Inquiry-based Learning Development Cases
Teaching Clusters

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1. Where I/we started from and wanted to achieve

The aim of this project was to involve as many members of staff in CILASS activity as possible and, with this in mind, we established eight 'teaching and learning clusters' (on the model of our long-standing research clusters') and invited colleagues to participate in one or more of them. The eight clusters focused on eight 'modes of inquiry' commonly used in research within English Studies and their brief was to consider how we could raise students' awareness of these modes of inquiry and help them to engage with them more autonomously.

2. What happened

Between September 2006 and July 2007, we held eight cluster meetings covering the areas of 'History', 'Theory', 'Performance', 'Close Reading', 'Writing', 'Technology', 'Science', and 'Sources'. In chairing these sessions, we used a stream-lined version of the 'Theories of Change' approach, asking colleagues: (1) to identify problems helping students to engage with the relevant mode of inquiry (to moan), (2) to consider how these problems might be dealt with in an ideal world (to dream), and (3) to identify practical ways of moving a step closer to that ideal vision, £400 being made available to each group to help in the process (to innovate). The eight modes of inquiry were then used to structure student inquiries in the module *Roots/Routes* (the case study for which can be accessed via the link on the right hand panel).

To encourage colleagues to participate, we made presentations at both Departmental Meetings (the School of English then consisted of two departments – English Literature and English Language & Linguistics). We also made a PowerPoint Presentation at the School of English Curriculum Review Meeting in September 2006, reporting on what had happened so far and what was forthcoming. In all these presentations we made use of a visual brand that we developed for the launch of the University Teaching and Learning Strategy in June 2006.

All of the clusters produced ideas for mini-projects intended to support IBL activity in their area of concern and £400 was made available for each. The extent to which these have been driven through to completion varies and this is discussed in more detail in the next section.

3. What worked

Thirty members of staff participated directly in the learning and teaching clusters (out of approximately fifty). Some participated in more than one cluster. We were delighted with this level of participation, since there had not traditionally been much exchange in the field of learning and teaching across the School. The incentive of a free lunch made the prospect of giving up valuable free time more appealing!

The sharing of ideas and experiences proved to be one of the most successful aspects of the Teaching Clusters, creating a new space for ideas about learning and teaching. Responding to the staff questionnaire, one colleague stated that the project had been 'vital', adding that it had created 'a space and a time to trade ideas, and think up projects'. Some projects have already resulted in impact in the curriculum. For example, the first-year foundation course in literary studies has been energised through the establishment of creative writing competitions which provide an incentive for students to learn more about the sonnet, about drama, and about prose by producing creative work directly connected to the outcomes of the module.

In an evaluation questionnaire, staff were asked to comment on the effectiveness of the clusters as forums for discussion and responses were generally positive. One respondent stated that the meeting s/he had attended was 'really stimulating – it was interesting to hear how colleagues approach writing, the

types of strategies they use, their values and outcomes and student responses to them'. Another said: 'We had an interesting debate and some potentially productive ideas about how to encourage inquiry-based learning were put forward'.

One colleague commented upon the impact of the CILASS discussions upon his/her own teaching: 'I am now using WebCT routinely in creative and inventive ways as a result of the CILASS experience. I try and get students to pursue independent lines of inquiry more too, especially through IT'. Another stated that there is now 'a much greater emphasis on IBL at an early stage [in the student experience], rather than as something to work up to [with more experienced students]'. A colleague in the field of drama said: 'I am thinking of ways in which drama strategies could feed into colleague's work, and how I could benefit from their greater expertise in teaching literature and linguistics, etc. So the impact of the clusters was not so much about increasing the amount of IBL, which is already considerable, but in improving it and refining it especially in the area of collaborative research'. We feel that these comments provide evidence that students' experience of IBL has increased as a result of the clusters project. In addition, some of the mini-projects are highly visible to students, including the 'Writing' group's online literary magazine, *Route 57*.

The eight themes chosen for the clusters were intended to reflect the diversity of work within the School and thus provide scope for all members of staff to participate. All the clusters attracted members of staff with appropriate interests, except for the 'Science' cluster, which we shall re-evaluate. The 'Science' cluster was especially designed to attract colleagues in theoretical (rather than historical or socio-cultural) areas of linguistics. The fact that the learning and teaching clusters concentrated on modes of inquiry, rather than on generic approaches to teaching (group work, for example, or VLEs), resulted in a high level of engagement and very focused discussion.

All but one of the clusters ('Science') produced viable ideas for mini-projects. However, the extent to which the projects have actually been driven forward varies. The 'Writing' project resulted in the creation of an online creative writing magazine, *Route 57*, as a focus for writing both within the curriculum and outside it. Two editions of the magazine have now appeared and the project has provided an excellent model for active and creative collaboration between staff and students. (The editor is an MA student who, as an undergraduate, took a level-3 module on multimedia approaches within English Studies, taught within the School of English CILASS space, and, as such is well equipped to run an electronic publication.) The 'Theory' group developed an idea for an online resource for teachers – a kind of 'ideas bank' – dealing with IBL approaches to the teaching of Literary Theory, and this resource is now available to staff members in the form of a VLE. The 'History' cluster did not pursue the idea for an online resource that emerged from their original discussion. However, the most active members of that group, Dr Philip Shaw and Dr Cathy Shrank, subsequently went on to apply for IBL grants from CILASS to develop projects of their own, both of which relate to the themes explored in the original discussion. Another idea that came out of this group was to make more use of the local environment as a resource in historical inquiry and, in March 2007, a hundred students taking a module on Early American Literature visited the William Wilberforce Museum in Hull and then were asked to write reviews of the exhibition, which were assessed. A selection were sent to the Museum and met with an interested response. The discussion held by the 'Close Reading' group led to collaboration with LDMU on self-access resources for students learning about textual analysis. The other four so far have less to show in concrete terms, although we are optimistic that both 'Technology' and 'Performance' will still produce constructive innovations.

Collaborative inquiry was already fairly widespread within English, even before CILASS was launched, and responses to the staff questionnaire suggest that colleagues have seen recent discussion as affirming values that they already held rather than leading them to adopt entirely new practices. In some cases, staff have seen this reaffirmation of the value of collaboration in positive terms: 'I teach theatre, so we always work with a group-based/collaborative approach, and students spend a great deal of time in independent learning situations. I think what CILASS offers me is the possibility of extending this to research and writing'. In other cases, colleagues have been unsure about what is new in collaborative approaches: 'I don't have a clear grasp of the difference between inquiry-based learning and what I ask my students to do as a matter of course'.

Enjoyment is hard to quantify but one colleague commented: 'There's a buzz about it in the School … and the T&L profile is high on the School agenda as well as on the list of things we can be proud of'. The same colleague added: 'It is also, crucially, having beneficial effects on student satisfaction, especially in

the ways it has helped students recognize how they can independently exploit the information-technology based on resources of the library. For the first time since my arrival here, we are getting students praising the library resources'.

4. What I/we learned and how it will be taken forward

There is always scope for improvement and, as we enter phase 4 of the project, we hope to address some of the concerns mentioned above. In particular, we want to re-engage colleagues through a process of reporting in which colleagues who have been involved in concrete developments, whether through the teaching clusters, though personal IBL grant projects, or participation in CILASS events help to raise awareness among less IBL-active colleagues.

In terms of resourcing, it can be difficult to commit the necessary time and energy to CILASS projects in the face of competing demands and especially in the run-up to the RAE. However, we feel we have managed to sustain a good level of engagement. As the report on our reflective interview notes: 'One of the enabling factors for this has been the fact that there are two members of staff involved who can share the responsibility and engage in dialogue. This was seen as a very positive model for future engagement with CILASS'. As the report also notes: 'Both Richard and Duco find that multiple roles, both within CILASS and with teaching generally, help with sustaining enthusiasm and building links between colleagues and activities' Funding to buy-out project leaders from teaching worked more successfully for Duco than for Richard. This is partly because it was difficult to find anyone who could take over Richard's specialist teaching. Buy-out is not the solution to all problems and, although it sounds attractive, it cannot always be made to work in a way that makes innovative work truly viable.

CILASS has had considerable strategic Impact within the School. It has been central to our School's "Learning Teaching and Assessment Strategy" document 2005-10 and to the School's strategic plan; connections between research and teaching as focused through IBL and CILASS activity have been presented as a distinctive aspect of the School of English's profile in our RAE submission; and there are new individual CILASS projects within the School focusing on the core curriculum.

There is definitely scope for the Roots/Routes module to impact upon other areas of the curriculum but this is something that needs to be tackled in the second iteration. We are already talking to members of the drama team about making connections between the work on 'Performance' and elements of their teaching. Students in the module also commented on synergies between their work on *Roots* and the compulsory level-2 module in literary theory that they were taking in parallel. Again, there is room to make these connections more concrete.

5. Any other comments

The Teaching Clusters project was designed to be of interest to all members of staff on the basis that if all members of staff were involved, all our students could potentially be impacted by it (the School currently has over 1000 students). In practice, it is difficult to assess the full extent of the impact on the student body. At the very least, all students know about Route 57, the 'Writing' cluster's creative writing magazine. In addition, because of the teaching clusters, individual members of staff have become interested in CILASS and IBL and are now IBL Grant project leaders themselves, impacting again on students in the department. (These include Cathy Shrank's project on Information Literacy in the core curriculum and Susan Fitzmaurice and Philip Shaw's work on Student Mentoring).