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Journal Item

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Version: Accepted Manuscript

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Abstract

This paper explores the ways in which module and curriculum development in the context of a distance education programme plays an important role in 'constructing' a discipline's object of study, thus contributing to the ways in which knowledge is understood in society. The paper examines how the process of module production both reflects and shapes the discipline within which the module is positioned, and looks at the ways in which the collaborative approach of module design used in distance education contexts facilitates a sustained engagement with the issues that constitute disciplinarity. The context for this examination is an undergraduate module introducing distance-learning students to the subject of English language, its state and status around the world. This module constitutes the equivalent of one semester of student work, and integrates various pedagogical resources to provide a comprehensive introduction to the subject. The production process, with input from academics across the globe and the use of specially commissioned audio-visual materials examining the existence of English worldwide, represents an attempt to incorporate disciplinary expertise from a broad range of sources. In reflecting upon the processes of module creation and dissemination in a distance education context, the paper offers insights into the practicalities of pedagogically-focused disciplinary knowledge production.

Keywords: disciplinarity, knowledge construction, English, syllabus design, distance education, open educational resources

Introduction: constructing a discipline

This paper explores the ways in which the production of the teaching resources used in a distance education (DE) programme plays a significant role in 'constructing' the discipline in which the course of study is positioned. The argument is that the complex and sustained process of module and curriculum development which distance education necessitates, means that the resources produced do not merely reflect current disciplinary knowledge, but play an active role in shaping and defining the nature of that discipline. This role is reinforced by the longevity of distance education resources and their potential for use beyond the institution where they were produced.

An academic discipline represents a wide range of knowledge, research interests, and methodologies together with the practices of those who identify with the discipline. As such, disciplines can be considered a construct of those working within them. An integral aspect of the concept of disciplinarity has always been the context of education (Kelley, 1997a; Krishnan, 2009), and in designing and teaching new modules or curricula, academics are also contributing to the ongoing construction and reconstruction of the discipline: they are both drawing on established disciplinary knowledge and practices, and developing and reconceptualising them in the light of new thinking. The creation of tangible and lasting pedagogic materials by DE institutions and their potential for global dissemination now creates greater possibilities for evolving disciplinary conceptions to influence both teaching and research thinking.

Disciplines are often defined as being constituted of a number of different components. Kelley (1997b: 1), for example, lists the following:

> a characteristic method, specialized terminology, a
> community of practitioners, a canon of authorities, an agenda

of problems to be addressed, and perhaps more formal signs
of a professional condition, such as journals, textbooks,
courses of study, libraries, rituals, and social gatherings.

Since the emergence of the Humboldtian idea of the university in the early nineteenth century, teaching and research have regularly been brought together under the auspices of the same institution and this has resulted in disciplinary structures being guided by educational imperatives and by institutional frameworks which facilitate research practices. The creation of teaching materials such as textbooks and assessment strategies help establish the academic content of the discipline, and codify a central canon of key issues, theories and influential empirical studies.
For the purposes of this paper we concentrate primarily on this educational element of the disciplinary framework, looking at how the teaching of a subject at a distance – and the various procedures, practices and resources that are involved in this – acts as a way of systematising knowledge and playing a key role in the construction of the discipline.

Working on the principle that knowledge is always in part discursively constructed, the community of scholars (their organisation, practices, and conventions) will necessarily figure significantly in mapping out disciplinary territory. Research on this topic has thus explored the way that academic discourse communities (Swales, 1990, 1998) or communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) construct and encode the current conceptions of their fields through, for example, published research writings (Hyland, 2000). It has also engaged in ethnographies of the everyday routines and practices of scientists (e.g. Latour and Woolgar, 1979) in order to survey the social dynamics which shape academic communities' research practices. To date the discursive construction of knowledge in DE module production and dissemination and its potential to reconfigure disciplinary knowledge has been little studied.

The production of a large-scale distance-learning module offers a productive opportunity for a critical examination of the social construction of education-oriented aspects of the disciplinary process within the context of an extensive DE production model. The module is intended as a largely self-sufficient course of study on the subject; its breadth of coverage, along with its integration of different pedagogical resources and approaches and its use of a range of academic consultants, all mean that it is a highly co-ordinated attempt to offer a comprehensive introduction. The ambition involved thus offers a snapshot of a discipline at a particular time, and an analysis of the processes involved – of the decision-making, the choice and structuring of material, the collaboration with geographically-dispersed colleagues, and the tailoring of the content to the particular student body – provides insight into the way in which educational imperatives relate to the concept of the discipline; that is, both how the discipline is constructed and how the discipline helps construct its object of study, its own knowledge base.

The paper employs a case study approach (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2007) which describes and reflects upon the production process of the pedagogic resources (which the authors were themselves centrally involved in), looking specifically at the way knowledge is chosen and presented and how this was influenced by the requirements and affordances of the DE context, and then relates this to the disciplinary tradition, English language, in which the module is operating. By examining the decisions made during the production process we exemplify the mechanisms through which the construction of this particular module and, we argue, the wider discipline were shaped. The reflective process draws upon both the insider observations of the participants, as well as the analysis of the archive of documents accumulated during the course of the module's production (e.g. the records of meetings, administrative documents), along with correspondence both internally within the team and with external consultants. Finally, the impact of this sustained

collaboration is related to the ability to disseminate the materials and the revised disciplinary construction widely through a variety of media.

The context

Our institutional context is a large higher education institution dedicated to DE, which enables teams of academics and others to develop and produce education resources over extended periods of time. The disciplinary context is English Language Studies (ELS) which is a fruitful area for study as its position vis-a-vis adjacent knowledge areas is particularly unstable and therefore open to new knowledge configurations. In Europe, for instance, ELS is often integrated into departments of Philology which combine the study of languages, their literature and linguistics (Gupta and Katsarska, 2009). Within the UK, ELS may form part of degrees in English (hereafter referred to as English Studies (ES) to differentiate it from the language 'English'), or Linguistics or be combined with other subject areas such as Modern Languages or Media and Communications Studies. The tensions about where it sits organisationally also influence the relationships it has with other knowledge communities and can provide a creative environment for the integration and development of concepts and paradigms from other disciplines. It is partly in the expanded negotiation around such issues (made possible by the wider DE team approach to production) together with the potential for significant dissemination (through textbooks and open educational resources (OERs)) that enables the design of this and similar DE modules to play a role in constructing and establishing the discipline beyond a single institution.

The module represents 600 hours of study at second year/level. It replaces an existing introductory module that occupied the same broad curriculum slot and which had been taught for many years. Student interaction takes place online in module forums and face-to-face with tutors. Tutorial attendance is not compulsory. The student body is

relatively mature and the majority are studying part-time. In addition, the module is made available internationally to students directly enrolled, and in partner institutions. Our student body, therefore, could not be assumed either to live in an English-dominant country or have English as their main language. The majority of our students were likely to be aiming for a BA degree in English Language and Literature or Language Studies (mainly students studying one of French, German or Spanish, and English) with a substantial number also pursuing a general Humanities degree or a Literature degree. Their previous modules were not therefore direct preparation for ELS, so the module needed to be fully introductory, and also provide the foundation for further study.

The production was a collaboration between a team of eight academics, a group of educational media producers (overseeing the production of audio-visual and interactive online content) and a project manager all within the institution. These considerable inputs to module production and the lengthy process involved are a significant feature of the distance learning model, in which the initial production process has to produce a core of material and activities which can be used for up to a decade, and address potentially thousands of students over that time. Such longevity and wide take-up necessitate a process which has the time and resources to intensively engage with the curriculum in ways which individually authored single modules at traditional universities do not.

The team's conception of the discipline was informed and influenced by others from beyond the institution including a leading academic in the field from a different university who, as an external assessor, had academic oversight of the production. Work was commissioned from researchers in a number of different countries in order to gain insights from their perspectives both geographically and with respect to their approach to the discipline. For similar reasons we conducted face-to-face and telephone interviews with academics and others from around the world (which

comprised part of the audio-visual (AV) content produced), and also invited critical comment on both our plans and our draft materials from leading international academics in the disciplinary field. As the core printed materials were offered to publishers on a co-publishing basis we had feedback from an additional group of expert readers about what they saw as significant; that is, as likely to appeal to academics teaching the discipline in other institutions. Much of the AV material was collected and edited by an external media company. Their interpretation of our requirements, their international contacts and their editing skills also had a significant influence on the final materials produced. With the wealth of expertise available, the process of collaboration influenced how we were constructing the field. This process was constantly evolving as a result of our interaction with all the people and organisations with which we worked. The resulting module therefore draws on a wide variety of academic perspectives, both cross- and inter-disciplinary and international.

The various decisions taken over what to include and exclude were rarely taken by individuals but rather were a product of the interests and ideologies of the team members involved, discursively and collaboratively constructed. The module team working together over extended periods of time had numerous opportunities for building up shared understandings which enabled the selection and integration of disparate resources and viewpoints. Drawing on the 'interthinking' model of creative and productive talk (Littleton and Mercer, 2013) provides a mechanism for understanding how the processes of DE curriculum development help to reconfigure a discipline's object of study. The module team draw both on the *common knowledge* already established within the discipline and the knowledge common to the team created through shared discussion. This co-constructed view of the discipline is informed by academic collaborators from beyond the institution but the team choices made ultimately reconfigure the disciplinary knowledge.

The production process for this module was largely evolutionary in nature; there was no template disciplinary curriculum to follow. Certain decisions were needed at particular times in the process, and while working with a team of people necessitated a degree of forward planning and structure, the process as a whole was characterised by adjustments and refinements through discussion, with the final product (the module itself) continuing to evolve throughout the years of its design and construction. In the following section we reflect, in a post-hoc manner, on certain key dynamics and salient concerns.

Construction of the module

Shaping the discipline
In arguing that pedagogic materials production is integral to disciplinary knowledge production, we are faced with the issue of whether or not, in producing the module, we were reproducing or crafting existing disciplinary knowledge, or actually contributing to its development. In designing the new module we were not, of course, starting from a completely blank slate. We already had an existing module in the curriculum introducing ELS, but we considered that parts of its content and approach were becoming dated, and that the field had moved on in the years since its design. So the initial spur to production came from the discipline itself and the need to reflect the changes that had taken place. The lengthy planning and production process involved in distance module production meant that almost six years before the new module was to be made available to students, a departmental meeting was dedicated to discussing ideas and plans for it. Looking back at the presentations and discussion notes shows the team's conscious awareness of the internal and external influences that would shape the process. Factors such as staff enthusiasms and backgrounds, the Quality Assurance Agency for England's subject benchmark statements for English and for Linguistics (2000; 2007), programme needs, the English literature/language interface,

the global significance of English, and current school curricula proved to be prescient indicators of the different considerations which would have a bearing on the content and aims of the module. Additionally, listing what was covered by a variety of other institutions under the heading of 'English' started to position the new module in terms of why our approach is similar to/different from that of institution x or y. Subsequently and significantly, there was a concern with reconceptualising the discipline to take account of influences not only from literature and linguistics, traditional contributors to ELS, but also from anthropology (Goffman, 1967), education (Lillis, 2001) and social and political science (Bourdieu, 1984; Harvey, 2005), allied disciplines whose concepts and methodologies had influenced members of the team in their own approaches and research. This underpinned later specific choices, but initially led to agreement around the need to foreground varieties of English (or Englishes), a topic which had been significant in research terms over the last two decades (Seargeant, 2012). We extended the general varieties focus to include literary, geographical, national, social and cultural variation and to use underpinning research from areas such as anthropology and political science. This broadened focus was seen as pivotal to the aims of the module team and their desire to represent a richer version of the current discipline. In opting to foreground these issues we had to forego others, and in this way were constructing our representation of the discipline along the lines of what we considered key; we were adapting what Kelley described as the discipline's 'agenda of problems to be addressed' (1997b: 1), amending the central canon of key issues to reflect a more global and ideologically inflected stance including discussion of language ideologies, English, global politics and power relations, English language publishing, the canon and language politics.

Conceptual models and the team
There are a number of factors and scenarios which allow those with access to the means of dissemination of research or pedagogy to have an

influence on the shape of the discipline. These include disciplinary instability due to 'local struggles over resources, recognition and labelling' (Hyland 2009: 60) and disciplinary evolution as a result of shifts and reconfigurations of knowledge. As we have noted above, disciplines are in part the constructs of those affiliated to them and the ability to disseminate widely creates opportunities to influence their construction. The conceptual models and content choices made by the academic team assembled to produce the module were clearly related to their individual interests and experience and each configured the discipline differently. Unlike many disciplines, it is not unusual in the UK for ELS academics to have varied academic backgrounds, and ours included English Literature, French, Geography, Philosophy, and Art and Design. The most frequently shared characteristic was teaching English in countries where it is not the dominant language. Methodologically, team members also orientated to a variety of approaches, and had interests in diverse phenomena, all of which were to have their influence on the final module. Discussions around content areas were also influenced by the effects on the external profile of team members. As some of the AV and interactive content was to be made available as OERs, and all of the print materials being produced would be made available through commercial publishers, team members were mindful of their standing within the sub-communities of researchers they identified with. The knowledge that distance teaching materials are not ephemeral in the way that a one-off lecture course is and that the materials would be extensively shared with peers and others arguably increased the desire of some team members to stay in areas that felt familiar and safe and to maintain a particular stance towards the subject area. While individual orientations were considered, the creative interplay resulting from the discussions central to our DE production model led to a conceptualisation of the discipline that encompassed more than the sub-fields of team members; the core team and the academic sources they drew on created a particular depiction of the discipline, including the

topics and ideological orientations (summarised below) that they saw as central.

Three strong orientations to the subject matter emerged which can be summed up as a commitment to: description rather than prescription in explaining language use; description of language use at the level of individuals and communities in particular contexts rather than broad generalisations; and an overarching concern with the role of English on a global scale, including issues of power and inequality. The elevation of the significance of English as a global language represented the coinciding of recent trends within the discipline and personal and departmental interests which favoured a 'decentred' -- that is, non-Anglocentric -- approach to English. While this has theoretical and ideological underpinnings in a variety of ELS fields it also chimes with the personal experiences of team members in working and living in international contexts. We had a perspective on the language that was not rooted solely in Anglophone-centre contexts such as the UK and the USA, and a desire for students to enter into that perspective, and be able to take a critical approach to the position of English as a global language and all that this entails. The decision to use this ideological framing arguably sets up the module to construct a view of the discipline which moves away from more traditional historical or structural approaches to English.

We also deliberately moved between private and public language use, and by exploiting the range of media options available collected short videoed interviews with a variety of people – from students at our institution to internationally acclaimed poets and authors – talking about their own 'language biographies' (i.e. the role English, often alongside other languages, plays in their lives). In collaboration with media developers we devised online resources that enabled students to upload photographs of English use from around the world, highlighting the scope of its spread, and the diverse and creative ways in which it is used as part of the public

arena. These AV and interactive elements were also designed to encourage students to relate their study to the contexts of their own lives, and in this way to cultivate an awareness of the role that linguistic issues play in everyday social politics, rather than to simply perceive English as an object of academic study.

Academic consultants

As part of the extensive approach to curriculum production facilitated by DE we made significant use of academics and other voices from beyond the module team. Our initial plans and drafts were extensively critiqued by an external academic reviewer. We engaged academics from other parts of the English-speaking and -using world to write some of the material or to give critical feedback. They brought additional expertise and perspectives which we deemed necessary given our decentred approach to the English language. The ability to use AV as part of our pedagogic mix further enabled us to include the views of those living and working outside the UK, or with a non-Anglocentric perspective on particular topics. While this process allowed for the inclusion of a multiplicity of voices it was nevertheless managed and structured by the team; it is the team in the DE environment which ultimately constructs the disciplinary view for its students and wider audience.

External academic consultants were often disciplinary specialists and could therefore be expected to share some common knowledge. But we had to actively induct them into the views and understandings that were being developed by the core team. This involved a process of dialogue with them, usually by email, followed by a lengthy drafting and editing process. Trying to induct outside writers into the community of practice that the team had become was often difficult and illustrated how we had begun to cohere as a group and also how our thinking and ways of working were constantly evolving as we met together regularly. This evolution was in turn influenced by our dialogues with the consultant academics and by the perspectives that they brought through the dialogue

and through the drafting process. Their knowledge of their fields contributed expertise and current thinking beyond that of the core team, which was moulded through discussion to fit with and inform our emerging construction of the field.

Publishers and AV production

The sustained and collaborative production process enabled by DE is underpinned by economies of scale and the longevity of modules. It gave opportunities to produce materials in a variety of media which illustrated the aspects of the discipline we wished to focus on. This provided additional choices and opportunities to select people to write and interview and to film in locations in which issues around the discipline are being played out. It also promoted greater interaction with those beyond the module team, enhanced input from the wider discipline and provided data gathering opportunities which influenced our view of the subject.

The books produced were designed with the aim of co-publication, so early proposal documents went to publishers for their feedback. Some of this feedback came from non-UK academics and strongly endorsed our global, decentred and social approach to the study of English. It also pointed out some areas that we had not specifically, or in their view, sufficiently, highlighted in the proposal. This enabled us to review our proposals and to take account of such feedback as we felt relevant. In addition to publisher input, we were also influenced by those involved in producing our audio, video and interactive online content. The media company provided contacts in a number of the locations in which we wished to gather material; the people and locations they helped us to gain access to also affected the ultimate pedagogic construction of the module. Interviews with television script writers in Singapore, journalists and business people in China, international students at UK universities, and migrants in Canada all provided rich material from which to illustrate our view of the English language in its global context. Interactive media developers and AV producers worked with us to create resources that

constructed our view of ELS, to tell the story of English, illustrate its use around the world and raise the questions about its influence with respect to issues such as migration, education, multilingualism and cultural, economic and political power.

Cross-disciplinary links

In many institutions, individual modules form a component of various different degree programmes. In our institution degree programmes in 'English Language and Literature' and 'Language Studies' are the overall context for many of the students studying the module discussed here. Acknowledging and accommodating this in the module design was therefore an important influence on decision making and ultimately on the construction of the discipline. While such decisions are necessary in most institutions, it is the wider dissemination which is possible with DE modules and their materials which means that they have the potential for greater disciplinary impact.

We can illustrate the influence of the wider curriculum with the example of decisions made with regard to English Language and Literature as a combined curriculum area. One early administrative document focused on the traditional inclusion of the history of English and aspects of stylistics (i.e. the application of linguistic analysis to literary texts). From this starting point, we discussed expanding the field to include juxtaposing the language of everyday life with the language of literature, and introducing related topics such as language play, the role of authors and readers, and the English literary canon beyond Anglophone-centre contexts.[1] As the team continued to review the field and engage in the process of collaborative module design, additional alternative foci were added, and texts were suggested which ranged from illuminated manuscripts to online diaries. The process of making selections was influenced by the ways in which ELS and English literature can combine in interesting and relevant

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[1] A number of these topics feature in third year/level modules in our institution and reflect the impact of earlier curricular decision-making in shaping conceptualisation of the discipline.

ways to support students in their study of both. For example, literary texts from non-English dominant countries were deliberately chosen to illustrate the fact that English is not 'owned' by any one group (but rather it can be 'appropriated' by different cultures), thereby interweaving the interest in literature with the ideological orientation towards a decentred approach to English in context.

Methods of describing language use are valuable to both literary and linguistic analysis, and the ability to understand, analyse and reflect on the differences between literary language and everyday language provided a rich seam of content. Two areas where students were given the tools for language analysis which tied in directly with considerations within ES related to the topics of rhetoric and conversation. Analysing spoken language is core to ELS but through choices of illustrative material it was made more obviously relevant to ES students as well. In illustrating conversation analysis, for example, aspects of (speakers') style and narrative structure were introduced (both of which are areas of interest for literary studies), as well as how to transcribe and analyse real speech. These areas were seen as relevant both in providing alternative approaches to analysing literature, but also to enriching the creative writing process, which is a particular concern for the growing cohort of ES students who are also undertaking studies in creative writing[2]. In looking at rhetoric and rhetorical devices, material was chosen which first outlined aspects of classical rhetoric, and then applied this to Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar.* From the analysis of that literary example, students were guided through analysing modern political rhetoric and then examples of everyday persuasion. These content decisions reflected how the process of taking into account the student audience, the institutional context and also the wider interdisciplinary links between language and literature resulted in a redrawing of traditional disciplinary concepts of content.

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[2] In our institution creative writing modules are integrated within ES.

Designing for the future

A key concern in designing a distance module which includes printed material is how to ensure that the fixed content such as printed books and specially commissioned AV resources both respond to current concerns in the discipline but also will not soon be out-of-date. For our own students, a measure of updating is possible through web-based resources, but the potential for dissemination of our materials meant that our decisions over content were influenced by choosing material that was not likely to date too rapidly, and also trying to predict (or possibly even influence) future trends within the discipline. For example, in producing case studies we took the decision to focus on a number of locations where English is evolving both linguistically and in the role it plays in the social, economic and cultural landscape. Alongside our examination of English's global role as a language of power and influence, we thus focused on language developments in China, India and Africa. India and Africa were areas where team members had research interests and where colonialism and post-colonialism would clearly be influential. By including China, the module explicitly acknowledges the potential for change in the future role of English around the world and therefore within the discipline of ELS.

Technology is usually a concern in distance module production, but for ELS it is also a disciplinary concern. Technological developments have an influence on language and much has been written on English and the internet (Crystal, 2006; Seargeant and Tagg, 2011), including media-described anxiety about falling standards of language use (e.g. Thurlow, 2006). This was not, therefore, an area we could ignore, despite the challenges of appearing dated within a short time. Two complementary approaches were taken, the first of which was based on the history of material culture, looking at the societal impact of the influence of technological change from the alphabet to print and more recently digital culture in relation to English. The second approach looked at how individuals and their literacy practices have developed around digital

media, and how people have exploited the affordances of the media in linguistically personal and creative ways. The dominance of English on digital media is examined critically with particular emphasis on new research by members of the team into switching between languages in text messaging. These approaches allowed the focus to be on how English develops and varies over time and in different contexts, approaches which see language variation as the norm, and as a response to both technological change and individual needs and creativity. It positions the module as exploring and expanding the boundaries of current disciplinary research.

Dissemination

One of the arguments for distance learning modules having the potential to influence and construct their discipline through pedagogically-focused knowledge making rests on the potential for wide dissemination over sustained periods of time of module materials. This potential has been expanding rapidly with the increase in globally-available English-medium education, digital technologies and open educational resources (OERs) and more recently massive open online courses (MOOCs). The textbooks produced for the forerunner of our case study module are available internationally, have been adapted and translated and are frequently found on reading lists of other UK HEIs. The case study module is available directly through international enrolments and globally through partnership agreements with an estimated 700 partnership students taking the module in 2013-14. The international dimension, as noted above, was a direct influence on the design, and the nature of the discipline made it more salient for the team to keep in mind the transnational audience and their cultural sensitivities (Goodfellow and Lamy, 2009).

Insert Table 1 around here

A number of module resources were made freely accessible and this boosts the potential for such distance learning material to play a significant role in the construction of the discipline. The first unit of the module material was modified for completely online delivery, both as a teaching unit in itself and as a taster for the module as a whole. In the 14 month period following its initial upload, the material attracted approximately 10,000 unique browser visits, with almost a quarter of these clicking through to view the university's prospectus. It attracted visitors from around the globe, with people from the UK making up the largest portion (at 23% of the total), followed by visitors based in India, the USA, Russia, the Philippines and Brazil. A number of the videos and an introductory series of animated films were made available on sites such as YouTube and iTunesU. The number of hits shown in Table 1 indicate general reach through these sites and the university's OER's platform specifically encourages use by others including educators from other institutions (OpenLearn, FAQs) and makes provision for it under Creative Commons licence. Some research suggests that unlike books, open source on-line material is not so frequently used and adapted possibly due to lack of appropriate, easy-to-use tools for adaptation (McAndrew et al, 2009). Further work on enabling practitioners to make use of OERs with simpler tools is necessary in order to embed practices around OER usage (Armellini and Nie, 2013). Research beyond the richer nations also suggests that some digital material delivery and practices are not reaching or appealing to wider constituencies for either open source or paid for content (Asunka, 2013; Tuckett, 2013). However, some encouraging trends can be identified in relation to our case study module. *The History of English in Ten Minutes* short animated films have received a total of over four million direct hits, but in addition have been reproduced in whole or in part on numerous other sites (e.g. Dan Coleman's *Open Culture* blog of free educational resources (2011) and the *boingboing* blog of Maggie Koerth-Baker of the New York Times (2013)). The video *Shakespeare: Original Pronunciation* was described as 'a mini viral hit' by Alexander

Aciman in *Time* (2013). Again this has been embedded in numerous sites which augment the one million plus hits noted in Table 1. Such open availability of resources has the potential to widen the influence of pedagogically-focused knowledge production beyond individual education institutions. OERs, which distance education institutions are well placed to contribute to, can influence disciplinary content and focus through the dissemination of reconfigurations of subject knowledge. However, promoting new disciplinary understandings through pedagogic knowledge construction is more than making material available through OERs and MOOCs, activities which could just reproduce current understandings. Rather, it requires the rethinking of the disciplinary base, an activity which the extensive DE module production route is in a strong position to undertake, coupled with well-supported avenues for dissemination.

Conclusion

The reproduction of knowledge in terms of the teaching that takes place at an institution such as a university involves a range of processes concerning the selection, mediation and structuring of resources that are drawn from the products of the generation of knowledge (i.e. research and debates generated by the research community). These processes of selection (which material to include and which to exclude), of mediation (how to frame that material; what to highlight or background; what form of commentary and critique to append to it), and of structuring (how to combine the material with other material and create from it a coherent narrative) are themselves influenced by a number of factors relating to the personnel involved and the contextual constraints and regulative environment in which the teaching takes place. In this paper we have provided a description of and commentary on the nature of some of these processes for an undergraduate distance learning module in English Language Studies produced and delivered at a UK higher education institution. Given that this module and its materials will be available for

about a decade and be taught to thousands of students within and beyond the UK, this final product represents a notable example of knowledge production in the discipline as it currently operates in the Anglophone HE sector. The scale of DE production, the input from academics beyond the institution, and the creation of various OERs demonstrate how pedagogical choices can reassemble and reconceptualise the foundations of the discipline.

This paper has provided insights into the range and specifics of the social practices which shaped the final pedagogic product; practices which draw significantly on the affordances of the distance learning model we worked within, which promoted dialogic exploration of the field through team working and by drawing the thinking of dispersed academics together. This collaborative process among experts from a variety of specialisms brought 'discipline' to the pedagogic construction of knowledge. One point of note from this examination is the balance between the way that the production process involved both representing and recreating the discipline. It is not a given that a DE module will innovate in disciplinary terms. At the outset of the process described here, the balance tended more towards representing; that is, producing materials which followed an established curriculum, covered a particular set of conventionally agreed-upon topics, and represented the current state of the discipline. However, the interaction of the team and others over a period of time meant that as the process proceeded the choices made in terms of selection, mediation and structuring began to revise and re-imagine the curriculum, and, in a sense, move the discipline on. This was partly due to the phenomena that the discipline takes as its object of study (i.e. by developments in the nature of English as social/cultural/political circumstances around the world change), but also by the interactions of the people who were contributing to the materials and their particular interests and biases. The production process itself was marked by interactions around the personal interests of the team – their areas of expertise, their ideological beliefs

about language and its use and role in society, and their ambitions about the purpose of the module. In addition, the sometimes lengthy discussions with collaborators from around the world about the texts and materials being produced increased the potential to move the field on.

We have illustrated how the creation of a large scale distance learning module has the potential to enable collaboration which can reposition the disciplinary area of study for the students of our institution. OERs allow such disciplinary repositioning to have the potential to influence a much wider audience than has traditionally been the case in higher education. This may be dwarfed in future by the influence of MOOCs, but this will depend on whether such productions promote dialogue and interthinking between broad groups of academics or simply reproduce the current disciplinary constructions. :

Finally, the role that other practical concerns have in shaping the discipline should also be noted. In the case of this module, these practical concerns ranged from institutional constraints such as the need for cross-disciplinary accommodation, external constraints such as the QAA benchmarks, considerations around assessment, and other concerns such as the implications of producing externally published long-lasting material. Taken together, these various factors illustrate the ways in which a distance education model of pedagogic knowledge production enables social dynamics combined with technological affordances to come together in ways that can influence the reproduction and reinterpreting of disciplinary knowledge and boundaries.

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