



**Billy Clark, Marcello Giovanelli and Andrea Macrae** introduce the *Integrating English* project, designed to help teachers make the most of the diversity of English by bringing together a range of approaches from language and literature, and from other elements of the subject.

#### **Our vision: strength from diversity**

The *Integrating English* project, now in its fourth year, was set up to promote a vision for English teaching that celebrates and draws on the wide range of approaches and sub-disciplines that we feel makes the subject such a vibrant one. We started this project to promote the diversity which we think is one of the subject's key strengths and to draw attention to and celebrate meaningful connections and collaborations between different phases of English education.

Recent GCSE and AS/A Level reform, together with a renewed focus on grammar work in primary schools, have provided an opportunity for English teachers to rethink the nature of the subject and overcome some of the compartmentalisations of the past. In this article, we give a brief overview of the project's central aims and provide an overview of some of the work we have been doing with secondary English teachers to facilitate an integrated approach at all levels.

#### **English: a unified subject**

Our starting point has always been that we see English as a unified subject that incorporates the study of literature, language, drama, media and film, and creative writing. In a previous article in *Teaching English* (Clark, Giovanelli and Macrae 2014a), we presented our view that that this diversity is a real strength and could

lead to better discussion among teachers at all levels regarding the nature of the subject. This in turn could support more teachers in devising enabling learning activities for students.

We believe that studying English should involve drawing on a range of different approaches and ways of thinking about what it means to study a text. For example, in studying *Frankenstein*, a strong, integrated approach could include studying the social, historical and literary contexts of the novel's production, undertaking some biographical reading on Mary Shelley, completing a close linguistic analysis of the text at both a local and global level, exploring how the text has been interpreted by different groups of academic and non-academic readers, looking at drama and/or film representations, exploring its rich cultural history and representation in other media, and so on. We don't view this way of working as being primarily 'literary' or 'linguistic' (or anything else) but believe that all of these approaches complement one another in a very natural way and can, in the classroom, offer a richer experience for the student and the teacher.

#### **Stylistics, language and literature**

As researchers, we all work in stylistics (a field which draws on linguistics to help explain how texts, including literary ones, are produced, interpreted and evaluated).

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Connecting the linguistic and the literary is a natural and fundamental part of stylistics and we see this as a natural way of developing a sense of the subject as a coherent whole. Ideas from stylistics are also evident in recent developments in AS/A Level English Language and Literature specifications, which now explicitly require students to draw on language study to support their analyses of different kinds of texts. Consequently, awarding bodies have been able to develop specifications that offer an integrated vision for the subject and allow students to explore a range of different texts in a range of different ways. We believe that this is a very important way forwards in enriching the experience of texts for students, equipping them to speak, write, read and listen intelligently, skilfully, and with insight and understanding.

#### Spreading the word

Over the last four years, we've been busy developing the project and forging links with a range of partners. We were involved in supporting the development of AS and A Level specifications for awarding bodies, have co-authored student textbooks and have spoken about our work to both secondary and higher education teachers at numerous conferences and research seminars. In particular, we have spent a great deal of time developing and building up links with colleagues in secondary schools through our annual conference and through the dedicated blog, *The Definite Article*, that we run for AQA. We provide more details of these below.

#### Integrating English: the conferences

Since 2014, we have run an annual conference for teachers, hosted each time at one of our own institutions. These conferences have included a series of short talks and interactive workshops led by academic stylisticians, drawing on their own research and providing ideas for the secondary classroom. Although our original audience for these was post-16 teachers, our most recent conference at Middlesex University in November 2016 also attracted Key Stage 3 and 4 teachers, who found the sessions useful in developing teaching ideas for their classrooms. The conference has also provided a forum for collaborative work.

We have always been keen to avoid a simple transmissive approach where colleagues from higher education simply pass over knowledge and expertise to secondary teachers. To this end, we have included

jointly prepared and delivered workshops, resource development sessions where colleagues from both phases work together, and plenary sessions where all involved discuss issues arising from the day and consider ways forward. The feedback we have received suggests that this is a really powerful model allowing secondary and higher education teachers to co-construct knowledge and pedagogy.

#### The Definite Article: access to research

Some previous research we carried out (Clark, Giovanelli and Macrae 2014b) identified that A Level teachers of English Language and Literature specifications felt relatively less certain about where they could access current research in stylistics compared to those who taught the discrete English Language and English Literature courses. We also interviewed teachers who felt that since academic articles were often behind publisher paywalls, they were difficult to access and that, at times, the style and length of research papers made translating them into activities in the classroom a time-consuming process.

To support teachers, we set up *The Definite Article* to provide interesting and current research in stylistics that we felt would be useful for teachers in developing activities for AS and A-level specifications. Drawing on the success of similar projects such as *The Linguistics Research Digest*, run by linguists at Queen Mary University of London, and the *Research Digest* of the British Psychological Society, we provide, at different points in the academic year, digests of around 1000 words on key research in stylistics, wider reading lists, extended teaching ideas, and news and events that we feel would be of interest to teachers. We are constantly reviewing our content, and have had extremely positive feedback from teacher users that we have incorporated into our planning for future resources.

#### And finally...

Our website, including details of the project, conference reports and other news items can be found at <http://www.integratingenglish.com>. *The Definite Article* can be found at <https://thedefinitearticle.aqa.org.uk>. You can also follow us on Twitter @IntegratingEng

We're convinced that with a coherent vision, and through dialogue and collaboration, English can continue to grow and offer students invaluable knowledge, skills and insights.

#### References

- Clark, B., Giovanelli, M. and Macrae, A. (2014a) 'Putting texts at the heart of English: English as a diverse but unified discipline'. *Teaching English* 6, 17–20.
- Clark, B., Giovanelli, M. and Macrae, A. (2014b) 'Lang-Lit from A to BA: Student backgrounds and first year content', [goo.gl/Y8IY8d](http://goo.gl/Y8IY8d)

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