

## Impact case study (REF3b)

<b>Institution:</b> Plymouth University
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> D29: English Literature and Language
<b>Title of case study:</b> Making Words Human: Using Prosopopoeia as an Educational and Communication-Enhancing Tool
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>This case study refers to the work of Min Wild, an authority on Christopher Smart and the functions of rhetoric. The study shows how her research on prosopopoeia, the attribution of human speech or human qualities to inanimate objects (here, words themselves), is providing unanticipated benefits in a range of educational contexts. Wild's knowledge transfer to educationalists, as well as her own development of teaching tools, has led to her 'making words human' project is being used by primary school teachers in the South West to develop packages to enable literacy. It is also being used as a tool by which psychotherapists are training counsellors.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Wild is a critic with an abiding interest in the functions of rhetoric. Employed at Plymouth from 2004 (first as an Associate Lecturer, next during temporary lectureships, and since 2010 as a 1 FTE), Wild's research into rhetorical strategies has seen her publishing on writers from the 18th to 20th centuries, including an extensive study of rhetoric as a framing element in her monograph, <i>Christopher Smart and Satire</i> (Ashgate, 2008) - an analytical conspectus of Smart's little-known and irreverent eighteenth-century journal, <i>The Midwife</i>. Since then Wild's research has concentrated on the 'prosopopoeia', as a specific mode of rhetoric, that she found in Smart's work. Prosopopoeia is the figure of classical rhetoric that covers the attribution of human speech or human qualities to dumb or inanimate objects, and it had a heyday in the eighteenth century. The prosopopoeia that enabled Smart's assumed voice as a imaginary elderly midwife was the central concern of Wild's <i>Midwife</i> monograph. Her widely and favourably reviewed book also tracked Smart's dependence on classical rhetoric, especially comic and satirical figures such as litotes and paranomasia, which he used in attacks on the political and cultural absurdities of the day.</p> <p>Since her monograph on Smart, Wild has expanded her argument surrounding prosopopoeia in the essay, 'Making Words Human' (<i>Essays in Criticism</i>, 2010). In the essay she collects and analyses rare, arresting and defamiliarising examples of a specialised version of prosopopoeia, where words, sentences and even ways of writing get given human attributes. Wild is now at work on a monograph, also titled 'Making Words Human', and is tracing the trope from various times and forms (fiction, poetry, letters and criticism). For instance, from Plato to the twenty-first century words have been figured as soldiers; from Horace to Ali Smith, authors have used metaphors equating the physical form of books to human beings; from the Bible until now, kinds of writing are spoken of as if they were people. The research itself offers ideas in the field of literature, but also notes that the tools with which one works are not specific to literature: musicians do similar things with notes, and art critics with paintings. There are wider, interdisciplinary functions of such reflexive practice, with applications in a range of situations where words have to be used carefully or where their meaning will be reflected upon at a later date, as 'Details of the Impact' attests.</p>
<p><b>3. References to the research</b> (indicative maximum of six references)</p> <p>1. M. Wild, 'Making Words Human', <i>Essays in Criticism</i>, 60:4, October 2010. Internationally recognised publication and Britain's most distinguished journal of literary criticism.</p>

2. M. Wild, *Christopher Smart and Satire: 'Mary Midnight' and the Midwife* (Ashgate, 2008).

3. M. Wild, "The Bottom of All Things": Christopher Smart's Old Crone of Criticism': as part of special feature ('Critical Voices: Humor, Irony and Passion in the Literary Critics of the Long Eighteenth Century') in *1650-1850: Ideas, Aesthetics and Inquiries in the Early Modern Era*, Vol. 15, 2008: 271-292. Peer reviewed international journal on Enlightenment issues.

4. M. Wild, 'Alexander the Great and the 'Terrible Old Lady': Revisiting Christopher Smart's *Midwife*.' *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 27:2 (2004): 279–292. Official journal of BSECS.

5. M. Wild, "The Elation of Objects": Adorno and Wyndham Lewis' *Tarr*. *Wyndham Lewis Annual* XI (2004): 18–31. Now *JWLS*, the primary journal devoted to the work of Lewis. Official journal of the Wyndham Lewis Society.

6. M. Wild, "Prodigious Wisdom': Civic Humanism in Frances Brooke's *Old Maid*." *Women's Writing* 5:3 (1998): 421–5. International, peer-reviewed journal.

#### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Wild's research has contributed to social and educational welfare through her work with schools, counsellor training and counsellor continued professional development (CPD) sessions. This case study describes two situations in which others have used materials identified and codified by Wild's research in order to benefit their client groups, in educational and therapeutic contexts.

**Education:** Having recognized the potential of her 'Making Words Human' project to help with literacy, Wild began and maintained regular contact with the literacy co-ordinator (Gill Gilmartin) of the three Moorsway Federation Primary Schools in Southwest Devon in early 2012. This culminated in Wild's leading a day-long workshop with literacy teachers from the three schools, giving them knowledge and the impetus to develop new tools for engaging school children with literacy. Throughout the academic year 2012-2013, Wild continued meeting with the teachers, providing further examples from her research and consulting on 'making words human' as a trope.

In the Autumn Term 2012, Moorsway teachers delivered 'Personification' or 'Making Words Human' material with pupils at Key Stage 2 (Years 3-6). The humorous, visual and active elements of textual personification proved of use in engaging reluctant readers, especially since 'thinking more about how a word feels rather than the meaning linked to it [is] a key approach' (teacher feedback following a 2012 day training session with Wild). The teachers' written feedback in their 'Analysis of Writing' report outlines the enthusiasm, progress and achievements of the children at the end of the teaching sequences, and confirms the impact of Wild's work: "the techniques have been helpful in engaging children with difficult concepts and supporting their understanding'. June 2013 SATS statistics confirm value added in terms of 'points progress' is notable across all years 3-6: In Year 6, 62.5% achieved 'well above average' of national expectation; in Year 5, 25% achieved 'above average' beyond national expectation; in Year 4, 100% achieved 'above average' beyond national expectation; in year 3, 25% achieved 'above average' beyond national expectation. The Executive Headteacher at Moorsway has said that:

'we are already clear that the impact on children who struggled or were reluctant readers and writers has been very positive, with several children significantly improving their attainment in writing.... [T]he Making Words Human project completely captured the children's interest and gave

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the majority of them a renewed interest in reading and writing. The project made a valuable contribution to the Federation Improvement Aims of raising the attainment in writing. Equally [the] project was a very valuable continued professional development opportunity for all the teachers involved, enriching their understanding and professional practice.'

In her June 2013 report, Gilmartin describes how the activities 'captured the children's imagination and thoroughly motivated and engaged them in their writing. The fact that the children return to the idea again and again, demonstrates an enthusiasm and interest that other units of work haven't always achieved.' A specific example is provided of one underachieving Y6 boy who had his 'interest completely captured' and 'is now at age-related expectation having been below at Y2 indicating very good progress.'

Gilmartin has since delivered CPD training based on Wild's work to other local schools with the plan to use the 'making words human' approach to more broadly improve literacy. To this end, Wild has continued expanding the possibilities of her research, and has worked with an illustrator to develop an educational resource using personification of punctuation marks. Based on Gilmartin's view that "This will appeal to groups of children... much more fun than the traditional, dry way of introducing punctuation!", Wild's knock-on project, 'Punctuation Station', is being rolled out by the Moorsway schools from September 2013.

**Counselling:** Wild's work is also enhancing professional practice and providing an alternative tool in the ever-expanding field of adult counselling. Wild has aided the development of an awareness training package for counsellors called 'Alive to Language' which, since early January 2013, has been implemented in consultation with experienced counsellor-trainer, Jenny Start (member of the British Association of Counsellors and Psychotherapists). According to Start: 'There is much value in this extremely productive and original material ('Alive to Language') which is all about fostering and encouraging a deeper understanding of the personal use of words for both counsellors and clients, and enhancing the counselling process'. Start attests to how the material improves understanding of how mental states are articulated in counselling sessions, and focuses on developing a heightened sensitivity to language-use amongst counsellors. The programme is designed to facilitate examination of the language and kinds of expressions clients use in dialogue with the counsellor in three key ways:

- 1) during sessions, 'Alive to Language' is employed as a joint exercise to help with articulation and expression; it enables experimentation and insights into the power of language, to describe, explore and change feelings.
- 2) as a diagnostic tool after the session.
- 3) as a tool in continuing professional development, since it has great potential in two crucial areas, described by professionals as: 'foster[ing] insight/awareness' and 'emotional and interpersonal learning' (McLeod, 1993: 66).

The hour-long 'Alive to Language' package has twice been introduced into an Exeter College counsellor training course (12<sup>th</sup> January 2013 & 20<sup>th</sup> April 2013), using a PowerPoint presentation developed by Wild and Jenny Start. Positive feedback forms from 17 participants include: 'previously I think I was resistant to the idea of personifying objects/words but, having experienced it myself, I'd try this out in counselling skill practice'; and 'a very useful way to explore and talk about things that a client may have difficulty expressing otherwise.'

Start successfully introduced a more advanced CPD version of this material to practising

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professional counsellors at the 12<sup>th</sup> September 2013 meeting of the West Country Association of Counsellors and Psychotherapists, the main regional body for the profession. Feedback comments from this day include: ‘using metaphors for language in counselling will reduce the client being disturbed by the process of articulating feelings’; using this material ‘will help counsellor and client when there is “stuckness” during the counselling session. With the success of such short (1-2 hour) sessions of the material, Start will now offer an extended CPD day based on it, to both trainee and experienced counsellors (initially, at the Heartwood Centre, Dartington, Devon: <http://www.heartwoodcounselling.org/contact-us.php>).

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. Supportive statement from the Literacy Co-ordinator of the three Moorsway Federation Primary Schools in Southwest Devon to corroborate details of events in which schools leveraged their expertise and resources for other schools.
2. Supportive statement from Executive Headteacher, Moorsway Federation on impact in schools.
3. Supportive statement from Counsellor trainer from British Association of Counsellors and Psychotherapists on use in training.
4. Statement from Co-organizer of Westcountry Association for Counsellors and Psychotherapists on the use of the approach in their practice.