

**Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH)
Office of Learning and Teaching (OLT) project on *Teaching
First Year in the Context of Threshold Learning Outcomes
(TLOs)***

**Meeting to workshop and draft possible TLOs for English, co-
chaired with the Association of University Heads of English (AUHE)
Learning and Teaching Committee**

The Women's Club, Sydney, May 14-15, 2014.

Wednesday May 14

Attendees:

Anthony Uhlmann, UWS (President, AUHE)

Nicole Moore, UNSW Canberra (Chair, AUHE TLO working party)

Alison Ravenscroft, La Trobe (Member, AUHE TLO working party)

Jesper Gulddal, Newcastle (Secretary, AUHE)

Matthew McGuire, UWS (First year convenor)

Jane Stenning, NDU (Associate Dean Learning and Teaching)

Georgina Ledvinka, NDU

Chair: Joy Wallace, Charles Sturt, (National Convenor of the DASSH Associate
Deans Learning and Teaching Network; Member, AUHE TLO working party,
Associate Dean Learning and Teaching CSU)

Morning Session

Joy and Nicole began by explaining the dual context of the meeting:

- 1) an OLT-funded project on renewing first-year curriculum for the social sciences and humanities in the context of discipline threshold standards, across the disciplines of History, Geography, Political Science, Sociology and English; and
- 2) the Australian University Heads of English (AUHE) working party on Threshold Learning Outcomes for the discipline of English.

This meeting begins a process of workshopping, drafting and piloting a possible set of discipline TLOs for English that can be used for the interdisciplinary DASSH First Year OLT project. That project will hold a workshop for the English discipline in Melbourne June 11, 2014, to discuss first year teaching towards discipline TLOs in parallel with the other disciplines.

The AUHE working party, meanwhile, is working towards a separate OLT application to fund a discipline-wide, TLO setting project, which cannot be submitted

before November 2014. If successful, this funded project will run for one-two years and will reach out broadly across the discipline to establish a consensus about national TLOs for English/Literary Studies.

The AIM of this meeting: to draft a set of TLOs for use at the DASSH OLT project that can also be used as a pilot set of TLOs to begin the national consultations hosted by AUHE. **NB: These TLOs will be provisional and remain in DRAFT form until the full AUHE process has been completed.**

The ensuing discussion touched upon the following issues:

- Experiences with and status of TLOs at the attendees' home universities
- The status of disciplines/areas associated with English such as Creative Writing, Media Studies, Cultural Studies, Drama, Film, Journalism, and Communication
- The need for a balance between emphasising Literary Studies as a specific discipline and taking into account the association with related areas

Discussion of TLOs and first year student learning

Joy introduced the DASSH's project's emphasis on "Threshold Learning Concepts" – barriers to successful first-year transitioning. This was followed by the nomination of what students find difficult in first-year subjects at the institutions represented at the meeting:

- Close reading/textual analysis
- Application of generic academic skills in a discipline-specific context and the need to embed the teaching of these skills in the discipline curriculum
- Reading – both qualitatively and quantitatively. How do you encourage students to read long books? What capacity for reading do students have? (The OLT funded *Reading Resilience Project* was discussed in this context.)
- Understanding critical texts at a level enabling students to engage seriously with literary criticism
- Essay writing
- Writing well/academic literacy
- Discontinuity between lay reading experience/reading pleasure and academic reading (move away from theory and interdisciplinarity)

This was followed by a discussion of different models of first-year courses at different universities (whether focused on periods or genres and/or academic skills)

Afternoon Session

- The session started with a discussion on existing TLOs from the other humanities disciplines in the DASSH project – History, Geography, Political Science, Sociology. The following items were discussed:

- Who are the audience (external bodies, the university hierarchy, students, etc.)?
- Should TLOs be designed to map onto AQF level descriptors?
- Should we aim for clarity and concision (example: History) or should we provide more specific and comprehensive information (examples: Geography, Sociology).

It was agreed that this meeting's draft TLOs for English should ideally follow the AQF model with the subheadings *Knowledge*, *Skills*, and *Application of Knowledge and Skills*.

- TLOs or Graduate Attributes for English disciplines from a number of Australian universities were then consulted, together with the established TLOs from other disciplines. English discipline TLOs were provided by Murdoch, Federation University (Ballarat), UWA, and UNSW Canberra (as Graduate Attributes), as well as a draft set of English TLOs worked up by the DASSH Learning and Teaching Network members previously.

The meeting then proceeded jointly to begin drafting a set of TLOs through discussion, completing a workable template as below by the end of the day:

DASSH project Draft TLOs as at 14 May 2014.

KNOWLEDGE

- 1/2) [forms/genres] [periods]
- 2) knowledge of critical methods and literary concepts

SKILLS

- 3) Reading skills/textual analysis
- 4) Skills in communicating in a range of critical or creative forms
- 5) [Research]

APPLICATION

- 6) Apply relevant skills and knowledge in order to construct a coherent evidence-based argument
- 7) Recognise the significance of literary texts/literature in imagining and interpreting (the) (social) world(s)

Thursday 15 May

Attendees:

Anthony Uhlmann (UWS)
Nicole Moore (UNSW Canberra)
Georgina Ledvinka, NDU
Alison Ravenscroft, La Trobe
Brigitta Olubas (UNSW)
Melissa Hardie (Sydney)
Leigh Dale (Wollongong) Chair of Secondary/Tertiary Liaison working party, AUHE
Chair: Joy Wallace (CSU)

Morning session

Welcome from Joy and Nicole; introduction to dual context as above for new participants

Discussion of nominated barriers to learning in literary studies:

Added barriers;

- Reading skills, resilience and difficulties grappling with difficult texts (Brigitta; further discussion)
- Critical thinking skills, evident also across other disciplines (Leigh)

Further discussion of 'comprehension skills as a terminal skill' as a problem:

- Problems of retention from first year into second year
 - o Sydney losing students to competing and or cognate majors (gender and cultural studies, film studies)
 - o UNSW Canberra sense in which students consider English as remedial comprehension skills, terminal
 - o UNSW and Wollongong smaller first years but keep them through
 - o Titles renamed to attract students at La Trobe (eg Sex and Death) in the context of major restructuring of the major and degree program.

Interest in English as a major as a problem (Melissa Hardie, Nicole)

Discussion again of role of Creative Writing within English programs; question of relation to defining discipline:

- Perception as easier
- La Trobe move to 1/4/4 model (first/second/third year); reducing subject choice dramatically; question of sequencing and so on
- Relation to reading as practice and pedagogy

- Anthony: advocating connections back to writing as a practice, noting strength in writers groups and practice across Sydney, for instance
- Melissa – MA in Creative Writing introduced at Sydney; more formal introduction of creative writing at undergraduate level eventually
- Consensus on strategic wisdom of including creative writing within ambit of TLOs and discipline

Discussion of results to date from DASSH OLT Project survey.

Results from the DASSH OLT Project of First Year English Literature students (and staff) to discover perceptions about what studying the discipline at university entails were circulated for discussion.

Responses:

- Agreeing with problems with reading: Melissa ‘we have trouble getting them to watch a 2 hour film!’
- Noting difference between staff and student responses to which of a book and film is ‘better’
- Discussion of surveying students at third year, at the end of the learning journey – cf. History survey at stage one of OLT TLO process; Anthony noting a similar study in the US of English.
- Anthony noting cognitive processing involved in reading; process of building resilience done conscientiously; using eg of redesign of first year course at UWS; reading backwards from familiarity to unfamiliarity.
- Alison discussing teaching modernism; opposite experience - embrace by students of unfamiliar
- Melissa recommended Maryanne Wolf’s *Proust and the Squid*, work on cognitive processing of new generation and fragmented reading of contemporary world ; by necessity broken up tasks and fragmented time... That we of a certain generation have all gone through a crucial development stage reading long narratives; younger not able – discussion of Austen vs Faulkner. Wolf’s coinage of ‘the deep brain’.
- Add this into Curriculum debate into public arenas, argues Anthony
- Melissa noting interest in ‘brain training’
- Alison wondering whether appeal of modernism lies in being able to grasp the form from a few pages
- Brigitta discussing *Maurice Guest* and *Carpentaria* on an Aust lit course – noting that *Carpentaria* appealed more, which was surprising for her
- Anthony discussed his introduction of a ‘slow reading’ course at UWS: ‘why can’t people read *Ulysses* at UWS?’ As a single text course; produced ‘the best essays I’ve ever had’.
- Leigh: balancing between introducing new works and history of the tradition – students from less traditional universities respond to an invitation into the tradition; think about this as an oscillation between these aspects of the discipline.

- Leigh *The Man who Loved Children*;
- Melissa: discussed her experience in teaching just four novels in an advanced unit, all very contemporary; ‘fantastic actually’, a lot more time, with *The Wire* at the end; three weeks for each novel. ‘Such a treat’; what is it to study something intensively?
- Leigh reading intensively – reading reviews, then criticism each week. Skills can be developed in SLOW subjects.

MORNING TEA

Return to drafting of possible pilot TLOs. Discussion covered this range of topics:

- Recounting discussion and results from Wed 14 May
- Discussion of existing TLOs for English from Australian departments and programs submitted to AUHE
- Meeting agreed to use category model from AQF: Knowledge, Skills, and Application of these
 - Good consensus on ‘Knowledge’, ‘Skills’, but ‘Application’ caused difficulties
 - Good consensus: knowledge, 2 or 3 on students having knowledge of literary form and literary periods or literary history, not sure if in one TLO or separated. Third TLO: knowledge of critical methods and concepts
 - ‘Application’ category reflects back on knowledge and skills
- Discussion of active verbs: Students should ‘know’ rather than demonstrate? Others use ‘demonstrate’. Good discussion of whether this is necessary and terms expected by AQF. Need to be measurable.
- Discussion of overall aim and design of TLOs:
 - We could talk more technically and less in area of value and aesthetics; we could make a more technical argument for learning to read with cognitive capacity
 - Need to rehearse the function of TLOs to give a collegial framework across the discipline, ‘what will work well for one person might not for another’, but does have an element of manifesto, supposed to protect us, allow us to explain ourselves, it will build capacity for colleagues
 - This is difficult as TLOs need to be legible, usable down to unit level, need clarity
 - Idea that this list isn’t exhausted by pedagogical application
 - Need for them to state ourselves for others, to take a position
 - We need them to have reach outside our group; thus to be as precise as possible BUT to be clearly distinguishable from one another
 - TLOs should be for both students and lay people, parents for example
 - Break down the elements: We need to resist all our temptations to qualify or add ‘and’
- More thinking about ‘Skills’ TLOs: Reading and writing
 - Discussion of question of training students to read – how strongly should the TLOs emphasise this? To what degree are we building on skills or imparting basic ones?

- Students' capacity to do what is done. We teach reading not texts. If we can have TLOs that talked about the student's capacity to talk about and reflect skills
- Strong emphasis on need to articulate 'reading skills' explicitly
- Diversity in 'Knowledge' TLOs important:
 - Form/genre/period but the question of different areas? Some discussion of texts and where they come from different periods and places
 - Is it important to distinguish between language and literature? UNSW fighting against world literatures being taught elsewhere. We teach in translation. Importance of sense of diversity of regions and locations.
 - This is a big question for us as discipline
 - UNSW Canberra Graduate Attributes did a range of forms not just literature, literatures from around the world but not just English. In TLO knowledge of main traditions
- Discussion of secondary/tertiary nexus:
 - Reports from Vic and NSW that secondary school students are struggling to develop independent readings because they are being taught to present dogmatically applied theory: Marxism or psychoanalysis, say. 'They can teach them literary criticism that mobilises one tiny idea from a theorist. You need to be up to date: post-humanism, ecology, not Marxism.'
- Discussion of relation between literary texts and other texts. Noted a preface in SA which uses the phrase 'literature and related forms'.
- Discussion closed.

Discussion resulted in this formulation of TLOs:

Draft of pilot DASSH and AUHE TLOs as at 15 May, 2014

Knowledge

Students graduating in English will have knowledge of:

1. Distinct varieties of literary texts in their contexts from a range of periods and places
2. A range of literary forms and writing practices
3. Changing theories, methods, and concepts in literary studies

Skills

Students graduating in English will have the skills to:

4. Read, understand and interpret complex literary texts
5. Communicate coherently in a range of critical and/or creative forms
6. Locate, assess and use appropriate critical resources

Application of Knowledge and Skills

Students should be able to apply relevant skills and knowledge to:

7. Recognise and reflect on the significance of literary texts in imagining and interpreting the (social) world(s) DRAFT
8. Construct coherent, evidence-based arguments
9. [? DRAFT]

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