THE REAL RADICAL EDUCATION?

Liberal and General Studies with vocational students in UK colleges 1950-1990 as revealed through interviews with practitioners who taught it

Bulletin 2: history; aims; legacy

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Editorial

'Liberal Studies' and 'General Studies' (L/GS) were the terms most widely used to refer to a curricular element that existed across UK further - and some higher - education institutions between the early 1950s and about 1990. Many thousands of teachers and several hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of students took part, willingly or otherwise, in this radical experiment, which mainstream educational commentators and historians have largely ignored.

L/GS typically consisted of a one or one-and-a-half hour slot in the college day of young people who had been 'released' from work on one day a week, or the equivalent by block release, to follow technical courses, the rest of their college time being spent on work-related material. It was nearly always taught by arts or social science graduates rather than specialist vocational staff. Although exam boards required principals to certify that students had taken part in L/GS classes, for most of the period most L/GS was not formally assessed, let alone examined.

This placed L/GS lecturers in a situation which the vast majority of teachers and lecturers never experience. It pushed many of them into radically experimental practice, and some also towards ideas about education that are important here and now.

A group containing four former L/GS practitioners set up the Liberal and General Studies Project at a meeting at Huddersfield University in September 2013. They defined three broad aims: to research the origins of L/GS; to recapture the experience of teaching L/GS, through interviews with practitioners; and to explore the implications for FHE now and in future.

Since that meeting, interviews structured round questions agreed in 2013 have to date been recorded with 52 former practitioners (14 women and 38 men). All the interviews have been transcribed, providing a body of oral history material which can eventually be archived for access by researchers.

Our first bulletin, produced in October 2017, contained an article by Colin Waugh on the background to - and proposals in - the seminal 1955 National Institute for Adult Education report, *Liberal Education in a Technical Age*, an analysis by Liz Perry of interviewees' responses to question 9 ('Did you have a clear conception of what L/GS was for?'), and a discussion by Roy Stafford of the changing ideological and cultural climate in which L/GS teaching took place, illustrated by material from the interviews.

This our second bulletin also contains articles by three former L/GS practitioners. Bill Bailey looks at policy level developments which opened a space for L/GS in FE curricula. Jonathan Simmons develops further the analysis begun by Liz Perry of what interviewees said about their aims, teaching strategies and lesson content. And, basing himself on material from the interviews, Roy Stafford considers how an approach derived from principles underlying L/GS might be applied to a key present-day issue.

Future publications will give further historical background, extend the analysis of interviewees' responses, including those not represented so far, and propose ways in which FHE now could be strengthened by an understanding of the L/GS experience.

The Project is keen to conduct further interviews, and to involve the widest possible range of former L/GS practitioners in its future development.

Creating space for Liberal and General Studies in technical courses in FE

Bill Bailey

'A liberal element'

The White Paper *Technical Education* in 1956 and the Ministry of Education's Circular 323 of 1957 announced the government's decision that there should be an element of liberal or general studies (L/GS) in part-time day (PTD) technical courses attended by young workers. While the first contained references to the dangers of specialisation as justification for the policy, and the circular contained suggestions for the form it might take, neither document contained any answer as to how much time might be allocated to L/GS and how this teaching time was to be found in what were already crowded syllabuses. The evidence is that in the 1950s colleges were allocating about 220 (1) hours annually for the teaching of technical courses (Ministry of Education (1959), 381), taking the form of about six hours each week in classrooms and workshops. This represented an increase in teaching time compared with the position pre-war when the vast majority of students attended classes in the evening and were taught for about 150 hours on the same courses (Venables, 115). When, after 1945, more employers released their employees for part-time attendance at colleges, the colleges took the opportunity to increase the time given to the vocational content in order to help students' achievement.

During the 1950s concern was frequently expressed about over-specialisation in courses in secondary schools, universities and in technical colleges. *Liberal Education in a Technical Age*, published by the National Institute for Adult Education (NIAE) in 1955, was one product of this concern and it argued that technical courses should continue students' general education alongside the job-related, technical content. The first official action in response to this was the inclusion in the White Paper of the statement of the need for 'a liberal element' in technical courses. The White Paper's main purpose was to promote the expansion of advanced courses in technology and to this end eight Colleges of Advanced Technology (CATs) were designated. The CATs proceeded to submit proposals for the new 'Dip Tech' courses to the National Council for Technological Awards (NCTA) (2). These new full-time and sandwich courses included elements of social and liberal studies, comprising 25 per cent of teaching time, including aspects of industrial management.

The guidance on the developing of the mainstream technical courses published in Circular 323 in 1957 suggested possible ways forward for colleges engaged in 'liberalising' courses. These were: the inclusion of additional subjects; the broader treatment of technical subjects; and more personal teaching methods. At the same time, it was emphasised that these suggestions were offered as 'a contribution to thought' (Ministry of Education, 1957). 'Thought' was likely to be the principal outcome of this as, despite the additional teaching time available in the PTD mode, the view in most colleges was that it was impossible to reduce the time given to technical teaching to accommodate L/GS (NIAE, 118). At the time the City and Guilds and other examining bodies did not include any element of L/GS in their syllabuses or examinations, and the NIAE Survey referred to the effects of the 'cramping requirement of the examining bodies' (NIAE, 119). A further factor likely to affect any move to include non-vocational studies was the 'prevalent public opinion' as to the function of technical institutions: that they were there to provide a utilitarian education, limited to passing examinations (ibid.). That this was very much the view of teachers of technical subjects was also certain to influence the reception of any change towards 'liberalising' the courses. The intention, in some places, to give technical education a broader purpose was clear, but the space on timetables had yet to be found.

The Crowther Report and the 15-18s

The question was taken up in the Ministry's discussions of the terms of a new White Paper and then its consideration of the Central Advisory Committee's Report on the education of young people between the ages of 15 and 18 (CAC, 1959) (3). This brief had been given to the CAC in March 1956 and its generally progressive report ranged widely over provision for the age group. It called for raising the school-leaving age (ROSLA) to 16 and improvements in the education of those attending secondary modern schools. It too saw over-specialisation as a problem and recommended that those taking science subjects should also take classes in the humanities. With respect to further education, the Report expressed anxiety about 'wastage', the numbers of students who failed to complete their courses or failed to pass the examinations at the end of them. While recognising that this was inevitable in a system of voluntary attendance, the CAC's recommendations included widening the range of courses offered to young people, better guidance and selection of students, and more time for students to cover the content of courses. In particular it recommended that the 'county college year' of 44 weeks and 330 hours in the 1944 Education Act should become the normal allocation of hours for all PTD courses. The Committee believed that if these measures were adopted, they would improve and expand part-time technical education, and would provide the basis of practical experience for PTD release education to be introduced for all the age group in 1970 (4). As will be seen, the county college year proposal was to fall in the face of administrative and financial problems.

Indicative of current priorities, the Report also contained a 'crisis' chapter which identified the critical situation developing at the time with regard to the availability of university places. Increased staying-on rates at 16+ during the 1950s had resulted in increasing numbers of applicants for university places and some qualified applicants not receiving offers of places. This warning was influential in helping to persuade governments in the 1960s to plan for the expansion of higher education in response to 'demand' from below as well as from industry requiring more trained scientific manpower.

Better Opportunities 1961

The Ministry turned to discussing the Crowther recommendations early in 1960, focusing on teacher training and staff development for ROSLA and for improving the curriculum in secondary modern schools. The Further Education Branch was already preparing a policy paper on technical education and had much to consider: tackling wastage, the expansion of numbers taking advantage of voluntary day-release from work, introducing new courses, and relations between secondary schools and colleges. Action on wastage included reducing the length of some courses from three to two years, and new diagnostic courses for better placement of students on courses. These measures were incorporated into the White Paper of 1961, *Better Opportunities in Technical Education*, while the problem of expanding student numbers on PTD release was referred to a special committee, the report of which was published in 1964 (5).

With regard to teaching hours for L/GS the White Paper mentioned the CAC's recommendation that the county college year of 330 hours should be the standard year for all part-time day courses, and included the Government's agreement that more time should be available for technical courses. The Ministry had referred the matter to the National Advisory Council for Education in Industry and Commerce (NACEIC), and, the White Paper went on, the Government 'hoped' that 'something like 330 hours . . . will prove to be acceptable as a firm aim of policy and that it will be possible to make rapid progress in giving effect to this by one method or another' (Ministry of Education (1961a), 15). The wording here suggests that there was some hesitation, even reservation, among Ministry officials drawing up the White Paper about taking a clear position on the increased hours for L/GS. One such was expressed in one of the papers for an earlier discussion of GLS:

> Any proposals for progress are liable to unearth something of a dilemma. In a voluntary sector of the education system how far should one go in trying to force on students an activity in which, by and large, they are not interested? Is the attempt to do so a hangover from a nineteenth century conception that 'good' ought to be done to these less fortunate young people?

This was a muted presentation of a view in the FE world that students (and their teachers?) knew what they needed and wanted from their attendance at college, and that in the Ministry's FE Branch the officers were aware of resistance to the introduction of L/GS (6). Another aspect of the change to be studied was the impact on the staffing of colleges. Adding 90 hours to the teaching time for PTD courses would represent an increase of about 33 per cent and would be a significant increase in teachers and the salary bill.

This official hesitancy was repeated in the Administrative Memorandum which went to the LEAs with the White Paper in 1961. Mainly concerned with the structure of the new courses and the timetable for their introduction, this communication briefly stated

that 'English and General Studies' would be provided for, but that its 'precise scope' was not given because the interested bodies were giving further thought to the question. The Ministry was considering the CAC's recommendation for the increase to 330 hours for PTD courses and would consult with the LEAs on this.

The art of the possible

Discussion on this issue resumed in December 1961 when the Committee on the Crowther Report met to discuss the plan to extend the teaching hours for PTD courses. J. A. R. Pimlott, Head of FE Branch, put forward the 330 during 44 weeks. Significantly, at this meeting the Secretary of the Association of Education Committees, William Alexander, experienced in local administration and in national negotiations on salary and professional matters, was present (7). He stated that the 330 hours proposal was 'not on' because it would worsen the conditions of service of college teachers (at this time the FE teachers' contractual year comprised 38 weeks). Alexander went on to say that a 40-week year 'might be possible' as this was the working year of school teachers. The discussion concluded with agreement on the figure of 330 hours proposal, yet also on the need to give 'further consideration' to this (8). The contradictory end to this discussion showed that, without a significant change in FE teachers' conditions, it would be difficult to find a way of providing the 330 hours for GLS. While Alexander's objection was an administrative or technical one, it would have been welcomed by those resistant to the 'broadening' agenda, and, of course, to any worsening of teachers' conditions of service.

Over twelve months later, in February 1963 the Ministry followed up with Circular 3/63 on the implementation of the White Paper 1961. The NACEIC's report on the Crowther recommendations had been completed in the meantime and was included as an appendix to the circular. On the issue of the county college year the national committee welcomed additional time whih would help more students to succeed, as well as the opportunity to include more science and related technology. Also, the courses could include more general education, 'especially by work in English, but also by a liberal treatment of the technical curriculum, by the addition of further liberal studies and by physical education' (9). They recognised the issues raised in the proposed 44-week year - 'it would cause difficulties' - and would require more teaching staff. They were prepared to help with estimating the increasing demand for teachers.

Though generally positive on more hours this did not help Pimlott and the Ministry in pressing the case for 330 hours for PTD students. Nevertheless, in its final section of Circular 3/63 to the LEAs the Ministry repeated the view that an increase to 330 hours would contribute to 'industrial efficiency as well as being of individual benefit to the student release classes'. It went on to state that 'some colleges' were working the 44-week year (10), but that, following Alexander's advice, it was possible to fit 330 hours in 40 weeks. The official arithmetic of this went thus:

> 38 weeks x 7.5 hours (9 to 12, 1 to 5.30) = 285.
> Add 2 days for enrolment etc (= 15) and 2-hour evening classes in the autumn and spring terms to bring the total to 330 (11).

But it had already been agreed by the Ministry that PTD students should not be taught more than 7.5 hours in a day so this 'solution' meant that the students would have to return to the college on another day in the week after a day's work. In a sector of voluntary attendance this was asking a lot, even if transport was available and the workplace was not distant from the college. In short, it was not a workable arrangement and this was ill-considered guidance for the LEAs. No mention was made of the necessary additional staffing and funding, or of the need to discuss conditions of service with the teachers' professional association.

The circular left the LEAs and colleges to get on with including LGS in their timetables. Evidence of timetabling in colleges at the time is sparse but that which is available and personal knowledge suggests that on PTD courses the time typically given by colleges to L/GS was a period of three-quarters of an hour or one hour each week. Bristowe, for example, in 1968 mentions variations in time allocated but 'it is usually one hour a week for part-time students' (Bristowe, 115). Watson's survey, a few years later in 1973, revealed the weekly period of L/GS to be 'practically universal' (Watson, 49). This was the situation in a day at college which typically lasted from 9 am to 5 pm with an evening class on the same or another day in the week. In a 36-week year the allocation to GLS was thus 36 hours or approximately 11 per cent of the total of the annual 320 hours for teaching. This general picture is confirmed in an article on English in Further Education written in 1965 by Fred Flower, Principal of Kingsway College for Further Education in London. In this he refers to the acute shortage of teaching time in colleges and to teachers having to 'fight fiercely' to get the time they need. 'Theoretically', he went on, 'English and liberal studies may command up to 25% of course teaching time, but in practice this may not be more than 15%' (Flower, 15).

The City and Guilds informed the Ministry in 1963 that they had adopted a common policy on 'English and General Studies' in part-time day technical courses. This included the figure of 90 hours, and went on to state that there would be no external examination

but that colleges would verify ‘satisfactory completion’ of the course component of L/GS. The figures above show that this figure was not achieved. Rather, additional hours were taken for the technical components of the courses, leaving an hour a week for L/GS which was a long way from CAC’s 90 hours a year of general education for young workers. After much consultation with the relevant bodies, Pimlott had attempted to keep the higher figure in play but failure was always likely given the lack of commitment in the colleges to the adding of L/GS to the course, and the awareness that there was no obvious supply of suitable teachers to take on the work. The failure to implement the generous proposal of Crowther for the minority of 15-18 year-olds attending college courses, and through them at a future date, the rest of the age group, is in graphic contrast to the government’s response to Crowther’s ‘crisis’ chapter mentioned above.

Notes

1. This figure would increase to 270 when students were required to attend a weekly evening class. Peter Venables, in *Technical Education*, published in 1955, gives 220-240 as the number of hours. Some official douments referred to a minimum of 180 hours which was the accepted number of hours when the courses were taught on an evening only basis. It seems likely that the number of hours varied among colleges and in contemporary accounts.

2. The Diploma in Technology was equivalent in standard to a university first degree. At the time the universities insisted that only they, with their royal charter, had the power to award degrees.

3. This is usually referred to as the Crowther Report.

4. The Education Act 1944 had included provision for ROSLA to 15 (then to 16 as soon as possible afterwards); then required that all under-18s in employment should attend County Colleges on one day a week or its equivalent.

5. The Henniker Heaton Report rejected compulsion and instead recommended that more attractive part-time courses would lead to a doubling of voluntary participation by 1970.

6. The same paper reported that at a recent NUS conference (in 1955 (?)) there was applause at the comment that ‘liberal education’ was a ‘dirty word’ in technical colleges.

7. It was very unusual for such a senior man to attend what was a working party within a government department.

8. TNA ED46/1072

9. NACEIC Report on CAC 15-18 Report, 8.

10. The names of these colleges are not given in any of the documents on this issue.

11. In fact, the sums do not work out. Two-hour evening classes in the first two terms would total 48 hours - making 348 hours overall.

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Liberal and General Studies: its aims, methods and topics

Jonathan Simmons

The focus of this article is on key aspects of the aims and purposes of L/GS, particularly during the period before it came under pressure from the City and Guilds Certificate in Communication Skills (1) and was incorporated into TEC, BEC and then BTEC programmes (2), as this seems to me to be the most distinctive phase of its development. I pick up a number of themes elaborated by Liz Perry and Roy Stafford in the first occasional publication, and reuse some of the same quotes from interviewees. I take as a starting point terms used by Liz to group what interviewees said about the purposes of L/GS ('critical thinking', 'social and political education', 'growing up', 'cultural' and 'literacy'), and develop some ideas set out in Roy's article, particularly those that relate to role strain.

The purposes analysed here cover not only what would be conventionally thought of as the aims of L/GS practitioners but also what might initially be seen as methods by which these aims could be achieved. As my educational thinking has developed I have become more aware of the way in which issues are often couched in terms of dichotomies, something being 'either this or that', for example knowledge or skills, theory or practice, academic or vocational, mind or body, thought or action, process or product, acquisition or participation, education or training, pure or applied, knowing that or knowing how. I have become more aware of how both/and thinking is better than either/or thinking. There are usually many ways in which the scope of each part of a binary pair actually overlaps that of the other. One of the key conclusions I have come to about L/GS is that it is the combination of aims, methods and topics that is its distinguishing characteristic, such that to emphasise one of these aspects without the others diminishes the enterprise and allows the curriculum project to fracture. However, many of the themes analysed here have also been picked up separately in different ways, and continue to inform current and developing practices in further and higher education.

The idea of a liberal curriculum formed the basis from which L/GS grew. One interviewee characterised this in the following terms:

> . . . open, challenging, non-sectarian etc . . . And so I'd [imbued?] the value of debate, discussion, seeing how liberating that can be. So I knew that, at its best, liberal adult education can bring you outwards to look at the world, look at other issues, and see the value of debate and discussion, and, if you like, the civil society values of democracy. I'd put it no less than that, you know: ideally you want everybody to be well-informed, participating, debating and discussing the issues. (Derek Tatton)

Ideally discussion and debate encourages participants to articulate their views in as clear and concise a way as possible, to provide reasons and a rationale for a point of view, to listen to criticisms of that point of view, and to respond to those criticisms in as productive a way as possible. Actual debates and discussions are not always like this, but, as organisers of them, this is what L/GS teachers aspired to. The idea of a curriculum being open implies that no topic is excluded; the L/GS curriculum could address any kind of subject matter. It aimed to be challenging both in terms of what it required of students but also in terms of the manner in which topics were approached and methods adopted. Being non-sectarian implies that all views would be considered, that no one perspective would dominate. The value of debate and discussion was central to L/GS teaching and learning methods, which supports the ideal of an open curriculum where challenge is created and required. The inclusion of the term 'adult' by this interviewee brings into play the transitional nature of the students' status in society, as either moving into adulthood or encountering issues typical of more adult environments. As the outside world began to

impinge further on students' experiences they were also moving into a set of roles where they could increasingly influence their environment, which raised broader political aspects as well as the nature of civil society. All of these elements involved their own challenges both in philosophical terms of the scope of their meaning, and in practical terms of how they could or should have been implemented.

1. Developing students' critical thinking

One of the key terms which brought all these different elements together and was central to this conception of the L/GS curriculum was the aim of developing students' critical thinking. Embedded in the following quotations are further aspects of the aims and purposes of L/GS, which will be expanded upon in subsequent sections:

> . . . the conception of it was to broaden and to widen the education of people who, by and large, were leading very narrow, vocational types of courses, [to] try, you know, to open that up a bit . . . (Ted Bailey)

This interviewee then explained how, when teaching A-level Sociology, he would say to students:

> 'I want you to become a critical and questioning person'. And I would say the same thing applied to Liberal Studies - the way I did it anyway - because I rather hoped that people would question, and argue, and, yeah, as a result of swapping ideas, gain a slightly broader approach to everything. (Ted Bailey)

A number of links are made in these two quotations between critical thinking and the idea of broadening students' educational experiences, becoming questioning and developing reasoning. The following quote addresses the scope and subject matter which is to be subject to critical analysis:

> . . . to be able as far as possible to critically analyse their situation and the society they lived in, to establish an empathy and sympathy for the plight of others . . . (Mike Thompson)

Class identity is made a significant aspect of the role of L/GS as well as the challenge to commonsense ideas - a key phrase in the L/GS lexicon:

> I actually believed it was an important space in the curriculum for young working-class men and women to be able to challenge, you know, what their sort of - I mean, I think we used the phrase at the time - 'commonsense notions' of the world. And, you know, to take a critical look at the world. (Peter Glasgow)

A curriculum which aims to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions assumes a political dimension, particularly in relation to embryonic roles in society, and the fact that most L/GS students were training in work:

> I was introducing students to things that they hadn't thought about . . . I thought that General Studies was about introducing critical thinking, politicisation, making people aware of where their work fitted into the world in a much broader sense. (Malcolm Clare)

Stimulating interest and curiosity is linked here to technical aspects which could be central to students on such vocational courses:

> the General Studies curriculum attempted to nurture independent thinking, curiosity, awareness of the implications of technical activity and decision-taking . . . (Dick Booth)

The following quotation makes a link between being critical and the idea of developing a wider perspective and considering students' wider social roles. It also raises the significant point that in many cases the topics considered in L/GS and the method of discussion and reasoning used in these lessons led to a consideration of the values that informed such debates:

> I think [it was] the value of stimulating critical thinking, trying to help them develop a wider perspective on the society that they live in. I mean, that concept - citizenship - is about, you know, what's the society about that we live in and what are your values about it, and how does one, what does one do if one disagrees? (Felicity Munday)

Interestingly, the following quotation makes a link between, on the one hand, thinking critically and, on the other, being academic and considering different people's perspectives. While being academic can sometimes be used in a pejorative sense, here it is used as a way of signalling that in a positive sense being academic is to recognise that knowledge, rather than being fixed, is contestable and debatable, and is influenced by different perspectives:

> But underlying it all was the object of encouraging the students to communicate, to think about things differently, and to develop academic skills. So basically, whatever we did there was an element of they had to think critically, they had to look at things, discuss them and decide, sort of, where things were coming from, and when they were reading things they had to say, well, what perspective has this person got as opposed to that. (Geraldine Thorpe)

The final quotation in this section brings together many of the previous themes, so that we can see from this how the aim of developing students' critical thinking was related a number of different themes: communication, discussion, identifying different perspectives, challenging commonsense notions, exploring their own and others' values:

> To give students a critical understanding of the world, a way of becoming more politically, media, socially literate, a political corrective to the types of commonsense notions and falsely obvious stuff . . . developing a critical education, how you can look at things like immigrants' calls on employment, and begin to critically analyse that, and all those, sort of, commonsense notions, . . . So enabling them to have a critical fix and perspective on - and be able to overcome - what they would see as barriers. (Don Carroll)

In the current educational environment it is interesting to note that critical thinking has become a separate subject which has its own textbooks.

2. Discussion and debate

When discussion and debate work well, they are one way in which people learn what they actually think, enabling them to engage in critical thinking. Discussion in L/GS was intended as a collaborative activity which required listening and responding to others, being interactive. Debates created the lesson as it progressed, taking advantage of spontaneous responses, encouraging students to respond to each other's points of view. The role of the L/GS teacher was to manage the discussion, to ensure everyone who wanted to say something was able to do so, to prompt with questions and comments:

> I did believe in the power of conversation; and I did believe that a good conversation can be very educative . . . And so I did go into the job with that in mind, in terms of trying to provoke - to provoke or encourage - conversations . . . getting people to talk with each other in ways they haven't done before, and in so doing they see different aspects of each other. (Paul Elms)

And within discussion and debate the intention was to encourage reasoning, the giving of reasons for a particular point of view, the challenging of such reasoning, and linking this to the examination of one's values which regularly underpin reasoning. Argument and reasoning were central to L/GS purposes at the time, and the following quote expresses the way in which they were often seen as the aim of L/GS, where discussion was seen as a way for students to clarify their thoughts:

> The whole purpose, I thought, was to teach them to structure arguments and to argue their case. It didn't matter, as long as their views weren't obnoxious, you know, or illegal, what their views were. To me the whole raison d'etre of General Studies was actually to clarify and argue your thoughts. (Steve Stallard)

Discussion and debate were also seen as a means of generating confidence, giving students space to articulate their views and thereby to generate a voice:

> So I think all of those things were important: giving students the opportunity to be confident, to talk about virtually anything, to investigate things, to be able to articulate what they thought about them, to be able to express themselves. While obviously I thought it was important that they could do that in terms of their vocational work, but again the focus was on the student, I think, rather than in doing something on behalf of employers. (Roy Stafford)

In this regard there is a balance to be struck between having a clear structure of content and the immediacy of responding to the particular issues and responses of students to any of the stimulus material used in L/GS:

> I do think that they [ie Liberal and General Studies. Ed.] worked when they were spontaneous. Although we would go in with a subject, quite often with many discussion areas we would diverge from what we were supposed to be talking about. But those to me were the most useful, the most dynamic,

> where the students were most involved. So I personally felt that it's useful to have a structure, but it was quite important not to stick to it. (Barbara Hill)

One idea was to see debate as generating a resource for students to be able to analyse and evaluate arguments and the reasoning behind them, in contexts other than the L/GS classroom. This connects to the aim of being critical, and to students' possible work roles:

> . . . we wanted to stimulate the students to think, to be able to respond to challenges that they may face at the moment or later on in their working lives. We wanted to give them some kind of resource, not just that they could read and write but that they could analyse, they could spot a false argument - which we thought was really important - and that they would train up their communication skills so that they could express themselves, and also pass on messages efficiently and not in a slapdash manner. And so we did have a whole clear set of objectives, but we didn't always have the chance to deliver them in the way that we wanted. (Ken Hyam)

A further extension of the idea of discussion as generating a resource for students was the idea that L/GS involved the elaboration of knowledge, as opposed to the idea of education as simply giving students knowledge. In the following quote we can also see an element of an emancipation philosophy in terms of opening doors to conceptual tools:

> . . . that was to do with the students' capacity to reason; it's to do with the elaboration of knowledge. It's not about giving them knowledge or anything like that but it's rather like entering a genuine dialogue with those people in which both sides engage. So you've thought about how they can develop themselves conceptually, and take hold of conceptual tools and things that they are largely shut out from. So it's to do with the elaboration of conceptual tools by people who are otherwise shut out from them. (Colin Waugh)

Such conceptual tools included:

> . . . to be able to acquire a range of problem-solving techniques (Peter Salisbury)

Interestingly, the following quote differentiates discussion and debate from argument, which is assumed to be more of an oppositional presentation of opinions, in contrast to debate, which is more about thinking things through in an active, interactive and collaborative endeavour:

> I think it was just getting people to discuss and debate things, and not just argue, you know, [but] actually get them to think through things, and rational argument, which I felt was an important part of what that was about. (Barry Fyfield)

Finally, the central role of a discursive space is linked to the idea of negotiating the curriculum:

> So I thought that part of our purpose was to give the discursive space in the week, where the agenda could also to an extent be set by the learners. The process was important. Could they handle an argument? Could they express an argument? Could they express a point of view clearly? You could leave the topics to them. (Geoff Stanton)

L/GS was not just about developing problem-solving techniques but also about getting students to pose the problems they wanted to address.

3. Negotiating the curriculum

One implication of this approach was the need to negotiate the curriculum with the students, not just impose it, to develop a curriculum in which the students had a voice, not only in helping to determine what topics were covered but also in terms of the way in which the topics were addressed. The curriculum was negotiated, both in terms of the subject matter and in terms of the methods.

This did not mean staff abdicating all responsibility for the curriculum. What it did mean was sometimes described as setting an agenda with the students where they could suggest what should be studied but so could the staff. Part of the rationale for this approach was that in their previous and current education they would have had no say in what was to be studied, and L/GS was one arena in which they could have a say:

> I mean, it was like a negotiation with the students. No way would you sit there and say, 'We're doing this all lesson'. So there was always give and take. And that was understood. We didn't want - to put it crudely - to bust their balls, and they didn't want to be rotten to us. You know, if you could build up a

> good rapport, you could maximise what you could do in the lesson. (Steve Stallard)

And if it did take off, students benefited immensely:

> . . . you had the freedom to work with a group of students and start from where they were and develop an interest and develop ideas and what was really great was that sometimes you would get a student who would really take off on something. (Viv Thom)

The nature of this curriculum was a direct challenge to the idea of education as handing out knowledge to students in a one-directional pattern of delivery. A fundamental principle of L/GS was that it was relational. Education was seen as a collective rather than just an individual endeavour. A related aspect of the rationale was that it required students to think about what they did want to learn about, and sometimes it took time for students to be convinced that they really did have a say in the curriculum:

> What I thought was most worthwhile was . . . to give the students a chance to have a say about their own education. They'd been told what to do all their lives. Some of them had hated school, and it was a chance for them to actually think about what did they want to know, and what did they need to know, and would they be prepared for new experiences? I found that once the students thought they could have some kind of say [they] were much more open to doing things than if I'd said, 'Right, we're doing this . . .' So that sort of approach I found worked best, and it gave them a chance to look at their own needs as well as their learning. (Geraldine Thorpe)

A further aspect of the rationale was that in negotiating what was studied it would make the curriculum more relevant to the students:

> And what I have learned is that people come into the classroom with their own worldview and their own knowledge. I've also learned that we learn nothing at all in terms of life, or learning doesn't happen, particularly classroom learning doesn't happen, unless what is being done in the classroom is directly related to what people already know, because I've learned that the physical process of learning, the synaptic processes of learning, the neural psychology, if you like, of learning requires us to build on existing blocks of knowledge, to learn something. And so the concept of a negotiated curriculum, a classroom experience which makes use of the knowledge that's already there and links that directly to the knowledge that you want to generate, I think, is very important. (David Crabtree)

Negotiating the curriculum raised the question of the relevance of what students learned, not just to their gathering of qualifications but to their lives. Obviously the whole issue of who decides what is relevant to whom is fraught with challenges, but agenda-setting with the students allowed us as teachers to say what we thought was worth learning about, while also allowing students to do the same. It also encouraged teachers to seek out topics that students might be interested in but which they might not have already thought about, first by observing how and whether their interest was raised, and also by experimenting with possible topics and listening carefully and actively to their responses. One key to this was to consider how a particular topic might be best approached from the students' point of view. In many cases teachers are traditionally encouraged to approach a subject in what would be perceived as a logical order given the nature of the subject - that is, to start with the most basic tenets of a subject. However, often it can be more engaging to start where students might have an opinion about a topic, and work back from that point towards basic tenets, the purpose being to maintain interest in a subject and the perceived relevance of moving from opinions to facts and concepts. The intention was to elicit meanings from students that they already had, and to subject those to testing, verifying, re-ordering, re-classifying, modifying and extending:

> Basically it was to encourage students to think about topics which wouldn't normally enter their range of decision-making or knowledge. . . [It was about] the development of personal relationships for the students themselves because they weren't just sitting in a lecture room being talked to and being told what to do. They were encouraged to think about topics. (George Chambers)

So key characteristics of the L/GS curriculum include its open-ended nature, exploration of the nature of the questions being asked, and the capacity to generate questions that students are not aware of at first. These elements were intended as an environment for learning, in which the teacher, the students and the problems and strategies for solving problems would all play a part. Embedded in the L/GS philosophy was a key tenet: that the process of learning was just as important as the

content; that how something was learned was equally important important as what was learned. In fact, the idea of the hidden curriculum indicates that the methods of learning themselves also signalled what was considered important.

I want to conclude this section with an example of the way in which L/GS teaching methods sometimes came to influence the teaching methods of the students' parent department. While the nature of relationships with technical colleagues is a subject for another article, this is an example of a positive outcome:

> We worked on number as well. I recall the engineer that I was working with, and you'd hear the same from others, it wasn't just me, that that was quite an opening up for them, to see how things they taught in sometimes quite dry ways - and that there were other ways in. Looking at measurement, sending the group out around the classroom saying that you've got to measure very tiny things to very huge using only parts of your body and then come back and tell us. And they had to present how they'd done it. And that was a breakthrough with engineers which worked very well. (Madeline Hall)

4. Addressing students' changing social roles

One of the ways teachers identified subject matter that they thought students would be interested in was to consider issues around their changing social roles. This was often expressed in terms of helping students to develop as they moved into adulthood, and to manage more activities as their independence widened:

> . . . to improve the confidence of young people, and to improve their ability to make their way in the world by helping them learn how to manage money, make good choices in their lives, have good relationships, as well as improving their literacy and numeracy. (Julia Duggleby)

But it was not simply about helping with practical tasks; it was also about their developing selves, particularly attitudes and values. This aspect will be examined further in the section below on topics and subject matter:

> It was opening them up to what being an adult was like, what their potential was, and how they could enrich their own lives, both in practice in their job, and in their home life, but also in the things that they were interested in, and the way they spent their time. And their attitudes. So I felt that it was about opening up people's minds so that they could grow and expand, really. (Mary Conway)

The aims also recognised the increasing complexity that students were facing and would continue to face. So attitudes and confidence were a significant part of L/GS purposes:

> . . . everything that we did, everything that we tried to do, was to set the student up to be more confident, more able to function in the complex society into which they were about to be - or some of them already were - in, and to be stimulating, and to provide information and research skills. (Ken Hyam)

And this was often linked to the relationship between the individual and society:

> 'We live in a society, we live in a group. What do you think about this that's happening? What do you think about that?' And those sorts of conversations should be part of education. And we've lost that. And the other part of education is the development of the individual; you know, 'What's important? What are your morals?' Sorry, 'morals' sounds a bit . . . But what I mean is, 'What's important to you? What should you value? What do you value? Who influenced you in those values?' All of those things, they were the hidden agenda, if you like, of General Studies, but it's very important for getting the most out of your life. (Jane Gould (3))

For others, this informed perspective had a political dimension:

> . . . the idea was that we - me and other colleagues - were trying to develop political thinking in our young people, and all kinds of strategies were developed for that. (David Kear)

Sometimes this was expressed more explicitly in terms of the issues that should be addressed, particularly in relation to the workplace, the role of work in students' lives, and the social issues of race and gender. This was particularly relevant as virtually all the students were on vocational courses, entering into working contexts:

> . . . we knew what General Studies was for, which was: tackling issues of economics,

> race, class, gender and the dynamics of power in the workplace. (David Kear)

But they were also moving through a phase when age-related rights and responsibilities were changing, so this was another source of topics in the L/GS teachers' agenda:

> I think the other thing was the idea of actually trying to give students skills and knowledge that would help them when they were out in work or even when they were, you know, out in the environment as it was at the time. People remember the sus laws. I can remember doing quite a bit of stuff about 'what are your rights in relation to all of that?' So it was almost like that life [skills] sort of approach to giving students some knowledge and skills, and understanding of things that might happen to them. And consumer rights, for instance, and workers' rights, and all that stuff, we would be looking at. (Peter Glasgow)

But political topics were set within a purpose which was broader than just voting:

> I wanted to make sure that people did have an understanding that politics wasn't just something about government and distanced from them, but that it was something that affected all their lives, and that the distribution of wealth and power was something that people should understand and know how to change really. (Viv Thom)

5. Being student-centred

The aim of being relevant to students was expressed in the idea of being student-centred. It was intended as a contrast to being subject-centred. While this term was interpreted in many different ways at the time, it indicated that we intended to take student concerns seriously, that we wanted to negotiate what was studied in class, that we would start, in the phrase at the time, 'from where the students were at'. But it was also a term that was abused. For example, sometimes being student-centred was taken to mean simply doing stuff on sex, drugs and rock'n'roll (which wasn't a bad way to start), but it could also be limited in terms of developing students, so that, in a contemporary phrase, it not only 'started from where the students were at, but also 'left them where they were'. The following quote indicates the significance of this approach:

> . . . so what I would be doing was engaging with students and helping them develop [inaudible]. I wasn't doing it to produce better workers . . . I was always student-centred, that was always my purpose, and most of all I was trying to help students, and I thought this was an area of the curriculum you could develop new practices in. (Roy Stafford)

The following quote illustrates some of the strengths and weaknesses of starting from where the students were at, as well as exemplifying the challenge of not having a set curriculum:

> . . . because the concept of the negotiated and taught curriculum was something that I was able to experience, and I learned that the student perspective and the student take on things is really quite important, and that you can't bring about very much effective stuff within the classroom unless you're actually starting from where the students are at, and that's not just like lip service in the way that those Communication booklets were [This refers to assignments that formed part of the City and Guilds Certificate in Communication Skills. Ed.], by coming in and thinking I know what you want, to actually being in the situation where you have a lesson with people, and at any moment they can just turn round and say 'this is a load of bollocks', and you have to be able to justify what you're doing, and do it in a way which makes sense to them and brings them on board. (David Crabtree)

But, as another interviewee says, the term is now being used in a way which denudes it of its more radical aspects. Instead of being a term which encourages staff to consider what it is that students want to know and do, and to devise ways of negotiating this with them in a manner that is meaningful to them, it has been reduced to meaning that students can only decide when and how fast they learn, but have no input or say in what they study:

> But I think that what's happened is that that whole notion of student-centredness has been hijacked. So what I mean by that is that this whole thing about target setting and impact and so on - now every student's got to have a target, every teacher's got to have targets, everyone's got to have targets, they've all got to be met, they've all got to be evidenced, and so on - that, I don't think, is the spirit of student-centredness. I think the spirit of student-centredness was 'Don't treat

> everybody the same, don't treat them all as one homogeneous group, don't tell them all to shut up because you're about to speak, they've all got individual experience, they've all got contributions to make'. That would be inclusive, if you tried to teach to that, with a respect for that . . . And it's also about enabling each student to develop, not in a way that's measurable and trackable and quantifiable, but to get those invisible elements of education like socialisation and the development of the individual as part of the package. So I think we're a long, long way from that, because the student-centredness thing was hijacked. (Jane Gould)

Students could be difficult and challenging but actually many staff thought that this was a very useful stimulus for remaining student-centred and maintaining a focus on what students thought was relevant, although it did often take a lot of effort to persuade them of the relevance when students would ask:

> 'Why are we doing this?' And I thought that was the most useful of many of the questions in terms of that first stage, because one had to keep on trying to relate what you were doing to their initial experiences. (David Crabtree)

6. Broadening students' educational experiences

A more general set of aims was expressed i terms of broadening students' educational experiences, with the intention of countering the specialism of their vocational training:

> . . . my job was to make them think about other things outside of their vocational training; to look at the world and at politics and literature and to broaden their minds. That was my attitude and that's the way I handled it. (Bob Gaffey)

This stemmed from a growing concern about specialisation in English education:

> One of the strands that gave rise to General Studies was the feeling that technical education was too specialised - if you dig back into that area you'll find a lot of stuff about it being too specialised, so you needed to counter the specialisation, and once you do that you are coming in as an alternative, a counter to the core of the whole course, which presents lots of dangers. (Dick Booth)

> I think it was to do with broadening people's education generally, partly because everyone's education was narrow. That's [inaudible] the English disease, a much narrower curriculum was offered mostly. And the other thing that happens in England is that specialisation is valued, and being a generalist isn't. (Geoff Stanton)

Purposes expressed here include developing a broader perspective, making them more rounded individuals:

> I just felt that it was a real need to give them a broader way of looking at their own experience of life. (David Crabtree)

> I think it was to make the learners more rounded. Because they weren't just doing a vocational or manual subject, so it gave them a rounder education. (Pam Stevens)

Broadening students' thinking about wider issues is connected to using discussion as a method:

> So I think I did feel it was my job to continue to, sort of, broaden their horizons, and to get them to think about issues they might not otherwise discuss. (Jerry Thomas)

Key phrases included 'the whole person', 'cultural capital', 'humanism', 'the arts':

> . . . it's about developing the whole person and, for me, what General Studies gave us was the opportunity to add in that cultural capital dimension that rich and privileged children have anyway. Whether it was to introduce them to ideas or music or art of different kinds that other people had access to by virtue of their background and even where you lived and the relationships of geography and where other countries were, it just actually enables you to discuss those kinds of things, and I think it is about humanism and humanity in general, and if you don't have that, then it seems to me that you are missing something that is fairly significant. (Viv Thom)

A central connection between purposes and methods is made in this next quotation in terms of not imposing something. It reasserts an aim that technical education and training should be about

'other things in life beside their job':

> I believed in liberal education, but I didn't believe that something should be imposed on technical students as if it was superior to what they were doing. I felt that science and technology had an equal role to the arts and so I tried to merge the two together, to get the science and technology merged together with the arts to make a whole, because I believed in the whole person - that's what liberal education was, that people shouldn't just be reduced to machines doing their vocational jobs but they should recognise that there were other things in life beside their jobs. (Graham Taylor)

7. Reconsidering one's own motivations

The aim of broadening students' views of the world also came with perceived dangers such as being a missionary and being patronising. Here is an expression of the way the aims of broadening were perceived as problematic:

> I think if you'd seen me teaching in the first two or three years, there was a certain amount of preaching going on. I came across an exam paper I set, in which I asked the students - these were carpentry students - to read Nelson Mandela's speech from the dock and answer questions about it. That was the missionary thing . . . (Dick Booth)

However, it is tempered by a value statement which attempts to justify or forgive being patronising when it is serving a higher ideal:

> But idealism has to be nurtured and cherished even if, you know, it's sometimes patronising. (Dick Booth)

Later in the same interview this respondent emphasises the tension inherent in aiming to give young people a voice:

> It was a bit missionary-like and that has its strengths and its weaknesses. If anything I've become over the years more and more uncomfortable with the memories of that missionary bit, while at the same time more and more sure the attempts we were making to give young people a voice were very important. (Dick Booth)

This attitude is expressed in starker terms and expresses a concern which could be identified in the assumption that L/GS in some forms was aiming to 'bring culture to the masses' as if the masses had no culture already:

> . . . other Liberal Studies lecturers were interested in talking about politics - leftwing politics - to their classes, which I thought was unfair. And others were patronising to the students, thinking that they were lacking in the finer arts,which was their role to bring those students up to their level. And I disapproved of that too. So I was clear what I was doing. (Graham Taylor)

Or of raising political consciousness:

> I believed in the liberal education ideal that people were not just workers but also people with families, communities etc. I wanted to teach GS in FE - partly because it was FE and wanted students who wanted to be there, and partly out of a political feeling that I wanted to be discussing politics and literature with working-class students. Looking back that might have been a naive concept - to consider educating the working class to become politically active. It seems rather condescending now. (Adrian Perry)

Here is a further example of the ways in which the issue of being patronising was tempered by the desire to work with students in an open-ended way:

> . . . opening doors to students and giving them access to places like this [ie the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool, where this interview was being conducted. Ed.] - to art, music, literature, film and all of that. I mean I feel uneasy but, at the time, it's like civilising the natives and it's not meant to be, and it wasn't really like that, but it can have that feel at times. So it was opening doors to possibilities but also giving students some of the skills to argue with the world and to explore the world a bit. An awful lot of what I did and, I suppose, the technique I picked up, was very much project based, and letting the students decide what the problem was and then . . . decide the ways in which to explore that problem and the ways in which their solutions to that problem could be reported back. (Kevin Donovan)

In some ways it could be argued that worrying about being patronising was itself patronising, in assuming that these students had no mental resources to

recognise when they were being patronised:

> I remember walking into a new class that I'd never had before. They were second or third year students, and one bright spark, he was sat at the front, and he said, 'Ah, what're you gonna try and persuade us to believe this year, sir?' Which I thought summed up, probably a college attitude, staff and students, to what General Studies was. In other words, there was somebody, some stranger came in, and tried to persuade them to have another set of beliefs. And the fact that that was articulated probably represented a fairly general [attitude] - to some of the students. (Malcolm Clare)

It is worth putting the issue of being patronising into the broader educational discourse of the time, some of which was informed by the radical emancipatory educational literature that was burgeoning then. The following quote can be seen as reframing the issue in terms of legitimising putting students' experience at the centre of the L/GS aims:

> And for me it was like - to put a slogan on it - Paulo Freire's phrase: 'Name your own world'. He was doing that by teaching people language, of course, in South America. But that idea of naming your own world - so these people were starting to name their experiences and it was legitimising the fact they had these experiences and they were something to explore, you know. (Paul Elms)

The respondent whose words I used to raise this issue [ie Dick Booth. Ed.] initially went on to expand his concerns, and this raises a question about the class relationship of teacher and student. At one level this reflection on the relative class positioning of student and teacher would be resolved by an essentialist recognition of respective class origins:

> . . . my view was a sort of an idealistic one, that the people who were in FE colleges were largely working-class people who were in danger - very patronising, this sounds - in danger of having a very narrow sort of vocational education, as not an education at all but being trained and then being sent out into these jobs. And I suppose I had a sort of faint missionary attitude towards it, which is that it was our duty to broaden their education, to introduce them to, sort of, concepts that they didn't come across in training - basically to give them a good general education, an opportunity to question things that they wouldn't have got - or we suspected that they wouldn't have got - in their vocational education. So it was a very patronising view that . . . I just expected to, sort of, meet a sea of hostility and overcome it by my personality, you know, my background. 'Hey, I'm working-class like you' - that sort of thing. (Chris Lessware)

Here I want to end this section with a quote which sees the way in which the L/GS workforce changed over time. It does not resolve the issues raised above but provides a more historical perspective.

In response to a question about the extent to which L/GS teachers were middle-class people going into working-class establishments, and that this can be criticised because it is a bit like cultural colonisation, this interviewee replies:

> There may be a difference between the earlier generation of Liberal Studies lecturers who entered it from the mid '50s to the late '60s and who came from various backgrounds and some from the services or things like that, and there might have been a broader spread of class backgrounds, but after the Industrial Training Act of 1964 there was an expansion of day-release and an expansion of apprenticeships and so forth, and, at the same time, there was an expansion of higher education, which meant that there was a section of people whose family had never been to university before, and who came from a working-class background. And I think that a section of those people were the ones who became General Studies teachers from the late '60s onwards, and I would include myself in that . . . But somebody like Lauri [Say. Ed. (4)] is without question a working-class person with socialist antecedents and so forth, and I think that most of the other people that stuck to it were similar. But it is true that a lot of people who were involved in General Studies had such a background, and some prominent figures in the early days were working-class, and there may be particular traditions, especially in South Wales, which would push people towards that, even if their actual background was not working-class. (Colin Waugh)

8. Absence of formal assessment

Initially the curriculum was unassessed, but as L/GS became incorporated into TEC, BEC and then BTEC, it had to adopt similar assessment strategies

to the rest of the technical curriculum. A key strength of this unassessed approach was that staff could be responsive to students' needs as well as their wants; it enabled staff to be student-centred, to negotiate the curriculum. They were not constrained by externally imposed specifications or assessment requirements. One weakness was that some staff could get away with doing very little - just showing films, for example. Another was that in the changing external environment staff were not able formally to demonstrate what students had learned or achieved.

The major problem with assessment from an L/GS perspective was that it distorted the focus of study from what was relevant to students to what was measurable, and one of the difficulties was trying to make what was relevant measurable in terms set by examining and validating bodies:

> There was no assessment. And as we know, tails wag dogs. Imagine Liberal Studies, General Studies, being assessed! What would they be assessing, for goodness sake? It's unassessable. And therefore, very often curriculum orientated towards what is assessable and what isn't. 'Can you measure it? We better have it on. If you can't measure it, what's the point of teaching it? And so . . . there needs to be an infusion into education - and training - that isn't assessed, which frees up the syllabus, the curriculum, the participation of young people, for its own sake, not to pass an exam. (Malcolm Clare)

Without assessment there was no external stick with which to manage student motivation, but this could be seen as a positive aspect, like students questioning the purpose of their L/GS lessons:

> I think given the sort of premise that there was no inherent student motivation because there was no assessment that was clearly tied to the pass/fail in their qualification, I think the onus was on the quality of teaching and learning, because you were not going to survive if you didn't have their interest. So I think there was that interest. I think the fact that there wasn't a clearly defined curriculum made you innovative. (Felicity Munday)

The following quote illustrates one of the weaknesses of a formally assessed curriculum, the regurgitation of facts, which L/GS was intending to counter:

> You know, when students got involved in activity, you could actually be assessing for much more than, let's say, the regurgitation of historical knowledge. And also, people who previously had become fixated about 'I'm a maths teacher, I'm a this teacher, I'm a that teacher', some of them found it very, very difficult to understand that when students were involved in activity, that you could actually be assessing lots of different things rather than just following the discipline. And I think that came out of General Studies. (Peter Glasgow)

When formal assessment was introduced, it reduced L/GS to a similar function as the rest of the curriculum:

> There was, a multi-choice test! And it became much more like you would imagine the American high school system, where there was a right answer or a wrong answer and if you don't get it then you won't pass. And that really transformed the whole ethos of Liberal Studies, and turned it into a kind of advanced English teaching really, but without any scope for literature or film. In some ways I feel it was a loss of creativity. (Ken Hyam)

But the internal and external pressures built up and the accountability policies began to dominate. The following quote illustrates the concern that committed L/GS teachers had about colleagues who treated the open-ended nature of L/GS as an excuse not to do very much:

> . . . there was a bit of them wanting to carry on doing what they've always been doing, but we do actually need to have some standards, and only by having that kind of accreditation and structure will you get some respect for this. And it's all very well to be free to do what you like, but there was no accountaility for people who were just messing about and wasting people's time, or sending them off to do things that they really didn't need to do. (Viv Thom)

Conclusion

I have defined the distinguishing features of L/GS as a set of aims and methods, combined with topics that address issues found relevant by L/GS teachers and students - without the distorting influence of externally set, formal assessment. Many of these elements can still be found in isolated pockets in the education system, and can have a positive influence. Examples of such positive influences include 'active learning' and 'tutorials':

> General Studies teachers were perhaps at the forefront of . . . things like student participation in class . . . looking at individual progress . . . having activities that grab people and get them involved . . . the whole tutorial systems (Peter Glasgow);

'reflective practice':

> there is a lot of emphasis now on personal and professional skills development which encourages people to be reflective and to examine how they function in a communications skills context where they are with other people and developing listening skills and working in groups and in teams and all those kind of things. (Viv Thom);

making links with literacy practices:

> Because I think what people were attempting to do with General and Communication Studies needed the theoretical ideas of people like Barton and Hamilton on literacy being located within the experiences of people themselves. (David Crabtree)

And I would also include: criterion referenced assessment, the student as producer, and an emphasis on the process of learning.

For others, L/GS extended into Media Studies:

> And that's why, I suppose, that I've never really seen that much distinction between General Studies and Media Education. [They] were part of the same thing as far as I was concerned, it was all a basic set of interdisciplinary practices. (Roy Stafford)

The experience of teaching L/GS was also useful to individuals in different contexts, such as managing group discussion in a democratic way:

> . . . allow different people to speak, stop people speaking who wanted to dominate, hold up views that were expressed for people to hear, listen to and to think about - get a feeling for a decision or consensus, and try to move it on. Put my own views to one side. (Dick Booth)

So despite its decline as a separate subject, L/GS and its practitioners has continued to influence curriculum design and practice through its liberal, critical ethos.

Notes

1. The Certificate in Communication Skills Level 1 (also known as CGLI 772 and later CGLI 361) was introduced by the City and Guilds of London Institute awarding body (CGLI) in the second half of the 1970s. This free-standing qualification was assessed by externally set assignments and a multiple choice exam. It arose from a collaboration beginning earlier in the 1970s between CGLI and a curriculum development project organised by the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) inspectorate and a group of advisory teachers in that authority. In some colleges, both in ILEA and elsewhere, this qualification was substituted for L/GS, and in some others it was done within L/GS periods, alongside other work. Some colleges declined to participate in it. Eventually a level 2 and a similar numeracy qualification were also introduced.

2. Both the Technician Education Council (TEC) and the Business Education Council (BEC) were set up following the 1969 Haslegrave Report. TEC courses were introduced into colleges starting from 1974. A curricular structure based on Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives was used for all units, including those in what was now called General and Communication Studies (G&CS). However, the G&CS units were college devised, and submitted to the relevant programme committee of TEC (eg engineering, building, science etc) for validation. G&CS was now graded and students were required to pass it to achieve the overall qualification. Assessment decisions, based on phased tests set and marked in the college, were moderated by TEC. BEC courses, using a different assessment structure and nomenclature, were introduced in colleges from 1978. In 1993-94, TEC and BEC were merged to form BTEC, and an assessment structure based on common skills and core themes, assessed through a programme of integrative assignments (PIA), was phased in during the second half of the 1980s, replacing both G&CS and the assessment structures of BEC. BTEC later became part of the privatised awarding body Edexcel.

3. 'Jane Gould' is a pseudonym.

4. Starting in 1962, Lauri Say was a GS lecturer at, successively, Carshalton College, Isle of Wight Technical College, Tottenham College of Technology and South Downs College in Hampshire. His approach to GS was widely influential amongst practitioners. For a copy of a detailed interview with him done in the 1990s, please contact cwaugh1@btinternet.com.

Liberal and General Studies: its legacy for curriculum development now

Roy Stafford

The fifty L/GS teachers interviewed for the Liberal and General Studies (L/GS) project were asked a specific question about the potential legacy of their teaching experience and understanding:

> Q. 12. Should present-day FHE curriculum design take more account of experience in LS/GS/G&CS?
>
> [‘G&CS’ refers to General & Communication Studies, the compulsory 15% of TEC (Technician Education Council) and then BTEC (Business and Technician) courses which at least initially gave GS teaching some security, but in the longer term was replaced by more instrumental Core Skills and Key Skills.]

Perhaps unsurprisingly, all those who answered the question (some didn’t) were positive in saying that there were aspects of L/GS that could and should be re-introduced in current education provision. Also unsurprisingly, given the nature of L/GS practice, there was a very wide range of suggestions as to what the potential legacy might be. In the argument that follows we will look at some of the suggestions and try to assess what contribution the L/GS experience might make in the very different ecology of educational provision for young people in 2018.

L/GS, education and employment

When the first further (and higher) education colleges began to develop ‘Liberal Studies’ and other forms of provision that might fall under the heading of L/GS (e.g. English and Social Studies) in the 1950s, the opportunities for young people were very different. The school-leaving age had been raised to 15 in 1947 and the UK was experiencing almost full employment. School leavers could be expected to find employment relatively easily. Male employment opportunities often came with forms of apprenticeships or industry training programmes which might see them attending day-release classes at a local college. Young women could also easily find employment but not necessarily the same range of opportunities for vocational courses via day release.

The school leaving age was raised again to 16 in 1972 and is now a de facto 18 in England (but not the other Home Nations) at a time when unemployment figures are meaningless given the amount of forced self-employment and work on zero hours contracts. The big change in vocational education since the 1980s has been in the direct political involvement in curriculum development of ideologically-driven government ministers, so that it has moved from a ‘bottom up’ process directed by teachers, advisors and awarding bodies to one of ‘top-down’ directives by government-appointed and controlled bodies. Politicians have often ignored the findings of government-appointed educational researchers. This is not the place to argue the political case for change, but we must acknowledge that in the current climate government policies have aimed to run down further education provision and to narrow the scope of 14-19 education in schools. Our argument begins from the premise that the current curriculum offer has failed in terms of preparing young people for employment and full participation as citizens in a democratic modern society.

Interview responses

Some of the typical responses to the Project question about the perceived legacy of L/GS are as follows:

> . . . a lot of the softer skills that I think we were probably dealing with are now regarded as key to employability . . . (BF)
>
> the introduction of analytical skills, teaching logic . . . and discussion skills . . . (KH)
>
> . . . the focus of all education should be on making people happy and informed, as well as giving them skills for life and work. (JD)
>
> When I talk to young people, I realise that they would probably, if they were awake, be quite keen to do Liberal Studies, because they were asking a lot of questions that students didn't ask in the 70s and the 80s . . . students are very much more interested in politics than they used to be (BH)
>
> We have to . . . discover fresh means of awakening twenty-first century further and higher education students to the limitations of algorithms; and to give them some insight into those aspects of life which are not readily susceptible to quantitative analysis. (LC)
>
> . . . insofar as the GS curriculum attempted to nurture independent thinking, curiosity, awareness of the implications of technical activity and decision-making then it should be at the heart of the FHE curriculum. (DB)
>
> . . . because we figured out a lot about method and were clearer about our purpose - critical students, change society, develop critical approach . . . this is useful for any students . . . (DC)
>
> . . . the educational experience of those kids then, and - if there are any of them now, still . . . would . . . benefit from a more intelligent . . . approach to teaching methods, strategies, especially in the . . . shift from the passive, the sitting, to something that engaged them more, and made them more active. (BB)
>
> . . . there should be a space that allows people to move beyond contemporary understandings of vocational education and work so that you can develop a fuller understanding of the nature of wage labour in societies like ours . . . (JA)
>
> . . . anything that encourages breadth of the student's thought and which brings them into contact with problems of law and ethics . . . and which enables them to express themselves in far different ways than just the mere use of words . . . (GD) [=George Chambers?]
>
> Without a doubt . . . the only future has to be with the sort of ideas that permeated General Studies . . . about the value of individuals and the values of those individuals coming together collectively with shared experiences and shared aspirations. (KD)
>
> . . . the whole concept of being taken out of what you're doing most of the time to have a look at the world through [a] different perspective is . . . increasingly important . . . (CH)
>
> Do I think that young people should have an opportunity to do things outside the exam curriculum? Absolutely. (MG)

Although this seems like a list of quite varied comments, it's a relatively simple task to group them into easily understood principles for high quality general education. We can recognise the following:

- an emphasis on a broad curriculum;
- communication and expression in the widest sense;
- the importance of combining different kinds of skills and high levels of understanding;
- an awareness of what life-long learning might be;
- concepts of political literacy and understanding of collective endeavour - and what can be learned through wider experience of work and leisure;
- the importance of pedagogy and alternative ways of teaching and learning;
- ideas about 'critical education' and different ways of thinking.

Curriculum structures and L/GS philosophy

The L/GS ideas encapsulated in the principles above took a long time to die, despite attempts to remove them in the 1980s and 1990s. L/GS wasn't the only form of educational practice in which some of these ideas were developed and it's also true that several of them were renewed in some of the curriculum initiatives that appeared as a response to youth unemployment in the late 1970s/1980s and again in the 1990s attempts to restructure the 14-19 qualifications framework. Indeed, it could be argued that the real legacy of L/GS was its influence generally on curriculum development during the re-structuring of further education in the 1990s. Some L/GS teachers found themselves well-equipped to move into managerial roles because of their experience and awareness of the learning needs of young people in the new industrial environment. The writers of new qualifications also found several of the innovations of L/GS practice to be useful in envisioning new courses.

Overall, however, the L/GS experience tends to have been cherry-picked and innovative ideas have been lost inside structures which have not allowed them to develop. The reasons for this are often concerned with political expediency and ideologies which are instinctively opposed to the openness and flexibility of L/GS practice. We will look at some examples of L/GS practice that would now be seen as anathema by contemporary politicians but first we must recognise the current qualifications framework (a concept that first appeared in the 1990s) and how the prevailing education ideologies have used it (in England in particular) to change ideas about what a 'high quality education' might be.

L/GS ideas were developed at a time when 'post compulsory' general education and vocational education were the responsibility of local colleges democratically run in conjunction with local industries which supplied large numbers of young employees on day-release. L/GS provision was designed first for young workers and only later for full-time 'vocational students' and then 'pre-vocational' or 'general vocational' students. Some of the best ideas about using the curriculum space opened up by L/GS provision were also to be found in secondary education in English/PSHE and Social Studies and in informal education such as youth work. L/GS teachers may have drawn on these other sector practices but mainly the different sectors and the young people involved were kept separate until the 1990s. In the current situation, the artificial divide at 16 is increasingly meaningless and it makes sense to discuss a 14-19 curriculum. On the other hand the expansion of school sixth forms and sixth form colleges has made attempts to devise a coherent 'tertiary sector' for young people very difficult. Government policies have consistently favoured academic models of qualification structures and methodologies at the expense of vocational models.

There are several key issues about L/GS practice which run counter to prevailing education policies. For instance, the insistence on 'measuring outcomes' with 'rigour' has led to a focus on what can be examined rather than what can be taught and what can be learned through interaction between students and between students, teachers and forms of research and extra-classroom experience. Let's look at an example.

Simulation, groupwork and reflection

Simulation of communication and organisational/ social/judicial etc. processes was a popular form of L/GS activity. Examples might include court procedures, tribunals, public enquiries etc. in which students might be asked to prepare cases and argue them out in a formal setting or goal-oriented tasks in which groups of students must organise themselves to produce something.

> . . . sort of role-play activities where we'd have, I don't know, health and safety work issues and somebody had to be the works managers, somebody the representative of the workforce, and to decide what to do if there'd been an issue at work and so on. (JT)

The purpose of these activities was two-fold. They gave students opportunities to practice a wide range of verbal skills such as presenting a case in a formal context, responding to counter arguments, attempting to persuade listeners and so on. They also involved forms of research, finding out about procedures, possibly interviewing people and reading background documents. But as well as communications work, students might be expected to learn about a specific topic/issue through 'doing' rather than passively receiving information from a teacher.

Simulations were also widely used in forms of media education, another popular element in L/GS programmes. A good example would be the time-bound media production exercise such as compiling a news report. Any kind of media production work provides opportunities to develop social and organisational skills alongside basic technical skills in using media technologies. In a classroom/studio workshop context (and TV studios or portable video equipment were often available in FE colleges from

the 1970s onwards) such skill acquisition can be developed further by placing students under pressure to produce something with deadlines and minimum standards.

Sometimes L/GS teachers wrote their own simulations from scratch but this can be a time-consuming practice and often teachers found ways of adapting existing published materials (which might have been borrowed from colleagues in other colleges). *Radio Covingham* was a News Production simulation with materials and teaching notes produced by Kenneth Jones of the Inner London Education Authority's Media Resources Centre in the early 1970s (see Alvarado 1975: 22). This was a set of pre-prepared news stories, press releases etc. that could be 'fed' to student groups which were then charged with ordering and re-ordering the material to produce a news bulletin by a set deadline. This could be adapted as a production exercise so that each group could be asked to record their final bulletin on audio or video recorders.

Jones suggested that students shouldn't 'act' but should carry out designated roles in a radio production team. Some could be 'copy tasters', others would edit material, perhaps more than one would read out items from the bulletin. The teacher should play no role other than providing teams with a stream of news material. The aim of the simulation for Jones was to develop communication skills as part of a groupwork exercise. This was one of 'Eight Graded Simulations' published by the ILEA. One of the others was *Front Page*, a similar exercise for a print news layout. *Radio Covingham* could be easily adapted as *TV Covingham* and there were further similar published materials such as *Teacher's Protest*, an exercise in selecting images from coverage of a demonstration.

Jones was not interested in the actual decisions about which stories would be chosen, only in the practice of reading the stories, discussing them and negotiating the order. This was intended as a 'communications exercise'. L/GS and English/media education teachers made it something else. Manuel Alvarado (then the editor of *Screen Education*) points out that the shift from 'communication skills' to 'media education' in this context came about by adapting these simulations so that a 'de-briefing' exercise became a constituent part once the bulletin had been completed. This crucial move meant that students would become engaged in a critical analysis of news values and the institutional conventions of news production - a classic example of how the reflexive method of both L/GS and media education practice works when analysis 'follows' practice. The students have made decisions about which stories in what order will go into their bulletin, perhaps intuitively or because of familiarity with broadcast news. Now they will question themselves as to why they made those decisions. Alvarado points out that there are no 'wrong' or 'right' answers here, but it is essential to ask the critical questions. 'News' is 'written' and the meanings that are communicated are 'mediated' by its producers and the institutional context in which it is produced.

> To give participants simulated experience in order to develop their communication skills I see as highly problematic for there is the danger of normalising and reaffirming media conventions and current practices and this is not critically confronting their hidden ideology. I would further suggest that if this simulation is used in the way that I have indicated then it provides one of the few means of attacking such issues which in most teaching situations using other methods are, due to their difficulty and subtlety, virtually untouchable. (Alvarado, ibid p26)

What Alvarado refers to here as a problem is what was termed the 'imitative' process of reproducing industry practice. This was seen as inimical to both media education and L/GS which intended to interrogate rather than imitate, i.e. to investigate the ideology of news rather than to copy the industry practice. This distinction is arguably even more important in the contemporary context in which access to powerful media technologies is much greater.

What follows from this are a number of issues that run counter to current education practice. We'll ignore for the moment the suggestion that this is an attempt to subvert broadcast practice (which it certainly was). More immediate is the issue that this de-briefing process is very difficult to assess and to measure. It may be producing evidence that students have an awareness of a communication process and that they have certain skill levels but how do you assess and measure understanding? A second issue is that the whole exercise takes a long time.

Contemporary education practice in the assessment of GCSE and A/AS Level qualifications in England demands that the 'outcomes' of student learning be carefully measured against set standards which are specified in the subject content of a validated qualification. This is the most extreme manifestation of the ideologies that also underpin assessment on vocational courses. If something isn't listed in subject content it can't be examined. Whatever is learned outside the subject content is of no value (i.e. can't be credited as learned). Groupwork cannot be assessed as such. Each individual student's contribution can be assessed as long as it can be measured. What this can mean is that the main point of assessment in what was a

groupwork exercise would probably be to assess the individual's written communication skills if they have written some form of 'evaluation' of their contribution to the activity or compiled their own 'learning diary'.

The most effective form of assessment of something like a *TV Covingham* exercise is if a de-briefing exercise is followed by self assessment and/ or peer assessment. Let's assume a group of twenty students are split into three or four groups, each of which produces a news report in the allotted time (the exercise could today work through electronic material delivered to desktops/laptops etc.). During the de-briefing each group reflects on their experience of producing the bulletin and then answers questions from the other groups. Finally groups could score their own group and the other groups according to broadly-set criteria. They might comment on how well organised the group appeared to be, how the group explained their decisions, whether the bulletin worked for an audience etc. Using all the material produced for the exercise and the de-briefing (which could be recorded) the tutors could then decide how to make a final assessment and whether to award marks/grades individually or collectively to the group.

This kind of simulation exercise offers the opportunities for students to learn by doing. It is not 'efficient' or 'rigorous' as an assessment mode, but, more importantly, it allows students to think and act under pressure, practise a range of skills and build understanding of quite complex processes. There will be space for critical reflection on their actions. This is only an outline of what such an exercise might be. It could be extended, e.g. so that one team is given directives to 'go for audience impact' and another is reminded of Ofcom's regulatory powers and the need to conform to public service broadcasting etc. However it is utilised, this kind of teaching and learning environment is central to a broader curriculum with more chance of extending students and emphasising critical reflection.

Critical reflection

For a significant number of L/GS practitioners the concept of critical reflection was key to their aims for successful work with students. What they meant by this could vary. Here are a few of the comments by the teachers interviewed:

> [on hopes for students] . . . to be able as far as possible to critically analyse their situation and the society they lived in, to establish an empathy and sympathy for the plight of others (MT

> I wanted to make sure that people did have an understanding that politics wasn't just something about government and distanced from them but that it was something that affected all their lives and that the distribution of wealth and power was something that people should understand and know how to change really. (VT)

> I actually believed it was an important space in the curriculum for young working-class men and women to be able to challenge, I think we used the phrase at the time, 'common sense notions' of the world. And, you know, to take a critical look at the world. (PG)

> So that was worthwhile. If you felt, you know, you open people's eyes a little bit to different points of view, and they just say, you know, "No, I don't agree with that particularly". So I didn't necessarily mind if someone disagreed with me, you know, that was . . . as long as you helped them, or they marshalled their arguments. That was important to me. So giving different perspectives was important. (SS)

> When I started teaching A level Sociology, I used to say to the students at the beginning of the year, "Your parents want me to get you an A Level, But I want you to become a critical and questioning person". And I would say the same thing applied to Liberal Studies - the way I did it anyway - because I rather hoped that people would question, and argue, and, yeah, as a result of swapping of ideas, gain a slightly broader approach to everything . . . (TB)

> I think there was quite a strong set of strategies . . . characterised by student-centred learning, characterised by discussion, characterised by stimulus material. And those materials were sort of conundrums, quite often, or sets of questions that would get students thinking about particular topics, where you would try to challenge them with alternative or contradictory points of view - and of stuff from the news, kind of contemporary things. I think discussion was a key thing. Discussion, debate, argument, trying to get the students to express their point of view. And to talk with one another. (JS)

Although these quotes refer to slightly different strategies, they are all concerned to oppose the

idea of a student passively absorbing a body of knowledge. Instead they focus on student engagement and questioning. The quote which refers to 'challenging common sense notions' is representative of a number of approaches that focused on the student's understanding of the world when they first came to their L/GS class. The L/GS teacher would often have a scheme of work planned out, but what was more important was to encourage the student to engage with their existing understanding and this might mean adjusting the scheme if students showed interest in particular topics. Two phrases common at the time were "starting where the student is at" and "making strange the familiar". The approach was indeed 'student-centred'. Students confronting their own beliefs then discovered that there were other ways of looking at the same issues and were usually more willing to explore further than they would have been if simply told that "this is the way to look at it". Following on from this, it might be useful then to consider one of the main areas of concern about the behaviour and general understanding of their world as expressed by young people in 2018.

L/GS practice and teaching about social media

L/GS was developed and then declined before the widespread adoption of digital media and communication technologies in the late 1990s and certainly before the embrace of social media 'applications' ten years later. Yet in some ways the L/GS principles associated with the statements of practitioners presented at the beginning of this article seem potentially useful in tackling the range of issues raised by social media which have led to a form of 'moral panic' about harm to young people through cyber-bullying, invasion of privacy, fake news etc.

'Moral panics' have been identified on several occasions since the invention of the 'teenager' post 1945 and the development of youth culture and its associated consumer markets. Comic-books, rock 'n roll, new fashions, drug-taking, videogames etc. have all prompted reactions from establishment bodies and have in turn led to calls for forms of regulation and accompanying education programmes. In many cases the education initiatives appear to have been based on the same ideas as the moves towards regulation and legal prohibition and restriction i.e. to control and restrain activity.

Social media use and abuse involving young people is seen as an important issue for Ofcom, the UK regulator for communications. Unfortunately the response from Ofcom and other agencies has been mainly in the form of what media educationists would tend to see as 'inoculation' approaches. This implies an attempt to warn young people of the dangers but not to encourage them to engage and explore what actually happens in social media engagement and what the meanings of social media practice might actually be. Inoculation strategies are not properly student-centred and may have little impact on student behaviour. Ofcom was often consulted by government departments and education agencies in the early 2000s in pursuance of ideas about 'media literacy' - Ofcom has a statutory duty to research and promote media literacy set out in the 2003 Communications Act. Its main contribution now is to monitor and survey media use by children, young people and adults (most recently in 2017/18). Since the Brexit vote and Trump's election victory in 2017, various commentators and agencies have called for 'media literacy' teaching to be included in school curricula. At the same time, changes in the National Curriculum in England have removed media literacy from English orders for schools and the focus on STEM subjects has also had a negative impact on the numbers taking GCSE Media Studies.

At this point, it is important to be cautious. Students today are the product not just of personal use of digital media from a very young age in the home but also from IT (Information Technology) and then ICT (Information Communications Technology) programmes in schools and colleges. Some young people have developed high order skills in programming/coding and have become very attractive to employers and, in some cases, themselves successful entrepreneurs at a young age. However, the majority of young people have learned to be users or 'consumers' of digital media and their ICT education has primarily focused on learning about applications of branded software. The 2013 Department for Education orders for KS3 (12-13) and KS4 (14-16) in England include the following 'Aims' for 'computing programmes':

> The national curriculum for computing aims to ensure that all pupils:
>
> • can understand and apply the fundamental principles and concepts of computer science, including abstraction, logic, algorithms and data representation
>
> • can analyse problems in computational terms, and have repeated practical experience of writing computer programs in order to solve such problems

- can evaluate and apply information technology, including new or unfamiliar technologies, analytically to solve problems

- are responsible, competent, confident and creative users of information and communication technology.

What's interesting about this is that computing is said to have 'deep links' with mathematics, science, and design and technology. No mention is made of communication studies (though reference is made to communications technology), media studies, sociology, political literacy etc. The implication here is that young people need computing skills to 'solve problems' and are effective users of communications technology. An L/GS teacher might suggest that it would be good to learn how to 'pose problems', i.e. to think about the questions to be asked about digital technologies. In particular it might be a good idea to learn what the impact of digital technologies might be on individual users and on society as a whole. In addition, they might learn about the inequality of access to communication and the unequal distribution of the benefits accruing from the widespread adoption of these technologies. There is certainly a role for the L/GS principles of critical education set out at the beginning of this paper.

From the L/GS perspective there is a 'lack' in ICT programmes but this should lead to co-operation with ICT staff rather than antagonism. In another part of the L/GS Project, interviewees were asked about their working relationships with vocational teachers which varied considerably. L/GS practice could be enhanced or it could be diluted and undermined. We don't know what future co-operation might bring if approached positively by both sides.

Strategies for learning about social media use

As we've noted, young people (i.e. post-14) in English education may have quite varied experience of digital media generally and social media in particular. We aren't going to create a specific activity here in detail because we would need to know much more about the student group and the specific course they were following. But we can suggest ways in which L/GS approaches might help in teaching and learning about social media. (The kinds of activities discussed here have probably already been tried in many different contexts. There is no claim to originality here - only an attempt to think through possibilities using an L/GS approach.)

The aim of an activity would be for students to reflect critically on their own social media use and to explore the impact of their actions on others. Ideally, a large scale group project/simulation would need a significant amount of time and access to resources, especially teaching resources. L/GS practice often made use of team teaching and in this case it would be useful to bring together L/GS practitioners with ICT specialists and others such as staff with experience of PHSE in schools. As preparation it might be useful to focus on a case study, perhaps of the use of personal data in *targeting social media users* during an election or a marketing campaign. Students might attempt to log the kinds of personal data they have in the past been willing to provide to Google, Facebook, Twitter etc. and to search for examples of promotional messages that might have been sent to them - or they might want to investigate what kinds of campaigns might be planned by political parties or specific campaign groups. Could an exercise like this be simulated? Students might be assigned a campaign and asked to come up with a strategy. How would they interest segmented audiences (i.e. defined by age, gender, religion etc.) in supporting or opposing specific campaigns? They wouldn't necessarily have to create campaign messages but they would be required to make a presentation of their ideas with examples of the kinds of media messages and strategies they might use and then answer queries about their ideas from staff and other student groups.

One of the major concerns about individual social media use is about the potential emotional and psychological damage caused by deliberate or unthinking messaging, commentary, posting of images, video etc. There are several ways of approaching this and developing some form of critical reflection. The first and most controllable is a case study of a well-known celebrity who has featured in a specific case of social media exposure. Many such cases are of North American celebrities but there are likely to be British stories as well. The speed with which stories develop and then 'die' is quite bewildering for teachers but it should be possible to devise a simple set of tasks for students collecting examples that can be applied whenever a new story breaks. There has been a great deal of research in cultural studies and media studies into celebrity and fan cultures and this may provide ideas for structuring analysis and thinking about what might be acceptable behaviour for social media commentary. Students will also be aware that social media is also widely used to promote all forms of media performance and to raise the profile of celebrity figures.

Awareness of the range of behaviour of social media users might be addressed by asking students to compile a 'User Charter of Acceptable Behaviour'.

This refers to ideas about ‘netiquette’ and there are many attempts to do this online. Most of these are American and tend to be written in that inoculatory way, full of imperatives about ‘Don’t do this’ or ‘Read that’. More appealing to students might be something like ‘Wittertainment’s Code of Conduct in the Cinema’ devised for the Mark Kermode and Simon Mayo film programme on Radio 5 Live (see **http://www.bbc.co.uk/5live/films/code_of_conduct.pdf**). This is similarly a listing of ‘don’ts’ - but presented in a far more entertaining and engaging way. Could a student group agree a Code of Conduct for social media use? An attempt to do this is likely to reveal a range of positions once individuals start to think about it and how it might affect them. This is the crucial objective - to ask ourselves, how do we want others to interact with us?

The obvious temptation is to set up some form of simulated social media activity to see how some of the ideas above work out in practice. Great care needs to be taken and a simulation would need to be ‘closed’ on some form of intranet (a network only accessible within an organisation) which would require the full co-operation of ICT staff. Students might be assigned character names and profiles and then allowed to participate in some form of social media forum. Interactions in this forum could then be recorded and analysed by student groups. One specific activity related to this idea might be to create a number of such characters who develop profiles and who are then required to apply for jobs, university entrance, personal loans etc. which involves an interview panel with access to the profiles created through social media. What is it acceptable to use from publicly available social media profiles in order to decide who is an eligible job candidate?

Alongside such exercises it is also going to be important to ask students to undertake some basic research regarding equality of access to online services and what this means for participation in democracy. There are many myths about digital media use and access but, increasingly, aspects of everyday life are becoming less acessible to those who lack physical access or cannot afford access to online services. For example, many transport services and banking services are more expensive to use for those without broadband access. The aim of L/GS in the activities outlined above is to encourage students to question the digital communication environment in which they find themselves through research, analysis and critical reflection on their own actions.

Reference

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THE REAL RADICAL EDUCATION?

Liberal and General Studies with vocational students in UK colleges 1950-1990 as revealed through interviews with practitioners who taught it

Bulletin 1: origins; purpose; context

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