

FACULTY BULLETIN, December 2008

1. DEAN'S REPORT

The Dean's report is available on line at <http://www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/humnet/committees/policyandresources/dean/>

2. PUBLICATIONS NEWS FROM THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

David Nelson's 4th edition of his Penguin Dictionary of Mathematics was published in October. It is an updated and greatly expanded version of the third edition and took the best part of 18 months to complete. The IMA's 'Mathematics Today' has a review of the new edition and says it is 'superb' and 'recommended unreservedly.' The book first came out in 1989 and has sold well over 100,000 copies. A Japanese translation is currently being prepared for publication.

Lessons which teach children how to make friends, increase happiness and reduce their stress levels will help them get the most out of school, according to a new book by Dr David Spendlove, who used neuroscience to identify activities to help tackle feelings of anger, fear and stress at school.

Activities include getting teachers to tell jokes, a check list to beat exam nerves, and encouraging children to confront their irrational fears - such as being in a terrorist attack or bitten by a snake.

The lack of "emotional literacy" is particularly acute, he argues, in boys because they often have more difficulty in understanding their emotions than girls. Emotional literacy will help Britain tackle last year's UNESCO report that our children are the unhappiest in the Western World", he said.

"All the evidence suggests that our youngsters perform better if they are calm and happy and this book describes some ways in which teachers can address those issues. Such emotional engagement is central to good learning and motivation and without it learning becomes too abstract, leading to emotional disconnection."

Dr Spendlove says the approaches are urgently needed. "In today's world, it's is easy to convince ourselves that earthquakes or famines have 'little to do with me', he said, "In children this is compounded with brain changes around the ages of 10-18, when increasing amounts of dopamine creates the effect of learners appearing almost intoxicated in their thinking."

Dr Spendlove draws upon evolutionary psychology ,saying that children's emotional 'irrationality' can be partly explained by the Savannah Principle where humans retain much of what was useful to survive, find mates, and reproduce when they lived on the Savannah 10,000 years ago. "Many such principles govern our daily life but are long outdated, causing conflict in everyday life and particularly in schools," he said.

The book has featured in several national and local newspapers including the Times Educational Supplement, Daily Mail and the Manchester Evening News and Dr Spendlove also gave an interview to BBC radio.

3. EVENTS NEWS FROM THE CENTRE FOR NEW WRITING

Booker nominees launch Literature Live

The Centre's new Literature Live season was launched in style on 13 October, when both Colm Toibin and Andrew O'Hagan read from and discussed their work.

Scots writer O'Hagan began by reading a chapter from his recent award-winning novel *Be Near Me*, in which its narrator, priest David, is driven from his home after accusations of child-molestation. The narrative described his conversation with his mother, a writer of windswept, dramatic novels who had once harboured a hope that he too might write one day.

As the chapter unfolded it emerged that David has indeed held the hand of and tried to kiss a young boy, and would have slept with him had he consented to it. But he does not feel that he has carried out any kind of assault - a view clearly not shared by the marauding townspeople who burn out the ground floor of his rectory that night.

Colm Toibin's readings were both from his forthcoming novel *Brooklyn*, which documents the experiences of a young Irish woman, Eilish, as she emigrates to New York in 1951. The first described the first night of her rough crossing, during which she is locked out of her shared bathroom, in disturbing detail, while the second concerned rather more heart-warming scenes from her day as a Christmas dinner volunteer in Brooklyn's parish hall.

Surrounded by fellow Irish people, both volunteering and among the mostly homeless diners, she is fooled into thinking her recently-deceased father is among them: a man later revealed to be an outstanding and moving singer who serenades her as a thank you for her day's work.

The event's question and answer session with the audience revealed that, although Toibin hated his fictionalisation of episodes from Henry James' life *The Master* by the time it was finished, the great writer's techniques and systems have snuck into his own work and many of James's novels still "...fill me with joy."

O'Hagan also confirmed that *Be Near Me* is currently being adapted for the stage in a co-production between the National Theatre for Scotland and the Donmar Warehouse in London, where it will premiere in January 2009 with a cast including Ian McDiarmid.

Neil Gaiman reading

Sci-fi and fantasy polymath Neil Gaiman made a rare UK appearance at the Centre at the end of October, when he read from his new story *The Graveyard Book*. The event was a unique one for the Literature Live series as it included not one but two support bands, as the writer's friends Paul and Storm and Jonathan Coulton, who were playing at the University the same night, each performed a song at the beginning of the proceedings.

Neil then read half a chapter from *The Graveyard Book*, the idea for which first came to him over 20 years ago when his son was very young. Living in a tall

house with no garden, his son would happily ride his tricycle in the graveyard opposite; giving Neil the inspiration for an alternative *Jungle Book* in which the orphaned boy is raised by dead people.

In the extract concerned, the boy, Bod, has been looked after by a ghost called Silas who is now going away. He entrusts Bod's care to the school ma'am-like Miss Loupescou, who forces him to learn obscure lessons and eat her home-cooked meals.

In discussion with the event's chair, Jerome de Groot, the writer agreed that the book was about the creation and development of extended families, but that he had only realised the existence of this theme and his own feelings about it as part of the writing process. He saw the book as being both bleak and hopeful, and conceded that it very much drew on traditions of English writing and gothic tropes.

Neil then answered questions from the audience, describing his *Sandman* as "the first sexually-transmitted comic" and attributing the diversity of genres and audiences his work relates to a desire to avoid pigeonholes and his background in the 'anything goes' world of comics.

The evening ended with much dedication and commitment on both sides as the audience queued for two and a half hours to have their hero sign his books. But the night wasn't over for Mr Gaiman, who headed off to the Students' Union to return the favour at his pals' concert!

Amis and guests talk science

Professor of Creative Writing Martin Amis confessed to expecting to learn more than he contributed when he was joined by philosopher John Gray and psychotherapist Adam Phillips to discuss literature and science on 1 December.

The evening event, in the University's Whitworth Hall, was chaired by Head of Public Engagement Teresa Anderson. After the introductions each panellist summarised their key thoughts on the subject, and the shifting roles of literature and science as ways of understanding the world.

According to Martin Amis the rise of science effectively "stopped literature looking up", as well as identifying man's true position in the universe and countering past assumptions about our centrality. We also now realise that we don't have the capacity to understand everything, and must therefore focus on understanding what it means to be human - on inner rather than outer reality; an objective reflected in much contemporary fiction.

Adam Phillips saw psychoanalysis as a discipline torn between literature's appreciation of specificity and singularity and science's desire for grand, comprehensive theory. The analyst must use theory, but only until confronted by its exceptions.

As a child of the 60s he was more interested in art than science, and a product of a post-war education which viewed doubt as a virtue. While stressing that science has of course led to huge improvement and progress, he felt that its authority in many areas has led to a situation where many view it as an ever-present parent, from whom they would like to escape.

In John Gray's view, "explaining things better" has been an intrinsic part of 'the human project' since Darwin. H.G. Wells was an early advocate of the latter's analysis of humans as animals, but initially believed in science's capacity to humanise other species and, indeed, "burn the animal out of humanity".

Yet his fictional vivisectionist Dr Moreau ultimately failed in his attempts to turn animals into humans, a reflection of Wells' own realisation that knowledge can only be used by humans 'as they are' and in pursuit of their own goals. This application of scientific knowledge to the pursuit of human dreams has often resulted in nightmares like genocide, war and environmental disaster, in practice.

As Amis pointed out, the distinguishing characteristic of the human animal has long been held to be our awareness of death - and this directly influences the creation of art as a bid for immortality. Phillips added that humans also uniquely wish to become better animals, and much of the knowledge we choose to accumulate aims to defy or improve upon our inherent animal nature.

Further referencing our understanding of the world around us, Amis turned to the topic of 'pseudo-science', which he believed had no obvious equivalent in literature. Phillips connected the "revolt against reason" the writer described to the rhetoric he and other novelists themselves employ - the "power of persuasion" which, in extreme cases, has prompted and claimed to justify all kinds of atrocity.

Perhaps literature's equivalent to pseudo-science then is propaganda. Phillips certainly felt that we would benefit from finding a new, more analytical approach to all types of reading, to avoid being "taken over by other people's ideas".

The discussion was then opened up to a lively series of questions from the audience, which included whether objective progress could be identified in literature as well as in science, why a distrust of some aspects of science prevails in society and whether science or art has been the more powerful "sword" of totalitarian regimes.

4. E-LEARNING AND BLACKBOARD NEWS

Blackboard Courses in Semester 2

To support the [eLearning strategy and the Operational Plan](#) in the Faculty of Humanities, the Faculty eLearning Team will be contacting tutors/lecturers of 1st Year Undergraduate courses in all Schools from w/c December 1st in order to support delivery of their Semester 2 courses in Blackboard.

Teaching staff will have the option of selecting the Standard Course Structure which will ensure their course meets the [minimum specification](#) of the University's eLearning Strategy.

If you are not a 1st year tutor the eLearning team is still here to help find out what support you can get from

<http://www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/tandl/elearning/starterpack/>. We

strongly recommend that teaching staff who have not yet delivered a Blackboard course to their students should consider attending the following Blackboard events:

Starter Pack & Showcase sessions:

- December 10th

Kickstart training sessions:

- December 9th
- December 17th

Further information and a booking form for all the sessions above can be found at:

<http://www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/tandl/elearning/events/>

For all eLearning and Blackboard enquiries please call 65544 or email

elearning@manchester.ac.uk.

5. SKILLS TRAINING TEAM NEWS

It is all change on the Skills Training Team. Dr Julie Reeves will be leaving the University at Christmas to take up a post at the University of Southampton; we wish her the best of luck, she will be missed.

Congratulations to Ann Barlow who is taking over from Julie as **Head of Skills Training and Development** Ann is coming from Courses for the Public where she was Director - she takes up her post on 1st January

The new members of the team are –

PGR Development Officer - Dr Emily Bannister

Emily joins us from Manchester City Council, Legal Services where she was a temporary PA. Emily has recently completed her PhD at Keele.

Staff Development Officer - Dr Claire Stocks

Claire is coming from the Learning Institute at Oxford University where she is a Departmental Lecturer in Educational Development. She also got her doctorate from Keele. Her start date will be 2nd February 2009

e-Resources Development Officer - Miss Claire Morris

Claire is an e-learning technologist in MHS. She will be joining the team on 26th January 2009. She has already been renamed as Eclair.

There is an exciting event taking place on 15 December – Jorge Cham, creator of 'Piled Higher and Deeper' is coming to the University of Manchester. The event includes a lecture, book signing and reception. To register for a place go to www.manchester.ac.uk/eps/grads/events/phdcomics

6. MEDIA NEWS

This month, a report by academics at the Brooks World Poverty Institute on how best sellers give insights into poverty was covered in several national and international newspapers. The findings of Dr Rob Ford from Social Sciences that racial prejudice is declining in the UK were covered in detail by Mark Easton, the Home Editor of the BBC, in his popular blog.

Work by Dr David Spendlove from Education on emotional literacy was covered in the national and regional press. Historian Dr Ana Carden-Coyne published a long feature in a Guardian war supplement on the relationship between art and the First World War. Professor of Creative Writing Patricia Duncker published a review of 'Apology for the Woman Writing' by Jenni Diski in the Observer.

The Congestion Question map collaboration with BBC Manchester continues to interest the public – over 14,000 people have now added their view.

7. ICT NEWS

PC Quote Request

This service is now available via an online form on the University's BuyIT web pages <http://www.itservices.manchester.ac.uk/buyit/pc/>

From there select the Humanities PC service request link. The form provides information on the current Humanities recommended standard desktop PC plus information on a range of upgrade options. It also allows you to say what the PC is to be used for so a check can be made that the specification is suitable. Once you submit the form the information will go into our call logging system (Remedy) and a quote will be produced by our procurement officer. If this is acceptable it can be processed via your normal school procurement route.

As this is a new way of providing this service we would be interested in your feedback. One way to provide this is using the feedback form available when the Remedy job is closed. This has a comments section on it.

Other standard service request forms for a variety of common IT requests are available at

<https://helpdesk.man.ac.uk/incidentreporting.cgi>

Use of the forms ensures we gather all the required information and is recommended in preference to submitting email requests.

Adding new academic staff into the Faculty's Publications/Research profiles system

The service desk gets a number of requests to add new academic staff into the Faculty's Publications/Research profiles system. This function is carried out by the research manager of each school and so they are the relevant contacts for this process rather than the service desk.

Once the new member of staff is added in they can login to the system at <http://publications.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/> with their normal username/password, and edit their own profiles/publications.

The data in the Faculty's system will be automatically pulled out every 24 hours and appear on the University's RIP site at <http://www.manchester.ac.uk/research/profiles/>.

Contact the service desk if once added to the system the new member of staff has a problem on logging in or their updated profile/publications don't appear on the central RIP site after 24 hours.

8. FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Events are listed at:

<http://www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/humnet/aboutus/events>

Notification of events

Information on forthcoming events should now be submitted online:

<http://www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/humnet/aboutus/events/submit/>

Notification of bulletin items

Items for future issues of the bulletin can be submitted online via the following link:

<http://www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/humnet/aboutus/announcements/submit>

or by sending an e-mail to Laura.Dobson@manchester.ac.uk