

B.P.R.S. Report

Project name: *Text Reversioning – The Vampire Project: An Investigation Into the Use of ICT Within English*

Researchers: J Kruse, B Zaidi (Year 13)
See also: P. Stephen (Year 7)

Dates of Research: September 2000 - August 2001

Contact details: Arthur Mellows Village College, Helpston Road, Peterborough PE6 7JX

e-mail: zaidibg@amvc.schoolzone.co.uk
krusej@amvc.schoolzone.co.uk

Research Topic: Technology-Integrated Pedagogical Strategies; Secondary English teaching and learning

Geographical area where research conducted: England – Eastern Region

Educational Sector: Secondary

Abstract: This small-scale case study examined how the use of DTP and web-authoring packages to create original ICT texts could support the teaching and learning of the Case Study component of the AQA English Language A Level syllabus at Secondary school level. It further investigated how the value of ICT in English teaching could be ‘drip-fed’ down to Key Stage 3 students. The approach explored the idea that only through hands-on experience of ICT could students develop a genuine understanding of the practical and stylistic conventions of computer-generated texts. The study examined use of this approach in work on Vampires, carried out with Year 13 English Language students, and a control group of mixed-ability Year 7 students. Evidence about enhanced appreciation of language issues relating to audience, purpose and format, as well as improved ICT skills was gathered through print-outs of draft texts for a CD-Rom based on Vampires aimed at 10-12 year-olds.

Implementation: Taught by B Zaidi and J Kruse in Resources 1, a computer suite of 18 PC's situated within the College's Resources Centre. These teachers shared the timetable for the group of 16 students. To prevent unlimited access to the materials on vampires on the Internet, much of which were felt unsuitable for study, modified resources were downloaded onto the school intranet. They were multimedia, and included pre 20th century material. Students had to research the subject and create a CD Rom entry on vampires aimed at a specified audience of 10-12 year-olds. It was envisaged that they could quickly and easily manipulate the various texts for reversioning.

Aims: The main aim of the research was to better prepare one shared Year 13 class mixed gender for their English language Case Study exam AQA Specification B. Traditionally, students find this difficult and the topics are 'dry', in that they tend to cover topics which many students find unstimulating and demotivating. The subject chosen, Vampires, was to create interest. It was intended that the use of ICT would enable them to recast source material more easily, improve their knowledge about language and to promote self-evaluation of their own work. Additionally their confidence in using computers should improve. The exam paper demands an awareness of audience, purpose and format and it was hoped the project would deepen students' understanding of these concepts. An additional aim was to cross-reference the results with a parallel mixed ability Year 7 group given the same source material and criteria. It was also hoped that working with the Year 7 group would heighten the Year 13 students understanding of the younger audience that they were being asked to write for.

Findings: The research provided us with an opportunity and a framework to look at a number of aspects of classroom teaching which are difficult to study under normal conditions. Primarily, being able to provide students with the opportunity to draft their CD-Rom scripts straight onto computer clearly gave them greater insight into the practical issues of format, in particular the advantages that sound, moving image, hyperlinks etc have over traditional print-based texts in relation to the specified purpose and audience.

Secondly, though significantly, it clearly improved students' (and teachers'!) confidence and practical ICT skills. It also helped shape future ICT development in the English department in terms of schemes of work at Key Stage 3 and A Level, as well as enhancing discriminating software purchase.

Finally, the opportunities for student evaluation and feedback were relevant not just to this research project, but offered some insight into practical aspects of teaching and learning styles employed at Key Stage 3 and A Level.

Although the project was somewhat curtailed by the onset of terminal exams in Year 13, the findings have been sufficient to shape future schemes of work when tackling the composition and/ or stylistic analysis of computer-generated texts. More specifically, it soon became clear that students' understanding of how to draft a script for a CD-Rom was greatly enhanced by a hands-on approach to learning. The physical act of drafting their scripts straight onto computer gave

them a greater awareness of the interactive nature of the set task, and the need to be mindful of the enhancements and limitations of *reading* texts via a screen. This includes problems of scrolling, as well as the differences in hand-eye co-ordination. The need to often share texts in practical classroom situations was another significant factor, as well as the expectation that computer-generated texts will be colourful, designed etc.

Some of the findings were also quite unexpected. After studying hard copies of a selection of CD-Rom entries and web-pages, the practical task clearly forced students to consider not only the script itself, but also the 'hidden' audience of the person responsible for producing their CD-Rom. Thus, the most satisfying part of the project was the frequency with which students addressed the concept through the production process, providing guidance for sound effects, music, graphological features and other features common to CD-Roms.

Participants' Information:

- i) 13D English Language A Level group shared by Ms Kruse and Mr Zaidi; 16 students, mixed gender
- ii) Volunteers from Year 7 group taught by Mrs Stephen, 7 students, mixed ability, mixed gender

Equipment And Materials Used: Computer Suite comprising 15 PC's; internet research, Word, Powerpoint and Hot Metal Pro.

Also used vampire texts downloaded from internet including Bram Stoker's 'Dracula', various non-fiction texts.

Applied Method of Analysis: Evidence for success was obtained from student logs, teacher observations, and feedback from visiting observer (Sue Brindley) for a somewhat more independent view of the project. For the student perspective, small group interviews took place and questionnaires were filled in. In total, 8 teacher observations took place. The findings of these observations were that students clearly benefited from the ICT-based approach. Within lessons, students were generally good at filling in their logs, although they tended to disrupt the flow of the lesson rather than offering genuine insight into the nature of the tasks they were engaged in, which occasionally created unrest. Verbal feedback, both within lessons and in small group discussions which took place after the lessons during free periods or lunch-times tended to be more productive. In all cases, students felt that the work was helping them to develop a greater awareness of the practical nature of ICT-based texts, both in terms of reading them and in generating original texts.

Unfortunately, the timing of the project shortly before the final examinations meant that the original work produced by the students was unfinished, but the process was always intended to be of greater benefit than the product anyway. One student commented that her "fear of ICT" had partly been assuaged by the project and felt she had a greater understanding of the demands of the Case Study exam itself. Other students complained that they were opposed to the topic – Vampires – on religious grounds. A general feeling was that the pressures of the impending exams led them to largely ignore the implications of the evaluative process via the logs. Clearly, the most productive and favourable timing of the

project would be at the end of the Year 12 AS course after the May modular exams in preparation for the Editorial Writing exam, which will now be taken in January of Year 13.

Logs: Comprised an A4 sheet in 4 sections kept in folders. A sheet was filled in every lesson by both partners in a pairing who monitored progress every 10 minutes to prevent students forgetting their findings by the end of the lesson. They were designed to promote awareness of purpose and evaluate progress made.

Conclusion: From the feedback we received from students, they found the use of ICT beneficial for handling large amounts of texts quickly and easily, and ultimately produced a higher quality of re-casting than they did in their paper exercises in class. Thus, expectations for improved performance in the Case Study exam for 2001 are high, especially as an ICT-based task was part of the paper. Results are due in August. It also helped shape future schemes of work under the new AS/A2 syllabus, as well as offering some clarity in terms of future software purchase for web-authoring packages, extending to whole school implications. Additionally, students' and teachers' confidence in using/ teaching/ understanding ICT was enhanced. In the future, we will run an extended version of the project with Year 13 students, but do so earlier in the year to avoid conflicts with revision time towards the onset of the exam period, to help focus students on key concepts of audience, purpose, format and the social context in which such texts are encountered. The Year 7 control group was also useful in offering strategies for building up ICT skills in Key Stage 3 and helping to develop schemes of work which will hopefully lead to better-prepared A Level students of the future.

Recommendations: *On the basis of this research, we would suggest very strongly that the hands-on approach to developing greater understanding of the stylistic conventions of ICT texts is highly beneficial to students and teachers. We would certainly suggest that the project should run earlier in the Year 13 course, preferably at the start of the year in September as it serves as an excellent way of focusing students on the key concepts of audience, purpose and format, as well as the hidden audience of the people who will produce the finished version of your text, in this case the producer of the CD-Rom. It is often this aspect of Case Study work that students struggle with, particularly the less able.*

Problems: Two students objected to the subject matter of the research as it would compromise their religious beliefs. Difficulties of access to ICT facilities as rooms are block-booked by other subjects. Suites only have 15 computers so students had to share 1 between 2. We operate a 2-week timetable so there were continuity problems. As it got closer to exams, students resented encroachment on revision time.

Disruption of Year 13 with trips/ visits. Year 7 had to be taught at lunchtime which made peer overseeing impossible. Finances were also a problem as was getting paid time out for cover.

Research Evaluation: The success of this project is largely dependent on the results of the Case Study exam, though the benefits thus far are as outlined previously in terms of student/ teacher ICT confidence, software evaluation, preparation for delivery of the A2 AQA English Language A Level syllabus, development of Key Stage 3 schemes of work and so on. It also provided useful opportunities for external evaluation of lessons and schemes of work from other colleagues within the English Department, as well as external agencies such as Cambridge University School of Education.