Creative Writing. Joe Reddington, a computer science specialist, approached this task with a twist. Ignoring disciplinary boundaries and with the help of colleagues in the English and Computer Science departments at Royal Holloway, University of London, he set up the project toomanycooks to get students to collaborate and share the particular skills of their subjects for the purpose of writing a novel… in a week! Led by Joe and writer, Doug Cowie, the project has taught students new skills from other disciplines while giving them the chance to showcase and share their own expertise (see p. 26). The benefits of speaking and learning across disciplinary boundaries are also extolled by the joint honours students John Hodgson spoke to at five UK universities. With 20% of English majors studying other subjects, we felt it was important to uncover why students make that choice and what challenges they face by doing so. Thus we asked John to follow-up his survey of single honours students (see WordPlay 3) with a survey of their joint honours counterparts. We publish his preliminary findings here (see p. 18).

In a dispatch from the University of California (San Diego), Liz Losh describes teaching rhetoric and critical reading and research skills by examining the myriad ways the Obama White House uses web 2.0 technologies (p.30). Her students learn how to evaluate and critically interpret online political rhetoric, compare it with political rhetoric of earlier periods, while also developing the research skills to sift through and evaluate the masses of information generated by White House blogs, Flickr accounts and web channels. In engaging with contemporary politics students become aware of the debates surrounding our use of technologies in parallel with how the government uses technology to both inform and keep track of its citizens.

There is much more to discover in this issue—we hope you enjoy it. Thank you to all our contributors to WordPlay and to its predecessor, The English Subject Centre Newsletter and thank you, our readers. Remember you can access this and all English Subject Centre publications online and for free. Teach well. 😊

Nicole King
Editor
HumBox is an open collection of teaching resources that makes it easy for Humanities lecturers to publish, share and store their materials online.

You can upload things like seminar activities, lecture slides, podcasts and photos and download and adapt resources contributed by others. It's all about sharing ideas, approaches and resources and saving you time.

Sharing made simple.

Why Contribute to HumBox?
- Showcase and share your learning resources with colleagues, potential students and the wider world.
- Enhance your reputation and that of your institution.
- Benefit from allowing others to extend and enhance the resources you develop, and to suggest different ways in which they may be used.
- Create an archive of your work. HumBox is a safe, secure and easily accessible place to store resources.
- Become part of a growing network of Humanities colleagues sharing and re-using resources.

Why Download from HumBox?
- Don't reinvent the wheel – if someone else has already developed a learning resource similar to the one you need, then adapt it.
- Diversify your teaching repertoire – use different approaches from your own and other subject areas to add variety to what you do.
- Find a resource to help you cope with those little teaching emergencies.

And above all...
- It's free!

---

After English is a website for students of English who may be unsure of their future direction or panicked by the current doom and gloom about graduate vacancies. Unlike students studying a vocational subject, your career choices as an English graduate can seem unclear and challenging. After English has ideas, exercises to try and links to follow to help you start thinking about future possibilities and to realise your hopes and dreams.

---

What can you do now?

What matters to you about work?

Can you show others what you can do?

Activities & other resources

The Higher Education Academy

English Subject Centre
New Publications

Working in Postwar Britain

*Working in Postwar Britain* is a richly detailed example of career studies situated in an academic discipline. Career studies provides an opportunity for students to critique the concept of career from their own subject, as well as drawing on wider trans-disciplinary perspectives. It provides a non-directive space where students can reflect upon the intersection of their personal identity and discipline identity in a manner that is academically rigorous and personally meaningful. The document describes a 20 credit module that embeds career studies in an English degree. The module was designed by Dr. Will May from Southampton University using funds from the Centre for Career Management Skills (a HEFCE CETL based at the University of Reading). *Working in Postwar Britain* contains: a detailed module outline, assessment questions, examples of learning activities, and a reflective account of devising the module. http://tinyurl.com/6xe43zy

New Directions in Career Studies: English and Media Degrees

This booklet provides brief outlines for career studies modules from four institutions: Bath Spa University, University of Greenwich, Liverpool John Moores University and the University of Central Lancashire. Each provides a thought provoking example of the diverse ways that career studies may be embedded within disciplines. http://tinyurl.com/5vmsr2r

English Studies, Imaginative Writing and the National Student Survey 2009

This report presents an analysis of the 2009 National Student Survey (NSS) for English and Creative Writing. The report makes it possible to see how students in these disciplines answered each of the 22 questions in the Survey, and the results are also presented in a comparative basis with History, other humanities disciplines and the NSS results as a whole. It is possible to look at the results by gender and region. A methodological discussion of the NSS and an overview of the practical consideration for heads of department seeking to formulate strategic responses to NSS results are also included. The report for 2010 will be published shortly. Available in print from esc@rhul.ac.uk or online at http://tinyurl.com/3y6qeh3

Small Group Teaching in English Literature: A Good Practice Guide

This new Good Practice Guide aims to give practical help to those new to teaching small groups, and to suggest some fresh ideas for more experienced lecturers. It provides suggestions for activities you might use in seminars, and ideas for relating what happens in a seminar to what happens in the rest of the course. It also includes tips on the detailed running of seminars, such as setting up ‘ground rules’, and on evaluation. The content is illustrated by examples contributed by English lecturers and quotes from students. Whatever your experience and expertise, you will find something useful in this Guide. Available in print from esc@rhul.ac.uk or online at http://tinyurl.com/3y6qeh3
Events Calendar

Summer 2011

For further details about this free event and to register please visit our website
www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/explore/events

Supporting Creative Writing: a Networking Day for HE Careers Advisers and Lecturers
8 July 2011, Birkbeck, University of London

Numbers of Creative Writing students have grown significantly and rapidly in recent years, both at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. This workshop will enable participants to share ideas and experiences about supporting the careers aspirations of students of Creative Writing. The event will be an opportunity for careers advisers to learn more about the student experience of studying Creative Writing, and for advisers and academics to consider how they can best support and manage career expectations. The day will include a 'lift pitch' session enabling all participants to present an innovative idea for improving the student experience.

The workshop is being run in collaboration with the Careers Service at the University of East Anglia and the National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE). It is the sixth in a series of annual workshops hosted by the English Subject Centre for Careers Advisers working with humanities students.

SPECIAL ISSUE OF
LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Language and Literature is the scholarly journal of the Poetics and Linguistics Association (PALA). The next special issue (20.3) is devoted to pedagogy, and is being edited by Richard Steadman-Jones (Sheffield) and Ben Knights (English Subject Centre). The issue is addressed not to the teaching of stylistics as such, but rather to the question of how stylistics and the practices of teaching to which stylistics gives rise might illuminate issues of pedagogy more broadly: how students move between language communities; the dynamics of authority and footing; questions of formality and informality. The underlying hypothesis is that stylistics has an enormous amount to offer to wider teaching and learning communities. Stylistics is well placed to analyse the forms in which knowledge is negotiated in the classroom or VLE. If we take even such apparently mundane and subject-bound matters as ‘feedback’, disciplined attention to the language in which academics address students is of crucial importance.

http://lal.sagepub.com/
IT Works!

Brett Lucas casts an eye over recent developments in the world of e-learning for the last time...

As this will be my last IT Works column for WordPlay I would like to take this opportunity to wish all my regular readers best wishes for the future. It has been a fantastic ten years working with all of you in this exciting area. The next few years are going to see big changes in UK HE and I’m sure that with your energy, curiosity and enthusiasm you and your students will be able to harness the incredible power of e-learning to both adapt and enhance learning in new and ever more amazing ways.

Enjoy the ride!

Resources

18th century connect

If you are looking for research materials for 18th Century literature (that are also reviewed by scholars in this field), then the website 18thConnect may be your place. You can create an account and gather and tag materials, discuss materials with other scholars in the field, share your research with other scholars, review materials, and data mine the materials.

www.18thconnect.org

Internet for Video and Moving Images

Internet for Video and Moving Image Resources is a free online tutorial to help you learn why you might want to use video in your teaching and how to use the Internet quickly and efficiently to find copyright cleared video resources for your work.

www.vts.intute.ac.uk/tutorial/video/
Moodle 2.0 first look!

Moodle is rapidly becoming the VLE of choice these days and Moodle 2.0 is the new incarnation of this popular beast. This book will be useful to those involved in planning for the migration, equipping you with an understanding of what is possible and feasible and keeping you in the picture when the techies ask you ‘what do you want?’. Empower yourselves!


Learning through Digital Media – Experiments in Technology & Pedagogy

Published after an extensive, collaborative and open peer review process (MediaCommons), this collection of essays presents a myriad of ways in which technologies are being used to help engage students in learning. I’ve been reading this on my Kindle. Get it free now or buy the book.

http://learningthroughdigitalmedia.net/download

New JISC Digital Media worksheets

JISC Digital Media has recently finished releasing ten new advice documents. The eLearning-related series covers such diverse topics as: Mobile Learning, Audio Feedback and considerations for the delivery of digital media online, as well as offering how-to guides on topics such as adding multimedia to pdf files.

http://www.jiscdigitalmedia.ac.uk/blog/entry/ten-new-advice-documents-released/

Open Educational Resources demystified

I’ve mentioned HumBox in WordPlay previously as a fantastic resource for teaching materials in the humanities (watch out for new functionality shortly). Many of you are now starting to think about releasing your lectures and teaching materials as OERs so remember that there are a number of considerations to take into account. These range from specific technical issues to what makes it easier or more difficult for universities to embrace OERs. JISC have produced an InfoKit which aims to both inform and explain OERs and the issues surrounding them.

https://openeducationalresources.pbworks.com/w/page/24836480/Home

Publications

More
Help plan a revision session with your students / take the pain out of scheduling a meeting

Doodle is an online scheduling tool that enables you to avoid multiple emails by simply creating a range of dates for your meeting, generating a unique URL then inviting potential attendees to navigate to the URL to indicate their preferred day/time. It couldn’t be easier! You can create an account to get email notifications if you really want them.

http://www.doodle.com/

Another popular and even simpler alternative is Meet-O-Matic.

http://www.meetomatic.com/calendar.php

Create an online noticeboard then embed it in your webpages

Wallwisher is a free and simple to use online noticeboard. Navigate to the website and customise your new wall with a unique URL then circulate the URL to your students, who can help you create a unique look and feel for your wall. They can add pictures, video, audio and weblinks as notes. These notes can then be edited and organised. Use the wall live in classes, seminars or conferences to capture comments or thoughts from users or at a distance to ‘mind-map’ ideas on a topic, survey students and publish their replies to questions such as ‘Which text shall we do in the seminar next week?’ There are many, many fun ways you could use this tool.

http://www.wallwisher.com/

Add comments, highlights, and drawings to documents and images

A newcomer to the document sharing scene is Crocodoc. It allows you to upload documents (or webpages or presentations) then add comments, leave notes and highlight pieces of the text. You can add in your own text notes or draw on them. You can then invite your colleagues or students to collaborate with you on the document (a bit like EtherPad). You can add a password to your Crocodoc too for security and all without having to create an account. Extra features become available if you sign-in or pay. Well worth a look.

http://crocodoc.com/

Add subtitles to online videos

Ever wanted to add a question, prompt or a comment to a videoclip you have asked your students to watch? Overstream is a service that lets you add text captions to other people’s videos (such as what you might find on Vimeo or YouTube)

http://www.overstream.net/

Accessibility functions on your desktop

The new JISC TechDis Toolbar provides a range of productivity and accessibility tools and aids to help you and your students customise how you view and interact with web pages. Features include a text to speech function, spell checking and dictionary facilities, and a feature for gathering referencing information within a web page. It also provides simple ways to adjust the magnification or font used on web pages.

http://www.jisctechdis.ac.uk/techdis/news/detail/2010/toolbar
Teaching the New English

An invaluable series for new and more experienced teachers alike

Teaching the New English is an innovative series concerned with teaching English at degree level in the UK and elsewhere. The series considers new and developing areas of the curriculum as well as more traditional areas that are reforming in new contexts. It is grounded in an intellectual and theoretical concept of the curriculum, but is also concerned with the practicalities of teaching in today’s higher education classrooms.

Published in association with the English Subject Centre | Series editor: Ben Knights

FORTHCOMING

PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED

Save £5 on all paperback titles already published in the Teaching the New English series (RRP £18.99)

Just use the code WTEACH11a when you order online at www.palgrave.com
Literature and Politics

(Re)Writing the 1984-5 Miners’ Strike

Katy Shaw examines the evolving relationship between literature and politics for twenty-first century students and academics through a case study of teaching texts inspired by the 1984-5 UK miners' strike.

Katy Shaw is Senior Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Brighton. She has taught at a variety of educational institutions including universities, secondary schools, city academies, prisons and RAF bases. She is editor of C21: Journal of Twenty First Century Writings and is the author of several books including Analysing David Peace and Mining the Meaning: Cultural Representations of the 1984-5 Miners’ Strike.

Consider the relationship between literature and politics can involve examining the political content of a work of literature, the political perspective of the author, or the relationship between a text and its time. Teaching literary texts can often involve investigating all three of these areas. The importance of the relationship between literature and politics was memorably raised at an interview I attended at a major university several years ago. Mid-way through the interview process, just after I had given a presentation on my doctoral work concerning poetry produced by strikers in response to the 1984-5 coal dispute, the head of the interview panel raised his hand with a deep sigh. "What", he asked in an exasperated tone, "is the point of teaching this? Students don't care about politics, especially not the politics of the 1980s. How does this bear any relevance to what students are interested in today?"

In hindsight the question was brilliantly provocative, but at the time it ignited in me a deep sense of rage. Although I thankfully got the job (after a lengthy debate on the subject) I could not shake the professor’s question. What is the point of teaching texts that discuss the miners’ strike of 1984-5 to students today? What are the problems of teaching politics and literature for twenty-first century literature students? And why does the relationship between politics and literature matter anyway?

Every lecturer has encountered a student who has felt disengaged from, or disinterested in, politics. Undergraduates can usually reel off the most significant events of the First World War but much fewer are aware of the most significant events of the following decades. It might even seem strange that, for many of our students, events like the miners’ strike, or Margaret Thatcher's election, are 'history' at all. Until recently, many students were often least familiar with the very period of history closest to them.

Born into the ‘Cool Britannia’ of New Labour, contemporary students had little cause to look back on the Conservative legacy that bore the political conditions of the present day, to decades of unrest, division and disquiet both at home and abroad. Thanks to the looming spectre of the credit crunch this period has suddenly become more resonant. As the media mobilise discourses of, and references to, 1970s and 80s boom and bust, recession and unemployment, the politics of the recent past has at once become a more immediate, relatable and felt spectre for contemporary students. This article argues that the social, political and economic circumstances of 2011 have fostered a fertile ground for the re-illumination of the relationship between literature and politics. It will offer some personal reflections of teaching the two examples of texts from the heart of the Thatcher years - Tony Harrison’s poem ‘V’ and non-canonical poetry produced during the 1984-5 miners’ strike - to twenty-first century undergraduates literature students.

Tony Harrison’s ‘V’ is a long poem that explores the politics of change produced by shifts in power and identity in 1970s and 80s in Britain. It opens with an epigraph taken from a Sunday Times interview with Arthur Scargill, the leader of the National Union of Mineworkers at the time of the strike. In it he claims, My father still reads the dictionary every day. He says your life depends on your power to master words.

(Arthur Scargill, Sunday Times, 10 January 1982)

In this epigraph several essential elements of ‘V’ are established – the context of political conflict in the 1984-5 miners’ strike, language and its ability to influence the development of an individual's life and the notion of power as an active and malleable force in contemporary society. In my experience of teaching ‘V’, this epigraph seems to be the section of the poem that students are most likely to remember. As students of higher education they are well placed to realise how their ability to master words throughout their studies will form an essential part of their life skills but, in many cases, the poem...
Features

WALES CONGRESS
in support of Mining Communities

WHEN THEY CLOSE A PIT

THEY KILL A COMMUNITY
STOP THEM!
SUPPORT THE MINERS

© MuseumWales

© underclassrising.net
also makes them aware of the politics involved in the language they used to use as children, the language they use now as undergraduates and the language they will use as graduates in the future. The epigraph encourages an appreciation of the power of language, whether taboo as in ‘V’, or political such as the miners’ strike. The poem describes the 1984-5 miners’ strike as:

Class v class, as bitter as before,
The unending violence of US and THEM, personnified in 1984
By Coal Board MacGregor and the NUM.

The US and THEM here not only relates to politics – the left and the right – but to other important elements of identity, gender, class and race. As an elegy – a poem which mourns the loss of something or someone loved – its sense of passing explores the politics of exclusion – the passing of working class languages, values and cultures, people, places and spaces. In ‘V’, these ‘passings’ are mourned as victims of Conservative ‘progress’.

Images of coal and mining have a particularly prominent metaphorical meaning in this piece, relating implicitly to the politics of the period. The poem leaves implicit the fact that the miners’ strike was about keeping mines going, not pushing for more pay or better conditions. Throughout the poem the physical collapse of mines and mine shafts is presented as a symbol of the empty spaces left in communities when primary industries are obliterated from the employment market. Change is presented here as a social and geographical process. Even the means by which coal is produced – the pressurised crushing of plants over thousands of years – is presented by the poem as a potent metaphor for political change. ‘V’ is a conversation, an assertion, an exploration, a mission statement and a confessional. It is as vast and sprawling as the political issues of the period that it attempts to tackle.

In using literature to address contemporary political issues Harrison reflected a growing trend around the beginning of the 1980s to politicise the poetic form and to investigate language not as a given but as a system of signs whose meanings are variable, shifting and subject to highly charged political and cultural representations. The people of Harrison’s poem, like these fossilised plants, are presented as creatures under pressure whose energy is released in an organic and explosive moment which produces change and displacement.

In the non-canonical and largely unpublished poems authored by strikers and their communities during 1984-5, this explosive release comes from the creative act of authorship itself. The National Coal Mining Museum in Wakefield holds an archive containing hundreds of examples of strikers’ poetry, each revealing a partisan and passionate account of the year-long dispute. Throughout these poems the central image of coal appears again and again as a metaphor for people under pressure, whose compression, like fossils millions of years ago, has the potential to create large-scale energy and change. One poem entitled ‘Time For a Change’ claims that,

Pressed by force and might
Our energy will ignite the torch of change.

Writing was a fundamental part of the 1984-5 strike, acknowledged by the strikers as a valuable tool with which to articulate their beliefs and rights. However, unlike Harrison’s ‘V’ which was circulated in neat, convenient paper and hardback forms, strikers literature was often found on scraps of lined paper, on blank fly-leaves torn from novels and school textbooks, in old exercise books, on the backs of cereal packets, on till receipts and scribbled at the edges of pages in instructional booklets. In writing literally on the margins of existing literature, mining communities showed immense resourcefulness and purposefulness in producing writings which acted as a powerful form of self-representation and self-definition but which also highlighted the politics involved in the act of producing and circulating literature. Over the course of the strike, literature became an outlet for all the pressures endured by strikers, a voice in a cultural climate which overwhelmingly demanded their silence.

Writing back at the government’s counter representations of miners and their cause, strikers’ poetry does not offer the contemporary student an exercise in mere ‘retro nostalgia,’ but a window into a subjective assessment of the politics of their period of production. Through making these poems available to students in seminars, I try to show how literature and politics intersect on multiple levels with varying effects. My aim in using these poems in teaching is not to correct the historical representations of existing, published or canonical literatures with a ‘true’ version of history, but to juxtapose them with other facts and heterodox – sometimes contradictory – ways of configuring the political events in question.

As a response to the social, political and economic issues of the 1980s, strikers’ literature confronts the Conservative government of the time with a new type of counter-economics, born out of the need for an alternative, combative discourse with which to challenge and engage Thatcher’s New Right terminology. Early strike poems suggest that the government’s language was centred on abstract figures and terms rather than on the human force behind the mining industry. The main concern of miners seems to be that the policies of the Thatcher government are concerned with the good of the few rather than that of the many, and that this creates tension between those in power and the miners’ collectivist culture. In these poems miners can be seen to re-visualise the political situation by giving it a human face, putting real lives and real people at the forefront of the debate. In one poem called ‘The Politics of the Yorkshire Miners’ one striker writes:

Don’t they realise
It’s people they’re talking about
We’re not machines
To be put on the scrap heap.
Or animals out to graze
We have pride, feelings, names.

In addition to providing a voice to those effectively politically ‘silenced’ by dominant authorities, poetry also functioned as a useful tool of expression for those doubly disadvantaged during the conflict by both their gender and their class. Although women were heavily involved in the strike, female perspective was a rare addition to published accounts of the conflict, as writers focused instead on political perspectives, tactics and ideological concerns. This may be one of the reasons why women turned to the pen to make their voices heard. Women’s poems provide the reader with a unique and lasting account of the reality experienced by women who participated in this monumental historical struggle.
A central concern for many female writers seems to be the desire to make sense of the change in female role brought about by the strike. To illustrate the magnitude of this change, writers often establish oppositions within their poetry between traditional female pastimes and their new post-strike concerns. One poem which typifies the need to understand the impact of this change is ‘Kim’ by Yorkshire striker Jean Gittins:

I can’t understand what has happened to Kim
There’s been such a terrible change
When I think of how that girl acted before
I can’t understand such a change
A beautiful hand with the pastry she had
Her sponge cakes were lovely and light
But, now it’s all muesli, and yoghurt, and nuts
While she’s out at meetings each night
We could have gone on, for the rest of our lives
Never knowing, just what she was like
And she’d have been trapped in our image of her
If it hadn’t been for the strike.

Here, home-life and working-class culture are put in direct competition with an active, participatory social life and new ‘trendy’ health foods; a process of transition which the poem seems to suggest was not born out of, but speeded up by, the strike. This conflict undoubtedly shaped the lives of the women who lived through it. They learnt the capacity for personal growth in a collective movement, and found a place in society as a result of self-discovery and education.

Both ‘V’ and poems by strikers from 1984-5 present students with a multiplicity of histories, an almost deafening resurgence of voices from the past which enable the modern reader to produce manifold readings of a single political period as well as essential interplays of class, gender and politics. As Scottish poet Douglas Dunn argues, ‘V’ might not be the most beautiful poem in the world but it is certainly one of the most powerful. It is undoubtedly one of Harrison’s most significant works, a piece that British novelist Martin Booth went so far as to call ‘the most outstanding social poem of the last 25 years’. Likewise, the poetry authored by striking miners and their communities during 1984-5 illuminates the ways in which both literary content and form can be mobilised for political ends. The importance of literature in providing a space that will recognise and value unseen political perspectives and representations, concepts and understandings, of illuminating unseen works and projecting unheard voices, is perhaps best summed up by Terry Eagleton who claims in After Theory that:

In retrieving what orthodox culture has pushed to the margins, cultural studies has done vital work. Margins can be unspeakably painful places to be, and there are few more honourable tasks for students of culture than to help create a space in which the dumped and disregarded can find a tongue.

Both ‘V’ and strikers’ poetry from 1984-5 make significant steps in this direction, highlighting the potential of poetry as a form and literature as a medium not only as a product of a political period but as a potential catalyst for future political change.

So to answer the original question I asked myself while stalking away from an academic interview panel several years ago – 25 years on, what is the point of teaching literature about the 1984-5 miners’ strike, or in bothering to highlight the relationship between literature and politics at all? As an academic in the arts and humanities, the point is to underscore the significance of the relationship between literature and politics and the political nature of key aspects of the literary such as form, genre and language. In short, literature and politics are not dry, boring or questionable bed-fellows. Contemporary academics must ensure that, for contemporary students, politics – whether of relations, change, identity, gender or class – is at the core of their understanding and analysis of literature. Relating the politics of the past to that of the present not only reminds students of the social function of literature and the social responsibility of the author, but also relates the struggles of the present to a long heritage of similar battles. This recognition of the key role played by literature in politics – and politics in literature – should not only form a part, but the backbone of engaged and aware studies into literature in the twenty-first century.

References
Gittins, Jean (1985) Striking Stuff (Bradford: One In Twelve)
Pedagogies visible and invisible: reflections on the Subject Centre experiment

As the Subject Centre network prepares for its closure, Ben Knights sets out the challenges for the Literature, Creative Writing and English language communities in the ongoing struggle to provide fertile environments for the development of teaching practice in higher education.

With the forthcoming demise of the Subject Centre network (at least in its current form), this seems an appropriate moment to reflect on the meanings of a brave and valuable experiment. I’ll start with a rapid reminder of the Subject Centre moment, then move on to sketch some implications for the English disciplines. The Subject Centres, like the National Teaching Fellowship and other Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund (TQEF) initiatives grew out of that period after the 1997 Dearing Report, when a number of factors were widely perceived as having a negative impact upon HE teaching and the experience of university students. These factors included a major decline in the ‘unit of resource’ as a result of the massive expansion of the universities since the early 90s, and the consequent increase in average class sizes; but also a sense, focused by the Dearing Report, that the funding of research through the RAE and the ‘dual support’ system was creating an imbalance: that money, rewards, and prestige were being increasingly attracted to research to the detriment of the teaching role. The HE system had in the meanwhile responded to the political perception that teaching ought to be subject to quality review by adopting the Teaching Quality Assessment, and subsequently the QAA system of subject and institutional review, a quasi-inspectorial process which placed the emphasis on compliance and quality assurance. In this context, the Subject Centres and the ‘Learning and Teaching Support Network’ represented a major investment in discipline-based enhancement. The underlying principle of this adventure was that change and improvement could best be brought about by enlisting academics through their passion for their own disciplines.

English had its own relationship to this pedagogic turn. A loose federation of centrifugal academic tribes, English exhibits the oddity that while it is a national curriculum core subject, its practice in universities has
little in common with its incarnation in secondary education. Methodologically divergent, it has a rich and fissiparous intellectual heritage, much of which was already deeply rooted in pedagogies of which the discipline has been justifiably proud. It also – as the remark about schools implies – possesses a proliferation of ‘stakeholders’: writers and readers, parents, and grammar and spelling buffs, journalists, royals and politicians, towards all of whom the university subject exhibits a profound ambivalence, and from whom it frequently goes to great lengths to protect and even conceal its subject matter. As we tried to get the measure of the subject in its relation to its students, two connected features in particular seemed to stand out.

The first was the very success of the discipline in adapting to a culture of specialised research. Both internal and external influences converged to bring this about. During the 1970s and 80s, the Theory revolt had – paradoxically for a radical and subversive movement – prepared the way for the subject to move towards specialised and counter-intuitive forms of knowledge, a tendency subsequently accentuated by the osmosis of literary and new historical studies. Add to this the rise of the RAE and growing kudos attached to research funding, and you have a recipe for a fundamental re-casting of the reward structures and career patterns of the subject. The mutation of the forms of ambition and success within the profession had implications for teaching at a number of interacting levels. At one level, many of those who had made an honourable career of teaching found themselves increasingly left out of the new economy of prestige.

In aspiring institutions, the route towards success clearly lay through publications, conferences, research fellowships, and this gave rise to a feeling that teaching was a secondary activity or one which you would buy yourself out of at the first opportunity.

This is where the other feature alluded to above provides a context. This one goes back further into the subject’s old struggle with what it saw as naive or escapist reading. We might think of it as invisible pedagogy. In the early days of the Subject Centre, we frequently found English (especially literature) colleagues suspicious and resentful about what they saw as prescriptive interference. Despite the new world of benchmarks, learning objectives, module handbooks, and marking criteria, teaching was still thought of as a unique encounter between group (or individual reader) and text. Since the Education Reform Act of 1988, English in schools had become a public, regulated, visible business, its procedures increasingly ordained from outside the profession. The university tribe in the meanwhile could still entertain a belief in the unique and...
unreproducible nature of the transaction between teacher, student, and text, and hence in a kind of dematerialised pedagogy. The further one travelled up the university status hierarchy the more striking this became. Teaching took place in what lecturers tended to see, paradoxically, as a private space. This is the Arnoldian and ultimately Romantic objection to ‘machinery’ in a continuing mutation. As the TQA evolved into QAA Subject Review, the struggle for the soul of the subject became more intense. In an article in *Cambridge Quarterly*, members of the first TQA team, Kate Fullbrook and her colleagues, observed that English departments in particular disliked Assessment, partly because of the nature of their subject and the political psychology of its members. The subtleties of literary language can be called subversive and English lecturers like to see themselves as subversive by association, flitting, fleeting critical figures, chafing their student charges into distrust, irony, and accusation ... (*Cambridge Quarterly* 25.3, 1996: 273) No wonder that those (education developers, deans for teaching and learning, advocates of virtual learning environments, or subject centre colleagues) who recommended transparent specifications, techniques, fast developing as skills and craft-based subjects, ‘English’, intellectually self-critical and reflexive, was failing in one central respect to apply its own hermeneutic of suspicion: to its own pedagogy and the manner in which it transmitted (or failed to transmit) its own alert, proudly disillusioning values.

The dynamic generated between the interacting phenomena of specialised research and invisible pedagogy created numerous mysteries for students. Many continued to find infectious the challenge of getting on the inside of these discourses. But many superimposed their university experience on their previous experience of the school assessment regime and made a cognitive extrapolation. They came out with the working idea that they were meant to acquire and offer back as assessment a form of knowledge which read text as information, hypothesis as fact, heuristic suggestion as the currency of truth - or at least the truths desired by those with the power to award marks. The ambitions of English academics and a sizable proportion of their real and potential students had got out of kilter. The assumption that ‘we are all good at teaching’ inevitably marginalised those who argued the need for change.

In many ways, then, the Subject Centre found itself on the margins, but in a subject in some ways composed more of margins than of centre that was not necessarily a disadvantage. The subject has characteristically been re-animated from its own borders, and its contiguities...
with history, film, drama, anthropology, linguistics have been a perpetual source of intellectual hybridisation and refreshment. Pedagogy and the systematic study of learning need not, the Subject Centre wanted to say, be an exception. It need not be the one example of an intellectual domain from which English was too superior to learn. It was implicit in the subject centre experiment that we were not to be ‘top down’ suppliers of new ideas and practices, but agents, brokers, interpreters. We wanted to find out the kind of things that were happening and to make connections. But if we were to help re-animate the pedagogy of the subject group, we had to build up a map of inventions and their contexts. Where were new pedagogic energies to come from? To take a handful of examples, we found ourselves seeking out and helping to circulate energies and insights from:

• Inventive individuals (the challenge being to make their support systems and networks more reliable);
• E-learning and the digital revolution: extending the eco-system of the module and seminar into virtual environments;
• bringing within student view the wealth of digital resources;
• crossover: bringing the skills and craft approaches of Language and Creative Writing into a larger mix, e.g. by making more available the workshop tradition;
• habits and practices from different sites within and beyond the sector.

Throughout, the challenge was to legitimise and connect up experiments that were in any case growing up rhizomatically, but often starved of light and air. Thanks to an enormous number of advocates, friends, and helpers we went some of the way to open up new channels.

The English Subject Centre has been at least a qualified success. But that observation itself requires one to make some attempt to specify what success would have looked like, or in what dimensions it could have been sought. Here is a mixed bag of criteria or proto-criteria against which such an enhancement initiative could be measured. They all connect to the ambition of helping the subject renew and refigure itself for a new era. Rashly, then, let us say that success would have involved embedding students and the barriers the subject in many ways presents. It follows from that, that success would have involved also setting up strategies for seriously tackling the narrow range of class, gender, and ethnic recruitment so characteristic of the subject in HE, and widening its appeal beyond the minority of students whose ambition are themselves to become future teachers and academics. All these would have required a serious redress of the skewing of the subject towards specialised research, and the ability for the subject group to become better at explaining itself to multiple publics.

None of the above is meant to disparage the richness of the English subject nexus, or to suggest the existence of a systemic weakness in its teaching. A subject dedicated to critique, to the making and understanding of language, representation, form, narrative, the unblocking of the well-springs of creativity, will continue to have a role in the ethical transformation and enrichment of individuals and civil society. The need for what Robert Scholes called ‘crafty reading’ is not going to go away. But scholarship and professionalised research are not going to be enough to maintain the subject in being and secure its future success or its appeal to new generations of students. The subject group also needs now more than ever to pay continued and systematic attention to the care of its teaching roots. The public spending cuts, and the grave uncertainties of the new funding era from 2012 coincide with the imperative of paying re-doubled attention to the needs of teaching. It is a hideous irony that it is precisely those institutions which may have the most to teach us all about widening participation and widening the pedagogic repertoire which are the most likely to suffer closed programmes and staff redundancy. And inevitably, as the waters rise, there will be a scramble to board the ark of research.

But the community should not lose sight of the simultaneous need to preserve and re-fit the laboratories of teaching. It may not be an impact that the REF can measure, but the future of the subject depends on an ability to enter into dialogue with publics and students. Some hints towards a programme of teaching renewal might include:

• Campaigning for the enhanced reward of teaching careers;
• Within departments and subject groups inciting forums for discussion and comparisons of practice;
• Encouraging pedagogic research and writing, so that teaching is not simply seen as a secondary derivative of research;
• Developing modes of conversation with students, for example by undertaking local enquiries into the significance of NSS results;
• Creating spaces and forums (virtual or actual) for holding pedagogic conversations;
• Seeking out opportunities for dialogue with school teachers and school policy makers;
• Involving undergraduate and postgraduate students in community activity.

While the former Subject Centre staff will – so far as is compatible with their new responsibilities – continue to support the subject community in the development of pedagogic practice, much will remain for the community to do for itself through its subject associations.

It is a hideous irony that it is precisely those institutions which may have the most to teach us all about widening participation and widening the pedagogic repertoire which are the most likely to suffer closed programmes and staff redundancy.
It is easy to forget that about a fifth of our students study another subject in addition to English. If we include combined varieties of English (such as Language study, Literature study or Creative Writing) within the category of joint honours, the figure is higher. According to figures derived from the 2010 National Student Survey, the most popular disciplines with which English Studies are combined include History (17%), Teacher Training (16%), Drama (10%), and Philosophy (7%). What makes a prospective undergraduate decide to read English with another subject? What advantages - in relation to conceptual understanding, to the social life of the University, or to career prospects - might a combined course offer? How do students cope with differing epistemologies and tutorial expectations? Given their experience, would they recommend a combined course to others?

To gain some insight into these and other questions, the English Subject Centre recently asked me to conduct a focus group study of the experience of joint honours students of English within UK universities. This follows the study of the experience of students of English in UK higher education than I conducted last year. It was felt that the experience of joint honours students would complement the findings of the previous study, while gaining new information from placing English in a wider experiential context.

Most students saw the benefit of their joint honours course not in terms of social or vocational advantage but in terms of conceptual range and understanding. It was decided on this occasion to interview students from five UK universities. At the time of writing, I have interviewed 18 students (fifteen female and three male) in total from two pre-92 and two post-92 institutions. Subjects combined with English by the students I have met included (most popular listed first): History, Philosophy, Psychology, Music, Cultural Studies, Film Studies, Criminology, Politics, Italian, Information Systems, and Publishing. I have still to visit one University and have not yet undertaken a full analysis of the transcripts. This is thus an impressionistic, preliminary report, to indicate some of the patterns of student experience that are emerging.

Most students saw the benefit of their joint honours course not in terms of social or vocational advantage but in terms of conceptual range and understanding. It appears that there are many possible reasons for a student’s deciding to follow a joint honours course. Two students reported a pragmatic concern to compensate for a failure to achieve three A’s at A-level: the entry requirements for joint honours English were slightly lower. More common, though, was a positive choice based upon intellectual interests and, sometimes, career aspirations. Susan (all names have been changed) had enjoyed both English Literature and History at A-level, “and it turned out I could do them both here!” Belinda had originally applied to take Philosophy and Religious Studies, but, having worked in the English department of her old high school during her pre-university year, decided to become an English teacher and thus combined English with History. Cindy was interested in criminology but was uncertain that she wanted to pursue this as a career; English, she felt, broadened her career options and allowed her to follow a subject she had enjoyed at school. Although none of the students so far interviewed was actually taking a course in teacher training, more than one mentioned English as a suitable subject in case they decided to go into teaching.
Most of the interviewees identified themselves as joint honours students who had made a positive choice to study two disciplines. Even those who had decided to follow such widely disparate subjects as English and Information Systems might find themselves (in Estelle’s words) “split down the middle”. “I have friends in both departments,” she told me. “I’m fairly balanced. If anything, I do more English work now because I’m reading more.” Despite their personal commitment, however, some students felt that it was difficult to explain their subject choices publicly. Carey, who had tried to gain a place at Oxbridge, had been told by a school teacher that she had probably failed because she had indicated on her application form an interest in joint honours. Some students felt that joint honours courses were associated with broad and/or superficial study. Yvonne told me that she would define herself in conversation as a Philosophy student because “Philosophy is a bit more serious [than English]!” Felicity, on the other hand, said: “I always tell people I study Literature because people recognise it more and think of it as a more serious subject [than Cultural Studies].” A few students, however, identified more strongly with one of their two subjects. Richard, for example, saw himself as primarily a psychologist, because his course (unusually, he said, for a joint honours subject) would give him a vocational accreditation.

Several students said that they relished the variety and challenge of taking a joint honours course. Richard “always perceived doing one subject as eventually getting a bit boring”. More than one student commented on the pleasure of working in different parts of their University, and of meeting a wider range of students and staff than would otherwise be the case. In contradiction to the view that joint honours might be perceived a soft option, some students hoped that taking a joint course would look good on their CV. Cindy thought that her record would demonstrate her determination, hard work and individualism: “You’re slightly different and you’ve dared to combine the two [subjects].”

Most students, however, saw the benefit of their joint honours course not in terms of social or vocational advantage but in terms of conceptual range and understanding. “There’s so much overlap,” said Yvonne. “It enhances each subject with the other one.” Marie had found that her study of discourse analysis in Psychology had assisted her English dissertation. Daisy had found that her work in Early Modern History had complemented her Shakespeare study in English. Carla had studied aspects of Feminism within Philosophy and within English, and had found the two approaches complementary.

According to Victoria, English and History were “incredibly similar”, although History, she felt, might involve “a bit more research”. Felicity felt that the conceptual frameworks of English and Cultural Studies were very similar, but: “With English you are just looking at texts, whereas with Cultural Studies you can look at film, music, images; there’s a lot more variety.”

Two students felt that reading English was a definite help in writing good essays in the other subject. According to Yvonne, English tutors “hammer you into getting your essays perfect”. Some students said that they enjoyed the textual focus of English: the subject allowed deep focus on small areas of text, whereas History, Philosophy and Cultural Studies required a wider contextual knowledge. Others, however, found a focus on English Literature restricting. “In English,” said Marie, “we are not encouraged to use secondary sources of information; which is very hard for me as a Psychology student, because I’m constantly looking for things to back up my argument.” Felicity said that she always did better in Cultural Studies “because you can be more creative”. In English, she felt, “everything has been said.
Viv found that poetry analysis within her English Language course was "linguistic and quite technical", whereas poetry analysis in Literature was "more subjective". In English, and in most other subjects, students reported that the writing required was nearly always an academic essay, although (as suggested above) the forms of data required as evidence varied widely. Discussing tutors' requirements, students from two universities felt that a uniform approach to referencing and bibliographies would be helpful. Only Carla, who was taking Film Studies with English, told me that she sometimes had to write essays for a specifically different audience, such as the readers of a serious film magazine. Alan, who was in his third year of a combined course in English and Politics, had developed a robust approach to essay writing. He told me that he always structured an essay in three parts, and that, although there may be differences between his writing in the two subjects, "it's not the same as doing Computing Studies or whatever."

I hope to include in the full report an analysis of some of the essays submitted by students, to reveal ways in which they deal with perceived differences in the nature of the subject and in tutors’ expectations. The report will examine further some of the difficulties that joint honours students encounter, for example in scheduling, module choice, and managing their work. It will also deal with the ways in which their experience as a joint honours student has affected their career aspirations. I am glad to say that students’ overall experience is positive: their joint honours student has affected their career aspirations. I am glad to say that students’ overall experience is positive: their joint honours student has affected their career aspirations.
External Examining in the Humanities

18 February 2011

The workshop was organised by the English Subject Centre, the History Subject Centre, the Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies Subject Centre, the Philosophical and Religious Studies Subject Centre, PALATINE and the School of English Literature, Language and Linguistics at the University of Sheffield.

The workshop pursued two related purposes: firstly it was an opportunity for new external examiners to learn more about the role from ‘old hands’ and, secondly, it was an opportunity to debate some of the issues facing all external examiners in humanities subjects regardless of their level of experience. Much of the exchange of ideas and information happened through small group discussions and informal conversations which were facilitated by the shared understandings amongst humanities disciplines. On the other hand, there was sufficient ‘grit’ of disciplinary difference to generate points of contrast and discussion.

The workshop began with a series of short presentations by external examiners summarising the key issues from each of the discipline areas represented. These generated a great deal of guidance for ‘novice’ examiners. Eric Evans advised novice examiners to be sceptical of the bureaucracy of external examining, to beware of ‘going native’, to use the opportunity to learn and even to lobby for more pay. Several speakers emphasised the importance of meeting staff and, in some cases, students as part of the process. Paul Kleiman spoke about the need for the external examining systems to meet diverse disciplinary needs, which might manifest themselves in disparities between marking written and practical work and in different approaches to using the full range of marks. Both Hugh Pyper and Graham Webb talked about the difficulties involved in finding examiners and determining ‘national standards’ in subjects and languages which are not widely taught. There was some debate around the advisability or otherwise of using former colleagues as externals: Sue Vice saw this as being too ‘cosy’ whilst another view was that it gave the examiner a head start in understanding the nature of the department. The many and varied roles of the external examiner were noted: ‘critical friend’ to the department, generator of ‘ammunition’ for departments to use when making cases to university management, validator of a department’s own solutions to problems, work sampler and checker of systems.

After issues had been surfaced in this way, participants then moved on to examining them more closely in small groups. For example one group looked at ‘When things go wrong’, discussing the delicate role of the examiner in adjudicating and resolving differences occurring within the department and possibly between the department and the HEI. This group also agreed that the new fees structure would be likely to create a more litigious culture amongst students, with a consequent increase in the number of appeals in which externals might be involved. For the same reasons, the group also predicted an increase in differences occurring within the department. This group also agreed that the many and varied roles of the external examiner were noted: ‘critical friend’ to the department, generator of ‘ammunition’ for departments to use when making cases to university management, validator of a department’s own solutions to problems, work sampler and checker of systems.

The workshop pursued two related purposes: firstly it was an opportunity for new external examiners to learn more about the role from ‘old hands’ and, secondly, it was an opportunity to debate some of the issues facing all external examiners in humanities subjects regardless of their level of experience. Much of the exchange of ideas and information happened through small group discussions and informal conversations which were facilitated by the shared understandings amongst humanities disciplines. On the other hand, there was sufficient ‘grit’ of disciplinary difference to generate points of contrast and discussion.

The workshop began with a series of short presentations by external examiners summarising the key issues from each of the discipline areas represented. These generated a great deal of guidance for ‘novice’ examiners. Eric Evans advised novice examiners to be sceptical of the bureaucracy of external examining, to beware of ‘going native’, to use the opportunity to learn and even to lobby for more pay. Several speakers emphasised the importance of meeting staff and, in some cases, students as part of the process. Paul Kleiman spoke about the need for the external examining systems to meet diverse disciplinary needs, which might manifest themselves in disparities between marking written and practical work and in different approaches to using the full range of marks. Both Hugh Pyper and Graham Webb talked about the difficulties involved in finding examiners and determining ‘national standards’ in subjects and languages which are not widely taught. There was some debate around the advisability or otherwise of using former colleagues as externals: Sue Vice saw this as being too ‘cosy’ whilst another view was that it gave the examiner a head start in understanding the nature of the department. The many and varied roles of the external examiner were noted: ‘critical friend’ to the department, generator of ‘ammunition’ for departments to use when making cases to university management, validator of a department’s own solutions to problems, work sampler and checker of systems.

After issues had been surfaced in this way, participants then moved on to examining them more closely in small groups. For example one group looked at ‘When things go wrong’, discussing the delicate role of the examiner in adjudicating and resolving differences occurring within the department and possibly between the department and the HEI. This group also agreed that the new fees structure would be likely to create a more litigious culture amongst students, with a consequent increase in the number of appeals in which externals might be involved. For the same reasons, the group also predicted an increase in differences occurring within the department. This group also agreed that the many and varied roles of the external examiner were noted: ‘critical friend’ to the department, generator of ‘ammunition’ for departments to use when making cases to university management, validator of a department’s own solutions to problems, work sampler and checker of systems.

In a set of group discussions on discipline-specific issues, the History group focussed on the uneven treatment of joint honours students, and different practices in relation to oral examinations and vivas. They also departed slightly from the remit of the day to discuss examination of research degrees. The English group debated the pros and cons of material being sent to the examiner throughout the year, versus the ‘Rumpelstiltskin’ approach of putting the examiner in a room (or possibly broom cupboard) with a year’s worth of documents. This group also identified a need to further explain the marking process to students, so that they better understand the processes of second marking, moderation and anonymity.

Participants re-convened at the end of the day to put questions to an ‘expert panel’. These ranged from questions about the history of external examining in the UK and alternatives used by other countries, through to the tensions between quality assurance and quality enhancement inherent in the examiner’s role and the possible role for examiners in helping departments to fight cuts. Thus ended a wide-ranging day where novice and experienced examiners from a range of disciplines considered the past, present and future of external examining.

Jane Gawthrope
English Subject Centre

---

Greg Wade, Policy Adviser with UUK, then shared some of the findings of the UUK Review of External Examining, (Greg’s presentation is available on the English Subject Centre’s website [www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/explore/events/event_detail.php?event_index=296](http://www.english.hecadamy.ac.uk/explore/events/event_detail.php?event_index=296)) and the Final Report is now available at: [http://tinyurl.com/5t4bmzl](http://tinyurl.com/5t4bmzl). Some key points to emerge were that the UUK is not going to recommend criteria for appointment of examiners, but its report will include a list of common criteria for institutions to consider. The idea of a template for induction of externals was not supported, so the UUK will make recommendations only about the importance of induction. On the thorny issue of public and student access to examiners’ reports, the UUK will not recommend that reports have a ‘student section’; rather it will recommend that the whole report is ‘made available’ to students (but is not necessarily published). In order that there is a single focus point for recommendations, those of the UUK Review will be incorporated in the QAA Academic Infrastructure, which HEIs will be expected to implement and then be audited upon. The UUK Recommendations will therefore be phrased in terms of what all students can expect, with any exceptions or qualifications addressed through the QAA Academic Infrastructure.

In a set of group discussions on discipline-specific issues, the History group focussed on the uneven treatment of joint honours students, and different practices in relation to oral examinations and vivas. They also departed slightly from the remit of the day to discuss examination of research degrees. The English group debated the pros and cons of material being sent to the examiner throughout the year, versus the ‘Rumpelstiltskin’ approach of putting the examiner in a room (or possibly broom cupboard) with a year’s worth of documents. This group also identified a need to further explain the marking process to students, so that they better understand the processes of second marking, moderation and anonymity.

Participants re-convened at the end of the day to put questions to an ‘expert panel’. These ranged from questions about the history of external examining in the UK and alternatives used by other countries, through to the tensions between quality assurance and quality enhancement inherent in the examiner’s role and the possible role for examiners in helping departments to fight cuts. Thus ended a wide-ranging day where novice and experienced examiners from a range of disciplines considered the past, present and future of external examining.

Jane Gawthrope
English Subject Centre
Humanities High Achievers

Jane Gawthrope, English Subject Centre

What use is an English degree? How does studying English improve my career prospects? Why should the public subsidise students so that they can enjoy subjects of no practical benefit to society? At a time when students, parents, funders and policy makers seem to be questioning the value of humanities subjects, a number of humanities Subject Centres thought it timely to gather some examples of ‘high achievers’ who studied their subjects. Whilst statistics on graduate destinations are available from sources such as the Prospects website www.prospects.ac.uk/, we felt the time was right to highlight some of the more unusual, and high profile paths, that graduates have taken to reveal the diverse impacts and opportunities that degrees in our subjects can bring. Together with the Subject Centres for History and Philosophical and Religious Studies, we embarked on a trawl through University Alumni sites, FTSE 100 companies, Who’s Who and Dod’s Parliamentary Companion to identify ‘high achieving’ humanities graduates: those in the upper ranks of the diplomatic service, senior positions in banking, the public sector and broadcasting for example. (We collected some stories about successful but less ‘high profile’ graduates along the way too.)
Although our aim was to collect examples rather than to create a comprehensive database, we discovered that it’s much easier to identify high achievers in the media and arts than it is those in other walks of life. Although we were actively looking for people who had forged successful careers in business and the public sector, it seems that they are much less likely to be profiled on alumni websites than those who have a public face (or voice) such as an actor, broadcaster or writer. Whilst it is in the interests of the humanities to convince the general public of the value of humanities teaching in producing articulate, thoughtful and energetic graduates who can contribute to many walks of life, alumni websites often compound the myth that doing a humanities degree means that you are destined for a career in the arts and media. (The 2010 edition of ‘What do Graduates Do? www.prospects.ac.uk/assets/assets/documents/wdgd_2010.pdf shows that only 6.6% of graduates in employment six months after graduation are working as ‘Arts, Design, Culture and Sports Professionals’ compared to 7.0% for ‘Marketing, Sales and Advertising Professionals’ and 7.9% for ‘Commercial, Industrial and Public Sector Managers’.) This was our reason for including the FTSE 100 Directory and Dod’s Parliamentary Companion in the search: we hoped to identify more ‘achievers’ outside the arts and media.

We were able to identify over 150 high achieving English graduates in diverse walks of life. Emma Bridgewater, founder and owner of the pottery range that bears her name, graduated from Royal Holloway University of London with an English degree in 1983. David Brooker is the Director responsible for Olympic Legacy and Security in the Government Olympic Executive of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, a post he has held since March 2008. He graduated with a degree in English from Ulster. Jasmine Whitbread, Chief Executive of Save the Children, studied English at Bristol graduating in 1986.

If you wish to see the full list, perhaps to support talks at Open Days, these are available on two spreadsheets at www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/explore/resources/careers/grads.php There is one for all humanities subjects covered in the search, and one for English graduates. The spreadsheets contain links to more extensive biographies where available. Remember that the spreadsheets contain examples rather than being exhaustive, so you may wish to ask you own Alumni Office for other examples from your own institution. We hope that the evidence presented there will useful in two contexts. Firstly, in pointing out to young people that studying English is as good a preparation as any for pursuing the broad range of careers that don’t require a specific vocational qualification. Secondly, at a time when the humanities feel under threat and called upon to justify their relevance and impact, being able to point to a number of high-profile individuals who have built on the skills in creative and critical thinking developed by their studies demonstrates how the disciplines contribute to the strength and vitality of business, culture and society through their graduates.

Parliamentary Postscript

My main contribution to the shared task of gathering information for the database was to search Dod’s Parliamentary Companion looking for MPs with humanities degrees. (Dod’s is a directory and guide to Parliament which includes profiles of all MPs and Lords.) I confess to volunteering for this task because I thought that, although Dod’s is not available online, searching it would be fairly quick and easy because not many MPs would have humanities backgrounds. How wrong I was. Altogether, 183 of the 650 MPs in the current House of Commons (28%) have humanities degrees (including joint honours where there is a humanities element). Twenty-seven of these (about 4% of the total) have English degrees, and one, Dan Byles, Conservative MP for North Warwickshire has a Creative Writing degree from Nottingham Trent. The profile of the English graduates amongst MPs is heavily Russell Group biased, with seven of the 27 coming from Oxford or Cambridge, and another ten from Russell Group universities.

Of the 27 MPs with an English degree, 13 are Labour and 11 Conservative with the remaining three belonging to the Green Party, Sinn Fein and the SNP. Caroline Lucas, the Green Party MP for Brighton Pavilion has a PhD from Exeter, and both Chris Bryant (Labour, Rhondda) and Susan Jones (Labour, Clwyd South) both have MAs. (By way of comparison, there are 95 MPs with History degrees.)

The single course, however, that stands out as being the most likely ticket to a career as an MP is Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Oxford. An astonishing 39 MPs in the current Parliament studied PPE at Oxford. To quote the broadcaster Andrew Neil:

Labour Leader Ed Miliband graduated in philosophy, politics and economics (PPE) from Oxford and was pretty quickly working for Gordon Brown. His brother David also did PPE at Oxford and was soon advising Tony Blair.

New shadow chancellor Ed Balls also went to Oxford after private school to do – you guessed it – PPE. It was there that he met his wife, the new shadow home secretary Yvette Cooper, who also happened to be doing PPE as well.

[Does a social elite run the country? 26th January 2011 www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-12282505]
Literature and Politics Conference
24 September 2010

Literature students tend not to perceive English Literature as a particularly political subject to study, nor are most English departments seen as centres of political debate, but English as a subject area has long been used politically. The literary curriculum has often been subject to intervention in school and university departments, while politicians regularly invoke the English literary tradition for their own political agenda, and literary references are frequently employed in the promotion of political values.

In 1987 Raymond Williams gave a talk to Oxford English Limited on 'The Future of English Literature' in which he said:

Still, often, I find myself surprised that English studies are so controversial ... And how can it be that a subject like that should have been, almost throughout, a source of chronic irritation and indeed a series of acrid public disputes and causes célèbres ...


The Literature and Politics conference, held at the University of Brighton in September 2010, set out to address some of these controversies, identifying and debating competing definitions of 'English studies' as an academic subject. The conference was concerned to challenge any simple definition of English as a subject area, but instead to celebrate the diversity of contemporary literary studies. Each of the papers interrogated new developments in the complex interplays of literature and politics in contemporary life, and together they spanned a variety of texts and contexts. From the co-option of Shakespeare by the British National Party to the promotion of a sustainability agenda in the teaching of Creative Writing, the collection of papers addressed key areas across the Literature curriculum. Taking in the poetry of the First World War, representations of the miners’ strike and the teaching of race and gender through Toni Morrison’s Beloved, the presentations ranged across the wide landscape of current undergraduate provision in English departments. Colleagues from Education took the debates further into the teaching of English in schools, with papers on children’s literature and the configuration of Literature as a subject in secondary schools. The conference ended with papers on the current status of literary critical theory, and speculation as to the state of ‘Literature’ as a subject in the schools and universities of Cameron’s coalition Britain. The final discussion centred around the need to defend the energy of Literature as a subject area against any construction of the subject as a static celebration of English and literary tradition. Together, the conference papers testified to the great variety of work on the politics of teaching literature and of literary criticism in the context of the challenges of the twenty-first century.

The study day was conceived in the days before the ConDem (or LibCon) coalition was a political reality, and in the light of the sweeping changes to higher education, the debates took on a new sense of urgency. We were all too aware, only three months after the May 2010 election, that our experience of teaching of English in schools and universities was about to change profoundly; and that the Subject Centre itself would not be immune from government involvement. And so it has, sadly proved. The conference was itself a testament to the importance of the Subject Centre and the activities it makes possible; held just before the beginning of the new academic year, the event provided a space for academics to draw breath, to reaffirm our commitment to our subject and to share good practice in teaching the politics of literature.

Deborah Philips
University of Brighton

Katy Shaw, Zacharoula Christopoulou, and Adam Hansen

Adam Hansen

Gina Wisker and Richard Jacobs
‘On the Offensive’: An English Subject Centre discussion evening

1 March 2011

Chaired by Professor David Roberts of Birmingham City University, this discussion evening set out to explore the challenges of teaching English literature and Creative Writing, where that may involve exposing students to ideas and material they find disturbing or downright offensive. A whole range of ethnic, religious or personal sensitivities may be at stake. The psychological intimacy of English studies makes it particularly delicate in this regard – whereas in Law, for example, the explicit discussion of offensive conduct in criminal cases is accompanied by a forensic distance. How can teachers of English manage the tensions that might arise from the study of ‘offensive’ material, in the age of the fee-paying student? And do these challenges provide any strategic insights for English in the post-Browne era?

Four HE institutions were represented at the event: Birmingham City University, Keele University, the University of Wolverhampton, and Newman University College. A shared sense of commitment to the intellectual and imaginative liberty that English studies can foster soon emerged during the discussion. The issue of how to develop and sustain that strength, with all its stimulating risk, in the face of identity politics and the consumerisation of higher education, perhaps inevitably proceeded to raise more questions than answers. However, two practical examples of how HE institutions handle the ‘offensive’ focused matters. The Birmingham School of Acting, part of Birmingham City University, operate an arrangement whereby their students explicitly accept that they may have to engage with material that they may find offensive – and lists various examples of such material. This has the benefit of clarity, and gives teaching staff a convenient point of reference should a student (or group of students) demur. Coming from a different angle, Dr Mark Jones of the University of Wolverhampton described his experience of running a module based upon the study of ‘offensive’ or ‘unpopular’ material – a course which attracted the attention of the national press, in its occasional guise of moral outrage, when it was reported to include a ten minute viewing of pornography. The point of that course, Dr Jones explained, was to encourage students to be vigilant of the sometimes insidious processes of cultural production, within which framework the historicising of offensive material – for example, the early editions of Enid Blyton’s The Three Golliwogs – could be a teaching point in itself.

Discussing Dr Jones’ course raised the question of whether there might be a duty to offend on some level, where the pedagogical aim was to break through apathy – regarding, for example, the representation of gender or race? Should English studies implant notions of offence in students? That way, perhaps, madness lies – at least where too rigid an ideological agenda is at work. One participant suggested that in certain circumstances, it was wise to structure teaching so as to invalidate the notion of being ‘offended’, should a student take such a stance, because as a teacher, he was offended by the fact that students might take such offence. The fact is, that much canonical literature contains potentially offensive material: Shakespeare has been accused of the lot, from misogyny to anti-Semitism – despite the fact, of course, that he was not necessarily speaking in his own person.

This crossover with the idea of the canon summoned up the Arnoldian idea of culture as the best that has been thought and known – which in turn prompted some resistance, if the sense of what is ‘best’ were coloured by too prudish a taste. Indeed, the very idea of ‘higher culture’ might stir offence. Has then the pressure to ‘include’, to make ‘accessible’, become just another orthodoxy, intolerant of the values that it takes to be ‘elitist’? Here – as elsewhere – a distinction between being offended and not liking might be useful.

As the discussion drew to a close, it was remarked that Creative Writing, in particular, has the potential to engage with these many dilemmas productively, by enabling students to work through such matters with the tact and freedom of the fictive imagination. In whatever sphere of English one teaches, however, that productive response – intellectual, emotional, imaginative – must surely be the aim: the alternative, of paranoia, defensiveness, and speech proscribed beyond the demands of social awareness and good manners, hardly seems desirable.

There can be no easy answers here, because the question of offensiveness involves the very idea of a civil society with a plural culture. This does not mean that its day-to-day dilemmas need be ill-defined, of course, nor brushed under the carpet in a nervous conspiracy of silence. If there are two things that English in higher education needs in these interesting times, it is clarity of approach and a healthy confidence in the value(s) it brings to our social habitat. That line from Terence, ‘humani nihil a me alienum puto’ – ‘I consider nothing human alien to me’ – is perhaps one unwritten motto of English studies that deserves to be made more explicit.

Gregory Leadbetter
Birmingham City University
Too Many Cooks
A Royal Holloway Collaborative Project

Joe Reddington tells the story of how an innovative teaching project, linking staff and students from the arts and computer science, collectively wrote a novel in a week. In addition to being fun, the students gained a host of transferable skills and satisfaction along the way.

We started Project TooManyCooks with two core goals: to dramatically increase the contact time and feedback between students interested in fiction writing, and to give students experience in the entire lifecycle of creating a novel from inception to printing. I’d like to tell you how we did it in less than a week.

It is a complaint of employers that English Literature graduates (amongst others) have well developed writing communication skills, but some lack teamwork and social skills, when compared to graduates of degrees such as Media Arts and Drama, which have more emphasis on teamwork. Group projects like TooManyCooks – in addition to intensive peer feedback and goal-oriented work – can develop these skills considerably and make graduates much more attractive to employers, particularly in industries like journalism or media.

This project combined three distinct areas of expertise: Creative Writing, guided by Douglas Cowie (English), which ensured that the overall quality of the output was high; Software Engineering, which I supplied to ensure that the project was completed rapidly, effectively, and with few bugs (plot holes, in this case); and Narrative Analysis, provided by Fionn Murtagh (Computer Science) and Adam Ganz (Media Arts), which allowed almost instantaneous review of work or identification of problem areas. It is clear from the student feedback that the students found value in each of these areas and that the project would not have been a success if any of them were missing.

Douglas Cowie and I wondered if a group of students could produce a novel in less than a week; moreover, we wanted to know how much the students would learn in the process. We applied for funding – around £2000 – and booked a computer lab on campus for a week.

Without a clear method of organization, the project would fail. And we didn’t have one. So we borrowed one from computer science. Actually we borrowed a few and approached students in English, Media Arts and Drama, asking people to volunteer a week of their lives to try them out. I got a few volunteers, got emails from a few more and pretty soon I was swimming in them.

I’m deliberately approaching our techniques in a roundabout way here. If I had begun this article by telling you that nine students wrote a book together in a week your immediate assumption would have been that everyone took a chapter, wrote it, and then we stapled them together at the end.

There are good reasons we didn’t do that – the writing styles would have been very different between chapters, important plot details and characterisations would have been different; it would have been a mess. That is not what we did. We did not do that. You may think I’m laboring a point here but I have had a lot of conversations where I have spoken about this project for a while and the other person ends up saying ‘So… everyone writes a different chapter yeah? But how would that work because the style would change…?’ No!

Indeed we gathered all the Royal Holloway students in a room on the first day and they looked at me and they said “So we all right a chapter each yeah?” No: programmers start with a description, provided by the customer, of the program they want written. We were lucky enough to get a script written for us...
Creative Pedagogies

by Adam Roberts, whom the Guardian newspaper calls ‘the king of high concept sci-fi’, and who gave us a plot he’d discarded. The basic plot outline is that aliens arrive on earth – and ignore us. They build cities high up in the sky and destroy anything that comes near them, but otherwise they just ignore us. That’s the concept.

I added a few things about how much sex and drugs and so on were allowed and handed the brief over to the writers.

We let the students think about it individually and then gathered them around a white board. Characters started to emerge: there was a male protagonist, and his sister, and they had an evil dad who was doing experiments for the military. So obviously there then had to be a military character and he was told what to do by an evil politician character. So before working out anything more than the most general of plot arcs, the students were selecting the characters that would drive the narrative, along with their attributes and their relationships to one another or ‘interfaces’ as it would be called in computer science.

Programmers call this activity ‘class identification,’ and it is a crucial point in the process.

When we had the right number of characters or ‘factors’ we stopped and, after a bit of negotiation, every writer was given ownership of a character. They decided every feature of their character’s appearance, mannerisms, thoughts, actions, and speech. They had final say on everything that happened to their character.

The methodology of giving each writer the full ownership of a character is called ‘object orientation’ and is incredibly important. It is used in software to, broadly, keep complexity down and to eliminate bugs, and it did that for TooManyCooks. After the first day, the writers didn’t need to keep track of a whole 60,000-word narrative, they had to keep track of one (potentially quite minor) character, and that’s a lot easier.

We’ll come back to this because it is quite key, but first I want to talk a bit more about that first day.

We gave the writers some time to think about their characters and then went back to the main story arcs. Now that people were invested, many things happened simultaneously: subplots developed, whole scenes were sketched out, and after an hour or so we felt we understood what each other was talking about.

I wrote ‘The Story’ on a piece of paper and put all the characters names on it. We asked the writers how to split the story in half, and they agreed a sensible place to split it and so we had ‘time before boat’ and ‘boat and time after’. We wrote a quick description of each section and the characters that were involved in each section on the piece of paper. And then we split those. We did this again, and again, and again.

The ‘Cooks’ on day two, beginning the writing process in our first ‘lab’

A key concept was that any change in the structure had to have the approval of only the writers that had a character that was involved.
Very quickly we had 70 scene cards, each labeled with the characters that were involved in the scene and a description of what the scene had to contain. They contained every subplot, every shift, every idea; it was beautiful.

On the second day we brought the writers into a computer lab and showed them some software. We had worked quite hard to ensure that all sorts of learning approaches could thrive within the project: those with particularly visual approaches enjoyed our use of Unified Modelling Language (UML) diagrams, and the visualisations of the structure that were created by our analysis tools. People who had a preference for reading and writing enjoyed the fundamental writing activity but also updating plotlines and character descriptions on our wiki. Those with a preference for aural learning (including both of our dyslexic students) were invaluable both in group discussions and were in charge of using text-to-speech technology for accurate proofreading.

Each piece of paper the students wrote was then converted to a page in a wiki, and was tagged with the names of the characters involved. The writers went to a random page that involved their character and inserted a list of actions for that scene. If they felt that they were loosing inspiration they left what they were doing to someone else and switched to another scene. If they needed to check with another writer they checked with another writer. They. Kept. Writing.

An hour later they had written 7000 words just on the bullet points of their characters and related scenes. When they finished their lists they checked up on the bullets in other scenes their characters were in and once all the writers of characters in a scene had approved the bullets for that scene, one of them started writing the scene. The same rules of creativity applied: if they found themselves losing steam, they switched to another one, and they just kept going... and going.... and going.

At the end of the first day, we had a shade under 30,000 words, on the second day a shade under 50,000 and we hit 65,000 words about halfway thought the third day.

There was a separate proofreading process, which deserves its own article and we also used sophisticated data mining techniques that allowed us to see in real-time how the novel was evolving during the day and then alter our writing focus as necessary.

Seven days later, we had finished The Shadow Hours a solid, well-structured narrative that, while maybe not Booker Prize material, certainly showed a skill level greater than the sum of its parts.

The real result, however, was not the book, but the students. As an almost completely practical course, Project TooManyCooks explicitly developed transferable and study skills of teamwork, specialisation, communication, working under pressure, giving and receiving feedback and keeping track of a rapidly changing and developing knowledge base. All these skills were embedded within the overall project goal of allowing the students to experience and experiment individually with the processes.

Over the week the students developed as fast as the narrative did - and not just in terms of their creative skills. They saw,
and were involved with, the full workflow of novel writing from inception to planning to writing to proofing to choosing a cover illustration. Their skills in the ‘softer’ areas of teamwork, productivity, feedback, and management really started to come out over the course of the week. The absolute key thing here is that, once the manuscript had come back from the printers, they could hold in their hands the physical evidence of their work and proudly give copies to grandparents, teachers and friends. When examining the saved proofreading sheets from each day, we noticed how individual ‘cooks’ made vastly fewer of their previous mistakes whilst improving their writing style and speed of production. In addition, the project allowed students to develop individual specializations, if they wished to do so, such as working on structure, dialogue, character development, action, copy-editing or proofreading. Finally, over the course of this project, the group of arts and humanities students gained a real appreciation for the use of electronic aids to learning. A major part of this was the Narrative Analysis Software developed by Professor Murtagh that allowed them to visualize the novel as it came into being. The students also made excellent use of wiki sites for both holding information about the novel and for writing the novel itself. Furthermore, use of special electronic proofreading techniques and computer science design principles to structure the novel all contributed to the overall willingness of the students to engage with and make use of electronic aids in a technologically traditional (rather than a technologically experimental) subject area.

We think that the project has serious potential; it is our opinion that this kind of artifact-based learning can really energize students in areas where motivation could be lacking. Given that the prototype project gave little, if any, weight to developing the students’ skills - by adding several assistants to the team, ensuring that each student is given an hour for writing feedback every day and giving proper focus to the development of the skills as well as testing the technology, we can produce a intensive week-long writing course that offers the scaffolding and support needed to really develop creative skills as a group.

One interesting finding of the project was that selecting the students on the basis of writing ability would not have been a good idea. Many of our ‘cooks’ wrote beautifully, quickly and created exactly the right feelings but they were not natural teamworkers. They had to be persuaded to share and compromise during the collective process. On the other hand, some of the students from the Media Arts department had difficulty finding the right register for their writerly voices – but without their inclination to talk problems through, smooth over friction, and be open to all types of creative involvement I would have had rioting writers.

Now, thanks to a grant from Royal Holloway’s Outreach Fund, a new generation of students from sixth form colleges and schools will be able to give the project a try, and produce their own works of fiction. The younger students will have a slightly cut-down version of the project and will be writing a 40,000 word novel in five days.

My own teaching certainly changed after the week’s project, even when teaching Computer Science! I found that by giving individual students roles and responsibilities within the lectures (one looking at the performance of the algorithm, one the test data, one the extra features that could be added) I had much more engaged students.

The books that were produced over two runs of the project The Shadow Hours and The Delivery
Creative Pedagogies

TEACHING AROUND A PRESENT POLITICS ONLINE

Liz Losh discusses the challenges of teaching rhetoric through contemporary politics and how Obama’s White House and web 2.0 technologies have proven to be rich teaching tools and contexts for students.

Teaching about the rhetoric of elections or the language of political activism in university classrooms poses a number of immediate difficulties. Most obviously, students may fear that their work will be evaluated according to an arbitrary standard of political correctness that does not tolerate opposing views or that excludes students from participation who disagree with the instructor. There are also practical problems with keeping material relevant and engaging when current events in the twenty-four-hour news cycle on the Internet may change rapidly or take unpredictable turns. At the same time, appealing to students’ interest in political decision-making can increase their engagement with a given course or curriculum, and instructors can improve student attention, the quality of class discussion, and the clarity and persuasiveness of assigned writing dramatically by using political figures as rhetorical exemplars. Furthermore, university administrators often value civic participation and community service as part of a well-rounded education. Now that so much of our political discourse takes place online, faculty can mine a wealth of potential pedagogical material in large databases of texts, images, and videos that can be easily annotated and remixed by students.

There are a number of strategies for examining online political rhetoric that encourage students to develop their argumentative and research skills. First of all, it can be helpful to look at the long history of political oratory and print publication to encourage critical reading of new Internet genres. For example, if teaching about how U.S. President Barack Obama uses YouTube or text messages, it may be helpful to look at other kinds of archival materials like his campaign or convention speeches, his two memoirs, or his letters for comparison. It might also be useful to compare Obama’s online rhetoric with other U.S. presidents who used earlier forms of “new” media that relied on broadcast paradigms, such as Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s use of radio in his “fireside chats” or John F. Kennedy’s innovations with television in his White House press conferences.

Among writing instructors, teaching with the materials of the Obama campaign and inauguration presents a number of appealing possibilities for assignments and exercises. Although the editor of University English John Schilb recently complained of the lack of criticism in composition studies “about the rhetoric of the last Presidential race and of the two-year-long campaigns leading up to it” (Schilb, 2010), a number of writing instructors have designed courses about how political persuasion and participation is being shaped by the Internet in the Obama era. For example, at the 2009 convention of the Modern Language Association (MLA), Linda Adler-Kassner asked panelists how faculty could “leverage President Obama’s embrace of digital media to promote our own efforts to use digital media in the classroom.”

At the MLA, Ohio State instructor Shawn Casey described how a portion of his course focused on the Obama inauguration and explained how the unit allowed students to see how certain aspects of presidential rhetoric were coercive as well as persuasive. He explained how students were encouraged to choose particular digital objects of study or motifs in Internet rhetoric. One of Casey’s students responded with an analysis of the digital cutting and pasting of soul singer Aretha Franklin’s hat, who sang at the inauguration, onto other digital images and explicated the participatory exuberance and potential cultural insensitivity that her traveling hat represented.

Elizabeth Losh is the Director of the Culture, Art, and Technology Program at Sixth College at the University of California, San Diego. She writes and teaches about institutions as digital content-creators, the discourses of the “virtual state,” the media literacy of policy makers and authority figures, and the rhetoric surrounding regulatory attempts to limit everyday digital practices. She is the author of Virtualpolitik: An Electronic History of Government Media-Making in a Time of War, Scandal, Disaster, Miscommunication, and Mistakes.
Graduate instructor Jeff Swift of North Carolina State encouraged his class to focus on Twitter’s role in the election as a way to teach them about the importance of ethos or credibility in their written work. Based on his experiences working with this material, he suggested to his fellow instructors listening at the MLA that “President Obama’s huge success with the youth vote in the 2008 election suggests that following his example might teach us a thing or two about connecting with our students.” Swift gave his students, who didn’t use Twitter themselves, a “crash course” in the conventions of the microblogging service, so that they could better understand how political policymakers use very short form writing genres.

My own courses in public rhetoric and practical communication online have used elections as occasions for students to collect interesting Internet ephemera as they follow all the major candidates. Like others who teach about this material, I am interested in Internet mobilization, online performance, and imagining a “Gov 2.0” audience who expects what I have called “transparent mediation” and “mediated transparency” because using the World Wide Web causes users both to expect access to raw data and primary sources and to believe that everything can be remixed, remediated, composited, mash-upped, bookmarked, embedded, annotated, and otherwise digitally altered so that there is no authentic original anymore.

The MLA panel ended with York University writing program administrator Dominic DelliCarpini and his brother, University of Pennsylvania Annenberg School dean and writer on political communication Michael DelliCarpini discussing teaching students how to critically read the rhetoric of the MyBarackObama.com Organizing for America website for “weak arguments,” “indefensible claims,” and “unacceptable premises,” so that students aren’t forced to take political sides. Dominic DelliCarpini asserted that this kind of critical thinking about digital media could be part of curricular planning on a very large scale:

“The Obama administration’s rhetorical strategies and uses of new media offer writing classes an excellent example for rhetorical analysis in the proto-public sphere of an individual composition classroom. However, the larger question is whether helping students to understand and engage in civic and political matters is the business of writing programs more generally. That is, is Obama’s new media rhetoric just one more site for academic study — replacing, say, literary texts or essays from a reader — or can increased civic engagement and increased ability to use new media as a form of political participation and deliberation be counted among writing programs’ (and writing program administrators’) actual learning goals? Our presentation suggests that it can, and in fact that the WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition would support such a claim.”

Using the World Wide Web causes users to believe that everything can be remixed, remediated, composited, mash-upped, bookmarked, embedded, annotated, and otherwise digitally altered so that there is no authentic original anymore.

Of course, the lessons of these Obama critical pedagogies can be borrowed in other national contexts. Not only has the Obama online presence been emulated by heads of state from Italy to Israel, but many might agree with Tim Berners-Lee that the open data movement actually started in Britain. Political parties and government agencies have become creators of rich rhetorical resources for classroom use that are easily available online, and students can learn as much by studying the discourses of governance as they can from the discourses of campaigning. Classes are also interested in larger circuits of political production that include vernacular discursive practices and the representations, responses, and mash-ups created by a range of political constituencies.

Further Information
F2H: Transition from FE to HE in English Studies launch event

13 September 2010

The lashing rain and gale-force wind ensured that everyone was wet as they arrived at our event (having negotiated the door on the top floor that can only be opened from the inside). However, greeted by George Formby and sticks of Blackpool rock, we hoped to transport our audience to a scene where the sun shines, and students and lecturers achieve great things.

The event was designed to launch the resources produced during our project supported by the Higher Education Academy, part of what is cumbersomely entitled the Discipline-focused Learning Technology Enhancement Academy 2010. Our project intended to produce online materials to help students make the transition from FE to HE in English Studies. Many of the students studying at HE level at Blackpool & The Fylde College are ‘non-traditional’ in that they are often mature students, with families and jobs, who have taken unconventional routes through education. The two English degrees offered by the college are the BA (Hons) English: Communications at Work, and the BA (Hons) English Language, Literature and Writing. While some of our resources - on academic writing, grammar, etc. - would be applicable to several programmes of study, we also felt we needed to address the requirement in the latter degree to study all three strands of English. We therefore wanted to provide introductory materials for students wanting grounding and/or revision in Language, Literature, and Creative Writing.

It was wonderful that a number of Blackpool & The Fylde College’s own past and present students attended. They had been consulted during the course of the project, and were keen to see the results. Others included members of the college staff from different areas, including learning support, learning resources, and other disciplines, and lecturers from other HE in FE institutions.

We began this event by explaining the justification and the original vision for the project, followed by a description of the process – including several pitfalls and technological barriers encountered along the way. We also demonstrated examples of our resources, complemented by a reading of ‘The Sea’ by poet John Siddique. We had used this poem as a focus for our introductory Language module, and it was a privilege to have John himself at our event. It was particularly pertinent that he prefaced his reading with a reflection on his experiences in schools of ‘literacy’ being seen a stand-alone skill, rather than bound up in the experience of literature and language.

Over lunch people attending the event were given the opportunity to explore the resources for themselves using laptops. We then collected immediate feedback, followed by a ‘Liquid Café’ activity where attendees were invited to discuss in more depth the three areas of ‘Process’, ‘Content’ and ‘Widening participation’.

The project is still ongoing, and the feedback was therefore invaluable: we hope to build on the contributions from all who attended. The online resources should be available for our own undergraduates as they begin their studies this year, and will be more widely available in due course.

Candice Satchwell
Blackpool & the Fylde College

See Candice’s related article on page 34
Transition in education is a hot topic, whether it be from home to nursery, primary to secondary school, or from school to university (see, for example, Ecclestone et al 2010). For some children and students such transitions seem to present few problems, while for others the leap is a greater challenge. In higher education, there is a body of literature exploring aspects of transition, including the need for a sense of ‘belonging’ (Kember et al 2001) and ‘engagement’ (Bryson and Hand 2007), to counteract the ‘alienation’ (Mann 2001) they might otherwise experience. Ways of addressing these issues include the promotion of learning communities, for example through peer mentoring and peer-assisted learning, and the provision of scaffolding which encourages students to feel both supported and empowered.

One facet of the movement from one domain to another is the nature of the ‘literacy practices’ required in each setting. It is well documented that children who read and are read to in the home are more likely to respond well to reading and writing at school (Heath 1982). Research with college students has shown that if the reading and writing prevalent in one domain (college) is significantly different from that in another (home or work), students are easily ‘switched off’ and can feel demoralised and demotivated (Ivanic et al 2009). The same research has also shown that students can be ‘recaptured’ and inspired to succeed through interventions in the form of modifying the reading and writing they are required to do, by taking into account the kinds of reading and writing they are good at. Such a plan sounds simple, but requires delving into students’ everyday lives in order to understand their favoured literacy practices, and then requires examining the demands of the curriculum and considering ways of matching these up with how students like to learn.

The project under discussion here was intended to address concerns about students making the transition from further to higher education, in the specific case of English studies at Blackpool & The Fylde College. The intention was to create a set of resources that would address concerns identified by both students and lecturers at level 3 (A level) and above. Blackpool & The Fylde College delivers two English-related degrees: one is the BA (Hons) English Language, Literature and Writing; the other is BA (Hons) English: Communications at Work, which can also be studied as a two-year Foundation Degree. The college also runs an Access to HE programme, which includes a strand whereby mature students can study English and Creative Writing as part of a one-year course of study. Students from local schools, or who have studied previously at the college, can also take A level English Language and Literature.

The project to design and implement the resources arose in response to several issues. First was a recognition that students who take the English degree at Blackpool & The Fylde College have widely differing backgrounds and experiences, ranging in age from 19 to senior citizens, many with jobs and/or children...
The project aims to encourage students to be independent learners and thinkers. Through carefully structured support and scaffolding, we will encourage students to support themselves and one another.

Embedding: the best way to facilitate change is by embedding it in existing (successful) programmes. For example, student-led seminars will be written into modules; activities on referencing and plagiarism will be directly linked to specific assignments.

Transition: the whole project is based on the idea of facilitating transition - from dependence to independence, from level 3 to level 4, from individual to group identity, from doubt to confidence.

At college, we carried out consultation with students and staff, using a variety of methods including questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, and a ‘liquid café’ activity, which involved engaging in discussion and writing on tablecloths. Facilitated by the team, the aim of the liquid café was to establish the existing learner involvement, investment and awareness of preferred technologies: specifically to find out how learners are using technology, and which technologies are being used. This method resonates with approaches to academic literacy which embrace and build upon students’ existing preferences and capabilities, rather than imposing new and alienating literacy demands (Lea and Street, 2000). It was hoped that these students from level 3 and level 4 could provide important information about the technologies they used in their everyday lives, to enable us to make our bridging materials accessible, relevant and useful. Further, in addition to the annotation on the café tablecloths, information was gathered from learners through the completion of pro-forma diary pages (developed from the ‘clock activity’ used in a previous project, Satchwell 2006) asking participants to record a typical day in

Principles underpinning the project

Culture: we aim to create a culture wherein academic study and discourse is encouraged and promoted; where creativity is appreciated, and identity as a group of like-minded people is enhanced.

Community: we will encourage working together at all levels, in communities of practice, including student study groups, a local poetry society already established by college students, events in the college and in the wider community. The web pages will be open to guest users who will be invited to join the community of Blackpool & The Fylde College students.

Independence: the project aims to encourage students to be independent learners and thinkers. Through carefully structured support and scaffolding, we will encourage students to support themselves and one another.

Second, the degree programme is highly successful in terms of retention and achievement: given students’ often unconventional entry qualifications, their academic achievement can be quite remarkable. They often comment that the course has ‘completely changed their lives’, not just in terms of career, but also outlook, self-confidence, and attitude – they develop a ‘thirst for learning’, and for some the course results in the break-up of what turn out to be unsatisfactory long-term relationships. To a large extent, we seemed to be doing something right, and students who would never otherwise achieve a degree because of personal circumstances were able to succeed and move into new careers. There were therefore aspects of the current student experience to be harnessed and built on; but there were also issues relating to academic writing and scholarship which needed addressing.

As a part of the Discipline-focused Learning Technology Enhancement Academy (DfLTEA), the project was given support by the Higher Education Academy, including a programme of events designed to facilitate the success of the selected projects.

After attending an initial ‘team leaders’ meeting’, my first task was to create a team. Immediately, it seemed crucial to include two highly successful graduates of the degree who were now teaching at the college. They were both ‘unconventional/ non-traditional’ HE students, in that they had a wealth of life experience (one was a published author and prolific blogger; one had studied at an American university for a year and had two young children), but did not have a standard set of entry qualifications. They therefore both had an understanding of issues that might face a new undergraduate at the college. The team also included a first year mature student; a member of the college Learning Resources Centre team; an experienced adult learning representative and member of JISC RSC-NW; and the e-learning advisor from the HEA English Subject Centre.

One of our first tasks was to establish a common understanding of what we wanted to achieve. To establish what we meant by this, we produced a ‘rich picture’, and from the process of producing it, we developed a set of principles underlying our ambitions.

or dependent others. People joining the BA English programme study English Language, English Literature, and Creative Writing. Depending on their route into the degree, students often have little or no experience of one or more of these aspects. For example, a student coming through the college provision of A levels would not have been able to take a straight A level in English Literature, since this course was cut at the college in 2008; while others might be admitted with qualifications from several years ago or in related but different subjects. The majority of students would identify as ‘mature’, many returning to study after having families or having worked in a range of jobs.

Second, the degree programme is highly successful in terms of retention and achievement: given students’ often unconventional entry qualifications, their academic achievement can be quite remarkable. They often comment that the course has ‘completely changed their lives’, not just in terms of career, but also outlook, self-confidence, and attitude – they develop a ‘thirst for learning’, and for some the course results in the break-up of what turn out to be unsatisfactory long-term relationships. To a large extent, we seemed to be doing something right, and students who would never otherwise achieve a degree because of personal circumstances were able to succeed and move into new careers. There were therefore aspects of the current student experience to be harnessed and built on; but there were also issues relating to academic writing and scholarship which needed addressing.

As a part of the Discipline-focused Learning Technology Enhancement Academy (DfLTEA), the project was given support by the Higher Education Academy, including a programme of events designed to facilitate the success of the selected projects.

After attending an initial ‘team leaders’ meeting’, my first task was to create a team. Immediately, it seemed crucial to include two highly successful graduates of the degree who were now teaching at the college. They were both ‘unconventional/ non-traditional’ HE students, in that they had a wealth of life experience (one was a published author and prolific blogger; one had studied at an American university for a year and had two young children), but did not have a standard set of entry qualifications. They therefore both had an understanding of issues that might face a new undergraduate at the college. The team also included a first year mature student; a member of the college Learning Resources Centre team; an experienced adult learning representative and member of JISC RSC-NW; and the e-learning advisor from the HEA English Subject Centre.

One of our first tasks was to establish a common understanding of what we wanted to achieve. To establish what we meant by this, we produced a ‘rich picture’, and from the process of producing it, we developed a set of principles underlying our ambitions.

Principles underpinning the project

Culture: we aim to create a culture wherein academic study and discourse is encouraged and promoted; where creativity is appreciated, and identity as a group of like-minded people is enhanced.

Community: we will encourage working together at all levels, in communities of practice, including student study groups, a local poetry society already established by college students, events in the college and in the wider community. The web pages will be open to guest users who will be invited to join the community of Blackpool & The Fylde College students.

Independence: the project aims to encourage students to be independent learners and thinkers. Through carefully structured support and scaffolding, we will encourage students to support themselves and one another.
Creative Pedagogies

terms of media (digital or otherwise). The diary pages were demarcated into ‘college day’ entries and ‘non-college day’ entries.

Findings

This method proved successful in terms of engagement from students with the discussion at hand. However, there were also some pitfalls in using this less formal, and more student-led research approach. Because of the ambiguous language that informs current technologies, learners responded in their own words both in the tablecloth annotations and on the diary pages. As a consequence this did cause some potential confusion between software and hardware and technologies and implementation. For example, the word ‘text’ could be used to refer to SMS messaging, or reading course-related materials. Therefore, where there was no contextualisation, judgement calls had to be made by the team when collating the information.

Nevertheless, for the most part, information gathered during the liquid café event proved immensely valuable to the design of the transition resources. Although we did not ask students to put their names on the diary pages, we did offer them the opportunity to provide information such as age range, gender and level of study, which afforded us the possibility of breaking down information demographically. The most interesting point to be gleaned from this was that our students ranged in age from 16 to 65, and that their media practices were eclectic and diverse. However, our main focus at this stage in the project was to ascertain the preferred technologies overall. Our findings from the pro-forma diary pages are expressed in the following pie chart, which records the collective frequency with which differing technologies or media occurred.

As is evident, communication technologies, such as social networking sites, e-mail and text messaging figured heavily within the findings, as did mobile phones and books. There are some discrepancies, as already mentioned, where overlap within these categories is inevitable. Words like ‘internet’, ‘computer’ and ‘websites’ have all been somewhat interchangeable, while it also needs to be remembered that current mobile communications can access the internet, without involving a computer.

Further to this, conversations recorded on the tablecloths with respect to different technologies and media included comments such as the following:

**YouTube:** ‘Good for speeches.’
‘Helps read better.’
‘Seeing how it’s meant to be.’
‘Took clip off YouTube for presentation.’

**Books:** ‘More reliable.’
‘Can’t trust websites.’
‘Lay books out.’
‘Bibliography look better.’

**Facebook:** ‘Takes all your time.’
‘Causes trouble.’
‘When you’re meant to be working it’s a distraction.’
‘Use Facebook to communicate with other students about college.’
‘Join groups for causes.’
‘Would never learn from it, don’t think of it in that way.’

**Moodle:** ‘Never use it.’
‘Don’t know how to put work on there.’
‘Teacher tells you to go on it but then there’s nothing there.’
‘Been on – no useful info.’
‘Couldn’t access saved work on student profile.’
‘Never logged on from home.’
‘Good if teachers put class notes on.’
‘Always use Moodle for remote file access.’

**Miscellaneous comments:**
‘Everybody is assumed to be computer literate.’
‘TV, Dave, Sky Sports.
FX, HD, Documentaries, history. Great for ideas.’
‘I like Wikipedia, useful for references.’
‘Reading off screen a strain.’

In addition, responses to some of the discussion points facilitated by team members such as, ‘What do you feel would be useful to your learning?’ included comments such as:

‘Forums on Moodle – topic discussion – one week introduced by tutor – on topical subject – English (not assessed).’
‘Quizzes: online, assess progress as group.’
‘Examples of good commentaries / good essays to access in Moodle.’
‘Audio versions of set texts to download and subject discussion from experts.’
‘Multiple choice questions on Moodle.’
‘Library access to more books.’
‘Reading list prior to start of course to be put on Moodle.’
‘Student blog on Moodle.’
‘Access to JSTOR.’
‘More books. More online resources.’
‘Analysis of peers’ work – everyone writes something. Each week everyone analyses one piece.’
Acknowledgements

Thanks in particular to Michelle Hayward and Ashley Lister, who have worked tirelessly on this project, and who have contributed to the writing of this article.

References


The resources

These findings informed the ways in which we proceeded with devising the resources. Most significantly, it made us consider oral and aural aspects of media, as well as moving images, colour, clear and relevant representation, social participation; but also to incorporate more traditional references to academic articles, books, etc. The findings indicated that students were not wholly positive about Moodle, the college virtual learning environment, and this gave support to our initial plan to make the materials available as a publically accessible website - as a kind of gateway to the study of HE English at the college.

The resources we have now devised are divided into English Literature, English Language and Creative Writing, with additional resources on Academic Writing, including referencing, grammar, punctuation, and essay-writing. They are intended to have a dual purpose: as introductions to the different areas of English for prospective students; and as supplementary, consolidating, or revision materials for current students. The resources are interactive in so far as participants are invited to complete activities on- and off-screen, and to compare their responses to ours. We have tried to give the resources a ‘local’ flavour, in keeping with our principle of promoting an academic identity for our students who are predominantly from the local area. So, for example, the language activities - covering a whole range of topics including phonology, graphology, morphology, semantics - are largely centred around a poem ‘The Sea’ by John Siddique, which is specifically about Blackpool. The creative writing section invites students to use as inspiration photographs of ‘Old Blackpool’, provided with permission from the Local and Family History Centre at Blackpool Central Library, or to write a ballad in the style of ‘Albert and The Lion’, which also has a local setting. Following feedback from our students who are new to literature, the English Literature section includes a timeline to provide an overview of English poetry, and an analysis of Browning’s ‘Meeting at Night’ and ‘Parting at Morning’, keeping the theme of the sea. Overall, each set of resources is – we believe, and our student guinea-pigs agree – innovative, engaging, and accessible.

I would love to say, ‘Come in and have a look’ – but they are not quite yet available to a wider audience. If you are interested in seeing the resources once they are freely accessible, please contact Candice Satchwell on CSA@blackpool.ac.uk. We hope they will be of benefit to the English community at large, as well as to the students for whom they are specifically designed.
Feedback from the Subject Centre’s annual Workshop for Early Career Lecturers shows that participants value it as complementary to the institutional programmes they attend because it is attuned to the specific teaching practices of the discipline. Part of that discipline-specific experience has been achieved by working through a series of carefully paced pre-workshop activities delivered through our Virtual Learning Environment (Virtue) over the four weeks prior to the two-day event. These activities involve the careful modelling of situations participants themselves might design into their own courses and they include communicative tasks delivered through a discussion forum, peer review of videoclips of real ‘teaching situations’ and reflective activities on current thinking and practice regarding the pedagogy of English and Creative Writing.

The success of these activities in encouraging course participants to reflect on their pedagogy prior to the workshop got us thinking about how we might expand the of learning materials, to make them more widely available and useable independently of tutor-led facilitation. A funding opportunity provided by the JISC and Higher Education Academy under their Open Educational Resources (OER) call was an appropriate moment to take our ideas forward. We have called our collection of resources ‘The Pool’. 

*Worlds can be found by a child and an adult bending down and looking together under the grass stems or at the skittering crabs in a tidal pool.*

Mary Catherine Bateson
What do the learning materials consist of?
There are six different themes within ‘The Pool’:
• Subject and Learning
• Course Design
• Assessment
• Small Group Teaching
• Large Group Teaching
• Online Teaching
Each theme then consists of at least six different resources. These resources contain the individual and group activities. Subject Centre staff have provided guidance for ways you might want to use the resources or do the activities but you are free to edit, delete, add to and copy the resources any way you please. All the activities in ‘The Pool’ are designed to focus ideas about the six areas of activity outlined in the Professional Standards Framework (http://tinyurl.com/2ur4t59) which make it particularly useful to users on (or teaching) accredited courses such as a PGCHE.

Content for the learning materials has been gathered over the last academic year. Subject Centre staff have been busy filming lectures, seminars and workshops in English departments. We have also been filming interviews with academic staff and combing through the extensive resources on our own website to unearth the treasures that might benefit from a wider airing in resources such as this and repackaging them appropriately. The activities have all been reviewed by external teaching professionals and subject practitioners.

Anatomy of a unit
Let’s take a closer look at one of the themes in ‘The Pool’ that we have called ‘The Subject & Pedagogy’. The overall learning objective for resources in this theme is to invite users to think in systematic ways about the implications of their subject for the business of teaching both in the day-to-day and in the longer term. There are activities which involve using the English and Creative Writing Benchmark Statements to reflect on the challenges the subject faces and the strategies and approaches one might take to overcome them in course design and development. There are also writing tasks that can help users to experience different pedagogical approaches and to discover new ways of thinking about the way the subject is taught, and activities focussed on the keeping of teaching journals.

How will I be able to access the materials?
For the last six years the Subject Centre has run its own VLE called Virtue which runs on a Moodle platform. We have created the resources for ‘The Pool’ in Virtue and you can access them there by creating your own account and using the course access key ‘poolmaster’. All the activities can be downloaded from Virtue if you wish. The entire collection of materials from Virtue (not just ‘The Pool’) have also been uploaded to HumBox and, in turn, you can upload any of these materials to your own VLE if it takes SCORM compliant formats (most do nowadays). We have also uploaded all the materials individually into HumBox and set up collections for every theme. Browse for the themes in the bulleted list above or do a text search on ‘The Pool’. With availability across so many different platforms there is no excuse not to dive in and have a look around ‘The Pool’.

The future
Now that the resources are available for you all to use we hope that a community of users will emerge. The HumBox website gives users the opportunity to leave feedback about usage and even permits registered users the opportunity to upload their modified versions of our original work.

We certainly hope that learning resources developed for English studies might be suitable for integration into institutionally accredited programmes (e.g. PGCHE) or be of use to course teams (to stimulate thinking about curriculum design), to Subject leaders (to open up thinking about pedagogical issues in staff meetings) or to individual practitioners looking for new ideas or a fresh approach.

Why OER?
English has been well represented in OER projects: partnered with colleagues in other humanities Subject Centres to produce the successful HumBox collection of learning materials, a collection that is still growing and which is soon to re-launch with some new features. (www.humbox.ac.uk). The key advantage of making the resources ‘open’ is that they are made freely available under Creative Commons licences allowing you to use, modify, or just be inspired by them for your own professional development or the development of your staff. Putting the resources into open collections such as ‘The Pool’ also increases their visibility and audience.

Acknowledgements
To all those colleagues who have allowed us in to watch their classes, been interviewed or agreed to share their learning materials we extend a huge thanks!
www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/virtue/
Congratulations to Cila Warnke, a Creative Writing MA student in the Department of English at the University of Glasgow, who won our 2011 student competition.

Cila wrote the best essay submitted by a Creative Writing, English or English literature student. You can read her essay below followed by the second place essay written by Robert Yeates. Robert is a fourth year student on the English and American Studies degree at the University of Leicester. They each won £300 and £200 pounds respectively in gift vouchers. The competition is an annual Higher Education Academy event.
What do English or Creative Writing have to say to an age of austerity?

WINNER
Cila Warnke, University of Glasgow

When the recession first bared its teeth a literary friend of mine was blasé. Writers are used to being poor, she said, what’s new? She was right. The age of austerity is simply the rest of the world getting a glimpse of life as lived by “lifetime English majors” (as Buddy Glass called us) and creative writers since – oh – just about forever. Writers ranging from George Orwell to Hunter S Thompson, Oscar Wilde to Mavis Gallant, have lived in – and written some of their most exquisite, lacerating prose on the subject of – abject poverty.

You will have to have another job, Italian novelist and poet Natalia Ginzburg noted matter-of-factly in her essay, My Vocation, a love-letter to the art of creative writing. Few writers are fortunate enough to be able to prove her wrong. Even when times were good for the rest of the world: when hedge funds grew into dense money-thickets and credit was easy, when house prices rose and investment portfolios swelled with promise, writers shared little of the bounty. There were – and are – exceptions, of course. Some writers sell enough to buy a house in the country, a few nab movie deals, or churn out novels regularly enough to enjoy life in a certain style. Once in a while, a six-figure publishing deal makes headlines. For most, though, the act of writing, even for publication, is so remote from any prospect of financial reward as to render money virtually meaningless. The best advice I can give you, a literary agent told my course-mates and I, is to marry someone with money. She was only half joking.

Writers take for granted that talent, education and dedication do not necessarily lead to material success. This particular reality has come as an ice-water shock, however, to those who followed the beaten path from A-levels to university assuming it would lead them right into a secure job in their chosen field. During the boom years this progression seemed irrefutable; like two-plus-two equalling four. All you had to do, in order to have a comfortable life, was learn something useful like business, banking, marketing, or management, and then sashay into a comfortable office, regular paid holidays and the eventual promise of a respectable three-bedroom semi somewhere on the commuter belt. When there were plenty of well-paid jobs available choosing to pursue English or creative writing was seen as at best frivolous, and at worst a dangerous brand of stubborn, self-defeating stupidity.

Writers, like other artists, were asked: “Why don’t you get a proper job?” Now, there is no such thing as a “proper job”. Graduate unemployment is at a record high and it isn’t just humanities students who can’t find jobs. According to the BBC more electrical engineers are unemployed than are modern languages graduates, and fine arts is no worse a course, in terms of employment potential, than economics or civil engineering (1/11/10). The promise of the proper job turns out to be hollow.

Because English students and writers have never really participated in the collective fantasy of eternal satisfaction through consumption we are uniquely placed to help our stunned compatriots make necessary adjustments. Creative writers and English students don’t make calculations based on salary packages; we choose differently. We don’t talk about how much money we will be earning in five years, but about the novel we’re writing, our next article, or the screen-play we are going to adapt. Since we have no corporate ladder to climb, no water-cooler politicking to do, we spend our time reading, writing blogs, publishing journals, running workshops or teaching. We define ourselves by what we create in a world where the phrase “creative type” is commonly used as a pejorative. Compelled to question the petty orthodoxies about what we should or shouldn’t do with our lives, creative writers develop the habit of asking questions, of deciding for ourselves – day by day – who we are and how we want to live. “Freedom is a choice,” Hunter Thompson said, “You decide who you are by what you do.” Because writers have typically fallen outside of society’s casual assumptions about money and success we have learned the art of self-definition.

Writers have valuable truths to share in an age of austerity. We can encourage people to stop chasing illusive financial gains and focus on building a life around work they love. We are here to testify that creative work is a vital and satisfying life choice, not a privilege of rich dilettantes. Most of all, writers are proof that poverty is not fatal. We know from experience that there are many ways to take the sting out of a scant bank balance. Our leisure time is different: most writers don’t spend Saturday afternoons shopping, or own the latest flat-screen TV. Instead of going to restaurants we have friends round for dinner. We cultivate gardens, learn to sew or cook, take the time to bake home-made Christmas treats or make our own marmalade. We are familiar with frugality, with library cards, discount vouchers, charity shops, battered trainers and hand-made gifts. Rather than feel deprived, writers and “lifetime English majors” embrace the challenge of freedom and creativity, and can help show society that there is more to life than scrambling up the property ladder, or wearing the latest fashion. As Henry David Thoreau, a writer who knew a great deal about austerity, so beautifully articulated: “It is life nearest the bone where it is sweetest…. Superfluous wealth can buy superfluities only. Money is not required to buy one necessary of the soul.”

References
“Graduate Unemployment “at a 17-year high”’, BBC News, 1 Nov 2010 www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-11652845
What do English or Creative Writing have to say to an age of austerity?

RUNNER-UP
Robert Yeates,
University of Leicester

A fierce battle is being waged at the moment over the future of the humanities, as budget cut-backs in higher education squeeze departments whose practical contributions to society are seen as less apparent. In the face of this squeeze, the futures of many departments seem at risk, sparking debate over how we can adequately justify study of the humanities, when the sciences and other areas are also in dire need of funding. English and Creative Writing each have their respective problems in the face of such debate. English departments in higher education establishments in the United Kingdom are often one of the largest of the humanities departments. As a result of this, they need more than most to offer a strong defence of their value to the institution and to society as a whole. The comparatively young Creative Writing courses, on the other hand, face an early extinction in the face of cut-backs in the humanities, still being seen by many to be esoteric, unpractical, and even as attempting to teach something that cannot be taught. The value of the humanities has long been more difficult to measure than other areas, and so justifications of the study of English and Creative Writing have taken several forms.

Perhaps the most frequently raised defence is the idea that the study of English and Creative Writing enrich our society, enhancing British culture, enabling us to become more aware of our own and each others’ humanity. Despite the dismissal of such ideas by literary theorist Stanley Fish, who sees them as merely insincere and parroted rhetoric, they underlie much of contemporary debate about the humanities as a whole (Fish 2010). Indeed, the feeling among humanities students on university campuses seems to be that the work done in our departments contributes vitally to the richness of our culture, and improves our understanding and awareness of ourselves as a nation, and of the world as a whole. The interdisciplinary nature of the study of English, for instance, encompasses issues of race, gender, colonialism, history, psychoanalysis, and many other fields. The impact of the study of English is therefore extremely difficult to measure, as it permeates many academic areas, and cannot be merely viewed in isolation. The ability of English and Creative Writing courses to enrich society ought to make them all the more necessary in an age of austerity, when societies are under the great strain of financial hardship, and yet many still see the humanities as weakened by lacking the practical application of other areas of study. The notion that the well-rounded graduates of the humanities are favoured by employers may in fact be something of a myth, and is certainly rarely believed by higher education applicants. Nonetheless, the over-subscription of supposed ‘practical’ fields, forensic science being a prominent example, has left many prospective higher education applicants leaning towards subject areas in which they have a personal interest, rather than a career interest. Particularly when faced with vast student debt many students have preferred to choose a subject that addresses their passions, and English and Creative Writing are vital examples. Kate Soper, speaking at last year’s Why Humanities? conference, stresses that in a ‘post-consumerist era’ we should be placing an even greater focus than ever on the expansion of leisure via education in the humanities, something which can strongly enable a flourishing society (Soper 2010).

Perhaps in an age of austerity, therefore, English and Creative Writing ought to be receiving a greater focus than ever, if only for our society’s emotional well-being.

The obvious flaw with this argument, however, is that we do not need academic study to appreciate the humanities – if English died out in higher education, Stratford-Upon-Avon would not cease to mount well-attended productions of Hamlet. Perhaps, then, as Fish writes, we should not be asking what English and Creative Writing can offer society. In fact, if we take a utilitarian approach, the benefits of such programs can be seen as minimal at best. Instead, what we ought to be asking, as Stanley Fish suggests, is how English and Creative Writing programs fit into our image of what we want our educational establishments to be. Whether or not their goals intersect with the goals of the rest of society, it is these programs’ insights and style of analysis and teaching that enrich academic study as a whole, and that complement other fields of study and inquiry.

The pecuniary benefits of the study of English and Creative Writing, or even smaller areas such as Latin or Russian Literature might appear slim, but it is not their pecuniary benefits that inspired their creation. The line of distinction should be drawn between those departments that need to operate as training centres for prospective workers, and those which focus on in-depth study and analysis. As Fish writes, the university’s ‘conventions of inquiry are not answerable to the demands we rightly make of industry’ (Fish 2010). If we are to have universities, rather than trade schools alone, we must be willing to accept them as ‘whole universities,’ with each field and department as integral to its existence and functioning as another.

The bottom line seems to be at the very least English and Creative Writing have become a part of the tapestry of higher education, and elements whose contribution to education are impossible to quantify. In an age of austerity, a focus on the humanities in general ought to be seen as a way of enriching and enlivening a culture hindered by pecuniary restraints, rather than an area that can be pruned back to meet budgeting demands elsewhere. Moreover, if we value our educational establishments and want to justify the rising costs of tuition we should be taking the universities as they are, as their own entities with their own histories, ideals and projects, rather than asking them to conform to profit-centred business models. What English and Creative Writing have to say to us then, is as much as any other department to profit-centred business models. What English and Creative Writing have become a part of the tapestry of higher education, and elements whose contribution to education are impossible to quantify.

References

Teaching, Texting, Twittering Obama

September 2010

Manchester Metropolitan University’s Department of English hosted the UK’s first interdisciplinary Conference devoted to Barack Obama’s life and work.

Liz Losh’s lively interactive contribution to the pedagogy strand of the conference addressed the substantial pedagogical possibilities and challenges posed by Barack Obama’s succession to the American presidency. As director of the culture, art, and technology program at the University of California (San Diego), Liz studies the role of institutions as digital content creators, teaches digital rhetoric and poetics, and explores both the discourses of the “virtual state” and the media literacy of policy makers and authority figures. Our session, bringing together academics and postgraduates engaged variously by the practice of ‘teaching Obama’ began with an assessment of the different ways in which Obama appears as a subject across a variety of disciplines including English and Cultural studies, Politics, History, Media Studies. Delegates discussed the current ways in which Obama’s life and work appears on university curricula. Neil Foxlee, for example, considered the ways in which Obama’s speeches are critical in explicating the ‘art’ of rhetoric (on the first MA in Rhetoric in the UK). Julie Mullaney, Nicole King and others explored how Obama’s life writing, including Dreams from My Father and The Audacity of Hope, lends itself variously to explication of discourses of genre, race, class, multiculturalism in a variety of disciplines.

Liz went on to explore the impact and possible uses of a wider archive of Obama-related material including the White House’s own online archives, web logs (blogs), the outputs of fan communities around Obama (fan vids) examining a variety of representations and responses (‘mash ups’) to the Obama presidency. In doing so, Liz also posed a series of questions about current assumptions relating to student understanding of digital literacy and etiquette. She examined the necessity of developing programmes that develop students’ awareness not just of digital literacy but also of the ramifications of burgeoning forms of online regulation and control which might include the challenges posed to privacy and property by the forms of ‘data mining’ enacted by Google and Facebook.

In explicating her own use of Obama-related materials across a variety of disciplines, Liz explored the protocols that mark out ‘digital storytelling’ as a form and explored the genre signatures of ‘You Tube’ videos. She addressed the possibilities for developing different forms of student assessment and skills by enabling and equipping students to become both discerning users and creators of digital content. Here, Liz analysed how students’ creation of blogs help them to understand and develop the ‘genre’ of the blog and the different kinds of rhetorical purpose to which they can be put, as well as helping students’ and their teachers, as learners, to think critically about the idea that the internet serves as a model for ‘direct democracy’.

Julie Mullaney

Dept of English, Manchester Metropolitan University

See Liz Losh’s related article on page 32
On being a student, again!

Rosie Miles reflects of the renewing effects of becoming student while remaining a lecturer and how this nourishes her creative and critical appetites.

It’s late in the long spring term of 2011, and I’m facing that almost-the-end-of-term-but-not-quite malaise that descends on me periodically, numerous student emails about forthcoming essays, a just-about controllable sense of panic about the book I am trying to finish … and several months ahead of writing my own student assignments. In September 2009 I enrolled on part-time on an MA in Creative Writing (Poetry) at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU). In April I had my last taught class of the three-year course and already I’m in slight mourning for how quickly it’s gone.

I had known about MMU’s Writing School for some years prior to signing up and as an aspiring poet was very attracted to their Poetry MA for several reasons. First, the calibre of poets who teach on the course was a great draw, including Carol Ann Duffy (who became Poet Laureate just after my interview), Simon Armitage, Michael Symmons Roberts and Jean Sprackland. Second, I sensed that putting myself in the way of the structure of a course could be generatively good for my poetry, having benefitted from local writing courses in the past.

The actual impetus to sign up for an MA on top of carrying on with my academic job came in 2008 when I was ill and off work for nine months. I’m not saying that either being ill or off work are necessary in order to effect a significant decision of this sort, but I certainly had some time to do some thinking. The day I returned to work, I asked whether I could negotiate a reduction in my contract for a period in order to do the MA. My university, to its credit, was fully supportive. We made an arrangement that worked for both sides and I got myself a place on the course.

The student experience

I quite like being a student. I spent most of my twenties as one, and in that sense ‘being a student’ has played a not insignificant part in my sense of self. From the perspective of now being on the other side of the desk, being a student once more offers many of the good things about being at university with comparatively less of the responsibilities. Of course, there are responsibilities, and we all know what they are, but my MA course has offered a context in which, at best, I can push myself as a writer and flourish creatively.
MMU’s Creative Writing MAs are available via online distance learning as well as via face-to-face delivery. Some of you reading this may know my work in E-Learning and English Studies and so perhaps the online route might have seemed attractive to me. However, part of my desire to negotiate down my teaching commitments was precisely so I would have the time to be able to travel up to Manchester each week from Birmingham for classes. Michael Symmons Roberts has written eloquently of how online chat rooms can be very effective in the teaching and discussion of poetry but I was never actually going to be persuaded that this was how I wanted to do the course. I am, however, curious to know what discussing each other’s poem drafts is like in a real-time chatroom (something I’ve never used in my own teaching), and I’m still hoping to be allowed to ‘gatecrash’ (officially, of course) one of the online sessions one week so I can see how it functions. I’ve enjoyed some of the unexpected opportunities that doing the MA has afforded, including collaborating with a student composer from the next-door Royal Northern College of Music for the annual Rosamond Prize and having a poem of mine thus set to music and performed by a singer and pianist in a prize-awarding recital.

Working with writers

One of the great draws for me to this MA was the possibility of having workshops with Carol Ann Duffy. Whilst I’m not young enough to be of the generation of students who have grown up with Duffy’s work appearing on GCSE and A-Level syllabi, her work has been part of my poetic landscape for many years. So a term of workshops with her last autumn was a great privilege. I still can’t quite believe that, for instance, a poem that I brought to our very first workshop was ‘my poems’. I’ve enjoyed some of the unexpected opportunities that doing the MA has afforded, including collaborating with a student composer from the next-door Royal Northern College of Music for the annual Rosamond Prize and having a poem of mine thus set to music and performed by a singer and pianist in a prize-awarding recital.

Perhaps what is most valuable to me is the sense of being part of a writing community that doing a Creative Writing MA can offer. Everyone at MMU’s Writing School is there because they want to improve as a writer. What we may want to do with our writing and our ultimate aims and ambitions for it may differ, but we are all there to be challenged and encouraged by each other’s work and talents, and to learn more about the particular traditions of the writing medium we have chosen to pursue. There’s no doubt that I’m going to come out the other end of the MA far more informed about twentieth century poetry and with a much greater sense of what it means to ‘get serious’ about being a poet in the twenty-first century.

New models of teaching

Poets’ views of Creative Writing courses differ. Following a US model it is the case that Creative Writing courses have been a boom business in English and Humanities departments in the last ten years. Seamus Heaney has said that ‘All the writing schools exist to promote competence, adequacy, and a late-20th-century version of good taste. What is promoted is a kind of consensus about what things should be’. This measured, but faintly damning idea that university courses somehow iron out the rough edges of talent to some kind of homogenised middle ground cropse up several times in Denis O’Driscoll’s selection of poetry quotes on workshops. Peter Davison comments on it from the poet tutor’s angle:

We have made the writing of poetry an official subject on university campuses and have gone so far as to endow poets with legitimate careers at public expense, including salaries, health insurance, tenure, pensions, and faculty meetings. (That, dear friends, is a big change. Picture Keats or Rilke or Whitman at a faculty meeting.)

Less cynically, Eavan Boland writes that ‘A good workshop … can bring a writer to a state of crisis in relation to his or her own being a student again myself has also made me more sympathetic to some of the pressures on my own students.'
Creative Pedagogies

What do I Learn?

A simplified Benchmark Statement for students and their parents

Jane Gawthrope, English Subject Centre

The English Subject Benchmark, first published in 2000 and revised in 2007, is a familiar feature of the landscape of HE English. [It can be found on the QAA website at www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/statements/English07.asp] It was the starting point for the development of a similar document by the Creative Writing community [www.nawe.co.uk/writing-in-education/writing-at-university/research.html]; the English Language community is currently working on its own document. The English Benchmark Statement, like those for other disciplines, was however written for an academic audience. Its preface opens:

Subject benchmark statements provide a means for the academic community to describe the nature and characteristics of programmes in a specific subject or subject area. They also represent general expectations about standards for the award of qualifications at a given level in terms of the attributes and capabilities that those possessing qualifications should have demonstrated. [my italics]

In the current fees climate however it is not only the academic community who are interested in the ‘attributes and capabilities that those possessing qualifications should have demonstrated’. Potential students, their parents and students approaching graduation or recently graduated are also curious about how studying English contributes to their intellectual development and ultimately their employment prospects.

The English Subject Centre identified a need for a clear statement of the knowledge and skills to be gained by studying English for use with a non-academic audience. The English Benchmark was written for academics and is therefore necessarily detailed in content and sophisticated in the language it uses. The simpler version presented below was written for an audience of potential students and their parents as well as for graduates to draw on in interactions with employers. It has been added to the Why Study English? website and we are happy for it to be used, amended as required, at open days and as a tool to encourage graduating students to think about what they have to offer. We believe this document will be all the more useful for parents and potential students if individual departments and programmes tailored it to their local context. For instance, you might add an example of a learning activity or piece of curriculum content to each of the points in the simplified Benchmark Statement to give your audience a sense of what English is like in your department.

Although much of the subtlety of the original has been lost, it is hoped that this simplified Benchmark conveys the key points in a way that is accessible to those not immersed in the discipline.
The simplified Benchmark Statement

What you learn and the skills you acquire
If you are thinking about studying English at university, then you’ll naturally be interested in the knowledge and skills you will acquire in the process. Whilst there are many types of degree programme in English, each with its own characteristics and emphasis, the sorts of subject knowledge you would expect of any English graduate are set out below. (These are drawn from a more detailed and extensive document known as the English Benchmark Statement [link to www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/statements/English07.pdf]).

Subject knowledge
- knowledge of literature and language: for literature this includes a substantial number of authors and texts from different historical periods. For single honours literature students this is likely to include pre-1800 texts; for single honours language students this will include a broad knowledge of the history and development of the English language.
- knowledge and understanding of the distinctive character of texts written in the principal literary genres, fiction, poetry and drama, and of other kinds of writing and communication
- experience of regional and global English
- knowledge of the structure, levels and discourse functions of the English language
- appreciation of the power of imagination in literary creation
- awareness of the role of critical traditions in shaping literary history
- knowledge of linguistic, literary, cultural and socio-historical contexts in which literature is written and read
- knowledge of the relationship between literature and other media such as film
- knowledge of useful and precise critical terminology and, where appropriate, linguistic and stylistic terminology
- awareness of the range and variety of approaches to literary study, which may include creative practice, performance, and specialisation in critical and/or linguistic theory
- awareness of how literature and language produce and reflect cultural change and difference

Subject-specific skills
English graduates acquire a range of complementary literary, linguistic and critical skills, although the particular abilities and skills you acquire will of course depend on the course and modules you choose. The following sets out in general terms the sorts of subject-specific skills you will acquire from studying English literature or language.
- Skills in the detailed, balanced and rigorous examination of texts or spoken language and the ability to articulate this knowledge and understanding to others
- Sensitivity to how communication is shaped by circumstances, authorship and intended audience
- Sensitivity to the power of language and its role in creating meaning: an ability to go beyond the surface level of words and to discover hidden or intended meanings
- A broad vocabulary and ability to use critical terminology appropriately
- Skills in the accurate and appropriate presentation of academic work
- Awareness of how different social and cultural contexts affect the nature of language and meaning and influence questions of judgement
- Appreciation of the complexity of literary languages and how research can help understand them

Generic graduate skills
The key transferable skills which English graduates possess, and which make them attractive to employers, are:
- Oral and written skills in effective communication and argument
- The ability to analyse and critically examine diverse forms of communication
- The ability to plan, negotiate and carry out individual and group projects and presentations and to do so to deadlines
- The capacity for independent thought, reflection and judgement
- The ability to comprehend and develop intricate ideas, apply a variety of theoretical positions and weigh the importance of alternative perspectives
- A working sense of the nuances and ambiguities of words and symbols
- Research skills, including the ability to gather, sift and organise quantities of diverse material and evaluate its significance
- IT skills, especially the ability to work with and evaluate electronic resources and communication (such as hypertext, conferencing, e-publishing, blogs and wikis)
Book Reviews

www.janeausten.co.uk

Issues in textual criticism do not usually feature in national newspapers, but www.janeausten.ac.uk is an exception. In October 2010, a press release from Oxford University to publicise the site and the project behind it caused a flurry of comment in the mainstream press. ‘Blots, crossings-out and bad grammar’ (Independent); ‘Pride, prejudice and poor punctuation’ (Guardian) and, from the Daily Mail, ‘How Jane Austen failed at spelling’ were typical responses.

Leaving aside the question of how Austen would have done in GCSE English Language, the site offers a fascinating teaching resource. It is not that there is anything completely new in it: the 1100 pages of manuscript brought together online are all material which is already known: the juvenilia, including the glorious Love and Freindship, the ‘Plan of a Novel’, the cancelled chapter of Persuasion and Lady Susan, The Watsons and Sanditon. All of these have been in print at least since volume 6 of Chapman’s edition of Austen (1954), and much of the material has been published by Penguin, World’s Classics and others. Neither does the site resolve the question of how close any of Austen’s manuscripts is to the fair copy which went to the publisher. Professor Sutherland’s research has convincingly identified William Gifford as an interventionist editor who worked on the MSS of Austen’s later novels to fit them for print, but until a fair copy turns up, there is no smoking gun.

What is new about the site is that it gives a vivid demonstration of Austen’s mind at work. The site gives a split-screen view of the material, with the manuscript on one side and the diplomatic transcription on the other. The transcription includes all deletions and substitutions, and is faithful to Austen’s spelling, her underlinings, capitalisation, paragraphing and punctuation. It is exciting to be able to work with Austen’s writing in this way; the transcript + manuscript view makes textual intervention and transcription on screen with Austen’s legible and pleasant handwriting gives a frisson of authorial presence too.

The site offers ways in to some very big questions as well as local ones. Austen’s punctuation in her MSS has had a lot of comment, the transcription on screen with Austen’s legible and pleasant handwriting gives a frisson of authorial presence too.

The site offers ways in to some very big questions as well as local ones. Austen’s punctuation in her MSS has had a lot of comment, and the transcription on screen with Austen’s legible and pleasant handwriting gives a frisson of authorial presence too.

The Watsons
Lady Susan
Sanditon
The Dual Voice


2 The most substantial discussion of this is Patricia Howell Michaelson, Speaking Volumes: Women, Reading and Speech in the Age of Austen (Stanford UP, Stanford, CA 2002). Michaelson’s specific discussion of Austen is, however, marred by some mistaken assumptions and very selective use of evidence.

3 There were a number of later C18 books which theorised English in spoken terms: Thomas Sheridan, A Rhetorical Grammar of the English Language [1781] (Scolar Press, Menston, 1969) and John Walker, A Rhetorical Grammar [1785] (Scolar Press, Menston, 1971) are two examples. Before them, Joshua Steele, An Essay Towards Establishing the Melody and Measure of Speech [1775] (Scolar Press, Menston, 1969) had produced a scheme for printing language on an elaborated version of the musical stave.

4 Sutherland’s earlier work sees Austen’s writing as in tension between aural and printed modes. see Kathryn Sutherland, Jane Austen’s Textual Lives (Oxford UP, Oxford 2005)

5 There is a brief discussion of this possibility in Roy Pascal, The Dual Voice (Manchester UP, Manchester 1977), Pascal comments (p.137) that PID may be rooted in ‘mimicy’.
Conference Report: Environmental Change – Cultural Change
1-4 September 2010

The HEA English Subject Centre contributed to the success of a major international conference at the University of Bath on environmental literature and education. The conference, entitled Environmental Change – Cultural Change (1-4 September) brought together international experts to discuss how perceptions of the environment and our relationship with it are framed and represented, where our values and expectations come from, and what part literature and the arts can play in environmental education.

Professor Axel Goodbody (University of Bath) and Dr Greg Garrard (Bath Spa University) co-organised the event as a joint conference of ASLE-UK and EASLCE, the British and European affiliates of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE).

It was the largest ecocritical conference held outside the US so far, involving nearly 130 papers given by delegates from the UK, Europe, N. America and the Far East. Ecocriticism is the study of how our relationship with the natural environment is reflected in literature, film and the arts, and how they shape it in turn. It emerged in North America 20 years ago, as a thematically focused approach to literature and culture comparable to Feminism and Postcolonialism (complementing their study of the cultural dimension of gender and ethnic relations with a focus on the environment).

The conference was an occasion for ecocritics working in and across different languages and cultures to exchange experiences and findings. At the same time, it was an interdisciplinary gathering, bringing literary scholars together with colleagues working in environmental education, history, and communication.

The education strand at the conference was supported by the English Subject Centre. It began with a day-long Pre-Conference Workshop “Integrating Sustainability Across the Curriculum” held on the Bath Spa University campus. Workshop leaders Sherry Booth and John Farnsworth from Santa Clara University, California, spoke about their work in sustainability education and the Sustainable Living Undergraduate Research Project (SLURP) which they lead there. The rest of the day focused on ways to develop curriculum-change programs around sustainability at the participants’ universities.

Professor Sidney Dobrin (University of Florida) gave a plenary paper “Toward Complex Environmental Visual Literacies”, in which he discussed the famous ‘Earthrise’ photo of the blue planet taken during the Apollo 8 mission in 1968, and called for greater attention to be given to the role of screen culture in both ecocritical work and environmental activism. He argued that knowledge of digital technologies, awareness of visual rhetorics, and consideration of the conditions of textual production and circulation need to be embraced more fully in ecocritical and ecocompositional studies.

A panel on “Foreign Languages, Education and the Environment” was convened by Dr Uwe Küchler (University of Halle-Wittenberg), with papers on Translation Studies in Spain, EFL Textbooks, and the relevance of ecocriticism for teaching English in Germany. Three other panels included further papers on regional landscape in Swedish environmental education, barriers and drivers to education for sustainability, aesthetic drivers of scientific paradigms, site-specific performances as a medium of environmental education in the Netherlands, creative writing and environmental activism in the United States, integrating the study of Modern Languages, Literatures, and Cultures with Environmental Studies in Southwestern University, Georgia, building a classroom as an environmental project in New Zealand, and experiencing environment and place through children’s literature.

Full details of the programme and abstracts of the papers can be seen on the conference website www.bath.ac.uk/esml/conferences/e-c-c-c/.

Greg Garrard
Bath Spa University
Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*
Every time I read it, new readings and ideas open up. The entire struggle for both individual human identity and group identification resonates throughout the book, steeped in history, myth, music, sports and architecture. Phrases just keep coming back.

**Multatuli, *Max Havelaar***
Probably the literary classic of Dutch literature. On the one hand it’s the gripping story of Dutch colonialism in Indonesia, and on the other the hilarious day-to-day small business life in Holland, told through various narrators. It was required reading on the Dutch literature reading list for exams—I’ve been a believer in compulsory reading lists ever since.

**Steve James, *Hoop Dreams*, (1994)**
Best documentary ever to come out of the US. Two 14-old boys from Chicago are followed for four years in their (and their families’) pursuit of a better life through hoops. Maybe first ‘reality’ show. It’s impossible to be an objective observer, as you want the boys to succeed so badly, while at the same time you know the film actually demonstrates exploitation on different levels.

**Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams***
An eye-opener into American culture and politics. The weird autobiographical distance, the meticulous detail, and the self-mocking tone made me always think what would have happened had Henry Adams ever become President.
Desert Island Texts

Edith Wharton, *House of Mirth*
Consumerism galore and all about being trapped, mostly by the ‘honourable’ man Selden. One of the most notorious examples of the sophisticated literary man actually as one of the most dangerous species alive.

Anne Frank, *Het Achterhuis*
Still one of the most difficult texts to read for me. The questions about the Dutch and the war, the power of autobiography, and the unavoidable feeling of guilt and sentimentialy always haunt the reading.

E.T.A. Hoffmann, *Der Sandmann.*
At the University of Cologne, I took a seminar devoted to Hoffmann. I’d always loved the magic realism of the Dutch 1920 authors, but this was something else. Horror and beauty mixed into classic bed-time tales opened up whole new realms of literary experience.

Bill Russell with Taylor Branch, *Second Wind*
Ghost-written basketball autobiography about one of the first African-American college and professional basketball players. Named athlete of the decade by The Sporting News in 1970. Written by a civil rights historian holding true to the voice of Bill Russell, the book remains very important to me as an example of intelligent sport, social commitment, and humour.

Franz Kafka, *Die Verwandlung*
Best opening sentence in all of literature (only in German, though).

Paul Beatty, *White Boy Shuffle*
A contemporary version of *Invisible Man*, set in Santa Monica and LA, mixing real history (LA Riots and the bread truck scene) with oral story-telling, music, and uncomfortable laughter, as characters write their suicide poems to find their individual voice.
As is now widely known, the Board of the Higher Education Academy (HEA) has discontinued funding of the Subject Centre Network. Although a few Subject Centres will continue with support from their host institutions, such as the Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies (LLAS) at Southampton, this marks the end of 11 years of Subject Centres, established in 2000 to provide discipline-based support for teaching and learning in UK higher education. The English Subject Centre (based at Royal Holloway, University of London) will close at the end of July. Most of the Subject Centre staff are currently seeking alternative posts, hoping to stay within the discipline or education. We would like to thank all those individuals, departments and organisations with whom it has been our privilege to collaborate. The Subject Centre has worked with and through its communities, and could not have achieved all that it has without your contributions to events, projects, networks and publications. A central principle of the Subject Centre’s modus operandi was that of enabling the subject community to share innovative teaching by creating spaces (both virtual and face-to-face) for discussion. In the coming new era of student funding, we will all need to find alternative ways of creating these spaces.

The work of the Subject Centre will be continued in several ways. We are in dialogue with the English Association, the Council for College and University English (CCUE) and the National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE) about carrying forward key aspects of our work. These include, for example, a limited number of events and the Subject Centre main website and satellite websites ‘After English’ and ‘Why Study English?’.

We are also trying to make provision for the continued availability of our printed publications. Palgrave Macmillan will continue to publish the successful ‘Teaching the New English’ book series under the general editorship of Ben Knights. We have recently created a set of open educational resources for those new to teaching or wishing to enhance their teaching practice. These resources, ‘The Pool’, will be available from July via both the Subject Centre website and HumBox (www.humbox.ac.uk): see page 40 for more information.

The HEA (based in York) intends to carry on a programme of discipline-related work, and there will be a specific post allocated to support English. As you may have seen, key programmes such as small project funding and National Teaching Fellowships will continue. We would strongly encourage the subject community to take advantage of such opportunities.

Finally, we hope that the programme of events run by the Subject Centre over the last 11 years, alongside our web and print resources, have given academics, administrative staff and students the inspiration and confidence to organise their own formal or informal occasions for sharing ideas and pressing the boundaries of innovative pedagogical practice. Wherever these occasions take place, whether through departments, regional or research-based networks, we are confident that such dispersed and independent activity will be enormously productive and empowering.

With the cessation of funding for the English Subject Centre on the 31st July 2011, the academic communities we serve must look to a new era in terms of enhancing teaching and learning. So instead of the usual ‘Last Word’ column, we have decided to use this space to let you know how the work of the English Subject Centre will carry on, albeit in different guises.

The English Subject Centre Staff

Jonathan Gibson
Academic Co-ordinator

Nicole King
Academic Co-ordinator

Jane Gawthrope
Manager

Ben Knights
Director

Rebecca Price
Administrator

Brett Lucas
Website Developer and Learning Technologist

Carolyne Wishart
Administrative Assistant

Candice Satchwell
Liaison Officer for HE in FE (not pictured)
Forthcoming...
The English Subject Centre supports all aspects of the teaching and learning of English Literature, English Language and Creative Writing in higher education in the UK. It is a Subject Centre of the Higher Education Academy.

www.heacademy.ac.uk

The English Subject Centre,
Royal Holloway, University of London
Egham TW20 0EX
T 01784 443221 • esc@rhul.ac.uk
www.english.heacademy.ac.uk