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A National Exchange Scheme for English

One of the prime responsibilities of the Subject Centre is to 'spread good practice', a term which is so familiar to us all that it has become a cliché. A prime difficulty, of course, concerns the evaluation of good practice, and its necessary modification in the process of relocation. The term also has a facile ring to it, suggesting an easy malleability of surface which fails to acknowledge complexity, and an instrumentalist model of the way in which we might learn from each other.

The principle, however, is undoubtedly a good one. Many colleagues report that a very successful means of evaluating their own practice as teachers is to take up the opportunity of exchange. Working in a new context can provide a new range of professional experience, while also stimulating reflection and analysis. Clearly, one way of enabling this would be through the promotion of opportunity for colleagues to exchange in the UK. The Subject Centre will investigate the ways in which it could help to set up and administer such a scheme, if there is sufficient expression of interest. If you would like to take part in a feasibility study, or if your department would be interested in participating in exchange, then please email the Subject Centre (c.eckersley@rhul.ac.uk) under the title, 'Exchange Scheme'.

The Establishing of the English Subject Centre

Professor Judy Simons, Dean, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, De Montfort University, is Chair of the English Subject Centre Management Committee. In her former office as Chair of CCUE, Judy played a prime role in the establishment of the Centre. Here she writes of her expectations of its success.

The Subject Centre for English is unique. Its origins and its impetus come from the subject association and as a result its character is not determined by any single institutional agenda. In this sense it is an extraordinarily wide-ranging partnership. For the partnership that exists is not merely a formal arrangement between Royal Holloway, King's College and the Council for College and University English (CCUE) but rather an alliance between the UK English departments whose membership CCUE represents. The Centre took a long time to come into being, and was established six months later than the other LTSN centres in the UK. Its final configuration undoubtedly must have come as something of a relief to the joint funding councils. To the English subject community, however, its presence is more than relief. It is a triumph. For it demonstrates the strength of a united subject determined to take real ownership of its future.

We live in a culture that appears to be obsessed with audit. The RAE, QAA assessment, continuation audit, institutional reviews – to say nothing of all the 'dry runs' of these – mean that we are constantly having to defend what we do and how we do it. We drown in the paperwork that this causes and block the system with frenzied email attachments. Our natural eloquence becomes polluted with the rhetoric of officialese, and the filing cabinet fills to overflowing with old course materials because you must never, never throw anything away in case it should prove vital evidence for a review team at some time in the future! The English Subject Centre provides a respite from audit, but while it is providing a release it can simultaneously help us to cope with the pressures that the audit culture creates.

The Centre's authorised remit is to disseminate good practice in learning and teaching, and to aid pedagogic development in English. More importantly, if managed properly, it will dynamise the subject. By re-focusing attention on the central business of educating our students, the Centre can return

academics to the genuine excitement of teaching, one of the reasons why most of us went into this business in the first place. In the first few weeks of its existence it has started its planned cycle of visits to sixty English departments, devised a series of events from workshops to a residential conference, and created a website as well as this newsletter. The enthusiasm with which these initiatives have been greeted, and the fact that the Centre is already receiving approaches from departments on a daily basis, shows how much its services are needed.

At the CCUE general meeting in November 2000, Professor Deborah Cameron spoke compellingly against the language of skills as it has permeated our universities and infiltrated the instrumentalist approach to subjects, with a particularly detrimental effect on English. She argued for a return to the spirit of intellectual enquiry, the solid subject knowledge and the encouragement to think critically that are intrinsic to the study of English language and literature in Higher Education. What can English do? Why is it important? Are there any fundamental beliefs about the subject that we share? What are the significant debates? These questions underpin the activities of the Subject Centre if it returns academics to discussions about the basics of curriculum design, assessment practices, and innovations in learning. Our provision will be immeasurably enhanced if we address these questions together.

In government definitions of university ethos and character, it has become a truism to classify teaching and research as discrete activities undertaken by different groups of staff. But some of the most distinguished research stars in English are also the most dedicated teachers and can be the most passionate advocates for the subject. It's rubbish to suggest that good teachers can't also undertake high quality research, or that blue skies research doesn't inform or invigorate teaching. The Subject Centre should help to disperse this sort of myth, and through its range of activities will engage

academics from very diverse departments in explaining and sharing what goes on in the classroom and beyond. Quite apart from anything else it will thus become a tremendous information resource that can be tapped by all of us.

I'm writing here as the first Chair of the Centre's management committee, but also as someone who has taught (and who continues to teach and research) university English for twenty-five years. The other members of the committee, representing a diverse range of institutions across the university sector, have similar histories. We all believe fervently in the value of the Centre and what it can do for our subject. We will monitor and advise on the Centre's activities, ensure that the budget is being allocated responsibly and to the benefit of the subject community, and provide a first line of support for the Centre's team and for the college where it is physically located. We are enormously grateful to Royal Holloway for agreeing to take on the responsibility for

accounting to the funding councils, and for providing premises for the Centre's home. Special thanks must go to Professor Drummond Bone, Principal of Royal Holloway, and Professor Kiernan Ryan, Head of its English Department, for their personal investment in the Centre.

Professor Philip Martin, the first Director, has described the Subject Centre as a form of dating agency. It can provide introductions, create a database of departmental strengths, and arrange support for the lonely hearts who work in isolated conditions. Like the best dating agencies, it will use the new technologies in an informed rather than a mechanistic way, and it can arrange exchanges between departments so that we have the opportunity to see how the other half lives. I'd rather not push this analogy too far. Most of all, we wish the new Centre, its Director and its team every success for the future.

Vision and Aims of the English Subject Centre

The English Subject Centre is currently receiving approval for its draft strategic plan from its Management Committee and the LTSN Executive. When approved, the full version of the plan will be published on the Website. For information, some key extracts are given below.

The vision of the English Subject Centre is to be a vigorous, popular and essential resource for the whole English Subject community in Higher Education. It aims to be a focal point for discussion, debate and developments in the subject, and a rich source of knowledge about, and innovation in, all aspects of teaching, learning and assessment. The mission of the Centre is to be an outward-looking, pro-active and responsive unit acting on behalf of the subject community, and making a material and significant contribution to the development of teaching and learning across the diversity of the subject by way of a broad range of activities. Above all, the Centre will provide a service for the subject community driven by its needs and key developments.

The strategic aims of the Centre are:

- To discover and disseminate good practice in learning and teaching in English
- To generate new initiatives and responses and be an instrument of development in the subject
- To establish a national forum for debate and a focus for responsive development of pedagogical and curricular initiatives in English, and thereby contribute to such debates in other subjects
- To review the application of the new technologies, and promote the imaginative adoption of appropriate tools and products to enhance the study of the subject
- To facilitate the development of transferable, communication and other employment-related skills amongst English graduates
- To stimulate and encourage students' independence of mind and originality of approach in interpretative and written practice.

The Role and Purpose of the English Subject Centre

Professor Philip Martin, Director, English Subject Centre, Royal Holloway, University of London. As the Director of the Centre, Philip Martin writes of the importance of its integration with the subject community.

The establishment of the English Subject Centre will, I hope, be seen as a real opportunity for the subject, and a breakthrough in discussions and policies on teaching and learning. This initiative represents a clear recognition that the subject itself – for all its variety – is the best arena for the development of its teaching. Further, this new move is not impelled by the desperate and crude ideologies that have sometimes prevailed in accounts of how practice in higher education is changing or must change. Neither is it impelled by a philosophy dominated by competition and regulation. Far from it. The Centre is there precisely to develop the subject network. We have the opportunity now to pool expertise, experience and experiment, and improve our collective understanding of how students in English are best educated. This understanding includes a properly acknowledged context of rapid institutional and technological change, and the transformations in the subject itself, and its student constituency.

In an era that has seen the establishment of countless organisations and bodies whose purpose and value remain obscure to those engaged with the primary purpose of higher education, I am aware that even an initiative such as this might be greeted with the odd raised eyebrow or a bit of puffing and blowing. So let me make some reassurances. The English Subject Centre is not there to interfere with your working lives, neither should it become an additional burden. It is there to help, and to make contributions that will relieve the load. It is also there to stimulate discussions and initiate projects, as well as facilitate communications and awareness of the numerous initiatives that are already under way or recently completed. Necessarily, the Subject Centre has to be sensitive to the diversity of the subject itself, and the variety of institutional contexts in which its practice is located. 'Fitness for purpose' is also a key concern, and there will therefore be no drives towards uniformity: what is right and effective in one context may be completely inappropriate in another. Yet there are also opportunities for partnerships, collaboration and exchange. The Subject Centre will

promote and facilitate these, and in order to do so it will need to become well-acquainted with the range of practice in English nationwide. As ever in this subject area, the responsibility that accompanies the privilege of representation and overview demands a liberal concept of subject boundary, and an openness to new ideas and diversity.

We begin our work with an analysis of needs. To a large extent, the subject centre agenda will be determined by the needs of participating and interested departments, and already responses to our initial leaflet announcing the inauguration of the Centre are indicating some pressing concerns, including the use of IT, the expansion of creative writing as a pedagogic tool and a cognate programme, the place of the seminar, benchmarking, the QAA subject review round commencing in 2001, and Curriculum 2000. We will be addressing these issues by way of providing information in the newsletter, as well as running workshops and similar events. As our web pages develop, they will also become a source of information, discussion, and exchange.

As well as working in response to the analysis of need, we will produce reports, materials and initiatives to aid developments in curriculum design, review and practice, in particular by gathering and publishing information that will provide a context for the understanding of the condition of English. We will be following precedents set by CCUE in this field, and we will investigate such matters as application trends, diversification of programmes, interdisciplinarity, and the calculations of student time (and how they marry with an English degree) set by HEFCE in relation to credit ratings. Above all we see our role as focussing on letting you know what is available, and what is happening up and down the country. The greatest resource available to English is the experience of the subject community itself. With 2000 or more people in the subject at HE level, this is a huge and a rich resource, and a challenging task. Our advantage is that the foundation of this Centre is predicated on the recognition of the thriving network established by CCUE,

and the recognition of the strengths of partnership.

The English Subject Centre should be lively, intellectually serious, pragmatic, supportive, and positive in embracing discussion and controversy. No doubt it will not get everything right all the time, and we will also be realistic about what can be achieved during the timescales. Yet we have the opportunity, as we begin, to be fired by some utopian enthusiasm too. Is it impossible to imagine

that the deep satisfaction and sense of strong personal development that many colleagues derive from research might not also be discovered in the development of teaching and learning? I don't think so. The strong commitment that is so evident in those who teach English suggests that this is eminently achievable, and the Subject Centre will set itself the task of nurturing, valuing and legitimising this quality so that it can be sustained and developed.

National Teaching Fellows

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), as part of its use of the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund (TQEF), launched the National Teaching Fellowships Scheme (NTFS) to recognise and reward individual academics who have demonstrated excellence in teaching and support for learning. The scheme, administered by the Institute for Learning and Teaching (ILT), has secured funding for an additional two years. In the year 2000, twenty successful nominees received awards of £50,000 to benefit their work in teaching and learning. Four of these new teaching fellows work in the English subject community.

Dr Angela Smallwood is a senior lecturer in English literature at Nottingham University. Through the PADSHE Skills Interface Project, she will set up a series of seminars and publish papers contributing to the national debate on the broadening area of skills development in which academic study and the world of work overlap. Drawing upon a range of experts across the country, these will demonstrate ways in which the new requirements for personal development planning in universities can be integrated with students' skills development both inside and outside the curriculum. A major aim is to show how academic support for personal development planning may help university teachers realise their traditionally high aspirations for students' independent learning. For more information on the PADSHE Project see: <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/padshe>

Mick Short, Professor of English Language and Literature at Lancaster University, is planning to investigate the effectiveness of web-based learning. He will develop web-based materials for use in Stylistics teaching and test their effectiveness via a controlled teaching experiment comparing learning outcomes and student responses to web-based and more traditional teaching modes. He will also test a computer-based self-assessment mechanism. Students will be able to try out bits of analysis on three texts (a poem, a prose extract and a drama extract), estimate what grade they think they have achieved and then get an example of a piece of writing on the text which has been assessed at the relevant grade. This practise should help students before they do the assessed work demanded of them.

Professor Rob Pope, Teaching Fellow at Oxford Brookes University, will be working on two projects. The first of these will expand, and make available as a web-based resource, the materials for critical and creative rewriting first published in *Textual Intervention* (Routledge, 1995). These materials will invite students to generate parallel, alternative and counter-texts, as well as to experiment with genre, parody, imitation and adaptation. His second project involve the production of a critical and historical sourcebook which will provide a historical sense of the discipline.

At Manchester University, Dr Bill Hutchings will investigate the suitability of Problem Based Learning systems for the teaching and assessment of literary studies. The project will also consider the implications of problem based learning in terms of resourcing and assessment. Bill Hutchings' intention is to trial PBL systems on a small number of selected course units in 2001-02. These units will include his modules on eighteenth-century Poetry and on Samuel Johnson.

Further details about the NTFS can be found at <http://ntfs.ilt.ac.uk/>

Professionalism and English Studies

Dr Vivien Jones, Senior Lecturer, School of English, University of Leeds, writes of her experience in the role of Director of Learning and Teaching in the School of English, and of the tensions to be negotiated.

Where does professionalism reside in an HE sector in which teaching and learning are ever more subject to bureaucratic standardisation and in which, as funding structures make only too clear, research output is the really significant measure of success? My institution recently decreed that those members of departments who used to be known, at most, simply as the person who chaired the undergraduate teaching committee should become 'Directors of Teaching and Learning'—sorry, 'Learning and Teaching'. As always, a change of name has more mixed effects than the movers and shakers in the Post Office seem quite to have grasped. The oxymoronic managerial innocence of '*Director of Learning and Teaching*' makes only too evident the contradictions and tensions which currently beset our roles as teachers. The grand title is obviously well enough intentioned. Like the English Subject Centre itself, it responds to a felt need to improve the prestige of teaching in relation to research. But it does so by highlighting the considerably less prestigious—in some colleagues' eyes the positively perfidious—relationship between teaching and administrative procedures. ('The Subject Centre is not about increasing administrative or reporting tasks', we were anxiously assured when it introduced itself in October.)

As I listened in a recent Faculty Learning and Teaching Board to the fulminations of a colleague from another department who took the document on National Qualification

Frameworks as a form of personal offence, I found myself defending the equity of standardisation against the vagaries of unexamined 'professional' autonomy. To have become this amphibious creature, a 'Director' of teaching and learning, is perhaps always already to have compromised, then: to have abandoned individualised relationships with students and texts for the brave new world of quality assurance; to have been seduced by delusions of grandeur into an internalised enthusiasm for the procedural niceties you spend so much time dealing with—even, dare I say it, enforcing. Not surprisingly, I don't believe that's the case. Indeed, the challenge of accepting responsibility for the teaching and learning aspects of a department's activities lies precisely in resisting deprofessionalisation—which appears most often in the form of inflexible bureaucracy, but which can also come more cunningly disguised as the equally inflexible, but ostensibly high-minded, refusal to believe that 'bureaucracy' might ever involve questions of principle.

There isn't, or shouldn't be, a binary opposition between the pursuit of best teaching practices and the implementation of transparent procedures of accountability. The oddity lies perhaps in ever thinking that these things were separate, or separable. But it's certainly true that the significant focuses of professional judgment have shifted, or at least expanded, over the last ten or so years. What with the paranoia that attends Academic Re-

Application trends in English

Recent years have seen steep increases in application to some degree subjects and declines in others. Generally, the trend seems to be towards vocational courses, and away from traditional courses, including those in the Humanities. Yet over the last decade or so, institutions have often seen Humanities programmes as prime recruitment areas, and have been steadily increasing admissions targets. With targets stable or still increasing at one end, and decreasing applications at the other, there are implications for the condition of the subject and the student experience. As yet, institutions taking highly qualified students are unlikely to have noticed any effects from this, but many institutions with wider access policies or lower qualification thresholds are feeling the effects. If one or both of these trends continue, the effects will be more and more widely discovered. The Subject Centre is undertaking statistical research into application trends, and it intends to produce a brief report based on the statistics and consultation. If you are interested in participating in the consultation, or the analysis, then please e-mail the Centre (c.eckersley@rhul.ac.uk) under the title, 'Application Trends'.

view and the QAA on the one hand, and the university sector's general paranoia about litigation on the other, directing (or just practising) teaching and learning sometimes threatens to become a triumph of form over content, of paper trails over principles. In this climate, one of the more important exercises of judgment is to detect the difference between merely legalistic or fetishistic obsessions with consistency, and those 'administrative and reporting tasks' which, though often tedious enough, serve the best interests of students because they are based in genuinely equita-

ble systems of transparency and comparability.

Academic and pedagogical principles can be the only basis for bureaucratic procedures, and I actually enjoy working between my department and the centre of the university to ensure that that's the case. It's also true that academic and pedagogical principles depend quite heavily on bureaucracy for their implementation—but then, as Director of Learning and Teaching, I would say that, wouldn't I?

Research-led Teaching or Teaching-led Research?

The discussion about the relations between teaching and research is one which is likely to become amplified as the RAE and Academic Review are appearing on the immediate horizon. Here, **Professor Ann Thompson**, Department of English, King's College London considers the relation between the two.

We tend to assume that a direct link between teaching and research is inevitably a good thing, but which comes first? Do you teach a course because it bears some relation to your research area, or do you research a topic because you are required to teach it? In a period of increasing specialisation (partly driven by the requirements of the RAE) we are perhaps more likely to give research the priority and to try to keep our teaching, as far as possible, within the same broad area or period as our research.

This can be a very positive experience, both for us and for our students. I am fortunate in that my research area (Shakespeare studies) is popular with students both at undergraduate and postgraduate level. I am currently teaching a new option on '*Hamlet* and its afterlife' in the MA on 'Shakespearean Studies: Text and Playhouse' that King's College offers jointly with Shakespeare's Globe, and I could not ask for a more exact fit with my current research which is co-editing *Hamlet* for the Arden Shakespeare. So far it seems to be working well: I can, for example, offer the students guidance through the very extensive relevant bibliography, and suggest rewarding and manageable topics for their essays and dissertations. In return, I am confident that they will discover things I didn't know about the theatrical, cinematic, critical and cultural afterlife of the play.

But this link is not always so desirable or

beneficial. I find when I am teaching *Hamlet* at undergraduate level that I know it almost too well for the purpose: it is virtually impossible for me to imagine what it must be like to read the play for the first time, and I am capable of becoming impatient with students' perfectly reasonable desires to discuss topics which have for me become tedious through over-familiarity. I am in danger of teaching to my own interests at the expense of theirs.

From this point of view, there is much to be said for teaching outside one's research area and even for sharing the students' experience of reading a text at high speed the night before the class! Moreover, I know many colleagues who have allowed their teaching to lead or to redefine their research. This has happened, for example, in relation to women writers: the pressure to include some women on many period-based courses has resulted in the discovery of new research topics by people who were not necessarily in favour of this kind of expansion of the canon in the first place. Similarly, the pressure to include 'theory' in our teaching has made many of us see (and then write about) old texts in new ways.

I think then that the 'either/or' implication of my title is misleading: although current rhetoric gives research priority, there is productive traffic in both directions: this isn't a one-way street.

Does Researching Help or Hinder Your Teaching?

Professor R. J. Ellis, Department of English and Media Studies, Nottingham Trent University, ponders the effects of the Research Assessment Exercise, and discusses the relation between a thriving research culture and good teaching.

The RAE always seems to go through a roller-coaster of unpopularity: as the day of judgement approaches, those who have fared well in previous rounds go into paroxysms of anxiety, manifested by vociferous attacks on the necessity of the exercise. 'Is all this stressful misery necessary? Shouldn't the results this time be frozen for ever—or at least a decade?' they cry, overlooking the way in which such a freeze might sometimes end up rewarding incompetence or complacency in the management of quite substantial sums of public money as research efforts taper off.

On the other hand, those who have not done well in previous RAEs scramble to finance further improvements, hoping to be able to magic from an ever-dwindling unit of resource a means of sustaining sufficient research activity to rise up a notch or two in the ratings. For them the approach of the RAE is a time of hope.

However, as soon as the verdicts are announced, those who have fared well—almost always those who did well in earlier rounds (unsurprisingly, given the financial advantage provided by past success)—fall to celebration, whilst those who entirely missed out on funding give way to lamentation. To my mind such lamentation is reasonable. Most academics do not wish to teach at undergraduate level without engaging in some kind of complementary research activity, in the belief that teaching is greatly advantaged if underpinned by some related research.

By denying many departments, sections or teams (I will call these 'departments' henceforth) any support from the RAE's coffers, HEFCE condemns the staff in them to a five-year stint of pursuing their research as some kind of on-the-side hobby, draining them of energy (part of the reason they may teach less well). It is testimony to these academics' determination to underpin their teaching with research that they repeatedly manage to produce sufficient outcomes to warrant further attempts by their departments at obtaining RAE funding—sometimes, almost miraculously, attempts meeting with success.

By now I may appear to be close to teetering on the edge of an inconsistency in my argument: on the one hand urging that the RAE is necessary in order to arrive at judgements about how well departments are sustaining their research activity whilst on the other seeming to imply that every Unit of Assessment should be funded no matter what.

But I don't think I am. What I want to argue has two main strands. First, quite modest levels of support directed at departments left unfunded after obtaining ratings of 1 or 2 in the RAE would seem like manna from heaven, and help lift the siege mentality that makes it hard for staff in these departments not to hunker down to a few years' exhausting 'hobby-research' before making an 'escape-bid' application to another institution. The negative result of this stalag mind-set is a constant process of rather demoralising staff *churn-over*, as I call it. We should be concerned about the effect of this on the English academic community.

Secondly, I am prepared to take up the unpopular position of suggesting that, except at the bottom end, where funding starvation applies, the RAE does not seem to be doing too bad a job. Of course a list of complaints can be drawn up, and some of these have merit. (I myself would wish to arraign the harshness so far brought to bear on judging English submissions, compared to the relative generosity shown in other UoAs.) However, after all these complaints have been heard, shouldn't we be forced to return to the compelling fact that each RAE has successively shown that more English academics are being entered as research active and that on average departments are scoring higher rankings than before? In other words, quite simply, the RAE is stimulating more research and this research is being judged as of better quality.¹

If there is going to be any acceptance at all of the idea that some sort of accountability needs to exist, that improvement should be rewarded, that any decline should be

reciprocally penalised and that no-one really thinks that every RAE submission should be funded at the same level, then the challenge to critics must be: design something decisively better—no less fair, no less responsive to change, and no less effective at improving both levels of research activity and the quality of the research itself (which, I have to repeat, is what the rankings in successive RAEs have shown).

All this matters when turning to the issue of learning and teaching because of the ‘cultural’ impact of research on teaching. I have already indicated one way this impact occurs: the way in which there has long been a belief that undergraduate teaching should be underpinned by an engagement with research. Perhaps it is time for this argument to be more fully articulated and exemplified, not least because more and more often it is being asserted that the RAE has stimulated an obsession with research that impacts negatively on teaching. I do not believe any such damaging gulf has opened up. Let me explain why.

Firstly, the QAA English teaching assessment process revealed no such negative impact but rather a happy co-existence. I have carried out a comparative analysis of those English departments entered in both the 96 RAE and the 94/95 TQA.² You will recall that in the 96 RAE, departments were rated 5*, 5, 4, 3A, 3B, 2 or 1, whilst in the TQA they were rated as ‘Excellent’, ‘Satisfactory’, or ‘Unsatisfactory’. I grouped together firstly RAE 5* and 5 departments, then RAE 4, 3a and 3b departments, and finally RAE 2 and 1 departments (on the basis that 5* and 5 rated departments received by far the most money—since the amount increases ever-faster the better the RAE rating—and 2 and 1 rated departments received nothing at all). I then translated their TQA rankings into numeric scores (where Excellent = 5; Satisfactory = 2.5; and Unsatisfactory = 0), and calculated what the average scores were. So departments rated 5 or 5* in the RAE turn out to average dead on 5.00, since all of them were rated excellent in the TQA. The match I found is pretty compelling; the TQA average consistently rises as the RAE rating rises. As the below table indicates, the rise in the TQA average is exponential, matching the way RAE funding rises:

RAE Rating	Average TQA Rating [?]
5* & 5 (8) ^{??}	5.00
4, 3a & 3b (37)	3.45
2 & 1 (27)	2.87

[?]Excellent = 5; Satisfactory = 2.5; Unsatisfactory = 0

^{??}Sample Size

Furthermore, most of the TQA ‘Excellent’ ratings awarded (64.3%) were obtained by 4, 5 or 5* rated research departments. Exactly three-quarters of these obtained a TQA ‘Excellent’, compared to only 21% of those departments rated 3, 2 or 1 in the RAE—a massive bias. Plainly good research and good teaching *do* go hand in hand, and unless we ridiculously start to claim that this is ‘naturally’ the case (and if Occam’s razor is used upon all other suggestions as to how this data might be interpreted), the implication must be: *research does indeed help you teach better.*

This accords with my own subjective experience, and underpins my second suggestion: that researching a subject leads to a greater competency when teaching it at degree level. Speaking for myself, I find this is true—even at Part One level. When giving first-year lectures, I find that if I have been conducting research directly or tangentially relevant to the subject I am teaching I always feel more confident about finding ways to make my material accessible and clear yet not simplistic nor reductive. Confident of my knowledge, I teach more tellingly. When Part Two teaching is at issue, such a feeling of secure competence is matched by a sense that I am in a position to meet better the demands and respond to the insights of undergraduates showing sometimes startling intellectual maturity and shrewd judgement.

Let me provide an example at this point. For almost half a decade I have been carrying out research into the writing of the first female African-American novelist, Harriet E. Wilson (including the preparation of an edition of her novel, *Our Nig*). This specific research built upon earlier work and teaching on African-American writing. (Symbiotically, my teaching stimulated an interest in researching Wilson’s novel.) My research enabled me to identify aspects of *Our Nig* that I wanted to explore with my students—ones that proved fundamentally useful in getting students to address issues of genre in African-American

writing. It soon became clear to me these issues of genre could be crystallised in such a way that they would constitute a compelling case-study in a Part One foundation module addressing the general significance of genre in literary studies. And so it has proved: student evaluations support my belief.

Please do not misunderstand me: I am not (reductively) arguing that all good undergraduate teaching stems from the pursuit of relevant research, or that non-researchers are not able and should not be allowed to teach undergraduates. No such simple equation exists. There is probably no great reason why a tutor should not teach Part One seminars on *Our Nig* and genre without a research grounding in African-American writing (even if, very often, the ability to teach the topic successfully ultimately relies on a solid understanding of the methodological and theoretical issues underpinning the issue of genre, which in turn may flow from research activity of some kind). And it must also be simply true that there will always be charismatic English scholars who can find ways of teaching subjects far removed from their research concerns in an effective and compelling fashion. Nevertheless, I believe that research and good teaching are significantly enchainé at degree level.

It is this belief that motivates me in advancing my final point. And, ironically, it involves introducing a second reservation about the RAE as it exists at present: I was very disappointed that HEFCE's generic criteria for RAE 2001 do not finally allow clear penalisation of departments returning low levels of research-active staff—very much against the drift of previous, albeit informal feedback. It had been widely expected that entering a high proportion of research active staff in RAE 2001 would be clearly advantageous whilst entering a low proportion of research active staff would be punished. But HEFCE finally drew back from this, instead stipulating that any department entering low proportions of active staff could not be penalised on that basis alone.

While the intentions behind this decision may have been the laudable (but anachronistic) ones of allowing departments just starting off on the research track not to be scuppered from the start and enabling brilliant lone researchers to win some funding, its consequences have been far from benign. All

departments instead became involved in a kind of grotesque gamble: should they enter a bare minimum of researchers and aim for the highest possible rating, or enter more staff and risk receiving a lower ranking, or seek some middle passage. The 'blind bet' lay in trying to guess which strategy would pay off best (quite literally, since money is at stake). Since possessing a relatively higher proportion of 'research inactive' staff carried no penalty, it became essential to second-guess what the consequences would be of retaining a few less middle-ranking researchers and reluctantly jettisoning others to become part of an inconsequential tail of 'non-active' staff (demoralisingly discarding their research).

The implications of this were appalling. RA5 could still be devoted to demonstrating a thriving research culture, but the most obvious indicator of this—high levels of research-active staff—could now only matter in a minor way. No major penalisation could occur if instead a department entered only a few staff plainly of international standing with first-rate research outcomes. Baldly spelt out, this policy strongly favoured both incompetent research departments, who negligently allowed a few researchers to progress rapidly at the expense of others, and the cynical, who disregarded all the early talk of 'fostering a thriving research culture' and cold-bloodedly concentrated resources upon a few whilst relegating all others to a 'teaching only' status. With hindsight, it is plain that handsome dividends accrued from deliberately establishing two cultures in parallel (a research culture for some and a teaching-only culture for the rest)—by means of casting a cold eye upon a department's middle-ranking researchers from the outset, and supporting only the most promising. Furthermore, using large chunks of a department's research income to poach staff from other institutions, rather than foster the development of the department as a whole, paid off handsomely, too. The term 'research active' became devalued—a term of infinite variety, defined purely by how a research department decided to pitch its gamble.

But my main point here is to highlight the way this impacts on teaching and learning. If I am correct in asserting that good teaching and good research exist in a happy symbiosis, then HEFCE's switch of emphasis meant that, since it was now 'good management' to allow

'two-cultures' to emerge in a department, some staff would find it difficult to keep up their research, and the advantageous link between teaching and research could become damagingly etiolated.

So: I end with two suggestions. Firstly, the English Subject Centre might want to test my claim, and seek to collect together examples of the ways in which a strong research culture promotes good teaching (and not just harken to the siren claims that somehow research and teaching are antipathetic). It could help discover, articulate and disseminate models of good practice in this arena. Are tutors able to provide examples like mine readily? Or are they more likely to come up with examples of how the need to do research impedes teaching – and in what circumstances? Secondly the Subject Centre may (perhaps subsequently) want to enter into a dialogue with HEFCE about how far it is sensible to countenance—even encourage—downplaying the importance of sustaining research activity across a whole department, if teaching

consequently suffers. What I am urging, overall, then, is that the Subject Centre undertakes a careful identification of all the mutually reinforcing ways that research and teaching come together in English, in what I hold to be the well-founded belief that such positive interactions heavily outweigh any negative dimensions to the research/teaching interface.

Notes

1. See Kate Fullbrook and R. J. Ellis, 'A Slap in the Face of Ambition', *Guardian Education (Higher)*, 31 March 1998, p.vi.

2. There are inevitable flaws to doing this: in the TQA all English department members contributed to the rating, whereas the RAE rating was based only on selected, 'research active' staff. Also lumping 5* and 5 departments together, 4, 3a and 3b departments together and 2 and 1 departments together could be challenged. My data is taken from *Quality Assessment of English Subject Overview Report* (HEFCE 00 12/95) and *1996 Research Assessment Exercise: The Outcome* (HEFCE RAE96 1/96).

English in Real Time

Degree programmes, in accordance with HEFCE recommendations, are now commonly measured in terms of the hours worked by students to achieve their awards. Thus, just as each module, unit, or year, is accredited in the currency of CATS (credit accumulation and transfer) points, so too the degree is measured by the number of hours, and these hours are now commonly registered in module and programme descriptions. So a student coming to a module will discover among the information provided that there are (for example) 130 hours to be spent on the work. Clearly such hours are meant as a form of guidance.

What happens when a student announces that they have 'spent' their allocated time, and therefore will not be able to finish reading the set texts? How can degree courses like English measure the amount of time study should take, when the range of activities (reading, writing, searching for information, problem solving, translation, analysis, referencing and so on) are subject to so many variables? Should English degrees be designed according to such time limits? How long does it take to read *Paradise Lost*? How long does it take to write a 3000 word essay? These are the kinds of questions being asked by those designing English curricula, and being asked of them by validation procedures and other structures of enquiry. Alongside this, colleagues working in English are familiar with student anxieties about having time to read the set texts, and a number of colleagues will be familiar with the problem of students attending seminars without having completed the set reading. So what is happening with English in Real Time?

The Subject Centre intends to produce a brief report on this matter, designed to help departments struggling with this requirement and those concerned about their students' reading. If you share these concerns, or if you have the means to allay them, or if you have experience of designing curricula subject to time measurements, please e-mail the Subject Centre (c. eckersley@rhul.ac.uk) with the title 'English in Real Time'.

English on the Boundaries

Professor Ben Knights, Section Head of English, University of Teesside, considers English Studies and its engagement with vocationalism.

While obviously English in Higher Education is still practised in diverse institutional contexts, it seems a safe bet that it will increasingly be taught within vocationally-oriented institutions and its worth assessed (by potential students as well as funding managers) in terms of skills. At this juncture one route leads towards sardonic dismay, retreat and denial. A few souls will be fortunate enough to cluster together on the higher ground of more hospitable or genteel habitats. They will be our botanists burying a bank of seeds to preserve biodiversity against better times. Those occupying more hostile environments will have to choose between internal exile and service teaching—though realistically redeployment or redundancy might beckon first. Another route leads to dialogue with the surrounding systems, acknowledging the force of the discourse of 'outcomes', while pointing out that these might take a lifetime to become apparent. This article recommends the second route. One of the strengths of the community of 'English' is its plurality. But if we are to avoid becoming simply a repository of cultural capital, to resist a decline akin to that of Classics in the early twentieth century, we shall need to evolve common strategies.

Robert Scholes' admittedly transatlantic preoccupations help make a point. The 'highly textualised and mediated nature of our society has constructed for teachers [of language and literature] a position of great importance as educators—if we are willing to change our discipline so as to occupy this position'. Other propositions follow which bear upon how we relate to our students and our potential students: indeed upon the whole debate about the 'public face' of English Studies. We are preached at in a relentless neo-utilitarian discourse designed to produce economic/social/educational/penal/medical success (and along the way generating failure in plenty). This discourse—and what Noble refers to as its associated 'get-tough accountability'—goes with a literalism about language (in the very moment when the PR people are practising the wildest semiotic extravagance—modernist forms and utopian dreams colonised for making a profit), and an inhibition against grasping large systems of relations.

One pedagogic consequence is to discourage both students and staff from taking risks. Another, that the production ('value-added') of autonomous learners tends paradoxically to breed consumer dependency. In the midst of all that, the practitioners of English Studies have to insist upon attention to the figural nature of language and to the *difficulty* and *slowness* of reading. ('Readers who dominate texts,' points out Elizabeth Flynn, 'become complacent or bored because the possibility for learning has been greatly reduced.') Against complacency and boredom we must defend the position that what you acquire through the experience of disciplined reading is not a straight road to psychological or any other sort of truth, nor even a toolkit of skills, but a sense of the provisional nature of versions, the inter-reaction of figure and referent, of the collaborative interpretative work which humans have to do. The difficulty of reading is simultaneously the challenge of creating and performing imaginative systems adequate to represent and change our world, and the enterprise in which teacher and student join is, in a Bakhtinian sense, a boundary activity. (Every 'internal experience ends up on the boundary.... To be means to communicate.')

So our uncomfortable business will be what Aronowitz and Giroux call 'border pedagogy'. Let's briefly list some of the cross-border activities with which English Studies already engages and where our strengths lie. (These tentative recommendations point neither to higher synthesis nor to the subordination of one term to the other.) One such zone comprises transactions with adjacent disciplines: much of the energy of English Studies has always been generated at the moments where the subject passes through the force fields of History, Philosophy, Linguistics, Fine Arts or Cultural Studies.

1. *Unmasking and demystification? Or celebrating the aesthetic?* Of course we must help our students find the way towards critical skills and the courage to use them. (As Ronald Barnett insists, 'the exercise of critical reason calls for brave acts.')

But our necessary zest for critique must also respect the desire for celebration. Snootiness towards heritage,

against which the late Raphael Samuel pun-
gently warned historians, shades in the liter-
ary case into contempt for the legitimate de-
sires of students and readers: the right to the
canon, or the will to explore character and
motivation. Setting up a handful of more intel-
lectual students as cognitive heroes—with the
rest cast as the empirical and confused
Other—was always a game of diminishing
returns. And this inward-turning has further
meant that, like the Left, we have been unerr-
ingly good at self-sabotage. Internecine war-
fare may be invigorating, but we cannot keep
undermining ourselves in the interests of criti-
cal or ideological purity: there are better uses
for our formidable unmasking tools.

2. *Analysis, criticism, interpretation? Or pro-
duction and writing?* English Studies will
need to embrace production and writing in
other modes in addition to the critical essay. A
commitment to writing, as Kathleen McCormick
has shown, need not mean succumbing to
subjective expressivism. The graduates for
whom we are responsible will have acquired
critical skills and some sense of the existential
demands imposed by using them. They will
have developed and be equipped to go on de-
veloping a set of expressive and cultural re-
sources, a *linguistic repertoire*, which enables
them to become active within the culture.
They will have access to a lexicon of expres-
sive resources which enable interventions in-
side and outside organisations. They will be
aware of a variety of discursive horizons; in-

ward with a spectrum of cultural forms; able
to access a range of histories and cultural
resources, to think reflexively, and have the
confidence to engage in what Jerome
Bruner calls subjunctive or conditional think-
ing.

3. *Research? Or pedagogy?* English Stud-
ies generates a rich diversity of learning and
teaching practices. While this is not a plea to
embrace pedagogy at the expense of re-
search, we need to give more of our atten-
tion to celebrating and building on our own
communicative activity, and in the process
learn to promote our subject in terms of the
models of learning which it articulates. As
teachers we have to use our authority to
hold and protect the spaces within which for-
mative interchange between the affective
and the cognitive may take place. In doing
so—and while acknowledging that didactic
zeal can itself be a form of power—we will
need to resist the current (and fiscally con-
venient) trend towards delegitimising teach-
ing and persist in a dialogue between learn-
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Behind the Acronym: HAN

The Humanities and Arts Higher Education Network (HAN) was instituted in April 1994, by a group of academics at The Open University, with the aim of linking together the then scattered community of educators and researchers committed to improving processes of teaching and study within the arts/humanities. We also aimed to form a pressure group to help improve perceptions of the relative importance of the domain within higher education systems internationally.

Not only has this network survived, it has flourished over the years. It now has a membership of some 200 academics, representing 100+ UK universities, who work right across the range of disciplines and fields. Accordingly, the HAN disseminates research results and new developments in teaching method (nowadays, especially uses of the electronic technologies); broadcasts information about meetings/conferences (members' own and world-wide) and in support of research funding applications (e.g. to the FDTL, ESRC/HEFC programmes); and enables researchers having common interests to form consortia towards the conduct of research into teaching and learning.

For further information see: <http://iet.open.ac.uk/research/herg/han/index.htm>. If you would like to join the HAN (membership is free), please contact Yvette Evans, Network Manager, at: y.c.evans@open.ac.uk

Manchester UP

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Academic Review for English, 2002: The Subject Overview Report for English

Professor Philip Martin, Director, English Subject Centre, here offers a digest of the Summary Report of the last teaching assessment exercise in English, 1994-95.

This Funding Council document was produced as a summary statement of the findings of the last subject assessment round (known as TQA), which took place in 1994-95. Much has happened since then of course (including the foundation of the QAA) and the next round of academic review, as it is now termed, will commence under the new method announced by QAA which incorporates the Subject Benchmark statement. The new method is announced as a 'lighter touch' approach, and one involving comparatively less direct observation of teaching. Whereas the 94-95 visits were selective, every institution will be visited in the new system. What follows here is a broad summary of the Subject Overview report, and it is offered as the preamble to the Subject Centre's engagement with the next round of assessments.

The Subject Centre's remit is to support teaching and learning developments across the range of activities. Clearly a major priority for English Departments this year will be preparation for Academic Review under the new method, due to commence in 2001. Therefore, we are proposing three events in early 2001 designed to support such preparations, and in order to orientate our approach, I am beginning with a reading of the summary report which, if nothing else, may serve to stimulate reflection and debate. It is important that individual departments go to the original document to construct their own readings of

its significance. What is offered here is not a definitive reading, but a guide to the issues that were picked out in the conclusion of the report as being in need of address.

The summary report is generally positive, emphasising the diversity of the subject and its range of curricula catering for a broad constituency of students. The main strengths in the whole provision are summarised as consisting of a vigorous curriculum and enthusiastic students; diversity and choice balanced with clearly focussed aims and coherence; successful widening of access alongside sustaining quality; high retention rates alongside intellectual challenge and academic progression; development of valuable skills alongside knowledge and understanding; excellent staff-student relations.

The report also emphasises that there are areas for improvement, as follows:

- Clearer articulation of aims and learning objectives.
- More effective quality assurance procedures.
- Better integration of IT.
- Greater intellectual rigour in classroom practice, and more effective use of small group teaching.
- Improved research methods support for postgraduates, and more effective marking and return of work.

- Improved library provision.
- More careful relation between the stated aims for preparation for employment and specific learning objectives.
- Greater participation in staff development programmes for teaching, learning and assessment.

Some of these receive more detailed or fuller treatment in the report (which runs to around seven pages). A brief summary of such amplification follows.

Articulation of Aims and Learning Objectives. Early in the report it is noted that the diversity of English requires its prospective students to be carefully guided by the objectives of each individual programme. It goes on to remark that many departments need to make clearer statements between 'subject aims, methods of learning, criteria and methods of assessment, and intended learning objectives.' Later, the report identifies one factor in departments falling short of an excellent rating to be an insufficiently rationalised notion of the course aims, and 'more specifically, the learning objectives of specific course components'. It points out that such statements should work for the benefit of students and staff. The report also notes strengths in this area, and implies that excellent ratings saw the 'notable strength' of 'the effective match between the student learning experience and the expressed aims and objectives'.

It is clear, therefore, that this issue was of sufficient proportion to give some concern last time round, to the extent that it is mentioned on a number of occasions in the overview report.

More effective quality assurance. About half of those departments visited in 94-95 were deemed to fall short in demonstrating the effective impact of quality assurance processes on the provision. Little amplification on this point is found in the body of the report, although it seems likely that this refers to departments whose evaluation procedures (such as Annual Review) noted concerns which were not subsequently addressed. The report observes that around 50% of quality assessment reports 'consider library facilities inadequate for the courses they support', this inadequacy consisting mainly of a shortage of space and texts. A related matter is the e-

port's observation that the most frequent student complaint was the slow return of marked work.

Better integration of IT. The report does not elaborate on this much beyond the observation that 'many providers are still not meeting their aims and objectives in this area.' It also remarks that although IT skills are frequently cited as being acquired in English, they are actually more often 'in need of development.'

Greater intellectual rigour and effective use of small groups. These two critiques are bound up together in the report, indicating, perhaps, a lack of variation in teaching techniques in seminars or in lengthy teaching sessions. The summary notes early on that 'greater intellectual rigour' was needed to push half the providers visited up to an excellent rating, and it links this to a need for more effective teaching, and a consideration of 'the part played by students in small groups.' The point is made again later in the report, where student passivity and a lack of opportunity for student contribution are also mentioned, together with the difficulties of handling two- or three-hour teaching blocks.

Postgraduate support/research skills. The report states that postgraduate work is a growing area in English, and that in almost half the visits, improvements are needed in student support, the prompt turnaround of work, and the teaching of research methods. No further details are provided.

Enhancement of Library Provision. While the report sings the praises of excellent provision in some institutions, it states that around half of the provision is inadequate for the courses it supports, and that the most common criticism was the lack of reading spaces and texts. Further, there were concerns that attempts to compensate this deficit by the provision of photocopies engendered other disadvantages. Other means of alleviating pressures (flexible lending, flexible opening hours, focus on supplies of texts meeting stated learning objectives etc) are commended.

Employment and Learning Objectives. The report observes that the listed aims for most English programmes include preparation for employment. It also notes that in practice such skills are not articulated as specific learning objectives. The body of the report

gives no further details. It comments, however, that there is commonly an understatement of transferable skills and their latent employment value, and gives examples of the 'abilities to enquire, to make sound judgements, write clearly and succinctly and meet tight deadlines.'

Staff Development. The report opines that there was insufficient take-up of institutionally-devised programmes of staff development, and notes that this phenomenon frequently coincided with a satisfactory (rather than an excellent) grading. It states that all providers could improve by a broader spread of good practice.

Alongside the summary report ([www.niss.](http://www.niss.ac.uk/education/hefce/pub95/)

www.niss.ac.uk/education/hefce/pub95/) colleagues might also like to consider the CCUE Report, *The English Curriculum: Diversity and Standards*, delivered to the Quality Assurance Agency in 1997.

This academic year, the Subject Centre will organise events to discuss and address these issues, and will include invited speakers qualified to address the new method of Academic Review. Further details of these events will appear in future issues this newsletter.

It is probably also worth noting that the Summary Report's concern about staff development is a concern addressed by the Funding Councils' inauguration of the Subject Centre.

Pay Attention Now!

Dr Michael Luntley, Department of Philosophy, **University of Warwick**, discusses the models of knowledge implicit in systems used to evaluate teaching practice.

Suppose that the knowledge base involved in academic research is capable of being made fully explicit—it can be fully coded and written down in books. Suppose that teaching in Higher Education consists in the transfer of this knowledge base. It would not then be unreasonable to describe our practice as researchers and teachers in terms of our gathering and transfer of this knowledge base. We could set aims and outcomes regarding its transfer that would measure our effectiveness as teachers. This provides a 'thin conception of practice' - a description of what we do in HE that is, in principle, accessible to anyone and that provides a transparent accountability measure of practice.

Contrast the above with the thick conception of practice that acknowledges the existence of knowledge bases that cannot be rendered fully explicit. Suppose that academic research and teaching involve discipline specific knowledge bases embedded in the particularities of practice and which are not transparent to those outside the discipline. In short, there is a know-how to being a good student of literature that is discipline sensitive and ignored by the thin, explicit, discipline insensitive description of HE practice. What would be a model of such knowledge bases and how important is it to acknowledge their existence?

One model for embedded knowledge bases is provided by knowledge that is dependent on attentional skills. If this model is correct, it is of considerable importance.

Attention to the environment presented in perception makes available belief and knowledge concerning your position and relative movement in that space. This knowledge base is essential for agency. There are, in addition, specialised attentional skills, which issue in belief and knowledge, whose acquisition takes a long apprenticeship. In transferring the explicit knowledge bases recorded in our discipline's textbooks, a key issue concerns the development of skills in knowing how to read that data, how to make use of it in continuing the conversations of the discipline, how to single out those aspects ripe for critique and those that, for the time being, can be left unchallenged. It is a mistake to assume that these skills are discipline insensitive. Learning how to engage in the conversations that constitute literary studies is not necessarily the same as learning how to engage in the conversations that constitute history, philosophy, sociology. There are discipline specific rules of engagement—discipline specific attentional skills for handling texts.

If this is right, there is a know-how to engag-

ing in the conversations that constitute our disciplines that is not capable of being made fully explicit. The knowledge base that depends on discipline specific attentional skills is only shareable with those who possess the same skills. In acquiring these skills you learn how to embed in a practice that resists rendering in fully transparent terms. In so doing, you acquire a partial immunity to transparent accountability and that is something that is a legitimate cause for concern. Of greater present concern, however, is understanding better the nature of the know-how that turns on these specialised attentional skills.

Attention is something you do; it does not happen to you. In equipping our students with the attentional skills that enable them to participate in the discipline, our task is to offer them an apprenticeship in a specialised form of agency. Their goal is to learn how to take part, and to do this they need to learn how to attend to the particular aspects of text, performance and production that concern the student of literary work. But attention is intrinsically dynamic, imaginative and creative. The knowledge bases it supports are continually

shifting. Even in the simple case of attention to the immediate environment, a literal turn of the head and slight change of perspective can offer opportunities for new engagements. The same applies with the sophisticated attentional skills that make someone a literary critic or a philosopher. These are the skills that fuel our creativity and imagination. In teaching such skills, you can have purposes, but not goals, for if you are successful, the shape of the conversation will change before your ears as the skilled student finds their voice and, in attending, changes the contours of the environment in which you are both embedded.

This is not a plea for an 'anything goes' response to the regimentation of academia carried by the thin conception of practice. It is a plea for time and space to attend more carefully and to log more accurately the rich variety of knowledge bases we exploit in practice and to begin to articulate a richer, thicker conception of what we're about.

(The author's 'Articulating Practice', *Proceedings of 6th HAN conference*, 7 October 2000, is available in at <http://iet.open.ac.uk/research/herg/han/>)

Creative Writing

Andrew Motion, Poet Laureate and Professor of Creative Writing, School of English and American Studies, University of East Anglia, reflects on the growth and establishment of programmes in creative writing, and the opportunity to address some fundamental questions from a position of strength.

Ever since English Literature first became a degree course, arguments have raged about its principles and practice—and quite right too. Sometimes these have emerged in more-or-less purely theoretical terms (for example, to be or not to be a post-structuralist); sometimes they have taken the form of conversations about assessment and quality control.

Many of us involved in the teaching of Crea-

tive Writing feel we are tuned into an amplified version of these things. When the University of East Anglia and the University of Lancaster pioneered the original British CW MA courses some thirty years ago, they triggered a storm of controversy that has never completely died down. Isn't writing done alone (and probably in a garret) or not at all? How can anyone evaluate students' fiction and poetry without compromising existing university methods?

Creative Writing Database

Last year, the Arts Council commissioned Lois Beeson to investigate the provision of creative writing in higher education. The project was developed in consultation with Graeme Harper, Director of the Development Centre for the Creative and Performing Arts at the University of Wales, Bangor, NAWE (the National Association of Writers in Education) and Writernet. We hope to make the resulting database available through the English Subject Centre website. If you would like to check that Lois Beeson knows about your creative writing courses, please email Siobhán Holland with details (siobhan.holland@rhul.ac.uk)

These days, with 40-odd CW MA courses now established round the country, the doubting voices are fewer and further between. Perhaps people have been persuaded by the comparisons often made between the value of such courses and the value of, say, RADA, or the Royal College of Art. Perhaps the visible, worldly success of many course graduates has played a part. Perhaps (more cynically) opponents within academies have been silenced by the prospect of large applications, and therefore healthier departmental budgets.

However they are perceived, the fact is that CW courses are here to stay, and have already worked a sea-change within many Schools of English at undergraduate and MA level. Their achievement, quite simply, has been to bring acts of criticism and acts of creation closer together—a change which is simple enough to describe, but has massive and excitingly complex consequences. It

means, among other things, that those of us teaching Creative Writing have to change, in order to make the most of our new situation. We are obviously free (as I hope we really always have been) to insist on writing courses being just that—opportunities for writing, not for second guessing publishers. We no longer have to suppose our natural posture is defensive. And this in turn means that we can afford to revisit some of the initial questions about quality and assessment. What value (especially at undergraduate level) do we put on ('mere') self-expression? How do we combine the writing components of a course with the more familiarly academic elements? The questions are fundamental—exactly the kind that should be asked by any organisation, or movement, or whatever, as it enters its maturity, wanting to maintain in the future the sort of self-confidence it has so painstakingly created in the past.

Creative Writing Workshops

Julia Bell, School of English and American Studies, University of East Anglia, discusses the value of the workshop in teaching creative writing.

The use of the workshop style seminar in creative writing teaching has become something of a standard at UEA on both graduate and undergraduate courses. This kind of seminar which allows the students to present work to their peers and receive feedback, seems to be one of the most popular and enduring parts of the course. Students express again and again that where they gain the most in Creative Writing is from hearing other peo-

ple's work and talking about it.

At a postgraduate level, this is pretty much all you will get, with the focus resting on the workshop leader to shepherd and direct the group dynamics into a functioning critical organism. At undergraduate level there is still an element of teaching involved, some formal stuff on Plot, Point of View and so on, but every week for an hour we discuss two, or

Behind the Acronym: NAWE

The National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE) is the one organization supporting the development of creative writing of all genres and in all educational settings throughout the UK. Its website is a major interactive resource for writers and all those who wish to learn more about the writer's craft. The Directory of Writers gives extensive details, including samples of work and audio-visual presentations, of over 1200 writers. The Archive contains conference papers and journal articles dating from 1987, when NAWE was founded. There is also a Directory of Writing Courses to assist in identifying appropriate courses for writers at all stages of their development.

NAWE is particularly concerned to integrate good practice across all levels and to create strong cross-curricular links. Our projects range from Study Support in primary schools to a Continuing Professional Development programme for all writers and writing tutors.

For further information, please contact Paul Munden, NAWE, PO Box 1, Sheriff Hutton, York YO60 7YU Tel: 01653 618429 Email: paul@nawe.co.uk Website: <http://www.nawe.co.uk>

maybe three, pieces of work submitted by other members of the class.

For the first few weeks the responses are generally thoughtful, if a little timid, generally playing to the strengths of the writing: 'I liked this piece', 'I thought the dialogue was great' etc. but once everyone has had a go, and the class has had a chance to get the measure of each other, it gets more pointed, directive, editorial. 'I liked this but I thought the dialogue could be sharper, more succinct, why don't you cut it and add some more description?' And so forth. There's a sense in which the group is looking for the potential in the work and trying to send the author in that direction. There is an acknowledgement that in one way or another everybody is giving a bit of themselves away. One student noted that 'It was scary at first to read in front of everyone but after a while I got used to it as everyone was in the same boat so they weren't too judgmental.' In this environment the transferable skills on offer to the student are numerous. The participatory nature of the workshop means that if no one says anything we sit in silence for an hour. The expectation of a seminar led from the front is instantly dismissed. In the first instance the writing improves, but secondly there is the development of an editorial as well as a writing skill, a self-consciousness that can be applied in other subjects. In Practical Journalism for example,

students benefited from having their journalistic work reviewed by the class. The class had a chance to think about the rhetoric of journalism and to see it applied in practise by their peers. The workshop created an environment where the art of journalism could be dissected and then applied to the written work.

Similarly, this kind of environment prepares students for teaching themselves. It creates an atmosphere of mutual learning, of watching others progress. One student noted on their Creative Writing Evaluation form that 'it taught me to edit and to criticise.' Obviously the workshop doesn't suit all students, the less confident struggle having to present themselves orally, there is sometimes a danger that the class can be ruined by the singular voice who won't shut up, the group may not like each other and refuse to talk. But these problems are rare and usually overcome if the workshop is led sensitively. In *Creative Experiment* Frank Whiterhead suggests that the 'real problem the teacher of English has to face is not how to supply pupils with "matter" to write about; it is rather how to develop within the classroom a climate of personal relationships within which it becomes possible for them to write about the concerns which already matter to them intensely.'

The workshop, when working as it should, goes a long way towards creating that climate.

Enriching Academic Method

Alistair Dunning, Information, Training & Research, Arts and Humanities Data Service, discusses the relationship between electronic resources and traditional teaching methods in English Studies.

The cover illustration of critic George Steiner's *No Passion Spent* depicts a learned-looking man deep in concentration over a weighty tome. Originally painted in the eighteenth century by Chardin, the image still remains a pervasive representation of the literary scholar: absorbed, alone, engaged in high-minded pursuits and receiving stimulation only from the printed word.

While the image of the literary critic engaging only with the printed text is a seductive one, it is perhaps not the most fruitful identity to adopt for the literary intellectual operating within today's universities. Electronic material, whether on CD-ROM or the Internet, offers

literature teachers a richer range of resources than those relying solely on the printed word. The computer is increasingly becoming a valuable tool for finding fresh stimulation in literary scholarship and pedagogy.

The computer has its critics, of course. Some assume that computers introduce a quantitative aspect to a subject that is essentially qualitative in nature. Others fear that computers may replace teachers and, on the Internet, offer students an excess of information without this information being presented in an intellectually coherent fashion.

However, electronic resources in the past

few years have evolved with these worries in mind. One excellent example is provided by the *Virtual Seminars for Teaching Literature*, designed by the Humanities Computing Unit at the University of Oxford. The Virtual Seminars' site (<http://info.ox.ac.uk/jtap/>) hosts four seminars allowing students to investigate specific aspects of World War One poetry. The third seminar is perhaps the most inventive part of the resource, allowing students to contrast the four extant manuscripts of Wilfred Owen's 'Dulce et Decorum est.' Previously, the opportunity to view the manuscripts had been restricted to senior researchers with access to the relevant archives. This seminar allows undergraduates the opportunity to investigate the manuscripts at close quarters, and to examine the hesitations and uncertainties involved in the creation of Owen's most noted poem. Students, more often presented with edited and printed copies of poetry, can develop a fuller understanding of the ambiguous nature of a work of art.

These seminars exist to add an extra dimension to students' factual awareness and critical skills, not to supplant the lecturer. One of the *Virtual Seminars'* creators stipulated that the seminars 'are not designed to replace a course or teaching time, but to supplement an existing one, providing students and staff with new, freely accessible resources'. Evaluation carried out on the *Virtual Seminars* confirms this. Teachers did not leave students alone to do the course, but the students' opinions garnered from the website were introduced into traditional roundtable seminars, essays and even written dissertations.

The Shakespearean resource, *Hamlet on*

the Ramparts, (<http://shea.mit.edu/ramparts/>) is another resource which places the emphasis firmly on the qualitative study of literature. Exploiting the multi-media capabilities of the Internet, it allows students to explore the many different interpretations of Act One, Scenes Four and Five of *Hamlet*, in which the protagonist meets his ghostly father. Interpretations available for viewing on the website include not only modern textual editions, engravings and film, but also highly divergent printed editions from Shakespeare's own time. Students following the related tutorials are therefore made aware of the richness of the original play, its interpretative openness and the enthusiasm with which centuries of readers have embraced this openness. While there is nothing revolutionary in this method (literary critics have long established the technique of studying a text through its manifold interpretations), it is the availability of this content that demands notice. Having such a wide variety of materials at one's fingertips opens up a whole new perspective on the teaching of literature.

All this is not to suggest that the computer is introducing a brave new world of literary studies. The computer is not replacing existing teaching skills or research methods. Instead, it is meant to point out how the tasks of the teacher of literature, perhaps even the reader in the Chardin painting, can be enhanced by the use of electronic resources. A well-designed electronic resource is something that can be integrated into existing academic method, enriching rather than replacing traditional resources.

Behind the Acronym: AHDS

The Arts and Humanities Data Service is an on-line facility enabling quick searches for materials across a wide range of sources. Primarily used by researchers, AHDS is nevertheless an invaluable service available to those setting up new programmes, or compiling bibliographies, when a review of materials available for students is a necessary first stage. Through BIDS, articles can be located, and the details electronically ordered direct to your e-mail in-box. To learn more visit the site at <http://ahds.ac.uk>.

Together with the Resource Discovery Network (or RDN), the AHDS is also running a series of seminars, 'Arts and Humanities Online,' through the year at a range of venues. For details, see <http://www.humbul.ac.uk/events/>

QUESTIONNAIRE

We would be grateful if you would take the time to complete this short questionnaire. You can also fill it in at our website (<http://www.rhul.ac.uk/ltsn/english/resources.htm>)

A) Did you find the content of the newsletter relevant to your concerns, or the concerns of your department? Which articles were most relevant?

B) Please suggest up to three areas within learning and teaching that you would like the *English Subject Centre Newsletter* to focus on in future issues.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

C) Would you, or any of your colleagues, be interested in contributing an article for a future edition of the newsletter?

Name _____

Topic _____

Email address _____

Postal Address _____

We would also welcome offers to review textbooks; letters for publication in the newsletter and responses or new issues related to the 'Teaching Issues' column. If you would like to contact us to discuss the newsletter please contact Carol Eckersley in the first instance carol.eckersley@rhul.ac.uk tel. 01784 443221.

D) If the newsletter was posted to you directly, please inform us if you need further copies. If you would prefer not to remain the newsletter addressee, please suggest an alternative addressee. We are in the process of compiling an accurate mailing database and we would appreciate it if you would make clear the exact number of copies your department requires for full-time staff, part-time staff and postgraduate tutors.

Return questionnaire to:

**Mrs Carol Eckersley
English Subject Centre
Royal Holloway
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Humanities Computing

Dr John Lavagnino, Lecturer, Centre for Computing in the Humanities, King's College London, describes the mutually informing disciplines of humanities and applied computing.

One of the hosts of the English Subject Centre is the Centre for Computing in the Humanities at King's College London (<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/cch>), which for some years now has offered an undergraduate minor in 'applied computing' that may be coupled with many of the humanities degrees at King's. Some students and observers think that the point of the combination is to add something to a humanities degree that is actually useful; but of course existing humanities degrees stand up perfectly well on their own, and the real value of the combined degree is to give computing skills their proper application through understanding of a humanities discipline.

We teach some skills in the use of particular software packages along the way. But that's not the focus of the program, which could hardly justify itself if it were: by the time students received their degrees, the skills they learned in their first year would be quite dated. Our programme's real focus is on understanding what you're doing and on thinking about how to explore and research texts and images

using computers; it is more a course in doing research than in clicking on things. You need some computing skills for that, but you also need the skills associated with humanities degrees: the ability to interpret, to see beyond the direct statements made by a text, and the ability to synthesize, to see how different pieces of evidence fit together. In the electronic world new approaches to research are possible; but the best preparation for creating and extending such approaches is a thorough knowledge of traditional methods.

Many people are disoriented by the largely unsorted and uncontrolled jumble of texts on the Internet; but there's little reason to believe this will become much more orderly, especially as it merely continues what was always the case with texts in the real world, outside libraries. The teaching of English has already been moving towards much greater use of texts in their native forms, rather than processed into textbooks and readers; that's a change that will help students deal with the electronic world, too.

Teaching Issue Column

Each issue of the newsletter will feature a 'teaching problem', inviting readers to contribute strategies that might be used to resolve it. To contribute a solution or to suggest a problem related to teaching and learning for future columns please contact Siobhán Holland (siobhan.holland@rhul.ac.uk). Generic and subject specific questions are equally welcome.

Issue One:

I teach three seminar groups on a second-year special option course which is very popular with students. The course has been running for three years and usually works well. However, this year, one of the seminar groups is refusing to co-operate with me or with each other. Students don't answer questions and even small group discussions don't prompt them to engage with each other. Some group members protest that the work is too difficult, and protest particularly about being asked to read primary materials which aren't supported by critical commentary in the library. I feel this is an excuse as students in other groups are happy with the detailed support available in the module handbook. Other students who normally contribute a lot to seminar discussions feel that their learning is being jeopardised by the poor level of discussion. I don't feel it would be ethical to move the good students into the groups that are working well, but as the semester goes on the atmosphere in the class is just getting worse, and attendance is starting to suffer. Has anyone got any ideas on how I can deal with this situation?

The Death of the Essay

Professor David Punter, Department of English, University of Bristol, argues for the realisation that radical changes in the structures of information and authority make the essay, and its conventional place in assessment, anachronistic.

I am currently teaching a course called 'Presenting the Future'. It deals with a selection of twentieth-century texts of the future from Huxley and Orwell through to Russell Hoban and Iain Banks. I ask each of the students to prepare a presentation on a chosen text, and last week it was William Gibson's by now virtual-canonical *Neuromancer*. The student announced that he was choosing to look at *Neuromancer* in its cultural context, and would be introducing us to cyber-punk, to Gibson's own tergiversations about cyber-punk, and to some of the relations between fiction and virtual reality. This he did with some aplomb; but he also said that, true to the spirit of his topic, he had 'stitched together' his presentation from various web-sites on Gibson, cyber-punk and so forth.

This focussed for me some of the difficulties I have been feeling for several years about what one might grandiosely call the 'crisis of authority' in our pedagogic practices. As teachers of literature, I suppose we are all used to not knowing quite whose words we are hearing, or, perhaps better, words generated by what machine—this, after all, is part of the exhilaratingly uncanny nature of the discipline. We live at a time characterised by, among other things, the death of the signature and its replacement by pin numbers and similar techno-authorisations; and a consequence of this is that what we have all been living with for some time, whether we choose to acknowledge it or not, is a furthering of uncertainty about where our students' words (or even our own) are coming from.

This has an obvious bearing on issues of plagiarism. Two semesters ago, I found myself involved in a case where two students had produced essays that bore alarming similarities to each other. We have all been here before, and we seem to have two tactics for dealing with such matters. The first is the tactic of the long haul, whereby we send some poor benighted soul (usually ourselves) off to the library to check whether a printed source will helpfully and yieldingly claim responsibility; the second is to suppose collusion and hope that a sufficiently stringent, but non-violent, interview might establish whether the

source lies rather in room proximity in the student halls of residence.

It used to be possible to be reasonably clear as to which tactic was more likely to succeed; if we were thinking in terms of printed sources, there would generally be a suspicion that a certain roundedness of phrase, a certain apparent familiarity with otherwise unfamiliar source material, would give the game away. If the similarity seemed rather to be taking place in terms of a fairly undeveloped discourse, we would go for the collusion option.

But this, of course, is no longer a viable distinction, because printed sources have been replaced, in many students' learning patterns, by access to web-sites. These web-sites, as we know, do not always conform to the protocols of the printed word; they may, indeed, be more or less 'literate'—whatever that may mean—than the work we expect of our own students. Sometimes, confusingly, they are constructed, written and maintained by the students themselves. What emerged in the case I have mentioned was, in fact, that both students—who clearly did not know each other—had independently accessed the same site, and had downloaded information with minimal changes.

I am not concerned here with how these processes affect the issue of plagiarism itself, although there is clearly more work to be done on this in many departments of English, work that will probably continue to produce Student Handbooks increasingly unreadable in their size and minute quasi-legal complexity. My concern rather is with the sustainability of the student essay itself within systems that have moved consistently away from exams and towards coursework, continuous assessment, periodic assessment, and all the other permutations of assessment that we now practice and encourage. The notion of the student essay is itself, of course, open to a variety of interpretations. We may say that it encourages the construction of a reasoned and coherent argument, and thus allows for the demonstration of identifiable transferable skills. We may locate it centrally in the procedures of assessment. We may regard the marking of and

commentary on—whether in person or not—such essays as an essential, or in some cases *the* essential, component in the development of student learning.

I wonder whether in attaching this value to the essay we are now not merely living in the past, but refusing to admit to the ‘presenting’ of the future. Processes of information retrieval and deployment have changed radically over the last twenty years, changed perhaps to a point of unrecognisability. Students do of course still write, or at least their essays get written; but in the era of the post-signature do we really still imagine it possible to be certain from what de-subjectivised machine this writing is emerging? We have ourselves been responsible—for excellent reasons—for discouraging, and in some cases forbidding, hand-writing; a good thing too, in that it saves our time and the students’, and clearly prepares them for a world in which hand-writing has little place. I personally find that my hands turn into peculiarly misshapen claws if I have to write more than two sentences on end (which is why students continually, and irritatingly, complain about my hand-writing). However, this is again not quite the point: like some more enlightened colleagues, I could provide my commentary on students’ essays in the form of an attached (and of course word-processed) sheet if I took the trouble. But the question, it seems to me, is really about the student essay itself, and what we are thinking we are doing in assigning value—and a grade—to it. I have no evidence at all that students are cynical about this—indeed I am sure they are not—but I do think that they are increasingly amazed about our gullibility, and find our attitude towards sources and authorities quaint and slightly (but lovably) risible. They know very well that they are, on average, more web-literate than we are; they know too that the web is so vast, so multifarious, and so quality-immune that the chances of us following them through the maze—unless they are as innocent as the students I have been mentioning, who simply told us the situation, but without the faintest admixture of guilt—are, to quote Bret Easton Ellis, less than zero.

I think that the days when we could approach student essays looking with a refined eye for originality of thought, penalising over-reliance on sources, speculating on the quality of mind shining through the odd unfortunate phrase, and all the rest of the panoply of dis-

tion on which our grading and classification systems appear to continue to rest, are decisively over. They have, I think, been over for some time, but we have been reluctant to admit this for a variety of reasons. One reason is that to realise such a thought would be to threaten the base of our own authority. Another would be that a consequence of such a realisation would be that we would have to engage in a radical rethinking of our assessment practices, rather than tinkering at the edges.

The third reason is that, as I see it, it faces us with the politically difficult option of a return to an exam-based system. I imagine I am not alone in remembering that I set my face at an early stage of my career against exams. Although of course there was the apparently inevitable hypocrisy, for someone of my generation, of having occasionally to admit that the exam system had done me pretty well, I was more than happy to join the chorus of those who complained that sudden-death exams were unjust, that they penalised the slow, thoughtful genius, that we all have good days and bad days, that the work produced was too short and panicky to allow for real inspection and discrimination and so on.

All these things I think *were* true. I am in no way sorry to have spent most of my working life to date in departments which have exercised the utmost care, and in some cases great inventiveness, in devising assessment schemes that allow a thousand flowers to bloom. I also still think that, at its best, continuous assessment both allows, in its macro manifestation, for a better and more inclusive judgement of student skills, and at the other end of the scale allows students to expatiate more freely than exams do on the development and basis of their ideas.

But I do now think that the heyday of such thinking is past. The future has caught up with us; it is presenting itself, but so far we are preferring not to answer the door-bell. I hope that nobody is thinking at this point that I have an answer to suggest; I don’t. But I do think we face a choice which, unless we can think of better ways of going at it, will be unpleasant. The only way yet devised, or at least practised, of divorcing students from immediate unverifiable reliance on source materials has been the examination; but disbelief in the pedagogic or summative possibilities of the examination is now widespread. Furthermore,

to advocate the re-entertainment of such a system runs a terrible risk; it means that many academics who would sooner resign than attract the label 'traditionalist' might find themselves arguing in favour of a system against which they have set their faces for decades.

What to do? This is, it seems to me, what *not* to do: to continue in blithe denial of the current changes in information and authority. There is, of course, an option adopted in part—but nowhere, I think, wholly—of adopting a simulacrum of IT as an assessment method in itself: of building in an element of techno-based, multi-choice tests. That might be part of the way forward, but I doubt it should be the main part. It is, to my mind, not that our students want us to acquiesce in the state of things; it is that they are challenging us—they find themselves necessarily in the position of challenging us—to find ways of going *further* than the currently available means, ways of continuing to value the truly critical as it becomes ever harder to distinguish.

This is, of course, something that happens to disciplines from time to time – the examples of philosophy and psychology come to mind; it is not unique in itself. What is, however, unique about the present situation, in my view, is that we are faced in English with the immediate consequences of a cultural revolution that empowers students in ways which we are unlikely to emulate. The dreadful image of the video recorder—yesterday's technology but still sufficiently frightening to some—springs to mind, granddad demanding help from a six-year-old to manipulate the controls. We do not, I think, want to get into that position. The discipline of English, for all its complicated history, for all its past cohabitations,

for all its nationalist embroilments, for all its internal wars and visible scars, is still a strong, viable and desirable discipline; our students are impressive, articulate and forward-looking. I would like to think that we can maintain a sense of authority that goes with and rewards this cultural confidence, an authority that has ensured for many years that we are the subject of preference for many of our most excellent youngsters as well as an unparalleled magnet for life-long learning.

But I think that to maintain this position we need to think beyond generic transferable skills, and to try to come at a new set of ideas as to what truly testing tests might be. Naturally I hope that the Subject Centre might foster this debate, which is one that I, at least, consider to be a matter of urgency; there would also be a great deal to be said for finding some way of involving students in discussions about what the 'assessment of English' actually *means*, to them. We are not yet in the age of the post-human, or even (I think) of the trans-human; but the fact is that our students know a lot more, on average, than we do about what possibilities the future holds; that is because they are students of English, and are therefore more or less dedicated to the very fictions that are shaping our future. What we need from an assessment system is a way of distinction that both commands the assent of those who are 'subject' to it, while at the same time maintaining the credibility of those who administer it; otherwise (perish the thought) English might become a discipline whose heyday becomes consigned to that peculiar episode of the past that we shall come to designate (de-signature?) as the twentieth century.

Behind the Acronym: BUFVC

The British Universities Film and Video Council (BUFVC) promotes the production, study and use of moving image media for higher education and research, and is a rich source of resources for teaching and research covering a wide range of disciplines, with a particular emphasis on media and media history. The Council has established extensive archives of TV off-air recordings (at least 16 hours per day have been recorded since June 1998), and of newsreel and related materials. It is also running a number of projects designed to open up access to these resources, some of which will be relevant to colleagues teaching English programmes which cover media and such twentieth century contexts as newsreel and documentary reporting. The Council has premises at 77, Wells Street, London, W1T 3QJ, and can be contacted on 0207-3931500. Visit the web site at <http://www.bufvc.ac.uk>

Teaching Travel Literature

Dr Robin Jarvis, Reader in English, University of the West of England, recounts his experiences in the establishment of modules in travel writing at undergraduate and postgraduate level.

Travel writing has become a strong focus of attention in literary and cultural studies over the past ten years or so. There is now a significant, growing body of criticism and theory devoted to the genre, at least two dedicated journals in the UK, regular academic conferences here and overseas, and a recently-formed International Society for Travel Writing which should help raise the status of this area of study. However, at the teaching level progress is less evident: there are few undergraduate courses or modules on travel writing, and there is not, to the best of my knowledge, a single UK taught Master's degree in the field. As someone who has designed and taught modules on travel writing at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, my experience may be of interest to colleagues in other institutions considering such ventures.

A number of practical and intellectual problems await anyone planning a course on travel writing. On the practical side, resource issues will loom large. Your library is unlikely to have an adequate supply of criticism unless someone has been purposefully buying in the area for the last ten or fifteen years, and a major book-buying exercise, including multiple copies of certain key works, will be necessary if students are not to complain of a lack of material to support their studies. You will also have to keep a keen eye on the cost of set texts: since most or all of the books you select will not often feature on course syllabuses, cheap student editions are unlikely to be available, and a full set of coursebooks will come to quite a tidy sum. From one point of view, though, the availability of any edition is a bonus, since the greater your desired historical range, the more availability of texts is going to be a problem, and the more your course will risk being driven by what happens to be in print. The supply of modern editions of travel literature from the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries is improving, but is still very limited; anthologies of excerpts can be helpful, but tie you to someone else's agenda, and their selection policies are too often governed by the need to illustrate or contextualise more mainstream 'literary' texts.

However, it is the intellectual problems that

are the most interesting. Text selection is again the heart of the matter. There is no generally accepted 'canon' of travel writing. No text 'selects itself' automatically; instead, each choice has to be made for particular, well-considered reasons, and it is a good idea to share these reasons with students at an early stage in the course. My experience is that students are far more ready to question, or even challenge, the selection of texts for travel writing courses than they are for courses on, say, Romanticism or Modernism, where certain writers and texts are included almost because it would be perverse not to do so. My own selection of texts was deliberately catholic, because I wanted students to confront a good range of the different forms of travel, and travel literature, characteristic of the modern period (broadly defined): scientific or philosophical travel, sentimental and Romantic travel, colonial travel, adventure travel and survival narratives, postmodern travel, tourism. I also wanted to pick texts to foreground some of the difficulties of defining or theorising travel writing, and to probe the boundaries between the discourse of travel and other kinds of writing: thus Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* allowed us to consider the claims of poetry as travel writing; Kipling's *Kim* demonstrated the blurred line between fact and fiction which all travel writing negotiates, however subtly; Thoreau's *The Maine Woods* provided an opportunity to assess the importance of nature writing in the evolution of travel literature; while the place of travel within postmodern culture was examined via hybrid texts like Barthes's *Empire of Signs* and Baudrillard's *America*. In both the undergraduate and postgraduate modules I taught, the syllabus required students to engage with some of the most productive concepts in modern travel writing studies: orientalism, imaginative geography, othering, the rhetoric of anti-conquest, the tourist gaze.

The chronological range and discursive variety I have hinted at would still be my preferred model for teaching travel writing, but it is not without problems. Just as there is no received canon of travel literature, so there is no pre-fabricated rationale for a course on the subject, and it is more difficult to construct and

communicate one when the content of the module is so heterogeneous and the approach so varied. One begins with a whole range of issues that demand to be addressed—including postcolonial questions, Self and Other, the gendering of travel, problems of truth and reference, the rhetoric of the aesthetic, displacement and alienation, and so on—and the struggle is to emplot these concerns in a way that makes sense for students and allows some measure of continuity. Because this is not easy, some lecturers might prefer to adopt a narrower rationale for their course: colonial and postcolonial theory, under the auspices of which much of the best research on travel writing has taken place, can provide one such framework; feminist criticism and theory, excited by a genre in which, because of its strong affinities with the diary and journal, women have frequently excelled, offers another; an approach more rooted in geographical concepts and perspectives would organise the curriculum in a very different way around issues of space, place and landscape. Despite the advantages of 'buying in' theoretical and methodological coherence in this way, it does seem like short-changing the diversity of the genre, and can appear as formulaic, oversystematised, and authoritarian. Students will resist the kind of academic condescension—mixed, in the case of earlier literature, with the condescension of posterity—that rubbishes the notion of self-exploration and treats travel writers as deluded individuals who need to be put firmly in their theoretical place.

While the lecturer needs to think carefully about his or her aims and objectives in tackling a representative body of travel writing, students will have their own expectations that will have to be negotiated. They will have a natural interest in the subject, if only because travel, and the mobility of human lives generally, is such a fundamental dimension of modern reality. As a result, they will expect to make connections between the travel writing they study and their own travel experiences, and perhaps hope to have those experiences illuminated or enhanced. On the undergraduate module I taught, many students took the opportunity to try to achieve this by producing their own piece of travel writing in place of an extended critical essay. This kind of activity is valuable, but benefits from writing workshops and skilled supervision, because given a free rein most students' 'travel writing' will degenerate into a rather flat, banal, diaristic prose.

Students may well already be keen readers of travel writing, since—judging from the shelfage devoted to it in most bookshops—the genre is almost as popular now as it was two hundred years ago. However, they may have little acquaintance with more 'literary' travel writing, and some students' expectations may well be shaped largely by the works of Bill Bryson and his ilk. On my own module, such expectations were cruelly rebuffed when the first two texts to be studied were Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey*, followed by Wollstonecraft's *A Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*. Only much later in the course, when navigating intricate modern texts by Naipaul, Raban, and Chatwin, did students grudgingly concede the value of studying some earlier exemplars and seeing something of the evolution of the genre.

Two final points. A lot of travel writing, and not just that from past centuries, is plainly of dubious artistic merit. In earlier periods, travel writers often conceived their primary task as passing on knowledge of the world, rather than, for example, deploying sophisticated narrative techniques or crafting fine descriptions. Secondly, travel writing from the eighteenth century onwards, indeed up to the quite recent past, is typically marked by attitudes, beliefs and values which today's students are likely to find distasteful or abhorrent. The same could be said of novels or plays, of course, but the problem seems particularly acute with travel writing because so much of it revolves around intercultural encounter. These aesthetic and ethical issues are bound to arise in any travel writing course, and indeed should be made to arise because they are important questions that deserve to be confronted. The success of the course may hinge on the inevitable student response to a text that is racist, sexist, and imperialist, and has no outstanding literary quality: why are you making us read this? To be at all prepared to answer this question, those of us who have developed a scholarly interest in travel writing need to be ready to lay aside our methodological armour and encourage our students to practise some historical imagination, inhabit an alien language and mentality, and take the writing on its own terms. That is, when dealing with texts which so often sensitise us to discursive strategies for controlling and containing the Other, it would be ironic not to let the literature, at least some of the time and only as far as possible, speak in its own voice.

Curriculum 2000: What do you teach, my lord?

Keverne Smith, College of West Anglia, King's Lynn, introduces the 'Curriculum 2000' qualifications that are replacing 'A' Levels.

Pre-Curriculum 2000 sample syllabus	Curriculum 2000 sample syllabus
<p>AQA 623 English: Language and literature separate</p> <p>All elements of the course assessed at the end of two years.</p> <p><u>Language work</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Discussion essay or creative writing 2. Summary 3. Comprehension <p><u>Literature work</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Study of a minimum of six texts, two of which must be pre-1820. 2. Sample question : 'Explore your reaction to Isabella and her role in <i>Measure for Measure</i>' 	<p>AQA Specification B English: language and literature integrated</p> <p>6 modules (3 assessed in Year 1 for an AS qualification, 3 in Year 2 for a full A-level).</p> <p><u>AS Module 1</u>: Introduction to Language and Literature Study. Anthology about war, containing short 'literary' and 'non-literary' pieces.</p> <p><u>AS Module 2</u>: The Changing Language of Literature: Comparison of two texts, such as <i>The Diary of a Nobody</i> and <i>The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole Aged 13^{3/4}</i>.</p> <p><u>AS 3 Coursework</u>: Production of Texts</p> <p><u>A2 4 Coursework</u>: Transformation of a literary text into a different form.</p> <p><u>A2 5 Talk in Language and Literature</u>: comparing ordinary conversation with Shakespeare's use of conversation.</p> <p><u>A2 6 Critical Approaches</u>: a 'synoptic' unit testing range of A-level skills via unseen material. Material released the Friday before a Monday exam.</p>

It's all change at A-level. Well, not quite all, but in English we will find that there are substantial differences between the work demanded of students at 'A' Level and that involved in the 'Advanced Subsidiary/Advanced' GCE qualifications that are replacing them. September 2002, when the first Curriculum 2000 students start their degrees, may seem a long way down the road, but we may arrive there sooner than we think.

There are three Englishes offered at A-level: English Language, English Literature, and a combined Language and Literature course, usually just called (as in this article) *English*. All three Englishes have changed, but it is in the combined course that the changes are greatest.

All the new English specifications, regardless of Exam board, seek to *integrate* the study of language and literature. In AQA Specification B some modules are close to what we traditionally expect, but others, such as AS 2, The Changing Language of Literature (see table) are not. Students have to

compare/contrast a pre-twentieth-century with a twentieth-century text, for instance More's *Utopia* with Huxley's *Brave New World*, from the viewpoint of changing attitudes to writing and to language. These are interesting texts, but they are not drawn from the usual A-level 'canon' AS 5, *Talk in Language and Literature*, does not examine a Shakespeare play from the traditional A-level angle of theme and characterisation, but from the angle of dialogue construction. Students analyse ordinary conversation and see to what extent Shakespeare uses or ignores its features in producing heightened dramatic dialogue.

There is also more emphasis in AQA Specification B on students producing their own texts. For AS 3 'Coursework Production of Texts', a student might write, for instance, a short story, and for A2 4 'Text Transformation', a thirty minute puppet version of, say, *Twelfth Night*, to introduce young children to Shakespeare. For both modules students have to write an accompanying commentary on their texts, analysing the choices they have made and the reasons for them.

I do not want to suggest that this new specification is better or worse than previous syllabi: clearly the activities listed can be shown to develop important skills in a responsive student; rather I wish to emphasise how *different* it is, and how *different* may be the skills it produces. Students who don't read beyond the set books will have studied two collections of extracts and short texts (AS 1, A2 6), four complete texts (AS 2, AS 4, AS 5), at least two of them pre-1900; but responsive students will be used to encountering texts in a much more active, creative way, to thinking more about the *process* of writing, and to reading a much greater *variety* of language, including speech, than most of their predecessors.

Specifications such as this give impetus to unresolved questions such as, 'Should degree level English courses be *primarily* literature-based?' 'Should the texts studied in the course be *primarily* from the "canon"?' Many degree courses include other aspects of English study, but in most literature and language go their separate ways. We'd need to travel a long way to produce a more integrated

course. Should we be doing so? Are the skills involved in the new specifications ones which should be developed more explicitly at degree level?

There's another implication too. Given that students may have studied one of three Englishes, and that the specifications vary to some extent between Exam Boards, should departments run in the first term or semester, or even throughout the first year, an induction to degree level English studies? (Anglia Polytechnic University's Speak-Write project, described below, is a successful example of this). My own experience of teaching Study Skills, which is an attempt to induct students of very different ages and backgrounds into degree level study, has been that a few students don't see the point of extra work, but most are enthusiastic and even grateful that time has been set aside for this.

Traditionally, the transition from A-level or Access course to university has been taken for granted; the new curriculum encourages us to be more active in making this transition successful.

Speak-Write

Dr Rebecca Stott, Head of the Department of English and Reader in Victorian Literature at Anglia Polytechnic University, and **Dr Tory Young**, Editorial Manager of the Speak-Write books at Anglia Polytechnic University, discuss the Speak-Write project, which they co-direct.

The Speak-Write Project was established in the English Department of Anglia Polytechnic University, Cambridge, in January 1997. Initially a three year project funded by HEFCE, Speak-Write was developed as a response to the widely-held perception across the Higher

Education sector and Business community that standards of oral and written English were declining amongst undergraduates. The team built on research into undergraduate communications skills and classroom experience to develop an innovative foundation

University Entry and Curriculum 2000

Curriculum 2000 is not simply a re-shaping of the syllabus. Students entering Higher Education in 2002 will no longer be required to tender points at A level as the prime currency for admission: the new system runs on a dual currency of units and points. Institutions will offer students combinations of these. An A level for instance, will normally be valued at six units, an AS, at three. Other combinations are possible; some advanced GNVQs will be worth twelve units (doubles) while others will be single-weighted at six units. Applied A levels and key-skills qualifications can also be combined into a total qualification package. Institutions are currently pondering how to establish criteria for admissions in terms of the total numbers of units required, and then, the total number of points (points equating to grades). Simultaneously, they are considering whether or not to recognise Key Skills units and points. For the latest information, and to view those admissions packages which have been established, see: www.ucas.com/getting/schools/curriculum2000/index.html

course for students. This was piloted in the English Department at APU and assessed by specialist academic readers from other institutions. The materials were continually refined and developed over a three year period.

These have now been published by Longmans as four course books:

Grammar and Writing ed. Rebecca Stott and Peter Chapman;
Writing with Style ed Rebecca Stott and Simon Avery;
Speaking Your Mind: Oral Presentation and Seminar Skills ed Rebecca Stott, Tory Young and Cordelia Bryan;
Making Your Case: A Practical Guide to Essay Writing.ed Rebecca Stott, Rick Rylance and Anna Snaith.

At APU the books are taught in workshop-style seminars: students work in small groups undertaking activities designed to encourage analysis and practise of advanced writing and grammatical skills and also to develop oral presentation, teamwork and argumentation skills. These activities are focused upon literary texts but also involve creative-writing tasks and work-based scenarios. The students write up the activities and commentaries undertaken in their groups in workbooks which are handed in for assessment of the module but also provide a valuable source of information to be referred to for the rest of their degrees. Students report substantial improvement in their understanding of the structures and use of language and many report an immediate rise in their marks for essays. Tu-

tors, meanwhile can provide more specific comments on students' written work because of this increased understanding of grammatical structures.

This year the FDTL granted the largest amount of continuation funding to the project to disseminate the materials to other HE institutions. As curriculum consultant Tory Young has visited many British HEIs to discuss the ways in which the materials can be tailored to suit the needs of other English departments and cognate disciplines in the humanities. This service has proved extremely popular and will be continued over the next two years of the project's development (for contact details please see below).

From January the Royal Literary Fund will fund the next phase of the Speak-Write Project which will focus on Professional Writing. Newspapers constantly report complaints from the business community that graduates lack the *specific* communication skills employers need. The project team will undertake research into the kind of communication skills required of humanities graduates in writing-intensive professions such as publishing, public relations and arts administrations. The team will interview employees who have recently graduated and joined these professions and their employers to determine the nature and range of the writing tasks they undertake as part of their work. From this research a course in Professional Writing will be developed designed for Higher Education humanities degree programmes and will form the basis of the fifth book in the Speak-Write series.

Subject Centre's 'Seminar Day'

Dr Siobhán Holland, Project Officer for Academic Liaison, English Subject Centre, reports on the first study-day held at the Centre in December.

The first English Subject Centre study day was held at Royal Holloway on December 2nd 2000. The event focused on what happens in seminars. Seminars in some form remain central to the study of English at undergraduate level. However, despite the increasing assessment of teaching the seminar remains a private area of experience. Delegates took the opportunity to discuss with colleagues from other institutions the different ways in which the seminar fits into student learning and

teaching practice.

Robert Eaglestone, from Royal Holloway's English department, provided a phenomenological account of the seminar and spoke to the delegates about the difference between what we feel seminars should do and what we feel they actually do. The discussion moved from real seminars to virtual seminars in a workshop, presented by Siobhán Holland, that introduced delegates to 'virtual' seminar mate-

rials developed at Staffordshire University to supplement 'real' seminars for level one students. After lunch, Tory Young from Anglia Polytechnic University, introduced materials developed at APU to raise student awareness of the purpose of seminars and the roles and responsibilities of students in them (Tory discusses these materials elsewhere in this newsletter). She also generated a discussion which gave all of the delegates the opportunity to discuss perceptions, and uses, of the seminar in their own institutions.

It emerged that different ideas about the seminar were embedded in their administration in different departments. In some, attendance at seminars remains entirely voluntary and this policy reflects a conception of student learning which takes place predominantly through independent study. The seminar is not being signposted as the most important arena for learning. Elsewhere, 'three strikes and you're out' policies signal the seminar as a compulsory element of university education and as absolutely central to student learning. At Anglia Polytechnic University 10% of each module at every level is awarded for participation in seminar discussions, so that the discursive function of seminars is privileged. Clearly

the broader administrative structure of a degree programme, structured to some extent by pedagogical concerns, sends out messages to students about the role and value of seminars in an English programme.

Before the final discussion, Nick Otty led a workshop which drew on methods developed by DUET (Development of University English Teaching). The workshop encouraged us to reflect on discussions which had developed during the day. It also drew attention to the ways in which the discussion sessions had returned again and again to the issue of seminars as they related to students' acquisition of skills. This emphasis no doubt reflects the increasing pressure on academics to justify student learning in terms of skills. More hopefully, the event as a whole suggested that English lecturers wanted to put stress on skills that were subject-specific and not simply generic. The attempt to identify these subject-specific skills, and an interest in focusing on the specific issues involved in teaching texts, will form a part of future Subject Centre events on the seminar. For information about these events please check the Subject Centre website at <http://www.rhul.ac.uk/ltsn/english>

Behind the acronym: DUET

Developing University English Teaching (DUET) is a teaching project organised on a workshop basis whose staff offer training in the teaching of English in higher education. It is run by the DUET Project Management Group whose members are responsible for advertising and organising the workshops, selecting the staff and monitoring the activities and achievements of the workshops. The project co-ordinator is Sue Habeshaw, University of the West of England, Bristol, and has been running successfully since 1979, when it was launched by Professor John Broadbent at the University of East Anglia.

What distinguishes a DUET workshop from a conventional staff development course is partly that it is discipline-specific and partly that the staff group are seen as managers of a collaborative process rather than tutors or experts. Recipes and teaching ideas get exchanged, skills are practised, literary texts and theories are studied, organisational issues of power, authority, task and role are addressed but the essential goal is insight. The workshops are about thinking and making meaning collaboratively.

If you would like to know more about DUET or arrange a workshop for your department, contact the co-ordinator, Sue Habeshaw (sue.habeshaw@uwe.ac.uk) or visit their web site: <http://www.uew.ac.uk/duet/index.htm>