



Introduction: Crossing the Divides

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This issue of *Working With English* celebrates and showcases the diversity of ways in which English Studies today crosses disciplinary and methodological divides, bringing to bear upon itself the findings and approaches of ‘other’ disciplines, exploring the interplay between teaching and research and introducing new pedagogical practices into the English classroom.

Historically, the field of English Studies has been notable for intellectual flexibility and for openness to new topics and disciplinary paradigms. ‘English’ has thus always been made up of a tempting smorgasbord of sub-disciplines: Modern Literature, English Language, Medieval Literature, Performance Studies, Critical Theory and Creative Writing, to name only a few; meanwhile, over the past twenty years or so, teachers and researchers of English have found themselves increasingly engaged with disciplines such as Philosophy, History, Art History, Classics, Theology, Geography, Psychology, Media Studies and Education, and frequently, such border crossings have also involved innovations in teaching practice. The essays which follow exemplify some of the exciting possibilities to which such collaboration and innovation can lead.

This issue has been edited in partnership with three members of staff from the Higher Education Academy English Subject Centre. The Subject Centre exists to champion the teaching of English Literature, English Language and Creative Writing in UK Higher Education and to enhance the learning experience of students of the subject, both undergraduate and postgraduate. We are very pleased to have had the opportunity to collaborate as guest editors with *Working With English*. A principal driver of our pedagogical work and research with the English Studies community in the UK has always been collegiality and discussion, a habit of mind of which this issue is a particularly happy example. As the Subject Centre’s Director, Ben Knights, argues, ‘practice can always be enhanced by a process of exchange...the opportunity to understand how others work is always productive of reflection and development’.¹

Analysing in detail their experiences of teaching, researching and learning English and other disciplines in tandem, the authors of the five articles which follow raise key issues such as the interface between language and literature, the nature of text as performance and creativity in research and the classroom. Two of the articles provide vivid examples of disciplinary overlap in the reading of literary texts. In ‘A Language Spoken Everywhere: Fashion Studies and English Studies’, Margaret Stetz provides an engaging close reading of two coming-of-age novels where an understanding of what clothing and attire signifies deepens one’s understanding both of the narratives and of their historical context. English literature, fiction, coming-of-age narrative, Fashion Studies, Gender Studies and material culture are all part of her

discussion and analysis. Stetz also interestingly discusses the history of writing about fashion in literature. In ‘Sentenced to Destruction: A Stylistic Analysis of Two Post-Apocalyptic Novels’, Martin Boyne compares two contemporary novels, Russell Hoban’s *Riddley Walker* and Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*, in order to draw parallels between their themes and structure as evidenced through sentence structure and stylistics. The article provides a detailed close reading and stylistic analysis, helpfully summarising the novels under discussion and their specific linguistic features, principally ‘deviant sentence structure’. Boyne shows the importance close linguistic analysis can have for literary interpretation.

The articles by Inga Bryden and by Delia Dasousa Correa, Robert Samuels and Katia Chornik present a broader view of current interdisciplinary possibilities in English Studies, depicting in contrasting ways the benefits of such interdisciplinarity for teaching as well as for research. Bryden’s article, ‘Crossing the Street: Literature and Urban Space’, explores the tensions and connections between literature and urban environments by describing shifts in the teaching of a module on this topic, ‘Literature and the City,’ across a number of years, focussing in particular on students’ experience of the module and their engagement in cross-disciplinary analysis. Bryden offers us a rich, multi-layered example of reflective pedagogical practice, paired with a sophisticated and engaging discussion of key theoretical questions on the study of literature and urban environments. She paints an evocative picture of the evolving relationship between teaching and research on a given topic. The collectively authored ‘Literature and Music: Interdisciplinary Research and Teaching at the Open University’ surveys the research area of music and literature from the contrasting perspectives of a doctoral student and her advisors. Using a sequence of authorial voices, the article explores the challenges and rewards of teaching, learning and researching at the crux of two disciplines. It provides a textured impression of different people in a single higher education institution doing diverse but related tasks and makes a strong argument for the importance of this particular disciplinary overlap. Crucially, the authors present the institutional challenges to interdisciplinary work on the one hand and, on the other hand, detail the physical and intellectual shifts required for successful collaborations between people in different disciplines.

Finally, Danielle Clark, Fionnuala Dillane, Katie Long, Naomi McAreavey, and Niamh Pattwella forcefully demonstrate the value of crossing a pedagogical divide by describing the application to an interdisciplinary English course of a teaching methodology originating outside the Humanities. ‘Literature in Context: Enquiry Based Learning for 1st Year English Students’ argues that Enquiry Based Learning (EBL) has many benefits for English students, despite its more familiar association with practice based or professional disciplines. In a robust and persuasive argument for customising EBL teaching methods to a subject such as English, the article raises important pedagogical questions about how lecturers assume learning will take place and how the learner experience can be improved when course design and delivery is ‘shaken up’ by EBL methods. By providing an in-depth look at how EBL has been implemented in the School of English, Drama and Film at University College Dublin, the authors explain and analyse how the acquisition of competencies and skills through group work can enhance student understanding and appreciation of all aspects of literary discourse, analysis and research.

Collectively, the essays in this special issue provide a vivid and attractive snapshot of English Studies today: hospitable to intellectual and methodological challenges from disciplines across the academic spectrum; continually ready to

experiment and innovate; committed both to its students and to rigour and excellence in research. We hope this issue stimulates your teaching and research as it has done for us whilst preparing it for publication.

Endnotes:

¹ Ben Knights, 'Purpose and Philosophy'

<<http://www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/communicate/about/purpose.php>>

[accessed 16 December 2009].