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Engaging with Europe

Europe's difficulties have made exciting headlines in recent months. Split over Iraq, unable to agree on a Constitution and struggling with the economic stability pact, Europe looks to be on the ropes. But appearances may be deceptive. It may not be quite business as usual, but it is certainly a case of Europe attempting to find shared solutions to difficult problems, such as the nature of the new world order, the global economic crisis and the addition of new member-states to the EU. At the very least, it provides lots of meaty issues for colleagues in European Studies to get their teeth into. And in view of the world-wide scale of the problems, it should also provide an impetus to Area Studies concerned with other parts of the world.

Higher Education provides a microcosm of the broader picture as Europe attempts to respond to global changes by creating a European Higher Education Area, capable of matching the U.S. and Japan, by 2010. That is a tall order and, as the EU Commission has warned, unlikely to be met without urgent reforms.¹ In response, the package of changes known as the Bologna Process is likely to be accelerated, with resulting opportunities and threats.

The harmonisation of taught degrees in a two-cycle structure may seem to sit comfortably with our undergraduate and post-graduate cycles, but as European partners align their programmes we are likely to find that aspects of our practice begin to look anomalous. Four-year Bachelors, one-year Masters, undergraduate Masters, and such, will come under increased pressure to align with 3 + 2 patterns. We will have to make more effort on credit transfer, especially with credit accumulation. We will have to increase our efforts to define our relations with careers and employment, already high on our own government's list of priorities. And we shall have to do more to encourage our students to study or work abroad – not just language undergraduates.

We shall certainly be driven more deeply into the familiar tensions between co-operation and competition as non-UK partners loom larger on our horizon. Good links will become more important in both teaching and research. But as more continental universities offer programmes through English, they will also compete with us for the best students.

The Subject Centre is doing its best to keep abreast of developments, and is encouraged by the increased national awareness of the issues. We participate actively in the European Language Council and the Thematic Network in languages associated with it. The latest avatar of this, TNP3, draws in a strong UK contingent, including our partners CILT, the National Centre for Languages. We are planning a future event around this, focusing on three aspects: preparing students to work in the language-related industries, general skills for employment, and the interface between HE and other sectors of education.

As the LTSN prepares to morph into the new Higher Education Academy, we shall be keen to develop its international dimension and its engagement with Europe. We are hopeful that this may be among the Academy's priorities. The Subject Centre will continue in its present form for at least the next academic year, though there may be some changes after that time. What these changes will be, it is too early to predict. But whatever the future holds, it seems certain that we shall need to help people in Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies to engage more effectively with Europe. We may also need to help our colleagues in the wider European area engage with UK partners, to mutual benefit.

Michael Kelly
Director of the Subject Centre

¹ Communication from the Commission, "Education and Training 2010" The Success of the Lisbon Strategy hinges on urgent reforms (2003)

European Commission Action Plan: Promoting language learning and linguistic diversity

Following a wide public consultation last year, the European Commission has launched an action plan (2004-2006) for promoting language learning and linguistic diversity in Europe. Key areas for action are:

- Extending the benefits of life-long language learning to all citizens
- Improving language teaching
- Creating a more language-friendly environment



Education and Culture

A series of specific measures utilising existing funding programmes have been proposed.

http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/lang/languages/index_en.html

Recent Subject Centre Events

IALIC Pedagogical Forum Locating the Intercultural in an Educational Context

December 2003

This unique event, chaired by Professor Mike Byram (Durham), formed part of the 4th Annual Conference of the International Association of Language and Intercultural Communication (IALIC). It explored specific issues relating to the learning, teaching and assessing of intercultural skills, including examples of practical approaches to intercultural teaching and research findings on the impact/outcomes of intercultural learning.

Laura Lengel and Brigit Talkington (Bowling Green University, USA) gave a plenary on their research into intercultural teaching worldwide while Hugh Starkey (Leicester, UK) presented his research into how positive intercultural experiences influence the motivation and enthusiasm of language teachers.

There were also parallel panel sessions which included short presentations on themes such as the European Language Portfolio, identity construction of the L2 user, the use of film for intercultural training and the metanarrative of TESOL. Also included in the panels were short Descriptions of Practice (course outlines with an intercultural component). These included courses in intercultural communication, intercultural awareness for translators, observing culture. Abstracts and Descriptions of Practice can be viewed on the Subject Centre website which will also be publishing full papers from the Forum. This is the first time that the Subject Centre has collaborated in this way and it proved very successful both as a joint venture and as an experiment in developing a Pedagogical Forum model. We hope to continue our association with IALIC and to work with other subject associations in the future.

www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk/events/archive

English Language and Linguistics: from 'A' to BA

October 2003

“I now have a greater understanding of students' experiences and expectations leading from their A level studies.”

As with the Intercultural Learning Pedagogical Forum, this event was something of a new venture for the Subject Centre as it involved speakers and participants from a range of sectors and disciplines not normally involved in our activities. This overview of the nature of English Language teaching at 'A' level and its relationship to Linguistics in general, and more specifically to English Language and Linguistics at university, very effectively highlighted what both universities and students can and cannot expect of the subject when it comes to translating knowledge and skills from school to university. Colleagues with expertise in 'A' level teaching (Tim Shortis, AQA, and Andrew Moore, East Riding Yorkshire Council) demonstrated that while students will have covered some of the 'basics' of Linguistics in their 'A' level programme, there is a strong focus on language for communication, writing skills and historical linguistics while the standard components of a traditional Linguistics programme at university (syntax, semantics, morphology etc.) may not have been covered in very much detail. However HE does have a part to play in helping to bridge the gap between school and university, as exemplified by Sheffield University's 'A' Level Study Days, which play a very useful role in introducing students to university Linguistics while at Lancaster they have created an English Language and Linguistics course that complements the 'A' Level. Feedback from the event indicated that this dialogue between sectors and disciplines was long overdue and very much appreciated. We hope to provide more such bridging initiatives in this and other areas.

www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk/events/archive

Selling Languages: Challenges and Solutions

November 2003

This event examined recent research findings into learner attitudes towards languages, early language learning and ab initio degrees. It also explored some recent curriculum developments that have been adopted to address changing market needs in Languages in Higher Education.

Papers were presented on the following themes:

- The effectiveness of primary language learning in Scotland (Joanna McPake, Scottish CILT)
- Ab initio language degrees in Scottish universities (David Bowker, University of Paisley)
- Learner attitudes to language learning (Linda Fisher, Cambridge University; Catherine Watts, University of Brighton and Terry King, University College London)
- The National Recognition Scheme (Kate Green, DfES)
- Foundation Degrees (Tim Connell, City University)
- The year abroad/the three-year degree (John Russell, University of Bradford)

The key issues to emerge from these presentations and subsequent discussions centred on employability and on the need to improve the relationship between higher education institutions and schools.

A full report on the event can be accessed on the Subject Centre website at:

www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk/events/archive

Research Project Update

The development of criticality among undergraduates in Modern Languages

Ros Mitchell, Brenda Johnston, Florence Myles and Peter Ford
(University of Southampton)

This ESRC-funded research project based at the University of Southampton has been looking at the development of criticality among undergraduates in Modern Languages and another contrasting subject, Social Work Studies. We are using the term 'criticality' rather than the more traditional term 'critical thinking', to reflect our broad interpretation of the goals of higher education, to include critical self-reflection and critical action as well as critical thinking. The development of criticality in undergraduates has long been a central aim of higher education (e.g. Newman 1989), and there are many policy statements on the need to develop undergraduates' critical abilities. However, the processes by which criticality may develop and the shape it takes in different fields are poorly understood. This project seeks to investigate those processes.

The criticality project aims to develop:

- an integrated theoretical interdisciplinary framework for understanding the teaching and learning of criticality;
- rich empirical descriptions of how criticality develops during undergraduate education;
- comparison of the reality of student learning with policy initiatives and statements;
- a foundation for future work on (a) the transfer of criticality to other disciplines and life situations and (b) more effective teaching and learning of criticality at undergraduate level.

A crucial element in understanding student learning is to access the developmental processes they are going through, rather than just examining final written or spoken products, although those too are important. Last year, we observed ML classes, and interviewed lecturers and case study students in three different years of study, tracking individual students through a sequence of interviews and also tracking how they set about their assessed work, both written and spoken. We are now doing our analysis and will soon be able to make comments about the nature of development in Modern Languages degrees.

Initial analysis suggests that content courses in Modern Languages encourage student development in various areas: formal knowledge including information location and management skills, self-reflection, networking skills, interpersonal development. Even when a student's final product and grade are disappointing, they may have been through a rich developmental process which this project can document. The Year Abroad provides what is for many a life changing experience, expanding horizons and coping abilities beyond that of many other undergraduates. Language courses develop a range of study skills, including close analysis of text, and awareness of 'voice', appropriacy and the intercultural nature of communication.

The LLAS Subject Centre and the Criticality Project team are running a one day event on 28 May at CILT in London where the contributions ML study can make to student development will be discussed. Specific focus will be on the contributions which language study, the Year Abroad, and 'content' courses in literature, culture etc. can make to student development. Numbers attending the May 28 seminar will be limited. Expressions of interest in attending this event should be sent to B.H.M.Johnston@soton.ac.uk. The team will also make a presentation about their work at the Subject Centre 2004 conference.

www.critical.soton.ac.uk

A new umbrella for the Area Studies community

Attendees at our Area Studies events have for some time felt that Area Studies is in need of an organisation which could develop a sense of community amongst multidisciplinary Area Studies subject associations, represent the interests of Area Studies to government and initiate strategies for the promotion of Area Studies. The Subject Centre is delighted to have been involved in brokering this event, which has led to the formation of UKCASA (United Kingdom Council of Area Studies Associations).

UKCASA was formed on 5 November 2003 at an open meeting at CILT. To date, 16 Area Studies Associations have come together to form the council, the aims of which are as follows:

- To promote, support and defend Area Studies programmes
- To provide a voice for Area Studies in dialogue with different government agencies
- To develop a collaborative community amongst Area Studies Associations and practitioners
- To promote interdisciplinary research and teaching about specific regions of the world

Professor Dick Ellis, Nottingham Trent University and Dr Peter Matanle, University of Sheffield, were elected as founding chair and vice-chair respectively.

To find out more contact John Canning j.canning@soton.ac.uk.
A website for UKCASA will be launched soon.

News in Brief

Rationales

Following a proposal for the development of a taxonomy of rationales to 'enhance the attraction of languages and lead to a wider social and academic profile' (A new landscape for languages, Kelly and Jones, 2003), the Subject Centre has begun work on devising a comprehensive set of rationales for language learning which is due for publication later in 2004.

Residence Abroad

The Subject Centre held an expert focus group meeting on residence abroad at the British Council in London on 18 December 2003. Current issues in residence abroad were identified at the meeting and a series of possible marketing strategies were highlighted. Following on from this, the Subject Centre will be organising an event to promote residence abroad on 7 May 2004.

Employability

The Subject Centre is undertaking a study on how students in Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies are equipped to enter the workplace after graduation.

You can help us by telling us what you are doing to prepare students for the workplace and what you think the rationales for studying languages and related studies are.

www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk/resources/resourcesitem.aspx?resourceid=1668

For more information on these events see our event page

www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk/events

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- Regular mailings of this publication
- Free copies of other Subject Centre publications

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www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk/maillinglist

Forthcoming Events

Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies Conference 2004 Navigating the new landscape for languages

30 June - 1 July 2004
School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS),
University of London

This two-day conference jointly organised by the Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies and CILT (in partnership with UCML, SCHML, AULC and ALL) aims to bring together all those concerned with the development of policy, strategy and the curriculum in languages and related studies in Higher Education, both in the UK and internationally.

The conference will address national, international and institutional policy issues as well as innovation with respect to curriculum design, content and delivery.

Themes

- Collaboration with other sectors of education/marketing and recruitment
- Income generation
- Accreditation and recognition schemes
- Innovation in curriculum structure and content

Understanding the world: Developing interdisciplinary area studies to meet the needs of the 21st century

The day will be of particular interest to those from all disciplines in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences.

Themes

- Tourism as a major force in intercultural communication
- Teaching and Learning in African Studies
- Teaching economics in Middle East Studies
- Health and safety in residence abroad

Sir Harold Walker, who was UK ambassador to Iraq during the First Gulf War, will speaking on the topic of 'Why the UK needs Area Studies?'

Date and Location	Event
19 February 2004 University of Birmingham	Teaching and learning Africa a workshop organised as part of the Area Studies project
20 February 2004 CILT, Covent Garden	Extending good practice in less widely used less taught (LWULT) languages
27 February 2004 CILT, Covent Garden	Developing materials for the university language learner
24 March 2004 Woburn House, London	Understanding the world: Developing interdisciplinary Area Studies to meet the needs of the 21st century
7 May 2004 British Council, London	Residence Abroad
14 May 2004 Kingwood City Learning Centre, Fulham	Using PowerPoint in Modern Language teaching in HE
28 May 2004 CILT, Covent Garden	The Development of Criticality in Modern Language Students