

Atlas: The Bulletin of the Area Studies Project ISSN 1740-7672

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atlas

the bulletin of the Area Studies Project

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ATLAS is the Area Studies Project bulletin published by the Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies. Editor: John Canning e-mail j.canning@soton.ac.uk

The Area Studies Project was launched in October 2002 by the LTSN Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies (LLAS). Collaborating with partner Subject Centres, the project aims to support practitioners teaching on multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary courses in Area Studies subjects across a wide range of disciplines.

Atlas aims to:

1. Publish articles which provide examples of good practice in the teaching and learning of Area Studies.

These may include, but are not limited to, articles on:

- Course design
- Interdisciplinary learning and teaching
- Marketing Area Studies courses to potential applicants.
- Area Studies graduate employability
- The role of language learning in Area Studies

2. Disseminate news within the Area Studies community.
3. Publicise events of interest to the Area Studies community.

Notes for Contributors

Contributions are welcome on any aspect of teaching and learning in Area Studies subjects in Higher Education. These may include case studies of teaching and learning practice, comments on educational trends and policy and discussions concerning multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary teaching. Articles should be submitted to the editor in MSWord or RTF format and should be about 1000-2000 words and use the Harvard Referencing System. Articles accepted for publication may be subject to editing. Illustrations and graphs should be provided in a reproducible form (which may include reduction) and should be provided in a separate file from the text of the article. All visual materials should have copyright permission secured by the contributor.

Reviews

Reviews of books, websites and information technology relating to the teaching and learning of Area Studies in Higher Education are also welcome. Reviews should not exceed 500 words.

Other

We also welcome letters to the Editor and comments on previously published articles, reports from Annual General Meetings of Area Studies Associations, Area Studies Conference reports and other news items (max 150 words).

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Edited by
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Editorial: Great challenges but greater opportunities for Area Studies

John Canning

Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies

Area Studies in the news

Since my last editorial back in May 2003, Area Studies has received much attention in the news though not for the reasons we would like. Departmental closures in Middle East and East Asian Studies at Durham made headlines in the national press during the summer and despite widespread protest the decision was finally taken to close these departments down.

Area Studies has been in the news across the Atlantic too. The establishment of Area Studies in the USA under Title VI reflects the high status given to Area Studies as a federal government priority under the 1965 Higher Education Act. "The security, stability, and economic vitality of the United States in a complex global era depend upon American experts in and citizens knowledgeable about world regions, foreign languages, and international affairs, as well as upon a strong research base in these areas." (US Department of Education 1998).

However, US Area Studies departments have recently been accused of being hotbeds of Anti-Americanism, staffed by unpatriotic and subversive faculty who are a threat to, rather than the guardians of US national security. This news has provoked much discussion amongst practitioners in the United Kingdom in Area Studies and in disciplines such as Post-Colonial Studies and Human Geography.

UKCASA

However, against this backdrop of pessimism, Area Studies is fighting back. On 5 November 2003, representatives of Area Studies Associations came together to form the United Kingdom Council of Area Studies Associations (UKCASA) in an event entitled 'Opening an Umbrella for Area Studies' organised by the Subject Centre. UKCASA will provide a powerful voice in furthering the sense of community which is beginning to develop in Area Studies. The aims of UKCASA, as outlined in its constitution, are as follows:

- To promote, support and defend Area Studies programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate level in UK Higher Education Institutions.

- To provide a voice for Area Studies in dialogue with different government agencies across the UK.
- 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 of Nottingham Trent University and Peter Matanle of the University of Sheffield were elected as founding chair and vice chair respectively. Full elections to the offices of UKCASA will be held in London on 6 February 2004. To learn more about why forming UKCASA has been necessary, please read the article by Dick Ellis in this edition of Atlas.

The Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning (FDTL)

FDTL has just entered its fifth and final stage and Celtic Studies is one of the eligible subjects. We are delighted to see that some exciting bids have been put together (with the help of the Subject Centre) and we wish bidders every success when the proposals are judged.

The Area Studies Project

The English Subject Centre has held two very successful events, 'Teaching American Literature' and 'Irish Studies in the Curriculum'. These well-attended and well-received events demonstrated that many issues surrounding interdisciplinary programmes and teaching are shared across Area Studies. The Economics Subject Centre has published a case study of teaching economics in an Area Studies programme on its website. The Subject Centre for Sociology, Anthropology and Politics held an event 'Teaching and Learning Africa - New Themes, Techniques and Technologies' in February 2004 and GEES (Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences) held a one day conference on support and safety in fieldwork, work placements and cultural exchanges. Back 'home' at Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies, the project hit the road in February when we headed to Stirling for 'Teaching methodology, philosophy and social theory in Area Studies'.

The project reaches its pinnacle on 24 March 2004 with a one-day Area Studies conference, organised by all the participating Subject Centres. We are delighted that Sir Harold Walker, who was UK ambassador to Iraq during the First Gulf War, has agreed to address the conference. The conference will be an opportunity to draw together many of the different threads which have arisen from the Area Studies Project as well as hearing from Sir Harold Walker who strongly believes that it is important for the UK to produce graduates who are familiar with the societies and cultures of regions such as the Middle East.

2004 is set to be an historic year for Area Studies. The challenges are great, but the opportunities are greater. With the Area Studies Project entering its climax and the formation of UKCASA, Area Studies is better equipped to face these challenges and create new opportunities than at any time in the past generation.

Reference

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(1998) Last accessed 19 January 2004

Why Area Studies needs an Umbrella Organisation: Some Thoughts

R. J. Ellis

Nottingham Trent University

This is the text of a talk given by R. J. Ellis at a recent meeting aimed at establishing an umbrella organisation bringing together, in a common Council, representatives from all of the twenty or so Area Studies organisations.

If one looks across the field of post-war UK Higher Education and considers its development, one can repeatedly identify how significant interventions have been made by Subject Associations. In turn, within Area Studies itself, a large number of individual subject Associations exist, and each has made a mark upon the development of the Area Study that it represents. Area Studies Associations have been highly effective, but by and large one thing differentiates them from other HE subject associations: size. Of course, the size-range of the twenty or so different Area Studies Associations varies hugely. The British Association of American Studies (BAAS) and the Standing Conference of Heads of European Studies (SCHES), at one end of the spectrum, are very much larger than, say, the British Association for Korean Studies (BAKS) or the British Association for Canadian Studies (BACS). But even BAAS is comparatively small when set alongside many other subject associations. The Council for College and University English (CCUE), for example, is very much larger. Its membership encompasses virtually every HE institution in the UK and its regular meetings reflect this composition. As a consequence of this profile, it has been regularly able to attract speakers from HEFCE, the AHRB, and from government; Geoff Crossick and Sir Brian Fender provide two noteworthy examples in recent years. Such occasions also lead to the chance for developing a dialogue with such visitors, in question and answer sessions, and more informally (e.g. over refreshments). In other words, subject associations that are larger in size have, at least arguably, rather more access to and so more influence over those decision-making bodies affecting academics' working lives.

For some time now, I have been working with the Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies as the Chair of the Specialist Advisory Group for Area Studies. This has brought me into close contact with the University Council of Modern Languages (UCML). As a result I have been able to watch this organisation at work, as it were. I have come to see how

it operates as a very effective, politically astute body, which certainly, for example, helped influence the AHRB's decision to accord Languages the status of a 'minority subject' (alongside Engineering) needing special support. And it is a body well able to produce impressive empirically based studies to back up its arguments. Again, it is a very large organisation, and thus able to generate substantial influence.

All this suggests that the different Area Studies Associations might usefully group themselves together in an umbrella organisation. An organisation called the Coordinating Council of Area Studies Associations (CCASA) sought to bring together a select number of Area Studies Associations in a common body. But CCASA no longer represents a viable solution. Firstly for the simple reason that CCASA seems to have gone into liquidation, not having met for several years. Secondly because its focus was almost solely upon issues related to research and the funding of research, to the virtual exclusion of teaching (no longer a viable position to take up, and one quite simply out of line with the sort of coverage generally provided by large Subject Associations). And thirdly, for (more or less) political reasons to do with CCASA's (beleaguered) belief that, since Modern European Languages were so adept at looking after themselves at the expense of other, lesser taught Area Studies, CCASA would only allow onto its Council non-Modern European Area Study Associations (so, for example, excluding the University Association of Contemporary European Studies) – a discrimination surely well past its sell-by date. All Area Studies now feel somewhat beleaguered, in an HE climate of budgetary shortfalls and tight recruitment. Universal Area Studies co-operation just seems much more logical now.

This is particularly the case because 'Area Studies', far more than previously, is now beginning to emerge as a recognisable label. The establishment of the Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies was

in itself one sign of this – a sign rendered all the more visible by the fact that, almost at the same time, a requirement was placed upon the Area Studies community to come together to devise a QAA ‘Area Studies’ benchmarking document. Though the benchmarking document that resulted is a very effective piece of work (Quality Assurance Agency, 2002), it is fairly clear, with hindsight, that things would have been easier had a tradition of working together already existed. And we have not seen the last of benchmarking: Quality Audits will still use the benchmarking document, and from time to time it will, doubtless, require some form of updating.

These developments mark some sort of governmental recognition of Area Studies as a sensible and meaningful label – ironically, very late in the day, given how recent debates concerning globalisation, diasporas and migrations, the ‘post-national’, identity and performance have problematised the relationship of space and place, with fertile and exciting consequences for Area Studies (see Ludden no date.). The question must, then, arise: what do we want to do about this new visibility? How can it be used profitably, if at all? I want to suggest that it is, quite simply, time for the Area Studies community to come together collectively (however difficult it may be to find the time!) to reflect upon its condition, its direction, its strengths and its weaknesses.

This could become a very pressing need as arrangements for the next RAE come fully on stream. We know that HEFCE is expected to reduce the number of panels that are set up to assess the different subjects. This makes it quite probable, or at least possible, that American Studies may not survive as a discrete panel. Even European Studies looks vulnerable. Is it, then, in our interest to campaign for an Area Studies panel? Or how will we otherwise negotiate, if at all, for a clear channel to be established down which Area Studies’ RAE submissions might be directed? There is, certainly, an opportunity and probably a need to debate this issue as a community.

This consideration almost certainly interlocks with other ways which Area Studies may want to set up debates concerning its position.

Firstly, it is perhaps advantageous to come together as a community to consider issues of resourcing (for example, in the terrain of collaboration between institutions, which is emerging as a priority development in the eyes of both the DfES and HEFCE).

Secondly, it would be helpful for the community to be able to react to the widespread adoption of claims to

interdisciplinarity within the Humanities and Social Sciences by articulating more fully than before precisely how its blend of multi- and inter-disciplinary work offers something different, distinctive and intellectually important to its practitioners and its students. Ludden comments on the relative weakness of Area Studies’ theorisations of the approach to interdisciplinarity that Area Studies uses by describing it as ‘mushy’. (Ludden no date).

Thirdly, it would surely be advantageous for the community to come together to consider how it can develop across-the-board strategies for raising the profile of Area Studies, especially in the field of student recruitment.

Finally, it would also probably be helpful to develop generic arguments defining how Area Studies can position itself in terms of Widening Participation, Knowledge Transfer and other contemporary debates of this kind.

However, perhaps the most pressing reason for UKCASA’s establishment stems from the way in which Area Studies in general is facing some difficulties (ones not unconnected with a tight recruitment situation). Recurrently, as Area Studies practitioners come together, details come out about course closures or other kinds of cutbacks. Therefore, we could very usefully develop some arguments that will help defend Area Studies in general, and/or which can be adapted and applied in more particular circumstances. Once again, pooling ideas could be of inestimable value.

Such a defence function is in itself a time-honoured aspect of Subject Associations’ activities (one only has to look as far as the endearingly entitled History in the Universities Defence Group). And there are real issues, particularly resource issues, to address in drawing up a defence:

- How does one handle the way that Area Studies, being multi- and inter-disciplinary in its approach, is not cheap to resource, especially in library terms?
- How does one deal with the issue of the position and centrality of language work in some Area Studies provisions, particularly in resource terms?
- How does one deal with the need to maintain good recruitment?
- How does one deal with the issue of placements or exchanges abroad?

And so on. Perhaps the best way to unpack how these issues can coalesce is to take a particular example, but, since that would be invidious, let us consider a hypothetical case: “Atlantean Studies” at Rugeley University.

Atlantean Studies at Rugeley can trace its origins back to the “Whitby Report” of the 1950s, which observed that there was a severe under-provision of courses in “Atlantean Studies” and “Pacifanean Studies”, despite the growing global significance of Atlantis and Pacifanea as emerging “tiger economies”. Consequently, measures were introduced to enable the introduction of these two Area Studies and Rugeley University benefited from this. It also benefited from quite substantial support from the Atlantean government, specifically for the development of library and related resources.

However, over the years, Rugeley found it expensive to resource Atlantean Studies, and it proved difficult to achieve good levels of recruitment with any sort of consistency. In turn, the Department only scored a 3a in the RAE, so has just recently lost all its RAE income. Additionally, as is the case in almost all of HE, Rugeley University’s financial situation is precarious, and so budgetary economies needed to be effected.

Rugeley University has therefore come to the conclusion that it makes clear financial and strategic sense to close down Atlantean Studies – not least because closing down Atlantean Studies is relatively easy to do. The marginal costs will prove to be low. Most of the staff need not be made redundant. Those teaching Atlantean History can be moved over to the History Department, those teaching Atlantean Geography to Geography, the Literature Staff to (Comparative) Literature in the English Department, and Atlantean language staff can be shifted over to the University-wide Language Programme. The course leader is coming up to retirement, as well. So there just is no need to contemplate the need for expensive, confrontational redundancies.

This sort of tale is becoming increasingly familiar: “Pacifanean Studies” at the University of Uttoxeter can provide another example. Most of the reasons for threatening the closure of Pacifanean Studies at Uttoxeter and Atlantean Studies at Rugeley are held in common, though the Research argument differs somewhat. Pacifanean Studies at Uttoxeter did better than Rugeley’s Atlantean Studies in the 2001 RAE by being awarded a 4, but since most of the rest of the University scored a 5, the result dragged Uttoxeter down the league tables. And, furthermore, Pacifanean

Studies did not exist as a separate Department, but only as a degree programme drawing on support from several different Departments. And so... not on, but off: Pacifanean Studies at Uttoxeter looks set to go the same way as Atlantean Studies at Rugeley: Pacifanean Studies’ lack of Departmental status makes it even easier to close down.

What is badly needed is to develop some sort of counter-discourse in defence of such Area Studies, one based in large part upon identified generic arguments that would be of use in preserving not only Rugeley’s Atlantean Studies and Uttoxeter’s Pacifanean Studies but any other threatened Area Studies programmes. And I think these arguments exist. These counter-arguments in part – especially at the moment – can draw upon issues of national security (and perhaps we should not be shy about playing this powerful, if ideologically complicated, card). We know, for example that, during the Afghanistan eruption, there was almost no academic community that could be turned to for inputs concerning Afghan society and culture – its current construction and its historical derivations – and that there was some government concern over this near-vacuum (Ehteshami 2001). Something of the same thing happened in the aftermath of 9/11. But we certainly also need something more to set alongside these national security ‘panic-button’ arguments, currently so much in vogue.

Perhaps, for example, we could and should invoke the American example, where the United States government does take a view about supporting Area Studies. In the US some distinct funding exists for ‘Area Studies’ (which has always proved to be a label in more common currency across the Atlantic, see Ludden no date.). Perhaps we should now advance the argument that similar support should be considered in the UK. Perhaps the time has come to argue for a new report, along the lines of the Scarborough report drawn up during the 1950s. Perhaps this could consider and, best of all, try to measure empirically the usefulness of Area Studies in developing trade and economic links by establishing a community of knowledgeable experts on different overseas areas? Having a body of students and academics working on a geographical area also customarily leads to the establishment of exchange and placement programmes, so promoting international understanding and further exchange. Universities are involved, housing as they do a significant segment of the upcoming intellectual elite of a country. UKCASA could consider and perhaps develop all these arguments.

But there may also be other bases upon which to advance an argument, of less specific but still real relevance. For example, it can and perhaps should be argued that the interdisciplinary nature of Area Studies gives its students a uniquely in-depth understanding and appreciation of what intercultural competence is, how it is made up and how it can be developed. Such intercultural competence is, arguably, a transferable skill, of general use in the labour market. For example, more and more large (and small) corporations have real needs in the field of intercultural competence, and not just in their personnel departments. In addition, Area Studies students (and staff!) have developed a real understanding of how issues of globalisation must be articulated in complex ways, taking account of specific, intervening national and ethnic issues. Thus Sony's advocacy of glocalism ('think globally, act locally') has been rearticulated by Ulrich Beck's and others' insistence that globalisation be identified as constituting not only such corporate-led 'globalisation from above' but also 'globalisation from below' (Beck 1997: 14, 68, see also Gerle 1995, 2000). And, of course such complex processes of globalisation, both from 'above' and 'below', are complicated by local and regional, as well as national, considerations, controversies and interventions. Area Studies, generically, can play a significant role in the articulation of such considerations as these, but perhaps what remains to be done is to try to characterise more fully what exactly is contributed by 'Area Studies' in these terrains, and in what ways exactly these contributions are enhanced by Area Studies' particular interdisciplinary approaches (which in turn perhaps do still need greater characterisation). There are, for example, risks as well as advantages in stressing how Area Studies emphatically relies, more than any other subject, upon inter- and multi-disciplinary approaches to deliver its curriculum – risks to do with the way students (and even academics) may in the process fail to attain the depth of knowledge or coverage needed to generate useful understandings (Tanabe no date).

I believe there is, then, another clear role for UKCASA in this epistemological arena. UKCASA can and should function not only as a forum for developing arguments to point out just why the effecting of short-term economies in curriculum delivery might have longer-term disadvantages of complicated kinds, but also to promote the development of broader reflections upon Area Studies, what it is and what it delivers. Through the networking and exchange it can foster, UKCASA will

prove to be invaluable to the Area Studies community as a whole.

The above paragraphs may read somewhat polemically, partly because they are a version of a paper that I delivered at a recent meeting, sponsored by the Area Studies Project, seeking to enable the establishment of an Area Studies umbrella organisation, and partly because I have long believed that such a step is necessary. Perhaps this is no bad thing. But my talk was only one of several, and two others, by Professor Michael Smith of Glasgow Caledonian University and by John Selby, HEFCE's West Midlands Regional Consultant, can provide me with two further arguments as to why UKCASA's establishment is a worthwhile step. Professor Smith has carried out a survey on 'The State of European Studies', a report commissioned by the Standing Conference of Heads of European Studies (SCHES), which explores some trends in the delivery of this particular Area Study, that had some clear resonances for others in the field of Area Studies. Without UKCASA, arguably, few outside of SCHES would have become aware of this report, despite its generic implications and usefulness. John Selby's presentation, whilst stressing that HEFCE doesn't "do" Area Studies and that institutions are regarded as autonomous, did by implication define a number of ways in which Area Studies might, as a community, develop arguments that could help establish a supportive dialogue between HEFCE and HE institutions, nationally and regionally. These arguments had to do with, for example, an imminent redefinition of HEFCE's category of 'minority subject' (currently embracing Languages and Engineering) and how, recently, there has been some indication from the government that issues of national interest might be involved in establishing some sort of co-ordination for the delivery of Area Studies. For example, the AHRB's 'Ring-Fenced Doctoral Awards Programme' has identified 'East European and Balkan Studies' as an area needing ring-fencing, given the way provision in this area has become so etiolated in the UK. In a sense, then, I would claim that Smith and Selby have already shown us how UKCASA might be of immense significance in advancing the cause of Area Studies in the UK by generating new opportunities to set up dialogues, both inside the Area Studies community and with those outside. So please do get your Area Studies Association or other organisation to become involved.

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Student Learning Styles: A Challenge for Teachers in Multi-Disciplinary and Inter-Disciplinary Settings

John Bradbeer

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This article is adapted from a talk given by the author at the Area Studies Project event, Hybridity, contact zones, borderlands, liminal spaces: interdisciplinary and intercultural learning in Area Studies curricula held in May 2003.

Introduction

I became aware of the difficulties faced by students on interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary courses when I noticed that the students taking geography in joint honours programmes usually under-performed in their assessments compared to single honours students. When I talked to my colleagues in the other disciplines and got them to check out the results in these, the pattern seemed to be confirmed. I also remember comparing notes with friends at university about lectures we had attended and finding that, while we broadly got the same understanding (or sometimes the same misunderstanding) from lectures, their notes looked very different to mine.

We are well used to issues about different sorts of students as a result of widening participation agendas. Most of the concern expressed is about disability, age or ethnicity. What perhaps is over-looked is that these different students also bring with them a greater diversity of learning styles. Sternberg has popularised the idea of multiple intelligences and many teachers in higher education are aware of David Kolb's cycle of experiential learning, not least because of its enormous popularity with staff developers. It is suggested that good and effective learning completes a cycle:



Probably fewer teachers know that Kolb also developed ideas on learning styles and the learning styles that characterise different disciplines. In this article I shall briefly introduce work on learning styles by Kolb and their adaptation by Honey and Mumford and show how these learning styles are deployed by students in various disciplinary settings.

Four Learning Styles

Behind the learning cycle, Kolb argues, are two fundamental axes of experience, a horizontal axis that opposes the use of experience either by extending it or by transforming it through reflection, and a vertical axis that opposes gaining information and experience through accepting the flow as it comes with breaking into the flow and attempting to structure it. Kolb then suggests that four learning styles can be derived from these two axes. His learning styles are shown in the table below.

Kolb's Four Learning Styles

<p>Accommodator Carries out plans Interested in action and results Adapts to immediate circumstances Uses a trial and error approach Sets objectives Sets deadlines</p>	<p>Diverger Imaginative and good at generating ideas Can view situations from several angles Open to experience Recognises problems Investigates Senses opportunities</p>
<p>Coverger Good at practical applications Makes decisions Focuses effort Does well where there is one answer Evaluates plans Selects from alternatives</p>	<p>Assimilator Able to create theoretical models Compares alternatives Defines problems Establishes criteria Formulates hypotheses</p>

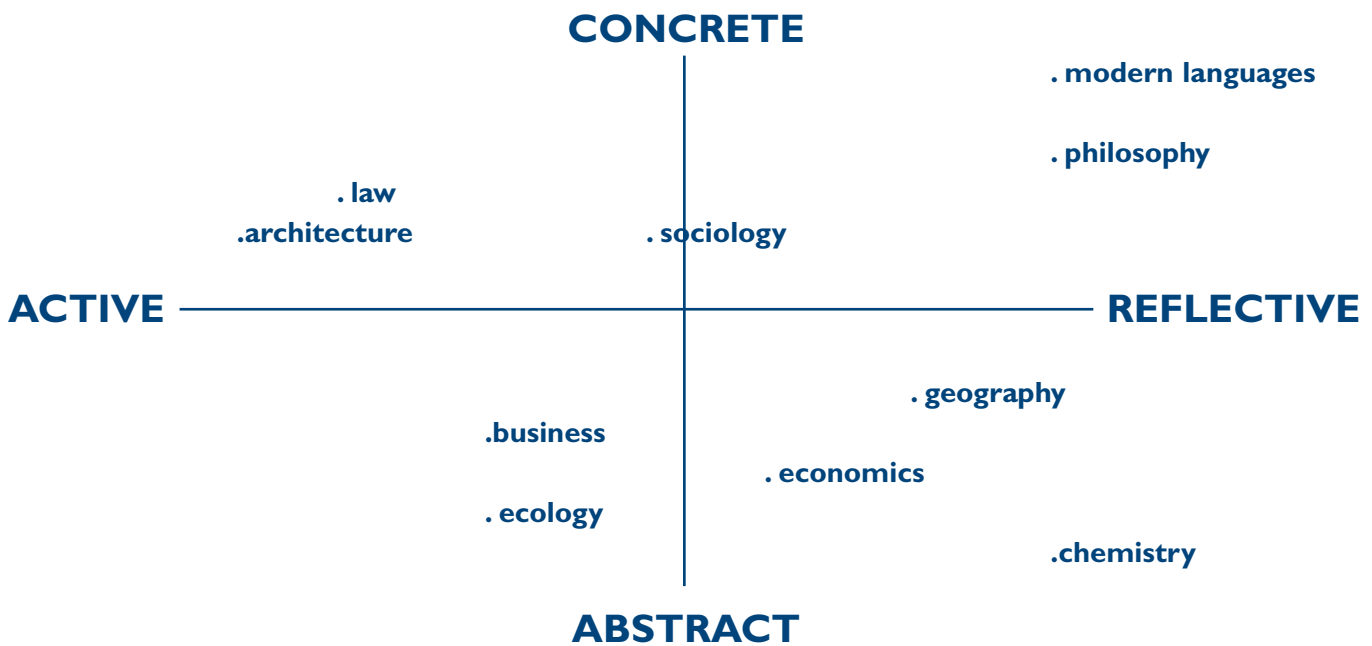
Kolb suggests that people have a dominant or preferred learning style. In the UK, Honey and Mumford have developed a similar classification of learning styles to Kolb, but they contend that people have varying preference or strengths for each of the four learning styles, so that it is possible for an individual to have the capacity and confidence to work with all four styles. The styles Honey and Mumford identify correspond with Kolb's styles as shown in the table below. Honey & Mumford's questionnaire is probably easier to use with students than Kolb's, but it does have a training emphasis in its wording.

Kolb's classification	Honey & Mumford's classification
Assimilator	Theorist
Diverger	Reflector
Converger	Pragmatist
Accommodator	Activist

Disciplines and Learning Styles

Kolb argues that different disciplines operate in distinctive ways and tend to favour a specific style of thinking and working. Indeed, Kolb suggests that all knowledge can be classified as assimilative, divergent, convergent or accommodative. He suggests that individuals will tend to be drawn to disciplines where their learning style is favoured and because of this they will then do well and the association will be consolidated. Based on a fairly large sample of Americans, Kolb suggests this classification of disciplines.

Orientations of academic disciplines in the USA (after Kolb)



The exact location of the disciplines may be contested and of course may not be the same for other countries. However, there is an important principle to be derived from this classification of disciplines. Students following multi-disciplinary or interdisciplinary programmes of study will find moving between disciplines quite difficult. Moving from a concrete reflective discipline like modern languages to an active abstract discipline like civil engineering will be particularly difficult. Perhaps

rather less challenging for a modern linguist would be to move to another concrete discipline albeit one with a more active dimension, such as law, or to move to another reflective discipline, albeit one with a more abstract dimension such as geography. In theory, at least, switching between disciplines in the same quadrant should be easier as students should be able to continue to use their favoured learning style.

Implications for teaching

There are many implications of differences in learning styles for both teachers and students in higher education. The major challenge to both teachers and students is the realisation that there are other ways of learning than that (those) you habitually use. Teachers will unconsciously use a teaching style that probably broadly follows their learning style and will be perplexed that many students find this teaching demanding or unappealing. Equally, students will find it perplexing that teachers do not do the obvious things when teaching and appear to have little comprehension of the difficulties they are experiencing. So the mere act of explaining that there are different learning styles can open the prospect of more effective dialogue. Students (and teachers) need to become aware of their learning style(s) and of their associated strengths and weaknesses. Use of Kolb's Learning Style Inventory or Honey and Mumford's Learning Style Questionnaire in induction sessions followed by a discussion of the various learning styles is an obvious first step. I prefer to use Honey and Mumford as it gives relative strength of preference for each of the four learning styles. This avoids any implication that there is a correct learning style. However, some caution needs to be employed as students with a low preference for all four learning styles can feel disheartened. Another reason for using some formal instrument to expose students' learning styles is that many students do not recognise their own styles. I have described each of the Honey and Mumford learning styles in turn to my students and asked them to use a scale of 1-5 (1 very unlike me to 5 very like me) to rate themselves. I have then used the formal instrument and I usually find that about a third of the students self-report as the diametric opposite of what the questionnaire suggests.

Knowing one's own learning style and its associated strengths and weaknesses allows both teachers and students to note types of task that will probably prove intellectually and emotionally more demanding. Learning styles are not fixed and can both develop with experience and with deliberate practice. When I first encountered Honey and Mumford's learning styles I correctly guessed that I was a theorist and a reflector, but was surprised to find how strong my activist style was. Presumably years of rushing around in higher education had forced me to become more of an activist. So we should encourage students after developing their preferred learning style(s) to add further styles to their repertoire and more importantly, to recognise the types of task where their usual preferred style might be at a disadvantage.

For students studying on multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary programmes, the ability to recognise the different types of intellectual challenge that each discipline presents is crucial to success. Indeed, most disciplines themselves make variable demands on student learning styles. Honey and Mumford activists would enjoy foreign language conversation but tend to become bored with critical analysis of poetry. Theorists would dislike the immediacy of conversation in a foreign language and probably also struggle with literary criticism but reflectors would enjoy literary criticism. Students who are aware of their own learning styles and of the general pattern of intellectual demands of their various disciplines and sub-disciplines will both enjoy their study more and tend to be more successful.

For teachers, one of the major challenges has to be to recognise that perhaps a minority of students share their own learning style. So at both the course unit and the individual session level, teachers need to try to offer something for each of the learning styles. Use of Kolb's learning cycle can be helpful in planning sessions. There tend to be more Honey and Mumford activists than reflectors in classes and so the reflection on learning probably needs to be built into the session rather than left to students to do in their own time. Assessment too poses its own problems. While it is possible to devise different assessment tasks to appeal to each of the learning styles in turn, it is rarely feasible to have so much assessment in a course unit. So the ideal assessment tasks are those that allow students to approach them from several standpoints and so employ more of the favoured learning style.

Different learning styles imply that students will find general study skills advice either at worst meaningless or simply unhelpful. Much of the advice in general student study guides is perfectly valid, but it may not suit all students. Rather, students need to understand the task demands of study and assignments and then to draw on their own learning style(s) as appropriate, making modifications and watching out for potential pitfalls. With examination or essay questions, activists may misread the question, reflectors may say lots of interesting things but not quite answer the question set, theorists perhaps oversimplify or omit practical examples and pragmatists will have all the up to the minute topical references but not much conceptual base.

Once you have discovered learning styles, I would hope that, as a teacher in higher education, your teaching will never be the same again. Learning style is a complex field and there are many more style dimensions and styles than I have covered in this article. I have indicated a few useful sources for reference to find out more.

Annotated bibliography of references and further reading

Honey, P. and Mumford, A. *The Manual of Learning Styles*. (Maidenhead: Peter Honey, 1992)

Honey, P. and Mumford, A. *Using Your Learning Style* (Maidenhead: Peter Honey, 1995).

These two short books explain the Honey and Mumford learning styles and how teachers and students may use them. See also www.peterhoney.com.

Kolb, D.A. *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*. (Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice Hall, 1984).

This is where Kolb describes both the learning styles and the intellectual character of different disciplines.

Murray-Harvey, R. Learning styles and approaches to learning: distinguishing between concepts and instruments. *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 64 (1994) pp. 373-388

A paper that explains the differences between learning styles and approaches to learning.

Prosser, M. and Trigwell, K. *Understanding Student Learning: The Experience in Higher Education*. (Buckingham: Open University Press and Society for Research into Higher Education, 1999)

This is an accessible review of the research into student learning using an influential approach in higher education research, phenomenography. It does not discuss learning style as such.

Richardson, J. T. E. *Researching Student Learning: Approaches to Studying in Campus-Based and Distance Learning*. (Buckingham: Open University Press and Society for Research into Higher Education, 2000).

This is a good if rather demanding overview of much of the research into student learning and Richardson discusses the strengths and weaknesses of some of the many instruments devised to identify approaches and style of learning.

Riding, R. J. and Rayner, S. G. (eds.) *International Perspectives on Individual Differences Volume 1: Cognitive Styles*. (Stamford CT: Ablex Publishing, 2000)

This is a very useful collection of papers covering a variety of cognitive styles and different ways of examining them.

Sadler-Smith, E. 'Learning style': frameworks and instruments. *Educational Psychology*. 17.1/2 (1997) pp. 51-63

A paper that does just what its title suggests!

Sternberg, R. J. *Thinking Styles*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997)

Sternberg introduces yet another dimension related to but distinct from learning style. A thought-provoking book in many senses of the phrase!

Teaching American Literature and Irish Studies in the Curriculum

Siobhán Holland

English Subject Centre

In the autumn, the English Subject Centre organised two events which related to two of the area studies with which literary study is most closely associated. The events on 'Teaching American Literature' (24 October 2003) and 'Irish Studies in the Curriculum' (7 November 2003) were held at Senate House in London and drew delegates from a wide range of institutional contexts. They also drew on collaborations with projects and organisations with detailed knowledge of the area studies involved. The 'American Literature' event was organised in collaboration with AMATAS: the Americanisation project (www.amatas.org) while the event on Irish Studies was co-organised with the British Association for Irish Studies (www.bais.org.uk) and the Institute of English Studies.

Both events explored the issues involved for lecturers who have to balance their research and teaching affiliations with the structures offered by their institutions. Many of us are happy to identify ourselves as being 'area studies' people while at the same time finding ourselves operating under different identities in practical terms. Lecturers who contribute to 'American Studies' or 'Irish Studies' programmes, for example, are often lodged in English departments and teach to single-discipline undergraduates as well as to those interested in interdisciplinary approaches. Other colleagues are only in a position to offer 'area studies' style modules on pathways or as lone modules within the confines of traditional disciplinary-based programmes.

While 'American studies' academics have traditionally been more likely to have the chance to teach in dedicated programmes they, like their colleagues in Irish Studies, are increasingly likely to find that programmes, departments and even faculties are being adjusted around them in ways that complicate any attempt to promote or maintain area studies programmes or genuinely 'area studies'-inflected ways of reading literature. The plenary speakers, Dick Ellis from Nottingham Trent and Paddy O'Sullivan from the Irish Diaspora Project at Bradford respectively (as well as Roy Foster from Oxford who responded to Paddy's paper), helpfully explored the issues raised by sets of interdisciplinary, disciplinary and institutional affiliations.

As both events were concerned to some extent with 'national' literatures, delegates discussed students' preconceptions about the possibility of using literature to gain a totalised, authentic knowledge of a coherent and self-identical society. At the 'Teaching American Literature' event, Bridget Bennett from the University of Leeds discussed the problems involved in persuading students to engage with versions of the past in American literature modules. Jill Terry from University College, Worcester explored the problematics of developing curricula which give students access to minority or countercultural voices while at the same time not writing canonical American texts out of the student experience. Colleagues involved in the AMATAS project shared some of their workshop materials. Meanwhile Paul Giles from Oxford University called into question the frameworks for reading American literature which have become conventional in the delivery of programmes over the last twenty years.

At the Irish Studies symposium, delegates discussed the investment students often have in Irish studies courses in terms of their own searches for 'authentic' identities. Meanwhile Matthew Campbell from the University of Sheffield and Siobhán Holland from the English Subject Centre debated the issues involved in, and strategies for, teaching Irish texts to English students. Derval Tubridy and Lucia Boldrini from Goldsmiths discussed their approaches to teaching Joyce and Beckett both in contexts where Irish issues or contexts are and are not prominent or determining factors. Their papers helpfully raised the problem of exceptionalism: that is the strategy of teaching American or Irish literature as if it is created in totally unique circumstances that render comparisons with other literatures irrelevant.

Increasingly, courses on Irish texts are attracting undergraduates and postgraduates who have few or no preconceptions about Ireland. Paddy Lyons from Glasgow discussed his experiences of designing and delivering Irish literature courses in Scotland as well as elsewhere in the European Union. The issues involved in organising programmes were discussed in detail at both events. Conor Carville and Daragh Minogue from St. Mary's College helpfully shared their experiences of re-

validating and effectively retrenching the role of an Irish Studies programme. They also outlined their FDTL (Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning-Celtic Studies) project bid, which promises to introduce students to interdisciplinary debates on migration and make use of creative writing as a critical approach. Their ideas helped to suggest some of the ways in which innovations in English and Area Studies programmes can be productively and innovatively combined. One of the major drivers for this kind of interaction is offered by the extension funding recently allocated to the AMATAS project which will allow for the further development of its work in and with English departments.

What was striking for those of us who attended both events was the extent to which similar debates emerged and shared concerns were raised. The levels of coherence remind us of the importance of there being a subject centre with responsibility for area studies, and the relevance of its sustained and detailed interactions with other subject disciplines, subject centres, projects and associations which have investments in area studies.



**Woburn House,
20 Tavistock Square,
London WC1H 9HB
24 March 2004 10.30am**

Understanding the world: Developing interdisciplinary Area Studies to meet the needs of the 21st century

This event is part of the Area Studies Network, a collaborative project between six partner Subject Centres:

- Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies
- English
- Economics
- Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences
- History, Classics and Archaeology
- Sociology, Anthropology and Politics

The day will be of particular interest to those from disciplines in the arts, humanities and social sciences who teach on Area Studies programmes.

Keynote speaker: Sir Harold Walker

(Chairman of the Royal Society for Asian Affairs and UK ambassador to Iraq 1990-1991)

Why the UK needs Area Studies.

Parallel sessions include:

- Supporting diverse groups of learners on interdisciplinary programmes.
- Creating resources for learning and teaching in African Studies
- Health and Safety in fieldwork and residence abroad.
- Interculturality
- Language learning in Area Studies
- Widening Participation

If you would like to register for this event please visit: www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk/events

There will be a charge of £40 per person and includes lunch.

**For further details and on-line registration
visit our website at www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk**

About the Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies and the Area Studies Project.

Subject Centre staff

Prof. Michael Kelly	Subject Centre Director
Liz Ashurst	Subject Centre Manager
Dr John Canning	Academic Coordinator for Area Studies
Jane Copeland	Subject Centre Secretary
Paula Davis	Projects Officer
Alison Dickens	Senior Academic Coordinator (Learning and Teaching)
Dawn Ebbrell	Higher Education Information Officer (Based at CILT, London).
Angela Gallagher-Brett	Academic Coordinator for Languages and related studies
Becky Jennings	Web Editor
Sue Nash	Subject Centre Senior Secretary
Marie Weaver	Projects Secretary
Vicky Wright	Senior Academic Coordinator (Strategy)

The Area Studies Project is funded by the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) to improve learning and teaching in Area Studies subjects. The project is hosted by the Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies, based at the University of Southampton in the School of Modern Languages. We are part of the UK's Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN), which comprises 24 Subject Centres and a Generic Centre. Between us we support all disciplines taught in Higher Education. For more information visit www.ltsn.ac.uk

How to use the Subject Centre:

- Click on our website www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk
- Come to our workshops, seminars and, conferences
- Read our newsletters. Please contact the Subject Centre to receive your free copy and to sign up for our monthly e-bulletin llas@soton.ac.uk
- Help us to support Area Studies Associations.
- Join the Area Studies Network

The Area Studies Project on the Web

Our Internet based resource centre includes:

- Marketing materials for Area Studies and for Languages. These include:
 - A downloadable e-pack to be used as support materials for Area Studies recruitment: www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk/asmarketing.aspx
 - The Languages Box: www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk/languagesbox.aspx
- A guide to good practice in the teaching of Area Studies written by practitioners of Area Studies: www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk/resources/guidecontents.aspx
- A guide to Area Studies-related resources held in special collections in UK university libraries: www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk/resources/collections.aspx

