

## The Intersection of English Education Practices and Workplace Needs

CONSTANCE KAMPF AND SUVI ISOHELLA

In difficult economic times, the place of education in the economy comes to the forefront with questions about how effective our programs are in preparing students to become contributing members of the workforce and society. As the discipline of English studies sits at the cross-roads of humanities and education for a global society, it has traditionally enjoyed high enrollments and unquestioned value. However, two trends are affecting the position of English studies in the academy: 1) the emergence of communication studies as a discipline and 2) the movement towards education in English as a global language across many disciplines in Scandinavia. Because of these movements, the place and purpose for English studies is being called into question. In addition, the ability of an English studies degree in preparing students for the global workforce is also being examined. To address these emergent trends in academia, this issue brings together papers from the U.S., Denmark, Finland and Spain to examine the intersection of English education practices and workplace needs.

This issue began as a panel at the ESSE 2008 conference in Aarhus, and has, through our dialogue with each and responses to peer reviewers, grown into a collection of articles which offer key points for consideration in reflecting on the intersection of English education practices and workplace needs. We began with the following questions in our call for proposals:

- How effective are current English language education practices in international content-oriented curricula such as Marketing and Management as well as translation and technical communication for learners' career needs in working life?
  
- How do the linguistic, rhetorical and communication foundations for English language education connect with current industry issues such as language policy, Project Management, etc.?

## Introduction: English Education practices and workplace needs

We invited scholars and instructors to look at current and future directions in education for content-oriented curricula in English, as well as translation and technical communication through a combination of perspectives rooted in Linguistics, Culture, Communication, Rhetoric and Knowledge Communication. Through the responses, we were able to bring together a group of international educators and scholars dealing with the intersection of English education practices from a variety of countries and disciplinary perspectives.

With respect to the first question about the effectiveness of English education practices, the authors describe their efforts to connect theory with real world practices in their classrooms. They describe strategies with respect to four different career tracks:

1. Language teachers & professionals in global contexts
2. Business professionals working in English as a global language
3. Translators
4. Technical Communicators

The authors look at practices in each of these career tracks, and describe their work on issues involved in helping students making necessary connections to prepare them for a transition to the workplace. Arnó-Macià focuses on knowledge about language (KAL) and the link between explicit declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge for language teachers & professionals in global contexts. Brady and Jose focus on technical communicators and their need for cultural knowledge in a global context. They discuss how Communities of Practice (Wenger) were enacted and nurtured to help students in “writing for and collaborating with an international audience.” Kampf and Isohella argue for a place for a course enabling students to understand project management as a work practice which can offer students an opportunity to apply their language, discourse analysis, analytical skills and creativity in a transitional setting which can serve as a bridge between the classroom and the workplace. They suggest it can be taught as a situated problem-solving experience involving real-world clients. Schjoldager describes a course for translation students giving them

an opportunity to build knowledge about professional translation through a case competition with professional translators as partners. Stotesbury examines her course description through interviews from working business professionals—executives working in Europe in global contexts requiring English. She finds that executive survey responses tended not to focus on culture, *per se*, but rather on more practical issues such as deciphering the meanings of Asian speakers at both the conceptual and linguistic levels. All of the authors point to notions of reflection, connection to practitioners and research related to current business practices and language needs as a means of increasing the effectiveness of a connection between English education practices and the workplace.

In addressing the second question, how do the theoretical foundations of English and related disciplines connect to current industry issues, the authors use notions of content and social knowledge from the discipline gained through reflection. For example, Stotesbury points out the large range of business documents created by the executives surveyed. This finding links back the questions of effectiveness because creating usable documents includes both understanding of genre structures and of social context in the workplace. Arnó-Macià uses language awareness work to connect the foundations of a systematic teaching of grammar to metalinguistic skills necessary for performance in the workplace. Brady and Jose use reflection to help technical communication students consider the complexity of the connections between their own communication practices and their professional identity. Kampf and Isohella describe Project Management documents as a place for connecting genre theories to real life cases. Finally, Schjoldager connects competences for translation to the simulated on-the-job experiences that students gain from the translation case competition.

These authors and cases document current directions in English education practices from different countries and in different areas of English studies. They describe their work in connecting the classroom and workplace through research and teaching practices which actively involve practicing professionals. The question remains, is this a viable future direction for English Studies curricula, and can workplaces be connected to a humanities tradition

Introduction: English Education practices and workplace needs

while preserving the strengths of a humanities education? And finally, the question that we must continue to ask ourselves, what is the place of English Studies in a changing academic world? And how can we use our research and reflective skills to help define and explain English Studies?