

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: University of Wolverhampton
Unit of Assessment: 29 – English Language and Literature
Title of case study: Integrating Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) Discussion Activities into the English Studies Curriculum
1. Summary of the impact This case study details the impact of a specific area of original research carried out as part of the Unit's wider commitment to pedagogy. It shows how research and development of the use of VLEs at the HEI has had a significant influence beyond the HEI in the following ways: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• It has contributed to professional development and teacher training;• It has been included in course design and teaching materials at other HEIs;• It has initiated further research and innovations in the use of digital resources and social media as pedagogic tools.
2. Underpinning research This research was supported by series of Innovations Grants (2004-06) administered by the HEI's Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) in the first stage. Thereafter, it was supported by an English Subject Centre JISC Distributed E-learning Project Grant (£6k) in 2005-07. The research has led to additional successful funding grants and individual awards enabling the further dissemination of the research through Miles's role as E-Learning Advocate for the ESC (See 4, below), and her award of a National Teaching Fellowship (£10k). In recognition of their contributions to the project, Miles (2006) and Dr Francis Wilson (2007) were awarded E-Tutor of the Year under the HEI's 'Rewarding Excellence' scheme. The underpinning research began in 2004 as a practice-based enquiry conducted at the HEI by Senior Lecturers Miles, Colbert, and Wilson (not entered), with Dr Hilary Weeks (now University of Gloucestershire) appointed as research assistant. The project sought to investigate the design, moderation, and assessment of VLE discussion activities in English studies, with the aim of developing a set of guidelines for best practice applicable to programmes in other disciplines, wherever VLE platforms may be integrated into course provision. Working in a fresh area of enquiry, the research demonstrated that integrating VLEs through assessed activities could achieve added value by reinforcing traditional skills of critical reading and research, while engaging with 21st-century notions of digital textuality. The principal published output of this phase of the research was a peer-reviewed article in <i>Arts and Humanities in Higher Education</i> (2007; repr. 2011) wherein Colbert, Miles, Wilson, and Weeks demonstrated how the integration of assessed online activities could enhance teaching and learning, drawing on case studies of applications within modules at Wolverhampton. Miles also published an essay on VLE applications to Victorian Studies in <i>The Journal of the William Morris Society</i> (2007) and in an article, 'Text. Play. Space', on the English Subject Centre website. From 2005-07, the research team broadened the investigation to evaluate the extent of and attitudes towards VLE use in HE English departments. A national questionnaire was followed by a day conference in May 2006 that brought together 34 leading innovators in VLE discussion activities from 18 HEIs around the UK. The survey and discussion arising from the conference provided crucial data underpinning the team's second major publication, <i>Online Discussion in English Studies: A Good Practice Guide to Design, Moderation and Assessment</i> (2010), which featured a taxonomy of design features, a framework for e-moderation, an extensive analysis of the assessment of VLE activities, and a summary of the 2006 survey findings. In this period, the parameters of the project were extended to incorporate contributions on Creative and Professional Writing from Candi Miller and Jackie Pieterick, Senior Lecturers at the HEI. In addition, Case Studies that demonstrate the growing reach and significance of VLE activities were solicited from

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Dr Matthew Green and Dr Christina Lee (University of Nottingham), Dr Heather Beck and Professor Michael Symmons (Manchester Metropolitan University), and Dr Stacy Gillis (University of Newcastle).

3. References to the research

Colbert, Benjamin, Rosie Miles, Francis Wilson, and Hilary Weeks. 'Designing and Assessing Online Learning in English Literary Studies'. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 6.1 (February 2007), 74-89 [DOI 10.1177/1474022207072200]. (Quality indicators: AHHE is an international peer-reviewed journal; the article was ranked 21 of 50 most read articles during August 2012; it was reprinted in *Online Learning*, ed. Michael Thomas, vol. 4 [London: Sage, 2011]. ISBN 9780857027658.)

Miles, Rosie, Benjamin Colbert, Francis Wilson, Hilary Weeks, Candi Miller, and Jackie Pieterick. *Online Discussion in English Studies: A Good Practice Guide to Design, Moderation and Assessment*. HEA English Subject Centre Report Series, No. 21, 2010. ISBN 978-1-905846-40-5. <http://www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/archive/publications/reports/onlinediscussion.pdf> (Quality indicator: Submitted in REF2 – Output RM2.)

Miles, Rosie, 'Teaching William Morris Online', *Journal of William Morris Studies*, 17:2 (Summer 2007), 54-72. <http://www.morrissociety.org/publications/JWMS/17.2.Miles.pdf> (Quality Indicator: Peer-reviewed journal.)

Miles, Rosie, 'Text. Play. Space: Creative Online Activities in English Studies', *English Subject Centre* (October 2007) http://www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/archive/publications/seedguides/seedguide_bestinshow.pdf (Quality indicator: reprinted in *Best in Show: Case Studies in Higher Education* (HEA, July 2011) ISBN 978-1-905846-57-3.)

Miles, Rosie, Benjamin Colbert, and Francis Wilson. 'Creating and Assessing Discussion Forums in English Studies'. English Subject Centre (JISC Distributed E-learning Project Grant), 2005-07. £6,000.

Miles, Rosie, Benjamin Colbert, and Francis Wilson. 'Critical Questions for WOLF: An Evaluation of the Use of the VLE in the Teaching of English Studies' (Phase 1); 'The Pedagogic Value of VLEs in the Teaching of English Studies' (Phase 2); 'Embedding Online Discussion in English Studies' (Phase 3). Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) (Innovation Grant). 2004-06. £6,000.

4. Details of the impact**Professional Development and Teacher Training:**

The Good Practice Guide proved to be one of the English Subject Centre's most popular reports with over 200 downloads within its first year of publication, and is recommended by Brett Lucas in '15 ideas to help with your course design' (2012) on Queen Mary University's Learning Institute site. The team's 2007 AHHE article meanwhile has appeared in a reading list for the PGCE/GTP at the University of Sussex (2010/11), among the resources for designing blended learning at the Open University of Hong Kong (2012), and on English 714: Theories of Pedagogy in English Studies at the University of Las Vegas, USA (2010).

The team's research has also made a major contribution to the Online Teaching topic of 'The Pool', an HEA/JISC-funded Open Educational Resource project designed to provide 'high quality resources to support HEA accredited programmes or schemes of professional development that meet the UK Professional Standards Framework' (HEA Open Materials for Accredited Courses). The topic embeds videos from the 2006 Wolverhampton Day Conference as well as excerpts from the Good Practice Guide (2010).

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The Guide itself is available online, hosted initially by the English Subject Centre (03/02/11: 1457 views; 5830 unique page views) and remains an open resource via Humbox where it has attracted the following testimonials: 'I recommend it to anyone interested in exploring ways of enhancing the learning experience of their students by using discussion boards in any Arts and Humanities discipline' (Teaching Fellow, University of Leeds); while an Academic Coordinator for the University of Southampton's Centre for Languages, Linguistics, and Area Studies commented, 'an excellent resource ... which will have applicability across disciplines' (HumBox Notes & Comments, online).

Course Design and Teaching Materials:

In 2006-07 **Miles** was made one of six national 'E-Learning Advocates' as part of a project sponsored by the English Subject Centre promoting good practice in e-learning amongst the HE English community. As a result of this, she continued as an E-Learning Consultant for the English Subject Centre, a contract renewed annually from 2007-2011 and worth £6,000; she also received an E-learning Project Support grant of £5,000 in 2011-12 with which to continue her work. To date she has addressed over 200 lecturers at more than 20 English departments across the country (e.g. Loughborough University (2007), Manchester Metropolitan University (2008), University of Exeter (2010), University of Surrey (2010), and Open University (2011)), expanding the project's reach with a visit to Warwickshire College of FE/HE to speak to colleagues in Business Studies (2013).

The successful impact of these visits may be measured in responses attesting to direct inclusion of new techniques into individual modules, and their significance may be similarly measured in statements suggesting a wider impact upon overall course design within and beyond English Studies. For example, one colleague asserts, 'I drew on your visit to incorporate a discussion board assessment into one of my modules ... The new assessment method was an unqualified success' (SL in English, University of Chester). Another stated that, 'I can confirm that I am planning a new module for 2011-12 which will incorporate many of the teaching and assessment methods from Rosie's example' (SL in English, University of Exeter).

The wider applicability of the ideas and approaches described by Miles were highlighted by colleagues for their relevance for other subject disciplines. For example, the Programme Leader for English & History, University Centre, Yeovil, responded: 'Historians and critics, alike were impressed with the range of ideas that seeing your model generated'; whilst the SL at Chester cited above presented to a Staff Conference in 2012 to disseminate VLE innovations across the institution ('so ... that other colleagues ... will also be inspired to follow your excellent example'). Other colleagues noted the usefulness and applicability of the technical guidelines produced by the research. For example, 'I was highly impressed by the technical mechanisms and marking criteria by which forum contributions were assessed' (Director of Teaching for English, Open University). Another colleague stated that they were introduced to 'some excellent assessment guidelines and criteria which ... are really useful as a basis for future development on our own modules' (SL in English, University of Cumbria).

Further Innovations in Digital Resources. Since October 2009 Miles has run a blog on English Studies and E-Learning as 'Ms E-Mentor': <http://www.msementor.co.uk>. It describes her online activities as they happen during her teaching and is thus another medium through which the research of the team is modelled in reproducible applications of online work. She has employed this platform to explore and promote further applications of the Wolverhampton research to 'Twitter' in a commissioned article in *The Guardian* (11/6/12) which was followed by notice in an article on digital media in the classroom (*The Independent*, 30/7/12), retweeted over 800 times.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)**Professional Development and Teacher Training:**

- 1) 'The Pool', an HEA/JISC-funded Open Educational Resource project designed in provide 'high quality resources to support HEA accredited programmes or schemes of professional development that meet the UK Professional Standards Framework' (HEA Open Materials

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for Accredited Courses). The topic embeds videos from the 2006 Wolverhampton Day Conference as well as excerpts from the Good Practice Guide (2010) into discussion activities, is generally indebted the Wolverhampton research, and lists the Good Practice Guide as a key resource.

<http://www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/virtue/course/view.php?id=29>

- 2) Brett Lucas, '15 ideas to help you with your course design', The Learning Institute, Queen Mary, University of London, 2012. <http://www.learninginstitute.qmul.ac.uk/elearning/ole/15-ideas-to-help-with-your-course-design/>
- 3) Rosie Miles, National Teaching Fellowship ('Claim for NTF Fellowship 2011' submitted to HEA awards committee).

Course Design and Teaching Materials:

- 1) Director of Teaching for English, Open University (corroborating statement [1]).
- 2) SL in English, Programme Leader BA Creative Writing, University of Chester (corroborating statement [2]).
- 3) David Ellis, *In at the Deep End: The First Year in English Undergraduate Studies* (2008). Includes both references to the AHHE article and employs UoW and its VLE use as a case-study. Researched and written whilst Ellis was at the University of Derby. <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/subjects/english/firstyear.pdf>

Further Innovations in Digital Resources:

- 1) Rosie Miles, 'Teaching with Twitter', 11 June 2012: <http://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/blog/2012/jun/11/teaching-with-twitter>
- 2) Online responses to Miles's 'Teaching with Twitter'; <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/digital-media-get-top-marks-as-they-bring-a-new-kind-of-learning-into-the-classroom-7987554.html>
<http://blog.educpros.fr/doctrix/2013/09/30/doctorants-etre-ou-ne-pas-etre-sur-twitter/>