



The Subject & pedagogy: introduction to the collection

(Collection 1 of 7)

Overview

A major influence on initiation into the discipline takes the shape of learning to carry out successful research and to write publishable things. Of course, many postgraduates do some – in some cases quite a lot of - teaching within modules designed by other people. But when beginning a career as an academic, they frequently get little help in developing an understanding of what makes a good academic citizen. Such staff are entering a community, and like any community this one requires them to work with and among other people, understanding the rationale of the different roles they may be required to take on. Among the core attributes of this elusive role is teaching and all the tasks (preparation, designing modules, marking and giving feedback, documentation, increasingly roles in academic and pastoral administration) which are included in 'teaching'. These are matters not only of the quality of our own experience as teachers: they bear directly upon the quality of the student experience of learning. (For a wide-ranging discussion of the meanings of this often glibly-used concept see Graham Gibbs' paper *The Dimensions of Quality*.)

The object of this group of activities is to invite recently appointed academic staff to think in systematic ways about the implications of their subject for the business of teaching both in the day-to-day and in the longer term. If they are taking an accredited course (Postgraduate Certificate, Certificate in Academic Practice, etc.) they will be hearing a lot about the psychology of student learning. As subject colleagues, we point out to them that they should not set their mind against this on the grounds that it is too generic, or too schematic, or 'nothing to do with my subject'. But they do need stimulating opportunities to connect what they are hearing and reading with what they



1 | This resource is part of a set of professional development resources for Higher Education English (including English Literature, English Language & Creative Writing) called 'The Pool'. The resources were developed by the English Subject Centre in 2011 as part of a JISC/HEA Open Educational Resources (OER) Project. This work by the English Subject Centre is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 2.0 UK: England & Wales License.

already know about their subject, both as former students and as people whose role is to help students to learn. Clearly something central here is the fact that subjects in the English family work all the time with discourse, dialogue, pragmatics, metaphor, narrative, interpretation That is what they do. The subjects conventionally grouped around English do not (other than in some limited cases) lend themselves to a transmission version of education. Rather, they are underpinned by the idea that the core teaching role is to create environments within which learning can take place. The activities in this collection invite readers to tease out the pedagogic implications of this immersion in dialogue, this commitment to meanings not yet fully formed, but in the process of being made. Underlying all these resources is a belief that there is a value to taking out and examining one's tacit assumptions. They can become tacit again (no one is trying to rob teachers of their professional intuition), but at a more highly-informed and articulate level.

It is important - we say to them - to try for some clarity about what drives you as a teacher if they are not simply to be blown around by external pressures. But thinking about one's own formation as a teacher needs to be complemented by thinking about how students may relate to the subject. (Writing, Literature, or Language.) We suggested above that one should not write off insights emanating from educational theory and discourse. Blanking out or belittling such insights may be an aspect of that 'orientalism' of disciplines analysed by Shan Wareing (see below.) If we are to play an effective part in enabling student learning we have to be conscious of the opportunities and challenges our subject presents to students as they seek to internalise and use its characteristic forms of argument, discourse, and evidence.

Our fundamental point is that - while not neglecting insights from other disciplines including Education - the reader needs to think through the insights into pedagogy lent them by their discipline. It is in the nature of a discipline to question its own practices, but in English that questioning tends to be addressed to texts or to instances of language rather than to the milieu in which learning happens. Thus, we all want our students to learn to be critical: but do we exercise our critical skills on pedagogic matters? We are interested in narrative and linguistic cohesion, but how much do we know about the cohesive or centrifugal forces at work in the seminar?



Another fundamental point is to bring to the surface the idea of pedagogy as 'framing': the need to think consciously about framing, and the ways in which your chosen or default frame will foreground some things and background others.

The ethos of the whole collection is underpinned by an idea of professionalism, not as an armour worn against litigation, but as an ethical responsibility. In writing these resources, we are influenced by the idea of a teaching as a 'craft', in the sense in which Richard Sennett has posed 'craftsmanship' as a mode of responsibility for and attuned-ness to one's expertise, a relationship to work in many ways at odds with the assumptions of corporate neo-liberalism.

Links & References

- Gibbs, Graham. (2010). *The Dimensions of Quality*. Higher Education Academy.
- Wareing, Shân (2009) 'Disciplines, discourse and Orientalism: the implications for postgraduate certificates in learning and teaching in higher education', *Studies in Higher Education*, 34: 8, 917 — 928
- Ben Knights on pedagogic research in English
- Andrews, Richard (2010) *Re-framing Literacy: teaching and learning in English and the language arts*. New York: Routledge.
- Sennett, Richard (2008) *The Craftsman*. New Haven: Yale UP.

Professional Standards Framework

How does the entire collection under this theme relate to the PSF? As well as providing a device for mapping the levels of competence attained by lecturing staff, the PSF also provides a tool for reflection - albeit a fairly basic one. Conceptualisation of 'areas of activity', 'core knowledge', and 'professional values' provides one way of articulating what you know about pedagogy and how you activate and implement that knowledge. It is a device for rendering the tacit explicit, and to that extent converges with the objects of this collection of activities.

More information about the Professional Standards Framework can be obtained from the summary factsheet in the Subject & Pedagogy Collection in HumBox.

<http://humbox.ac.uk/2731/>



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Individual & Group Activities

Some of the activities in this collection (the same is true of the other themed collections) are designed for individual use. Some are designed for use in groups (for example within the framework of a certificate course). In many cases the resource could be easily adapted for either. But where there is a marked difference we have indicated that a resource is primarily inflected towards either individual or group use.

Resources in the *Subject and Pedagogy* Collection

- **Subject and pedagogy: introduction to the collection (* you are here)**
- Working with the English subject benchmark statement: resource overview
 - Using the English subject benchmark: group activity
 - Using the English subject benchmark: individual activity
- Working with the Creative Writing subject benchmark statement: resource overview
 - Using the Creative Writing subject benchmark: group activity
 - Using the Creative Writing subject benchmark: individual activity
- Writing and the teacher: resource overview
 - Writing tasks: group activity
 - Metaphors: group activity
- Hearing yourself teach: resource overview
 - Keeping a teaching journal: individual activity
- Working with threshold concepts: resource overview
 - Crossing the line: individual activity
 - Crossing the line: group activity

