

English Drama Media



Special issue:
English, Sexuality and Gender

Also:
Grammar and Writing, Part 2





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These collections of NATE articles, available as one complete file (pdf), downloadable free of charge from the **Members' Area** of the NATE website, are drawn from the three NATE periodicals:

- magazine **NATE Classroom**
- professional journal **English Drama Media**
- peer-reviewed research journal **English in Education** (these articles are referenced only – accessible by all NATE members on the Wiley Blackwell page directly from the members' area of the NATE website, and with a direct link to one sample article in each collection)

This series, **absolutely free of charge to all NATE members**, is also available to non-members at a cost of only £12.50* per collection from the **NATE bookshop** at www.nate.org.uk. The first three collections available now are listed above; further collections will be available soon – see www.nate.org.uk for updates.

The collections are gathered around the areas of interest most prevalent over the past five years of publication. The themed articles – 15 to 20 in each collection – will be invaluable to:

- **all teachers who want to plan a half-term series of lessons on a relevant theme**
- **to Heads of English who are planning Inset on a given topic**
- **to PGCE or English Education lecturers who want to bring themselves and their students up-to-date on aspects of current practice and research**
- **to consultants or curriculum leaders who want to refresh their own thinking, or garner fresh approaches and ideas.**

(*price correct at time of going to press, subject to change without notice)

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English Drama Media

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Advisory Group

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Janet Evans, Anne Fairhall,
Elaine Millard, Ruth Moore,
Sean McEvoy, Jonothan Neelands,
Helen Nicholson, Mark Reid

Design Neil Baird, Dokumenta Limited

Layout and Production Matt Storr

Printing Buxton Press Limited

NATE Administration

Anne Fairhall (publications manager);
Ian McNeilly (director)

ISSN 1742-5514

Cover Image: Still from the BBC TV series *Torchwood*, featuring John Barrowman and Gareth David-Lloyd, copyright BBC Photo Library.

English Drama Media is the professional journal of NATE, the National Association for the Teaching of English published three times a year in February, June and October. The views expressed in the magazine are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the association.

Contributions to the journal are welcome. Notes for contributors may be found at www.nate.org.uk. The editor may be contacted at gary@nate.org.uk



NATE
50 Broadfield Road, Sheffield, S8 0XJ
Telephone 0114 255 5419
info@nate.org.uk

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Gary Snapper teaches A Level English at the Cheney School, Oxford, and is a freelance teacher, consultant and researcher. He is a member of the NATE Post-16 Committee. In a previous existence he was Head of English at Impington Village College, Cambridge.

Sexuality, gender and English

The main theme of this edition of *EDM* is the relationship between sexuality, gender and English teaching – focusing on attitudes to homosexuality; the ways in which such attitudes are constructed and perpetuated through approaches to gender and sexuality in schools and society; and some of the things that might be done by English teachers to fight against homophobia and to build communities where potentially damaging stereotypes of sexuality can be acknowledged, explored and overcome.

There is relatively little written on this crucial topic in professional literature in the UK, and even less that takes on board contemporary theories about sexuality in formulating effective ways of dealing with such issues in the English classroom. The leading commentator on this topic in the UK, Viv Ellis, contributed a timely and original article to the very first edition of *EDM* (in 2003) – *Beyond Legz Akimbo: Sexuality and School English after Section 28* – which aimed to explore new ways of thinking about sexuality and English. Since then, *EDM* has rarely returned to questions of sexuality and gender in English – so this edition aims to begin to make up that deficit.

There are of course many other questions about gender and English that we might want to explore, and which are undoubtedly related to questions of sexuality – for instance, the ways in which sexism still manifests itself in the English classroom and curriculum, the extent to which feminism has changed things, the ways in which language and literature betray the patriarchal structures of society, the implications of the under-achievement of boys in English, and so on. A future edition of *EDM* is planned to explore some of these avenues.

Tackling homophobia in English

Despite the enormous progress that has been made in recent years in relation to positive representations of and attitudes to gay people (see for instance *Torchwood's* Jack and Ianto featured on our cover), it sometimes seems that homophobia is the one remaining prejudice of the 'big three' (sexism, racism, homophobia) still allowed in schools – perhaps because students know that teachers are still often scared of challenging it, for a variety of reasons.

Much of the debate in recent years has centred on the use of the word 'gay' as a derogatory descriptor for anything considered 'uncool'. There are still those who would argue that this is a harmless usage, failing to recognise that 'harmless' linguistic joshing of this sort reveals the underlying prejudices that continue to make life a misery for the thousands of young people in the school system who are trying to understand, come to terms with and seek acceptance for their homosexuality.

As **Chris Waugh**, an English teacher in an inner-city London school, points out, in the opening article of this

edition, one of the things that makes this stubborn prejudice more resilient and potentially more crushing than others is that so many have to suffer it alone. Gay children do not generally have gay parents, only rarely have gay siblings, and are very likely not to have gay friends; they may well have no-one to turn to, no forum for finding reliable information, support or affirmation. As Chris argues, English is the place where such students are perhaps most likely to find such affirmation. Similarly, because of the silence which so often surrounds sexuality in schools (and outside), English is the place where homophobic children are perhaps most likely to have their assumptions and prejudices challenged. The opportunities English offers for exploration of representations of sexuality in literature, and in culture and language more generally, are invaluable.

Chris's article is a passionate, personal, and exceptionally well-written reflection on being a gay English teacher, on being open about sexuality, on why sexuality matters in English, and on the importance of honesty and trust in the English classroom. If you read only one article in this edition, I recommend it be this one.

Following Chris's article, **Lydia Malmedie**, the education officer at Stonewall, outlines some of the work that Stonewall has done in recent years in highlighting the issue of homophobia in schools, and gives details of resources which Stonewall provides to help English teachers, and others, to approach issues of sexuality. In particular, she discusses *FIT*, the highly acclaimed play for young people, by Rikki Beadle-Blair, commissioned by Stonewall for the theatre and now released on DVD – a superb resource for English.

Kathryn Sauntson and **Helen Simpson's** article takes as its starting point the way in which questions of race and gender have gained visibility in English classrooms, whilst questions of sexuality are often neglected. They discuss findings from their research, in which they interviewed teachers and students about their experiences in the classroom, and examined the English National Curriculum, to find out why such a situation might pertain.

Performing masculinity and femininity in English

Jack Williams, an English teacher in a London boys' school, contributes a fascinating article based on a classroom research project on boys' notions of masculinity, clearly a major factor in issues to do with perceptions of both sexuality and gender in schools. He explores what happened when he used his class's study of *Pride and Prejudice* as a focus for engaging students in a study of the representation of men in the novel and for exploring the boys' own attitudes to manliness.

In his article, **John Hodgson** (NATE Research Officer)

approaches gender from a different perspective, looking at some of the ways in which the subject English might be seen as gendered. Around 75% of post-16 students in English (at both A Level and university) are female, and this is often ascribed to the 'soft' nature of a subject often focused on discussion of character, motivation, emotion, and so on. Here, John looks at the experiences of male and female students in university English, exploring the ways in which such views of the subject are disturbed by the university experience.

Through his discussion, John hints at a range of issues to do with the ways in which educational experience constructs and is constructed by notions of gender. Is English really – or does it really need to be – a 'soft' subject? And even if it is, why should the 'soft/hard' binary matter in terms of gender take-up? Such questions open up a rich vein for discussion to which *EDM* hopes to return later.

Grammar for Writing

On a quite different note, this edition of *EDM* contains the second of two articles contributed by **Debra Myhill** and

her **Grammar for Writing** group at the University of Exeter. In the last issue, the group gave an account of the significant findings from their extensive classroom case studies which demonstrated the beneficial effects of certain modes of grammar teaching on students' writing. This second article explores the nature of teachers' subject knowledge about language and the ways in which the promotion of subject knowledge might lead to more effective teaching about language.

And finally...

Elsewhere in *EDM*, Ben Knights, director of the late English Subject Centre, reflects on the work of the centre and its relationship with schools, Keith Davidson explores some issues about phonics, Tom Rank's *Media Studies* continues to mine the endless supply of Gove-related stories in his satirical survey of English-connected news, *Briefing* gives a further update on the curriculum review in England, and *Further Reading* features reviews of significant new books on literature, writing, media, language, and primary English.

Beth Tovey's Literary Signposts



Briefing

NATE Briefing

NATE Conference, York 2012 – The Subject of Discussion

NATE's Annual Conference for English teachers and others in the English community will be held in 2012 in York, from Friday June 29th to Sunday July 1st, providing high-quality, high-value professional development. Key speakers will be **Andrew Motion, Meg Rosoff, Ron Carter, Jacqui O'Hanlon** and **Simon Wrigley**. There will

be the usual mix of high quality workshops, seminars, research presentations, a commercial exhibition and social events. **Workshops, seminars and research presentations** cover topics including creative writing, critical reading, Shakespeare, grammar, graphic novels, poetry, ICT, film, drama, picturebooks, EAL, moving image, spoken language, A Level, journalism, children's literature – and others. See www.nate.org.uk to book and for further details.

English and Literacy Briefing

English in England: National Curriculum Review

The **Expert Panel for the National Curriculum Review** has published its report **The Framework for the National Curriculum** (December 2011). Changes to English and other core subjects, which had been expected to take place in 2013, will now take place in September 2014, as a result of the complexity of the issues raised in the report. Consultation for the new curriculum will take place early in 2013 and final programmes of study should be in schools by September 2013. See www.education.gov.uk for further details.

The report presents a mixed bag of progressive and retrograde ideas. One positive aspect is its unprecedentedly strong emphasis on the need for oracy to be taken more seriously at all levels of the curriculum. Amongst other proposals in the report are the following:

- Splitting KS2 into two 2-year units, reducing KS3 to 2 years, and extending KS4 to 3 years.
- Ending assessment by National Curriculum levels, replacing it with a system of attainment targets for each key stage linked to programmes of study.
- Making humanities, arts, and modern foreign languages compulsory till the age of 16, and reducing the status of Citizenship, ICT and Design and Technology, in line with the review's underlying philosophy of bolstering the role of traditional subject teaching, as seen in the Ebacc.

The work of the Expert Panel has included examining evidence from what it calls 'the education systems of high-performing jurisdictions around the world' such as Singapore, Hong Kong, and certain states in Canada and the US. No doubt this is interesting work, but it has been undermined by its linkage to continuing government propaganda about declining standards in the UK.

The unbalanced emphasis on traditional subject teaching has also been challenged by the **Cultural Learning Alliance** in their report **ImagineNation: The Case for Cultural Learning**, supported by a group of leading cultural figures including Mick Waters, Kevin Spacey, **David Puttnam, Nick Hornby, Michael Boyd** and **Nick Serota**. See www.culturalllearningalliance.org.uk for further details.

Whatever the changes brought about by the National Curriculum Review, it is worth noting the irony that, by the time they take place, the majority of schools in England will be academies and therefore not required to follow the National Curriculum.

English in England: English NC Programmes of Study

Whilst we await the **draft NC programmes of study**, reports – mainly in the **Daily Telegraph** – continue to suggest that Michael Gove wants to see specific changes to the English programmes of study designed to make the study of 'more challenging' classic texts and authors compulsory at KS3 and KS4. In February, Education minister Nick Gibb, launching a campaign to improve reading standards, opined that 'Every child ought to read a Dickens novel by the age of 11'.

At the same time, the **Prince's Institute** continues to promote traditional conceptions of curriculum, including a focus on the teaching of pre-20th century literature in schools, and to be championed by the Telegraph (**'Prince Charles's elite teachers will bring back Chaucer and the Crusades'**, 6th November 2011) and by conservative educational commentators and politicians. Whilst the Prince's Institute is doing excellent work in boosting teachers' subject knowledge in literature, the jingoistic and mono-cultural discourse framing it must set alarm bells ringing, especially when we note that the director of the institute, public school head **Bernice McCabe**, is a key member of the National Curriculum Expert Panel.

Meanwhile, the **Looking for the Heart of English** project, which seeks to initiate a 'national discussion about what really matters in English teaching', is continuing, with discussion groups taking place around the country. The project, which published its first findings recently, will then make representations to the government. See www.heartofenglish.com for further details.

Phonics and Technical English

In the light of current government initiatives in the **teaching of phonics**, such as the statutory 'phonics check' in KS1, **NATE** is conducting a survey of views about phonics, and urges teachers from all phases to complete an online questionnaire to help shape the Association's response. NATE wants to know more about the impact of the emphasis on phonics on the reading curriculum. *The questionnaire may be accessed through the NATE website, www.nate.org.uk*. There is also concern about a new **'technical English' test** which is to be introduced at the end of KS2 as part of the English SAT, to test students' spelling, grammar and punctuation.

New Ofsted Report: 'Moving English Forward'

A new Ofsted report which reflects on how attainment can be raised in English was published in March. **Moving English Forward** identifies ten areas of weakness in English and suggests actions that would help to improve practice. The ten areas identified are: the teaching of writing (including spelling and handwriting); the lack of specialist English co-ordinators in primary schools; the fact that too few pupils read widely enough for pleasure; the impact of tests and exams on the English curriculum; the transition from KS2 to KS3; inflexible lesson planning; weak entry levels of language and communication at KS1; lack of purpose in KS3 English; lack of student understanding of

the relevance of English outside school; lack of attention to literacy across the curriculum.

There is much of interest in this report, especially a renewed emphasis on encouraging a love of reading amongst students and explicit suggestions that formulaic approaches to lesson planning and exam preparation can inhibit enjoyment and motivation in English. Commentators have been quick to point out the irony of Ofsted's comments, however – see, for instance, Michael Rosen's blog (www.michaelrosenblog.blogspot.co.uk) and Francis Gilbert's comments at www.localschoolsnetwork.org.uk). See www.ofsted.gov.uk for the full report.

Secondary Briefing

Changes to GCSE: September 2012, 2013 and 2015

Any student who takes a **GCSE English Literature** exam from **September 2012** onwards (including those who have already started their GCSE courses) will be subject to new arrangements for the assessment of **spelling, punctuation and grammar**. Ofqual is due to confirm the changes to awarding bodies before Easter. For students starting GCSE courses from September 2012 onwards, **GCSEs will be de-modularised**, so that all students will take the exams at the end of the course, as previously. (Modules will still be available in 2012-13 for those who started the course in 2011).

GCSE English Literature specifications will be 'tightened' from **September 2013** onwards, to take into account 'the suggestion that some GCSE qualifications may permit narrowing of the expected course of study'. (What this means is that Michael Gove is concerned that students are not studying enough pre-20th century literature).

New English Literature specifications will be published ready for teaching in September 2013.

Whatever happens, there will be entirely **new GCSE courses in September 2015** following the introduction of the new **National Curriculum**, now delayed until 2014. Ofqual has also announced that arrangements for **GCSE controlled assessments** will be reviewed for 2015. Ofqual's investigation into controlled assessments, published in October, suggested that controlled assessments have reduced teaching and learning time and that they have given students fewer opportunities than coursework 'to develop key skills in refining and editing their work.' However, the scrapping of controlled assessments, if it happens, does not necessarily mean the return of coursework, given Michael Gove's insistence on greater emphasis on final exams.

See www.education.gov.uk and www.ofqual.gov.uk for further details of all these changes.

Post-16 Briefing

New A Levels from September 2014

There will be new **A Level specifications** from September 2014. At this stage, however, it is unclear what the changes will consist of, or indeed how the changes will come about. Michael Gove has instructed Ofqual to let universities lead the process, working with awarding bodies to develop new courses, but it is not yet known what structures will be set up to persuade universities to participate or to achieve wide consultation. It is likely that A Levels will be de-modularised, though it's as yet unclear what this will mean for the AS exam. See www.ofqual.gov.uk for further details.

A report published in April by Ofqual into the suitability of A Levels – **Fit for Purpose?** – has informed ministers' views of the A Level situation. However, despite the very negative accounts of it given in the press by government sources, the report actually finds little wrong with A Levels, finding that most people are fairly happy with the qualifications, and that only minor adjustments are needed. The report also finds that university lecturers are reluctant to become involved with curriculum formation at A Level.

A Levels v. The World

Despite continuing attempts by Michael Gove to depict the UK education system as characterised by declining standards, and as performing badly in relation to international comparisons, a report commissioned by Ofqual in response to such concerns has shown that A Level compares well with other countries in the breadth and depth of knowledge covered and the degree of challenge posed.

Interestingly, the report (**International comparisons in senior secondary assessments**) found that A Level English 'stands apart' from other countries in its 'almost exclusive focus on reading and interpreting traditional forms of text, with other countries, often taking a broader view of the subject, also encompassing film. The report suggests that 'reviewers considered that this broader interpretation may prepare learners better for studying in a higher education setting.' See www.ofqual.gov.uk for further details

Literature Briefing

World Shakespeare Festival



As part of the **London 2012 Cultural Olympiad**, the **RSC** and **Shakespeare's Globe** are leading a **World Shakespeare Festival** which will take place around the country between April and September. It will coincide with a major **British Museum** exhibition, **Shakespeare: Staging the World**. With a focus on international and multi-cultural perspectives, the festival will include two RSC series, **What Country Friends Is This?** and **Nations at War**. The former includes Shakespeare plays about journeying and migration (*The Comedy of Errors*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Tempest*, *Pericles*), whilst the latter includes *Richard III* and *King John*, as well as a production with the **National Theatre of Mexico** (*A Soldier in Every Son* – the Aztec Trilogy).



Further international perspectives are brought by **The Iraqi Theatre Company** (*Romeo and Juliet* in Baghdad), the Brazilian **Companhia Bufomecnica** (*Two Roses for Richard III*), and the **Chekhov International Theatre Festival** (*Midsummer Night's Dream*), as well as by RSC productions of *Julius Caesar* (set in Africa) and *Much Ado About Nothing* (set in India). Meanwhile, Shakespeare's Globe presents **Globe to Globe**, a season in which all of Shakespeare's plays will be performed, each in a different language. Further productions will take place in London, Edinburgh,

Newcastle, Stratford and other venues. See www.worldshakespearefestival.org.uk for further details.

A major education programme will also take place as part of the festival, with a varied and wide-ranging programme of events, including workshops for primary, secondary and sixth form students. The programme culminates in a three-day conference in London, **Worlds Together**, from 6th-8th September 2012. The conference will explore the place of Shakespeare and the arts in young people's lives across the world, and will offer workshops on teaching Shakespeare as well as opportunities to explore research and practice and take part in discussion. Key speakers will include **Michael Morpurgo**, **James Shapiro** and **Shirley Bryce-Heath**. See www.rsc.org.uk/education for further details.

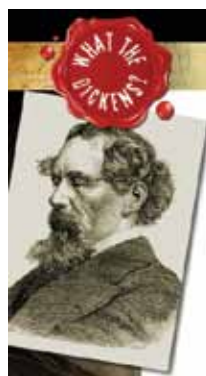
Shakespeare Birthplace Trust



GETTING TO KNOW SHAKESPEARE

The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust has developed its education website, **Explore Shakespeare**, to include extensive resources for students and teachers, and two very enjoyable new sites designed to engage the public in developments and debates in the world of Shakespeare. **Blogging Shakespeare** and **Finding Shakespeare** contain a wealth of information and resources which could be of great value to the teacher and student of Shakespeare. Additionally, the Trust has initiated a free online course about Shakespeare, **Getting To Know Shakespeare**. For full details of all these projects, see www.shakespeare.org.uk.

The Dickens Anniversary



A number of education events and schemes are taking place to mark the Dickens bicentenary in 2012.

The **Dickens Association** and the **English Association** have announced the **More Dickens Competition** for primary schools. Teachers are asked to submit details of a class project (including work on different modes or forms such as sound, images or words) based on one of Dickens' works, along with examples of children's work. The deadline is 1st April 2012. *Notes for guidance and registration form are available at* www.le.ac.uk/engassoc.

The National Schools Partnership has produced a set of creative writing resources, **What the Dickens?**, aimed at introducing KS2 and KS3 students to the work of Dickens, including videos by writers **Meg Rosoff**, **Mal Peet** and **Sally Phelps**. See www.whatthedickens.org for further details.

Meanwhile, **Dickens 2012**, the official bicentenary organisation set up by the **Charles Dickens Museum** and **Film London**, has organised a wide range of activities, including a major exhibition – **Dickens and London** – at the **Museum of London**, which runs until June. See www.dickens2012.org for further details.



BBC Shakespeare Unlocked



Coinciding with the World Shakespeare Festival, the **BBC** has launched a major Shakespeare season, **Shakespeare Unlocked**. Programmes include a documentary series by James Shapiro on King James I and Shakespeare, **The King and the**

Playwright; a film by Simon Schama, **Shakespeare and Us**; a series of short programmes on Radio 4, **Shakespeare's Restless World**; and productions of the plays on both Radio 3 and Radio 4, including a **Histories** cycle produced by Sam Mendes on BBC2.

In connection with this project, **BBC Learning and RSC Education** have also created a valuable online resource called **Shakespeare Unlocked**, a series of short films which enable students to watch key scenes from **Romeo and Juliet**, **Macbeth** and **A Midsummer Night's Dream**, and hear actors and directors discussing the interpretive choices made in performing the scenes. The clips and associated material may be accessed through www.bbc.co.uk/arts/shakespeare, where full details of the season may also be found.

RSC Teaching Shakespeare



The RSC has also launched a major education project called **Teaching Shakespeare**, in partnership with the **University of Warwick**. The project offers teachers access to a programme of online resources and courses that combine the active approaches of the RSC with the scholarship of the University of Warwick. Aimed at teachers of English, Drama and Literacy in KS2, 3 and 4, the resources aim to help teachers engage students actively with Shakespeare in the classroom. Online films show RSC actors and lecturers Jonothan Neelands and James Shapiro working with students in UK schools. There are also podcasts of interviews with actors, directors and voice experts. The resources are available to buy from this summer.

In addition to using the materials as CPD, teachers can take a postgraduate course on teaching Shakespeare and attend week-long residential courses at Stratford. The online courses start in September 2012, with applications now open. For further details see www.teachingshakespeare.ac.uk.

The Romance of the Middle Ages

A major exhibition about medieval literature and its influences is running at the **Bodleian Library, Oxford**. The exhibition's website offers the opportunity to view and read about all the exhibits, which include the only existing manuscript of 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight', a folio edition of the works of Shakespeare, manuscripts by Tolkien and Pullman, and Terry Jones's working script of *Monty*

Python and the Holy Grail. In association with the exhibition storyteller **Daniel Morden** and music group **The Devil's Violin** have embarked on a nationwide tour of a show, **A Love Like Salt**, which explores the original romance stories which informed tales by Chaucer and plays by Shakespeare. For further details see www.medievalromance.bodleian.ox.ac.uk and www.fiddle.org.uk/devils_violin/salt

The ROMANCE of the MIDDLE AGES

The Power of Caribbean Poetry

The Caribbean Poetry Project, a joint initiative of the **Cambridge University Faculty of Education** and the **University of West Indies**, is hosting a conference on Caribbean Poetry in Cambridge from 20-22 September. Speakers will include John Agard, Grace Nichols and Linton Kwesi Johnson. The programme will include performances, seminars, workshops and lectures by poets and scholars. The final day will focus particularly on teaching Caribbean poetry. For further details see <http://caribbeanpoetry.educ.cam.ac.uk>.



New Film Resources

FILMCLUB has launched a new initiative, **The British Connection**, which invites schools to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee through film. The campaign highlights 60 great British films which students will be encouraged to watch, discuss and review in their school film clubs. The films begin in 1952 with **Limelight**, and end in 2011 with **Attack the Block**, going by way of **Vertigo**, **Gregory's Girl**, **Distant Voices Still Lives**, **Billy Elliot**, and many others. For further details, see www.filmclub.org.

Film Education, meanwhile, has launched a set of resources for teaching film in schools, **Thinking Film**. The resource, distributed free to schools, offers a DVD of film clips accompanied by lesson plans and worksheets for subjects across the curriculum. The project follows on from the publication of the report, **Making the Case for Film Education**, which was released earlier this year. See www.filmeducation.org/tbinkingfilm for further details.



What's On

NATE Events

www.nate.org.uk

NATE Annual National Conference:

English – The Subject of Discussion

Fri 29th June – Sunday 1st July, York

Key speakers: **Andrew Motion, Meg Rosoff, Ron Carter, Jacqui O'Hanlon, Simon Wrigley**

NATE Annual Research Symposium

Teaching Grammar for Writing

Thu 15th November, British Library, London

NATE Friday Workshop:

Bridging the Gap Between KS3 and KS4

Fri 5th October, NATE Headquarters, Sheffield

Course leader: **Sarah Darragh**

NATE Friday Workshop:

Literacy for Non-Specialists

Fri 12th October, NATE Headquarters, Sheffield

Course Leader: **Moyra Beverton**

NATE Friday Workshop:

Powering Up English with ICT

Fri 19th October, NATE Headquarters, Sheffield

Course Leader: **Tom Rank**

NATE Friday Workshop:

Outstanding Speaking and Listening

Fri 9th November, NATE Headquarters, Sheffield

Course Leader: **Joe Walsh**

NATE Friday Workshop:

Raising Grade Ds to C+ in GCSE English

Fri 16th November, NATE Headquarters, Sheffield

Course Leader: **Helen Lapping**

NATE Friday Workshop:

Teaching Grammar for Writing

Fri 23rd November, NATE Headquarters, Sheffield

Course Leader: **Helen Lines**

UKLA Events

www.ukla.org

UKLA International Conference:

Crossing Places: Literacy, Life and School

Fri 6th – Sun 8th July, University of Leicester

Key speakers: **Joanne Larson, Victoria Risko, Morag Styles, Beverley Naidoo**

English Association Events

www.le.ac.uk/engassoc

English Association Conference:

Dickens and Childhood

18th June, Museum of Childhood, London

Key speakers: **Peggy Reyonolds, Michael Slater, Lucinda Dickens Hawksley**

National Literacy Trust Events

www.literacytrust.org.uk

NLT Primary Conferences:

Teaching Literacy across the new curriculum with a focus on non-fiction

20th Jun, York; 21st Jun, Bristol; 22nd Jun, London

Key speaker: **Pie Corbett**

NLT Primary Conferences:

Reading for Real

4th Oct, London; 9th Oct, Newcastle; 16th Oct, Manchester

Key Speakers: **Stephanie Austwick, Kevin Jeffrey, Gill Matthews**

Prince's Teaching Trust Events

www.princes-ti.org.uk

Prince's Teaching Institute Course:

Dickens

Fri 15th June, Southwark Cathedral, London

Key Speakers: **Kaye Mitchell, Josie Billington, Stephanie Cross**

Prince's Teaching Institute Course:

The Contemporary Novel

Fri 29th June, The People's History Museum, Manchester

Key Speakers: **Ian Brinton, Jenny Hartley, Robert Douglas-Fairhurst**

BFI Education Events

www.bfi.org.uk/education

BFI Media Conference:

Creativity, Industry and Learning

Weds 4th - Fri 6th July, BFI Southbank, London

Key speakers: **Ian Livingstone, Emma Mulqueeny, Patrick Younge, Briony Hanson, Jay Arnold**

BFI Workshop:

Teenage Kicks – Teenagers on Film (KS3/KS4)

Fri 22nd June, BFI Southbank

English and Media Centre Events

www.englishandmedia.co.uk

Emagazine A Level Literature Conference

Wed 24th Oct, Institute of Education, London

Key speakers: **Robert Eaglestone, John Mullan, Emma Smith, Patience Agbabi**

EMC Course: Teaching Poetry with Michael Rosen

Monday 18th June, English and Media Centre, London

Course tutor: **Michael Rosen**

EMC Course: Outstanding English Teaching

Wednesday 27th June, English and Media Centre, London

Course tutor: **Martin Phillips**

EMC Course: English Essentials for NQTs

Tuesday 3rd July, English and Media Centre, London

Course tutors: **Kate Oliver, Jenny Grahame**

EMC Course: AS English Language: Language Frameworks

Friday 6th July, English and Media Centre, London

Course tutors: **Marcello Giovanelli, Dan Clayton**

EMC Course: Teaching Jane Eyre for English Literature A Level

Friday 13th July, English and Media Centre, London

Course tutor: **Lucy Webster**

EMC/Arvon Day for Teachers as Writers

Saturday 14th July, English and Media Centre, London

Course tutors: **Mark Haddon, Becky Swain, Barbara Bleiman**

Schools Network English Events

www.theschoolsnetwork.org.uk

Outstanding Literacy for Ofsted

3rd July, London; 27th September, Manchester;

16th October, London

National English Conference

27th November, London

Other Events

'Unlearning Shakespeare' Symposium for English/drama teachers and researchers

Wed 28th June, Oxford Brookes University

Key speakers: **Paul Prescott, Bethan Marshall**

www.shakespeareineducation.com/2012/03

IBBY International Congress:

Crossing Boundaries - Translations and Migrations

23 – 26 August, Imperial College, London

Speakers include: **Aidan Chambers, Shaun Tan**

www.ibbycongress2012.org

Caribbean Poetry Project Conference:

The Power of Caribbean Poetry – Word and Sound

20th – 22nd September, Cambridge University Education

Faculty

Speakers include: **John Agard, Grace Nichols, Linton**

Kwesi Johnson

<http://caribbeanpoetry.educ.cam.ac.uk>

Unlearning Shakespeare

Oxford Brookes University, Thursday June 28th 2012

Unlearning Shakespeare is a one-day symposium for English teachers, lecturers and researchers to explore how creative teaching and learning fits (or doesn't) with formal learning structures at school and university. It explores, through a focus on Shakespeare pedagogy, what teaching and learning actually are, where practicality meets imagined ideals, and what might be changed or best left alone. The focus of the symposium is on the relationship between institutional structures of thought and practice in learning and the positive turbulence or system stresses caused by

injection of or experimentation with innovative approaches.

The day will include talks by practitioners and researchers, and drama workshops, with keynote speakers Bethan Marshall (King's College London) and Paul Prescott (Warwick University). Entrance is free. Please register attendance by 22nd June. Contact Jane Coles, Oxford Brookes University (j.coles@brookes.ac.uk) or Liam Semler, University of Sydney (liam.semler@sydney.edu.au).



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EDM Special Issue - English Teaching and Sexuality Strategies and Resources



- Do you want to tackle homophobia or homophobic language and prejudices amongst your students, or even amongst staff?
- Do you want to create an English classroom where issues about gender and sexuality are explored and discussed?
- Do you want to celebrate the contribution of gay and lesbian writers and thinkers to literature, language and culture?
- What are the best ways to teach about these issues?
- Are you a gay teacher who needs support or guidance?
- Do you know a gay student who needs support?
- Where can you go for information or resources to support any of these issues?

The articles in this edition of EDM aim to help you think about and find solutions to some of these problems. This page attempts to summarise some of the ideas and resources currently circulating that might be helpful.

Sexuality in the Classroom

This is a good time for tackling homophobia in schools in the UK. As this article demonstrates, there is a plethora of high quality resources available to support schools and teachers; and awareness of the damage that can be done by homophobic language, attitudes and bullying is greater than it has ever been, perhaps especially since the suicide of 15-year-old Dominic Crouch last year. Furthermore, despite the fact that homophobia remains a serious and widespread problem, it's also clear that positive attitudes to homosexuality are more widespread than ever, boosted perhaps by increasing evidence of gay people in the media, sport, film, etc. And government has never before been as pro-active in helping to tackle the problem as it is has been this century.

The resources described below are not specific to English, but most of them provide material which is very suitable for use in English lessons, especially perhaps in work on language, on speaking and listening, and on non-fiction and media texts. Even without the specialised resources described here, newspapers provide a wealth of powerful reporting on the problems and prejudices faced by gay people in schools, in sport, and in society more generally, many of which could be used very effectively in English. As many of the writers in this edition point out, work on literature also provides many opportunities for consideration of issues about sexuality.

One of the key messages for teachers that has been emerging in recent years is that effective approaches to tackling homophobia result not so much from one-off PSHE-style lessons about 'the problem of homosexuality', but from embedding ideas about, representations of and explorations of gender and sexuality into subject lessons as part of the normal work of the class – just as schools and teachers have been doing in relation to issues about racism and sexism for many years. Similarly, it is increasingly recognised that teaching 'about homosexuality' is only a part of teaching more inclusively 'about sexuality and gender', a strategy which makes it clear that sexuality is about everyone's experience, not just the experience of 'the other'.

School's Out

www.schools-out.org.uk



This message is effectively explained and illustrated on the website **The Classroom** (see 'Goodbye to the 'gay' lesson' at www.the-classroom.org.uk), which is part of the wider web presence of the organisation

School's Out, which has been campaigning for LGBT equality in education for almost 40 years. The Classroom is a resource designed to 'show teachers inspirational examples of how the use of LGBT experience as material in lessons can help to raise attainment and manage behaviour', and focuses on ideas about 'usualising' and 'actualising' ideas about sexuality – making them visible and allowing them to be actively confronted in the classroom.

The School's Out website, though not as glossy as Stonewall's, is crammed with information and resources, including a **Student Toolkit** to help students raise issues and bring about change in schools, and a great deal more. School's Out also has a **national conference** in February each year, and membership of the organisation brings regular newsletters and other support.

LGBT History Month

www.lgbthistorymonth.org.uk



School's Out is also responsible for a major resource for schools, **LGBT History Month**, which has taken place every February since 2005. Modelled on the successful Black History Month experience, it provides a platform for schools – and society in general – to focus on positive representations of LGBT people throughout history and across the curriculum, and to work to bring about changes. The site contains extensive resources for schools, as well as many more general resources, and a monthly bulletin contains detailed updates and much other information.

Stonewall
www.stonewall.org.uk



The website of **Stonewall**, the charity that campaigns for equality for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) people, is another major resource for teachers. On the next few pages, Lydia

Malmedie, Stonewall's Education Officer, outlines the resources available for English teachers, including the highly acclaimed film of **FIT**, a play, described by The Times as 'a kind of gritty take on the shiny E4 drama *Glee*', commissioned to provide a focus for discussion of sexuality issues among young people. Described by Ian McKellen as 'the best anti-bullying film I've ever seen', this is highly recommended by its users. If you would like to help Stonewall to develop further resources for use in English lessons, please contact Lydia.

Stonewall runs a variety of anti-homophobia programmes including its **School Champions** scheme. Its website is packed with resources and publications of various kinds which can be used in the English classroom in many ways. **The School Report** and **The Teacher's Report** are glossy booklets which give the results of Stonewall's research into homophobia in schools, and could themselves be powerful resources for use at GCSE. In addition, the website provides plenty of more general support for gay people. Stonewall's annual education conference, **Education for All**, takes place this year on July 5th at the British Library in London, with BBC Director Mark Thompson as key speaker.

Amnesty International
www.amnesty.org.uk



Amnesty's leading human rights campaigning includes sexuality rights. Their website contains several areas focusing on this area, and resources

include superb lesson ideas which are ideal for speaking and listening activities in English.

Elly Barnes and Stoke Newington School
www.ellybarnes.com



In conjunction with School's Out and LGBT History Month, the teacher **Elly Barnes** offers workshops, under the banner **Educate and Celebrate**, giving practical advice about how to make schools LGBT friendly. Elly is a music teacher and diversity course leader at **Stoke Newington School**, which, in the light of her success, has become a diversity training centre. The next course is on 19th June, 2012. As a result of the programme, the schools has been recognised by Ofsted as a centre of best

practice for successfully challenging homophobic bullying. The website also contains a variety of articles and other resources.

Exceeding Expectations
www.exceedingexpectations.org.uk



Exceeding Expectations is a project which aims to end homophobia through education in Manchester schools, led by **Manchester City Council** and the **Lesbian and Gay Foundation**. Although Manchester-based, the extremely well-presented website offers a wealth of resources and information

designed specifically for use in schools and directly addressing teachers' concerns, and links to the also very useful website of the Lesbian and Gay Foundation.

Tackle Homophobia
www.tacklehomophobia.com



With the slogan 'Supporting schools to tackle homophobia', this website is part of a project funded by the **Paul Hamlyn**

Foundation in the four countries of the UK. The website provides resources and gives details of legislation, projects and other issues which are specific to each country, as well as plenty of help which is common to all four.

Show Racism The Red Card
www.srtrc.org



Show Racism the Red Card, which confronts issues about racism through football, has released a new set of

resources under the banner **Homophobia: Let's Tackle It**. A 23-minute film, **Talking about Homophobia**, is at the heart of the project, and features interviews with actor Kieron Richardson (Hollyoaks), comedian Rhona Cameron, and England rugby player Ben Cohen. There is also a further 17-minute DVD featuring top sporting personalities talking about homophobia, and a comprehensive education pack. It's also worth noting that **the FA** has released a 30-minute anti-homophobia video which can be seen at www.thefa.com.

Diversity Role Models
www.diversityrolemodels.org



Diversity Role Models was set up in 2011 by a teacher in the wake of the suicide of bullied schoolboy Dominic Crouch, and, like Stonewall, arranges for gay role models to go into schools to talk to students direct.

Other organisations

All the main teaching unions offer advice and resources on tackling homophobia, as do most anti-bullying organisations (see www.antibullying.net). EACH (Educational Action Challenging Homophobia, www.eachactionorguk) and JAAHB (Joint Action Against Homophobic Bullying, www.intercomtrust.org.uk) provide further support.

Gary Snapper
Editor

The Importance of Being ... Out

Why Sexuality Matters in English

Chris Waugh reflects on his experiences as a gay English teacher, arguing that openness about sexuality is a crucial element of the work of the English classroom.



Chris Waugh
teaches English at
the London Nautical
School, Lambeth.

If I were given the opportunity to speak for ten minutes to my fifteen year old schoolboy self, I would give that angry kid the information that I know for a certainty would have made a real difference to his life. One of the first things I would tell him is that Oscar Wilde was gay. It is with that young man in mind, and the thousands of them who have passed through the threshold of my classrooms since then, that I am open with my students about my being a gay man.

Those two decades ago when I sat in an English classroom reading Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, my teachers managed, in what on reflection was a mightily sophisticated censorship effort only possible in a pre-internet era, to suppress any mention of the homosexuality of its author, let alone the subtext of the play itself. Given that we were also shown Stanley Kubrick's 1971 version of *A Clockwork Orange* in all of its ultraviolent glory, I am now struck by the question: 'What was so dangerous about Oscar Wilde that we had to be protected from him?'

I developed a teenage obsession with the Merchant-Ivory production of E. M. Forster's *A Room With a View*. I had watched the film, carefully recorded in VHS with pauses for the ad breaks, hundreds of times through my teenage years and into my early twenties. I felt deeply betrayed by my teachers and prior educators when I finally discovered at university that Forster, Wilde and many other authors who I had an affinity with were gay. It was as if I had been denied my own inheritance. It was only then, after being on this planet for 20 years, that I first started to believe that I had a place, a voice, an entitlement and a sense that there was a group to which I belonged. All of this might have been afforded to me by my English teachers, if they had simply had the courage to speak the truth. If I had gone on to tell that troubled young man that a number of his teachers were likely gay as well, I might have saved the fellow a decade of angst and a heck of a lot in therapist fees. I can, however, tell that truth to the fifteen year olds I see in my classroom each day.

A successful classroom in English must encourage the open and free expression of ideas, perspectives, values

and responses. It must allow students the scope to test their ideas and it must offer plenty of room for the student to err. A potent tool for encouraging this tolerant environment is to step into it as a teacher. Introducing an aspect of myself, like sexuality, to become part of the classroom discourse, offers that conversation the gravity of personal attachment. It allows students to explore their own tolerant attitudes and indirectly demands that such tolerance is shown towards many forms of difference.

The Importance of Being ... Honest

Fast-forward to 2012 and the modern English classroom. Oscar Wilde still features, as do many of my other gay brothers and sisters from the great British literary heritage. Now it is illegal to discriminate against me or any of my gay students on the basis of our homosexuality. Yet now, in the boys' school in which I teach, I am still alone as an openly gay teacher and I know no students who identify as gay. 25 years later, it is as if I am still the only gay in the village.

Today my sexuality is an asset to me as a teacher. I am vastly more effective as a gay teacher than I could ever be as a (sexuality-undisclosed) teacher. *The Importance of Being Earnest* is taught in the full light of day. When Algernon or Jack go off 'Bunburying' no one in our

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classroom turns a blind eye to the inference of that very direct neologism (just read it slowly). In the Morris Gleitzman novel, *Two Weeks With the Queen*, when we discover that Ted's lover is actually a man and is dying of AIDS and not cancer, a full and frank discussion ensues about the gay people we know and I can share my own experience of losing loved ones to the disease. Carol Ann Duffy is allowed to be lesbian and her interest in re-imagining historical figures suddenly makes sense. We can have fun speculating on exactly what influence Siegfried Sassoon had on the uncommonly handsome Wilfred Owen during their short time together in that hospital in Edinburgh during WWI.

The opportunities go deeper than this. My openness sets a precedent for open and frank discussion on all subjects in the classroom. The subject of English reaches its full majesty when it arches towards consideration of identity, culture and sexuality. Tolerance can be cultivated in a classroom where honesty and self-acceptance is the

The subject of English reaches its full majesty when it arches towards consideration of identity, culture and sexuality. Tolerance can be cultivated in a classroom where honesty and self-acceptance is the norm, and the inevitable challenges of homophobia, are so much more easily confronted from a position of openness.

norm, and the inevitable challenges of homophobia, both direct and insidious, are so much more easily confronted from a position of openness. It has always been a paradox of some interest to me that, in a domain so incredibly intimate and personal as the teaching of English to children, the dominant advice to gay teachers has been to maintain a distant, oblique presence in the classroom, to keep our personal selves 'on a low light'. This, to me, seems the wrong approach.

The Importance of ... Sexuality in the Classroom

Some of our students are gay. Just as some are female, some black, some Muslim - and it is our obligation to generate an environment where they feel safe, respected and where their individuality is celebrated. These students have a right to be represented in the curriculum. It should be as absurd to consider suppressing an author's sexuality as it would be to suppress their gender or race. And the case for gay people is so much stronger. While most who are in the minority in society at least have a family who share this experience, gay people often grow up in straight households. They don't have a refuge at home to which they can retreat from the sense of being an outsider and the frequent persecution associated with it. They often don't have adults at home who share their experience of growing up different. The opportunity for us to create a place where these young people feel acknowledged and entitled is enormous. It can, quite literally, be life saving.

If the strength of this argument is not self-evident, you need only to look at the statistics. The lesbian, gay and

bisexual charity Stonewall's research identifies that 60% of young lesbian and gay people say that there is no adult at school nor at home with whom they can talk about being gay. It is unimaginable that 60% of children any other minority might have no-one to talk to about their identity. Aside from the value to all students in showing acceptance of difference in the classroom, we have a primary responsibility to those gay kids, and a secondary responsibility to the straight kids, to teach tolerance for all.

English is about exploring and understanding the making of meaning. The means by which we make meaning asks us to examine different perspectives. We consider the ethnicity, gender, class of an author or a character in order to fully understand their intentions, their actions - to make meaning of the text. Sexuality is as important a perspective as these others. Ignoring it undermines a text. When first reading *Earnest*, I was amused by Lady Bracknell's obsession with surface over substance, but I was betrayed as an English scholar in being denied the opportunity to examine the gay political subtext of her determination to elevate the maintaining of appearances to the status of a religion. The cleverness of the multiplicity of the character of John/Jack/Ernest Worthing was not simply a farcical conceit - it was deep social commentary, gay commentary, written by a gay man whose experience of the world informed his writing so deeply that it is inextricable. The same is so of me as a teacher. My sexuality informs my teaching and to deny my students access to that information is nothing more than an act of 'Bunburying' of the highest order.

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..as a high moral tone can hardly be said to conduce very much to either one's health or one's happiness, in order to get up to town I have always pretended to have a younger brother of the name of Ernest, who lives in the Albany, and gets into the most dreadful scrapes. (*The Importance of Being Earnest*, 1.83)

The Importance of Being ... Yourself with Your Students

Authenticity is one of the most prized dispositions in the classroom and young people can ferret out insincerity and half-truths with lightning acuity. One of my favourite and most memorable moments in teaching occurred in my earlier years when I worked in a rural school. I was working with a challenging group, mainly boys. Shakespeare was the topic and I was earnestly trying to



tease out of them a response to a question about Romeo's belief in fate. A particularly disengaged young man put his hand up, for what felt like for the first time, and I eagerly nominated him to speak. 'Are you gay?' was the question. It was a small town, he knew the answer to this question, but my answer to this question was what mattered. The instinct to demur was strong, but to my enduring pride, I managed to squeeze out a calm-sounding, 'yes'. From that moment forward all the class's resistance to learning disappeared.

Young people need to see courage and honesty in the people around them. They test us for it and they are attracted to, and show tremendous trust in, those who embody those qualities. This opportunity for me to demonstrate my confidence in my students, my willingness to be true to myself, my belief in the relevance of my sexuality to my role in the classroom is a moment of courage. This moment immediately shatters the invisible panes of carefully maintained unspoken anxiety around the subject of homosexuality; moreover it is an act of faith in the students I work with. My experience has affirmed the maxim that the best way to be trusted is to show trust.

The Importance of ... Teaching Tolerance

As education achingly re-orientates itself to face the challenge of meeting the needs of the 21st century child there is an increasingly strong argument for bringing sexuality into the light of day; both the sexuality of the teacher and the sexuality of the student. The modern classroom has deconstructed the old frameworks of teacher authority in favour of a student-centred approach to learning. As a result, teachers rely on authentic learning relationships with their students to be effective. This is an opportunity to transform our classrooms and face these 21st century challenges head-on. With the consideration of sexuality as the prism, a classroom can become more authentic, tolerant, critical, capable of managing ambiguity, aware of subtext, responsive to change and aware of the power of media, language and literature.

Authenticity is one of the most prized dispositions in the classroom and young people can ferret out insincerity and half-truths with lightning acuity. Young people need to see courage and honesty in the people around them. They test us for it and they are attracted to, and show tremendous trust in, those who embody those qualities. My sexuality informs my teaching and to deny my students access to that information is nothing more than an act of 'Bunburying' of the highest order.

The English classroom is an ideal environment for the interrogation of the importance of sexuality in schools. The history of homosexuality is very much a coded one, in which homosexual literature has often been a powerful form of cultural resistance. Some of the most effective usages of modern language have been seen on the placards of anti-homophobia rallies. It is about time this brilliant material, with its message of tolerance and cleverness in delivery, starts to surface in the national examination papers, as examples of a sector of our wider social discourse.

'Homosexual agenda: Spend time with Family - Be Treated Equally - Buy Milk'

The Importance of ... Challenging Assumptions and Representations

My use of the Stonewall-backed anti-homophobic bullying film *FIT* as source material for a study of the spoken language of South London youth is an example of where material with explicit gay, lesbian and bisexual content is used for another purpose. The study of contemporary spoken language encourages the exploration of unique variances in spoken language as it relates to social groups. The language of sexuality in modern society is rich with exactly the textured interpretations that are needed for developed responses to this task. Even the examination of the use of the word 'gay' alone in modern conversation demands a wide set of analytical approaches. 'Gay' traditionally meant 'happy', latterly has meant 'homosexual', and has evolved more recently in urban slang to mean 'stupid' or 'undesirable'. The mobility of the word 'gay' offers a unique opportunity to explore the relationship between language and society. In doing so, we de-stigmatise its use, we clarify the effect of its pejorative use, and we advance the students' understanding of language.

The film is not presented as a social issues drama, but as a source for other linguistic investigation. The inference here is powerful: the gay content is incidental, naturalised, and the film is examined on its wider merits. Because I'm open about my sexuality, my entire classroom has this character. It is a room where a homosexual frame of reference is native, and where other frames of reference, introduced by the students, become important contributions, adding to the conversation. This subtle challenge to the assumption of heterosexuality is necessary if we wish to demonstrate inclusiveness to highly sensitive gay students, and it has the additional benefit of encouraging the heterosexual students to question their own assumptions.

The study of English can encourage challenges to the assumption of heterosexuality. My being a homosexual reader allows for exploration with students of ideas of readership participating in the construction of a text, well before such abstract concepts are formally introduced to a learning programme. Through my taking a clearly defined

personal stance in relation to a text, my students are challenged to do the same. Immediately they are catapulted out of the security of acquiring my response as if it were their own and instead they become eager to develop their own personal response. By making my personal perspective uniquely relevant in the classroom, I am igniting the desire in the students to do the same - to differentiate themselves from me by expressing a perspective that is true to their own unique self-perception. Nothing could be more fulfilling for an English teacher than engaging in a conversation with a group of students where each is defending their experience and interpretation, and presenting it as something they are teaching or introducing with its own unique value. Through placing a high value on my unique perspective, I invest my students' point of view with the same value.

Another aspect of this critical process that has been highly fertile in the classroom has been an examination of the universality of heterosexual representation in the mainstream world. This has led to some brilliant discoveries on the part of students of similar disparities in the representation of diverse genders, cultures, religions and ethnicities. Suddenly the students begin to notice the paucity of black faces in print advertising or of the representation of every bank manager on television as a middle-aged man. Naturally, these conversations are not limited to me as a gay teacher; however my position in society allows me to express a perspective that rings of authentic experience. I am not only a conduit for the experiences and ideas of others but I speak also from the authority and intimacy of my personal experience.

The processes of re-framing a challenging problem, re-creating a series of events in an altered time-frame or physical setting, presenting an argument by exploring its contrary dimensions are all highly prized critical strategies in English. My homosexuality has afforded me a differing perspective from the mainstream which I can offer to the students as a means of illustrating these processes of deeper critical thinking - particularly in the goal of encouraging them to develop their own unique personal response and taking into account their culture, gender, sexuality, religion.

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The Importance of Being ... Courageous

The young people in our care need us to face the truth about sexuality. The ones who are gay, lesbian or bisexual are listening and watching with urgent interest for any sign of our position on their sexuality. The straight ones need our help to interpret the conflicting and coded messages they're being sent about homosexuality. What better way to do this than through the study of English?

Risk, risk anything! Do the hardest thing on earth for you. Act for yourself. Face the truth. (*Katherine Mansfield*)

The images illustrating this article are stills from the 1996 film Beautiful Thing (by Jonathan Harvey) with Glen Berry and Scott Neal

STONEWALL SCHOOL CHAMPIONS PROGRAMME

Preventing and tackling homophobic bullying in Britain's schools



Stonewall's School Champions programme helps schools prevent and tackle homophobic bullying so that all young people can fulfil their potential.

With a year's membership costing only £100 for primary and £200 for secondary schools, School Champions enjoy a range of benefits including:

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Visit www.stonewall.org.uk/educationchampions, e-mail the Education Team at schoolchampions@stonewall.org.uk or call on 020 7593 1871.



Some Students Are Gay

Tackling Homophobia in English

Lydia Malmedie outlines ways in which English teachers can help tackle homophobia in schools, and describes resources available from Stonewall, the charity which campaigns for equal rights for lesbians, gay men and bisexuals.



Lydia Malmedie is Stonewall's Education Officer.

What does sexual orientation have to do with teaching English? A great deal. Take, for instance, all the discussions of relationships between fictional characters in literature classes you undoubtedly lead. Sexual orientation is there implicitly already - only generally the assumption is that of heterosexuality. While the majority of the population is straight, Government estimates suggest that six per cent of the population are lesbian, gay or bisexual. You don't have to be a maths teacher to figure out what that means for a class of 30 students. But this isn't just about gay people - it's also about those pupils who have gay friends or family members.

What's the problem?

Stonewall's 2007 research, *The School Report*, found that seven in ten lesbian, gay and bisexual young people have never been taught about lesbian and gay people or issues in class and that over 60 per cent feel there isn't an adult at home or at school who they can talk to about being gay. Where gay pupils or those with lesbian, gay or bisexual family members don't see their reality and lives reflected in class, this can make them feel invisible and not part of a school community.

Based on a YouGov poll with over 2,000 school staff, Stonewall's groundbreaking research *The Teachers' Report* found that nine in ten primary and secondary school teachers say lesbian and gay issues should be addressed in school or in specific lessons. However, over a third of secondary school teachers and almost two thirds of primary school teachers have not addressed it in their classrooms.

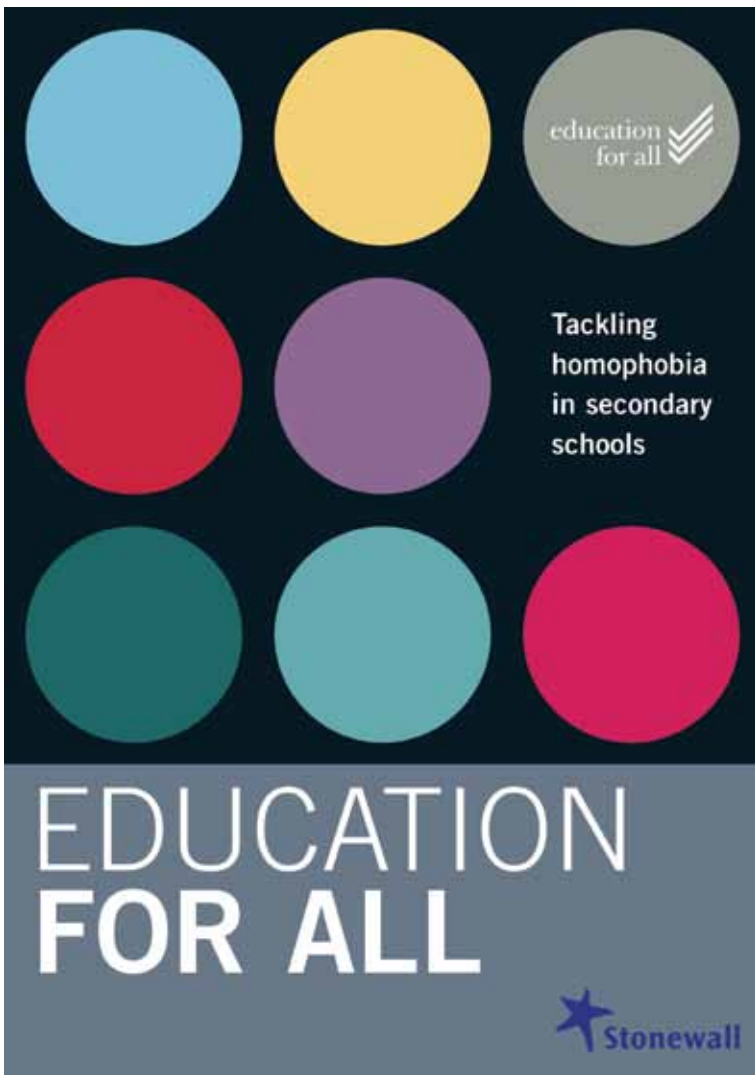
When you're learning about someone in a lesson, often kind of like a writer, you learn about their background and often the things that have influenced their work somehow and often race comes up and sex. I remember this a lot from English writers and then finding out after I've studied a book that they were gay and it was just never mentioned and it must have had a really big effect on their life, especially when you do historical figures. It would be nice for that to be mentioned as part of the

background. Not just kind of superfluous like - oh, and they were gay - but talking about how they were gay and the effect on their lives the same way that we talk about other background things when we're talking about someone in context. (*Adyna*, 18)

Since lesbian, gay and bisexual issues are hardly ever mentioned in class and families with gay parents and carers are often not talked about, it isn't very surprising that homophobic bullying is endemic in Britain's schools. *The Teachers' Report* showed that homophobic bullying is the most common form of bullying after bullying because of weight. Over two thirds of young gay people have been homophobically bullied - but pupils who have been taught about lesbian and gay issues in a positive way are 13 per cent less likely to experience it. They are also 60 per cent more likely to feel happy at school (*The School Report*, 2007).

Homophobic bullying doesn't only affect gay young people or those perceived as gay. It can affect any student who might not conform to gender stereotypes or behave like a 'typical boy' or a 'typical girl' or who is simply perceived as different. Like all





other forms of bullying, it can seriously impact on pupils' self-esteem, attendance and attainment; half of gay young people who have experienced it say they've skipped school because of it (*The School Report, 2007*).

Including LGB issues in teaching helps prevent homophobic bullying because pupils get the chance to talk about their stereotypes and challenge each other's assumptions. It also gives greater confidence to students who are gay as they feel acknowledged.

A law with a legacy

There are many different reasons why English teachers might fail to mention, for example, that Carol Ann Duffy is

Including LGB issues in teaching helps prevent homophobic bullying because pupils get the chance to talk about their stereotypes and challenge each other's assumptions. It also gives greater confidence to students who are gay as they feel acknowledged.

a lesbian when discussing the Poet Laureate's poems. One reason is that teachers are unsure about what they are and aren't allowed to talk about; another is that they don't have the confidence to address it. This is partly due to the legacy of a damaging piece of local government legislation - Section 28. This law, prohibiting the 'promotion of homosexuality' and labelling same-sex families as 'pretend' family relationships, never really applied to schools but resulted in teachers worrying whether they were allowed to talk about gay issues or characters in class. Introduced in 1989, the law was finally repealed in 2003 but its effect is still felt today.

Not sure of the law – I know I am not allowed to promote homosexuality and am not sure what this involves. (Zoe, teacher, independent primary school, London)

Nine in ten primary and secondary school teachers have never had any training on how to prevent and tackle homophobic bullying, and more than a quarter of secondary school teachers would not feel confident in supporting a young person who came out to them. Furthermore, two in five would not feel confident in providing pupils with information, advice and guidance on lesbian and gay issues (*The Teachers' Report, 2009*).

Education for All

Stonewall's 'Education for All' campaign was launched in 2005 to combat this legacy and raise awareness of homophobic bullying and its impact. We have since been working successfully in coalition with over seventy organisations to influence policy and make sure teachers have the skills, confidence and tools to challenge homophobic bullying and talk about lesbian, gay and bisexual issues in class in an age-appropriate way.

Stonewall works closely with national and local government as well as national agencies and teacher training providers to achieve this. In its Education White Paper *The Importance of Teaching*, the Department for Education made tackling homophobic bullying one of its priorities and has since published new advice for schools on tackling all forms of bullying including homophobic bullying. The Equality Act 2010 and the public sector Equality Duty now require all schools, including free schools and academies, to take proactive steps to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations amongst different groups.

The emphasis on tackling homophobic bullying and changes in equality legislation leave no doubt that schools can and should talk about lesbian, gay and bisexual issues in class and this will now also help them to stand out in Ofsted inspections. Under the new framework for school inspections which came into force in January 2012, inspectors will look for evidence on what schools are doing to challenge homophobic bullying. The guidance for inspectors furthermore makes specific reference to lesbian, gay and bisexual students as a specific group

whose needs have to be met. Good schools will be able to demonstrate how they ensure all students, including gay pupils, have access to information they need and can feel safe.

Talking about it in English

All young people, including those with gay friends or family or who will grow up lesbian, gay or bisexual, want to see their lives reflected in school and to feel part of the school community. Teachers don't need to teach a 'gay lesson' but should be prepared to acknowledge and talk about lesbian, gay and bisexual issues as part of lessons. This doesn't have to be difficult.

Just this year a new English teacher joined who is gay, I think, and he has one of the Stonewall 'Some People Are Gay, Get Over It' posters in his classroom. I don't do English but I know him because I go to debating and he runs that. Just seeing the poster in his room is really cool, especially at a school where it's never mentioned, none of it is ever mentioned. So just to see that in his room is really cool – rare, but nice to see. *(Mike, 17)*

If there's one subject where pupils explore their feelings and other people's lives, as well as reflect on the changing uses of language, it's English. By exposing students to poetry, novels and plays from other cultures and other times, teachers give space to their imaginations, their empathies and their understanding of other human beings. It is the ideal arena for discussing feelings, values and morals.

Poetry takes on emotions directly, while fiction, either novels or plays, allows the safe discussion of themes which might prove incendiary if approached in other subjects. Attaching issues to characters makes those issues both safer – this person isn't real at the end of the day – and yet somehow more immediate. It allows readers into other people's heads.

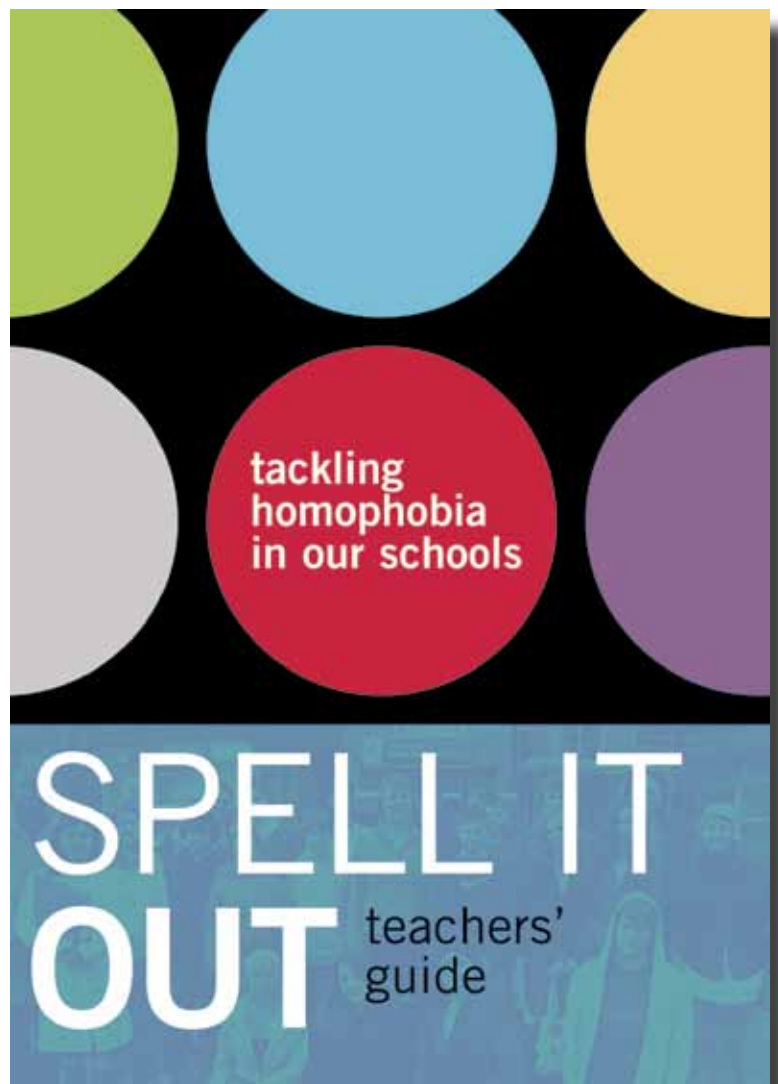
It's in English that you can give gay and lesbian students coming to terms with their identities the material they need, while helping pupils who perhaps come from backgrounds where 'the gay thing' is at best taboo and at worst openly ridiculed some insight into how it feels to be different. It allows pupils to confront their own prejudices, assumption and fears. Mentioning that writers like Sarah Waters, Christopher Isherwood, Patricia Highsmith, Jeanette Winterson or Truman Capote are gay provides all pupils with an important piece of information for thinking about and discussing their motivation and representation in literature. For gay students, this acknowledgement will be important to make them feel more part of the school community.

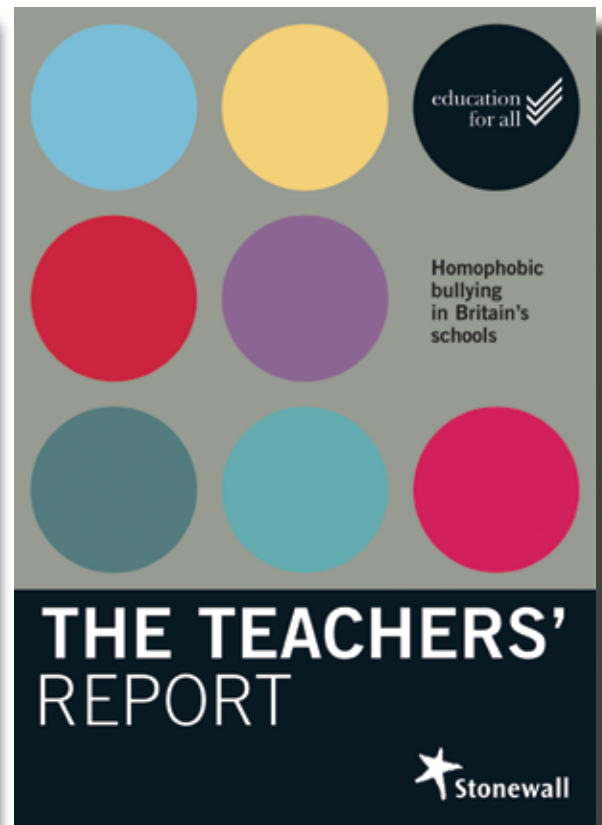
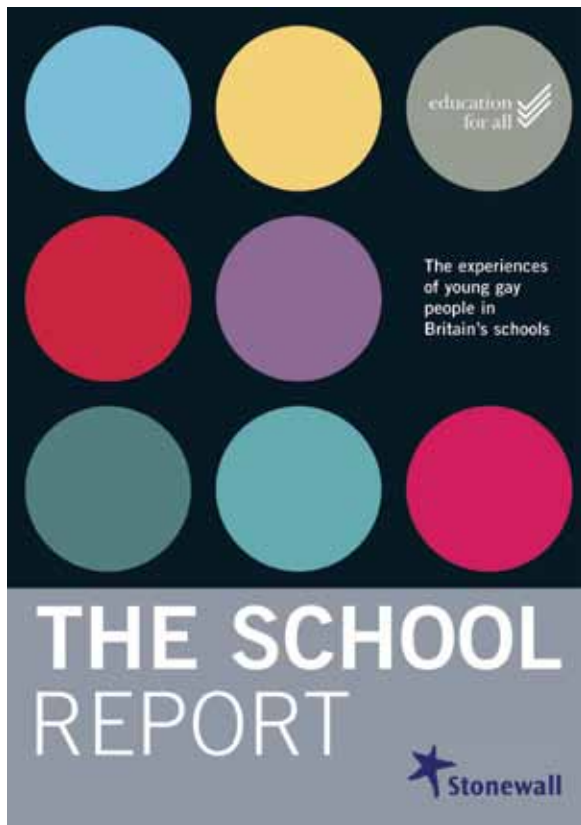
The subject is also a place to discuss how language and meaning changes - such as the meaning of the word 'gay' for example. Teachers can discuss how groups can positively reclaim terminology such as the word 'dyke' - but it is also in this context that students come to realise the power of language and the damage it can do. This greater awareness can have a direct impact on the use of homophobic language and homophobic bullying.

It's in English that you can give gay and lesbian students coming to terms with their identities the material they need, while helping pupils who perhaps come from backgrounds where 'the gay thing' is at best taboo and at worst openly ridiculed some insight into how it feels to be different.

From First World War Poetry to Shakespeare...

Apart from these general opportunities, there are many specific topic areas in the English Literature curriculum where you can provide students with the important opportunity to talk about sexuality. War poetry is one example. While themes of loss and fear and political outrage are routinely explored when studying trench poetry, the simple fact that war poets such as Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon would now be identified as gay is rarely mentioned. Yet themes of love, friendship and camaraderie take on a whole new dimension with that additional knowledge.





And then there's Shakespeare of course. You could reflect on the fact that during his times only men were allowed to act, and how this is the basis of much comedy, romance and tragedy in plays such as *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night* and *The Merchant of Venice*. Traditional gender roles and stereotypes – and why it's OK not to live up to them (the basis for a lot of homophobic bullying, even of straight pupils) – are easy to discuss in this context.

I teach English so this does come up. I am careful (when I remember) not to make assumptions about relationships with the students. I discussed Shakespeare's sonnets which are possibly addressed to a young man and the idea of gay relationships in the Renaissance period. (Heather, teacher, independent secondary school, London)

Whenever the subject of love comes up – as it will when studying poetry or literature in general – it's important to acknowledge that some people fall in love with members of the same sex. Simple - but so important for gay students who are often brought up with the idea that homosexuality is about sex and love is for straight people. It's also important for straight students to see that human emotions like love are universal and not the preserve of any one group.

Resources that make it easy

Since nine in ten primary and secondary school teachers have not had any specific training on tackling

homophobic bullying, Stonewall has produced a range of innovative and practical resources, including training DVDs for primary and secondary school staff ideal for a lunch-time session or twilight-INSET. *The Spell It Out* DVD for secondary school staff addresses issues like challenging homophobic language in the classroom, corridor and staff common room and how to respond when a pupil comes out.

In addition to the DVDs, teachers can turn to Stonewall's Education Guides on topics like supporting lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils, working with faith communities, and effective school leadership and get inspired by by good-practice case studies.

For further lesson ideas, teachers can get hold of *Ob No! Not The Gay Thing!* - a wall-hanger for the secondary school staff room with lesson ideas for seven different subjects, including English, as well as a frequently asked question section. And then of course there's *FIT* – Stonewall's highly-acclaimed, powerful film for secondary schools students about being oneself, coming out and getting along.

Stonewall Education Programmes

In addition to our resources, Stonewall's programmes provide tailored support to local authorities, schools and young people in talking about lesbian, gay and bisexual issues and tackling homophobic bullying.

The **Education Champions** programme provides an opportunity for local authorities to work with us, and each other, to create a safe and inclusive learning environment for all young people. Launched in 2009, more than 50

local authorities in England are now part of this programme and receive bespoke training to support their local schools in tackling homophobic bullying. Find out more at www.stonewall.org.uk/educationchampions.

Reflecting the change in the education system with more schools turning into academies outside of local authority control, Stonewall launched the **School Champions** programme in November 2011. Over 80 primary and secondary schools have since become members and work with Stonewall to embed anti-homophobic bullying work through policies, staff training

and the curriculum. Find out more at www.stonewall.org.uk/schoolchampions.

Young people play a central role in the 'Education for All' campaign through our **Youth Volunteering Programme** and we also work directly with young people through our **Talent Programme** and our Pride Youth Event. We provide information and guidance to young people through our website: www.youngstonewall.org.uk and we work with other youth organisations to help make them gay-friendly.

What you can do

There are many easy things you can do, starting from today:

- Remember that some students will be gay or have lesbian, gay and bisexual family members and friends.
- Acknowledge lesbian, gay and bisexual authors and provide opportunity for pupils to talk about gay issues and homophobic language in class.
- Order Stonewall's resources and download lesson plans at www.stonewall.org.uk/educationresources.
- Attend Stonewall's Education for All Conference, 5 July 2012, The British Library in London. Register at www.stonewall.org.uk/educationconference.
- Sign-up your school to become a School Champion for a free seminars, resources and much more at www.stonewall.org.uk/schoolchampions.
- Find out whether your local authority is an Education Champions by visiting our website www.stonewall.org.uk/educationchampions.
- Get hold of a copy of FIT and use it in class or organise a screening in assembly over a period of time.
- Arrange for an INSET session with colleagues on challenging homophobic language with our staff training DVDs *Spell It Out!* or *Celebrating Difference*.
- E-mail us with your lesson ideas and any feedback or good practice examples education@stonewall.org.uk.
- Tell colleagues from other schools about Stonewall's resources and the School Champions programme.

For more information, consult www.stonewall.org.uk/educationforall or contact Lydia at education@stonewall.org.uk.



FIT – the feature film adaptation of Stonewall’s highly successful play for schools

Students respond best to teaching materials that are relevant to their lives and experiences. *FIT*, Stonewall’s feature-length film for schools, is an intelligent, powerful and entertaining film that can be used in English lessons in a variety of ways. It tackles the issue of homophobic bullying in a culture where everything from not liking sport to wearing the wrong trainers is ‘gay’. Especially created for Key Stage 3 and 4 students, and relevant also to sixth-formers, the film complements various learning objectives from the National Curriculum, including English and Performing Arts.

Through the individual stories of six young people, the film explores - amongst other themes - relationships, conflicts, bullying and sexual orientation. The story follows them as they battle through a minefield of exploding hormones, awakening feelings and homophobia as they attempt to fit in, stand out, discover their own identities and accept each other.

How to use *FIT* in your school

Based on a play seen by over 2,000 young people, the film *FIT* is split into seven chapters allowing teachers to screen the whole film as a drop-down day, using exercises to explore and discuss a range of themes and issues between each chapter, or by watching individual

chapters over consecutive weeks. Some schools have chosen to focus on one chapter that explores a particular issue they wish to discuss. The DVD also contains a series of video diaries, giving students the opportunity to listen to the characters talking more in-depth about their feelings and the situations they are facing. The video diaries can also act as a starter for students to discuss their own personal experiences and observations.

The accompanying 16-page booklet highlights the main themes in each of the individual stories and suggests questions to consider making it easy to prepare lessons around the film. A copy of the screenplay is available through Amazon and allows for work on the text while the high-energy songs and clever lyrics can be downloaded from the Stonewall website.

Themes

FIT is a fantastic vehicle to explore many elements of the English curriculum. As an education and campaigning tool, students can discuss what the purpose of the resource is and how it communicates with its intended audience, and how the representation in mainstream media of gay people compares to that in *FIT*. The film can also be used to explore character development. What assumptions do we make about each character and why? What challenges do each of the characters face and how do they approach these differently? How do the characters relate to each other and how and why does this change? Through the range of topics addressed and the range of viewpoints expressed by the characters in the film, students are given the opportunity to evaluate their own views and interpret and explore the views of others.

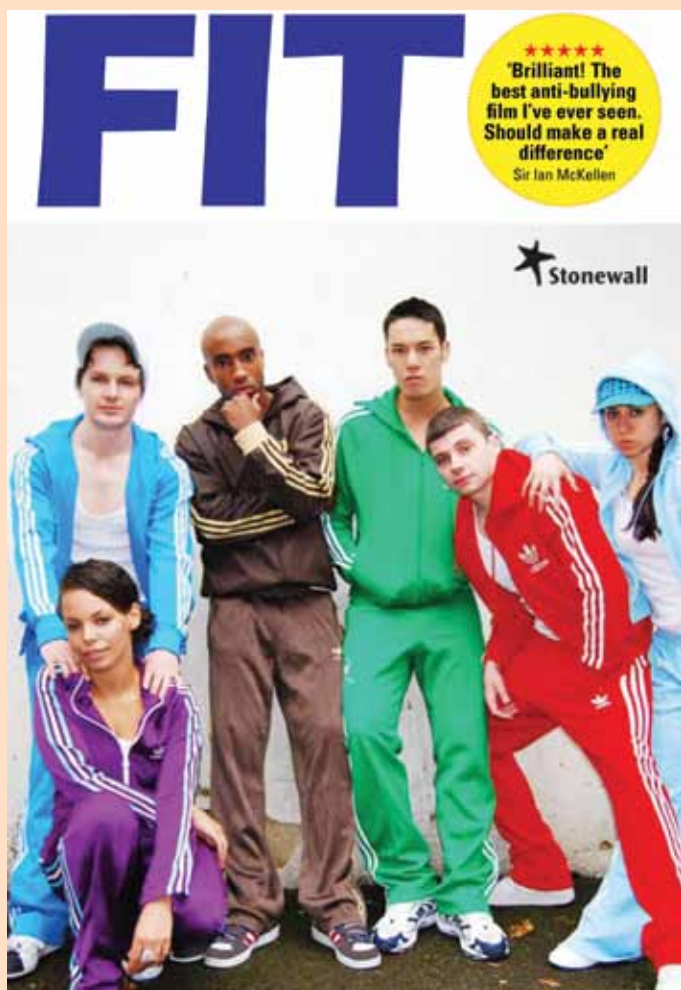
FIT also enriches a class on the change in use of language and its development in general without having to specifically address lesbian, gay or bisexual issues. However in the context of spoken language and slang, teachers can talk about the common use of ‘that’s so gay’ and ‘you’re so gay’ and the impact this can have on people. One story in particular, Karmel’s story, focuses on how the use of ‘gay’ as a derogatory term can affect others, especially gay people themselves. Another chapter talks about the words and phrases we still use today that are derived from Shakespeare and raises the subject of Shakespeare’s sonnets written to a ‘fair youth’, which can be used to discuss how sexual orientation might influence a writer’s work.

These are just a few examples of the many creative ways *FIT* can be used to discuss a range of issues relevant to the lives of young people. The film also addresses issues such as coming out, perceptions of gay people, homophobia in sport, whether sexual orientation can affect careers, and different families.

We want to hear from you!

Some teachers who have already used *FIT* in class have sent us their lesson plans - why not share your ideas with us, so we can promote them to other schools too. We’re always looking for best practice examples and would like to hear how you’ve used *FIT*

To find out more about *FIT*, for further resources and to order a copy of the film visit www.stonewall.org.uk/fit or e-mail chris.dye@stonewall.org.uk.



Other Cultures, Other Sexualities?

Including Sexuality in Secondary English

Drawing on interviews with students and teachers, *Helen Sauntson* and *Kathryn Simpson* reflect on the ways in which the English curriculum encourages teaching about race and gender but discourages attention to issues of sexuality.

Helen Sauntson is a Senior Lecturer at York St John University. **Kathryn Simpson** is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Birmingham.

Sexuality in schools: the big picture

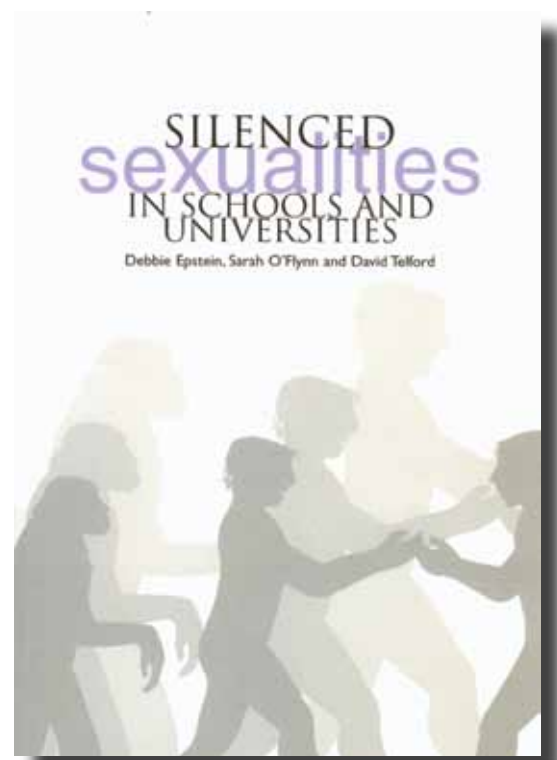
Sexuality in schools is just beginning to be recognised as a serious issue in the UK. Homophobic bullying is currently identified by the government as a major area of concern in schools, given its detrimental effect on the mental health of children and young people who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual, or who are questioning their sexuality. Reports published by the gay rights organisation Stonewall UK (Hunt and Jensen, 2007; Guasp, 2009) draw attention to the problem of homophobic bullying in UK secondary schools in stark terms, prompting a growing recognition that homophobia is prevalent in all aspects of schooling in the UK, and that equality and diversity issues around sexuality have not been addressed as directly as those around other types of discrimination such as racism. Other surveys also corroborate these findings, such as the *Prevalence of Homophobia* surveys conducted by the National Union of Teachers in the North West of England over the last few years (2009-2012). Pearson, Muller and Wilkinson (2007) provide an overview of various research which has repeatedly found that same-sex-attracted youth achieve lower academically than their other-sex-attracted counterparts. They note that same-sex-attracted youth are at a higher risk in general of mental health problems which can lead to disengagement from learning and social withdrawal, both of which impact negatively on academic achievement. The research presented in this paper focuses on how curriculum intervention and change may be one strategy for tackling heterosexism and homophobia in schools. We draw on data from interviews with English teachers and LGB-identified young people, as well as analysis of the national curriculum itself, in order to explore how our participants experience and understand sexual diversity issues in relation to the English curriculum in secondary schools.

Importantly, the two Stonewall Reports (Hunt and Jensen, 2007; Guasp, 2009) found that where pupils feel that they have been taught about LGBT issues in a positive way LGBT pupils are 13% less likely to experience homophobic bullying, and 60% are more likely to be happy at school and to experience their school as an accepting, tolerant and welcoming place. This suggests

that the curriculum could play a part in making sexual diversity more visible and acceptable in schools. However, the Stonewall Reports also identified a lack of training and confidence in dealing with sexuality issues amongst teachers. This is a key issue that emerged clearly in the interviews with English teachers that we carried out in our own research, as we discuss later. Importantly, it is not only the LGBT pupils who are affected by homophobia in schools but everyone hearing homophobic language or witnessing and/or experiencing homophobic behaviour is affected. Therefore, it is important to tackle issues around homophobia not just as a means of ensuring the well-being of LGBT (and all other) students, but also to enable all teachers and students to feel confident in discussing and dealing with sexual diversity.

The importance of tackling homophobic bullying in schools is starting to be addressed through various government policies and guidance documents. The current government's 'programme for government' document pledges its commitment to 'help schools tackle bullying in schools, especially homophobic bullying' (http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/409088/pfg_coalition.pdf).

This aim is re-iterated in the Department for Education's (2011) discussion document on the future of teacher training. In 2009, the *Single Equality Bill*, entitled *A Fairer Future*, was introduced. This was a precursor to the introduction of the



Equality Act (brought into effect in 2010) designed to tackle discrimination based on race, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief. In addition to this legislation, the previous and current governments have also provided published guidance and support which relates specifically to gender and sexuality in UK schools. For example, the *Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning* (SEAL) strand of the *Primary National Strategy* specifically highlights gender and sexual orientation as key areas which need to be given more attention in the curriculum. Introduced under the Children Act in 2004, *Every Child Matters* requires local authorities to make provision for 'every child, whatever their background or circumstances to have the support they need to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic well-being.' It also stipulates that all young people should 'feel safe from bullying and discrimination.' But how effective are these policies and pieces of legislation and guidance? Are they really working to reduce levels of homophobia and promote acceptance of diversity around sexual orientation in schools? Recent academic research suggests that there are still serious, and often quite complex, issues to be considered in relation to sexualities and schooling.

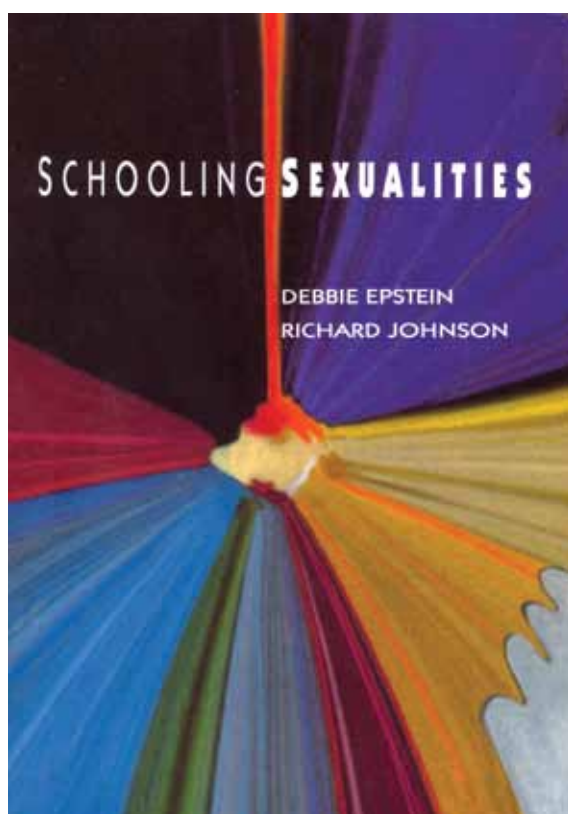
Researching sexuality in schools

In addition to the Stonewall reports, other research has identified schools as sites which are overwhelmingly characterised by heteronormativity and homophobia (see, for example, Allan et al, 2008; DePalma and Atkinson, 2009; Duncan, 1999; Ellis and High, 2004; Epstein and Johnson, 1998; Forrest, 2000; Morrish and Sauntson, 2007;

No Outsiders, 2010; Youdell, 2005). Epstein et al (2003) identify schools as sites where heterosexuality is repeatedly constructed as normal and sexualities which transgress this norm are silenced, often in quite tacit ways. This is an important point as it emphasises that particular forms of behaviour and uses of language do not have to be overtly homophobic in order to be experienced and identified as such. McCormack and Anderson (2010) similarly find that, in a co-educational sixth form college in England, male students are able to perpetuate dominant discourses of heterosexuality even when homophobia is absent. There is also evidence to suggest that when students feel excluded from school because of their sexuality, this can have a negative impact on their school engagement, well-being and, ultimately, their levels of attainment (Hunt and Jensen, 2007; McDermott et al, 2008; NUT, 2009-2012; Pearson, Muller and Wilkinson, 2007; Roen et al, 2007).

Other research has examined more closely the processes through which heteronormativity and homophobia actually occur in schools. Duncan (2006) has examined the prevalent use of the term 'gay' as an insult and observes that 'gay' is mainly used to denote boys who do not possess enough of the qualities fitting the ideal male stereotype of the dominant peer-group. In the schools that Duncan visited, hypermasculinity had a hegemonic status within the school culture. The use of 'gay' as an insult was a key way of policing masculinity in the schools and was thus used more as a means of policing gender rather than as an accurate way of referring to known or out LGB students. Youdell (2005) and Airton (2009) similarly note how heteronormativity is linked particularly to sex and gender. Airton (2009) observes that gender non-normativity and queerness is often conflated in the school environment. Therefore, one way of tackling the problem is to increase gender diversity.

In addition to the research discussed above, a number of studies have specifically argued for curriculum and teaching intervention strategies to be used as a means of combating homophobia and increasing students' awareness and understanding of sexuality issues in a broader sense. One such project is that of the *No Outsiders* team who conducted action research focused on the use of primary classroom resources to address sexuality issues and, in particular, to counteract discourses of heteronormativity. Focussing on the use of materials which challenge heteronormativity in primary school lessons (for example, the use of storybooks containing LGBT-identified characters and the use of drama work focused around sexuality and gender issues), the project team found that the children in the study responded well to the range of character identities and relationships represented in the storybooks and drama activities. A key element of our own research has involved conducting a close analysis of the English Key Stage 3 and 4 National Curriculum programme of study documents to understand how these documents set up particular positions concerning sexual diversity. As we discuss below, we found that the English curriculum is worded in ways which discourage teachers from openly incorporating sexual diversity issues into their teaching.



English and sexuality in Birmingham

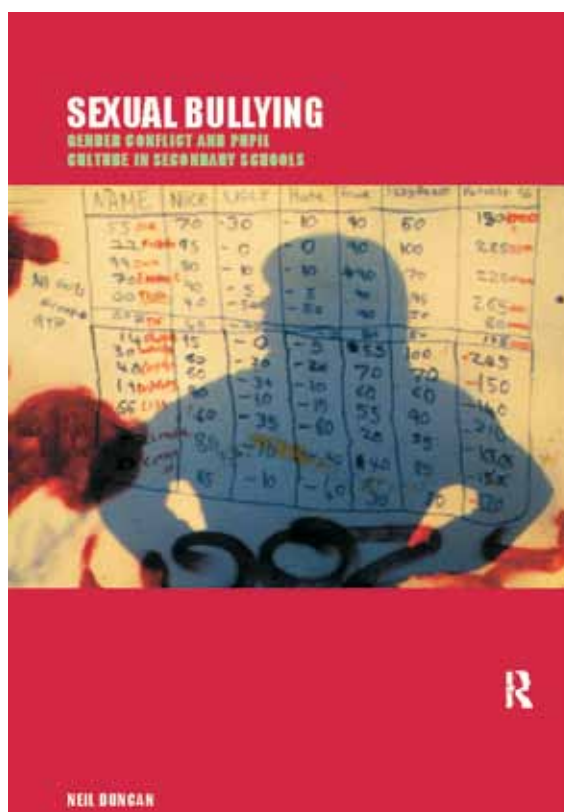
We wanted to explore these wider issues in more detail and in a local context and set up a small-scale qualitative study carried out in the Birmingham area. We interviewed five English teachers working in a variety of secondary schools in the area and fifteen young LGB-identified people (aged between 16 and 23) who attended, or had recently left, Birmingham secondary schools. All of the young people attended a LGB youth group in Birmingham. This was the only practical way of accessing openly LGB young people for the research and it had the additional advantage of providing a context in which the young people could talk about their school experiences, but away from the school itself. The teacher interviews lasted for 30-45 minutes and the young people interviews lasted for approximately 20 minutes. Due to the potentially sensitive topic of discussion, the youth workers who ran the group acted as gatekeepers in the interviews with the young people. All interviews were recorded and transcribed in full. The interviews focused in particular on investigating the teachers' and young people's perceptions of the ways in which sexuality is discursively constructed in the English National Curriculum. Our research focuses on English for two main reasons: firstly, it is a core statutory subject in the National Curriculum for England and Wales; secondly, several of our research participants suggested that English was a subject which potentially would lend itself well to addressing issues around sexuality.

A key finding from the interviews with young people was that they generally felt English to be a more liberal and creative subject than some others. English is seen as a subject where there are no 'right or wrong' answers, and therefore having much potential for discussing different opinions and interpretations. The English teachers also recognised the potential of this subject for opening up discussion of questions around sexuality and sexual diversity, through the use of fiction in particular. However, despite this potential, all interviewees felt that sexuality issues were still not addressed at all through the delivery of the English curriculum and so this perceived potential was not being realised, as the following interview extract shows:

Pat – English teacher:

Pat: I think English is a great subject for having discussion on everything, so there's maybe something we can actually bring in more but I am wary because for a start I don't want to impose things on other teachers who might not feel the same as me and also - we will get complaints, huge complaints from parents

Significantly, Pat emphasises potential complaints from parents as a key reason for not addressing sexuality issues in her English teaching, as well as not wanting to 'impose things on other teachers'. These concerns were expressed by other teachers in the study. Another example from the young people interviews is illustrated in Amy's discussion of the teaching of *The Color Purple* in her English classes:



Amy (young lesbian-identified woman):

Amy: I remember reading - what's the book called, brilliant book - *The Color Purple*

Int: oh yea

Amy: fabulous book - I stayed up all night reading it thinking this - you know - when they got like a dialogue in books that's kind of done in an accent and you come down the next morning and you kinda talk in that accent [both laugh] - it was one of those books for me but ...

even with that it wasn't really mentioned which to me was like surely that's a huge part of this book

Int: yea

Amy: but maybe it's because I was still - you know - I was still quite young - I don't know really but that was only mentioned in passing

In this extract, Amy perceives a dissonance between the theme of lesbian sexuality which, in her reading of *The Color Purple*, emerged as a major theme ('that's a huge part of this book') and the silence around this issue in her English classes. In the section of the interview which followed, Amy explained how her English teacher spent much time focusing on the issues around racial and ethnic diversity which are raised in the novel, but the parallel issues concerning sexual diversity were markedly absent from the teaching. It seems then, that Amy's English teacher felt confident in dealing with issues concerning racial diversity (which are explicitly addressed in the English curriculum programme of study documents) but not with sexual diversity (which are not mentioned explicitly in the English curriculum). In the extracts below,

Ann (English teacher) and Fay (young bisexual woman) similarly recognise that fiction texts are routinely used in English to address issues around 'race' and 'culture' but not around sexuality.

Ann (English teacher):

Ann: I'm just thinking of some of the poetry that's on you know at key stage 4 - it's not really - I mean we do poetry from different cultures which brings up lots of issues but it doesn't address sexuality directly -

there's nothing - and it addresses race a lot but it doesn't - sexuality isn't there

Fay (young bisexual woman):

Fay: in English class we mostly just talked about other groups - we didn't really talk about gay people or homophobia - we always talked about like other people basically - other cultures and stuff

In order to consider why this may be the case, we turned our attention to the content and language of the English curriculum itself.

Studying the programmes of study

In addition to the interviews, we conducted a detailed linguistic analysis of the English National Curriculum programme of study documents to see if and how the curriculum itself constructs certain positions and ideologies around sexuality. The linguistic analysis of the Key Stage 3 and 4 programmes of study revealed a number of interesting issues concerning sexuality. On the one hand, despite the fact that the National Curriculum for English is

a prescriptive document, it does seem to offer possibilities for exploring sexuality issues as part of the programmes of study. Descriptions of what is to be studied within each of the key skills are fairly broad and open-ended, and there seems to be scope for teachers interpreting those descriptions in such a way that sexuality could be addressed through their delivery of the subject. Yet, as we have already seen in the interview extracts above, both the young people and teachers in the study commented on the lack of visibility of non-heterosexual identities in the curriculum and its delivery. So why is this potential not realised? One of the reasons for this failure could be what is linguistically absent from the documents – the literal absence of terms referring to sexuality and to sexual diversity from the programme of study descriptions and accompanying explanatory notes. In fact, one of the English teachers recognises that a reason for sexual diversity not being explicitly addressed in English lessons could simply be because of its absence from the curriculum – meaning that teachers are 'not forced to confront' it:

Ann – English teacher:

Ann: I'm just trying to think now - which it can be avoided too easily - I suppose it's not openly addressed - **it's not something which people are forced to confront I suppose through the texts that they teach**

One such example of where sexuality is markedly absent from the programme of study is found in the explanatory notes for the Key Stage 4 'language structure and variation' element of the curriculum. This strand states that students should explore 'the ways in which language reflects identity through regional, social and personal variation and diversity'. Here, the explicit mention of social and personal variation and diversity seems to lend itself well to exploring variation around sexuality, as sexuality is an integral aspect of social and personal identity. However, the explanatory notes which accompany this section of the curriculum put restrictions on its possible interpretations:

The ways in which language reflects identity: These could include accent, dialect, idiolect, lexical change, varieties of standard English such as Creole, occupational variation, and differences in language use according to age and gender. (*Key Stage 4: Language Structure and Variation – Explanatory Notes*)

There is a marked absence around sexuality here, as the differences in language use listed do not specify sexuality as a form of sociolinguistic variation. Although the explanatory notes function only to offer suggestions as to how teachers may interpret and implement each section of the programme of study, the very absence of sexuality (and the concurrent visible presence of other social variables such as age and gender) probably means that teachers are much less likely to include it in their delivery of this part of the curriculum.



Another example of sexuality being absent from a part of the curriculum in which it might be expected to appear occurs in a thread which we refer to broadly as 'social variation/diversity'. Particular kinds of social variation are referred to throughout the programmes of study, especially in relation to representations of social identities in literature and the construction of identities through language. Examples include:

- This could include relating the way **women** are presented in literature to the attitudes and behaviours of a particular period, and understanding that attitudes and behaviours change over **time**.
- Themes could include images of **men and women, place** and identity, and narrative voice/viewpoint.
- These could include accent, dialect, idiolect, lexical change, varieties of standard English such as Creole, occupational variation, and differences in language use according to age or gender.

Again, we can see that, whilst social identities based on gender, nationality, age and occupation are present in this list, sexuality is conspicuously absent. In a special issue of the *Gender and Language* journal dedicated to exploring the language of homophobia, Morrish (2011), Leap (2011) and Peterson (2011) all discuss how homophobic formations can emerge from texts which, at face value, appear to be 'value-free'. Morrish states that 'homophobia may still be the result even when overt homophobic messages are not part of the text's content' (2011: 328). In educational contexts, DePalma and Atkinson (2006: 334) have also pointed out that heteronormativity is 'maintained not only in terms of what is said and done, but also in terms of what is left out of the official discourse'. It seems the case that homophobic language, therefore, can be enacted as much through what is not said, as through what is said and this is evident in the English programme of study texts. It seems that in the English National Curriculum, it is the very absence of sexuality as a form of social identity which effects a discourse of heterosexism by erasing the possibility of sexual diversity.

One place in the English curriculum where sexuality could be interpreted as being included is in the list of recommended authors that appear in the explanatory notes for 'Reading' in both Key Stages 3 and 4. Whilst some known LGBT-identified authors are included in these reading lists (e.g. Carol Ann Duffy, Oscar Wilde) there is no explicit mention in the curriculum documents of how the works of these authors may be used to explore and address issues around sexuality. In fact, this apparent incongruity was noted by both the teachers and young people in the interviews (as we have already seen from Amy's discussion of *The Color Purple*). Some teachers went on to explain that they felt these opportunities to discuss sexuality issues were not taken because of an anxiety on the part of teachers in terms of not feeling confident of raising such issues but also because of the fear of a negative response from the pupils, other staff and school managers and a lack of support in tackling such issues.

Pat – English teacher:

Pat: I was listening to Carol Ann Duffy on that programme the other night reading some of her poems - and of course we did Carol Ann Duffy but we don't have any that have anything to do with sexuality

Ann – English teacher:

Ann: the exam boards won't deal with anything that might be remotely controversial in their exam papers ... a lot of teachers are afraid of what parents are going to say and you know there's this big sense that that you're always being watched (laughs) and that you know everything you say in the classroom goes out - you know

- and I don't think that is the case but I think we're a bit paranoid as teachers (laughs) you know - are we *allowed* to have this conversation these days - you know - and what if a member of senior management walks in and we're having these conversations - you know - it's that kind of a fear I think that staff have- which is wrong really

Here, Pat notes that the works of Carol Ann Duffy, an openly lesbian poet, appear in both the English National Curriculum and the GCSE poetry anthology being used in her school. Despite several of Duffy's poems focusing upon sexuality, Pat points out that these particular poems are absent from the curriculum. Ann's response suggests that the examination boards perceive explorations of sexuality in texts as being more 'controversial' than exploring other forms of social identity such as race, ethnicity and gender. The labelling of sexuality as a 'controversial' topic supports notions of sexuality as a taboo subject in schools (e.g. DePalma and Atkinson, 2006; Epstein *et al*, 2003). The interviews suggest that teachers feel constrained by exam pressures, particularly at Key Stage 4, and are reluctant to engage in what they perceive as risk-taking in deciding how to deliver the curriculum and GCSE examination syllabi. We argue that if sexuality was more explicitly included in the curriculum documents, this would help to 'validate' it as an area of study in English, and therefore help to allay teachers' fears by offering them some sort of protection.

'A deafening silence'

To conclude, we have attempted to unpack the linguistic basis of what Atkinson refers to as 'a deafening silence surrounding sexuality and sexual orientation' (2002: 127). She is speaking here about the curriculum for Initial Teacher Training in the UK but the same can be said for the secondary school curriculum as well. Our research so far has revealed that there clearly seem to be opportunities for delivering the English curriculum in ways that enable the exploration of sexuality issues, but there is simultaneously a marked absence of sexuality in the English curriculum in that it is not explicitly mentioned in ways that other forms of diversity are. Our analysis of the programme of study texts suggests that the English curriculum is worded in ways which discourage teachers

from openly incorporating sexual diversity issues into their English teaching. This is supported through the teacher and young people interviews. This can have the effect of perpetuating discourses of heteronormativity in the English classroom which can exclude and be detrimental to the well-being of all students but especially to those identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual or who are questioning their sexuality. Furthermore, the teachers in our study repeatedly point not only to the English curriculum's omission of reference to sexual diversity as an obstacle to discussion of these issues in their classrooms, but also to there being a lack of support from their institutions and a lack of training that would enable them to have the knowledge and confidence to deal with homophobia in a direct and effective way, and we can infer, to raise issues of sexual diversity in their classrooms. In such contexts, prejudices are confirmed and those critical of homophobia are often silenced. What is needed is the creation of a whole-school culture which promotes equality and diversity at all levels – from policies to classroom practice and outside the classroom as well.

Discussions with colleagues in our own institutions have revealed a need to address these issues at initial teacher training level, as well as a part of continuing professional development for in-service teachers. Work with students on initial teacher training courses is a vitally important way of beginning to tackle all forms of homophobia circulating in our schools. In order to fully tackle all forms of homophobia circulating in our schools, we urgently need to address the silences around homo and bisexuality, as well as the overt homophobic language practices. Curriculum intervention, training around sexuality issues, and getting whole schools on-board with a genuine commitment to equality and inclusion are all essential if we are to address and challenge these silences and absences around sexual difference and diversity.

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'LGBT is an acronym for 'lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans' where 'trans' refers to a number of gender identities including, transsexual, transgender and transvestite. In our own research, we only interviewed young people who identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual.

Truths Universally Acknowledged

Reading for Gender in *Pride and Prejudice*

Jack Williams reflects on what happened when he asked his all-male Year 11 class to think about constructions of masculinity in *Pride and Prejudice*.



Jack Williams teaches at the City of London School

'You could tell the difference'

When I was at school there was a teacher who used to reminisce about the days 'when boys were boys and girls were girls, and you could tell the difference'. It was one of his catchphrases. Another was: 'when they cut me open I'll be blue and white inside'. Blue and white were the school colours, and one of the places they were worn, naturally enough, was on the rugby pitch on Saturday mornings.

I was never there, however, because I didn't play rugby. I was hopeless at all sports, in fact. I couldn't throw, or catch and I lacked co-ordination and speed, as well as any interest in playing games. This was not a boy being a boy, in my teacher's view: I know this because he once called me a 'poof' for losing a running race during a PE lesson. I was ten. He was nicer to me after that, but I suspect only because my mother complained, which probably made matters worse as far as he was concerned. After all, not only did I not like rugby, but I was a mummy's boy to boot. And what kind of a boy is that?

I think that many people's thinking about gender has moved on since then: after all, rugby players can now be gay, and footballers can cry. We increasingly understand that the qualities we might associate with manliness (or boyhood) are not necessarily innate, and that there isn't just one way to be a man – as Butler (1990) suggests, masculinity is performative, something we 'do' in a way that varies according to social and institutional context. Like Connell (1987) it is better to use the term 'masculinities', and to think about the way our society privileges some of these discourses and marginalises others.

But what do the boys we teach think? As a teacher in a single-sex school I wanted to find out, in part because I was sometimes discouraged by the behaviour that I observed amongst the students I taught. It seemed clear to me that much of their thinking about gender in general and masculinity in particular was, to say the least, lacking in nuance. It appeared that traditional signifiers of masculinity, such as physical power or athletic prowess, were often more highly valued than other characteristics,

which were given a correspondingly lower status as a result. It was also acceptable to use language that might be perceived as homophobic (for example the use of the word 'gay' as an insult), and which certainly suggested narrow, straight-jacketed thinking about the many different possible ways to be a man.

Of course, it could be argued that this is something many teenage boys go through, a phase that is the product of teenage insecurity and the search for identity that characterises adolescence. And although I am not overly concerned, in the long term, about the attitudes my students may have about these issues – I think, on the whole, that they will grow up to be fine young men, and not bigots – it does bother me, on a short-term, pastoral level, that boys who do not fit the hegemonic masculine ideal might be unhappy or, even worse, bullied by their classmates.

For this reason I decided to undertake an action research project with the aim of investigating further what boys thought about gender, and to see if there was anything I could do to enhance and broaden their understanding of manhood and masculinity. I hoped to be able to give boys the tools to think critically about the roles men are expected to play in our society, something which to me seemed particularly important in an evolving world, in which gender roles are changing and where it is

As a teacher in a single-sex school I was sometimes discouraged by the behaviour that I observed. It appeared that traditional signifiers of masculinity, such as physical power or athletic prowess, were often more highly valued than other characteristics, which were given a correspondingly lower status as a result. It was also acceptable to use language that might be perceived as homophobic.

Some respondents demonstrated an apparent awareness of the performative nature of masculinity, with one student writing for example that men should be able to cry, but must also demonstrate a ‘tough outer layer’.

no longer necessarily the case that ‘boys are boys and girls are girls and you can tell the difference’. After all, these boys will eventually have jobs in workplaces that, some commentators argue, have become increasingly ‘feminised’ and in which traditionally masculine traits are not valued. Whether or not this is true (and many feminists would still say it is a man’s world) boys and young men should certainly be able to look with clear eyes at some versions of masculinity, and to choose whether they wish to inhabit them. Do men really have to drink heavily, or play rugby, or fight, to be men? If you like romantic comedies, or the colour pink, or you don’t like beer, does that make you less of a man? This is particularly important, perhaps, in boys’ schools that could be said to promote a particular brand of masculinity at the expense of others – the football squad might have a high profile while the debating team might not. To the extent that this is the case, we owe it to our students to show them that there are other possibilities.

Pride – and Prejudice?

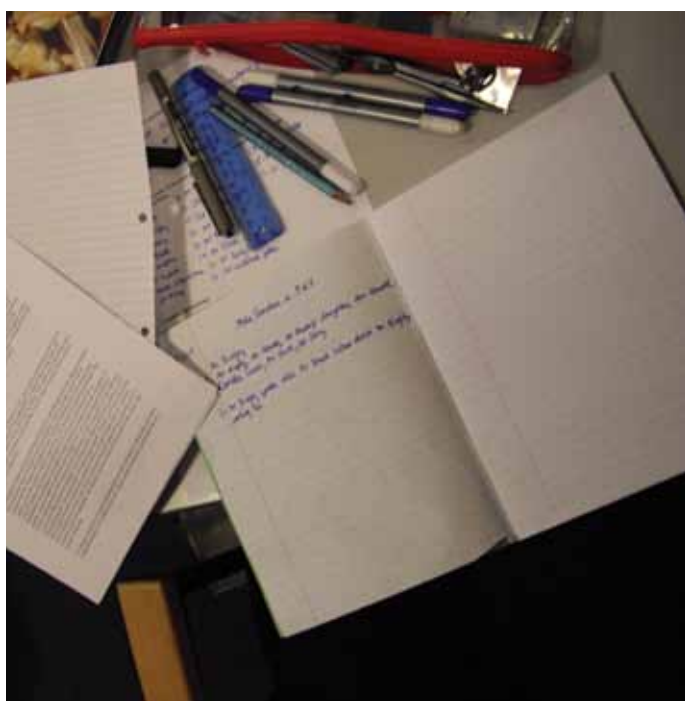
In seeking to undertake practitioner-led research of this kind, I was fortunate in that I teach English – a subject which lends itself to discussions about masculinity in ways that other areas of the curriculum may not. However, there were still decisions to be made. Firstly, I had to decide which of my students would really get something

out of the research; in the end I thought that a group of high-achieving Year 11 students would have the sufficient maturity to fully engage with the topic. Secondly, and as a result of this decision, I had to find a way of integrating the action research into the existing IGCSE curriculum – in the Spring Term, when the work would take place, boys would be preparing for their summer examinations. I decided that the best way of doing this was for the boys to study one of their Literature set texts, *Pride and Prejudice*, through the lens of masculinity and gender. They would gain a full understanding of the text, its style, characterisation and themes, but they would do so from an unusual perspective which would hopefully also make the course more enjoyable for them.

Pride and Prejudice might not, at first glance, have seemed an obvious choice for a project of this kind. However, although ostensibly a novel *about* women and *for* women (some boys complained beforehand that it was a ‘girls’ book’) it actually has a great deal to say about men and masculinity. It features many male characters, some significant and others more incidental, through which Austen presents a number of different ways of ‘doing’ masculinity, some of which are privileged – for example, Mr Darcy – and others that are not (for example the foolish Mr Collins). It is a novel, in part, about the way society shapes male behaviour and expectations, particularly in relation to women. And because of its appeal to many women, and afterlife as a film starring Keira Knightley and a TV series starring Colin Firth, it provides a useful jumping-off point for a discussion about the way gender shapes our decisions as readers.

The most significant choice I had to make concerned the way I would approach the topic. What was the best way of encouraging boys to think about gender? My reading led me to think about the use of critical literacy techniques in my teaching. Critical literacy, which as an idea is more common in the US and Australia than the UK, has several important basic tenets. To be critically literate, first of all, is to understand that we live in an unequal world, in which power is unequally distributed, and that the language we use and the texts we read (and the way we read them) reflect this. Gilbert and Rowe (1989, p.16) suggest that ‘when we write, and when we read, we enter into the dominant and accepted sets of social meanings’. In other words, both texts and readers are steeped in the values of the society that produced them. Critical literacy encourages students to understand this process, and aims to empower them to analyse the way both they and others read texts. In terms of reading for gender, students should follow Reid (1989) in her effort to ‘read as a woman’ – i.e. to ‘confront and oppose much that we usually do as readers, in order to articulate things otherwise suppressed’.

So I had a plan. In order for students to gain an understanding of the way gender is constructed by texts, I would use some of the critical literacy activities suggested by Martino and Mellor in *Gendered Fictions* (2000), an excellent teaching resource. I would conduct my research using qualitative methods, with the aim of measuring my students’ engagement both with the course they were undertaking and the novel itself, as well as assessing their



attitudes towards masculinity and manhood before, after and during the research. And I would collect data in a variety of ways: through the use of field notes and still photography, audio recordings of lessons and (self-selected) focus group, as well as worksheets and other written assignments completed by participants.

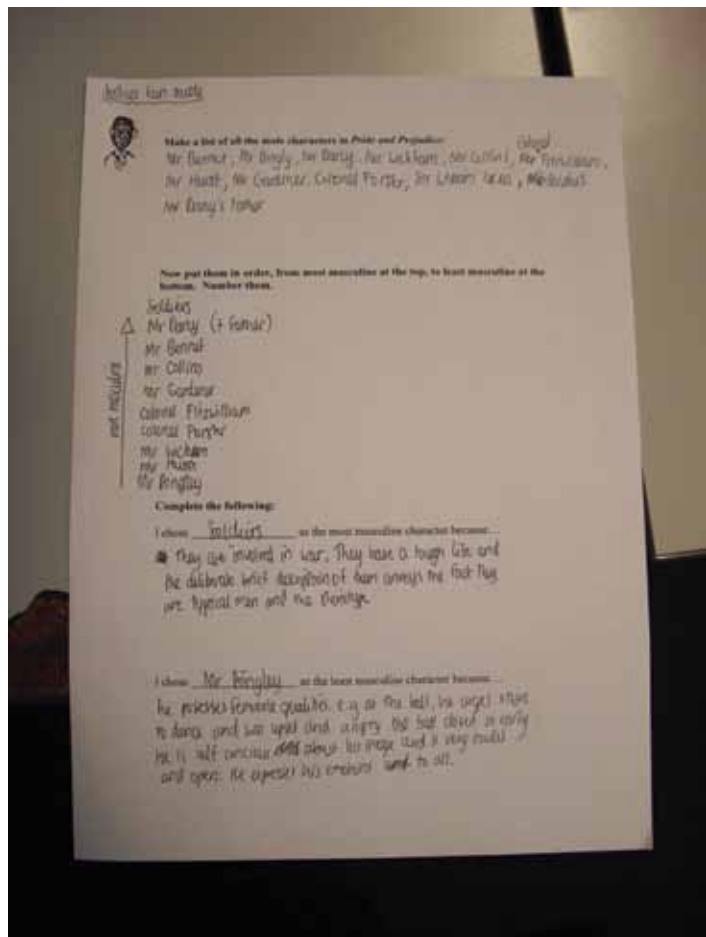
Boys, men and masculinity

What, then, did the boys think about men and masculinity? My initial survey of their ideas, taken from a questionnaire each of the students in the class was asked to complete, revealed a mixed picture. As perhaps might have been expected in a liberal, cosmopolitan school in a diverse capital city, a number of respondents gave answers that appeared to indicate an understanding of masculinity that went beyond 'traditional' or hegemonic conceptions of gender. The idea that men should be 'caring' was fairly widespread, for example, and a number of students stated that there was a great deal of diversity among men – and no such thing as an ideal man. However, many of these students also stressed the importance of more traditional signifiers of masculinity (e.g. height, muscularity, hairiness) and took as role models men, mainly athletes or sportsmen, who might be seen to illustrate some or all of these qualities.

Conversely, the majority of students did not align themselves with traditionally marginalized or stigmatised models of masculinity. Only one student chose a homosexual celebrity as a role model (and, interestingly, chose to submit his survey anonymously) and a small number of respondents seemed to adopt, perhaps provocatively, an almost stereotypically chauvinistic stance: one boy said that a man 'should be courteous to inferiors such as women'. Some respondents demonstrated an apparent awareness of the performative nature of masculinity, with one student writing for example that men should be able to cry, but must also demonstrate a 'tough outer layer'. Another group of students, however, wrote in a self-consciously glib or amusing fashion, perhaps indicating their embarrassment at addressing the issue at all. A similarly mixed picture emerged from the first focus groups and lessons that I took, where some boys continued to make jokes that expressed their own discomfort, commenting for example that the sandwiches provided contained 'masculine' bacon and 'gay' lettuce. Similar attempts at humour were made in the second lesson of the course, when students were asked to complete a questionnaire about their early experiences of gender; one student, for example, shouted to another that 'I've done a survey and it turns out you're GAY'.

Gendered Fictions

This was all very tiresome, but with the introduction of *Pride and Prejudice*, interestingly, things improved. Using the novel as a focus made the discussion much less personal, and much less focused on the students themselves, and therefore easier for them to engage with



without the risk of self-revelation. As the project progressed, boys seemed to become more comfortable, and more fluent, in discussing issues of masculinity and manhood. There was, increasingly, less recourse to humour as students became accustomed to the use of critical literacy activities; boys appeared to welcome the opportunity that these provided to write and speak about masculinity and literature in a more subtle, complex and discriminating manner. Activities adapted from *Gendered Fictions* allowed students to consider the ideas about gender that they bring, as readers, to a text. For example, to make the students question their assumptions about gender, I re-wrote an early scene in *Pride and Prejudice* where Mr Bingley is talking to Mr Darcy at the Netherfield ball. In my version, Charlotte and Elizabeth are speaking, and the result is peculiar, creating a strange dissonance between the way we expect men and women to behave and what they seem to be saying:

Mr Darcy had been obliged, by the scarcity of ladies, to sit down for two dances; and during part of that time, Elizabeth had been standing near enough for him to overhear a conversation between her and Charlotte Lucas, who came from the dance for a few minutes to press her friend to join it.

'Come, Lizzie,' said she, 'I must have you dance. I hate to see you standing about by yourself in this stupid manner. You had much better dance.'

'I certainly shall not. You know how I detest it, unless I

am particularly acquainted with my partner. At such an assembly as this, it would be insupportable. Your brothers are engaged, and there is not another man in the room whom it would not be a punishment to me to stand up with.'

'I would not be so fastidious as you are,' cried Charlotte, 'for a kingdom! Upon my honour I never met with so many pleasant gentlemen in my life, as I have this evening; and there are several of them, you see, uncommonly pretty.'

This was found to be amusing, as well as thought-provoking. One student felt that the scene illustrated the fact that 'We generally think of men as more powerful, active or assertive while women have actions done to them (and) men do actions'. Journal entries revealed that students were increasingly thinking about the nature of established gender roles, even if their opinions were not yet fully formed. One wrote that 'in literature, we have a bias, or expected view of men and women' and another added that 'It (the lesson) proved to us that women and men can be similar and (we felt) shock as it shows us (the) fixed roles of men and women in society'. One boy, who in a focus group had professed to an essentialist view of sex roles – 'To be a man is to be almost like a ruler in some ways... to be in charge, the alpha male, the top dog' – found himself thinking about gender in a different way. In a journal entry, he wrote: 'Are men and women opposite? Can they not be somewhere in the middle? Not



black and white but lots of shades of grey. They aren't so different'.

'Are men and women opposite?'

Many students also demonstrated an increasing awareness of the way in which power is manifested in texts, and the ways in which some kinds of masculinity are privileged over others. In an activity designed to assess students' perceptions of which male characters in *Pride and Prejudice* were set up by Austen as the most desirably masculine, boys were asked to rank the characters from 'most masculine' to 'least masculine', with the majority placing Mr Darcy at the top of the scale, and Mr Collins at the bottom. One boy noted in his journal that Darcy, although in some ways atypical of what a 'real' man should be in his opinion, was presented by the novel in this way: 'Interesting to see that even though a character like Darcy who seems to be passive with feminine qualities can be portrayed (sic) as the most masculine figure in the book'. There was heated discussion about the relative status of male characters, as careful attention was paid to the ways in which the text prepares readers to make judgements. Students were asked to list adjectives used to describe male characters, verbs used in association with them, the way their names were used (e.g. the way that Darcy's first name is hardly ever used, and what this implies about his status) and other aspects of the way they were depicted. One student, for example, said that Mr Bennet, who is often seen in his study, was therefore being presented as 'lazy' and that this was typical of the way in which men are often portrayed: 'they're (seen as) lazy, they can't be bothered to do anything'. There was also discussion of the status of married men in the novel, as the most desirably masculine characters are single; some students felt that marriage was equated with emasculation.

In addition, by using critical literacy activities as an approach to the text, students gained an understanding that masculinity is a social construct that varies over time and between cultures. Two lessons were spent comparing the way in which Darcy is portrayed by Colin Firth in the BBC miniseries of *Pride and Prejudice* (1995) and in the original text. Students were asked to analyse the language used to describe Darcy in the novel, and then to think about the differences between this Darcy and the BBC representation, for which Andrew Davies wrote the famous 'wet T-shirt' scene, where Darcy swims across a lake in the grounds of Pemberley. Of this scene and an episode (also not in the novel) where Darcy is shown to be fencing - presumably as a physical outlet for his uncontrollable desire for Elizabeth - one student wrote that 'The TV version shows a lot of... physical masculinity and how he expresses his feelings. The book does not go into much depth in terms of physical masculinity.' Others added that both versions of the character were masculine, but in different ways. In my notes about the lesson, I wrote that there 'Seemed to be an acceptance, generally, that ideas about masculinity and relative and culture/time-specific - not absolute'. This impression was borne out by the comments made by students in their journals, with one boy



noting, by way of example, that 'over time peoples perception of what it is to be masculine have changed, as the society around them changes. Overall, since the time *Pride and Prejudice* was written, when masculinity was being gentlemanlike and well mannered, the perception has now moved to a more physically dominated masculinity where it is important to be strong and sporty'. This is, of course, rather reductive: but demonstrative, nonetheless, of this student's increasingly sophisticated thinking on the issue.

Levels of engagement

There was also a greater sophistication in the language used to write and speak about men and masculinity. However, although every student became much more nimble with the language he used, using words such as 'masculine' or 'feminine' with confidence, poor expression on the part of some boys – at least some of the time – appeared to indicate a lack of understanding about some of the tasks they were undertaking as part of the project. One student wrote, of the TV version of *Darcy*, that 'Film, even though written 200 years later; still portrays masculinitys (sic) in form of sports'. Another wrote that 'In the film – he is nervous and shy, which is similar to how a lot of men act today. This shows that masculinity is very much like people are today'.

This somewhat muddled statement could be indicative of a desire to please his teacher by saying the right kind of thing. Other members of the group perhaps chose to hide

their confusion by making rather bland comments, such as 'It was interesting to see how in depth Jane Austen has made his (sic) character'. Such fence-sitting on the students' part could reveal an unwillingness to risk embarrassment by explaining that they were unsure about the issues under discussion. This was the case, to a greater or lesser extent, for a small number of boys throughout the course at various times. For example, one student, when looking at the way male characters were presented in the text, wrote that Mr Bingley had a 'passive name' – an observation that apparently makes no sense.

During the lessons on *Darcy*, I also observed in my lesson notes that I felt a particular point was 'understood and engaged with by *some* students, although perhaps not all – some students rather unengaged'. Indeed, some boys did seem to become more distracted as they approached the end of the course, perhaps because of the complexity of the material and the sophisticated thought processes that it sometimes demanded. Many of the boys who demonstrated the best grasp of the concepts under discussion, who displayed the most interest during lessons and who tended to speak and write about gender in the

By using critical literacy activities as an approach to the text, students gained an understanding that masculinity is a social construct that varies over time and between cultures.



most sophisticated manner also tended to be those who showed most interest in the project in general. Several students of this type chose to attend focus groups during their lunch hour, for example, and were keen to engage in discussion about the project outside lesson time. It is also notable that many of these boys – i.e. those who were both most interested in the project and relatively sophisticated in their thinking – were also those whose initial responses to the ‘pre-test’ survey were the most thoughtful and discriminating. By the same token, those boys who performed least well on paper were often those who contributed least to class discussions.

Pride, Prejudice, and Critical Literacy

The final lessons of the course, however, revealed that every student had made significant progress using critical literacy activities. Both a discussion of what the current popularity of *Pride and Prejudice* says about the nature of contemporary masculinity and an activity that asked students to critique different ‘readings’ of the novel (for example, ‘This novel is about the taming of a man’ and ‘This novel presents men critically and women sympathetically’) were approached with confidence and demonstrated the group’s awareness of the ways in which texts, and readers, create meaning. One student, for example, noted that the final lessons, which invited students to think about the novel as a whole, ‘highlighted

The project enabled at least some students to re-assess their attitudes towards masculinity, but, perhaps more importantly, it revealed that this is an issue that boys are interested in, one that they find important, and which they have feelings about, however embarrassing it can be to confront them.

for me the way in which your initial attitude affects the way you read the book and interpret it... I also caught a glimpse of how it is to read the book as a different person’. He also remarked that ‘the class behaved so well in the latter part of the lesson’, pointing to this as an indicator of engagement with the material.

On the whole, the exit survey was very encouraging. Responses provided strong evidence that many students had indeed broadened their understanding of masculinity and manhood as a result of studying *Pride and Prejudice* using critical literacy techniques. Boys were often keen to point to a wider definition of manhood than they were at the beginning of the course, in terms of both physicality and personal characteristics. Even those students who did not interrogate the terms on which the questions were being asked were more likely to demonstrate an awareness (to a greater or lesser extent) of the performative nature of masculinity. One such respondent wrote in the ‘pre-test’ that a man should behave ‘dominantly and powerful’; in the exit survey, however, he stated that ‘He should behave as he would like to behave... He should be free and behave freely and not conform to the behaviours of man and its world’. This statement, while unclear, does at least recognise that men feel pressure to ‘conform’ to expected behaviours, and that such behaviours are not necessarily innate.

So what are the implications of this? For me there are several. Firstly, however qualified its success, there is evidence that the project enabled at least some students to re-assess their attitudes towards masculinity, and that the use of critical literacy techniques enabled this. But, perhaps more importantly, it revealed that this is an issue that boys are interested in, one that they find important, and which they have feelings about, however embarrassing it can be to confront them. It is worth harnessing this energy, not only because it provides an accessible route into the teaching of a novel – where the students make a connection between the world of the text and their own lives – but because it is important, for the students themselves, for the school, and our society.

This article has been adapted from an account of an action research project that was originally produced under the auspices of the International Boys’ Schools Coalition.

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Women's Work?

Perspectives on Gender and Learning in English

The majority of undergraduate students of English are women. How do they, and their male peers, experience university English? *John Hodgson* reports on gender in university English studies.

When the English Subject Centre of the Higher Education Academy asked me to undertake a focus group study of students' experience of studying English in UK higher education (Hodgson 2010), one of their main concerns was the experience of male undergraduates. Men comprise only about 25% of undergraduate English students (Gawthrop and Martin 2003), and the ESC wished to understand their experience of studying what is frequently characterised as a 'feminine' or 'feminised' subject (Knights 2008). It is sometimes claimed (Smithers 2003) that the tenor of A Level English classes, where female students are also frequently in the majority, may discourage or disadvantage males. Might the same be the case in higher education? In fact, as the study progressed, many of the women students expressed a sense of alienation from certain aspects of the subject, while the men, although in the minority, appeared more comfortable in the academic environment. This unexpected finding will be explored in what follows.

Studying the students

Six universities were selected for the study: three older institutions, two of which were members of the Russell group, and three newer universities. To preserve confidentiality, the final report (Hodgson 2010) gave each a name derived from a location in *Pride and Prejudice*

Ashworth (post-92 University College) (not included in this short article)

Hunsford (post-92 University)

Lambton (post-92 University)

Longbourn (pre-92 Russell Group University)

Netherfield (pre-92 Russell Group University)

Pemberley (pre-92 University)

At my request, the universities circulated their English students to invite them to take part in a focus group on their own campus. Sufficient students came forward to run two focus groups in each of the pre-92 universities,


and one in each of the others. In order to gain the unfiltered experience of some of the male students, it seemed necessary to run at least one exclusively male focus group within each institution studied. However, arranging this proved much more difficult than had been expected. Given the overall female/male ratio of English students in higher education, I should have anticipated that far fewer male than female students would present themselves as participants in the focus groups. This difficulty was exacerbated by the increasing unavailability of students as the summer term progressed. Further, one of the students selected for an all-male group (on the basis of her 'male' name) turned out to be female. Because of these complications, it proved possible to interview only one all-male group, which comprised two students from an older university. I therefore decided to address gender issues in the mixed and all-female groups also. The consequent analysis of the gendering of the subject, as described in the words of these participants, proved a fruitful approach to understanding the experience of contemporary students of university English.

Regarding the gender of the students' tutors, the focus group participants from Longbourn, Lambton and Ashworth told me that there was a majority of female tutors in their English departments. Pemberley students reported a slight majority of male tutors, while the students at the other universities told me that the ratio of male to female English tutors was approximately equal.

This article cites the experiences of 27 students, listed on the next page. All of them were studying English Literature unless otherwise stated.

1. Men's experience of studying English

The most direct evidence of male experience of undergraduate English came from Alan and Mark, the two male students at Longbourn University who made up the all-male focus group. Alan's previous experience of English had been extensively masculine in character, in that he had studied at a London boys' grammar school where the men who had taught him in the sixth form had chosen *Tom Brown's School Days* as one of the A Level



John Hodgson is the chair of NATE's Post-16 Committee and NATE's Research Officer.

Students cited in this article

Hunsford University:

- Diana was a mature student in her late thirties. She had taken A Levels several years previously.
- Elaine, a mature student in her forties, had studied a range of subjects in a pre-university Access course.

Lambton University:

- Jenny had studied A Level English Language and Literature, Home Economics and Psychology in the sixth form of a mixed comprehensive school.
- John, a mature student in his late 40s, was taking a BA in English Language. In the past, he had studied electronics to A Level equivalent and English and Maths to GCE O level.
- Yvonne had studied A Level English Literature, History and Business Studies in the sixth form at a secondary school

Longbourn University:

- Alan had studied English, History and Biology at A Level in a boys' grammar school.
- Caitlin had taken A Levels in English, Art and Mathematics at an FE college.
- Françoise had been educated in France and had taken the French Baccalaureate with a British international option.
- Jessica had studied A Levels in English Literature, History and Economics at an independent girls' school.
- Mark had studied English, French and Classics at A Level in a mixed sixth form college.

Netherfield University:

- Alison had studied A Levels in English Literature, German and Theatre Studies at a mixed sixth form college.
- Holly had studied A Level English Literature, History and Religious Studies in a mixed secondary school.
- Luke had studied A Levels in English Literature, Art, Classical Civilisation, and Theatre Studies at a mixed independent school.

- Lydia had studied A Levels in Art, English Literature and Welsh in a mixed sixth form.
- Martine had studied A Levels in combined English Language and Literature, History, Chemistry and Biology at a mixed further education college.
- Rebecca had studied Maths, Geography, English Literature and English Language at A Level in a mixed secondary school.
- Robert had studied A Levels in English Literature, History, Geography and Economics in a boys' secondary school.

Pemberley University:

- Antonia had studied A Levels in English Literature, History and Geography in a mixed secondary school.
- Becky had taken A Levels in Psychology, English, and Music in a mixed secondary school.
- Bela had studied A Levels in Biology, French, Drama and English Literature in an independent school.
- Carrie-Ann had taken A Levels in a secondary school sixth form including English Literature, History, Drama, Critical Thinking and General Studies.
- Isabel had studied English in a mixed sixth form where she had taken A Levels in English Literature, French, and Biology.
- Justine had attended a single-sex secondary school where she had studied A Level Chemistry, English, and Art.
- Lynda had studied for the International Baccalaureate in a Dutch international school.
- Polly had studied in a mixed FE college and taken A Level courses in English Literature, Philosophy, Film Studies, Government and Politics.
- Seamus had studied the International Baccalaureate at a Further Education college where he had taken higher qualifications in English, History and Anthropology.
- Tessa had attended a mixed secondary school where she had studied English Literature, English Language and History.

set books. Alan commented ironically that his East End school hadn't exactly been Tom Brown's Rugby, but the classroom atmosphere had, he said, been similarly boisterous, and the teachers had engaged the students in a strategic approach to the texts to maximise their chances of success in the A Level examination. There was a bond between the male students and the teachers, who 'had that whole air about them of being one of the gang', and handed out bullet points at the end of the lesson to confirm the textual conclusions to which they had directed the class. Coming to university, he said, was 'a little bit of a culture shock': 'not the mixed aspect but the feminist reading of texts all the time and a far less direct approach to the issues that are raised in the text.' Alan compared his A Level class to university seminars, where, he said, there was 'a far more open floor for discussion'.

This, in his view, was 'quite a feminine approach'.

Mark had attended a mixed school where the A Level class consisted mainly of girls and some of the teachers had been women. 'I've been sort of told,' he said, 'that English is a sort of an effeminate subject to take. So I've always been fighting with that and it hasn't really affected me.' Since he had been at university, Mark had become 'much more aware of the greater ratio of girls', had noticed that most of his tutors were women, had seen that some of the options focused on women writers, and had found that seminars tended to 'move towards feminine readings and interpretations'. However, the gender aspect of his university experience was not very different from his previous learning context, and he said that his studies in English had made him interested in 'female related' options.

Alan expressed some hostility towards the affective element in the poetry of Carol Ann Duffy, commenting that, in a poem about the birth of her first child, she seemed 'extraordinarily wrapped up in her own emotions and senses'. However, he said that he appreciated the work of a female schoolteacher, an actress, who 'was very capable in expressing the way [the play] would have been performed, and the way that actors would have behaved and things like that'. This teacher 'could sympathize with the characters far more than we could' and highlighted a dimension of study that he felt was neglected by the male teachers, who 'were more wrapped up in the twists and turns and the outcomes of the plots rather than the characters themselves'. As a male student, he thought he brought a 'different perspective' to discussions at university; in a seminar on a Victorian novel, he had challenged the focus on feminist readings. However, he allowed the legitimacy of such readings in a patriarchal world where 'it's been masculine readings ever since day one'.

Masculine modes?

Many of the female students interviewed for this study commented (as will be discussed below) on the low number of contact hours and the overall lack of social involvement in their university English course. Mark and Alan echoed these comments, but their response had a certain masculine tone. They adopted a robust approach to the tutor-student relationship: in their view, it was up to the student to approach the tutor. 'It is very important,' said Alan, 'for a first year [student] to understand that university is more of a dialogue rather than a monologue. In essays, if you do badly, they won't necessarily say you should come and see me. It's only if you want to go and see them.'

Students needed, in Mark and Alan's view, to take a strategic approach to their studies. The assessment regime made essay writing (in Alan's words) 'the only thing that really matters on the course', and thus, he felt, it was sensible to put effort into essays rather than into attending seminars. Alan told me he took pleasure in 'creating new ideas'. It was important to have 'critics to back [them] up', but he 'didn't want to rely on someone else's argument too much'. It was necessary, of course, to have in mind the preferences of the person who would mark the essay, and to take account of one's status relationship with the tutor. (Alan felt that some of the younger tutors took a rivalrous stance and marked harshly 'almost out of a sense of competition with your ideas'.) At the same time, as Mark pointed out, the anonymous marking system meant that tutors often had little to say to students: they frequently had no real recollection of their work. Alan would look at the mark his essay had gained, and read what the tutor had to say about it, but he wouldn't 'source out' the tutor 'to have a little discussion about it'. He had been focused on the next essay. 'Turnover is the key,' he told me.

Mark and Alan presented, then, a male response to a learning context that might be construed as feminine in certain respects. Most of their fellow students were

women; a good proportion of the tutors were female; the subject matter sometimes included feminist perspectives; and the overt pedagogic method was of inclusive, open discussion. The assessment regime, however, appeared to emphasise the importance of isolated, individual effort, and the tutor-student relationship was distant.

Confidence and contact

Seamus, at Pemberley University, the only male in a focus group of six students, also spoke with confidence about his experience of English. He was scornful of the attainments of the students with whom he had studied for the International Baccalaureate, and glad to be surrounded by 'intelligent' people at university. He expressed a view of what was 'proper' in critical theory: a theoretical module in the first semester had included 'proper stuff' like formalism, but a recent three-week unit on feminism had been 'lightweight'. Like most of the students, he was critical of the formulaic writing he had been taught at A Level ('I'll tick the box, done, marked, I'm off') and glad that he now had the opportunity to write essays with a 'burning idea' that was exciting to write about and that his tutors would find interesting, even if they disagreed with it. He wanted more opportunities for writing and a longer time to reflect on the topic. He seemed confident in his student identity and said that he had never occurred to him to question why he had chosen a subject studied predominately by females.

Robert and Luke, the male students interviewed (along with one female) at Netherfield, participated vigorously in university life – Robert as a student journalist and Luke in the drama society. Robert saw the transition from school to university in terms of a leap into independence: he felt that he had been 'spoon-fed' at A Level, whereas at university 'people expect you to read a lot more independently and by yourself'. Robert felt that part of the difference in the learning and teaching culture was caused by the different sense of their vocation experienced by school and university teachers. 'Your [school] teacher was under pressure to get a certain amount of passes.' At university, he felt, the tutors did not assume the same responsibility for student grades. Robert took a kind of reverse consumerist view where the responsibility was placed on the buyer rather than the

Most of Mark and Alan's fellow students were women; a good proportion of the tutors were female; the subject matter sometimes included feminist perspectives; and the overt pedagogic method was of inclusive, open discussion. The assessment regime, however, appeared to emphasise the importance of isolated, individual effort, and the tutor-student relationship was distant.

The girls admired the confidence and relaxation that some of the boys demonstrated in class. They found this particularly surprising given their belief that English was a more natural subject for girls to study than for boys. 'I mean this in the nicest way,' said Becky 'but I think it takes a certain type of guy to do English.'

seller: 'You've paid your money - if you don't do the work that's your problem.' He appreciated his tutors' support, but he complained about having to pay the same fees as did other students who, he claimed, received much more tuition.

Luke said that the most obvious difference between his sixth form and university course was the much-reduced contact time. He linked this to an expectation of independent, rather than guided, reading. In his view, however, the bigger culture shock of moving to university from A Level was not the low contact time but the small amount of writing expected. He claimed that, when studying for A Level: 'Usually I'd have two or three essays to write a week; whereas now it's six assessments at the end of the semester.' He had expected 'loads of writing'. However, he preferred university tutors' expectations of essays: 'They're looking for an argument ... there is more focus on coming up with your own ideas about the text.' He had 'become used to working by myself so I find it easier to do it that way ... I probably don't speak to the tutors as much as I could.' Like Robert, he appeared to feel there was a safety net of tutorial assistance (personal or by email) that could be accessed if necessary, although staff were stretched, especially at assessment times.

Lads and language

John was a distinctive figure in the Lambton focus group in that he was male, a mature student, and taking a degree in English Language. He had the confidence of a man who had been employed for many years and 'done other types of writing'. He gave the impression of enjoying a 'hands-on' mode of English study: he liked group investigations and other collaborative work in Language and defined himself as 'well read' owing to his use of information books and twenty years' experience of the internet. (He was 'amazed' that Literature students would read whole literary texts every week.) He praised his tutors, who gave useful guidance on reading - 'books, articles, internet sites even' - and had excited him by introducing him to critical discourse analysis ('quite a revelation to me'). John would contact his lecturers while he was writing an assignment. He would ask: 'Does that look like a good plan for an essay? - and they'll give you feedback then or by email.' He appreciated the 'varied' assessment programme, which included peer review of presentations: 'It was fantastic. Instant feedback each week.' Despite his upbeat view of his studies, he had

found a module on language and gender chastening: 'To think of the way that women had been portrayed not just in literature but in scientific writing in the seventeenth and eighteenth century.' He felt that 'the lads in the class' would be thinking: 'I don't want to be associated with this.' John spoke with enthusiasm about his sense of progress: 'It's amazing the capacity I've learned to look at language in use ... I really notice everything even if it's just conversations with people or things I read or things I hear or things on the sides of buses. It's all language and it all now triggers all sorts of thoughts in my head ... I love it; it's great.'

2. Women's experience of studying English

The women in the focus groups spoke more about the men (although the latter were in the minority) than the men spoke about the women. Women expressed more awareness than did men of the difference in numbers between the genders. Becky, in Pemberley, remembered thinking in her first lecture: 'I should have done engineering!' Some said that they welcomed the presence of male students in seminars. When Antonia, in Pemberley, said that in her seminar group the boys usually came up with more interesting points and would 'push the argument further', there was murmured agreement from some of her peers. Bela said she liked the presence of males in seminars with a feminist agenda - without them, she thought, '[the discussion] becomes a bit one-sided.' Antonia agreed: 'We had guys in the seminar when we were discussing feminism, which made it interesting to see how they were responding to the texts, because to read them as women is very different to reading feminine texts as guys.' Several of the female students were anxious about the feelings of males in such classes. Yvonne, in Lambton, suggested that the male students in a class on nineteenth-century women writers would feel uncomfortable 'because they are aware of things that happened in the past and how women were classed as second-class citizens'. Some of the female students expressed distance from feminist discourses. Carrie-Ann, at Pemberley, had disliked the stance of a female tutor who had announced: 'If all the boys in the room left, it wouldn't make much of a difference.' Yvonne (Lambton) thought: 'A lot of girls tend to go over the top on the whole feminist thing and search for feminist issues that maybe aren't there.' In more than one group, women students expressed a sense of embarrassment and reticence at being thought a feminist. Lynda (Pemberley) said the girls would shy away from being labelled as feminists, while male students would try to accommodate a feminist position.

While several of the girls expressed concern for the feelings of boys who found themselves discussing feminist issues in a largely female group, they also admired the confidence and relaxation that some of the boys demonstrated in class. As Holly (Netherfield) put it: 'They are always laid back in the chair ... and they'll just throw something in at the end.' The girls found this particularly surprising given their belief (expressed in various ways)

that English was a more natural subject for girls to study than for boys. 'I mean this in the nicest way,' said Becky (Pemberley), 'but I think it takes a certain type of guy to do English.' She thought he would be 'not the most macho kind'. Rebecca (Netherfield) suggested: 'We [women] don't have to make any sacrifices or go against the grain to do it.' Lydia, in the same group, felt that an engineering student would regard her as stupid and that, talking to him (the imagined student was implicitly male) she would feel 'a bit of a cliché ... talking about all these ... pretentious ideas'. She thought that this fear was probably irrational, 'a female thing'. To her, subject choice and gender combined to create a sense of inferiority to those who studied the masculine outer world.

Making (male/female?) meanings

Although several of the women regarded English as a natural subject for them to study, they were not necessarily confident or comfortable with the social situation, the subject matter, or the learning and assessment procedures. Student life was sometimes described as private, individual and isolated. Caitlin (in her third year of English at Longbourn) spoke eloquently about the isolation she experienced as a student. Days would spread out in which she had nothing to do but write an essay, with no ready opportunity to communicate with others. 'English is not a sociable subject,' said Antonia in Pemberley. 'You are there in your little bubble on your own, reading on your own.' The students in Longbourn regretted the loss of a common room for English students which had been a good place to meet people and share interests. Even the mature student Elaine (Hunsford), who took a highly independent and determined approach to her study, regretted the lack of any group activities such as field visits or theatre trips. A sense of being 'outside', not knowing how to engage with, the university and the curriculum was expressed in various ways. Some of the Netherfield students, for example, were surprised to hear that it was possible to change one's tutor.

This sense of alienation from the social life of the university - the imagined collaborative study of scientists, medics and engineers was often mentioned - extended to the subject matter of English Literature. The subject English, according to Knights (2008: 5), 'has treasured affect, interiority and the 'soft' discourses of interpersonal relations.' Many of the students, however, said that they did not find the transition from school to university English a move into a familiar language or territory. Martine, in Netherfield, said that the problem of transition was not the amount of reading required, but 'trying to understand what they are looking for and even what you should be reading'. Isabel (Pemberley) would have liked to have had 'just a general idea of what you are working towards'. Alison, in Netherfield, appealed for 'a summary lecture at the beginning, so you know what direction you're meant to be heading and where you're aiming for, as opposed to floating along and hoping you'll have an epiphany or something'.

While some students were excited by literary theory -

'the whole poststructuralism thing was huge to me, it opened my eyes' said Lynda (Pemberley) - others found it 'really difficult' (Polly, Pemberley). Carrie-Ann (Pemberley) had come to understand that the literary-cultural concepts were not really difficult: 'It's just the phrasing they used to make it sound really heavy.' She thought that 'the subject matter is predominately feminine and does require very feminine ways of thinking', but the argumentative method required in seminars and essays was 'quite masculine' and required 'a slight desensitising', as 'you've got to cast aside your personal opinions and tried not to let them affect an argument or the way you see the book'. Isabel agreed that the focus of reading was 'often about society and general themes such as race and religion'. Polly felt that the subject matter was not feminine in the sense that 'we don't really talk about emotions in the books we read', and said that, in her experience, Literature students were never asked to undertake imaginative writing such as the interior monologue of a minor character in a novel. Indeed, only Diana, a mature student at Hunsford, spoke directly of the affective power of literature. 'I had a bad accident and got divorced and various things were going on and poetry was what saved me.' With an access of emotion, she said: 'There's always a poem that will just ... speak to you.' She insisted that the motive for her study was emotional rather than vocational, and said that all the hard work had not put her off reading. 'It's opened up lots of other avenues. Lots of areas of interest.'

From A Level to university

Several students also expressed an uncertainty about the method of study expected. Justine, at the end of her first year in Pemberley, was unclear as to whether 'we are supposed to take the kind of skills we learned at A Level and apply them on a weekly basis'. Much of the reading the students did was directed towards a forthcoming essay assignment, which would almost invariably count towards their overall course grade. Even at the end of her second year, however, Jenny (Lambton) felt that she didn't know what was expected of an essay. A tutor had told her that a university essay should be different from A Level writing about literature: 'You don't need to know it in as much depth, you don't need to learn loads of quotes.' However, 'knowing' the text remained crucial to Jenny's sense of competence: 'I just thought, if I didn't [know the book in depth], I wouldn't pass the exam.'

Polly felt that the subject matter was not feminine in the sense that 'we don't really talk about emotions in the books we read', and said that, in her experience, literature students were never asked to undertake imaginative writing such as the interior monologue of a minor character in a novel. Indeed, only Diana, a mature student, spoke directly of the affective power of literature.

Despite the preponderance of women students on university English courses, the majority of women tutors in several departments, and the traditional association of English Studies with affect, interior states and issues of human relations, it could be construed that these students' experience of the social, learning and assessment practices of undergraduate English lacked something of the feminine

This problem was exacerbated by the small amount of writing required in most courses and by the fact that most of this writing was formally assessed, so there was little opportunity to practise. Essay writing, according to Caitlin of Longbourn, was 'the only thing that really counts', and each essay was worth a significant proportion of the marks of the course. Caitlin and Jessica felt it was wrong that all or most of the assessment was based on essays that had to be written in this isolated manner. They compared the assessment weightings of English to other courses taken by their friends where a greater number of tasks were undertaken and each task counted for only a small amount of the assessment. Jessica compared the assessment system at Longbourn unfavourably with the experience of a friend at another pre-92 university who (she said) wrote an essay every two weeks which was read and returned by her tutor, so that a dialogue developed. Tessa (Pemberley) asked for weekly assignments 'which would help us to focus what we should be looking at in the text'. This, she suggested, would create 'a kind of system in the mind for getting an essay done'. Françoise countered that the high stakes regime made them go into depth and research their essays thoroughly in a way they might not otherwise do. But the students recounted several tales of students who had suffered from anxiety and depression brought on, they claimed, by the work regime – in some cases the students concerned had left the course.

Of course, the male students also commented on the differences in culture between school and university. Alan (Longbourn) said: 'We have so few contact hours and lectures and I've found so many of my friends end up missing them anyway.' He said he felt guilty whenever he missed a class, although they did not always offer the opportunity for discussion that was needed. In the first

year, said Alan, there had been 'a lot of awkward silences and we wouldn't feel comfortable really getting into a heated discussion or debate'. He felt that the 'vibe' of seminars was different at university: 'There is no pat on the back, like saying you've done well.' At university, unlike school, he claimed, one gains praise only for essay writing: 'Since it is all essay based, that's the only way we are assessed.' Nonetheless, he insisted that 'the system is fine, as long as the student isn't reticent. They have to get their voice heard. Otherwise you get nothing.'

The gender of English?

It is difficult to generalise about the student experience of university English from a small focus group study. It may be that the students who chose to take part in the groups were unusually vocal or concerned about their experience. Nevertheless, many of these themes were articulated again by the students who participated in my follow-up study of joint honours students (Hodgson 2011), and the following conclusion seems justified by the evidence of these focus groups. Despite the preponderance of women students on university English courses, the majority of women tutors in several departments, and the traditional association of English Studies with affect, interior states and issues of human relations, it could be construed that these students' experience of the social, learning and assessment practices of undergraduate English lacked something of the feminine. Diana in Hunsford was unusual in speaking directly of her response to poetry. To many of these students, male as well as female, university English meant a difficult journey of mastering theory, managing their reading, and writing essays for high-stakes assessment within an environment that was felt to lack nurture.

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'Knowledge About Language' Revisited

The Impact of Teachers' Linguistic Subject Knowledge on the Teaching of Writing

In the second of two articles drawing on findings from a large-scale study carried out in secondary schools, *Debra Myhill, Susan Jones, Helen Lines & Annabel Watson* explore the classroom impact of teachers' linguistic subject knowledge.

The recent Ofsted subject report, *Moving English Forward*, highlights the impact of teachers' linguistic knowledge on students' learning. In outstanding practice:

Teachers have a very good understanding of the English language, including differences between talk and writing, and address these issues directly in lessons. The technical features of language are very well taught. (Ofsted, 2012, p.16)

We would argue that grammar is about far more than the 'technical features' of language, but our own recent research does confirm OFSTED's emphasis on good understanding of language. In our '*Grammar for Writing*' research, conducted in 31 secondary schools, we wanted to know if teaching contextualised grammar improved students' writing. We found that it did – students in the intervention group improved their writing scores (as measured in pre and post-test writing samples) by 20% over the year compared with 11% in the comparison group. But we also found that teachers' linguistic subject knowledge (LSK) was a significant factor in determining the success of the grammar intervention. Students in classes with teachers with lower LSK made less improvement than those with teachers with higher LSK.

We measured LSK by giving teachers a 'grammar test' which scored their ability to identify word classes and syntactical structures in an authentic text – an extract from *Pride and Prejudice*. Scores on this test were very evenly spread, ranging from 35% to 92%, with a mean result of 60%. Teachers' first degrees were quite varied, including 8 who had a degree in subjects other than English. Only one had a degree with a linguistics component: unsurprisingly, this teacher scored 86%. Otherwise, there was no discernible correlation between first degree and LSK. Given that older teachers may have been taught grammar as part of their own education, we analysed the results to see if there was any relationship between years of teaching experience and linguistic knowledge, but there was no strong evidence of this: the four highest scores did include three teachers with more than 28 years of experience, but the second lowest score was from someone who had taught for 23 years.

A correlation between the teacher's linguistic subject knowledge and student outcomes is predictable. Indeed, the relationship between the two is highlighted in the supplementary subject-specific guidance for inspectors of English (Ofsted, 2010). In outstanding teaching:

Teachers demonstrate high standards in their own use of language and they model the processes of reading and writing powerfully to help pupils make real progress in their own work.

Andrews suggests that it is '*likely to be the case that a teacher with a rich knowledge of grammatical constructions and a more general awareness of the forms and varieties of the language will be in a better position to help young writers*' (Andrews 2005, 75). Of course, linguistic subject knowledge involves more than the ability to identify structures and use grammatical terminology. In the '*Grammar for Writing*' study, we were interested in how teachers applied their technical knowledge. Myhill (2005) argues it is axiomatic that meaningful, focused and relevant attention to grammar in the context of teaching writing requires teachers who are confident both about what they are teaching and how to teach it.

An effective pedagogy for writing includes knowing when to draw attention to a specific feature, being able to explain a grammatical concept clearly, and demonstrating how it might enhance the writing being undertaken. It also requires an understanding of the bigger picture of writing development and progress. In the context of the introduction of grammar into the curriculum in New Zealand, Gordon (2005: 63) cites one consequence of teachers' weak LSK: '*because of their own lack of knowledge about language*' they focused on superficial error in students' writing and failed to acknowledge students' '*writing virtues*' – their developing syntactic maturity.

Grammar insecurities

In the teaching materials that formed the grammar intervention, we tried to support teachers' linguistic



Debra Myhill, Susan Jones, Helen Lines & Annabel Watson are researchers in the 'Grammar for Writing' project at the University of Exeter.

knowledge and pedagogical decision-making through resources and teaching notes. Nonetheless, the schemes did require confident understanding of the grammatical points that were taught. Our lesson observations show that teachers with weaker LSK struggled to cope with student questions on grammar and sometimes communicated incorrect information to students. They were also more likely to alter or omit the grammar point that formed the focus of the lesson. Over half the teachers in our study found that certain aspects of the schemes posed a challenge. For some, the lessons included unfamiliar terminology or concepts (determiner, noun phrase and modal verb were cited, along with the compound noun pattern of kennings). Others struggled with teaching grammar effectively, finding it hard to explain concepts clearly, expand explanations, or handle students' questions. As one teacher reflected:

I didn't find it easy because I'm struggling to get my head round understanding some of these things myself and I think sometimes it shows and I think sometimes the kids know, and sometimes they throw out answers that I'm not quite sure about.

A much less predictable finding of our study was the strength of feeling about teaching grammar in the context of writing. Teachers reported high levels of anxiety about their linguistic subject knowledge. They recalled responses to the initial LSK test of feeling '*alarmed*', '*intimidated*', '*embarrassed*' and even '*ashamed*'. One said, '*I feel completely lost when anybody mentions grammar to me*'; another, '*when people say grammar, I'm like I don't really know grammar, I don't really know grammar*.' There were expressions of concern about getting grammar wrong in the classroom: '*I wouldn't want to teach them anything incorrect*'; '*I wouldn't be able to explain it or easily give an example that I would be confident was right*' and for some, the pedagogical problem was making grammar meaningful: '*how do you move from identifying those features in the writing to saying what they do in the writing?*'

Some teachers cited specific personal '*grammar insecurities*' that made them feel at a disadvantage compared with colleagues. One was aware of her '*seriously dodgy*' grasp of boundary punctuation, and reported being pulled up by her head of department for '*comma splicing*'. Hudson (2001) makes the point that grammar as a subject has '*weak intellectual underpinnings*': it is one of the few subjects likely to be taught purely on the basis of what teachers themselves learned at school, without any kind of 'boost' at university. This teacher clearly felt disadvantaged by the lack of grammar in her own education:

I wasn't even taught what nouns, verbs and adjectives are so I really struggle with...well the other day in the English office when people were talking about prepositions...I didn't know what they were...it's a sort of constant embarrassment to me. I'm supposed to understand what it is I'm teaching and I feel inadequate

a lot of the times because I don't really understand my own language.

Although we did not find any meaningful correlation between teachers' LSK test scores and length of service, we did find that the less experienced teachers in the study made more references to their lack of linguistic confidence, and that this often centred on explicit use of grammatical terminology:

It's that fear, it's that old style, nouns, verbs, prepositions, complex sentences, compound, you know all the terminology that's really scary and that, I think, most modern English teachers actually quite struggle with...it's something that I think a lot of my generation struggle with quite a lot.

Concerns about the insufficiency of teachers' linguistic knowledge are not new; nor are they restricted to the UK. Gordon (2005: 50) for instance, notes that teachers in New Zealand recognized '*their own, inadequate linguistic knowledge*', while in the US, Koln and Hancock (2005:106) report that '*many teacher-training programs certify secondary English teachers without the students having had a single course in modern grammar*.' We know from research that most secondary English teachers do not have a sound grounding in grammar and that there are historical reasons for this. In most Anglophone countries in the 1950s and 1960s, there was a rejection of a role for grammar in English teaching, as a consequence of which many teachers were not taught grammar themselves. In 1995 the National Curriculum reintroduced grammar, as did the Primary and Secondary National Strategies of the last decade, backed by a programme of professional training, both face-to-face and through printed resources. However, a Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) survey of teachers in the period immediately following the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy indicated considerable lack of confidence in linguistic knowledge, particularly with sentence grammar, and uncertainty about implicit and explicit knowledge. The report concluded that there was a '*significant gap . . . in teachers' knowledge and confidence in sentence grammar and this has implications for . . . the teaching of language and style in texts and pupils' own writing*' (QCA 1998, 35).

Influence on pedagogy

Several teachers in our study commented that the '*technical aspects*' of the intervention schemes were more explicit and detailed, more '*pinned down*' than they were used to, and that this created a challenge. As one explained, '*I've always sbied away from the nitty-gritty of prepositions and adverbs because I've been under-confident about them myself*.' Lack of confidence was reported by teachers as the reason for omitting or changing a teaching point in the schemes, often in anticipation that their Y8 class would struggle with the

grammar. Thus one teacher avoided teaching main and subordinate clauses, concerned about how the class would react to the greater than usual technical emphasis. In effect, this limited understanding about sentence structure to the choice of longer or shorter sentences. Another teacher deliberately avoided word class terminology which she felt would be off-putting for the weaker writers in her class; in a lesson that demonstrated ways of building detail in a simple sentence, only the term '*word*' was used. This diluted the intended specificity about choices that students could make, for example, the impact of moving an adverb to the front of the sentence, or the precision created with a prepositional phrase. Watson (2012: 31) highlights ways in which the teachers in the *Grammar for Writing* research were both aware of, and concerned about, the classroom impact of their insecurities about grammar. Lack of confidence often manifested itself as negativity towards grammar, and teachers worried that their own 'block' with grammar made their pupils see it as particularly difficult. Watson stresses the importance of teachers' feelings, since they '*have an impact on students by controlling both what grammar is taught and what attitude to grammar is evoked in the classroom.*'

None of this is about teacher bashing. The media, as we know from personal experience, is ready enough to assume that role. When a DfCSF-commissioned review of international studies on the effective teaching of complex writing was published (Myhill et al, 2008), a fairly minor reference to teachers' subject knowledge became the focus of the news report: '*Teachers struggle with grammar*'; '*English teachers who went to school when grammar was not on the curriculum struggle to teach it, research shows*' (BBC Online, 2 May 2008). In terms of effective teaching of writing, we know that there is much to celebrate. *Moving English Forward* draws attention to the positive developments of the last decade, in particular the impact of direct modelling of writing by teachers and the increased tendency of teachers to draw on their own writing when instructing pupils. In our project classrooms, there was much evidence of lively discussion about language and its effects, and a healthy regard for language play and experimentation.

But the fact remains that many teachers lack confidence in their linguistic subject knowledge yet are teaching LSK in the classroom. How does this affect the way that they teach writing? The qualitative data we collected, through lesson observations and interviews with teachers and students, has provided some useful insights into this question. These are explored in the rest of this article.

Grammar in the Schemes of Work

Learning objectives in the schemes of work were drawn from the Secondary National Strategy Framework for English. The following were common to all three schemes:

- Varying sentences and punctuation for clarity and effect

- Improving vocabulary for precision and effect
- Developing varied linguistic and literary devices

In the detailed teaching plans and resources that formed the intervention, these broad objectives were broken down into grammar points that were designed to enhance a specific aspect of writing. For instance, in the narrative fiction scheme, students were taught how to describe a setting precisely by choosing nouns and verbs carefully, rather than 'piling on' adjectives and adverbs. In argument writing, they noted the subtle alteration of emphasis created through choice of modal verb. In the poetry scheme, specific attention was paid to the effects of using enjambement and caesura. Teachers in the comparison group followed the same broad objectives, but were free to devise their own lesson plans. This meant that they had greater latitude about the linguistic features that were taught, and how explicitly they were introduced and practised. When we observed lessons, we noted the linguistic and literary terminology used by teachers and students and examples of classroom exchanges that illustrated both linguistic understanding and confusion. When we interviewed teachers after the lesson, we asked them to explain their pedagogic decisions, including any adaptations made to the teaching plans we had provided.

Meaningless grammar

Teachers with less confident linguistic subject knowledge were more likely to make generalised comments about language use. Advice to writers was vague, or redundant, in the sense that it was insufficiently elaborated or explained to be meaningful for students. Sometimes this meant that teachers referred to word classes almost as content items, things which should be included in sentences if you want to improve your writing. One teacher advised her class that they could write a powerful description if they used '*verbs, adverbs or nouns*', advice so generalised that it ends up rather meaningless. Of course, there has often been a parallel tendency in literary language to encourage students to include similes and metaphors in their writing, with no discussion or explanation of why this might be advisable. Indeed, in one lesson in our study, where the objective was '*to write a poem using a range of literary devices*', features such as repetition, alliteration, personification, simile and metaphor were listed without any sense of how students might be selective or how the use of a particular feature might enhance their writing. This kind of guidance leads to students learning that certain grammatical, or literary, features have intrinsic merit, merely by their presence, rather than by developing an understanding of how different choices subtly shade and influence meanings.

'Variety'

A set of comments related to the idea of sentence variety, which was a teaching focus of the schemes of work, and which is a prominent term in published objectives and assessment criteria. Teachers regularly advocated the use of variety, almost as a formula for success: '*sentence*

variety is key; *you need to be able to vary sentences to achieve higher levels*; *make sure you have sentence variety*. Students used the phrase too, for example when referring to how they could improve their writing: *I need to vary my sentence variety – she’s said that a lot in the marking she does.* However, there was rarely any explanation of what was meant by sentence variety in the context of a particular writing task. Nor was there suggestion of why this variety was beneficial, the implication being that variety, of whatever quality, was a good thing. Allied to this was the suggestion that writing would be improved by ‘adding more’, which was students’ chief strategy for improving writing: *I’d probably make it longer if I had more time and put more modal verbs in*; *instead of just using one pattern of three, use lots of different patterns of three and not just one sharp sentence, maybe like, a lot, a lot, a lot more than one.* In such formulaic approaches to grammar, the objective was presented as achieving variety rather than using variety to create meaning.

In contrast, one teacher with good linguistic subject knowledge gave a more precise and meaningful reason for using varied sentence lengths which made a link between the linguistic feature and how it might impact upon the writing. In the argument scheme of work, she was discussing how students could use contrast in sentence length in different ways: *in a long sentence you can detail the cruelty and a short sentence you can refer to sudden death for impact.* In the fiction scheme of work, another teacher provided a clear reason for altering the standard Subject-Verb order of a sentence, for example by starting with an adverb: *Look what’s happened by changing the word order. As a writer you can withhold information and build a sense of expectation.*

‘For effect’

Another aspect of redundant grammar was the tendency to promote the use of a particular linguistic feature ‘for effect’, but without any meaningful suggestion of what that effect might be. The term was often offered in generalised advice given just before, or during, individual writing tasks, but was rarely linked to, or triggered by, specific examples. Thus teachers spoke of the need to *think about where you put your punctuation for effect* and to *use sentences for effect*. Students were advised to *vary vocabulary for effect* and to *remember that some words are more effective than others and you need to find the right ones... just think about what effect it has as well.* The notion of effectiveness was also used for feedback, as in the plenary instruction to pick out examples of a *short sentence used for effect* or in a starter activity where students were asked to choose and share *an interesting and effective sentence* from their fiction books. Not all students understood the terms, which led to some interestingly imprecise suggestions about how they might improve their writing, for instance this exchange between researcher and student, reflecting on his narrative writing:

S: I just realised there aren’t that many short sentences either, I could put in more short sentences.

R: What would be the point of putting more short sentences in?

S: It’s kind of like for effect.

R: What sort of effect?

S: It’s like, um...I can’t explain what type of effect it is.

R: Just have a little think and have a go, or tell me to get lost.

S: I don’t have a clue.

To an extent, these comments reflect both the Framework objectives and the intervention teaching materials, which repeatedly encouraged discussion about the effects of grammar features, but many teachers lacked the applied linguistic knowledge which allowed them to move beyond the phrase *for effect* to a more text or context specific discussion. There was a suggestion that if certain features were used, good writing would follow, rather than a focus on *how* features are used in a specific context and for a specific purpose.

In one lesson that worked very well, the teacher positioned students as real readers of authentic texts. With students in small discussion groups, she provided examples of campaign leaflets, a strict time limit for reading them (equating to the amount of time an average householder might spend looking at such a text), and a blank sheet of paper for students to record examples of features that persuaded them to support the cause. Student groups then agreed a hierarchy of features and discussed these as a whole class. The teacher’s role was to summarise and clarify contributions, which included helpful labelling of features, and to extend students’ understanding of audience and purpose, for example: *So why should we use emotive language in an argument? Most charity leaflets work through empathy... so it’s very important to use emotive language... remember it can evoke different emotions, like anger or sorrow.* In a lesson on dual narrative, the same teacher was similarly direct and specific in stressing for students the purpose of using the technique, explaining:

In terms of your writing, it’s not just a case of keep changing. You need to be thinking about why these changes are taking place. What effects does it create? Why has Peter Benchley made these switches? So you know when to change for effect, not just because you’ve seen a published writer do it.

The phrase ‘for effect’ was made meaningful by being linked directly to the dual narrative from *Jaws* that students had analysed in a previous lesson.

The use of linguistic terminology

The lesson objectives and teaching plans provided for the

Intervention teachers often meant they needed to be specific and explicit about points of grammar, including the use of appropriate metalanguage. A number of teachers in our study reported a lack of confidence in handling linguistic terminology. Interestingly, several made a direct comparison with the use of literary terms, though for different reasons. One teacher said she felt *'more secure'* talking about enjambement and caesura (referred to in the Poetry scheme) than *'the difference between a complex and a compound and all the rest of it.'* This is quite surprising, given that all the terms relate to clause grammar, but there may be a perception that some grammatical concepts are harder than others to explain or exemplify, subordination being one of them. There was also a suggestion that literary terms, such as alliteration and personification, have an intrinsic interest for students in a way that grammatical terms do not: as one teacher commented about students' forgetfulness: *'nouns, verbs, adjectives - they just don't stick, those terms.'* Some teachers reacted very strongly against grammatical terminology: it was equated with the tedium of exercises and drills from their own schooling, with rules and *'getting it right or wrong'*, or ran counter to their real interests:

'because I'm more literature than language, for me the mechanics of language and how it's shaped is irrelevant and it's more about how it makes me feel and the effect of it at the end of it, and I don't really care how they've got there.'

It was possible for Intervention teachers to avoid using grammatical terminology – and attendant explanations – if they chose to: for example, by omitting references to abstract nouns detailed in the lesson plan or by not explaining 'adverbials' where displayed on a Power Point slide. Conversely, a teacher in the Comparison group, free to decide her own learning focus and lesson activities, made very specific grammatical references, using a raft of terminology, backed by quick examples from her own writing and from students' homework. All the following terms were used within the first ten minutes of the lesson: complex sentence, compound sentence, simple sentence, subordinators, present tense, first person, comma, semi-colon, adverb, adjective, noun; passive verbs (glossed as *'ones that slow the action'*), figurative language, similes, metaphors, omniscient narrator. The class was run like a writers' workshop, with clearly voiced expectations that grammatical knowledge was necessary to improve students' writing, and reassurance that key concepts would be revisited throughout the year: *'I think you're struggling a little bit with complex sentences, but don't worry, we'll come back to it.'*

Semantic definitions for word classes

For many decades, English teachers have developed their own ways of explaining basic grammatical terms to children such as defining a verb as a 'doing' word or an adjective as a 'describing' word. These explanations use

semantic definitions rather than form or function based definitions, and they probably arise from a desire to provide a helpful shortcut to understanding – explanations of grammar terms in grammar books can be frustratingly complex! However, this does create all kinds of misunderstandings and confusions, particularly when students look at language examples and use the semantic definitions logically. For instance, the *'doing'* word definition of a verb repeatedly catches out young learners, and many adults. Firstly, there is a problem because so many verbs have no obvious meaning related to doing anything (e.g. *be, think, might*). Secondly, very often the 'doing' in a sentence seems to a logical user of this definition to be located in a word which is not the verb. So for example, in the sentence, *I've never liked shopping*, using this logic, many students will select the noun *'shopping'* as the doing word.

Syntactical confusion

The results of the LSK test indicate that it is syntax in particular which teachers are least confident about, particularly clauses. In the interviews, many teachers articulated a specific anxiety about clauses, for example:

Generally with grammar I'm quite confident, um the nitty gritty parts I'm not so confident with, so things like embedding a clause in a complex sentence it takes me a while to work out how to do it, so to teach it, my confidence in that is less so

Because of the learning focus of the schemes of work, it is not surprising that many of the observed examples of pedagogical problems were to do with understanding different sentence types. Teachers found 'clause' difficult to explain and either ducked the question, *'Miss, what's a clause?'* or gave answers they knew were unsatisfactory: *'part of a sentence'; 'the bits between the punctuation'*. In one classroom, the teacher introduced the semi-colon without explaining that it joins two clauses, so that students used it in a random way to join a clause and a phrase. Wary of clause grammar, teachers often chose to focus on sentence variety in terms of sentence length, as this is easier to handle, and requires no grammatical explanations. The lack of explicit understanding of how simple and complex sentences are formed was evident from the comments of both students and teachers. One student explained: *"There was a cat' is a simple sentence; a complex sentence is like, 'There was a slim, something something ginger cat.'"*

The concept of grammatical simplicity was confused with semantic simplicity. In one classroom exchange, this misconception was corrected by a student:

Teacher: What's a simple sentence?

Student 1: When there's no interesting words in it?

Student 2: When there's a subject and a verb.

But in a number of classrooms, the equation of 'simple' with 'short' (or 'boring') and 'complex' with 'longer' or 'more complicated' was commonplace and inevitably confusing. For example, in a lesson where the teaching focus was on knowing how to deliberately vary the length of a simple sentence, by adding detail through expanded noun phrases or adverbials, the teacher referred to successively longer examples of a simple (i.e. one clause) sentence as '*very simple*', '*more complex*' and '*much longer and more complex*'. Semantic definitions of simple and complex sentences included terms such as '*a normal sentence*' and '*a more than average sentence*.' Definitions of 'main clause' as '*the main information*' and '*sub clause*' as something that '*gives secondary or additional information*' gave rise to generalised and somewhat misleading explanations of clause grammar, especially when the same teacher had described the function of adverbs being to '*make sentences more interesting*' by giving the reader '*more info*'.

In contrast, some teachers demonstrated more confident management of discussion of syntactical features which linked them very explicitly to the way they were working in the specific piece of writing under focus: '*Look at this and the way it's been changed. Sometimes you can change the structure of a sentence to make it more interesting.*' In the narrative fiction scheme of work, one teacher responded to a student's draft with the feedback, '*I like the way you've kept some short sentences in to build the tension*', and another drew attention to the way adverbials can create a sense of place and setting: '*We've got a real sense of the environment with adverbials in there*'. Where teachers were confident in their subject knowledge, explanations of grammar were succinct and clear, and almost always backed by examples and reminders of prior learning. One teacher, for instance, made a helpful distinction between a subordinating connective which '*may go at the beginning of a sentence or within a sentence to join a subordinate clause to a main clause*' and a co-ordinating connective which '*must go in the middle of a sentence to join the two main clauses*.' Students readily contributed examples of each type of connective.

Conclusion

We feel there are two key conclusions to be drawn from our research. Firstly, if grammar is to be a part of the National Curriculum, and all the indications are that grammar will have a renewed emphasis in the

forthcoming revision, then addressing the professional development of teachers is critical. It is important that this is not constructed as a deficit model – it is not helpful to think of this as filling gaps in teachers' knowledge. We have a highly qualified and intellectually capable cadre of English and literacy teachers; English PGCE courses attract more graduates with upper second degrees or higher than almost any other course. The linguistic subject knowledge issue is not a deficit in teachers' academic background but is a reflection of the way English has developed historically. Until the 1980s, there was only one English-related A level – English Literature; and degree routes through university have historically separated Literature and Linguistics, often in different faculties, and the dominant degree route into PGCE remains English Literature or related degrees. If teachers would now benefit from deeper linguistic subject knowledge, then this should be seen as an addition to, and an enhancement of, their existing strengths as literature experts and highly confident teachers of texts.

Secondly, subject knowledge is far more than naming of parts; it is about being able to look at a text and see how it is constructed; about being able to answer children's questions; about being able to generate an interest in language. Developing linguistic subject knowledge will best be achieved through supporting teachers in using that knowledge in meaningful contexts and exploiting the many rich and creative possibilities there are in adding a linguistic lens to literary analysis.

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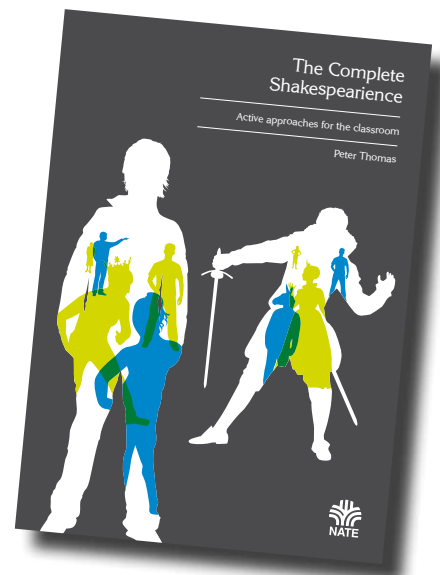
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Subject Matter

Reflections on Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment

The English Subject Centre 2003 – 11

Ben Knights reflects on the work of the English Subject Centre, a recent victim of the cuts in Higher Education.



Ben Knights is Emeritus Professor of English at Teesside University, and was Director of the English Subject Centre.

With the enforced closure of the national 'Subject Centre' network in July 2011, educationists said goodbye to an innovative and brave experiment. But why should a venture focused on higher education matter to the readers of *English Drama Media*? What could attempts to address the shortcomings of university pedagogy possibly have to do with schools? This article seeks to give a brief answer.

A good place to start would be *EDM* Issue 21. The articles by Barbara Bleiman, Gary Snapper, Andrew Green and John Hodgson connect directly to work carried on by (and the two latter grow directly out of projects funded and supported by) the English Subject Centre. In one way or another, all exploit the fertile possibilities arising from cross-sector dialogue, and seek to rebuild connections severed between school and university 'English' since the early 1990s. Readers might be interested for multiple intertwined reasons: the implications for potential university students of transactions across the gulf; the intellectual significance of the constant re-shaping of the subject; the fact that universities play a crucial role in the formation of the next generation of teachers. And if that wasn't enough, we might also cast a weather eye on the current Education Secretary's atavistic desire to give universities (he's thinking of the self-nominated elite of the 'Russell Group', of course) a greater role in the design and management of A-level.

The pedagogic turn in HE

The subject centres, like the National Teaching Fellowship and other related initiatives grew out of that period around the turn of the century, when a number of factors were widely perceived as having caused a deterioration in HE teaching and the experience of university students. These factors included a major decline in the resource per student as a result of the massive unfunded expansion of the universities since the early 90s, and the consequent increase in average class sizes; but also a sense, focused by the Dearing Report of 1997, that the funding of research was creating a distortion: that money, rewards, and prestige were being increasingly attracted to research to the detriment of the teaching and pastoral roles. In a successful attempt to ward off an HE version of Ofsted, universities had in the meanwhile adopted systems of Teaching Quality Assessment (soon to become the QAA system of subject and institutional review). In this

context, the Subject Centres represented a major investment in discipline-based enhancement. Lecturers had proved (and continue to prove) adept at circumventing attempts to oblige them to take training courses. In these circumstances, the underlying principle of the subject centres was that enhancement could best be brought about by enlisting academics through their enthusiasm for their own disciplines.

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

Research v. teaching in English

The first was the very success of the discipline in adapting to a culture of specialised research. Both internal and external influences converged to bring this about. During the 1970s and 80s, the Theory revolt had – paradoxically for a radical and subversive movement – prepared the way for the subject to move towards specialised and counter-intuitive forms of knowledge, a tendency subsequently accentuated by the osmosis of literary and new historical studies. Add to this the rise of the Research Assessment Exercise and growing prestige attached to research funding, and you have a recipe for a fundamental re-casting of the reward structures and career patterns of the subject. The mutation of the forms of ambition and success within the profession had implications for teaching at a number of levels. At one level, many of those who had made an honourable career of teaching found themselves increasingly left out of the new economy of prestige and reward. In aspiring institutions, the route towards success clearly lay through publications, conferences, funded research projects and fellowships, and this tended to imply that teaching was a secondary activity. Conversations and mentoring sessions became dominated by arcane discussions of research strategy, which of your publications would count for the RAE, or the best techniques for grant application. Very often of course, colleagues successfully brought together their research and their teaching. But this, too, had unintended pedagogic and curriculum effects. The ever-increasing specialisation of research within a modular regime reinforced a sense among students that knowledge was segmented and specialised, a succession of intense special topics. In that setting, writing

and assessment became resource and knowledge-heavy (cut and paste at the worst), and class discussion a forum for the exchange of specialised information.

This is where the other suggested feature comes in. This one goes back further into the subject's founding antagonism to what it saw as naive or escapist reading. In the early days of the Subject Centre, we frequently found English (especially literature) colleagues suspicious and resentful about what they saw as prescriptive interference. Despite the new world of benchmarks, learning objectives, module handbooks, and marking criteria, teaching was still thought of as a unique encounter between group (or individual reader) and text. Isolated from the new, regulated world of schools, the university tribe continued to entertain a belief in the unique and unreproducible nature of the transaction between teacher, student, and text, and hence in a kind of dematerialised pedagogy. The further one travelled up the university status hierarchy the more striking this became. Seminar teaching took place in what lecturers tended to see, paradoxically, as a private space. This remained possible in the universities (at least in the Humanities) in a way that it could not in schools. Education developers, deans for teaching and learning, advocates of virtual learning environments, anyone who recommended transparent specifications, techniques, overt attention to tools, processes, or aims, could be identified as outside agents infiltrating a quasi-sacred space.

By contrast, what the Subject Centre wanted to say was that the discourse of the seminar or lecture was as worthy of attention as the discourse of the text itself. For while a hidden pedagogy may be to some degree protected from outside interference, it is simultaneously cut off from external sources of renewal. There was in short a downside to this propensity to surround university teaching with invisible 'trespassers will be prosecuted' signs. A principled critique of routinisation and of the target and procedures culture protected a set of taken-for-granted practices. While English Language and Creative Writing were fast developing as skills and craft-based subjects, English Literature was failing to apply its own reflexive suspiciousness to its own pedagogy.

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

Re-animating pedagogy

In many ways, then, the Subject Centre found itself on the margins, but in a subject in some ways composed more of margins than of centre that was not necessarily a disadvantage. The subject has characteristically been re-animated from its own borders, and its contiguities with history, film, drama, anthropology, or linguistics have been a perpetual source of

intellectual hybridisation and refreshment. Pedagogy and the systematic study of learning need not be the one example of an intellectual domain from which English was too superior to learn. It was implicit in the subject centre experiment that we were not to be 'top down' suppliers of new ideas and practices, but agents, brokers, interpreters. We wanted to find out the kind of things that were happening and to make connections. But if we were to help re-animate the pedagogy of the subject group, we had to build up a map of inventions and their contexts. Where were new pedagogic energies to come from? To take a handful of examples, we found ourselves seeking out and helping to circulate energies and insights from:

- Inventive individuals (the challenge being that they were often isolated: we needed to provide them with support systems and networks);
- E-learning and the digital revolution: extending the eco-system of the module and seminar into virtual environments; bringing within student view the wealth of digital resources;
- Crossover: bringing the skills and craft approaches of Language and Creative Writing into a larger mix, e.g. by making more available the workshop tradition;
- Habits and practices from different sites within and beyond the sector.

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

The English Subject Centre was at least a qualified success. Given more time we might have been able to do more to develop a culture where academics talked to each other about teaching; and might have implanted more widely the need to understand the expectations of our students and the barriers the subject in many ways presents. We needed more time to develop strategies for seriously tackling the narrow range of class, gender, and ethnic recruitment so characteristic of the subject in HE, and widening its appeal beyond the minority of students whose ambition was to become future teachers and academics. All these would have required a serious redress of the skewing of the subject towards specialised research, and the ability for the subject group to become better at explaining itself to multiple publics.

Like the readers of *English Drama Media*, we attempted to foster a subject dedicated to critique, to the making and understanding of language, representation, form, narrative, the unblocking of the well-springs of creativity. We wanted to impress on academics that professionalised research was not going to be enough to maintain the subject in being and secure its future success or its appeal to new generations of students. The subject group needs now more than ever to pay continued and systematic attention to the care of its teaching roots. The public spending cuts, and the grave uncertainties of the new university funding era from 2012 onwards coincide with the imperative of paying re-doubled attention to teaching. The future of the subject depends on an ability to enter into dialogue with publics and students. In fostering that dialogue the Subject Centre played an honourable part.

A version of this article was published in the final issue of the English Subject Centre's magazine WordPlay in June 2011 <http://issuu.com/englishsubjectcentre/docs/wordplay5/1>

Elocution

Phonically challenged

Keith Davidson reflects on the differences between speech and writing.



Keith Davidson represents NATE on the joint Committee for Linguistics in Education – but these are his own views.

But there is a more fundamental difference. Writing is segmented, alphabetic letters in our system. Speech is not; phonemes are ‘alphabetic’ abstractions, identifying contrastive syllabic features of voicing, place and manner of articulation, which in reality overlap in the stream of speech. Phonics treats them as discrete units, letter sounds and is predicated on ‘citation forms’ of pronunciation, words pronounced in isolation as marked in dictionaries - with that further step, the component letters pronounced in isolation - as the key to initial literacy. Speech isn’t like that, and it’s a further problem that the citation forms are typically selected pronunciations of a minority accent, ‘RP’, itself something of an idealisation:

Literacy has a lot to answer for:

Pupils at an Essex primary school are receiving elocution lessons - to help improve their spelling. Staff at Cherry Tree Primary School in Basildon said some children were writing words according to how they pronounced them. They say the lessons are not about helping them to lose their accents.

Literacy co-ordinator Terri Chudleigh said: ‘if you are saying ‘we was’ instead of we were’ that’s what you’re going to write.’...

She said: ‘I thought we needed to introduce something that would give them a more accurate sounding of the word in their head so they could spell it correctly... their spelling is now much more accurate, their grammar much more accurate ...

Francesca Gordon-Smith [private elocution teacher], who runs sessions with pupils, said: ‘The idea is that when they’re writing their ‘elocution voice’ in their heads to avoid mistakes like an ‘f’ at the beginning of thought.’

(BBC News, 1 February 2012)

In England and Wales, RP is widely regarded as a model for correct pronunciation, particularly for educated formal speech. It is what was traditionally used by BBC newsreaders - hence the alternative name BBC pronunciation, although now... less appropriate.

RP itself inevitably changes as the years pass. There is also a measure of diversity within it. Furthermore, the democratization undergone by English society during the second half of the twentieth century means that it is nowadays necessary to define RP in a rather broader way than was once customary. LPD [*Longman Pronunciation Dictionary*] includes a number of pronunciations that diverge from traditional ‘classical’ RP.

British Received Pronunciation (RP) is not localized (= not associated with any particular city or region). It is to be heard in all parts of the country from those with the appropriate social or educated background [!]. On the other hand, most people do have some degree of local colouring in their speech.

(Wells, 2000)

The references to grammar are of course irrelevant. But note the tell-tale qualifier ‘accurate’, the euphemism for ‘correct’ that begs all the questions. ‘We was’ is a structured utterance, and so ‘grammatical’. The only question is: whose grammar? But spelling and pronunciation have nothing to do with that.

The issue here is linguistic primacy. Speech was and is primary, a biological imperative, developing, with the evolution of the vocal tract, in ‘homo loquens’ from perhaps 100,000 BC. Writing is secondary, a late cultural artefact dating from some 5500 years or so ago, depending on how you interpret the archaeological evidence (Crystal 2010: 206. 305). The child develops speech similarly, by induction long before the culture’s formal instruction in the writing system. In principle, then, writing follows speech, if also deploying its own distinctive systems. Yet the development of general literacy can all too often invert this natural process: speech adapted to how things are ordered in writing - as in such ‘spelling pronunciations’ as the nineteenth century re-introduction of the aspiration /h/ for initial <h->.

In a standardised writing system spelling is relatively stable; speech is not, varying in time, place, social context and style. So, even in a more phonically consistent writing system than ours, there is inevitable mismatch between speech and writing. German spelling, widely considered to be ‘phonetic’ (Masha Bell *et al*), was only standardised nationally in the nineteenth century, following the establishment of the German state, and has been subject to recently agreed, if minimal, ‘corrections’ which still leave some letter-sound anomalies in place, and it’s predicated on a standardised ‘Hoch Deutsch’, not popularly spoken in the south, let alone in Austria and Switzerland.

So, a model for letter sounds, that is itself subject to variation and in any case unlike how these Essex children actually speak, supposed to ‘give them a more accurate sounding of the word in their head so they could spell it correctly’. This assumes that, apart from spelling pronunciations, the writing system represents the model any more consistently than Essex speak: ‘Write-ly’ or wrongly, <f-> is at least as good a correspondence for the initial voiceless fricative in thought as the standard <th-> (a ‘digraph’ for the single phoneme); it’s ‘phonic’.

That’s the perceived problem: ‘some children were writing words according to how they pronounced them’ - i.e. ‘phonics’! Changing the model is merely re-arranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. And, while this is not supposed to be ‘about helping them to lose their accents’ - the aim being an ‘elocution voice in their heads to avoid mistakes’ - the implication is a model of ‘correct’ pronunciation.

But it seems to work - how can that be? Can I attribute it to some sort of incidental effect of the children’s heightened attention to the sounds of their own speech and the correspondences in the writing system? And, if that’s giving them more confidence in using the language in both speech and writing, how should I then presume to complain that the approach is fundamentally flawed?

References

- Crystal, D.** (2010) *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language* (3rd edition) Cambridge University Press
- Wells, J.C.** (2000) *Longman Pronunciation Dictionary* Harlow: Pearson Education

Media Studies

English in the News

Tom Rank surveys media coverage of English.



Tom Rank is an independent consultant specialising in ICT in English, an A Level examiner and currently Chair of NATE's ICT Committee.

Mr Gove's Diary

Our correspondent writes: *Mr Gove's diary seems of late to have adopted a more ruminative tone, as though already with an eye on posterity. It's as if he sees himself as a Headmaster or one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools in the grand Victorian tradition of Thomas and Matthew Arnold, with his references to 'the thrill of engaging with literature and great minds of the past and the present'. Extracts read like a cross between the Headmaster's log book and a piece in his beloved (and beloved wife's) Times newspaper. We begin with a headline-grabbing sound-bite followed by some erudition:*

Evgeny Lebedev brings Wilde and Milton to Leveson inquiry

If we're serious about dealing with our broken society and the poor showing of our schools, we need to recapture the spirit of the 60s! No, I don't mean flower power and drug-induced babbling – that's the cause of our problems. (I know, I was born in the 60s.) I mean the 1860s! Listen to Matthew Arnold: 'The whole scope of [this book] is to recommend culture as the great help out of our present difficulties; culture being a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world, and, through this knowledge, turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits, which we now follow staunchly but mechanically.' *Culture and Anarchy* – well, I know which side I'm on. Let's hear it for the 69ers – the 1869ers!

If you want to know what I mean, consider today's *Guardian*. It reports the 'obscure tomes by a couple of dead writers' clutched by Evgeny Lebedev at the Leveson inquiry. *Great Scott*, they were *John Milton* and *Oscar Wilde* – what's the broadsheet press coming to! It takes a Russian to show us up – at least he's not a Trot (can't be: he's a billionaire's son). Why don't our English newspaper proprietors have such high standards? Note: check what school the *Guardian* editor went to; put *Areopagitica* on A Level reading list, have a selection of tomes to clutch in photos. Might start with *Paradise Lost* – such an evocative title: it was Labour what lost it!

Public school domination 'morally indefensible'

Found out *Guardian* editor went to an independent school. So did some of his troublesome writers – so let's get column inches by denouncing them in front of a lot of independent school headteachers – in Brighton College!

Partial backfire: facetious Stephen Moss in the *Guardian* a couple of days later was trying to make capital of my kindness: 'For those of us who believe in social justice,' he [that's me!] thundered, 'this stratification and segregation are morally indefensible.' 'Hear, hear. But was it really wise for him, on the same day as the speech, to pitch up at Taunton School (fees £8,535 a term for boarders) to open a £2.3m extension?' Look, what am I supposed to do? Get adviser to send him a message: 'Independent schools will continue to exist, won't they? If he's invited to open something, he'll usually try to say yes.' (Especially if it's my mouth to announce a new wheeze!)

David Cameron praises children who rise when adults enter the room

Of course, David is right that there's a lot we could learn from public schools, though I wish he wouldn't trespass on my territory. To make things worse, the *Telegraph* illustrated this with an unflattering picture of me pulling a face while squatting on a tiny chair outside the Wendy house. I tell you, I'd rather have been standing up and the kiddies sitting properly on chairs – the little blighters move about too much.

BAN mobiles from schools – Ofsted

Good to see Wilshaw getting tough on the distractions of technology and hitting the headlines – he's learning from me. But then some teacher trainer called Miles Berry says on Twitter (what's he doing there?): 'Ofsted criteria for outstanding leadership and management in ICT: "the school is likely to have promoted the use of mobile technologies."' (Of course Twitter's great for us – I've told civil servants to keep all their reports to 140 characters.)

A pity Dave wasn't banned before he sent those texts to Rebekah Brooks – he didn't even know what LOL means! Have emailed him Sam Cam's Diary (don't know how the *Guardian* gets hold of it), which is very helpful – and mentions us again: 'So I went to Dave, of course we cannot be friends with people who are always around police stations but how about their friends, e.g., if the Goveys are friends with Rupert who is friends with RB can we still have the Goveys over and friends of the Goveys.' No one's that friendly with Rupert any more now. It's a good job the *Times* is behind a paywall; it makes it harder for anyone to find the piece I wrote about Murdoch in 1999. 'The greatest godfather of mischief in print' wasn't, with hindsight, my best turn of phrase. But not the same as sneery socialist MP Watson calling them a Mafia family – outrageous!

Hiya pupils, please avoid slang, ta

Delighted to read in the *Telegraph* that Sheffield Springs Academy is aping public schools: they've ordered pupils to stop using slang at school to improve their job prospects. Photo shows a phone with LOL! + smiley faces (if only Dave had been banned, eh?). South Yorkshire MP Angela Smith (another socialist), who taught GCSE English at a school in Dearne Valley, said: 'The school is wrong to ban slang. How will the school police this? Who will say what the difference is between slang and dialect? It could completely undermine the confidence of the children at the school.' Good grief, what are the teachers *there* for?

The *Telegraph* concludes: 'One in 15 had never used the word "drat" and half of the participants did not understand the word "cad".' I say! If they went to a proper school, they'd know – you meet plenty of dratted cads there!

There's a question mark in the margin beside this entry, with this: Handle with care; it seems their inspection has been picked up by troublesome journalist called Mansell on Twitter (ban it, I say!): 'inadequate' improvement... pupils "unclear about next steps to improve their work", five principals in 5.5 years and test result progress in both English and Maths well below national averages'. Well, I can't turn it into an academy again, better make it part of a chain. Oh, it's ULT academy already. Mansell: independent school, Oxford – and Trotskyite journalist!

Dear Mr Gove: Letter from a curious parent

More trouble from left-wing press when Michael Rosen started writing me letters in *The Guardian*:

'I see it's full steam ahead with June's phonics test. The results for your pilot tests are in and they make interesting reading. The pass level was put at 34 correct readings of the 40 single words. (I'm not sure why reading single words, not in sentences nor in passages of writing counts as 'reading'. Wouldn't it have been more honest to have called it a 'decode test'?) Sad to say, only 32% of the children reached the pass score. Now, one rumour I heard was that even the 'outstanding schools' that did the pilot scored at this sort of a level. If so, will your new head of Ofsted have to change the word 'outstanding' to 'crap'? He's rather good at that sort of thing, isn't he?'

Here's more in his April issue:

'Sitting on your desk is the Ofsted report on improving English, imaginatively entitled Moving English Forward. How delightful to see people charged with the study of English adopting that phrase of the moment, 'moving forward'. Mind you, being a writer, I've tried conjuring up the exact sense of the metaphor of 'moving English', and, I'll admit, I'm struggling. I'm seeing pictures in my head of you and Sir Michael Wilshaw on a parade ground, calling out to a mass of English teachers, 'Forward!'

I'll get the Ofsted chap to rebut this – he's already told teachers to man up. Can always rubbish Rosen for his piece in the same lefty rag saying 'Sorry, there's no such thing as "correct grammar"'. Didn't Rosen go a grammar school? And Oxford?

How the Ofsted chief got his maths wrong on SATs

Bit disappointed to see that Wilshaw, for all his tough talk, got tied in knots over literacy standards and averages on the radio. And then he tells the *Telegraph* that inspections may be damaging lessons: 'We have created the idea that we have to do a lot in lessons. It has to be exciting all the time,' as if that really is a bad idea! I thought a headmaster would do better – after all, I haven't got time for that sort of thing. Just look at this the *Guardian* dug out from the Select Committee:

Chair: If 'good' requires pupil performance to exceed the national average, and if all schools must be good, how is this mathematically possible?

Michael Gove: By getting better all the time.

Chair: So it is possible, is it?

Michael Gove: It is possible to get better all the time.

Chair: Were you better at literacy than numeracy, Secretary of State?

Michael Gove: I cannot remember.

The important thing is to show you have a sense of humour, can laugh at yourself – and then do what you want anyway. That's what public schools teach you, and the public love it – look at Boris!

My bet's on Gove for PM

Better news from the soaraway new *Sun* on Sunday – Toby Young says I could be the next PM because of the success of my free school policy! Kathy Gyngell in the *Daily Mail* is very kind as well: 'Michael Gove is a brave and brilliant man.' What a pity she spoils it with a 'but'! Just ignore the rest, about being 'pointless'.

You can't be serious about Harry Potter!

More evidence of decline in our universities from the *Telegraph* in May: 'In the 600-year-old halls of St Andrews University, a group of leading academics is discussing a piece of literature. Not just any old literature: this, they say, is "the narrative experience of an entire generation".' It's Harry Potter! Worse is to come: 'In 2008, a conference at Magdalen College, Oxford, debated the global relevance of Rowling's fairytale world.'

A shame Hunt is closing libraries where people could read proper books – though he's clever to make it seem councils are to blame. Perhaps I should suggest one of the fine old universities steps in to help – closing the library Mark Twain opened in Brent is getting us bad publicity. Oh, not again – All Souls College, Oxford, of all places, owns it and wants it back. PR disaster!

Better social mobility news: Jeanette Winterson is taking up the writing professorship at Manchester University. Working class girl made good, went to Oxford (of course), now part of the Establishment – try to get a photo op but don't let her stray off-topic, I see she's just written in the *Guardian*: 'Writing is a conversation, sometimes a fist-fight. It is democratic.' Don't want a fist-fight with a woman in front of the cameras! Makes telling people to 'man up' a bit too ironic.

Our correspondent adds: *The Dictionary of National Biography (from Oxford, of course) writes of Matthew Arnold: 'His criticisms of official educational policy in the early 1860s were founded on his conviction that education was too important to this task of propagating "high ideals" to be left to private provision.'* This no doubt explains Michael's attack on public school boys hogging all the best jobs. Like his.

Further Reading

Reviews of Books and Resources

From the Editor's Desk

The Romance of the Middle Ages

Nicholas Perkins and Alison Wiggins
Bodleian Library, 2012,
£19.99
ISBN 9781851242955

Anglo-Saxon Culture and the Modern Imagination

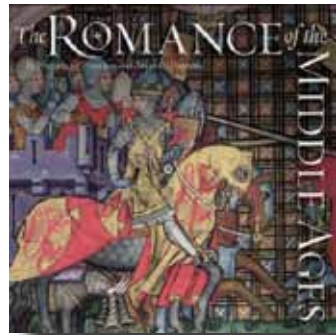
David Clark and Nicholas Perkins (eds)
D.S. Brewer, 2010, £55
ISBN 9781843842514

Geoffrey Chaucer Hath A Blog: Medieval Studies and New Media

Brantley L. Bryant
Palgrave Macmillan, 2010,
£16.99
ISBN 9780230105072

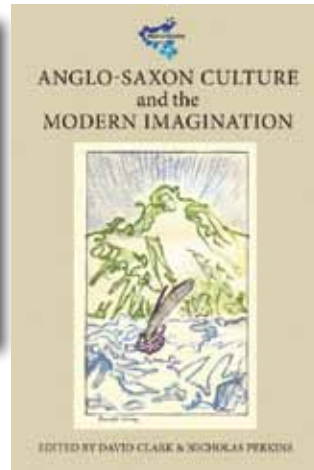
Let's face it - medieval English literature and language are not popular, either in schools or universities. Lecturers complain that medieval literature is disappearing from university courses as well as from school English: even in Oxford, Old English has been demoted to the ranks of the voluntary. But was there ever a golden age when the massed ranks of English undergraduates couldn't wait to get their teeth into *The Canterbury Tales*, let alone *Havelok the Dane*, or, heaven forbid, *Beowulf*?

When I was an undergraduate in the 80s, I was amazed by the lack of enthusiasm my fellow students



showed for the medieval. I had done Latin and Greek at A Level, so middle English was a cinch, but others didn't seem to feel like that: the language got in the way, the context got in the way, and so on. But to me, medieval literature seemed – well – quite fun. All that rhyme and rhythm, a sense of humour and adventure, wonderfully pungent and direct language, great stories, interesting history, and some fantastic imagery and lyricism too. And if that wasn't enough, listening to the LP of Prunella Scales reading 'The Wife of Bath's Tale' in the original pronunciation as a kind of medieval Sybil Fawcett was surely enough to convert anyone? Apparently not.

When I started teaching (1989), Chaucer was still a regular fixture on A Level syllabuses. He still is, to a lesser extent – but few teachers choose him anymore. And it's true that Chaucer presents particular challenges at A Level. With the best will in the world, it's not always easy to overcome the unfamiliarity of his language and allusions with a group of students for some of whom even doing Shakespeare might be pushing the boat out. Yet I can't help feeling that in depriving our students of the opportunity to experience something of the riches of medieval English – and its *fun* – we are doing them a disservice; and if we don't do something along those lines, getting at least some of them *into* the medieval, where will

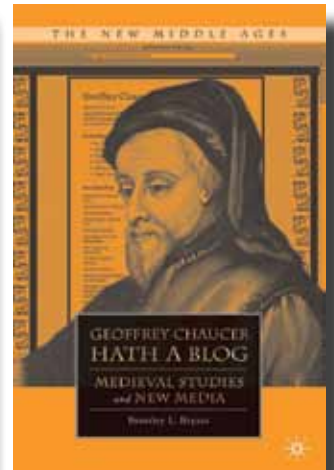


the next generation of medieval scholars come from? And what will the next generation of English teachers know about the medieval?

Perhaps we should remember too that many of our students are keen readers of medieval-influenced material, from Tolkien to Rowling, and are often fascinated by the history of the period, whilst translations of medieval works (e.g. recent works by Armitage and Heaney) are popular modern works in their own right.

Perhaps we should ask whether it is Chaucer *per se* which causes the problems, or whether it's rather our dominant modes of teaching him? Perhaps there are different ways of going about things, ways that might get around some of these problems?

Elsewhere, I have argued that the tyranny of the set text and examination culture at GCSE and A Level is responsible for a great deal of damage, and that we need to re-think the way we structure literary study if we are to endow more of our students with genuine enthusiasm for and understanding of literature in a textual world that is very different from 20, 30, 40 years ago. The set text – and the close reading that its study entails – must remain central to the work of literary study, of course; but



must it (and the formal examination of students' detailed knowledge of it) constitute the *entirety* of that study? Can we not envisage ways of formulating advanced literary study in schools which embed the study of set texts within a broader, less formal and more varied engagement with literary history, language and creativity – ways which generate for students both wider knowledge of and about literature, and more pleasure in encountering it? (And, crucially, which don't all need to be assessed...).

If we are, for instance, to help our students to access the pleasures and the *significances* of medieval literature, is the traditional exam-focused study of Chaucerian set text the best way to do it? At present, there is a choice between studying Chaucer at A Level or not. Most students do not. For most students, then, this strategy manifestly fails. But even if Chaucer were compulsory at A Level, would this be the best way of approaching it? Could we not rather think of students' entitlement to *experience and explore* the world of medieval (and other types of) literature in a variety of attractive ways which might kindle their interest in it, and illuminate for them aspects of the

broad sweep of literature, language and culture – which then might go on to inform their more detailed and formal study of literary texts more broadly? To put it another way - if they do not study a long medieval set text for the exam, why should they therefore be deprived of medieval English altogether?

As suggested above, thinking like this raises fundamental questions about the way we envisage and construct literary study at GCSE and A Level, and the role that assessment regimes – syllabuses, examinations, etc. – might have in *narrowing* that study. It also raises questions about the kind of resources available for literary study. I always try to bring some medieval literature into my A Level class: but a course that was more flexible and adventurous might allow us to do more and seek out more dynamic resources, especially when attractive digital and multi-modal resources are now so easy to obtain.

Recently, a number of interesting books have come my way which have stimulated thinking along these lines. One, **The Romance of the Middle Ages** (by Nicholas Perkins and Alison Wiggins), is the lavishly illustrated and most enjoyably written companion to the current exhibition of the same name at the Bodleian Library in Oxford. Both the book and the exhibition give a wonderful overview of medieval romance.

As I conveniently live in Oxford I was able to go and see the exhibition; I also took my A Level Literature students to see it, as part of a workshop led by the curator of the exhibition (and one of the authors of the book). The *rationale* for conducting the trip during the school day was that the exhibition included a focus on the relationship between medieval romance and Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, one of my students' set texts. They would see a First Folio Shakespeare edition and early versions of Lodge's *Rosalynde* and the anonymous 'Tale of Gamelyn', two texts from which *As You Like It* developed, and the curator would work on a scene of *As You Like It* with them, examining how Shakespeare integrated and adapted the source material.

All this was great, but actually what was most interesting about the event was seeing the students

respond with such interest to their exposure not only to general ideas about medieval culture but also to the physical and aesthetic presence of the manuscripts themselves, not to mention the scholarly environment in which they exist. They were keen to ask questions not only about the *content* of the texts but also about the ways in which the manuscripts were produced, their functions, who owned and read them, how they went from manuscript to school text book, and how an exhibition of this sort was put together. They began to focus, in other words, on imagining the physical reality of the texts as objects in the real world with real producers and consumers and with a direct aesthetic and material impact, rather than merely as classroom-bound objects of study for examination.

Performance is another way in which we might seek to bring medieval literature to life in modern times. A while ago, I reviewed Baba Brinkman's *Rap Canterbury Tales* in these pages (EDM Issue 13, Feb 2009), and argued that poetry performance has an important place in the main school curriculum as part of a broader strategy to recover the teaching of poetry from the exam-focused, print-bound cul-de-sac in which it currently finds itself. Brinkman reminds us that Chaucer's poetry has its roots in the oral tradition which still informs the cultures of (for instance) rap, slam poetry, folk song, pop music and storytelling. In a similar vein, the Bodleian exhibition has sought to link medieval romance with oral traditions by commissioning a great show with acclaimed storyteller Daniel Morden telling some of the romance stories that inspired Chaucer and Shakespeare, accompanied by the music of the group 'The Devil's Violin Company'.

As well as introducing the medieval romance genre, the exhibition also explores the influence of romance on later generations of writers. Thus, manuscripts on display include examples of Victorian romance and medievalism (Scott, Tennyson, Morris, etc.), C.S. Lewis's copy of Tolkien's edition of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* with Lewis's own annotations, manuscripts of children's literature by J.R.R. Tolkien and Philip Pullman, and Terry

Jones's working script of *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. We might reflect here that learning about the influence of medieval literature, language and culture on more modern writers, as well as more generally on literary culture, must surely be a way forward if we want to engage students both with the medieval and with the big picture of literary history. Perhaps the place where it's currently most likely to happen in the A Level 'canon' is in the study of Heaney's poetry. But what about also imagining, say, an A Level unit of work which set about a study of medieval literature by investigating the ancient sources of narrative ideas in modern children's literature, comedy, and even perhaps computer games?

Anglo-Saxon Culture and The Modern Imagination (edited by David Clark and Nicholas Perkins) explores this territory in depth, focusing on the ways in which Anglo-Saxon culture has inspired and influenced modern writers. This eclectic collection of critical essays examines the influence of Old English on the writers WH Auden, JRR Tolkien, David Jones, Basil Bunting, Geoffrey Hill, Ted Hughes and Peter Reading, and also explores modern re-tellings of and references to *Beowulf* in film, opera, comics, and the novel. The editors also point out that, beyond these, there are many volumes of children's stories based on Anglo-Saxon narratives, as well as '*shifting hybrids of Anglo-Saxon, Viking and Arthurian motifs, narratives and 'wikimation' via websites, chatrooms and gaming.*' As they write:

'[These essays] make a compelling case for returning to Old English texts and Anglo-Saxon artworks through an alertness to their performances and (re) iterations as editions, translations, collections, motifs, parodies, and narratives in an ongoing intertextual arena.'

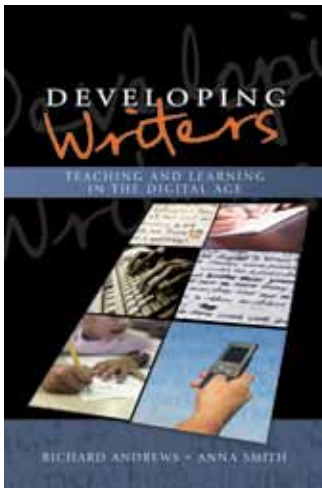
Such intertextuality is at the heart of a quite different sort of book – and yet one which similarly suggests ways of bringing the medieval into contact with the modern: Brantley L. Bryant's **Geoffrey Chaucer Hath a Blog**. This book inhabits both the world of rollicking history humour in the

Blackadder tradition, and the world of literary humour in which ancient texts are adapted to modern formats or translated into older languages (e.g., the recent *Maidens Who Don't Float: Classic Lit Signs on to Facebook or the Latin Winnie Ille Pu*) – but it's also a highly scholarly book, written by an American academic. It's based on the website of the same name (at houseoffame.blogspot.co.uk) which purports to present a blog written by Chaucer in a weird amalgam of medieval and 21st century language and culture. Here's an example:

O my gentil rederes, it hath been a thing of muchel difficultee and laboure for to type even the smallest entrie in myn blogge. For somer, lyk unto a songe of Barri Manileau, hath ydrawn alle the spirit and vigour from my limbes and hert. For the gretre part of the hot moneth of July, Ich satte in my garden on my comfortable lawan-chaire and langwissshed lyk unto sum yonge lover who hath ydumpede been. Ich daubede myn foreheed with a moyste towel and did drinke much of some dringes swich as margaritae and daquiri. By night, Ich busyede myself with writyng of my Tales of Canterburye....

Clearly the anachronistic juxtapositions of medieval language and culture with modern language and culture provide the fun here – but read more and you will find that detailed humorous commentary on the life and works of Chaucer is what enables the joke to keep going, along with more topical humour about modern literary scholarship. And for the literature teacher, the book (and the blog) is not only full of good jokes, but also suggests the classroom fun that might be had in helping students get over the unfamiliarity of Chaucer's language, or simply in allowing them to play creatively with the language, characters and situations in Chaucer's tales by recreating, elaborating or intervening in the texts in a variety of ways – if only there were the time, the space and the vision to do so.

Gary Snapper
EDM Editor



Developing Writers: Teaching and Learning in the Digital Age

Richard Andrews, Anna
Smith

Open University Press, 2011,
£21.99

ISBN 0335241786

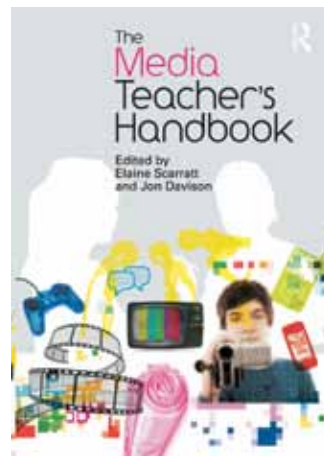
Developing Writers uses its title's neat ambiguity to relentlessly pursue current and possible models and of both writing and writing development at a pivotal time in global change in writing technology. Andrews and Smith review previous models of writing for their critiques of writer development, as a premise for their own speculative model of writing in a changing digital age. The focus throughout is on the writer. Models of writing development, reviewed in Chapters 4-5, revisit familiar product-process paradigms, not as oppositional perspectives, but as contributory to modelling the textual, social and cognitive frames through which we may understand writer development.

The authors move on to survey what digital technologies have developed in schools and homes since the 1990s, stressing the frequency and nature of changing communications, and indicating dissonances of children and young peoples' writing experiences in the many domains of their lives. It is refreshing to read of the constant sway in writing technologies, domains and practices, not as desirable 'must-dos', but as individual possibilities that constrain or afford writer-agency to young writers in both schooling and social live.

The authors stress throughout that writers' development should most fruitfully be the focus of research and classroom practice, irrespective of which technologies may, or may not, be available. Their primary focus is to develop their own model, presented in Chapters 9-10. The premise upon which this model sits is their theory of writer development as 'rhetor' in any given rhetorical situation, as 'framer' of textual forms, as 'chooser' of modes of communication, and as 'composer' of written products, with all the skill and preferences this allows. This last section of the book is the heart of its case, a model that extends current understandings of writing as practised in schools, daily life, over time, and in multi-channelled and multimedia lives. In this way Andrews and Smith offer refreshing ideas about writing as both a central skill in communicative life, and as one of the affordances schooling offers for developing the self.

Developing Writers: Teaching and Learning in the Digital Age offers readers briskly presented reviews of how writing has been understood, taught and theorised in the past century or so, and a welcome leap into its possible futures. It questions why, if schooling is committed to teaching children to read thoughtfully and aloud, is writing not always so taught? It should be on trainee teachers' booklists, and brings fresh thinking for practising teachers and school governors with an interest to developing their writing curriculum and teaching, ahead of the policy changes of the near future.

Phillip Norman
University of Plymouth



The Media Teacher's Handbook

Elaine Scarratt & Jon Davison
(eds.)

Routledge, 2012, £22.99

ISBN 978-0-415-49994-1

In the dim and distant past, when I was a young Head of Media Studies, I often thought about writing down all the useful stuff that I was learning – and indeed, all the stuff that I was just making up as I went along – so that other people could benefit from it later on. Things like; how to run a Media department on virtually no money, how to run production projects in school where nobody really liked kids doing production work, and how to deal with massive A Level classes. Sadly, 'other things' such as career progression, bringing up children and choosing to write down stuff that turned out to be less useful, got in the way. However, other people clearly did manage to get round to the job and a significant amount of that important information is included in *The Media Teacher's Handbook*, just published.

Inevitably, the book will draw comparisons with Julian McDougall's influential work *The Media Teachers Book* (now in its second edition, and co-edited with Nick Potamitis) but a closer inspection reveals that they really are quite different beasts; in McDougall's work what the reader got was a kind of version of his view of the subject (Media Studies) enacted through lots of very useful ideas for lessons, developed from his extensive experience of teaching in FE. *The Media Teacher's Handbook*, authored by a group of

practising teachers and academics, attempts to bring together a number of different threads from across the spectrum of 11-19 Media teaching and turn them into a handbook that will assist beginning teachers, more established staff and subject leaders and managers in doing their job, by combining theoretical positions and hands-on practical advice. Instead of seeing the two books as competing with each other, it is probably more useful to see them presenting two different perspectives on differing areas of classroom practice.

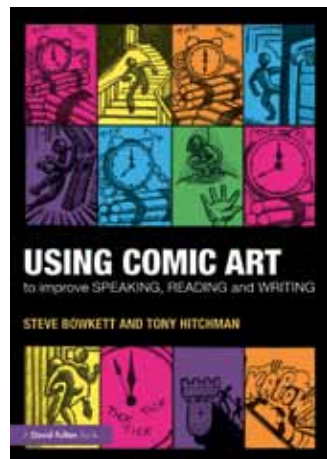
Make no mistake, this will be a useful book to many media teachers. Its clear structure means that readers will be able to find and use the information they need quickly and easily. The book is structured as a sandwich in three sections (*Contexts, Curriculum, and Career Development*) and, like any good sandwich, it is the bit in the middle that is the best. The Curriculum section is packed with examples of schemes of work, production projects, lesson plans and worksheets which all clearly come out of the excellent practice of experienced teachers such as Elaine Homer and Rob McInnes (to name but two). Importantly, the curriculum section covers teaching GCSE and A Level Media Studies, as well as ways into the sometimes awkward area of delivering Media through English and ideas for doing cross-curricular media education (an area close to this particular reviewer's heart).

This isn't to say, however, that the other two sections of the book (*Contexts and Career Development*) aren't useful too. There has long been a need for a guide to setting up and running a media department; it may come as a surprise to people, but there are still plenty of schools that don't have them. Christine Bell does a very good job of explaining the practical problems of this task and ways of dealing with them, and while established Heads of Media may do things differently, it is good to see a set of solutions in print. The *Context* section also does a good job of presenting some of the key debates about media education in a digestible form.

Two observations (I would

hesitate to call them criticisms, as I suspect that the authors could not do much about the circumstances in which they wrote and published the book) are worth recording here. Firstly, it is a testament to how quickly that the landscape of media education changes when an entire section of your book appears to be nearing obsolescence as soon as it is published. The section on the Creative and Media Diploma, while being theoretically very sound, and indeed educationally interesting, might end up reading like an obituary rather than a call to arms. Secondly, while the book acknowledges that media education is still somewhat at the mercy of the country's political masters, it sometimes leaves unanswered the questions generated by that acknowledgement. The current political climate for education (with its emphasis on the EBacc, league tables and the status of vocational qualifications) will create pressures for media teachers that this book cannot, through no fault of its own, help them deal with. One might, for example, with one's tongue firmly in one's cheek, ask why the book does not have a section on 'How to manage senior managers who don't see the value of Media education' or 'Discussions with Headteachers: Explaining why Michael Gove is as dangerous as Paul Dacre.' Such conjecture should, however, not take away from the fact that this is an excellent, useful book that should be essential reading for any secondary media teacher.

Stephen Connolly
Media Education Researcher



Using Comic Art to Improve Speaking, Reading and Writing
Steve Bowkett and Tony Hitchman
David Fulton/Routledge, 2012, £19.99
ISBN 978-0-415-67551-2

I am, have been and always will be a fan of comics. That fandom has led me on several occasions to think that I might be able to 'do something with comics' in my classroom, both in terms of studying them as a media form, but perhaps more importantly as a way of allowing students to better access forms of writing that they would otherwise find difficult. This was where all my plans went awry; my fandom got in the way and my students ended up spending ages talking about who would win in a fight between Wolverine and the Silver Surfer. Worse still, I ended up joining in and we never really got round to improving anybody's literacy or oracy.

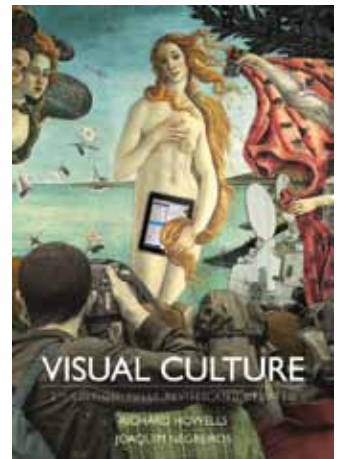
The really good thing about Steve Bowkett and Tony Hitchman's book is that it bypasses the problem of fandom altogether. This is not to say that they dislike it as an idea – both authors are very open, in the introduction to this extremely useful book, about the fact that they are comic fans. But they are also clear that their use of comics in the classroom is about the development of literacy, and what the reader gets is a rather clever set of ideas about the way that comics might be used by teachers to help their students improve some of the trickier concepts involved in writing such as organisation, structure, writing dialogue and writing endings.

As a consequence what the book does is, over a course of chapters, to show ways that students might use comic art (or perhaps what would better be described as the *conventions* of comic art) as a way into particular writing and reading techniques. The fundamental premise of the book is that comics – and what Eisner, McCloud and others have identified as their sequential qualities – present the reader with many features that are analogous to those of the written and spoken word, and can be used to explain and explore those aspects of literacy that students might have difficulty coming to terms with.

In practical terms the book undertakes this exploration through a large number of games and classroom activities. Some of these games are very simple (such as the coin-flip game, where students decide on answers to a set of idea generation questions by flipping a coin) and could be used in all sorts of creative ways to have students tell stories. Other activities are more specific to comic art, such as using drawing as a 'visual shorthand' for telling stories in a non-linear way; or developing what the authors call 'Kapow' techniques, which involves having students use comic art conventions such as speech and thought bubbles to explore other literacy topics like non-fiction. The emphasis of the whole book is on planning and producing good written and oral outcomes.

The beauty of the book is that it is very user-friendly. Neither teacher nor student needs amazing drawing skills to avail themselves of what it has to offer. If anything, the book reinforces many traditional English classroom activities, such as collaborative story-writing, thesaurus skills and learning about tenses, but in a refreshing and innovative way. Many of the activities and ideas outlined in the book would really bring to life some of the more challenging areas of the English curriculum, particularly for Primary and KS3 students, and it is because of these qualities that Bowkett and Hitchman's work is to be highly recommended for teachers working in these and other areas.

Stephen Connolly
Media Education Researcher



Visual Culture
Richard Howells and Joaquim Negreiros
Polity Press, 2012, £17.99
ISBN 9780745650715

Visual Culture maps much of the territory I ventured into many years ago when I was researching the use of visual images in advertising (*Images of Woman: Visual Communication in Advertising*, Chatto and Windus, 1975). I wish it had been available then! Though a book aimed at an academic readership, I think many students of A Level Media would find it very useful – though others might be overwhelmed. Teachers of Media Studies are certainly advised to read it and to cull from it those aspects most relevant to their interests and their areas of study.

We are still a long way away from being able to analyse visual communication in the way that we tackle written or even spoken texts. Too often the consideration given to pictures is superficial and desperately unmethodical. Yet it is the visual that carries so much of the meaning in the majority of contemporary cultural artefacts.

Howells and Negreiros divide their book into two parts. The first considers issues of theory and the second particular media, specifically: fine art, photography, television, film and new media. The theory section can be daunting but persevere. It is several degrees less daunting than the writings of most of the theorists described.

The Introduction is excellent, taking the reader through the major issues and discussion points which follow. Whether 'we will discover how visual texts can be read with just the same rigour ... as

the printed word' is arguable. We should indeed attempt that rigour and assess the strategies which are discussed in the chapters that follow. However, we are, in my opinion, quite a long way from having the tools at our disposal which match those available to analysts of printed or spoken texts.

The chapter on iconology is relatively straightforward, dealing with the way in which certain visual items carry specific meanings, a skull for death / transience of life, for example. They authors use the work of Panofsky as a starting point, explaining his three levels of meaning. The first two levels are probably familiar to students and teachers of media as denotation and connotation. Panofsky's first level is the 'what is there' or 'factual' level – a snake, a woman, an apple, for instance. The second or 'conventional' level comprises that which we interpret from these items, temptation, sin and so on. The third level is what he calls the 'intrinsic' level, which reveals information about the social and cultural attitudes of the society in which the work was created. At this level a car advertisement might reveal not only associations of power, masculinity, status and so on but also that the society of that time and place values motor transport which is chosen, purchased, and driven by individuals – just for starters.

The chapters on art history and form (which takes art, mainly painting) as its focus, I found it less useful for the Media Studies teacher. The extent to which the form influences and sometimes defines the content of a visual image is as interesting and relevant in, say, advertising as it is in art. A glossy full colour, full page photo carries meaning in itself, meaning which is very different from that carried by a line drawing or a quarter page black and white cartoon – even though the content might be the same.

A Level students will find the chapter on ideology rather heavy-going, I imagine. There is a useful description of Berger's controversial approaches (in *Ways of Seeing*) and the reactions to it but to me the main conclusion is that we need to see visual texts in a social-historical context just as we do with written or spoken texts. We are back with Panofsky's third

layer of meaning but with more sophistication, taking into account that there will be a number of overlapping and often contradictory contexts at any one historical / cultural point.

Semiotics, though, is a rich and rewarding chapter with much to say to those with an interest in analysing media texts. The focus here is on Barthes, who built on the work of early semiologists like Saussure. Saussure worked in linguistics and posited that the link between the *signifier* (the word e.g. cow) and the *signified* (the thing itself: something that gives milk and moos) is essentially arbitrary. It is merely an established convention that c-o-w evokes an image of a cow in the reader or listener. Barthes applies this to visual texts arguing that a visual symbol is equally arbitrary. Howells and Negreiros use the example of car logos as an example; the circle and three pointed star symbol of Mercedes could equally well have four points or be within a square. The relationship between the signifier and the signified is also fluid: the Eiffel tower connotes sophistication; the Blackpool Tower, of the same design, something quite different. For this to be understood, of course, we would need to know the context (e.g. another sign such as a croissant or a French flag) or read a text. This latter feature would provide what Barthes calls *anchorage*, though the authors do not mention what I think is a useful term. Because almost all pictures are polysemic (i.e. they carry many meanings simultaneously) and are non-linear (i.e. can be read from any place in the image to any other) it is often words which tie down or anchor the chosen message.

Much of Barthes theorising, especially about mythologies which arise from his Marxist viewpoint, are to say the least, arguable. Further, though he speaks of semiotics as a science, his approach is anything but scientific – more a series of interesting insights. However, his work adds to that of Panofsky and others and makes it clear that there is work to be done in analysing the deeper meanings carried by visual texts and this is as important as analysing written or spoken texts. While comparisons with linguistics are useful, though, it is apparent that the meaning-

making of pictures is not a language in the way we normally understand it and linguistic theory can only take us so far.

An aspect of language which Barthes develops for visual analysis in *The Rhetoric of the Image* and which I do find very useful is that of figures of speech, the primary one being metaphor (fortunately in visual media we do not have to nit-pick about the difference between simile and metaphor) though synecdoche, where a part represents the whole, is also powerfully used in display advertising.

The final chapter of the Theory section deals with hermeneutics, an area where it is difficult to see the practical application to the study of visual texts at school level (or to this bemused reader, any level). Like epistemologists, hermeneuticists seem to proceed like aero-acrobats, weaving and circling and displaying great skill until they land and you wonder what it was all about. Be aware of the culture from which the text emanates and be aware of your own culture and attitudes is what I would advise students.

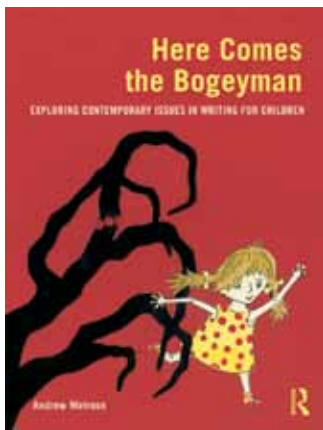
The second half of the book covers specific areas of visual culture, all interesting and with the possible exception of fine art, relevant to the student of media. There isn't space here to discuss all these chapters so I homed in on photography, being the area I spent time studying and trying to analyse methodically all those years ago. The authors spend much of the chapter debating whether photography can be art, which is interesting but may not be your students' main concern. The discussion does make us think about the nature of photography, though. Even though it appears to be mechanical ('a well-trained gibbon could produce satisfactory results') the choices made by the photographer – composition, focus, timing and so on – together with the effects which can be added subsequently clearly affect the way the resulting image is seen and are a function of the photographer's intentions.

While documentary photos (along with our everyday 'snaps') might include unintentional subject-matter, it is very unlikely that the photos used in advertising will contain anything accidental or

superfluous. This makes the analysis of advertising imagery that much easier than, say, newspaper pictures.

The book concludes with a chapter on New Media. While not denying the importance of the various new media so familiar to us all, the authors argue that though the delivery systems have evolved hugely, the content has not changed: a film is still a film however you view it, *Heartbreak Hotel* is the same song on vinyl or on your MP3 player. One of the exceptions they make is for the website, which they claim has characteristics that make it a genuinely new form. Integration, interaction and impermanence are what characterise a website and make it unlike anything that has gone before – something definitely worth discussing with your students. They make a similar claim for the music video but include no mention of social media; perhaps they will do so in the next edition. Whatever they have to say, it will be well worth reading.

Trevor Millum
NATE ICT Committee



Storytelling Across the Primary Curriculum

Alistair K. Daniel

Routledge 2011, £21.99

ISBN 9780415598606

Long ago, when the world was still young ...

Well, some weeks ago I was leading a staff development session in a large primary school. We were exploring the use of drama for writing. After some orientation activities I told a traditional Scottish tale to this group of twenty Key Stage 1 and 2 teachers. After the story telling we worked through a range of drama activities and writing opportunities prompted by the action and themes in the story. At the end of the session a number of teachers stayed behind to talk and ask questions about the work. All said how much they had enjoyed the storytelling and all admitted surprise that I had told the complete tale, uninterrupted. They had each anticipated and feared that I would stop or interrupt the narrative and that we would work on the story in stages. They were, they said, delighted to have experienced the story as told; shared in its complete form.

Pleasing as this was to hear, the teachers' comments made me think. The teachers' pleasure at being told a story is not in any way an indication that their role in the process was merely 'receptive' or 'inactive'. For, whilst the story was being told, the teachers had been intensely and actively engaged in its making; imagining, empathizing, remembering, anticipating, watching and linking the events and the characters in the story to their own life and literary experience. The teachers were exemplifying throughout that, as Alistair Daniel points out, the act of

storytelling in the classroom is not a solo performance but a 'social construction'. That evening the teachers and I made and re-made that old Scottish tale together.

Storytelling Across the Primary Curriculum is, essentially, a practical and encouraging resource for both primary and English teachers. The main core of the text offers the reader an excellent, illustrated guide to the craft of selecting, adapting and telling stories in the classroom. But the book is much more than then a practical classroom manual. Daniel begins by exploring the place of story and storytelling within a range of psychological, social, historical, linguistic and educational contexts. His approach and analyses are informed and authoritative without ever becoming dense or dry. He argues seductively that when we tell stories in our classrooms we tap into and align our teacher-selves to the inner lives of our pupils and to the way they see and make sense of the world. The chapter on the structure of narrative and on 'performance' is both fascinating and provocative; raising all sorts of questions about the constantly shifting and varied identities, roles and functions of the effective and imaginative teacher in the classroom.

In a key chapter on the craft of classroom storytelling Daniel explores the performance skills and the theatricality of the classroom storyteller. Whilst always well researched, his approach is consistently practical and he has some excellent advice on the use of what he refers to as verbal and visual 'absences'. These 'absences' are engagement cues, gaps for the pupils to fill, during the storytelling. For instance:

'... visual absences can make the story world present and take the storytelling community to the liminal point, the threshold between the imagined and the real. In this way, the storyteller can create a king by simply holding a plastic crown over a vacant seat: the way in which the crown is held, the use of gaze and the space given to the chair all build a scaffold for the imaginative response – to see a king who wears a crown and sits on a throne.' (p.49)

The second half of Daniel's book explores and illustrates the use of storytelling across the curriculum. In

history the author examines the importance of using contrasting and multiple perspectives in the retelling and understanding of key historical episodes like the Spanish Armada. There is a fascinating discussion around both the power and the sensitivities of storytelling within religious education and personal development programmes.

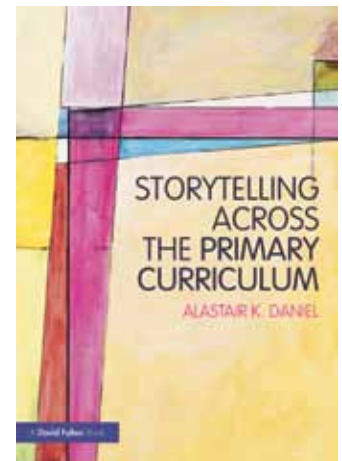
Key Stage 1 teachers are well catered for throughout the book and Daniel's reworking of Grimm's 'The Old Man and his Grandson' is a delight – a gift for the classroom. In the chapter on storytelling within drama and dance Daniel offers the infant practitioner an excellent case study of classroom work on the old Russian tale of 'The Giant Turnip'. Echoes of Dorothy Heathcote and Gavin Bolton's work resonate throughout the account and provide sound pedagogic foundations for this immediately practical and engaging resource. Teachers of older pupils are also catered for with interesting examples of the use of storytelling to support the study of texts as diverse as Macbeth and Shaun Tan's *The Arrival*.

This short book is a lively read and a valuable resource for both the primary and the English teacher. Daniel's scholarship is secure and convincing whilst his approach is consistently practical and enticing; tempting and daring the reader to take up the challenge and realize some of the benefits and the impacts of telling rather than reading stories in the classroom.

And so they did, from that very day, put the book away and told happily ever after.

Mick Connell

University of Sheffield



Here Comes the Bogeyman: Exploring contemporary issues in writing for children

Andrew Melrose

Routledge, 2012, £18.99

ISBN 978-0-415-61753-6

Andrew Melrose, Professor of Children's Writing at the University of Winchester, sets out to explore the nature of writing for children in the 'media-led' twenty-first century in his most recent text, *Here Comes the Bogeyman*. The book is divided into two clear sections: current critical theory and context and the process of writing. It is aimed at students of creative writing and others with an interest in this area.

In the first section Melrose deftly leads the reader through a maze of current theories and ideas opening with the 'show stopping' theory that 'children's literature does not exist' (Zipes 2002). Zipes rears his head at regular intervals bringing controversy and stirring the debate. Nurture is the first of the under developed 'bogeymen' that Melrose introduces as a neglected theme, ignored perhaps for its simplicity.

It becomes apparent fairly quickly that one of Melrose's personal objectives is to help children develop the necessary life skills to deal with, and interpret, their world, rather than to protect the young reader from what many adults deem to be the undesirable or inappropriate. Another recurring theme (and perhaps central to the author's viewpoint) is the ability of children to make connections between their world and the new experience being laid before them in story form. It is the responsibility of the adult delivering, choosing or writing the material to foster those

links without forcing their own world view upon the young mind.

'The cult and culture of childhood' is explored throughout and the differences between children's life experiences within western and developing countries exposed. The stark contrast between our parents' and grandparents' early lives is a reminder that childhood is a vastly varied state that continually changes and evolves. Melrose reminds us that children have little control over what they are fed by well-meaning teachers, parents and journalists with their often nostalgic preconceptions of what a good children's book contains – they are experts simply because they are the adults! Melrose has no quarrel with the producers of lists that claim to include the best children's reads, although he often questions their taste, but reminds us that they are guides for adults, not children.

As he weaves a path through a range of sometimes extreme views, Melrose presents the reader with the palatable modern view, that 'the writer and reader are involved in a shared project' where neither one is an expert.

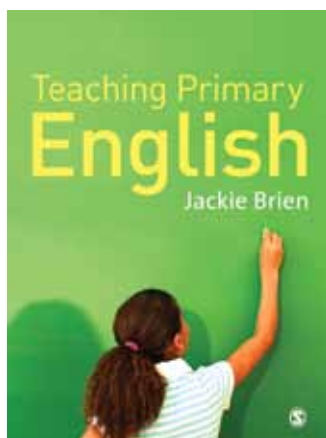
The second half of the book is much more straightforward. It aims to give advice and suggestions, of a practical nature, on structure, dialogue and age setting. As someone with an interest in children's reading habits and books in general (although not about to embark on the writing journey that many readers may be considering) I found this section intriguing and at times enlightening. Melrose possesses the rare ability to uncover hidden wisdoms that seem obvious once stated, but which have never quite taken hold as a fully formed concept – like an idea that has been balancing on the tip of the tongue.

Read this if you are considering writing for children, or if you have a serious interest in children's literature – this book is not aimed at the merely curious or parents who wish to choose books wisely for their children. *Here Comes the Bogeyman* is not an easy read. Part One is a densely-packed forest of current views, frustrating at times, and may take several readings to extract the most from the text. It certainly made me question my

own thoughts while throwing light on my observations of children's preferences and opinions.

As your guide through the cultural context of writing for children Melrose chooses the optimistic route, setting authors (himself included) high expectations as the builders of relationships that, with support and nurturing, will develop young minds into fertile, enquiring beings, ready to explore the unknown through literature.

Michelle Verdon
Nettleham Junior School



Teaching Primary English
Jackie Brien
Sage Publications, 2011,
£19.99
ISBN 9780857021571

I suspect that are few primary school teachers who, as students, did not quake with feelings of inadequacy when first faced with the huge responsibility for teaching children to read and write. Of course, we now realise that enabling young children to become literate is far more complicated than we first imagined. How do you begin to teach a child to read? How important are speaking and listening? When does spelling become important in writing? How do you make children want to read and write in the first place?

These and a myriad of other questions and uncertainties fill student teachers' thoughts as they try to 'get it right' for the classes they will teach.

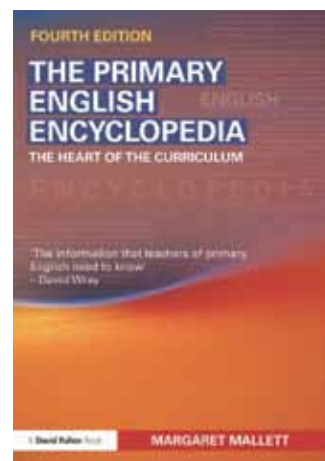
In this book, Jackie Brien aims to help student teachers get to grips with the basic skills and knowledge they need to do just this. The book

is well organised into eleven chapters that take readers progressively from a brief introduction on how children learn language, through chapters on speaking and listening, reading, phonics, the writing process, secretarial skills, inclusive learning and finally to planning and assessment. Each chapter has a contribution from another writer that gives a different perspective or provides food for thought. Throughout the book, readers are prompted by icons to reflect on their reading and how they might apply it to their classroom placements and course assignments. An extensive bibliography and suggestions for further reading are given at the end of each chapter – a boon for readers who want, or need, to delve deeper into particular facets of teaching or subject knowledge and much easier than searching through a long bibliography at the end of a book.

All in all this is a short, but comprehensive guide to current primary classroom practice and I am sure that it will be valued by student teachers as such. However, as Jackie Brien admits, changes to the English curriculum are imminent and there are currently few clues as to its content, other than an emphasis on phonics, grammar and writing skills. In addition, the National Literacy Strategy, which is referred to throughout this book, is no more and some of its methodology is being questioned. It is not an easy time to be preparing students for the Primary classroom.

However, Jackie Brien obviously understands students' needs and their course requirements. I have no doubt that, for the near future at least, this will become their reference book of choice because it is easy to use and in relatively few pages, they are introduced to the main features of good English and literacy teaching and perhaps more importantly, they are encouraged to think deeply about it.

Barbara Conridge
NATE Primary Committee



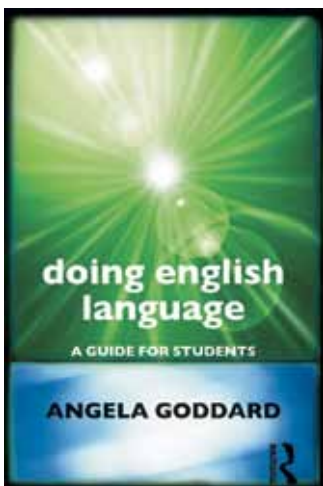
The Primary English Encyclopedia: The Heart of the Curriculum
Margaret Mallett
Routledge (4th edition),
2012 , £29.99
ISBN: 978-0-415-58952-9

A new edition of Margaret Mallett's impressive *Primary English Encyclopedia* has been published. This comprehensive text is an invaluable resource for anyone involved in Primary English teaching, with much of the content relevant beyond KS2, making this a versatile and useful resource bank of knowledge. Mallett has updated entries to acknowledge current issues and developments including the teaching of early reading, the phonics debate, reading schemes, new research, a who's who, children's books and extended entries on new literacies.

As well as definitions, there are helpful sections that give contextual information on past and current policy as well as all the major reports and key publications that have influenced the teaching of English from Bullock to Rose. Explanations and illustrative examples are provided with informed clarity. Although over 600 entries [536 pages], it is easy to navigate and find subjects or areas of interest. There are discussions on many aspects of English teaching underpinned by theory and further recommended reading. I also enjoyed Mallett's personal recommendations on the professional texts and the writers who have shaped her own knowledge and understanding. Finally she lists her own top 15 children's books.

This would be an excellent resource for new and experienced teachers wanting clear and helpful information about the teaching of English. I would also endorse this as a key reference text for student teachers. This English 'bible' would be an asset to any school staffroom as an accessible resource that delivers facts and findings that inform and interest.

Pamela Lewis
University of Brighton



Doing English Language: A Guide for students

Angela Goddard
Routledge, 2012, £14.99
ISBN: 9780415618823

The problem facing Angela Goddard at the start of this excellent guide to English Language study at HE is made clear early on when you find that Routledge (who publish this book) already have Robert Eaglestone's *Doing English* in their catalogue. The fact that Eaglestone's book calls itself *Doing English* but is then subtitled *A Guide for Literature Students* tells us, Goddard says, "something of the complex history of the subject area". English – for a long time and for many people – has traditionally meant the study of Literature.

If, like me, you went to university in the early 1990s to study English Language and Literature only to find that the language was Anglo-Saxon and the Literature was the other 90% of the course, then this book explains why that was the case, but also how that has started to change for the better. It's also

exactly the kind of book that an A level student, like me back in 1989, but equally one now looking at their first UCAS form and contemplating their first self-cooked meal of tuna, pasta and salad cream, would really benefit from reading.

Goddard starts by looking at the relatively recent history of English Language as a subject, its roots in philology, its initial zeal to "improve" the demotic forms of the average user, its links to traditions of preservation and prescriptivism and then its shift in the 1960s and 70s towards the fairly new discipline of Linguistics. The material on the growth of sociolinguistics is interesting as it shows the profound difference between the heritage industry approach to language offered by a body like the English Association in the early Twentieth Century and the warts'n'all acceptance of usage by early sociolinguists such as William Labov and those like Trudgill, Giles, Cheshire and Milroy who shaped the British linguistics landscape of the 1970s and 1980s.

The chapter on "Areas of Linguistics" provides a particularly helpful overview of the different types of approach that linguists use and shows A level students exactly where some courses might take them, as well as reinforcing key concepts that are needed in the main A level English Language specifications. The pithy examples of intertextuality, English as a Lingua Franca and technology's influence on the language all serve to illustrate the range and depth of the subject and are well-chosen to hook potential undergraduates.

Further chapters on Literary and Media Studies and Creative Writing show the range of skills that students of English Language can develop alongside other areas of interest, while the chapter on Research Methods is excellent, not just for those thinking of moving into HE but for pretty much every teacher or student of English Language at A level. The range of references to different data gathering methodologies and analytical approaches is really valuable, and clearly explained throughout, and it goes just far enough off the beaten track to offer teachers a few new ideas

about which researchers and case studies they should be mugging up on to keep up with how the subject is developing.

The last chapters look at the careers open to English Language graduates and the skills that can be gained to improve graduates' employability, which may seem a tad dry but in these times of full tuition fees and rising graduate unemployment, teachers are increasingly going to find it harder to persuade even some of the keenest potential English undergraduates to go on to degree courses like these if they can't see a job or career at the end of it.

Overall, *Doing English Language* is exactly the kind of book that sixth form teachers and students need. So, if you've ever been asked what an English Language degree involves, have had to convince an out of touch careers advisor that English Language is not just about writing stories, or you have some keen but uncertain students weighing up their options, Goddard's book should do the job nicely. I just wish that courses like those outlined in here and a book like this had been around when I made my university choices.

Dan Clayton
Language Teacher and Researcher



The Discourse of Text Messaging

Caroline Tagg
Continuum, 2012, £24.99
ISBN 9781441173768

Twenty years after Cor Stutterheim invented text messaging, and over ten years after SMS in the UK diffused from the initial base of its early adoption by adolescents and young adults to mundane ubiquity, Caroline Tagg has written a book which at last nails down what is going on in txtng interaction, as seen from the perspective of applied linguists. Based on the empirical evidence of over 11,000 messages, or over 200,000 words, she collected and analysed for her doctoral thesis (<http://theses.bham.ac.uk/25311/Tagg09PhD.pdf>), Tagg situates her approach in major emerging fields of scholarly enquiry including corpus linguistics, language play in everyday creativity, identity and its performance, the 'grammar of talk' (e.g. Carter, McCarthy), and sociocultural approaches to spelling (e.g. Sebba 2007). This in itself would equip a reader with much of what they might want to know about recent developments in the wider field.

In addition, the book gives a first rate overview and critique of empirical studies of text messaging including treatment of publications up to 2012 or still forthcoming. This is helpful given the way the field has developed in the very recent past, for example, in the provision of the publicly accessible text message corpus by Tao Chen and colleagues at the National University of Singapore. Tagg is direct about the limitations of all

such research, including her own, pointing out the ways in which collections of text messages, including those of apparently large number, are small by comparison with this ubiquitous global practice; we can only speak for the localised preferences of the groups and messages being sampled. This duly sceptical spirit informs her description of how she went about collecting her own electronic corpus of messages, including guidance about data collection and processing methods which could find a particular audience in GCE A Level students preparing their language investigation fieldwork. The tables and other selections of data and analysis will give that audience plenty to compare and discuss. For example, students may want to consider the implications of the material being collected over five years ago. Only 3% of the 248 main informants were 21 or under, and nearly 80% between 22 and 35, which may also have a bearing on texting choices, as Tagg comments. The treatment of ethical issues also offers practical explanation of the methods used to address the well known difficulties in collecting data from digitally mediated interaction including a technique for renaming identifying information while retaining researcher access to that respondent's identity.

Dwelling on such detail may give the impression this is a difficult book. It is not. Tagg writes in a clear direct manner and although *The Discourse of Text Messaging* represents the current state of the art summary of research, it remains accessible to the interested general reader. This is in part the consequence of the clear signposting of the chapters, and the sense of argument and cohesive momentum. More specialized ideas and references are explained in passing rather than in a separate glossary or set of footnotes, which makes the book useful for introducing more complex, unfamiliar ideas with direct exemplification. Similarly the many messages excerpted from Tagg's corpus exemplify seemingly more difficult ideas with a level of vividness and engagement, and, in that bizarre way of SMS, evoke whole ways of living by the traces

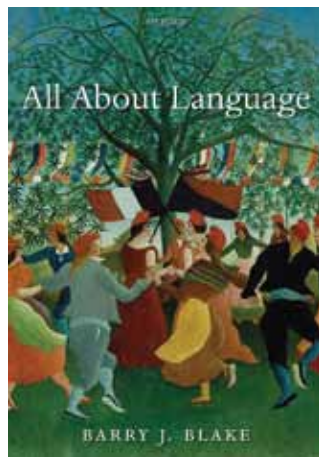
of cryptic textual cues. This book is a long way on from the ingenious lexical lists which featured in earlier studies and popular treatments.

Tim Shortis
University of Bristol



An Introduction to English Sociolinguistics
Graeme Trousdale

An Introduction to English Sociolinguistics
Graeme Trousdale
Edinburgh University Press,
2010, £16.99
ISBN 9780748623259



All About Language
Barry Blake
Oxford University Press,
2009, £14.99
ISBN 978-0199238408

From time to time the *EDM* editor sends me books offering an introduction to language study written primarily for undergraduates, with publishers identifying the inevitable overlap market for the much larger group of students following courses in GCE level English Language. More

recently some books have come badged with the claim they are written by real university linguists, with implications for those that are not, and as if that differently expert audience would know the better the nature of what it is students know, understand and do in order to obtain a general certificate of education in schools and colleges rather than a module in an undergraduate degree. The two books reviewed here provide introductions to Linguistics, and to Sociolinguistics, written primarily for undergraduate audiences.

All About Language gives an attractively designed, informative and congenially readable overview of what its blurb terms 'basic linguistic ideas and debates'. Based on Barry Blake's course notes and experience of teaching Linguistics in universities for over four decades, it includes thought provoking examples from several languages. The coverage is representative of such approaches to general linguistics with sections on language structures and description, syntax and discourse, speech and writing, language variation and change, language and cognition and the origin of language. Been here before? Nonetheless, I would recommend this as a well-crafted overview, albeit with limited direct application to those teaching about language at GCE level, unless and until the Committee of Linguistics in Education (CLIE) are successful in their aim of establishing an AS course in Linguistics.

Edinburgh University lecturer and CLIE Chair Graeme Trousdale has worked closely with teachers in both Scotland and the UK, and knows what goes on in the school curriculum. His recently published *Introduction to Sociolinguistics* joins a crowded marketplace of books with similar titles, and I had initial doubts about the purpose of yet another. However, I was persuaded otherwise by reading it. Trousdale presents an unusually well structured, concise, erudite, up-to-date survey of main developments in sociolinguistics since Labov, Trudgill and others initiated the sub-discipline over forty years ago. It is focused on a comparatively traditional approach which does not engage much with

systemic functional linguistics, social semiotics and multimodality, or the kind of text stylistics covered by the Routledge Intertext series. However it gives a highly readable contemporary update on the Labovian 'variationist' perspective. This book also offers an accessible introduction not focused on exam papers and curriculum specifications; one of the best of its kind.

Tim Shortis
University of Bristol



National Association for the Teaching of English

50 Broadfield Road, Sheffield, S8 0XJ

Tel: 0114 255 5419 Fax: 0114 255 5419

email: info@nate.org.uk website: www.nate.org.uk

- NATE represents English teachers in the four countries of the United Kingdom, engaging with the concerns of the profession locally, nationally and internationally. Through its regions, committees and conferences, NATE draws on the work of classroom practitioners, advisers, consultants, teacher trainers, academics and researchers to promote dynamic and progressive approaches to the subject by means of debate, training and publications.
- NATE is formed of its members, and is reliant on their active participation for the successful and dynamic functioning of the Association. NATE draws on enthusiastic, committed members to participate at regional and national levels, to join its committees, and to take responsibility for the running of the Association.
- Much of NATE's work is delegated to its regions and committees.
- These provide members with an opportunity to become involved with the promotion of the Association's aims at local and national level.
- The regions are vital in building a national network for the association. Each region co-ordinates a programme of activities for members, often focused on regional conferences. Each region has an elected Regional Co-ordinator, who co-ordinates the region's activities and represents the region at NATE Council.
- The age-range and specialist committees provide a forum for debate about current concerns in specialised areas of the profession. In addition, the committees disseminate knowledge and ideas, inform the work of the association, and help to represent it to local and national bodies. Committees meet several times a year. Elections are held annually for members of the following: Primary Committee; 9-14 Committee; 12-16 Committee; Post-16 Committee; Multicultural Committee; ICT Committee; Drama Committee; ITE Committee. An elected Committee Chair co-ordinates the work of each committee and represents it at NATE Council.
- At any time, NATE may also set up or sponsor working groups to deal with new or current areas of interest. Such groups may cease to function when they have accomplished their work, or seek to become standing committees.
- As well as books and pamphlets, NATE publishes regular newsletters, the academic journal *English in Education* and the professional journal *English Drama Media*.
- The work of the Journal is overseen by the Academic Review Board. There is also an EDM Advisory Group and an Editorial Board which assists the Publications Manager.
- Council is NATE's decision-making group, debating the association's policy and positions and guiding its management, planning and administration. Council is a vital link between the management of the association and the membership of the association.
- Council, which meets once a term, consists of the Management Committee, all the Committee Chairs and Regional Co-ordinators, and 12 elected members (four each year for a period of three years). In addition, Council may co-opt up to six members for one year each.
- NATE Management Committee conducts the business of the association in the light of Council's discussions, and is responsible for the financial conduct of the association.
- The administration of NATE is based in offices in Sheffield, under the management of the Company Secretary, assisted by the Director of Communications and Development.
- NATE is an active member of the International Federation of Teachers of English and seeks to share the experience of English teachers throughout the world.

English Drama Media

English Drama Media is the national professional journal published by NATE three times a year, with an intended audience of teachers, lecturers, advisers, researchers and teacher trainers in 11-18 English, Drama and Media. The journal carries articles and reviews which reflect current practice, developments and debates in all aspects of the secondary English, Drama and Media curriculum, building on a tradition of informative, challenging and thought-provoking writing by expert practitioners and researchers in the field. The journal is also a location for news and reviews of events, publications and resources relevant to the teaching of English, Drama and Media, and aims to record developments in the profession for current and future reference. The editor is always happy to receive offers to review or suggestions for things or events to review. The editor welcomes contributions of a range of different types (polemic, account of research and/or practice, reflection, satire, etc.) by a range of different types of practitioners (secondary teacher, academic, teacher trainer, adviser, consultant, etc.) We are particularly keen for classroom teachers to write about innovative practice. Academics and researchers are encouraged to re-present, for a wider audience, work already published in research journals or books.

Editorial procedure

English Drama Media is a professional journal for a professional audience rather than a peer-reviewed academic journal. Most articles submitted to the professional journal will have been either commissioned by the editor (with or without consultation with the advisory group) or discussed with the editor before being written and/or submitted, although writers are welcome to submit completed articles for consideration. Each main article is read by at least one member of the magazine's advisory group (see page one) before it can be accepted for publication. The editor and the advisory group member together discuss whether to accept the article before arriving at a decision. More detailed notes for contributors are available on the EDM page at the NATE website, www.nate.org.uk. The editor may be contacted at gary@nate.org.uk.

All Talk

English 14-19

All Talk supports GCSE English study of both Spoken Language and Speaking and Listening, and A level English Language. The All Talk website includes 15 units with supporting classroom materials including teacher and student hand-outs, video clips, transcripts, web links and teacher notes – everything you will need to support teaching and learning about spoken language all free to download from www.bt.com/alltalk

For information about our free nationwide CPD courses contact feedback@alltalkresources.com

www.bt.com/alltalk

