Introduction

Social Change and English, 1945-1965 is a three-year project funded by the Leverhulme Trust. The aim of the project is to produce a history of developments in the teaching of English in three London secondary schools in the twenty years after the war. We chose these English departments because they influenced the way English developed, not only in the UK, but in the Commonwealth, the USA and beyond.

Our research methods involve interviews with teachers and pupils together with the study of documents, photographs and films (including student work). Our most immediate aim is to record people’s memories while there is still time, and make these available.

News

New research officer

In January Georgina Brewis started as the new research officer on the project working four days a week. Georgina has a PhD in the history of voluntary social service and education in Britain and India while her other research interests include the history of student volunteering and social action.

Interviews update

To date the team has conducted 65 interviews with former teachers, pupils and other key informants. In April 2011 we held a group analysis day looking in depth at a selection of interviews with teachers across the three schools. Teachers interviewed so far recall the importance of new publishing trends, such as the production of high quality, affordable classroom literature for children such as the Heinemann New Windmill series that began in 1950. Others identify the key role of new technology such as film projectors and portable tape recorders in opening up new possibilities in English lessons. Pupils appear to have been profoundly influenced by the inspiring new teaching methods and the chance to engage in social and political discussion on issues of concern to them.
Book proposal submitted


Sound Archive

In April Georgina met with Dr Rob Perks, Lead Curator of Oral History at the British Library’s Sound Archive to discuss the deposit of our life history interviews at the end of the project. Through this connection with the British Library, we also hope to unearth and digitise some old reel-to-reel recordings of pupils and teachers.

Mapping networks

In March Georgina met with Professor Sir Alan Wilson and his team at UCL’s Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis to discuss ideas of mapping the networks of teachers and over time and space. Using gephi, an open source software for visualizing and analysing networks, there are exciting possibilities of visually demonstrating the rich set of connections between key people in our study such as Jimmy Britton, Harold Rosen and Nancy Martin. Such an experiment would enable this project to engage with the emerging field of digital humanities.

New project website

In February 2011 we created a new page for the project on the Institute of Education’s website. We also launched an independent website to publicise the study, advertise events and share interim findings.

The site includes a contact form to encourage former pupils and teachers to share their memories of English teaching in the period. See [www.remakingenglish.org](http://www.remakingenglish.org) for more information.

The new website has been featured on the Leverhulme Trust website and the IHR’s History News pages and we have posted links to relevant websites such as the History of Education Society, Facebook and Wikipedia pages.
Archival materials

Exciting new archival materials relating to the development of English teaching in the post-war period have been discovered in the basement of the Institute of Education. These include examples of pupil work from the 1960s and 1970s and the papers of Jimmy Britton and Nancy Martin. The boxes have now been moved to the Institute’s own archive, where they await cataloguing.

Pete Medway’s blog

Pete has been regularly updating his blog (http://petemedway.blogspot.com) with stories about writing the history of Walworth school and its predecessor schools, including recent posts on classroom layout at the Mina Road School.

Publications

Pete has recently written a piece for NATE’s journal *English, Drama, Media*. Georgina has written short articles for InstEd and the English Association’s *Newsletter*. John Hardcastle has an article on the early history of Hackney Downs School in the latest edition of *Changing English* which came out in March 2011. The project team has so far published a number of academic articles:


Presentations

Since last summer the team has given a number of talks on the project to a variety of audiences. In August 2010 John and Pete spoke at the European Conference on Educational Research in Helsinki. In November they presented to the DOMUS Seminar at the University of Birmingham and also gave a paper at the History of Education Society UK’s annual conference in London.

In March 2011 John gave a talk at a Centre for Language Culture and Learning Seminar at Goldsmiths, University of London.

Future events

This summer, team members John and Pete will be presenting at the History of Education Seminar at the Institute of Historical Research. All are welcome to attend:

‘Democratising English: Changing the subject in post-war classrooms’

Date: Thursday 2 June 2011, 5.30pm
Location: Room G34 (South Block, Ground Floor), Senate House, Malet Street, London

For more information

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www.remakingenglish.org