

The Higher Education Academy

History Subject Centre Newsletter



In this First Edition of the Newsletter:

The development of HUMBOX, the online repository for Humanities teaching materials

Information about ongoing research projects

Feedback on the first Teaching as a Postgraduate Researcher Workshop

Updates from the Regional Networks and Discipline Associations

News of all upcoming events



Welcome to the first issue of the History Subject Centre Magazine. This has been a busy and challenging year for the History team. History is now established independently at the University of Warwick and the team are devoting their energy and attention to supporting and enhancing teaching, learning and the student experience across the whole History community. In a year that has seen the announcement of a new framework for Higher Education, a review of student fees, consultations on the REF and the 'impact' agenda and reports on the diminution of History teaching at secondary level, the challenges facing Higher Education History remain exacting. The Subject Centre continues to liaise with the History subject associations and departments and academics across the country to ensure that History continues to have a strong voice at national and policy-making level.

The launch of History as an independent centre was accompanied by the design of our brand new website

www.historysubjectcentre.ac.uk

The website has a number of features designed to facilitate access to our resources. These include news feeds direct from our blog to social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook; a theme browser which draws together events, resources and external links on key topics; and an e-library of open educational resources. We are delighted to announce the introduction of two new publication series.

Historical Insights: Focus on Teaching published its first two issues *Teaching as a PhD Researcher* by Kate Bradley and *Hollywood for Historians* by Andrew Dawson in September 2009. In January 2010 a third edition *Medieval Castles* by Robert Liddiard will appear along with the first publication in the sister series **Historical Insights: Focus on Research**. Focus on Research is co-sponsored by the Institute of Historical Research in London and

will concentrate on the use of sources and methods in historical research. The launch publication will be Mark Freeman's guide to the use of Quantitative Methods in historical research.

The Centre has been active in participating in projects promoting the scholarship of teaching and learning in History. Reports on our projects are included in the Newsletter and we will continue to keep the community updated on our work with open educational resources and student feedback. One characteristic of the projects that we are keen to extend is the employment of undergraduate student researchers ensuring direct student engagement with the work of the Subject Centre. We have continued to undertake departmental visits and provide grants and funding for teaching-related conferences, workshops and development projects. The Regional networks have been lively this year with workshops and seminar series in the Midlands and North-West with further activities planned for the East Midlands.

Our flagship annual conference will take place this year at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford from **23-25 March 2010**. The conference will be celebrating ten years of the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme and we hope to have many past History National Teaching Fellows present. There will be a strong international presence at the conference as well as UK speakers disseminating their research.

S Richardson

Sarah Richardson
Director,
History Subject Centre



Reinventing Spaces—Spaces and Stories of Higher Education: a historical investigation'. A report on the active engagement of undergraduate research in learning communities.

The History Subject Centre has funded a project this year (led by Dr Cath Lambert and Danny Wilding of the Reinvention Centre at the University of Warwick) to investigate the design and development of teaching spaces in Higher Education. An important consideration for the Centre was the proposed engagement of undergraduates in the research team: to gain insight into the benefits and challenges for all concerned, which could be shared with our subject community. We have been impressed with the focus and methodology developed by the researchers and so, a review of the project to date is best left to Laura Moorhouse (second year History and Sociology), Hannah Lever (third year Sociology) and Laura Evans (second year Sociology), from a paper they gave at the Student Teaching and Learning Network Conference at the University of Manchester, 13th November 2009

Through our work, we are investigating the changes and continuities in the use and design of learning spaces at Warwick and other universities across the country. We have chosen to conduct archival research documenting the development of our campus, use photo elicitation to visually chart this progress and have reviewed relevant literature outlining pedagogy and architecture, in an attempt to offer plausible theoretical explanations for these shifts in space use. We are also conducting a series of interviews with prominent figures within universities to identify the ideas and ideals surrounding the concepts of the 'university student' and the university as a 'learning space', and discover whether they have remained constant over time.

Whilst we had many different reasons for getting involved in the project, our common reasons were to gain experience for a future academic career, it is an opportunity to collaborate with academic staff in our department and it is a flexible job with good rates of pay—ideal to fit in around studies.

Our initial lead, the obituary of David Medd (a prominent figure in primary school architecture in the 1940s) showed we each had different research interests on this varied topic. To begin with the thought of being let loose on a research task with [intentionally] very little staff input for 7hrs a week was incredibly scary.

Yet as the project has gone on, we have bonded as a team and arranged our own research meetings and 'contact time, and we feel now that the

We have learned from the research process that self motivation and initiative is vital; that research is a messy and often frustrating enterprise; yet also that this experience has been beneficial to our own studies, as we are now more confident in using the facilities available to us at the University, such as the Modern Records Centre and library databases.

research has some direction; with our three different angles coming together to portray a theoretical, visual, and policy informed analysis of educational space over the last one hundred years.



We feel that conducting research at undergraduate level enables students to apply what they discuss in the classroom to a real life situation, grounding the methodology and theory in reality, and improve understanding by 'learning through doing'. Thus we argue, that active field research should be made more accessible for social science students.

We have all been influenced by the work we have undertaken and feel that it has been a rewarding experience. We are all proud to be part of the Reinvention Centre and to be participating in the academic world as researchers. Working as part of a team has given us the confidence to attend academic events and to present our research at conferences, something that is a key skill for post-university life. We all agree that this has been a greatly enjoyable experience.

Whilst it is apparent that the 'Spaces and Stories' project has influenced our lives on a personal level, we also hope to contribute to the academic community. We have already attended conferences related to our research field and are presenting our work at the History Education Society conference at the University of Sheffield in December 2009. We aim to synthesise our results in a paper for the Reinvention Journal of Undergraduate Research and finally, present our completed project in a research exhibition at Warwick in April 2010.

For more information visit the History Subject Centre website and click on Research.

The History Subject Centre is part of a consortium of four Humanities Subject Centres working with partners in 11 different HE institutions on a pilot project to build a repository of freely available teaching materials called **HumBox**. The project is part of the one year initiative funded by JISC and the Higher Education Academy in April 2009 to showcase UK Higher Education by encouraging academics to publish existing resources.

Discussions on Open Educational Resources (OER's) are now a constant feature in the educational and national press ...

"The ranks of so-called 'self-learners' are swelling as the world's best universities put free lectures online" : the lead sentence of Richard Wood's full-page article in the Sunday Times on 11th October 2009.

"Online learning is a phenomenal educational growth area that offers value for money, geographical freedom and flexibility if delivery": the opening sentence from a piece on Telegraph.co.uk on 25th November 2009, which went on to say ...

Many leading universities are already providing free online material. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) has been doing this for nearly a decade. Others, including Oxford and Yale, have jumped on the bandwagon. Thousands of hours of material are online for students, educators and anyone else thirsting for knowledge.

Openness is not a new concept in the educational community but the key to sustaining the rapid rise of OER's is establishing confidence in the quality of material. Good online course materials take time and commitment to produce, and even then, how easy are they to find amongst the huge array of resources available on the web covering every possible subject?

In 2005, an English Subject Centre project (by Masterman and Lee) investigated attitudes to the sharing of learning materials

among staff and postgraduates and found that:


- The majority of tutors reuse learning materials created by others between 5% and 50% of the time
- The learning materials that are most reused are primary texts, secondary research texts, images and reading lists
- Although internet search engines and websites are widely used in sourcing materials for possible reuse, personal acquaintance plays an important role
- The overwhelming majority of respondents were prepared to make some or all of their learning materials available for use by others inside and/or outside their home institutions

These findings are common across the humanities, and certainly in our history community. HumBox is well on the way to establishing an innovative new online storage area of good quality humanities resources, with over 800 items already uploaded six months into the project: but providing a bank of resources for free download is only part of our aim, and only part of what is needed. Our collaboration has created the core of a community of humanities specialists who are willing to share their teaching materials and work across disciplines to peer review and enhance each others' work for the benefit of the wider academic community. A full list of objectives can be viewed on our project website <http://humbox.eprints.org/> and the screenshot on the next page gives an example of our resources and layout.

What are contributors and partners getting out of it? Why get involved?

The HumBox website will be officially launched on 26th February 2010 (for launch details see page 6), when anyone will be able to access and join the repository to download and review existing materials, as well as deposit their own work to share with others.

Working closely with the humanities community, to understand their needs and require-



Teaching resources can be browsed using tags and subject keywords.

HOME BROWSE FAQs ABOUT

Manage Resources | Profile Logged in as Mr Brett Lucas (Logout)

Supporting students: motivation (Resource)

The title of the resource is shown and previewed in the main window.

A description of the resource will assist you in deciding whether it is suitable for your teaching needs.

Attached Files

- Participat...aga_class.mov
File Size: 8.3Mb
Video (QuickTime)
- Motivation...Students.mov
File Size: 5.0Mb
Video (QuickTime)
- MOTIVATION...ARBOLEDA.ppt
File Size: 2.78Kb
Microsoft PowerPoint

Show/Add Comments

Description

This resource contains a powerpoint presentation and videos originally given as part of a training event for new language tutors. This resource can be used to highlight the issues of motivation and participation for new

Resource Metadata

From	Ms Alison Dickens
Added	24 Jul 2009 12:29
Tags	User
Languages	English
Attribution	Antonia Martinez-Arboleda
Downloads	0
Copyright	

Toolbox

The list of files that make up this resource are indicated here. This resource contains 2 videos and a PowerPoint presentation.

When a resource is deposited you can attach tags to indicate subject areas and teaching types.

The comments window allows users of the resource to comment about its usefulness.

The toolbox enables you to bookmark the resource and remix it with your own activities.

A Creative Commons licence shows you what you are allowed to do with the resource.

The author of the resource is clearly shown. Selecting the author will take you to their profile page.

ments, is an essential part of the project and our institutional partners are helping us to achieve this. In History, we have partners working at the University of Warwick (Robert O'Toole, Arts Faculty E-Learning Advisor) and the Humanities Research Institute at the University of Sheffield. Michael Pidd and Matthew Phillpott from Sheffield share their insights into the project overleaf

The opportunity to showcase excellent teaching materials, as noted by Michael and Matt, has become an increasingly important focus of the project, in tandem with the dynamics of sustainability. The technical design of the HumBox aims to learn from the best practice principles of social networking sites, which organically build and maintain

communities through dynamic user engagement with particular site features.

HumBox includes a personal profile page as a prominent part of the site: by allowing community members to comment on resources; by enabling users to email each other through the system; by revealing 'most viewed' and 'most downloaded' statistics, and enabling RSS feeds to keep members apprised of the latest uploads and developments with their own resources.

We hope that the site itself is appealing and useful to users, and crucially, simple to use, so that users want to return to it and can easily engage with it.

Changes in the RAE (now the REF) mean that the idea of impact has become important, and our partners feel that in the new online world, open resources are an excellent way of demonstrating impact through teaching, and showing how teaching content is research-based. Download

stats may be a blunt instrument, but they have incredible power. The idea that engaging with HumBox can enhance your professional profile, and indeed the profile of your institution, is a very appealing one that we hope will aid sustainability in the longer term.

Lisa Lavendar

Academic Co-Ordinator, History Subject Centre

References:

The UKOER programme is described on the JISC and HEA websites, www.jisc.ac.uk/oer and www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/learning/opencontent

Masterman, L. and Lee, S. (2005) *Reusing Learning Materials in English Literature and Language: Perspectives from Three Universities*. Available at www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/explore/projects/archive/technology/tech10.php

The HumBox website: <http://humbox.eprints.org/>

The Humanities Research Institute, University of Sheffield: <http://www.shef.ac.uk/hri/index.html>

Online education grows apace article can be viewed at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/expateducation/6588855/Online-education-grows-apace.html>

How can **YOU** get involved and find out more about the HumBox project ...

Sharing and Showcasing Humanities Teaching Resources: the HumBox Collection Launch Event.

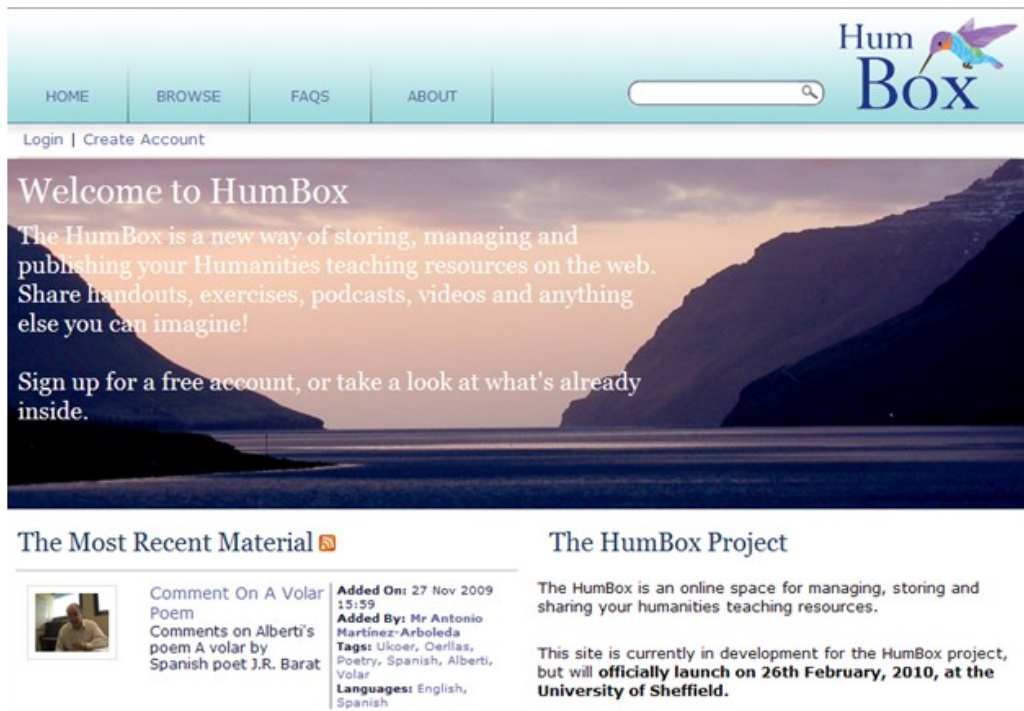
10.00 am to 3.00pm, Friday 26th February 2010 at the Douglas Knoop Centre, Humanities Research Institute, University of Sheffield.

This event is an ideal opportunity for lecturers in history, and the wider humanities, who want to explore new and different material, and find out how to raise the profile of their teaching resources in the wider academic community. Using the example of HumBox on its official launch, participants will learn about the principles and benefits of open educational resources (OER) and be shown how to use HumBox to showcase their own resources and repurpose those developed by others. Academics involved in the HumBox project will discuss their experiences and there will be plenty of opportunity to explore HumBox itself.

Registration for this FREE event is now open via the events page on the English Subject Centre website – one of our partner's in the project ...

<http://www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/explore/events/index.php>

The last date for registration is 12th February 2010.



The Humanities Research Institute [HRI] at the University of Sheffield is an environment where collaborative research and knowledge transfer (often with a technology component) is nurtured and given room to flourish. As such, our participation in an open educational resources project such as HumBox is an unusual activity for us and instinctively outside our area of expertise.

However, as a centre for interdisciplinary research, in which around 50% of our activities are with external HEI clients, we are uniquely placed to facilitate contributions of resources from across the entire range of arts and humanities disciplines, both within the Faculty at Sheffield and externally. In practice this has also included units and centres which are satellites to departments and schools but which contribute to learning and teaching, such as the National Fairground Archive, the Centre for Research into Freemasonry and the Founders' Library at the University of Wales, Lampeter.

Logistically we realised that our participation in the project would be no simple activity. The workflow which involved approaching colleagues, communicating the 'HumBox vision', gathering resources, reviewing them and finally uploading them to the repository required a significant investment in time. We employed Dr Matt Phillpott, the co-author of this report, to dedicate

two days per week to the HumBox Project. As a tutor within the Department of History, Matt has been able to contribute an understanding of learning and teaching which is not native to the HRI. The size, scope and quality of the HRI's contribution to HumBox is entirely thanks to his hard work and keen eye.

Our overall approach has been to provide depositors with a Deposit Form which enabled them to describe their resources (title, keywords, license for re-use etc). The completed form and resources were then sent to Matt for review and inclusion in the repository. By using a Deposit Form we have been able to keep a paper audit of our work, whilst Matt's role as the gatekeeper to HumBox has given us full editorial control over the HRI contributions.

Throughout the project we have encountered no criticism of the concept of OER or the 'HumBox vision'. Everyone to whom we have spoken has supported the idea of making educational resources available for sharing. In particular, everyone has understood that HumBox presents an ideal opportunity to showcase their teaching to peers, to enhance the reputation of their institution and promote excellence in UK HEI learning and teaching more generally. HumBox has even been seen by some as a form of publishing, subject to peer review.



Undoubtedly the colleagues most interested in this aspect of HumBox have been early career academics. In some respects the seriousness with which colleagues have viewed HumBox has presented its own problems because resources would not be handed over until each individual academic was completely satisfied that they were worthy of public consumption. Yet, in some respects this problem should also be seen as a positive, as those concerns have already resulted in a re-assessment of the quality of existing teaching materials by those colleagues. The core principle of HumBox to improve the quality of teaching resources begins before material is even uploaded to the repository.

A strength of the HumBox project from our perspective has been the people involved, from the project leaders to the other partners within individual institutions. As a partner we have felt fully embedded within the programme of work and the intellectual debate. This was particularly evident at the two-day workshop in which we were all given the time and mental space to thrash out both the detail of the HumBox system and the bigger issues of open educational resources, such as IP, peer review, quality control, technical sustainability, user design, misuse and service delivery over the longer term.



Network of Teachers of North American History

Do you teach North American History? If so, this network is for you!

I am developing a nation-wide network of university teachers of North American History (any topic, any period, both undergraduate and postgraduate level). We will come together on a regular basis to share experiences and best practice on teaching methods, facilitating the development of innovative

approaches to our topic including e-learning.

The network is open to all teachers of North American history whether based in History, American Studies or other departments and it welcomes scholars at every career stage from postgraduate tutor through to professor.

If you are interested in participating in such a network please email me with your institutional affiliation and a short description of your areas of teaching expertise/interest. If there is a good response a gathering of the network will be organised for later in this academic year.

Please pass this information on to any colleagues who are interested in the History of North America.

Contact: Dr Catherine Armstrong, Lecturer in American History, Manchester Metropolitan University: C.M.Armstrong@mmu.ac.uk

For More information on History Networks throughout the United Kingdom,



One of the particular strengths of the HumBox project that we have especially noted is the wide diversity of resources that it can offer. We have uploaded materials ranging from lecture presentations to interactive exercises, video files, and lecture podcasts. The range of teaching resources already uploaded promotes exciting and innovative teaching. We have also realised that HumBox offers an important arena to further promote institutions current and past projects. The potential inherent in offering resources that can be tailored and modified for particular teaching needs is an exciting prospect and encourages a new, more open sharing of ideas.

Finally, the value of participating in the HumBox Project from the HRI's perspective has been in gaining an understanding of the intimate connection between research and teaching within HEIs. On many occasions we noticed that the teaching resources which were being contributed to HumBox had their origins within externally-funded research and that undergraduate teaching is often an immediate impact of arts and humanities research. For an interdisciplinary research centre such as the HRI this has informed our understanding of the wider value of our own activities.

-Matt Phillpott and Michael Pidd

The Midlands Regional Network

The Midlands Network brings together academic Historians, archivists, museum curators and teaching and learning consultants from across the region. There are many practitioners of innovative History teaching and learning in the Midlands and the network provides an opportunity to disseminate good practice. During the last few years workshops have been held across the region in venues including Worcester, Edgbaston, Bartley Green and Wolverhampton. Among the themes that have been explored are e-Learning, challenges facing postgraduate teachers in higher education and work placements.



Our most recent event, held on 11th November 2009 considered **E-Learning Near and Far: Using Technology in Teaching History**. Presentations on wikis, online distance learning, blogging and integrating academic online resources into courses created thought-provoking discussions: a good example of how academics in a fairly close geographical area can meet effectively to discuss similar interests within their discipline and develop new contacts for future collaboration. A workshop on issues related to teaching local History is planned for 2010. In particular, it will provide an opportunity for Historians and Archivists in the Midlands to explore ways in which greater use can be made of the resources available in the region's archives for higher education local History teaching.

More information about the Midlands network can be found on the Subject Centre website at: http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/heahistory/getinvolved/networks/regional, or by contacting the network convenor, Dr. Richard Hawkins (University of Wolverhampton) R.A.Hawkins@wlv.ac.uk

visit <http://www.historysubjectcentre.ac.uk/getinvolved/networks>

“Teaching as a

This November, the History Subject Centre was pleased to host a free, full-day workshop on Teaching as a Postgraduate Researcher.

The event, which attracted attendees from universities throughout Scotland and England, opened with a discussion of where to obtain teaching positions and how to balance teaching commitments with researching and writing up a PhD dissertation. It was made clear that teaching, while rewarding, could be very time consuming. If the students weren't prepared for the responsibility yet, there was nothing to prevent them from taking up part-time teaching the following year.

From there, Mark Freeman and Fiona Skillen of the University of Glasgow and Valerie Wright of the



University of Dundee led students through a discussion of first-year transition, highlighting many of the differences between Higher History and HE History courses. Several important issues were raised, such as student expectations and over-confidence, and the need to re-enforce crucial research skills. Delegates were also invited to share their own experiences of first year and what challenges they had faced.

As the morning progressed Valerie and Fiona worked with groups to discuss methods of small-group and seminar teaching, as well as how to avoid (where possible) some of the common problems and pitfalls that affect small groups. The delegates were able to share their common concerns of “not knowing enough” and being able to control rowdier students. Most expressed comfort at seeing they were not alone in their fears.

The morning was rounded off by parallel sessions on assessment and using ICT in HE teaching. The session on marking, jointly led by Mark Freeman and Sarah Richardson, invited students to read and comment upon first-year writing samples and acclimatise themselves to the level of writing they

should expect from first and second year university students. Advice was also given on providing timely and effective feedback.

Across the hall, Robert O'Toole, eLearning Coordinator for the History Subject Centre, introduced students to a variety of eLearning tools they could employ in their teaching. Most importantly, he discussed the importance of postgraduate teachers understanding their own IT competencies, and exploring the competencies of their students, before embarking on overly-ambitious IT projects. To aid this process, delegates used a draft version of the Digital Literacy Self-assessment Tool, a final version of which will be available on the Subject Centre website in the near future.

After a brief, but well-deserved, lunch, the students again split into two sessions. The first was led by Melodee Beals, who explored the difficulties and rewards of a diverse cohort, specifically the implications of internationalisation and widening participation. Delegates explored their assumptions regarding language and regionality, sharing “common” expressions they used, such as “worried to a Mars bar”, and the effect such idioms might have on students in lectures and seminar environments. The second, run by Mike Rapport of the University of Stirling, introduced students to the art of lecturing, providing them with a “Bluffers’ guide” to handling their first time at the lectern. Mike took participants through the various stages of giving a lecture from thinking about and researching the topic to considerations for effective delivery.



The delegates then recombined for a session on Career Progression. Valerie discussed her own academic trajectory, including postgraduate teaching, conference and seminar series organisation, and post-doctoral research at the University of Dundee. Mark Freeman, likewise, provided an overview of his academic career, giving students tips on the relative advantages to different career paths. This session was particularly appreciated by

Postgraduate" Workshop

the delegates, who appreciated learning about the variety of career paths open to them.

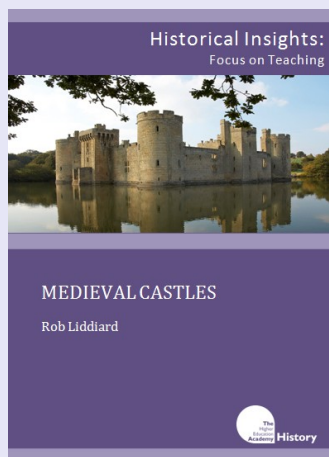
The workshop then concluded with a brief discussion of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and how postgraduate teachers could begin developing their teaching credentials. All attendees were encouraged to present at or attend the upcoming Annual Conference and to submit applications for teaching development grants.

Feedback from the event was overwhelmingly positive. According to one, the workshop was "Really useful workshop [and] made clear a lot of aspects of an academic career". Another appreciated the "chance to meet postgraduates from different stages of the research process."

**Melodee Beals Academic Co-Ordinator
History Subject Centre**

This January, the History Subject Centre will publish two new issues of our Historical Insights series.

HISTORICAL INSIGHTS: FOCUS ON TEACHING

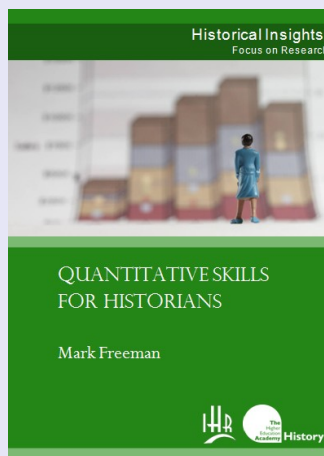


Medieval Castles

"Castles are one of the most vivid symbols of our medieval heritage, 'tangible' monuments that exert a powerful hold on the imagination of students and academics alike. Castles can therefore provide an excellent starting point for the study of medieval history. The variety and distribution of castles across Britain ensures that they can offer tremendous potential for fieldtrips and seminars in the field."

Medieval Castles provide readers with a guide to using castles to enrich and contextualise the teaching of history, an extensive discussion of the structure and history of medieval fortresses, specific examples of seminar topics and suggested reading and key teaching themes.

HISTORICAL INSIGHTS: FOCUS ON RESEARCH



Quantitative Skills for Historians

"Quantification, even of a comparatively simple kind, arouses fear among many students, especially those who come to history with a background in

arts subjects. Even those who approach history from a social-science background — students who also study sociology or politics — are easily disheartened when confronted with historical numbers. The same may be true of their teachers, who may not be frightened of introducing some quantitative study into the undergraduate curriculum, but who doubt the extent to which students will be able to use quantitative data with advantage, and who are aware of the resource implications of introducing lab sessions and the like into their courses."

This issue will feature guidance on integrating quantitative methods into historical research and teaching, and provide suggestions on where to find further specific guidance.

Feedback practices have recently come under increasing scrutiny, most notably because of the impact of the National Student Survey. 'It's Good to Talk: feedback, dialogue and learning' is a National Teaching Fellow Scheme funded project by Professor Alasdair Blair at De Montfort University, partnered by Dr Sarah Richardson of the Subject Centre for History at the University of Warwick and Dr Steven Curtis of London Metropolitan University. The project will identify, evaluate, develop and promote ways to improve feedback to students within the disciplines of History and Politics/International Relations. At the centre of this project stand the 7 principles of the SENLEF project (Jawah et al., 2004) which has attempted to provide a conceptual framework for feedback, and also to identify the principles underpinning good feedback practices. By taking one key principle – encouraging teacher and peer dialogue around learning – this project will pilot new feedback approaches in different subject areas across three different institutions (De Montfort, London Metropolitan, and Warwick).

The focus on feedback is associated with recent research on student writing and literacy in academic settings. Lillis and Scott (2007) suggest the expansion and increasing diversity of higher education and widely-held perceptions of falling standards in universities has raised the prominence of research into how students learn the ways of thinking and specific skills practiced in academic disciplines. But it can also be seen as response to efforts to transform the operating assumptions of universities along market-lines, which has empowered students to demand better value for money from their university institution. According to the National Student Survey (NSS), one of the areas where students are least satisfied with educational provision is the return of feedback on assignments (see Table 1)

Students who enter the realm of academia are often ill-equipped to apprehend the norms and conventions that underpin the distinctive kinds of writing valued by academics. Feedback is an important genre of academic writing that can enable students to understand the writing conventions and practices of a particular field, the requirements of assessed work, and the expectations of tutors. Recent scholarship indicates that current feedback practices suffer from an absence of conceptual reflection of their effectiveness. The aim of the research project,

then, is to improve feedback delivery through the development of more effective strategies based upon staff-student dialogue.

It is one of the central premises of the research that an improvement of student writing and learning requires not merely designing superior mechanisms for the delivery of feedback, but the recalibration of existing assumptions about how knowledge is acquired. Traditional conceptions of pedagogy rely upon the notion of students as empty vessels to be 'filled' with knowledge, which they simply regurgitate in writing (Parker 2002). In this model of knowledge transmission, learning and the barriers to learning are treated relatively unproblematically, leading to an under-appreciation of student preconceptions about the learning process and underestimates the complexity involved in understanding the specific ways of knowing valued in different disciplinary domains. In contrast, our research adopts an alternative approach that seeks to facilitate discussions between staff and students about assessment and feedback, encouraging students to actively engage with the learning process.

Assessment and Feedback Questions, National Student Satisfaction Survey, 2009	History	All Subjects (HE)
The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance	75%	70%
Assessment arrangements and marking have been fair	82%	72%
Feedback on my work has been prompt	65%	57%
I have received detailed comments on my work	79%	62%
Feedback on my work has helped me to clarify things I did not understand	70%	56%

Table 1: NSS scores for Assessment and Feedback questions, 2009

This project differs from much of the recent work on feedback by focusing on particular disciplines. Thus it takes as its premise that an understanding of disciplinary conventions and discourses that structure ways of thinking in a particular domain are crucial in ascertaining what students need to learn to practice in the discipline. One of the problems that we will face though is that the conventions, beliefs, and assumptions that determine what constitutes 'good' writing in a particular

Improving Student Feedback

field, are so often left implicit or unspoken in academic practice (Lea and Street 1998: 168-69). They remain hidden beneath expressions of the need for greater 'structure', 'argument' or 'coherence', the meaning of which differs from one discipline to the next. We need to explore how student writing and staff feedback practices construct "appropriate ways of knowing and reproduce appropriate forms of disciplinary and subject knowledge" (Lea and Street 1998: 168). Thus, we perceive feedback as having a twofold function: 1) an ideological one, in the sense that it articulates (however obliquely) a particular vision of the teaching and learning process; and 2) a practical one, in that it is devised as a way of advancing student understanding and achievement.

'It's Good to Talk' is in its very early stages and we will be reporting the outcomes of our research in future newsletters. We hope our research will lead to an informed, evidence-based approach to improving feedback practices in the discipline of History. Many institutional responses are encouraging standardised approaches (the creation of assignment feedback forms for example) and focusing on the 'transmission' of feedback rather than on improving student learning.

To promote student engagement in the learning process and to facilitate feedback discussions between staff and students, the project will consider various strategies:

- format (written, verbal) and presentation (marked/unmarked, annotations) of feedback;
- alternative feedback strategies: exemplars, peer review, generic feedback;
- constraints on creating dialogue: resources (e.g. time, teaching staff); institutional (programmes and modules making it hard to integrate feedback into the development of student learning; discontinuity of teaching staff; uncoordinated assessment strategies); student disengagement (resulting from inconsistencies in feedback delivery);
- the purpose of feedback: for correction? Justification of a mark? For students to apply lessons in future work?

If you would like to learn more about the research or want to be informed of the results please contact Sarah Richardson

References and Further Reading

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Making History

Teachers of undergraduate and postgraduate history in the UK will be interested in *Making History* (<http://www.history.ac.uk/makinghistory>), an IHR web resource which traces the development of the profession and the discipline of history from its professionalisation in the late 19th century.

Reviews in History



Another IHR resource of potential interest to teachers of the subject is the e-journal *Reviews in History* (<http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews>), which publishes reviews and reappraisals of significant work in all fields of historical interest. The journal is free to access, and has published more than 800 reviews, most of which are between 2,000 and 3,000 words, significantly longer than usually found in scholarly journals. These longer pieces allow for a new book to be placed in the context of the existing literature, and thus provide useful introductions for students to the state of research in a particular field. New reviews are constantly being commissioned, and recommendations of books or resources to assess, and offers to do so, are always welcomed, whether they be from postgraduates or professors. Again, please feel free to contact the deputy editor Danny Millum at danny.millum@sas.ac.uk with any suggestions.



Bibliography of British and Irish History

Users of the Royal Historical Society Bibliography (<http://www.rhs.ac.uk/bibl/>) will know that it already includes links to *Reviews in History* when books listed by the Bibliography have been reviewed there. This useful service will continue when the Bibliography begins its new incarnation in January 2010 as the Bibliography of British and Irish History (BBIH), to be published online by Brepols (<http://www.brepolis.net/>).

The new bibliography will continue to be compiled at the IHR using the same methods as the RHS Bibliography. Trial subscriptions are now available. You can learn more about the changes, including the rationale behind moving to a subscription service, and how to subscribe, by going to:

<http://www.history.ac.uk/partners/rhs-bibliography/faq>.

Public History Notice



The newly formed Historical Association Committee for Public History held its first meetings in May and September of 2009. The committee has been formed to draw together people with an interest in History and Archaeology, to represent the interests of those teaching History in all areas of education and to champion the cause of History in local, national and international settings. If you are interested in learning more please visit our website www.historysubjectcentre.ac.uk/getinvolved/networks, where more information is available.

Discipline Associations

News from the Teaching Policy Committee of the Royal Historical Society

Many readers may be Fellows and Members of the Royal Historical Society and receive news of this committee in the annual *Transactions*, but for those who are not – given how much the RHS has backed the work of the Subject Centre in recent years – it was felt it might be useful to provide a short bulletin of our work.

It is perhaps noteworthy in itself that the RHS has a committee dedicated to discussion of the teaching of History in all its guises, for the committee was only formed in 2003. Since then its members have worked closely with the Centre, been represented on its advisory panel, acted as judges of awards, and helped to run conferences and workshops, most notably in recent years, in association with the IHR, the HA and History UK.

We have taken a very broad remit for our deliberations and looked at the teaching of History in schools – most notably at A Level – the interface with first year undergraduate studies, the relationship between research and teaching, and – on a broader front – been concerned to monitor the decline in numbers of dedicated adult education departments in which so many History courses once thrived. We have also turned our attention to matters usefully raised by the Research Information Network, namely the impact of the digital age upon our teaching and our resources in particular. To this end we have recently attempted to carry out a survey of what is happening to History resources in university libraries, although with limited response to date.

There are obviously limits to what a committee can achieve, but we hope that we have raised the profile of teaching issues within the RHS, and by taking a strategic approach, have helped to influence policy or provide hard data for the occasional meetings of our President and others with government officials. We lobbied successfully with the examination boards to retain an independent study at A Level; we have urged government to monitor carefully the effects of the dramatic cut to numbers of those training to be secondary school History teachers, now down from around 700 PGCE places in 2006-7, to around 550 this year, and set to fall below 500 next year. It will be interesting to see how many of the current universities offering History PGCE courses – many now with uneconomic groups – will survive over the next few years?

Our work with the Historical Association has made us aware that there is a crisis looming in our secondary schools, where only around one third of all our pupils now take History beyond the age of 14, and even those only gain a limited amount of time each week. Representatives of the major examination boards with whom we have also been working closely confirm the growing need for academics to assist schoolteachers and their pupils with advice on independent studies, use of source materials and general historiographical frameworks. We are currently deliberating on how best we may be able to furnish such support in conjunction probably with the HA.

From the evidence of Ofsted reports, notes from the History RAE panel, analysis of the qualifications of History students going into teaching or research, to the now annual university student evaluations, it is good to see that History is in a thriving state as a discipline. Yet there are clouds looming and it is important that the RHS, the Subject Centre, the HA, the IHR and History UK continue to work closely together for the benefit of all those teaching and studying History.

Andrew Foster, Vice-President and Chair of the RHS Teaching Policy Committee between 2006 and 2009.

Forthcoming Events in 2010

- 12th January** — Enhancing Learning and Teaching Through Assessment and Feedback
University of Chichester
- 29th January** — Teaching as a PhD Researcher: Midlands
University of Nottingham
- 17th February** — Teaching Marxism Workshop
The Peoples History Museum in Manchester
- 26th February** — Sharing and Showcasing Humanities Teaching Resources:
The HumBox Collection
*University of Sheffield, Douglas Knoop Center
Humanities Research Institute*
- 12th March** — Teaching and Learning with Visual Sources
University of Manchester
- 12th March** — Irish Studies: Postgraduate Study Day
University of Warwick
- 23rd to 25th March** — 12th Annual Teaching and Learning in History Conference
Lady Margaret Hall, University of Oxford
- 25th June** — History in the Universities Schools' Conference
Canterbury Christchurch University

For information on any of these events please contact the History Subject Centre

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