

**TRANSITION AND ACCULTURATION:
CHANGING EXPECTATIONS IN THE MOVE
BETWEEN A LEVEL AND
UNIVERSITY**

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Education

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Abstract

This study concentrates upon students making the transition from sixth form to university English Studies. In recent years, this is an issue that has come under increasing scrutiny within the higher education sector and to a lesser degree within the sixth form sector. It is apparent from a growing body of literature that lecturers in higher education are unsatisfied with the relationship between A level and degree level manifestations of subject and with the ability of in-coming undergraduate students to bridge the gap between the two. It is equally clear from the literature that for many students, the experience of moving from A level to undergraduate study is a problematic and often painful process. This thesis considers matters of academic transition and pedagogic encounter within English Studies from the perspectives of both students and teachers.

In exploring these issues, a central focus is teachers' and students' expectations and how these are established within the variously constructed learning fora of the sixth form and of higher education. The interaction of these contrasting and sometimes conflicting expectational schemas at the academic borderlands of transition is explored through a detailed consideration of pedagogy and views of pedagogy amongst both teachers and students. The difficulties attendant on creating mutually conducive learning environments, operating to the satisfaction of students and teachers alike, are considered in the light of philosophical frameworks developed out of the writings of Pierre Bourdieu and Lev Vygotsky.

The thesis also considers recent and current political developments. The direction of policy-making under New Labour, addressing both 14-19 school education (DfES, 2005) and higher education (DfES, 2003a; DfES, 2003b) witnesses significant changes in the shape and purposes of post-compulsory and higher education. It also signals the advent of further changes, and as such highlights the need for a fuller consideration of the interaction between sixth form and higher education. The widening participation agenda in particular resonates with this thesis' focus on transition, being a factor that may serve further to complexify and problematise the already strained relationship between A level and higher education.

By means of surveys of sixth form students, sixth form teachers, first year undergraduates and university lecturers, this thesis draws out the experiences and expectations of teachers and learners on both sides of the A level/university divide. Data arising from these surveys provides a background for more localised data collection conducted through observation and interviews undertaken over the course of one academic year within a large pre-1992 university English department.

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Chapter One

Introduction and Rationale

1.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the rationale behind my research interest in the issue of sixth form to university transition and English pedagogy. It provides an initial explanation of the experiences from which this research interest springs and of the issues, contexts and perceptions in which it is rooted. It also outlines the purposes of this study, how issues were identified, and what it could represent in terms of an original contribution to knowledge.

Whilst the primary focus of this thesis is the study of English Literature at A level and at university, discussion occasionally addresses other related subject areas. Reference, for example, is on occasions made to the study of other 'English' subjects at A level – English Language and English Language and Literature. This is for two reasons. Firstly that these alternative versions of English at A level cast interesting light on the assumptions and the limitations of English study at A level, and secondly because many students entering the study of English Literature at university do so from the background of English Language or English Language and Literature rather than straight English Literature. Similarly, I have chosen, throughout the thesis, to refer to the study of English at university as English Studies, rather than English Literature. This is to reflect the fact that literary study at university now comprises a widely varied range of matter including, for example, elements of media studies, cultural studies and creative writing. Whilst clearly related to literary study, these areas of English offer students experiences which cannot adequately be covered by the conventional notion of English Literature.

It is also worth observing that whilst many of the students surveyed, interviewed and observed in the course of this thesis are Single Honours students, there are others following either Combined Honours or Major/Minor programmes. For these students, the experience of studying English Literature is self-evidently different and may impact significantly on students' pedagogical, support and assessment needs. For the purposes of this study, however, discussion centres upon these students' experiences of literary study.

1.2 Personal experiences and research

The roots of my interest in English pedagogy and the student experience of transition from sixth form to university are twofold:

- my personal experiences of teaching English at A level;
- my experiences in Initial Teacher Education. Trainees on such courses operate at a second transition point, as they look to return from university to school. Consideration of this 'reverse' transition provided useful insights into the difficulties they faced in moving between the cultural worlds of school English and university English.

1.2.1 Personal experiences of teaching A level

Firstly, my experiences over many years of teaching English Literature to A level have made me aware of the needs, aspirations and expectations of a wide range of students. The reasons why students undertake the study of one or more of the family of English qualifications at A level (English Literature, English Language and English Language and Literature) are many and varied. It is important to recognise and stress at the outset the general nature of GCE qualifications and the varied abilities and intentions of students undertaking them (Barlow, 2003; Green 2005a). By no means all students taking English options at A level wish to enter higher education in any capacity, and only approximately 10% (Bleiman & Webster, 2006; AQA, 2003) wish to pursue English Studies to a higher level. The body of students preparing for and sitting A level English subjects is, therefore, multifarious in its nature and in its expectations.

With this in mind, my principle aim as a teacher was to ensure that all students in my A level classes, regardless of their reasons for studying English and their future intentions, were enabled to gain effective access to their A level studies. This meant providing opportunities for them meaningfully to engage in learning at an appropriate personal level within the complex forum that is the English classroom. A wide range of factors, such as curricular stipulations, assessment requirements, class dynamics, ~~individual student needs and the teacherly choices predicated upon them~~, all interact to create the unique conditions of the classroom. The fundamental shaping forces

upon teachers' work, therefore, are many and various, as they seek to forge a workable model of English for their students. Each teacher, it became apparent to me, was engaged in an act of academic construction, through which they formed an operable version (or rather a set of interrelated operable versions) of English for their students. This, I became aware, was profoundly important and powerful in shaping students' experiences and consequently their expectations of English studies. The pedagogic and 'cultural' forms of English students experience at A level are teacher-mediated. Teachers, therefore, are powerful guiding influences on the ways in which students perceive and begin to draw the 'map' (Evans, 1993) of the subject they are studying.

Through my experiences of teaching A level, it became apparent that the 'map' many students are encouraged to create, is a frequently limited, set-text bound vision of English Studies. Set texts, in other words are in danger, in many cases, of becoming the subject of study in their own right, rather than a vehicle through the consideration of which students are introduced to the broader world of English Studies. It became clear to me that this was a situation of potentially damaging significance in its likely impact upon students choosing to continue their study of English in higher education. It was likely that such a situation would impact directly upon students' conceptualisation of English as a subject, upon their expectations, and upon the skills that are required effectively to function within the context of higher education English.

It was important at the outset, therefore, to seek to establish the context out of which students emerge into higher education English Studies. A level classrooms and university lecture theatres and seminar rooms, my experiences as both teacher and student had taught me, are very different places. Nevertheless, it is against the background of A level study, the practices it has inculcated and the expectations it has established that new undergraduate students seek to make sense of and evaluate their early experiences of university study. The potentially problematic nature of such issues in terms of student transition, as one English Studies 'system' meets another, is evident. These difficulties have, perhaps, been further exacerbated by current A level specifications with their inherent time pressures (Hodgson & Spours, 2003a) and heavily assessment-shaped priorities. This has led to an increasingly vexed

relationship with higher education and other end-users of post-compulsory qualifications (Hodgson & Spours, 2003a; Hodgson & Spours, 2003b). The Tomlinson Report of 2002, the recommendations of the Working Group on 14-19 Reform and New Labour's response to them are recent manifestations of the continued difficulties students, teachers and end-users are facing.

1.2.2 Experiences in Initial Teacher Education

The second significant influence on my choice of field for research emerged from my role as an Initial Teacher Educator. Through sessions focusing on issues of subject knowledge and what this constitutes, it became apparent that many of the trainees entering my courses had undergone a personal 'crisis' in their development as subject specialists throughout the course of their degree level studies. This was particularly prevalent at the point of entering university. As graduates, all trainees had evidently effectively managed to come to terms with the requirements of university English. However, the disparity between the cultures of school and university English Studies remained an issue for these trainees. In many cases this was manifest in their troubled attempts to define their personal construct of English as a subject (Green, 2006a; Banks, Leach & Moon, 1999; Grossman, Wilson & Shulman, 1989).

The combination of these two educational experiences logically formed my research interest in the pedagogy of English Studies at A level and in higher education. I was particularly interested to consider teachers' and students' assumptions and expectations of study at each level and the pedagogical choices such assumptions necessitate or encourage. From here I wished to explore the impact of these choices on student learning and the potential outcomes of conflicting subject cultures at A level and at university on students' experience of transition.

1.3 Current political issues

My interest in the issue of transition from sixth form to university was deepened by political debate and policy development surrounding both the 14-19 curriculum and higher education. The current political agenda and rhetoric centres around significant change in sixth form studies and in higher education. New Labour's intentions as laid out in the White Papers *The Future of Higher Education* (DfES, 2003a), *Widening Participation in Higher Education* (DfES, 2003b) and *14-19 Education and Skills*

(DfES, 2005) demonstrate this. The relevance and importance of research into the interface between secondary and higher education sectors and their respective practices is evident. When the political impetus to move towards mass higher education is set against the requirements of higher education providers, significant tensions emerge. There is growing concern amongst academics in English departments, for example, that incoming students, despite increasing grade profiles, display fewer of the characteristics and less of the knowledge required for successful transition to an English degree (Gawthrop & Martin, 2003; Knights, 2004; Green, 2005a). Careful consideration of how educational practices across sectors prepare students *for* and assist them *with* the transition from secondary to higher education is both relevant and necessary.

1.4 Purposes of this study and the Research Question

Given the comparatively small body of literature specifically addressing students' views of the issue of transition and their expectations on entering higher education English Studies, I decided primarily to focus my investigation on these. The purposes of this study are, therefore, threefold:

- to identify the expectations of sixth form and first year undergraduate students of English, and to consider their role in determining how effectively students manage the transition from A level to higher education;
- to evaluate a range of pedagogical approaches adopted at A level and in higher education, to explore students' experiences and perceptions of these, and to evaluate their impact upon student development in the first year of higher education;
- to consider the 'boundaries' of A level and university English Studies and to explore whether these represent a meeting or a division of perceptions.

I particularly wished to explore the range of approaches currently prevalent in the teaching of English at A level. This is an area of considerable importance in ~~understanding students' perceptions of the purposes and the means of English Studies.~~ These, when brought into contact with the expectations and means of study prevalent

in higher education manifestations of subject, I believed, would prove significant factors in determining the success or failure of student transition.

My own experiences of A level and higher education teaching, along with my professional knowledge of pedagogy assisted in the framing of my research question.

This was:

What are the expectations and experiences of students of English Literature at A level and in higher education, and how do such expectations and experiences impact on student transition?

1.5 Conceptual Issues

In order to explore these issues, a close focus on students undergoing the experience of transition was essential. In itself, this study lent itself automatically neither to quantitative, nor qualitative, nor mixed method approaches. My epistemic and ontological loci, however, and the reasons for the study automatically prioritised certain issues (Woods, 1992; Mills, 1993). In their turn, these established certain methods of data collection and analysis as more fruitful and appropriate than others (see Chapter 3 for a fuller discussion). At the heart of establishing the conceptual framework for research, therefore, is the alignment of the framework for research with the research question (Stake, 2000), or as Cresswell (2003) puts it the matching of problem to approach. Through such careful alignment, 'each proposition directs attention to something that should be examined within the scope of the study' (Burns, 2000, 464). Also of importance in the design of research, however, are the researcher's own experiences and expertise and the intended audience of the reported research (Cresswell, 2000). The validity of the outcomes through the verification, or what Janesick (2003) terms the 'crystallisation' of data arising from the research design, is also central.

The process of research design, therefore, is reflexive and multi-faceted. It must take into account the needs of the researcher, the subject(s) of the research, the eventual audience, and the cultural context within which the research is taking place (Jacob, 1992). ~~In designing a research process, however, it is essential that design and method~~

are not confused (de Vaus, 2001); the structure of research and the tools of research must be evaluated discretely, as suggested also by Stake (2000).

With this in mind, I set about constructing my Case Study design. A group of six students, all working within the same pre-1992 university English department, was selected as the primary source of qualitative data. However, in order to verify the data that would emerge from interviews and other materials gathered from these students, I believed it was important to establish a broader picture of the first year experiences and expectations of students. Data gathered from these six students would, therefore, be evaluated against a broader set of observational data gathered within the same department, and a set of questionnaire data collected from a range of higher education and sixth form institutions.

In establishing my own design for research an initial conceptual framework was established which took into account a variety of factors:

- theories of teaching and learning;
- the curricular demands of A level study under Curriculum 2000 and the role of assessment in shaping students' experiences and views of English;
- Department for Education and Skills policies with regard to the development of the 14-19 school curriculum (DfES, 2005);
- the widening of participation in higher education (DfES 2003a and 2003b);
- philosophical perspectives of education and its purposes;
- current practices in English education at A level and in higher education.

The focus of my research question on students' expectations and experiences and the ontological stance this implies, required approaches to data collection which would ~~allow insight into the experiential reality of traversing the divide between sixth form~~ and higher education. A primary means of establishing this would be through a

detailed consideration of the range of approaches to teaching and learning employed, students' abilities to relate to these and engage with them, and the impact of these on their abilities effectively to manage their transition. Observation would obviously be a powerful tool in establishing the realities of the 'classroom experience' of first year undergraduates and would allow a functioning insight into pedagogy at work. It would allow me to gain an insight into classroom relations between students and staff, and between students and students. This would enable me to begin to analyse how far students' expectations are reflected in reality. Given the important role of observational data within the research process, it was also important to recognise the interaction between the observer and the observed in the construction of meaning (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Schwandt, 1994) and the dangers attendant on this (Schofield, 1996) when incorporating the experiences of the 'viewed' and subjecting this to theoretical analysis.

In exploring the expectations and experiences of students, I felt it was essential also to consider the expectations and experiences of their teachers. The meeting of students' and teachers' views of subject studies – at both the paradigmatic and the experiential level – are central to a consideration of pedagogic interaction. Students' views of subject may, for example, be either formed or undermined by the subject-view of their teachers (Knights, 2005a). The coincidence or divergence of subject construct (Banks, Leach & Moon, 1999) and expectations between students and their teacher(s), and the pedagogical assumptions upon which the teacher-learner relationship is based (Knights, 2005a; Green, 2006b) are central to the issue of transition. Bourdieu's philosophical concept of the 'habitus' (see Chapter 2), and his reflections on the ways in which individuals manage the meeting and synthesis of conflicting habits, whilst not conceptually unproblematic, have proven illuminating as thinking tools. The notion of habitus, set alongside his propositions relating to 'symbolic violence' and pedagogy, have been significant in developing a starting point for analysing some of the ways in which classroom encounters are negotiated and managed. Such matters, as has already been suggested, are important in developing an understanding of how and why students succeed or fail in managing to develop their abilities as learners and in modifying their 'performance' to the demands and expectations of the university environment, and issues surrounding this.

1.6 Shared concerns, divided perceptions

Underlying this study lays also an awareness of the concerns of teachers of English in higher education, who perceive a growing divergence between English Studies as taught in schools and colleges at A level and as practised in universities (Knights, 2004). The presence of such concerns is, in itself, symptomatic of malaise at the chalk face. Regardless of the extent to which pedagogic practices between sixth form and higher education may or may not reflect each other, ontological and epistemological perceptions of the purposes and nature of English Studies at A level and in higher education inevitably vary. As observed early in this chapter, A level is conceived and delivered as a general qualification, which degree level study is not. In this distinction alone, before even considering questions of pedagogy, lay significant causes of transitional difficulty. Innate socially constructed mismatches between A level and degree level 'versions' of subject necessarily result in problematic differences.

Such a divide is also recognised by some teachers operating within the sixth form sector, who sense that sixth form and university English have diverged under Curriculum 2000 (Bluett, Cockcroft et al, 2004; Barlow, 2006a; Atherton, 2005). Within both sixth form and higher education sectors, therefore, there is a growing malaise surrounding the matter of transition – and implicitly student progression – between sixth form and university study, and how this can effectively be managed.

1.7 Conclusion

Effective management of transition between phases of education may rely upon the clearer exploration and delineation of boundaries. Through such exploration, the establishment of a shared understanding of purpose and expectation at the interface between A level and university studies may be possible. However, frequently the demarcation of these crucial boundaries remains tacit and is often unclear to teachers and learners alike, leading to fundamental mismatches and misunderstandings between sixth form teachers and university lecturers, and also between lecturers and incoming students who, while they share a subject, also often hold obverse relationships with it (Green, 2006a). It is the intention of this study to attempt to identify some of these problematic mismatches, to explore their manifestation in pedagogy, and in so doing to identify practices in both sixth form and higher education English Studies that may facilitate the experience of transition. Further, my

intention is to explore the boundaries of English study at A level and at university; to consider encounters between students and staff, and between individuals and the subject they have chosen to practice – English. In so doing, it is hoped, a picture emerges of the root expectations that shape these transitional pedagogic encounters and the difficulties arising from them.

The primary purpose of this thesis, however, is to give voice to students and to explore the experience of transition from their perspective. In identifying their perceptions and expectations, and in following them through the experiences of A level and university – the demands of modular assessment, the A level classroom, the seminar room and the lecture theatre – a picture of the conflicting demands of transition emerges which contributes to a new understanding of the issues and difficulties they face.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to consider the currently available literature on the matter of sixth form to university transition and the study of English. It is divided into four sections, covering the following key issues:

- **student and teacher expectations;**
- **curriculum and assessment;**
- **student study skills;**
- **student 'location' and pedagogy.**

This review of literature explores current thinking and also identifies some key areas for further investigation.

First, however, there are initial discussions addressing two further areas:

- **the theoretical underpinning of my research.** This section outlines a number of philosophical issues and concepts drawn from the works of Bourdieu and Vygotsky. These concepts are significant in the analysis and discussion of data that follows in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.
- **recent and current political developments in the field of higher education.** This section offers a brief background looking to establish how the changing context of higher education and projected developments in the student body are likely to impact upon the nature of higher education. It also presents initial ideas relating to changed and changing student needs and how teaching and learning practices may need to be modified as a result.

Material discussed in this chapter is specifically related to the research question identified in Chapter 1:

What are the expectations and experiences of students of English Literature at A level and in higher education, and how do such expectations and experiences impact on student transition?

For purposes of this study, the literature reviewed has been largely limited to material produced within the context of higher education in the United Kingdom. It touches on literature dealing with generic issues of transition, writings addressing the broad disciplinary area of the Arts and Humanities, and materials specific to the study of English. Occasional reference is made to significant literature emanating from the United States, Australia and South Africa, where such work reflects directly upon the United Kingdom context and provides informative contrasts or sheds light on effective practices.

2.2 Theoretical underpinnings

Significant within this review of literature and the ensuing analysis and discussion of data, are a number of philosophical concepts arising from the works of the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and the psychologist Lev Vygotsky. The concepts outlined in the following section have, in the words of Jenkins (1992) in his critique of Bourdieu's work, been 'useful to think with' as I approached the writing of this thesis. Although in many ways these two perspectives may seem to oppose each other, Vygotsky proposing a – for want of a better word – benign notion of pedagogy and Bourdieu a less 'innocent' view, these perspectives provided a useful dichotomy in my thought and analysis. Through exploring the psychological and sociological insights they provide into pedagogic encounters, it was possible to explore the oppositional forces at play within the English classroom.

2.2.1 Social arenas, the individual and learning

Social constructivism is a central tenet of the pedagogic views of both Bourdieu and Vygotsky. In considering learning, both therefore pay particular attention to the

following:

- social arenas within which learning takes place;
- social reasons for imparting learning;
- social interactions between participants in the learning context;
- social conditions from which learning arises;
- social and cultural ‘constructions’ of learning; and
- the social impact of learning outcomes.

Whilst the individual and individuality are vitally important within any consideration of pedagogy, for both Bourdieu and Vygotsky, learning is socially, not individually constructed. The ways in which they seek to understand pedagogic environments and pedagogic encounters compare and contrast in a number of enlightening ways. The following section sets out to explore a number of key issues and concepts which are of relevance in the ensuing analysis and discussion of data surrounding transition.

2.2.1.1 Bourdieu: Field and Habitus

In their transference between what Bourdieu (1989) terms ‘fields’ (the transition between their post-16 and higher education studies), students face a particular set of difficulties, academic, social, personal and, increasingly, financial. Bourdieu defines the concept of ‘field’ (in Wacquant, 1989, 39) as:

a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation ... in the structure of the distribution of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions.

A field is a politico-social arena within which agents operate hoping to gain access to the specific 'capital gains' it offers. Educational institutions, therefore, or classrooms, may be considered as manifestations of fields offering students and teachers access to educational and cultural 'capital'. The notion of 'field' implies definition and delimitation, and as such implies the presence of boundaries. As Evans (1993) suggests, this is a particularly significant concept in relation to English as a discipline. Movement or transition from one field to another necessarily implies the notion of crossing boundaries, with all the difficulties and conflicts this may entail. Transition brings into contact the 'rules' of differing fields and cultures of learning, each of which operates according to its own expectational codes and systems. The interaction of these expectational codes and 'rules' takes place, under variously constructed social conditions, within individual agents as they move from one field to another. From this perspective, relative difficulty or ease in transition may be seen primarily as the result of how effectively and closely 'fields' interrelate. Bourdieu suggests that however closely they may be connected, the movement from one field of education to another inevitably involves the student in some form of internalised conflict.

Such a notion is clearly germane to the experience of students making the transition from school to university. It is clear that movement from one learning environment to another, even if the new environment were familiar and shared to a large extent the values and expectations of students' previous experiences, would lead to the creation of certain tensions. These tensions, if effective transition is to be made, have to be overcome. There are, however, problems attending on Bourdieu's views, which tend to reduce agents (in this case students) to the status of puppets at the mercy of a plethora of 'objective' forces all seeking to impose politico-pedagogic power over the individual. Bourdieu's analysis seems open to charges of determinism (Jenkins, 1992).

This element of determinism, Bourdieu seeks to overcome by recourse to the notion of the 'habitus'. Students arrive in higher education with pre-formed notions of subject and education based on a range of prior experiences, of their subject in particular and of education in general. Such experiences have inevitably acted as a form of 'training', establishing certain expectations with regard to academic

behaviours, work patterns, values and so on. Subjection to such influences (pedagogic action), the legitimating forces underlying them (pedagogic authority) and the means of inculcation they adopt (pedagogic work) together create what Bourdieu calls the habitus. This he defines as 'the site of the internalisation of externality and the externalisation of internality' (1990c, 205). The habitus is, therefore, a subjective construct formed by the individual's experiences of a variety of 'fields' within the objective world. The habitus in its turn is the means by which the individual (in this case the student) views and relates to the outside world (in this case the world of the higher educational institution). The habitus is, therefore, a subjective force, objectively formed by a variety of factors, such as social class and parental views, both of which, in relation to the specifically educational context, embody tacit perceptions of education as 'capital'. The family, the site of the primary pedagogic action, Bourdieu sees as the most powerful formative influence involved in shaping the habitus. Other factors and encounters are also involved. The experiences of learning English within the educational cultures of GCSE and latterly A level, for example, also inevitably act as significant shaping factors in establishing the individual student's habitus and the expectations they will carry with them into the higher education context. The habitus is thus an internalised force – the product of a form of academic training – durable enough to exist beyond the end of the application of any given pedagogic action. As such, the habitus continues to be a force – and a source of potential conflict – within on-going education, where new pedagogic actions, pedagogic authorities and pedagogic works are encountered.

The extent to which the individual and internalised habitus reflects the prevailing views of the new field (in this case the higher education institution), Bourdieu argues, will have a significant influence on the success with which individual students manage to modify their own habitus and related practices to the demands of higher education study. Bourdieu (1990c, 33) frames his discussion of this issue within a consideration of what he terms pedagogic work:

The specific productivity of pedagogic work, i.e. the degree to which it manages to inculcate in the legitimate addressees the cultural arbitrary ~~it is mandated to reproduce~~, is measured by the degree to which the habitus it produces is transposable, i.e. capable of generating practices

conforming with the principles of the inculcated arbitrary in a greater number of different fields.

The issue of transposability or adaptability is central here. The most useful *habiti*, Bourdieu suggests, provide agents with abilities that will operate effectively within a range of 'fields'. *Habiti* which are only narrowly applicable, while no less powerful in their influence on the behaviours of the individual, are more problematic. The extent to which individuals' previous experiences have intentionally or by coincidence provided them with a 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu, 1990a) of their new environment is directly related to the effectiveness with which they manage the movement between one field and another. Without such a 'feel for the game' (one of Bourdieu's favoured metaphors), which is predicated by the habitus-forming factors outlined above, students will find their transition and access to the capital on offer within their new field more difficult to achieve.

The extent to which views of education as cultural capital are determined by students' familial, social and educational backgrounds (and the influence of these on the formation of the habitus) is a particularly significant issue in Bourdieu's analysis of educational settings. The question of 'ownership' and students' feelings of belonging is central to his exploration of habitus and field. He considers students as representing a spectrum running from traditional to non-traditional. Traditional students he argues, by virtue of their particular educational experiences and up-bringing, have developed a habitus closely related to the requirements of higher education. In the context of this thesis, such students would be likely to succeed in their transition. Non-traditional students, by contrast, do not bring such advantages with them and would therefore be less likely to make successful transition.

Such ideas are of interest in the light of New Labour's Widening Participation agenda. The face of higher education is changing. This is clearly outlined in a recent White Paper (DfES, 2003a) which establishes governmental policy of *widening* participation in higher education (DfES, 2003b) – a significant shift from previous political attempts under the Tories to *increase* participation (Hodgson & Spours, 2003a). A ~~newly emergent student body, drawing on social groups which have not traditionally~~ participated in higher education, will inevitably bring with it a new and potentially

problematic range of attitudes *to* and valuations *of* (higher) education. Such expectations and needs, if they are not in opposition to, will at least challenge academic hegemony. In this resides the potential for conflict. Bourdieu argues that socio-politically constructed attitudes towards cultural capital and the (assumed) right to access culture – here represented by the arts, and specifically literature – tend to be self-reinforcing. This he explains with his concept of the ‘cultural unconscious’, a learned code comprising:

attitudes, aptitudes, knowledge, themes and problems, in short the whole system of categories of perception and thought acquired by the systematic apprenticeship which the school organises or makes it possible to organise. (Bourdieu, 1971, 182)

The presence of such codes within the habitus of the traditionally educated classes, who, Bourdieu argues, naturally have a feel for the cultural game, and in a sense own this field, tends to reinforce the status quo (1984). Conversely, differently constructed attitudes and aptitudes in non-traditional students are likely to lead to conflict and crisis within pedagogic encounters. Difficulties for newly emergent students under the widening participation agenda would, if Bourdieu’s observations are correct, be likely further to complexify the already difficult transitional issues students face.

2.2.1.2 Vygotsky and internalisation

The issue of internalised codes of behaviour and symbols is also central to the psychological explorations of Vygotsky. Like Bourdieu, Vygotsky identifies the importance of external encounters in the formation of these internalised individual behaviours and perspectives, particularly in relation to what he calls the ‘higher psychological processes’. Individual schemas of behaviour or academic value, for instance, are socially constructed and, therefore, culturally biased. For this reason, he eschews the idea of ‘inherent psychological schemata’ (Vygotsky, 1978: 45) which predate experience. A priori conceptualisations of higher learning functions are thus rejected.

What then is the genesis of such higher learning functions? Vygotsky conceives of learning neither as coming purely from *within*, nor wholly from *without* (passed on

from adults or teachers). Rather, he suggests, learning is a series of 'qualitative transformations' (Vygotsky, 1978: 46) or incremental steps through which the learner comes explicitly to engage with new concepts. Learning is, in other words, conceived as an historical process. Through a series of transformations, new concepts become implicit within the learner through the process of internalisation. The internalisation of learning cannot happen alone, however, but is built upon effective mediation. Adults, teachers and more able peers within the learning and social environments enable learners to move beyond what they could otherwise achieve. Externality thus enables the internalisation of what would otherwise be inaccessible or incomplete learning.

The significance of these ideas to matters of transition is evident. Like Bourdieu, Vygotsky insists upon the importance of culturally acquired (and consequently culturally biased) processes in the formation of individual schemas of learning. Learning is a socially and culturally located and conditioned dialectical activity. Any learning environment as such encodes its own social and cultural 'values'. A level English studies encodes one set of socio-cultural and pedagogic values which relates to but is also distinct *from* the socio-cultural and pedagogic values of degree level English studies. Thus, the processes and behaviours that are internalised in the process of A level study are inevitably different to those instilled (and required) at degree level. The meeting of differing expectational frameworks is likely to involve students in difficulties at transitional points within their education. The role of teachers, therefore, is crucial. In their ability to understand and address the needs of their students as they move from one educational experience (or set of experiences) to another lies the key to students' success in transition and development.

2.2.2 Relations between teachers and learners

2.2.2.1 Bourdieu: Symbolic violence – pedagogic action, pedagogic authority and pedagogic work

In pursuing the relationship between addressers (teachers) and addressees (learners) within the pedagogic context, Bourdieu propounds the concept of 'symbolic violence'. Symbolic violence is the imposition of a set of systems, values or meanings – for example academic, cultural, political or religious systems – on groups or classes

in such a way that the imposition is perceived as legitimate. The acceptance of such systems by the subjected group(s), he argues, blurs their perception of the power-relations that allow the act of imposition, and serves to reinforce the status quo and the order it represents. Underlying any pedagogic encounter, Bourdieu suggests, is a (deliberate?) misrecognition of the interaction between addresser and addressee.

Symbolic violence provides an interesting perspective from which to evaluate the politico-pedagogic environment of the classroom. If, as Bourdieu suggests, the outcomes (and consequently the processes) of education represent notional capital, students' needs will be best served by acquiescing and accepting the terms and demands of their teachers. Teachers and lecturers thus stand as mediators between the educational institution and the student. Teachers (as initiates) use pedagogic encounters to introduce learners (as initiands) to sanctioned subject content, practices, methods of exploration and means of expression.

These concepts are particularly significant in exploring issues of transition, where students are moving from the learned rules and structures of one educational culture system to another. As students move from sixth form to university, it is necessary for them to submit the methods, expectations and philosophies they import from A level or other post-16 qualification to the requirements of the higher education institution. New undergraduate students thus find the cultural requirements inculcated by A level teachers subjected to the scrutiny and redefinition of university lecturers.

Bourdieu also outlines a number of other key concepts which provide a basis for the following analysis. The first is 'pedagogic action', which he defines as 'the imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power' (Bourdieu 1990c, 5). The means by which such 'arbitrary' cultural and pedagogic power is wielded and applied will vary from institution to institution, but is always imposed by symbolic violence. Such symbolic violence can only subsist where the dominant agent (in this case the lecturer) and the dominated (the students) collude in accepting such a distribution of power. The granting of power to lecturers (and teachers, in the school context) and the educational institution is significant within pedagogic action. In fact, Bourdieu goes so far as to suggest that 'arbitrary power ... is the precondition for the establishment of a relation of pedagogic communication' (1990c, 6). Such arbitrary power, he

suggests, must exist for the classroom effectively to function. The classroom effectively functions because of conservatism, as the pedagogic action necessarily 'inculcates towards reproducing the power relations which are the basis of its power of arbitrary imposition' (1990c, 10).

Pedagogic action is inextricably linked to 'pedagogic authority'. In effect, this is the right granted to impose pedagogic action. Students in granting pedagogic authority allow the impositions of pedagogic action. This serves the purpose of legitimising the symbolic violence of pedagogic action, regardless of whether or not such imposition is, in fact, legitimate – a misrecognition of power and right. This essential misrecognition, Bourdieu (1990c, 13) suggests, is the basis of pedagogic interaction, and serves inevitably to reinforce and reproduce the innately conservative cultural conditions of the educational institution:

... pedagogic authority, a power to exert symbolic violence which manifests itself in the form of a right to impose legitimately, reinforces the arbitrary power which establishes it and which it conceals.

The innately conservative and 'reproductive' nature of educational institutions within Bourdieu's conceptualisation is clear. He sees in 'every teaching body the tendency to retransmit what it has acquired by a pedagogy as similar as possible to the pedagogy of which it is the product' (1990c, 60). Pedagogy is defined not by reference to the learner, he argues, but by reference to the teacher. As such, he goes on to suggest, 'teachers constitute the most finished products of the system of production which it is, *inter alia*, their task to reproduce' (1990c, 197). Such views clearly impact to a considerable extent upon questions of teaching and learning and the nature of students' experiences.

The extent to which such issues of pedagogy are tacit and the extent to which they are explicit is also a defining feature. Implicit pedagogy is ultimately an exclusive and self-reinforcing process. Bourdieu (1990c, 48) envisages it as a cycle, thus:

... a process in which the master transmits unconsciously, through exemplary conduct, principles he has never mastered consciously, to a

receiver who internalises them unconsciously.

Explicit pedagogy, on the other hand, seems to take more account of the needs of individual students. This would seem to be based on notions of democratising the educational experience – an issue of particular relevance given current debates surrounding New Labour's policy of widening participation in higher education. Bourdieu (1990c, 53) considers whether it is possible to create such a democratisation of education. He observes:

It may be wondered whether a type of secondary pedagogic work which ... took into account the distance between the pre-existent habitus and the habitus to be inculcated, and was systematically organised in accordance with the principles of an explicit pedagogy, would not have the effect of erasing the boundary which traditional pedagogic work recognises and confirms between the legitimate addressees and the rest.

This he calls Utopian – though as Knights (2005b) observes, utopianism is not necessarily a bad thing – as to democratise fully the educational establishment is contrary to the interests of the dominant group. Educational institutions, he suggests, exist to reproduce a specific (and sanctioned, and therefore legitimate) cultural arbitrary.

Inherent within pedagogic processes, whether implicit or explicit, is 'pedagogic work', which Bourdieu (1990c, 31) describes as '... a process of inculcation which must last long enough to produce a durable training'. This 'durable training' is the habitus – the internalisation of the cultural arbitrary and its manifestations which continues to operate after the pedagogic action has ceased.

2.2.2.2 Vygotsky and mediation

Although both Bourdieu and Vygotsky conceive of learning as socially constructed, distinct differences emerge between them in terms of the practical *purposes* of and ~~the nature of that construction. This is particularly evident in the political dimension~~ of pedagogy. It is evident from the above discussion that Bourdieu conceives of

pedagogic encounters as quasi-political encounters. Pedagogy is seen as purposive 'reproduction', and its means as frequently implicit. In so far as students fail to share the implicit values of the pedagogic action, their ability to engage with the 'capital' on offer will be limited. The teacher is perceived as a tacitly compliant tool within the process of 'reproduction'. The engagement between teachers and learners is thus politically motivated and controlled.

Writing out of the context of dialectical Marxism, Vygotsky, on the other hand, tends to de-politicise the nature of pedagogic encounters. Learning is achieved by means of (benign?) teacherly mediation, allowing students to access otherwise inaccessible areas of learning residing within what he terms the 'zone of proximal development'. In enabling students to access such material learning, he suggests (1978, 90-91), the explicit teaching of process through interventionist modelling provides a platform for future development. The mastery of skills or concepts, in other words, is not merely 'reproduction' (which would be simply imitation) of an educational encounter, but rather the beginnings of a nascent phase of development through which new skills or concepts can be practically deployed and tested with increasing sophistication. This 'zone of proximal development' Vygotsky defines as the difference between students' *actual developmental level* and their *potential developmental level*. Learning within this zone, he believes, can only be accessed through the mediation of a teacher or more able peer (Vygotsky, 1978: 84-85).

The role of teachers and lecturers is to assist students in the development of new understandings, concepts and skills through appropriate intervention. The development of higher cognitive processes is thus conceived as an historical and incremental process dialogically created between teachers and learners. This role is, therefore, particularly important at points of transition, where not only do students encounter new pedagogic content but also new pedagogic forms and pedagogic relationships with their teachers. In the terms of this thesis, students of English at A level operate according to a set of external forces, all of which are mediated through their teachers. Similarly, students entering higher education English Studies are exposed to concepts and practices specific to the institution they enter mediated through their lecturers. ~~The role of the teacher or lecturer in providing fertile ground~~ for transition is, therefore, obvious.

2.3 Political Developments

There are a number of planned developments in the 14-19 curriculum. These come in the wake of the report of The Working Group on 14-19 Reform (2004), chaired by Mike Tomlinson, and indicate a new and broadening gamut of issues emerging within the field of A level teaching. These issues will inevitably have an impact on the nature of university teaching and secondary-higher education transition.

Statements by Ruth Kelly, the Secretary of State for Education, and the recent White Paper (DfES, 2005) indicate a political drive for further change and on-going development in this field, including the potential for much greater flexibility in terms of the role and timing of assessment. The White Paper recognises the need to address issues of progression and assessment within A level qualifications, including the possibility, as initially recommended by Tomlinson's Working Group, of completing formal assessments at *appropriate* rather than at *fixed* points. Also mooted is the possibility of a long project-style assessment designed to reflect the demands of higher education and the workplace, although whether this will be subject or more broadly based is yet to be established. Also suggested is the 'drawing down' of university modules for the most able students. If initiated, these changes will have significant impact on the range of student experience at A level, an experience which is currently criticised for its narrowness of vision and its targeted focus on Assessment Objectives (Hodgson & Spours, 2003a; Green, 20005a; Barlow, 2006a).

2.4 Student and teacher expectations

One of the first major papers to deal with the issue of student expectations and their impact on transition within the United Kingdom higher education context (Booth, 1997) dealt with the experiences of a group of history students. Data for this paper were collected over a three-year period by means of a two-part questionnaire. The first consisted of a set of 'closed' questions designed to gather a range of quantitative data, covering students' perceptions of their chosen subject of study, of teaching and learning and their personal intentions. The second part consisted of a set of 'open' questions inviting students to reflect more fully on their views, hence generating ~~supporting qualitative data. This relates to Bourdieu's concept of the habitus, and~~ seeks to establish the defining features of students' attitudes towards their chosen

subject.

Booth suggests that student expectations on entering higher education are key filters through which learning either passes or is blocked. He argues that for effective transition and progression in learning to be possible, students' expectations must be clearly comprehended. The source of such student expectations is, of course, difficult fully to determine and is not an issue Booth explores. However, students' A level experiences of study are the most likely formative influences. In identifying the problematic nature of an implied divergence of expectations between students and lecturers, Booth points to the presence of a conflict between the subjective formulation of students' expectations – their habitus – and the demands of the objectivised institution. He does not, however, explore the formative objective experiences that go into the creation of students' subjective expectations.

Current specifications for English Language, English Literature and English Language and Literature each predicate substantively different views of what English Studies entail. This consequently leads to the creation of divergent expectations amongst students emerging from A level about English Studies as a discipline. Each specification operates according to its own set of Assessment Objectives, which do not overlap, although there are areas of similarity between them (Barlow, 2005; Bluett, Cockcroft et al, 2004). The effect of such segmentation of the subject at A level may lead students to form falsely narrow constructs of subject (Banks, Leach & Moon, 1999) which fail to reflect the broader epistemological and ontological concerns of higher education English Studies (Green, 2005a; Bluett, Cockcroft et al, 2004; Amigoni & Sanders, 2003; Eaglestone, 2000).

Somewhat different in this respect is the case of the Advanced Extension Award (AEA) in English. In spite of the tripartite division of English at A level, this award is open to candidates following any one of the specifications. Unlike the individual subject specifications which operate according to a plethora of specifically allocated Assessment Objectives, this award has only one Assessment Objective which is taken to be adequate to reflect the needs of assessment in all of the 'Englishes'. This calls into question, therefore, the rationale in separating out the three strands of English at A level. Bluett, Cockcroft et al (2004) and Barlow (2006a) all point to the harmful

atomisation of English in the current specifications and emphasise the strength of the unified vision of the subject embodied in the AEA. The success of the AEA as an indicator not only of current attainment but also of likely future achievement (Barlow, 2006a) exemplifies the possibility of developing a unified vision of English Studies at A level rather than retaining three potentially damagingly diverse specifications.

The unification of vision this suggests could significantly impact upon students' expectations as they emerge from their studies. It would enable higher education admissions tutors and other end-users of post-compulsory qualifications to make more reliable assumptions about the nature of the students they are receiving and would also remove from the current system of assessment the damaging legacy of the Assessment Objectives (Working Group on 14-19 Reform, 2004). In homogenising the nature of English at A level and minimising the difficulties inherent in shifting between 'fields', the impact of transition could also be minimised. Many of the problems associated with developing an understanding of 'the game' (Bourdieu, 1990a) of English Studies could be managed by thus closing ties between sixth form and higher education English Studies.

Lowe & Cook (2003, 74) also stress the importance of mutual understanding and expectations. They formulate the difficulty thus:

The problem associated with inaccurate prior perceptions is that it contributes to a disengagement from educational (and social) aspects of university life. Such disengagement can have a detrimental effect on academic performance.

Booth identifies concerns among schoolteachers that higher education lecturers fail to understand the nature of their students and their needs in learning. This, while not explored in detail, clearly implies that significant differences exist between what is required for successful study in secondary and higher education contexts. It also suggests that students' expectations are likely, in many cases, not to align with the expectations of their university tutors. A similar conclusion can be drawn from Booth's reflections on university lecturers' views that incoming students tend to be passive, narrow and unadventurous in their interests and fight shy of independent

thought. This is an observation also offered by Green (2005a) within the context of English Studies. Detailed exploration of students' and lecturers' expectations is notably absent from the current literature and is an area for urgent further research that this thesis seeks to address. The nature of this expectational gap is left undefined, providing a central issue for further research.

The question of student expectations is also addressed by Cook & Leckey (1999, 158). They consider a range of issues surrounding transition, not simply academic transition, and they explore factors affecting student retention at the University of Ulster. In particular they point to

the widespread belief that in order to ease student transition it is essential that university staff have an informed view of the diversity in the backgrounds, needs and aspirations of the students they teach.

As a result of developments in higher education policy under New Labour's widening participation agenda, this diversity is likely to broaden. Lack of clarity regarding expectations and lack of mutual understanding between students and their lecturers, Cook & Leckey argue, has a negative impact on transition, academic performance and retention, reducing the likelihood that students will effectively be able to adapt to the demands of higher education. This observation is also offered by Tinto (1982) in his study of American first year higher education students.

Green (2005a), using data derived from a survey of teachers and students at both sixth form and university levels approaches the matter of comparative expectations by asking sixth formers, first year undergraduates, A level teachers and lecturers to identify the abilities they believe are necessary to achieve success in higher education English studies. An extremely high level of consistency appears between all four groups and can be broadly summarised, in no particular order, as follows:

- communication skills;
- essay writing skills;

- the ability to formulate, and sustain and develop an argument;
- analytical ability;
- dedication and self-motivation;
- note-taking and note-making abilities;
- independent study skills;
- interest and enthusiasm;
- research skills;
- intellectual curiosity;
- creativity;
- wide subject knowledge;
- knowledge of literary criticism and literary theory;
- wide reading;
- love of and confidence in reading.

Such a list would seem to indicate a broad consensus between English communities about the basis upon which effective higher education English Studies operates and that assumptions are shared across the sectors. However, this is an unwarranted impression. The coincidence of vocabulary employed to describe practice (e.g. reading, note-taking and analysis), as Green notes, instead of indicating commonality of practice, serves rather to mask divisions. For example, what constitutes effective ~~understanding and use of literary theory and criticism in sixth form study~~ diverges widely from the use of theory and criticism as part of a degree course.

2.5 Curriculum and assessment

The nature of A level English study and the pedagogical rationales underpinning it are considered by Bluett, Cockcroft et al (2004). Drawing on questionnaire responses from A level English teachers, this short book explores teachers' views of English Language, English Language and Literature, and English Literature specifications under Curriculum 2000. These are compared to historical syllabuses for study (see also Scott, 1989), and to closely related A level specifications such as Media Studies, the International Baccalaureate, and curricular programmes for study adopted abroad – notably in Australia.

The authors consider the three English specifications on the basis of their theoretical and conceptual robustness, given the paradigm of subject they seem to encode. This inevitably involves scrutinising students' cognitive engagement with subject at both content and theoretical levels. In effect they consider how students of A level English are required to function substantively and syntactically within their chosen subject (see also Grossman, Wilson & Shulman, 1989). Bluett, Cockcroft et al conclude that whilst English Language and to a lesser extent English Language and Literature (as well as subjects such as Media Studies) require students to locate their newly acquired content knowledge within carefully established theoretical frameworks and their related discourses, English Literature specifications under Curriculum 2000 make much less stringent theoretical demands. Indeed, it is possible for students to complete their A level studies (and to attain good grades) without having engaged with Literary Theory and other related theories in any genuine depth.

Whilst the purpose of Bluett, Cockcroft et al is not explicitly to explore issues of transition to university, the conclusions they draw inevitably bear on the problems students opting to pursue English Studies at university are likely to endure. On entering university English Studies, undergraduates face a highly theorised version of their chosen subject. Bluett, Cockcroft et al (2004) conclude that current A level English Literature specifications lack theoretical robustness and do not meaningfully engage with theoretical approaches to the study of English. For students entering the ~~theory-led world of higher education English Literature~~, this poses significant transitional difficulties. The literature on the impact of this is limited, and is an area

requiring further research.

In contrast, Barlow (2005a) has sought to defend the current A level English Literature specifications. He has written widely on the subject of A level English Literature, and in an address to the English Association/Common English Forum (2003), he outlines ways in which English Literature specifications, especially through holistic course planning and the carefully targeted use of synoptic modules, can be used to ensure that students gain both linear and lateral development within the subject. He also points to the Advanced Extension Award in English as an example of advanced level study that more closely reflects the nature and concerns of higher education English Studies. This paper does not operate according to the tripartite division of the subject at AS and A2, but is designed to be accessible to students preparing for English Language, English Language and Literature and English Literature. Current evidence, however, indicates low levels of take-up for the Advanced Extension Award. In 2003, only 1341 candidates sat the paper out a total of 79,774¹ candidates sitting the three A level specifications. Therefore, even though the Advanced Extension Award may offer candidates an experience of practising English that is more akin to the experience of study of the subject at degree level, the number of students actually gaining such insight is disappointingly small.

Interestingly in this regard, while Barlow (2005a) refutes the conclusions of Bluett, Cockcroft et al (2004) that English Literature specifications require a more rigorously cogent and coherent theoretical framing (which is present in English Language and to a lesser extent in English Language and Literature specifications), he praises the Advanced Extension Award for its synthesis of the three A level English subjects. This implies that all three subjects are susceptible to a shared theoretical and cognitive framework (see also Barlow (2006a) where he propounds this view at greater length) and that all three are assessable against such a framework. However, the individual subject specifications do not reflect this. For students entering higher education English Studies, the atomisation of English at A level is potentially problematic. The exclusion of the study of literary texts, for example, from English Language specifications and of linguistic analysis from English Literature specifications means

¹ Data extracted from Interboard Statistics, 2003.

that students are moved rapidly away from the more integrated approaches to the teaching of language and literature that characterise GCSE. The separation of affective and functional dimensions of language as manifested in literary and linguistic study challenges current notions of practice in secondary education and also has significant potential impact on students' abilities effectively to function in higher education.

Curricular issues are also the focus of the work of Hodgson & Spours (2003a, 2003b). Whilst they write on a wide range of issues surrounding Curriculum 2000, including all advanced qualifications and the implementation of Key Skills programmes, they draw a wide range of conclusions specifically pertinent to English A level.

Hodgson & Spours (2003a, 109) regard institutional pragmatism and instrumentalism at both secondary and higher education levels as particularly significant issues. Faced with overloaded curricula, particularly at AS level, they come to the conclusion that study at advanced level:

has, so far, in our estimation, made Curriculum 2000 a tedious and uninspiring curriculum that encourages instrumentalism and game-playing to maximise qualification outcome rather than experimentation, creativity and preparation for lifelong learning.

Such conclusions clearly raise a number of issues concerning students' abilities to succeed in their on-going education. If Hodgson & Spours' assessment of the curriculum is correct, the implications for students' expectations of study and their abilities personally to engage with and respond to their studies are significant. The concerns Knights (2004) raises with regard to cognitive risk-taking and independence seem to find an echo here.

The 'instrumentalism' and 'game-playing' to which Hodgson & Spours refer, with their implications of assessment- rather than learning-driven practice and grade maximisation, is reflected in the context of higher education English Studies (Gawthrop & Martin, 2003), and is an issue also explored in detail by Barlow (2006a). Gawthrop & Martin's survey data were collected by means of a

questionnaire sent to all English departments within United Kingdom higher education institutions. 43% of the responding departments identified an increasing A level grade profile amongst in-coming undergraduate students. Discussing similar issues, Green (2005a, 2005b) demonstrates that higher education lecturers, in spite of rising student grade profiles, believe that new undergraduate students are entering higher education studies with declining abilities. Particular areas for concern are subject-specific study skills, transferable skills and subject knowledge. Hodgson & Spours (2003a, 53) relate this directly to the nature of Curriculum 2000, the legacy of which, they believe, has been 'quantitative gains but qualitative losses'.

Such developments in A level studies are likely to have a significant impact on students entering higher education and issues of student transition and retention (Ozga & Sukhnandan, 1998). Surprisingly, therefore, the literature indicates little change in admissions (Gawthrop & Martin, 2003) and pedagogic (Green, 2005a) practice in higher education institutions. This is, perhaps, partly as a result of how curriculum reform was managed. As Hodgson & Spours (2003a) point out, in the face of higher education's exclusion from the inception and development of Curriculum 2000, most institutions have tended to take a pragmatic stance on admissions, continuing to rely on the traditional three A levels as the main (if not only) criterion for admission. This in spite of their misgivings about the changing nature of both A level study and the students emerging from it.

This finding is corroborated by Gawthrop & Martin (2003), in whose survey 92% of responding departments identify examination performance as the sole criterion against which offers are made. Such a response scarcely addresses problematic transitional issues. More serious is the failure to develop pedagogical practices to meet the changing needs of the student body. In one study (Green, 2005a), 94% of lecturers surveyed indicated that their teaching had changed little or not at all since the inception of Curriculum 2000. It is apparent that for a range of reasons, lecturers are failing to respond in their teaching to perceptible student needs. This seems likely to exacerbate the difficulties students face in making the transition to university and it seems likely to impact on student retention.

The relationship between teachers of A level English Studies in schools and in higher

education is a further issue explored in the literature. Stephenson & Weil (1992) identify the problem of isolationism of both schools and universities. The lack of understanding evident between schools and universities, and the disjunctions of practice between them are apparent in much of the literature so far cited. Moreover, there is also indication of a lack of desire on the part of practitioners on both sides to find an understanding. Green's studies (2005a, 2005b) support such a view. Presenting data gathered by means of a questionnaire survey of teachers and lecturers at A level and in higher education, he shows that practitioners on both sides tend to see responsibility for preparation for university study lying with the other.

Even where a desire for dialogue exists, the establishment of contact is limited by factors such as time pressure, overloaded AS and A2 curricula (Hodgson & Spours, 2003a), attainment grade targets, recruitment targets and institutional Research Assessment Exercise agendas. These factors all impact upon the management of student transition into university. Green (2005a) identifies that a lack of contact between teachers in the two sectors means that effective interaction between schools and universities rarely takes place, to the detriment of both students and teachers. This issue needs to be further researched in order to identify its impact upon the expectations and assumptions of both transitional students and teachers.

2.6 Student study skills

How effectively students entering higher education are able to manage independent study depends not only on their preparedness in respect of subject knowledge, but also upon their study skills. Smith (2003, 94) considers such issues in his discussion of student performance in lectures and seminars. He observes how easy it is in the lecture forum for many students, unversed in the demands of preparing for and learning from lectures, 'silently to drown'. This is partly a study skills issue centring on students' abilities as note-takers. Marland (2003, 206) states that note-taking 'is not a skill required in most school A level classes', an observation that Smith (2003, 87) extends:

Many A level students need the security of taking very full notes because they do not feel they have yet acquired the ability to assess the relative importance of the ideas being introduced.

Note-taking, this implies, is more than simple transcription. It also relates to students' abilities efficiently to engage with the intellectual and academic content of lectures. Smith's main concern is not students' abilities to record the content of lectures effectively, but rather their ability to make appropriate selection from material presented. Smith's observations usefully indicate that this is a far more serious issue than a skills deficit alone. His acknowledgement that content in itself provides a stumbling block to progression indicates the extent to which cognitive, metacognitive and pedagogical questions about the purposes and nature of higher education English Studies learning also need to be addressed. Students entering higher education are required to come to terms with epistemological and ontological shifts which affect not only how they view their subject, but also the very nature of that subject.

The issue of note-taking is also addressed by Clerehan (2003), writing out of the Australian higher education context. Recognising the difficulties students face in learning effectively to function within the lecture forum, she recommends the phased introduction of lecturing and note-taking. This, she suggests, needs to be supported by specific university guidance sessions on how to function within the lecture to ensure that student engagement is maximised. Stewart & McCormack (1997, 103) go further in making a case for changing practice within the lecture hall. They highlight the dangers of what they term 'one-way learning' as embodied in the lecture, recommending the incorporation of a range of activities – such as reading time, group-work, pair-work, question and answer sessions and so on, which require students to be active participants in the process of the lecture rather than passive recipients. Too often, they suggest, the lecture, which persists because of its economies of scale, is a way of controlling the teacher-student relationship rather than encouraging it. Evans (1993) also comments on the problematic pedagogical implications of the lecture as a forum for learning, pointing to its proven limitations and students' and lecturers' ambivalent responses to its value (see also Green, 2005a). Relating to this, it is also important to consider the role of pedagogy, and scholarly practice generally, in the establishment of implied relationships between teachers and learners – issues also raised by Knights (2005) and Green (2006b). Such relationships are substantially different from those that many students will have experienced in their studies prior to university and are likely seriously to affect their ability to

manage effectively the transition to the new learning environment.

Durkin & Main (2002) advocate the development of subject-specific study skills sessions, which introduce students not only to the overt skills of reading, writing and note-taking, but also introduce effective ways of managing and pursuing independent study. The benefits of such an approach to easing transition are clear. Not only would it on a functional level assist students to operate, it would also serve to introduce them to what Grossman, Wilson & Shulman (1989) identify as the 'substantive' and 'syntactic' dimensions of subject knowledge which underlie assumptions about the subject in its university manifestation.

Reading is another significant skills issue addressed by Smith (2004, 91). He identifies as follows the problem faced by students moving into university:

It is apparent that the abrupt change from limited intensive reading pre-higher education to wide-ranging, extensive, contextualised reading in higher education is a major stumbling-block for a significant number of students.

Here Smith highlights a major issue. Students' understanding of reading is radically challenged and recontextualised when faced with the demands of university courses, the reading demands of which are substantively and substantially different to those at sixth form level. This issue is also addressed by Green (2005a), who explores a range of pedagogical issues surrounding reading and their impact on student transition. His examination of the use of pre-reading, guided reading and reading aloud in the context of sixth form studies and university studies points to significant divergence in practice between sectors. He further comments on the use of DARTs (Directed Activities Related to Texts) (Lunzer & Gardner, 1979). Such approaches, the data make clear, are widely employed in sixth form teaching as methods of guiding and supporting student reading, but are comparatively little used within teaching sessions in higher education, a discrepancy which impacts significantly on students' engagement in reading. Such approaches could, he suggests, be constructively employed as a means of assisting students in the development of skills and cognitive awareness in respect of independent study. His discussion includes a consideration of the relationship

between drama and reading and the use of creative and recreative writing to enable students to engage in deep reading.

Green (2005a, 49) concludes his discussion of reading by remarking on the likely impact of differing perceptions of reading:

If, in expressing their love of reading, as most students entering degree level English study do, the exercise to which they refer is essentially different to the activity university courses demand of them, this is indeed a deep problem.

The impact of issues surrounding reading, he suggests, is a key factor in establishing students' and teachers' expectations and their consequent experiences of teaching and learning in the first year of undergraduate English Studies. This is an area for important further research.

2.7 Student 'location' and pedagogy²

The work of Parlett & Simons (1988) reflects usefully on this very question, considering the issue of student 'location' at the beginning of their university experience. They employ the metaphor of academe as city. The student is the traveller and the academic the guide. They identify the responsibility of the academic, therefore, to establish student 'location' and student needs at the point of entry into higher education (see Figure 1).

² There exists a substantial body of literature surrounding student-centered learning. This has not been addressed here as it places the role of the teacher at the periphery, a notion which is inherently suspect. Whilst students and their needs must inevitably remain at the centre of teachers' attention, the teacher necessarily remains the primary shaping force within the classroom, directing through his/her pedagogy and practice the means by which students can engage with learning. The focus of this thesis on pedagogy, therefore, led to the decision to omit a discussion of this literature.

Figure 1: Student 'location' and student needs

- i) what the student needs to know;
- ii) how they need to know it;
- iii) in what order they need to know.

Summarised from Parlett & Simons (1988)

Students and their learning needs are thus the focus *of* and stimulus *for* pedagogical choices. This, as suggested above, requires a developing understanding of student expectations, so that teaching is responsive to actual cognitive and metacognitive needs, rather than to a set of possibly erroneous and often implicit assumptions.

Stephenson & Weil (1992, 25) also fix the academic focus firmly on the student and pedagogy. Their beliefs are summed up in the view that:

Starting at the point students have reached is almost a first principle of teaching.

As in Booth's (1997) analysis, this addresses the point of contact not only between students and their subject, but also between secondary and higher education. Stephenson & Weil proceed to explore the importance of transparency in respect of both the academic content and the academic processes of higher education. McInnis & James (1995) point to the development of school-university links as central in developing successful access and transition to higher education. Creating an open dialogue around such issues, they suggest, encourages a climate of mutual understanding between teachers, academics and their students which can only serve to enrich students' experiences of study and facilitate effective transition. Green (2005a) also considers the issue of comparative expectations between teachers and lecturers. He points to a high apparent coincidence of views between teachers at post-compulsory secondary and higher education levels. However, he also identifies that to a significant extent common vocabulary rather than representing a shared understanding of what is required for successful higher education study, tends to mask

deep divisions in practice. The understanding of what constitutes reading, for instance, or the effective use of literary theory, varies significantly between teachers in the two sectors.

In considering the issue of transition, however, it is important not only to consider the interface between secondary and higher education, but also to reflect on the relations between teachers and learners. This is an issue that is surprisingly absent from the literature in the United Kingdom higher education context. It is, however, a matter approached by McInnis & James (1995) who explore the first year experience of undergraduates in Australian universities. They identify that significant gaps exist not only between schools and colleges and university, but also between students and academics. This is of fundamental importance in that it foregrounds a range of issues surrounding what constitutes effective working subject knowledge in academics and students alike and the obvious implications of this for pedagogy.

The nature of pedagogy in higher education English Studies is addressed by Knights (2005a). Taking an historical pedagogical perspective, Knights compares the teaching of English in English universities at two critical junctures. He explores the era of Criticism as practised by the Leavises and their followers and the era of Literary Theory. In considering each he propounds the view that lecturers' personal constructs of subject, and the assumptions embodied within them, automatically imply certain established relations between teacher and learner. These relations in their turn implicitly privilege certain pedagogical assumptions and approaches which may or may not be of benefit to the individual student. He identifies, in terms reminiscent of Bourdieu, the power and significance of insider/outsider relations within the classroom and considers how such relations encode notions of (sometimes deliberate) inclusion and exclusion (Bartunek & Louis, 1996), working to the benefit of some but not others. He concludes that quantum shifts in the nature of higher education English Studies, for example towards the dominance of Literary Theory, necessitate the development of and dictate the nature of new pedagogies.

Such concepts clearly link to the observations of McInnis & James (1995) outlined above, and also indicate the need for lecturers actively to explore their own tacit practices and assumptions when approaching teaching. The outcomes of such

interrogation of practice need to be set alongside the practices employed by colleagues teaching at sixth form level in order to establish how students can be helped more easily to manage the transition to university.

Green (2006b) urges the importance of university teachers actively interrogating their personal constructs of subject and the pedagogical assumptions that underpin their work with undergraduates. Such pedagogical questioning, he suggests, is a vital element of effective practice in establishing how the needs of all students may best be met. Such interrogation, he insists, must also be accompanied by the kind of rigorous exploration of student needs and expectations advocated by, amongst others, Booth (1997), McInnis & James (1995) and Lowe & Cooke (2003).

In this paper, Green also explores practical applications of Bourdieu's (1990c) notions of pedagogic work and pedagogic authority. He outlines the relationship between students and teachers in the classroom context thus:

Lecturer-student interactions are inevitably influenced by the substantive demands of theoretical and/or socio-political perspectives on literature and depend upon certain pre-established and frequently unstated (but tacitly accepted and therefore socially reinforced) forms of 'pedagogic authority' and 'pedagogic work'. Subjective acceptance (by students) of objectively assumed authority (by teachers) and the relationship this implies between them is a manifestation of what Bourdieu (1977) terms 'symbolic violence', a politico-pedagogic force he sees as innate within the classroom context.

The symbolic violence underlying classroom interactions and its impact on student learning presents a substantial challenge to transitional students coming to terms with new types of 'pedagogic authority' and 'pedagogic work'.

A number of other writers over recent years have begun to question issues of pedagogy at both post-compulsory secondary and higher education levels and their ~~relation with issues of transition~~. Ballinger (2003) points, on the basis of a limited set of observational data, to certain similarities between A level and university teaching

practice, based on approaches adopted in the small-group context. She seeks to identify commonality of practice between the A level classroom and the higher education seminar, though no deeper consideration of pedagogical underpinnings of teaching and rationales for teaching are considered.

More extensive in its implications is the work of Drew (2001, 324) – based on student responses. Concentrating on the major methods of ‘delivery’ typical in the higher education context – the lecture, the seminar and the tutorial – he explores students’ favoured learning contexts. The salient observation emerging from this paper is that:

tutorials were prized most highly, for help with subject and work, for feedback on progress ... and for personal support.

This highlights an important issue. The old-style one-to-one or small-group tutorial has dwindled as a part of the higher education experience, owing to time- and cost-efficiency, and has been replaced by advertised ‘office hours’ during which academic staff are available for consultation. As Green (2005a) demonstrates, only a small minority of students continue to receive tutorials as a regular mode of teaching. In his survey, only 14% reported receiving a conventional tutorial. However, Drew makes it clear that the formative opportunities and the element of personal contact at the heart of tutorial work are highly valued by students. The lack of personal individual contact in the experience of many first year students may well be a significant contributory factor to transitional difficulties.

Smith (2003, 2004) explores a number of issues surrounding pedagogy and the experience of learning, persuasively identifying a problematic ‘lack of planned transition from school to higher level study’ (p. 91). In a second paper based on a survey of 182 students (or approximately one in forty-seven of the English undergraduate population) Smith (2004) explores three key areas (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Key areas of Smith's research

- i) teaching methods employed;
- ii) reading;
- iii) essay writing.

Smith identifies surprisingly little divergence in opinion and experience according to respondents' age and/or post-compulsory English qualification. Note-taking emerges as a particularly significant issue. Engaging with Marland (2003), Clerehan (2003) and Stewart & McCormack (1997), he explores some of the difficulties students face in effectively recording their learning in teaching sessions, particularly their reliance on copious note-taking and recycling. This is an issue also identified by Green (2005a). Significantly Smith (2004, 87) states:

Many A level students need the security of taking very full notes because they do not feel they have yet acquired the ability to assess the relative importance of the ideas being introduced.

This suggests what may be a useful distinction between uncritical *note-taking* and cognitively and critically engaged *note-making*. This observation clearly also links to students' reading of both primary and secondary texts and brings into question the level of understanding they display in response to reading. This is reflected in his findings that only 22% of students surveyed reported that A level prepared them well for reading primary texts and 24% that it prepared them well for reading secondary texts. The substantially differing demands and nature of reading and study in higher education English Studies represent, for Smith, significant barriers to successful transition.

Smith's survey incorporates Advanced GCE and Access candidates only and does not include responses from candidates who followed the International Baccalaureate. Green (2005a) indicates that some significant areas of difference emerge between candidates entering with different qualifications. Such differences are often centred not so much around the content of the course undertaken at post-compulsory secondary level – although these are significant as Bluett, Cockcroft et al (2004) make clear – but rather around the skills required successfully to complete the course taken. The pedagogical, paradigmatic and philosophical assumptions underlying the

particular visions of English Studies the various post-compulsory qualifications encode are also significant – issues interestingly addressed by Knights (2005a) and by Green (2006b).

Green (2006b) explores the particular issue of Literary Theory. He considers both its application at A level and in university teaching. This is a controversial area of the curriculum, fraught with difficulty, as Bluett, Cockcroft et al. (2004) and Atherton (2005) also point out. Lecturers, Green suggests, should not assume that students enter their university studies familiar with the ontological and epistemological issues implicit within multiplicitous substantive versions of subject. This is an issue further complexified by the range of discourses English Studies employs and the distinctive modes of interrogating text or language attendant on these. Such issues, he observes, are a central feature of higher education English and other humanities disciplines but are issues that many students at A level have only encountered to a limited extent. This is a significant issue for lecturers and students alike. Substantive subject frameworks encode implied relationships between students and the object of study and also between teachers and learners. Knights (2005a) also deals with the nature of teacher-student interactions. He highlights how contrasting substantive manifestations of subject demand different pedagogies to reflect varying theoretical and/or socio-political perspectives on literature. These, he argues, depend upon certain pre-established and frequently unstated (but tacitly accepted and therefore socially reinforced) relations between teachers and students. These relations are manifested in differing forms of pedagogic authority and pedagogic work. Subjective acceptance (by students) of objectively assumed authority (by teachers) and the relationship this implies between them is a manifestation of what Bourdieu (1977) terms ‘symbolic violence’, a politico-pedagogic force he sees as innate within the classroom context. However, as Knights (2005b, 261) points out, pedagogic encounters should be dialogic, ‘shaped not only by the aims of the teacher, but ... by the presuppositions and fantasies, enthusiasms and boredoms, of students as well.’

Green (2006b) pursues these ideas further. At both the ontological level (in selecting objects for study) and at the epistemological level (in devising pedagogic approaches), ~~he suggests, teachers encode and enforce relationships based on such ‘symbolic violence’.~~ The right of teachers to require students to work in substantively defined

ways, and the obligation of students to 'perform' within these parameters generally goes unquestioned. The substantive formulation of the subject thus affects its manifestation in the classroom, which is, in its turn, the means of access to cultural and educational capital (Bourdieu, 1984). As suggested above, however, the successful accessing of this 'capital' depends upon students' acquiescence in the pedagogical framework imposed by teachers – the act of symbolic violence. In effect, successful pursuit of educational capital is dictated by the extent to which students accept the status quo and modify their 'game' (Bourdieu, 1990) to reflect this. Such modification, however, can only occur through teacher-constructed pedagogic encounters, where students' individual preferences, expectations and desires are allowed the freedom to interplay with those of their lecturers. If such encounters are denied by a thoroughly unyielding pedagogy, effective shaping cannot take place.

The question of student expectations in relation to teaching and learning approaches is central here. Lowe & Cook (2003, 63) find that 'about one-third of the cohort appear to expect teaching styles associated with school'. In many ways unsurprising, this serves to indicate the pedagogical as well as the cognitive gaps that exist between secondary and higher education sectors. Green (2005a, 2005b) addresses this issue directly. He examines student expectations of the contexts of learning (i.e. lectures, seminars and tutorials) and also considers the approaches to learning students will be required to adopt within these teaching and learning contexts. The evidence he presents indicates that the range of teaching and learning strategies employed within higher education teaching sessions is more limited and, from student perspectives, more limiting than the range habitually employed in the post-compulsory secondary classroom.

2.8 Central issues and implications for research

The literature reviewed identifies a range of significant themes regarding the student experience of transition and related pedagogical issues. Albeit a number of small-scale and localised studies have been undertaken, the following issues require further investigation and provide the focus for my research:

- **an understanding of the cognitive and experiential processes undergone by students in transition from sixth form to university English Studies is required;**

- the possible impact of New Labour's higher education (DfES 2003a & 2003b) initiatives on the student composition of higher education English courses, particularly through the widening participation agenda.
- an interrogation of the assumptions and expectations of both students and teachers, seeking to identify where these diverge between school and university sectors and how this impacts upon the experience of teaching and learning.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with methodological issues and explores the approaches I adopted in my research. This involves a detailed review of the processes employed in developing and undertaking:

- a set of four linked questionnaires;
- interviews; and
- observation.

It explores the practical uses to which these approaches were put within the context of my research and seeks to locate them theoretically through consideration of a range of relevant literature.

3.2 Research Programme

There follows a table outlining the various stages of the research process undergone in the completion of this thesis.

Stage	Jul 04	Au 04	Se 04	Oc 04	No 04	De 04	Ja 05	Fe 05	M 05	Ap 05	M 05	Ju 05	Au 05	No 05	De 05	Ja 06	Au 06
Application for ethical approval	✓																
Discussed project with host department	✓																
Developed linked questionnaires		✓															
Obtained ethical assent of students and lecturers			✓														

Stage	Jul 04	Au 04	Se 04	Oc 04	No 04	De 04	Ja 05	Fe 05	M 05	Ap 05	M 05	Ju 05	Au 05	No 05	De 05	Ja 06	Au 06
Discussed study with students and lecturers			✓														
Piloted linked questionnaires				✓													
Beginning of year questionnaires for selected students				✓													
Data collection and analysis – linked questionnaires					✓												
Data collection - observation				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							
Student interviews							✓				✓						
End of year questionnaires for selected students												✓					
Complete data collection - interviews													✓				
Student validation of interview data														✓			
Data analysis - interviews															✓		
Data analysis - observation																✓	
Commence writing thesis																✓	
Submission																	✓

3.3 Rationale and theoretical underpinnings for research

A growing body of evidence exists to suggest the difficulties inherent in making the academic transition from school or further education to university (Ozga & Sukhnandan: 1998; Lowe & Cook: 2003). This transition involves the interaction of a

set of complex forces and issues all of which take on specific disciplinary forms. For students of English moving from one institution to another, significant challenges emerge in learning (or failing to learn) how to cope with a differing and often conflicting body of cognitive and metacognitive demands (Marland, 2003), teaching practices (Green, 2005d; Ballinger, 2003), study patterns (Stewart & McCormack: 1997), levels of independence (Green, 2005a), assumptions (Smith, 2004; Smith, 2003) and expectations (Clerehan, 2003; Cook & Leckey, 1999; Booth, 1997). For this reason, serious consideration must be given to the experience of students moving into higher education from a variety of institutional and academic backgrounds. It is also important to address how they manage the experience of change and why they either succeed or fail in making the necessary academic shift.

These issues provide particularly fertile ground in English, a discipline that Evans (1993) styles as essentially 'transgressive' in its constitution. If, as this concept of transgression would suggest, English is a discipline constructed around boundaries and the crossing of those boundaries - with all the notions of difficulty and conflict this would imply - students who choose to cross the line between school and university English are likely to experience pains associated with their 'transgression'.

The presence of boundaries between school and university English is suggested by Knights (2004, 28), who identifies:

the perceived and growing gulf between English as practised in school under the influence of the National Curriculum, National Literacy Strategy and Curriculum 2000, and that practised in higher education.

My research explores the experiences of students and teachers whose interactions occur at these frontiers of discipline. It aims:

- to explore the nature of the boundary lines that exist between sixth form English and university English;
- to consider students' expectations on entering higher education study and how these relate to 'boundaried' notions of subject;

- to consider the relationship between pedagogy, expectations and the ‘policing’ of boundaries;
- to consider notions of ‘access’ to the capital of culture and learning;
- to explore how students try to come to terms with crossing these boundaries.

Knights’ observations point not merely to a perceived gap between English in its school formulation and in higher education, but indicate the fear of a genuine rift between manifestations and cultures of English in sixth form and in higher education. Differences between ‘versions’ of English exist not only between but also within sectors, as Chambers & Gregory’s (2006, 5) reference to the ‘culture wars’ of the last two decades in the higher education community suggests. Evans’ (1993) analysis indicates that such divisions may well be inherent in the very composition and identity of English, and may indeed be a manifestation of internalised crises upon which the discipline functions. They may also, however, be understood in dialogic terms, as the cognitive, metacognitive and pedagogic ‘debates’ between disciplinary practitioners. Such rifts and conflicts, Bourdieu would suggest go on to manifest themselves in ‘symbolic violence’ at the institutional and at the classroom level. Such conflicts, he argues, are innate within any pedagogic context and, indeed, within any academic discipline. This may be encoded in the contrary impulses of the English teaching and learning environment, which often divides itself along dichotomous lines. These contrary impulses are potential causes of conflict. Figure 3 below offers an illustration of some key examples.

In this context it is essential to consider the importance of social constructivist views of education. Bourdieu’s philosophical perceptions of such social constructivism tend to highlight notions of opposition. The subjective habitus, for instance, is placed in oppositional relation to the objective ‘field’, or the individual (be it student or teacher) in oppositional relation to the institution, and so on. Such conceptualisations, worked out within a framework of what he terms ‘symbolic violence’, encourage a view of the classroom as metaphorical battlefield; a shared space within which the student and

the teacher operationalise cognitive and pedagogical conflict. The ultimate end of this conflict is the submission of the individual's position to the demands of a 'legitimised' pedagogic action. This philosophical stance is to be contrasted with the notions of Vygotsky. In his analysis, co-operative social interaction is one of the key pre-requisites for learning. The social context provides an opportunity for individuals to meet in a mediated learning environment, which can cognitively stretch them beyond actual developmental levels (Vygotsky, 1978: 85) and into new cognitive territory, which he terms the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978: 86). The teacher or the more able peer group thus provides a means by which an individual can go beyond summative cognitive evaluations of his/her ability to perform alone (as manifested, for example in examination performances or other individual tests). Within the mediated social context, access to higher areas of learning can be gained. This notion has considerable significance in considering issues of school to university transition. In considering students' use of independent study time, for instance, it points to the need for lecturers to provide stimulating interventions, which will allow students to move forward into new cognitive arenas they could not access alone. Similarly, the arrangement of informal cross-year-group study groups would maximise students' opportunities and the fruitfulness of independent study.

Figure 3: Contrary impulses in the English classroom

- teacher ↔ learner
- accessible learning (inclusive) ↔ academic rigour (exclusive)
- writer ↔ assessor
- the individual ↔ the academy
- reader ↔ author
- skills agenda ↔ cognitive agenda
- 'appreciation' ↔ theoretical response
- literary theory ↔ literature
- analysis (thinking) ↔ affectivity (feeling)
- creativity ↔ receptivity
- private ↔ public

Both Bourdieu and Vygotsky for all of their differences, recognise that learning is a social exercise (perforce) conducted in a social context. Whether based on notional conflict or co-operation, education is conceived as a mutually constructed activity between teachers and teachers, teachers and learners, or learners and learners. These constructed encounters may take place face-to-face, in a virtual environment, or in an internalised form during independent study – as an extension of actual classroom encounters, or imagined encounters through reading. This complex of pedagogical interactions is acted out within an array of educational spaces: offices, classrooms, seminar rooms, lecture theatres, libraries and so on. These learning spaces comprise, therefore, a complex web of fora, which cannot necessarily be perceived as places of uncomplicated shared endeavour. It is important to recognise that no learning space operates in isolation, but reflects and reacts to a plethora of other more or less related learning environments. To this extent, all learning spaces operate at a shared boundary or a set of shared boundaries that at once separate and unite teachers and teachers, teachers and students, or students and students. The interaction between these various groupings within and around the classroom operates at these shared boundaries. It is by no means straightforward, and may not always be benevolent. Sometimes, within Bourdieu's analysis, for instance, pedagogic interactions at these boundaries take on a ritually (and sometimes literally) adversarial nature. The boundaries of the classroom and the 'rules' of functioning within them – perhaps to continue the adversarial metaphor we should say the terms of engagement within them – may, for instance, represent significantly contrary impulses within the teaching and learning space.

Within Vygotsky's analysis, too, the classroom or other learning space is a place of encounter: between cultures, between individuals, and between individuals and concepts. Vygotsky's discussion of children at play, for example, can equally be applied to the experimental learning situation of the seminar room. Such play, Vygotsky (1978, 95) points out, is by no means spontaneous, but is rigorously defined by a set of internalised 'rules' (1978, 100). In the search for new meaning, the child employs actions and the rules attached to them as a means of experimentation. The rules act as a cognitive touchstone against which new experiences can be measured. Likewise, in the classroom context, students employ the internalised 'rules' of their previous learning and cognitive experience (their internalised expectations) as the

touchstone within their academic 'play'. These 'rules', Vygotsky (1978, 126) argues, are 'socially formed and culturally transmitted', and in this sense come close to Bourdieu's notion of the internalised and socially constructed 'habitus'.

Classrooms, therefore, are essentially dichotomous in nature, as exemplified in Figure 3. Recognition of this is paramount in seeking to analyse the nature of individual students' experiences in transition. The dialectic of the classroom may manifest itself in many ways, some of which are outlined in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Teachers and students in the classroom

- 1) The having of knowledge (teacher) ↔ The absence of knowledge (student);
- 2) The requirement to pass on knowledge, but the desire to remain in the position of control (teacher) ↔ The need to gain knowledge and the desire to exercise increasing autonomy (student);
- 3) The power to dictate the terms of engagement in the classroom (teacher) ↔ The need to accept such terms (student).

My interest in this area emerges from the personal experience over many years of teaching English at A level, and from a growing perception of the concerns of many teachers within the academic community about the relationship between A level and higher education. Knights (2004, 29) expresses these concerns thus:

the unitised model of cognition (visible paradigmatically at the level of the dominance of anthology and extracts, and syntagmatically at the level of narratives of learning) is at odds with the sophisticated pattern making and cognitive risk taking which higher education should foster.

In exploring students' and teachers' experiences of English Studies at A level and at university my intention was to establish an understanding of the views and expectations of the 'receivers' and 'providers' of education and how the relationship between them is pedagogically constructed. A principle focus of my research, therefore, was teaching and learning practices at A level and in higher education. The exploration of how pedagogic practices between sixth form and university interrelate led to a consideration of how such pedagogic experiences translate into student expectations, and the impact of these expectations on transition.

Pedagogy, and the relationship pedagogic stance implicitly or explicitly establishes between students and teachers, is a very significant issue within students' transition. It emanates from and also establishes the very expectations that frame individuals' and institutions' conceptualisations of subject (Banks, Leach & Moon, 1999; Grossman, Wilson & Shulman, 1989). Students' constructs of English at A level and the expectations that accompany these constructs, for instance, will inevitably be shaped by the curricular requirements of Curriculum 2000 and by their teachers' responses to these. Similarly, the assessment patterns it establishes and teachers' use of the Assessment Objectives will impact upon students' developing sense of what English is – at content, syntactic and substantive levels – and what it means to be a student of English. It is, then, important to consider how far this prepares them for the experience of university English.

3.4 Research Question and methodology

As stated in Chapter 1, my research question is:

What are the expectations and experiences of students of English Literature at A level and in higher education, and how do such expectations and experiences impact on student transition?

As the literature review in Chapter 2 identifies, there are important gaps in the current literature dealing with the study of English at A level and at university. In considering this literature, I have sought to establish the 'boundaried' nature of English as a discipline through the consideration of four key thematic areas. Particularly important in focussing thought has been the issue of expectations. This, as Booth (1997)

suggests, is one of the key sources of difficulty for students making the transition to university. As such, I suggest, it is one of the key determinants of 'boundary' for both students and teachers as they meet at the shared divide that is transition. In doing so, pedagogic approaches to the delivery of the subject at both levels and the pivotal role of assessment were considered as central determinants of students' experiences and as measures of expectation.

At the outset it was important to establish that my chosen methods of data collection were well suited to the rationales of my research and to my research question. Flick (1998) makes clear that the selection of methodology should be prioritised and that researchers should ensure their adopted method(s) address(es) a number of fundamental issues (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Selection of methodology must allow for:

- 1) the underlying requirements of the research question;
- 2) the area of investigation;
- 3) the population of the research and their needs (individual and corporate);
- 4) the opportunity for participants to express their views in meaningful and appropriate ways;
- 5) variations in attitude and response.

Summarised from Flick (1998)

Beyond this, Jacob (1992) points to the importance of ensuring that the chosen research tools are designed to reflect the cultural context(s) within which they must operate if the collection of data is to be effectively and meaningfully achieved. In this case it was important that they reflect the varied institutional contexts of schools and universities, of students and teachers to be included within the sample.

The institutions used for the collection of questionnaire data were as follows:

Higher Education Institutions

- 2 pre-1992 universities, both located in the south-east region of England;
- 2 post-1992 universities, one located in the north-east of England and the other in the south-west;
- 1 higher education college, located in central England.

Schools and sixth form colleges

- 1 independent boys' school in the London region;
- 1 mixed independent school in the south of England;
- 1 girls' comprehensive school in the London region;
- 1 mixed comprehensive school in the London region;
- 1 sixth form college in East Anglia.

3.5 The Higher Education Institution

A supporting study over the period of one academic year, incorporating regular observation of teaching in both lectures and seminars, and interviews with first year students and members of academic staff was undertaken in one of the pre-1992 institutions in order to provide a detailed set of case studies for purposes of comparison.

I undertook an extended period of observation over one academic year within a pre-1992 higher education institution located in the south of the United Kingdom. The host English Department is a large department with twenty-four full-time members of staff, twenty-five visiting lecturers, and an annual intake of approximately 150 undergraduate students.

Observational data were gathered through attendance at first year undergraduate lectures and seminars in two chosen modules. The first of these was a module on Shakespeare. This module was selected as all students following A level courses are obliged, during both Year 12 and Year 13, to undertake the study of plays by Shakespeare. As such, this is a subject area familiar to them and provides an interesting area of comparison between performance at A level and at Level 1. The second selected module was entitled 'Inventing the Novel'. The module dealt largely with early novel texts written in the eighteenth century, the majority of which do not appear on A level syllabuses. This module was selected as an area of subject with which students arrive at university unfamiliar. As such it provided an interesting contrast to the more familiar field of Shakespeare. The intention in selecting these two modules was to establish:

- the extent to which familiarity of subject matter facilitates transition, or whether in fact such familiarity creates specific problems of its own;
- the extent to which the study of new subject matter presents students with difficulty, or whether in fact the newness of the material provides a motivating stimulation;
- the extent to which student difficulties in transition are processual rather than subject content based (Grossman, Wilson, et al, 1989), linked to teaching and learning contexts.

3.6 Ethics

Ethical considerations are also paramount, as Warwick (1982) and Patton (1987) indicate. Such issues, which are often particularly sensitive in the educational context (Deyhle, Hess et al, 1992), needed to be managed with care. Further ethical issues arose surrounding access to the research site (Goffman, 2002) and the sensitive management of the observer role (Mason, 2002; Patton, 2002).

Ethical approval was sought from the Ethics Committee of the host higher education institution within which I undertook my research. In consultation with the host department, a group of students, which would form the core focus of my work, was

selected and these students were approached. The consent form (see Appendix 1) and information sheet (see Appendix 2), illustrating the aims and objectives of the study and the roles and rights of participants, were explained to each of these students on an individual basis. All members of staff in the host department whose teaching sessions would be observed as part of the study were approached and were given the opportunity to discuss the project, making clear that they were free to withdraw at any time. In addition, interviewees were able to review transcribed interview data and to comment on it and, if they wished, to withdraw it before it was employed.

A number of ethical considerations arose when undertaking classroom observation:

- anonymity of the subjects, on both an institutional and individual level must be maintained in order that no prejudice should accrue as a result of participation in the study;
- all members of the teaching groups observed should be made aware of my presence in the teaching room, the reasons for my presence and the nature of the work I was doing.

3.7 Methodology: Linked Questionnaires

(See example completed questionnaire in Appendix 3)

The purpose of this investigation was to explore the views, expectations and assumptions of both teachers and learners at A level and in higher education with regard to teaching and learning, and to consider their experiences of the teaching and learning process and its impact. In seeking to explore the shared boundaries of the classroom, a particular focus was the extent to which student experiences at university reflected or differed from their experiences at A level and the impact of this on their management of transition to higher education. Ascertaining students' and teachers' perceptions of the role of assessment and its impact on student learning and the movement into higher education provided another core focus.

My research question required the exploration of students' experiences and views, and ~~therefore directed me towards the use of linked questionnaires~~ and classroom observation followed up by interviews with a small selection of students as my chosen

methods for data collection. As a balancing and complementary perspective, it was also important to establish teachers' experiences and views. The employment of linked questionnaires allowed such a comparative exploration of a range of issues surrounding the teaching and learning of English at A level from both teachers' and learners' perspectives. The purpose of the questionnaires was to gather data reflecting a set of dichotomies, as suggested by the oppositional forces outlined in Figure 1 (sixth form teacher-student, sixth form teacher-university teacher, sixth form student-university student, university teacher-university student). In so doing, I was enabled to gain insight into a variety of views around matters of classroom practice and to use this as a means of exploring how far teachers' and learners' experiences, assumptions and expectations coincide. The exploration of data surrounding such dichotomies (see Evans, 1993) provided insight into the 'boundaried' nature of English study and cast light on potential areas of conflict and difficulty likely to impact upon student transition. Pilot questionnaires for both teachers and students of A level English courses were created and distributed to two schools of a contrasting nature. These were completed and suggestions and modifications were incorporated in the final draft.

Peterson (2000) observes the necessity of carefully considering the mode to be employed in the administration of questionnaires. He identifies consistent evidence that response to questionnaires varies significantly according to the mode employed, a view endorsed by Wright, Aquilino & Supple (1998). Owing to the size of my planned survey, a face-to-face or telephone mode of delivery would not be possible, and as I wished to use the questionnaires to gather qualitative as well as quantitative data, such methods would have been impracticable. It was, therefore, necessary for me to devise self-administered questionnaires. A number of potential problems attend on this. Murry, Lastovicka & Bhalla (1989), for example, in a study considering the nature of voluntary respondents to questionnaires point out the dangers of self-selection bias. With self-administered questionnaires, the researcher remains at a distance and where the questionnaires are distributed by mail or other means at a distance, researchers relinquish much of their control over who responds to their questionnaires. This was partially the situation in the case of my own research. I was ~~planning a large survey of teachers and students in both schools and universities.~~ As such, while I could to an extent maintain control over the survey, by targeting students

and teachers within particular institutions, the actual respondents would remain out of my control. This raised questions as to how far the survey could be considered representative. With this in mind, I used the opening section of the questionnaires to collect a certain amount of biographical information about individual respondents to maintain some sense of who the respondent was in each case (see Appendix 4 for a full breakdown of questionnaire respondents). The sample was, therefore, an opportunity sample, meaning it was not possible to draw any gross generalisations about the population of the survey (Silverman, 2000; Schofield, 1996).

3.7.1 The questions: validity and reliability

It was important to pay particular attention to the construction of the questions within the questionnaires. These were the primary vehicle for eliciting information, and as such it was essential that they served the needs both of the research question and of respondents. The needs of the latter were particularly important, especially where, as in this case, questionnaires were self-administered. Questions that respondents either could not or would not answer, however closely they may address the research question, would be empty vessels (Peterson, 2000). This also connected closely to issues of validity. Czaja & Blair (2005, 104) offer a binary definition of validity, stating that it 'requires, first, that the questions measure the dimension or construct of interest; and second, that respondents interpret the questions as intended'. They thus point to core issues based on the evaluation of how far the chosen research tool measures what it is supposed to be measuring (Polit & Hungler, 1987). It was also important to ensure that respondents were enabled to provide a 'true' picture within their responses. This is suggested by Hammersley (1990, 57), who prioritises 'the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers'. Walker (1988) identifies key issues surrounding the conceptual, internal and external validity of data. Perceptions of the validity of data (Wolcott, 1990) and method (Mason, 2002), however, also have to take into account the inherent trustworthiness of responses and the extent to which the respondent is presenting an accurate picture to the researcher, or whether he/she is responding in the way they believe they are expected to respond (Boulton & Hammersley, 1996).

It is also important to consider the extent to which any chosen sample or population is or can be considered representative (Munn & Drever, 1999) and the extent to which

results obtained from them can be applied to a wider population or indeed the population at large (Hammersley, 1992). In this context, Kirk (1986) provides the useful distinction between the 'reliability' of a research tool, the extent to which it produces the same answer on repeated application, and 'validity', the extent to which it produces the right answer.

With this in mind, I carefully set about evaluating the nature of the data I wished to elicit from the questionnaires and how this could most usefully be done. The purpose of the linked questionnaires was to establish multiple perspective views of a set of shared issues surrounding the transitional process of moving from A level to university English study. This I wished to explore particularly through a consideration of the nature of teaching and learning and the environment(s) within which this takes place. As such, the questionnaires were designed to elicit a combination of quantitative data (how often and how widely certain approaches to teaching and learning were employed) and qualitative response (where respondents were asked to offer supporting explanation of the benefits and/or disadvantages they attached to each of these approaches).

To gain a rounded view of these issues, it was essential to gain the views of all four major groups in the transition from A level to university:

- sixth form students;
- sixth form teachers and lecturers;
- first year university students; and
- university lecturers.

Each group is a significant stakeholder in the process of transition to university. The perspective of each group, however, was likely to reflect a varying set of expectations, concerns and interests. In this differing (and possibly conflicting) set of responses may lay issues that cast light on and forces that impact upon the difficult process of transition and the oppositional forces operating within and between English at school

and at university. The four linked questionnaires were, therefore, devised to establish a multiplicity of views of 'common ground'. In order to facilitate this, each questionnaire was divided into three sections:

- background details;
- teaching and learning; and
- transition to higher education.

3.7.2 Background Details

Questionnaires were completed anonymously. The purpose of the first section was, therefore, to gain an overview of the breakdown of respondents. Within the outline population of teachers, lecturers and students, however, further specific details were required. The following details were requested on each of the questionnaires:

- sixth form students were asked to identify their gender, age group, current educational institution and target post-GCSE English qualification;
- sixth form teachers/lecturers were asked to identify the type of institution in which they teach and the post-GCSE English qualifications they teach;
- first year university students were asked to identify their gender, age group, sixth form education institution, post-16 qualifications and grades and the reasons why they chose to study English at degree level;
- university lecturers were asked to identify their type of institution and the entry qualifications they accept.

Example Background Details section from undergraduate students' questionnaire:

Students' Questionnaire

Section 1: Personal Details (please tick as appropriate)

1 Gender: Male Female

2 Age group: under 20 21-30 31-40
41-50 51-60 over 60

3 Current educational institution: State school
State Sixth Form College Independent school
Independent Sixth Form College Other

4 Target English Qualifications:
Advanced GCE English Literature Advanced GCE English Language and Literature
International Baccalaureate (incl. English) Access course (incl. English)

Other (please list)

The collection of this information was essential in order to ensure that the composition and range of the data sample could be ascertained (Czaja & Blair, 2005) and to establish the extent to which the sample could be considered representative (Hammersley, 1992; Hammersley, 1990; Munn & Drever, 1999).

3.7.3 Teaching and Learning

This was the largest section of the questionnaire and was intended to provide an insight into the range of teaching and learning approaches employed in the delivery of English A level qualifications and in degree level teaching. The section was divided into thirteen sub-sections, each focussing on a different approach, and was designed to

collect a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. Respondents were asked to reflect on the range of teaching approaches in three ways:

- to identify whether these approaches were employed Sometimes, Often or Never, by a simple tick-box. This enabled the gathering of quantitative data to gain a statistical picture of the range and frequency of practice within and between the institutions sampled. It also helped to establish an understanding of which approaches cross the boundaries of A level and higher education and which do not;
- to offer their view of the usefulness of these approaches in teaching and learning, by means of a Likert scale from 1-4. The decision to use an even number of options on the scale, removing a 'neutral' option, was taken in order to oblige respondents to consider more carefully whether their responses to particular teaching and learning situations were positive or negative, even if they did not have particularly strong feelings. De Vaus (2002, 105-6) offers the opinion that a 'no opinion' or 'don't know' option should always be available in questionnaires, a view supported by Converse & Presser (1986), who see in the removal of such an option the danger of creating false and unreliable responses. However, given the active and interactive nature of teaching and learning and the importance of personal response within the learning environment, it was my view that students and teachers can never maintain a genuinely neutral view of process. Requiring respondents to evaluate their response to certain approaches as either positive or negative would also prove useful when it came to analysing the resultant data. This section of the questionnaire provided an interesting insight into the similarities and differences in the perceived value of the range of pedagogic approaches identified according to students, teachers and lecturers. By comparing the views of the four stakeholder groups, areas of comparison and of conflict in pedagogic practice could be identified;
- to explain the perceived pedagogic and/or learning benefits of each approach. ~~This was designed to extend the above two responses, offering respondents the opportunity to explain their quantitative responses, and to explore issues~~

surrounding each of the chosen approaches. This provided a qualitative response which enabled the development of a fuller understanding of students' and teachers' differing perceptions of pedagogy within English. It also provided useful data upon which to base further, iterative data collection via follow-up interviews and/or observations.

In order to ensure the greatest potential for comparison, the categories in this section remained constant between all four questionnaires.

Example Teaching and Learning section from undergraduate students' questionnaire:

Section 2: Teaching and Learning

How often do you do the following activities in your English teaching sessions? (Tick box to indicate.)

How useful do you find each method to be? (Use number scale to indicate.)

How does this help you in your learning? Even if some of these approaches are not used in your teaching sessions, please explain how you feel they would help your learning. (Use spaces provided.)

Reading in advance

Never

Sometimes

Often

1 (not useful)

2

3

4 (very useful)

Guided reading tasks in groups (targeted passage-based reading with specified group discussion, question response, analytical or written outcomes)

Never	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes	<input type="checkbox"/>	Often	<input type="checkbox"/>
1 (not useful)		2	3	4 (very useful)	

Reading as a class

Never	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes	<input type="checkbox"/>	Often	<input type="checkbox"/>
1 (not useful)		2	3	4 (very useful)	

Whole class discussion

Never	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes	<input type="checkbox"/>	Often	<input type="checkbox"/>
1 (not useful)		2	3	4 (very useful)	

Group/pair discussion

Never	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes	<input type="checkbox"/>	Often	<input type="checkbox"/>
1 (not useful)		2	3	4 (very useful)	

Close textual analysis

Never

1 (not useful)

Sometimes

2

3

Often

4 (very useful)

Research using other materials (e.g. literary theory, literary criticism, context material, other literary texts)

Never

1 (not useful)

Sometimes

2

3

Often

4 (very useful)

Student presentation

Never

1 (not useful)

Sometimes

2

3

Often

4 (very useful)

Teacher presentation

Never

1 (not useful)

Sometimes

2

3

Often

4 (very useful)

Use of Directed activities related to text (e.g. sequencing activities, sorting information into tables, cloze (word substitution) procedures, prediction exercises)

Never Sometimes Often
1 (not useful) 2 3 4 (very useful)

Audio-visual/ICT stimulus

Never Sometimes Often
1 (not useful) 2 3 4 (very useful)

Drama-based activities (e.g. role-playing, hot-seating, improvisation)

Never Sometimes Often
1 (not useful) 2 3 4 (very useful)

Creative, recreative and free writing responses to text

Never Sometimes Often

2 How confident do you feel in your independent ability to read, analyse and respond to a text you are approaching for the first time?

1 (lack confidence) 2 3 4 (very confident)

This section of the linked questionnaires was designed to generate data around the pedagogical borderlands that define meetings between students and teachers and between the post-compulsory sector and the higher education sector. Its purpose was to verify or challenge the existence of perceived 'gaps' between English practices in A level and university Englishes (Knights, 2004; Green, 2005a), and to provide data that would assist in defining the boundaries between school and university English – a paradigmatic and pedagogical Mason-Dixon line. The data provided by these questionnaires also offered a broader context against which specific institutional observation and individual interviews could be evaluated. Questionnaire data thus became the basis for the inductive generation of 'theory from data' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2000; Silverman, 2000). Material from the questionnaires was formulated into working constructivist hypotheses which could be explored and tested through a sequence of classroom observations undertaken in schools and in university departments. These data also provided a basis for follow-up interviews with a selected group of first year undergraduates, as a means of deductively testing and exploring inductively established areas for research. Mouly (1978, 178) describes such an approach as:

a back-and-forth movement in which the investigator first operates inductively from observations to hypotheses, and then deductively from these hypotheses to their implications, in order to check their validity from the standpoint of compatibility with accepted knowledge.

University teaching habitually employs both lectures and seminars, learning environments distinctly different from each other. To reflect this, questionnaires targeting first year university students and lecturers asked for comment on the use of the various approaches in both learning environments where appropriate.

Teachers and lecturers were also asked to comment, in this section, on the impact of assessment on the delivery of English at A level. In particular they were asked to consider how the use of Assessment Objectives has impacted upon the A level classroom, teachers' pedagogical choices, students' perceptions of learning, academic development and examination performance. This was of particular interest given that, in a recently published English Subject Centre survey of university English departments (Gawthrope & Martin, 2003, 43-44), whilst 43% of departments recorded an increasing student A level grade profile, they also lamented 'a marked drop in the standard of written English and in the range of reading'. Still more interestingly, in spite of such an apparent contradiction, 92% of the departments in the survey identified examination performance as the principle criterion by which they select students and none has adopted alternative selection criteria beyond the UCAS form and interviews.

Given concerns about student progression between A level and university studies in English, it seems that A level provides no straightforward gateway into higher education, but is yet another exemplification of the 'boundaried' nature of the subject. The link between A level and university English hinges on both assessment and teaching practice. This section of the questionnaire aimed to elicit key information in both areas.

3.7.4 Transition to higher education

This section of the questionnaire was designed to reflect the particular contact each of the four respondent groups has with issues of transition and to see how aware and/or interested they were in the extent to which the work they do impacts upon these. It was divided into two sections:

- in the first, each group was asked to identify how effectively they believe A level English study prepares students for the demands of Level 1 study and the abilities they believe are necessary for successful study of English at university;
- in the second, the questions were targeted at particular areas of interest within the various target groups:
 - **sixth form students** were asked to reflect on their expectations of university teaching. The purpose of this was to identify potential students' expectations of the nature and quantity of the teaching they will receive at university. This information was used to provide a comparison to the reality as reflected in responses of Level 1 students. Both of these sets of responses were also used to provide a comparison to university lecturers' expectations. In eliciting such data it was possible to gain an insight into the nature of teaching and learning expectations from a range of perspectives and to consider how this impacted upon students' experiences of academic transition;
 - **first year university students** were asked to comment on how far and in what ways their university study has met their expectations. They were also required to identify programmes in place to help manage their academic transition both at school or college and at university;
 - **teachers and lecturers** at both phases were asked to comment on the existence of cross-phase dialogue and how useful they find (or would find) such contact. The intention here was to establish the willingness of teachers to engage in constructive dialogue to draw together the Englishes that exist in schools and universities. Such dialogue is, of course, by its very nature transgressive of one of the key boundaries in the process of transition – the boundary between the school and the academy.

Example Transition to higher education section from students' questionnaire:

Section 3: Transition to Higher Education

1 How confident you would feel to enter the study of English Literature at university?

1 (lack confidence)

2

3

4 (very confident)

Explain your answer.

2 What abilities do you think are necessary to succeed in the study of English Literature at degree level?

3 What teaching approaches do you think are used in teaching English Literature at university?

4 What teaching approaches would you find the most useful?

5 Please indicate the number of hours/week you think university students are expected to dedicate to:

Lectures, seminars and tutorials

Independent study

3.7.5 Use of method

The process of compiling the questionnaires was a detailed one. As explained above, it was essential, for purposes of comparison, to ensure that the questionnaires were closely linked. It was essential also that all respondent groups were able to relate to the areas selected for questioning. The choice of an appropriately varied range of issues and teaching and learning approaches (Gardner, 1987) was, therefore, crucial.

3.7.5.1 Piloting

The importance of piloting, to iron out as many difficulties as possible before undertaking a full sample is emphasised by Munn & Drever (1990). They identify a number of purposes in undertaking a pilot (see Figure 6):

Figure 6: Piloting questionnaires (Munn & Drever, 1990)

1. “debugging” the questionnaire, making sure the questions asked are clearly and unambiguously worded;
2. evaluating whether the questionnaire, both physically (in terms of its organisation and layout) and through its demands allows respondents effectively to convey their response;
3. ironing out off-putting features, such as undue length, poor presentation, etc.

They also recommend piloting the questionnaire with volunteers who fall within a researcher’s desired population, but who will not be part of the final sample. This allows for clear insight from a potential respondent to the final survey, but does not then compromise any final responses that make their way into the final data. With these issues in mind, I undertook a pilot of the questionnaires with sixth form students of English and their teachers in two schools of a contrasting nature, ensuring as far as possible a balance of respondents, male and female, and covering both state and independent sectors.

The process of piloting the questionnaires was used as suggested by De Vaus (2002, 116) to assess responses in six key areas:

- variety of response;
- clarity of questions;
- redundancy;
- scalability;

- non-response; and
- acquiescence.

The careful evaluation of pilot responses to the linked questionnaires was essential to establish both that the questionnaire was fit for purpose as a self-administered survey and that the resultant data would be useful for analysis. In other words, it enabled assessment of the clarity of the questionnaires for the respondent and their usefulness for the researcher. This process was illuminating and gave rise to a number of areas for further reflection and development of the questionnaires before proceeding to the final versions:

- the Teaching and Learning section needed to include creative, recreative and free writing responses as approaches to literature. Pope (1995) and Evans (1993) both identify the troubled place of creativity within the teaching of English;
- the questionnaire was quite long; its purpose was to gather as wide a range of information as possible, but the length may be prohibitive;
- the Teaching and Learning section required a level of metacognitive reflection that not all students may be able to provide within the self-administered format (Peterson, 2000). Where appropriate, therefore, brief examples were provided to assist respondents;
- the questionnaires allowed for individual reflection, and as such met one of the key requirements established by Flick (1998), that participants should be given the opportunity to express their views in a meaningful and appropriate way;
- the questionnaires enabled the meaningful comparison of responses from a range of perspectives within a structured format (Sapsford, 1999), which would be of assistance in comparing and analysing arising data;

- truthfulness of response may be an issue, as there was a danger respondents may respond the way they felt they ought to rather than offering their genuine feelings and beliefs. However, Peterson (2000) observes that this is generally not an issue except where questions touch on issues of personal sensitivity, which was not the case with these questionnaires;
- ensuring a meaningful and representative sample was vital (Sapsford, 1999).

3.7.5.2 Analysis of Data

Data from the four linked questionnaires were analysed by respondent group. Questionnaires were logged in chronological order of their arrival, according to respondent type, using the following categories:

- sixth form students – SF1, SF2, SF3, etc.
- undergraduate students – U1, U2, U3, etc.
- sixth form teachers and lecturers – T1, T2, T3, etc.
- university lecturers – L1, L2, L3, etc.

At the point of arrival, key details of each respondent (e.g. age group, gender and institution type in the case of sixth form and undergraduate students) were recorded to gain a developing picture of the nature of the sample emerging – see Appendix 4 for the full summary.

Once responses had been returned from all participating institutions, initial analysis of data was undertaken within each of the four categories surveyed. This initial analysis took the form of compiling statistical tables by percentage to represent the quantitative responses offered by each group of respondents. Qualitative responses were coded to begin the process of making sense of and organizing the body of data I had collected. Through the coding of these data, I was in effect, as grounded theorists have suggested, asking questions of the data and engaging with them. The coding of data thus became a process by which interpretation shaped emerging codes (Charmaz,

2000). These codes began to offer a series of ways of 'reading' the data and beginning to convert these into meaning.

The coding process was essential, then, in organising data, but it also served other key purposes. It was also the first stage in the conceptualisation of data (Bryman & Cramer, 1990). Emerging codes, such as 'independence', 'reading', 'misunderstanding' and 'isolation' were important in that they facilitated the abstraction of data. Through reading and increasingly detailed levels of analytical work, these codes were tested and brought to bear upon the data I had gathered.

The collection and the analysis of data, therefore, rather than being discrete processes, began to overlap each other (Bryman & Cramer, 1990). This overlapping was particularly evident as the four questionnaire data sets were brought into contact with each other. Comparison was a central aspect of my research. Glaser (1979, 1992) and Strauss (1987) both identify the importance of comparison – in the former case constant comparison – within the coding and analysis of data. The generation of action codes (see previous paragraph) to facilitate this (Charmaz, 2000) proved to be important at this stage. Codes developed through the analysis of sixth form student questionnaire responses, for example, were enlightening within the on-going analysis of responses from the three other respondent groups. These codes provided the basis of a corpus of comparisons and contrasts that enabled me to shape my perceptions of how expectations and experiences of English varied between the four participant groups. As Miles & Huberman (1994, 432) suggest, such comparisons 'sharpen understanding by clustering and distinguishing observations'. Comparisons within my research, seeking to reach such sharpened understanding, are made in a number of ways:

- between respondent groups in questionnaire survey;
- between questionnaire data and observational data;
- between questionnaire data and interview data; and
- between observational data and interview data.

The interleaving of these data provided a rich ground for comparative analysis, and also served useful purposes in the verification of data.

As each stage of analysis was undertaken, codes were either rejected, or developed and refined, according to their value in abstracting meaning from the comparative data. The codes thus evolved and fed forward into the collection of subsequent observational and interview data in the host higher education institution. The coding of questionnaire data was, therefore, the beginnings of an iterative process, through which emerging codes formed new questions, and were tested through further stages of data collection.

A further important area for consideration in relation to my research is whether concepts existed prior to engagement with my data or whether they emerged from it. In the name of objectivity and 'truth', the latter stance appears desirable. However, inevitably, as an experienced teacher of A level over many years, and latterly as a lecturer in Initial Teacher Education, I drew on a wide range of experience dealing both with A level students and with graduates of English in approaching my research question. In reality, it seems likely that many researchers embark on projects with some preconceptions or hypotheses surrounding what they may find. In this case, a third way is suggested, whereby the researcher states his/her interests and guiding concepts at the outset and engages these with the data he/she gathers. Such an approach, of course, requires the researcher to be open to developments, refinements and contradictions that may emerge in the course of data collection and analysis.

In the case of my own work, my previous teaching experiences led me to anticipate the existence of significant differences in teaching practices between A level and university, and to identify in these differences one of the major barriers to effective transition. This was a significant factor in shaping the design of the linked questionnaires. The striking difference in timetabled teaching hours between sixth form and university and the increased emphasis this inevitably places on independent study was another area I believed likely to result in difficulty for students in transition. I therefore used the questionnaires as an opportunity to test the validity of these perceptions, and to develop my sense of how these specifically impacted on

students' expectations and experiences. Other issues, such as difficulties surrounding reading within higher education English, emerged from my engagement with the available literature. This reading suggested areas for further investigation, and to that extent influenced the development of the linked questionnaires and my analysis of them. As previously indicated, this then inevitably led forward into the analysis of data and further cycles of data collection, through which I was able to explore and develop original perspectives on these issues. The codes developed in the process of analysing survey data, for example, served as a form of pre-coding in the collection and analysis of observational and interview data

3.8 Methodology: Interviews

3.8.1 Interviewer effect

Interviewing is a social process, involving the interaction of the interviewer and the interviewee. As such, it is essential to consider the extent to which the interviewer becomes not just the explorer of interviewees' experiences – somebody who neutrally presides as the interviewee constructs his/her response – but is also, inevitably, embodied within that response, both in terms of process and in terms of content. Social scientific research, Rosenblatt (2002) argues, often draws a distinct line between fact (even where 'fact' is offered in the form of a narrative) and fiction. In so doing, it seeks the most effective ways to elicit 'truth' and 'validity' from the interview situation. Like Denzin (1997), however, he sees the boundary between fact and fiction as one that is blurred rather than distinct. He considers the ways in which interviewers and interviewees mutually 'narrativise' each other (Rosenblatt, 2002: 898-899). From the perspective of the researcher he goes on to explore how, in so constructing (and sometimes multiply constructing) their subjects, interviewers play a central role also in narrativising the matter and the meaning of interviewees' responses.

In undertaking research into the nature of students' experiences of English study at A level and at university, I was aware that interviewees would often offer narrative vignettes as illustrations and as evidence of the factors that shaped their views of English. Interviews followed on from my initial analysis of questionnaire data, and therefore I had already defined a number of key issues – such as the nature and role of

reading at each stage of education, the role of assessment in defining students' views of subject, how students cope with lectures, dynamics within seminars, etc. – that I wished particularly to pursue within the iterative process of data collection and analysis. To this extent, I was aware that my interview design would prove a defining influence on the narrative of the interview and the way that this would feed forward into subsequent analysis. Within these areas, however, I sought to ensure that my questioning – semi-structured to take account of an initial written response the interviewees had already completed – was open and allowed students the opportunity to offer their own, unmediated version of their experiences.

In pursuit of 'truth' and 'validity', Kvale (1996) and Rubin & Rubin (1995) suggest that the process of interviewing should be a guided conversation in which the interviewer asks questions and listens 'so as to hear the meaning' (Rubin & Rubin, 1995: 7) while the respondent answers. This assigns to the interviewer and interviewee distinct roles in the conduct of the interview, and seeks to minimise the potential for the interviewer to influence its meaning – to minimise, in other words, the interviewer's effect on how the interviewee responds. However, in the assignment of such roles lies the recognition that the interview situation is, by its very nature, dramatic in inception. An interview is a place where two or more 'selves', all more or less provisional in nature (Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2002) engage with each other, and in so engaging through questions and responses, 'negotiate' or dramatise the outcome of the interview. This appropriately meets the needs, but also creates one of the primary difficulties of the interview. As Warren (2002, 83) identifies, '[t]he purpose of most qualitative interviewing is to derive interpretations', and tends, therefore, to be epistemologically constructionist. However, the relationship between the 'voices' of the interviewee and the interviewer in the construction of the interview's meaning, both at the time it is undertaken and in subsequent data analysis, is problematic. The interview must tell the interviewee's 'story', but that 'story' in its turn becomes part of the over-arching narrative of meaning the researcher goes on to construct.

Another key element in effective interviewing, as it relates to interviewer effect, is the matter of trust. The validity and frankness of interviewees' responses will depend upon the extent to which the interviewer is perceived as reliable, and how the social situation of the interview is defined (Wengraf, 2001; Powney & Watts, 1987). In this

respect, the personality of the interviewer is a determining feature, along with who he/she seems to be, what or whom he/she represents, and the reasons for undertaking the interview. In order to create the best conditions for the interviews I undertook, I met with interviewees on an individual basis in a private location within the host department at times suggested by them. Interviews were recorded on audiotape with the permission of the interviewees. In order to conform with ethical standards for the conduct of research, the establishment of informed consent (Warren, 2002) was essential. All interviewees were, therefore, provided with an information sheet outlining the purposes of my research (see Appendix 2) so they were clear about their role within the broader context of my study. They were also asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix 1), outlining their rights and roles within the interview process. In following this protocol, I sought to gain interviewees' trust and engagement on a personal level with the interview process and the use that would be made of interview data.

3.8.2 Interview data and analysis

Interviews, which Sanger (1996, 61) argues are, within the context of qualitative research, 'even more than observation ...the predominant means of data gathering', were conducted with five first year students. These interviews followed up on key themes and issues identified through analysis of student responses to data arising from the linked questionnaires. In order to gather an initial insight into these students' responses to the core issues emerging from the linked questionnaires, each interviewee provided a written response to a set of structured questions. (A schedule of the questions forming the basis of these written responses can be found at Appendix 5.) These responses in turn were used to establish the basis for a set of semi-structured interviews during which interviewees were questioned on the core issues raised by questionnaire responses, but with the freedom to adapt questions to the particular circumstances and concerns raised in their written responses.

Interview schedule

- 1) What were your reasons for wanting to study English?
- 2) How many hours/week do you spend in:

- a) lectures;
- b) seminars;
- c) independent study.

- 3) Does there seem to you to be any difference in English study at A level and at university?
- 4) Outline the reading requirements of your course. How do you go about managing this?
- 5) Do you perceive a difference in the nature of reading between A level and university, in terms of both *what* you read and *how* you read?
- 6) How do you structure your independent study time? Do you receive any guidance, and if so what?
- 7) What other kinds of support would you find helpful?
- 8) How do you prepare for lectures? How are you guided in your preparation?
- 9) How do you prepare for seminars? How are you guided in your preparation?
- 10) What other kinds of academic support would you appreciate?
- 11) Explore particular issues raised through initial written responses.

The semi-structured interview format adopted provided what Kvale (1996, 124) refers to as 'an openness to changes' within the interview process, which was important in order to pursue the individual 'stories' and experiences the interviewees wished to offer. It was also important, however, to ensure the possibility of valid comparison of student response by providing sufficient structure replicated in all interviews (Johnson

& Weller, 2002) in order that the nature of questioning did not lead to biased and interviewer-constructed accounts (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002).

My intention in these interviews was to follow the guidelines of Rubin & Rubin (1995, 46), who advise the interviewer 'actively [to] solicit a wide variety of ideas, themes and explanations and ...not to limit how interviewees respond to your concerns'. Interviewees were asked to reflect on a number of core areas surrounding their experiences of teaching and learning in both their pre-university and university education. They were also asked to explore their assumptions and expectations about the nature of English literary study at university and to consider how far these expectations had been met by their experiences at university.

The students selected for the interview process were chosen in consultation with the department within which I was undertaking my observational research. They were selected in order to provide key information within the specific context of the host department (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Warren, 2002) and formed an institutionally representative sample in terms of gender, age and ethnicity.

The first step in analysing the data after conducting the interviews was to transcribe the interviews. As Mishler (1991, 47-8) points out, the process of transcribing interview data is complex and time-consuming and involves the transcriber in significant acts of selection in terms of how speech, paralinguistic, other forms non-verbal and physical communication are rendered. The presentation of the interview and the discourse employed in transcription can only, therefore, ever offer a partial view of the complexities of the interview itself. The act of transcription, however, for all its limitations was a useful process, as, through the very act of transcription, it established firmly the responses and concerns of the interviewees and enabled the development of a personal and interactive dialogue with the data (Powney & Watts, 1987).

~~In transcribing student interviews, I opted to omit notation of physical communication or body language, but sought to represent all elements of verbal and other non-verbal~~

oral communication. The accuracy of the transcribed data was verified by the participants themselves, who were given the opportunity to check interview transcriptions (Poland, 2002). This also met ethical considerations, whereby interviewees were able to review and comment on (and even withdraw, if they wished) the emergent data.

The interview transcriptions prepared employed the following abbreviations:

- the researcher = I;
- students = S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, etc.

For clarity, questions were presented throughout in bold type and responses in italics.

The resultant data were treated as giving access to the experiences of the interviewees (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995) and were used as means of attempting, through coding (Wengraf, 2001) and subsequent analysis, to construct meaning. Due caution was observed, however. Baker (1982, 109) points to interviewees' tendency to 'create' the world and 'to make it work out in a particular way', especially in relation to the interviewees' perceptions of the interviewer and what they believe the interviewer wishes to hear (see also Rosenblatt, 2002). The influence of such constructivist tendencies within the interview situation highlights the importance of the social context of the interview and the perceived relationships between participants in the process (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). It also reflects upon the social setting for the interviews, which were conducted on an individual basis within an office (Wengraf, 2001), and the relative comfort (or discomfort) of the interviewer and the interviewee in this setting, which can also have a significant impact on the outcomes of the interview.

3.9 Methodology: Observation

Observation has been characterised by Adler & Adler (1994, 389) as 'the fundamental base of all research methods'. As my third method of collecting data, it was chosen as ~~it would allow a practical insight into the deployment of the strategies teachers~~ employ within the classroom context and learners' reactions to them. It would also

provide another strand of data to set alongside the material gathered from questionnaire responses. In beginning to consider my role as observer, the ideas of Gold (1958), who identifies four categories of observational locus, and Junker (1960) were particularly useful. Given my desire to be in the classroom, but not wishing by personal input to influence the outcomes of any given teaching session, I adopted the role of the complete observer.

Patton (1987, 22) states that valid observational data must have both 'depth and detail'. This closely links with the views of Marshall & Mossman (1999, 107), for whom observation 'entails the systematic noting and recording of events, behaviours, artefacts in the social setting chosen for study'. The systematic recording of observation must provide the researcher with the descriptive detail to be able effectively to undertake detailed analysis of what has been observed. This corresponds with a major purpose of my own observations, which was to develop a systematic means of recording the pedagogical approaches employed and to note the variety of student response to these approaches. Observation needed also to provide a useful format for evaluating what Feiman-Nemser & Buchman (1985) term the 'pedagogical thinking' underlying teachers' choices. I hoped that arising observational data would provide a practical insight into students' and teachers' constructions of subject knowledge (a dichotomous relationship, as Dewey (1903) identifies). I also set out to ascertain how such personal constructs of subject (Banks, Leach & Moon, 1999) interact in the establishment of classroom dynamics, and the pedagogical choices this required of teachers in the construction of the teaching and learning environment. In order to gather this kind of information, a sustained sequence of observations (or fieldwork) was needed within the host institution.

Fieldwork is defined by Lofland (1971, 93) as:

the circumstance of being in or around an on-going social setting for the purpose of making a qualitative analysis of that setting.

The power of observation as a research tool is more forcefully expressed by Becker & Geer (1970) who identify in observation the most complete of all research strategies. These perceptions of observation, set alongside the ideas of Patton (1987), helped me

to establish my position as observer. He identifies a number of advantages in observation as a method (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: Advantages of observation as a method (Patton, 1987)

- 1) it enables the researcher to capture the context of interactions;
- 2) it allows the inquirer to be open and inductive, and to go beyond prior conceptualisations of the context they are observing;
- 3) it allows insight into things that are routinely missed by people who are regular participants in the situation observed;
- 4) it allows insight into things participants would not or could not discuss during interview;
- 5) it can move the observer beyond the selective perceptions of research subjects, whose perceptions may be limited by a range of influences;
- 6) it allows for informed personal interpretation in the analysis of data.

With these benefits in mind, I had to consider carefully what my role would be, bearing in mind the potential effects of the observer on both teachers and students. It was then necessary to formulate the exact nature of my role. In this again Patton (1987) proved formative. He outlines five key areas for consideration when setting up observational inquiry, each of which I related to my own research as follows:

- **role as observer** – in undertaking observations, I adopted the role of non-participant observer. This allowed me, as Burns (2000, 468) observes, to remain ‘aloof from the case being investigated and eschew group membership’. As I would not be a long-term member of the group, to become a participant was not possible. Nor, given that I wished to evaluate the

interactions between teacher and learner, would participant intervention have been appropriate.

- **explanation of observational role to others** – teachers and students alike were made aware that I was undertaking observation and what the focus of my attention would be. All consented to the observations.
- **portrayal of purpose of investigation to others** – for ethical reasons (Patton, 1987) the clear identification of researchers' purposes is of paramount importance. However, there is always the danger that the presence of the observer and the knowledge of their purposes may have a direct impact on the interactions that take place during the observation and may lead some participants to modify their normal behaviours (Van Maanen, 1983), including the Hawthorne effect (Hammersley, 1990). For this reason, I sought to make myself as inconspicuous as possible, informed the groups observed that their anonymity would be maintained, and reassured participants that observed data would not reflect on them personally.
- **duration of observation** – as I was operating within schools and universities, the length of individual teaching session observations was dictated by timetabling requirements, and as such remained beyond my control. However, the length of session was naturally a significant feature in determining the nature of teaching and learning activity undertaken and teachers' and students' engagement within the process of the sessions observed.
- **focus of observation** – the focus of my classroom observations was to observe closely the interactions between teachers and learners and the way this manifested itself in the variety of teaching and learning activity undertaken within the teaching session. Observation of these interactions and the pedagogical stances of teachers gave me a practical insight into the establishment and operation of 'boundaries' within a range of English classrooms.

As a lecturer in Initial Teacher Education, I am an experienced observer in classrooms. However, the nature, purpose and focus of the observations undertaken was significantly different to the observations I usually undertake. After careful consideration, I decided on the importance of developing a standardised observation sheet for use in my observations. Bryman (1989, 207) reflects on the value of pre-arranged charts and forms as a means of recording observation, suggesting that structured observation benefits from 'the recording of and encoding of observations according to a previously formulated schedule'. Given the specific focus on teaching and learning, such a pre-ordering was both possible and desirable and accordingly I proceeded to devise a standardised observation form. To facilitate the comparison of data received from the survey I was also piloting, this form was closely modelled on the linked questionnaires discussed above. I also wished the observations to allow for wider reflection and for the identification of approaches I had not considered, should these arise, and to allow some of the benefits of compiling field notes. Direct observation of the behaviours and interactions of students and teachers in the classroom setting provided many advantages, as Sánchez-Jankowski (2002) identifies, allowing a measure of initial data analysis during the process of data collection. The formulation of field notes was, therefore, at once a form of recording and of selection, and therefore an immediate dimension of analysis is implicit within the very act of data collection. However, the 'face validity' of both observer and observation data, as Sánchez-Jankowski (2002) points out, comes into question when moving from observation to representation, where critical assumptions, theoretical stances and analytic processes come into play. The validation of data arising from observation is also considered by Angrosino & Mays de Pérez (2000), who highlight 'quality' and 'efficiency' of observational data as key traits and Denzin (1997), who focuses on the experience of both the observer and the observed.

Observations were undertaken in the host university department over the course of one academic year. Data arising from these observations was used as a means of verifying data arising from the linked questionnaires and also as a way of assessing the validity of data emerging from student interviews. In order to establish the range and nature of work being undertaken in English at both post-16 and university levels, ~~I believed classroom observation would complement the linked questionnaires as a~~ source of data, providing me with a view from 'within' the classroom of practice at

both post-16 and university level. The data thus gathered was intended to allow a practical reflection upon the questionnaire responses. It illuminated issues the participants themselves were perhaps not conscious of (Patton, 1987; Atkinson & Hammersley, 1998), though in this respect the cautionary words of Goffman (2002) on the 'precarious' business of providing 'rationalisations' of others' experiences are also important to note.

For purposes of continuity with the linked questionnaires and to facilitate comparison and analysis of the data, I devised the observation form around the same set of approaches to teaching and learning. In doing this, I planned to ascertain the uses to which specific approaches to teaching and learning are put in the practical context of the classroom (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985; Grossman, Wilson & Shulman, 1989); Banks, Leach & Moon, 1999; Green, 2005c). I was also able to make observational evaluation of students' responses to such approaches and gain insight into their perceptible benefits and disadvantages. These qualitative observational data were set alongside both qualitative and quantitative questionnaire responses in order to evaluate or 'crystallise' (Janesick, 2003) the validity of comments on the usefulness of individual approaches and also offered an insight into the range of ways and contexts in which these approaches were employed. Observations also provided an insight into the variety of teaching and learning approaches adopted within a single teaching session, information not available through the questionnaires, looking at ways in which teachers and lecturers combined approaches within teaching sessions, the importance of this in establishing an effective classroom dynamic (and/or the ways in which these established the 'boundaries' of the experience) and the impact this has upon student learning in a variety of learning contexts. It was also important, however, to recognise the interaction between the 'viewer' and the 'viewed' in the construction of meaning (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Schwandt, 1994) and the dangers of this (Goffman, 2002), with the incorporation of the voice of the 'viewed' and its role in the formulation of theoretical analysis.

3.10 Conclusions

Taken together, the three methods of data collection explored in this chapter provided a variety of insight into the experiences and expectations of students entering higher education. They also provided access to the expectations (and/or students' perceptions

of the expectations) of teachers at both sixth form and higher education levels, expectations which play a powerful formative role in students' experiences. Importantly, the variety of methods was employed in order to create a means of cross-verifying the data gathered. As has been indicated, cycles of data collection and analysis overlapped in the course of work on this thesis (see Research Programme in section 3.2 above). This made the gathering and analysis of data an iterative process through which developing ideas and hypotheses could be tested and developed or rejected.

Chapter 4

Analysis of Data – Key Background Issues

4.1 Introduction

The following two chapters analyse data gathered during my research. This analysis is undertaken within the four thematic areas employed in the review of literature in Chapter 2.

This chapter presents data treating:

- **student and teacher expectations;**
- **curriculum and assessment;**
- **student study skills.**

The fourth thematic area:

- **student ‘location’ and pedagogy**

is considered separately, in Chapter 5. The reasons for this are twofold. Firstly, expectations, curriculum, assessment and study skills provide the foundations upon which students entering higher education build their experiences of learning and are key features in their abilities to define and respond to matters of pedagogy. These are therefore treated first. Secondly, as I approached questionnaire, interview and observational data gathered in the course of my research, issues of student ‘location’ (an understanding of where students *are*, cognitively, metacognitively, and processually in terms of their relation to and ability to engage with their English Studies) and related issues of pedagogy came increasingly to the fore. My treatment of data in this area therefore became fuller, and is presented separately.

4.2 Epistemology and Ontology

Hamlyn (1995, 242) defines epistemology as the 'nature of knowledge, its possibility, scope and general basis'. A similar definition is offered by Jenkins (1992, 20), who sees epistemology as 'a critical concern with how and if it is possible to know the world and how one can justify any particular claim to knowledge'. This establishes clearly the fundamental basis of the act of research as the researcher seeks to extrapolate the scope of knowledge from a specific context. Crotty (1998, 8) identifies how objectivism provides an interesting additional dimension, agreeing that epistemology is 'what it means to know', but seeing this as 'objectified in the people we are studying'. Meaning is thus seen as inherent within the subject of study. These epistemological perspectives proved both illuminating and challenging as I approached the gathering and analysis of my data. In researching my chosen field I was aware that my subject dealt with dialectical processes and operated according to multiple dichotomies. Similarly, if I was fully to engage with issues of significance in students' transition in the study of English, my inquiry required the simultaneous consideration of:

- students of English;
- the pedagogy of English; and
- English as a discipline, or a set of related disciplines.

Any particular claim to knowledge, therefore, or any claim to originality of perception arising from my research, must be based in a close alignment of these distinct but linked research subjects.

The challenge I faced, then, was how most effectively to extract objectified meaning from my data through analysis, and to evaluate its validity. From this perspective, epistemology treats not only issues of knowledge, but also questions of 'justification', thus entering into the realms of ontological proof. The ontological 'study of being'

(Hughes & Sharrock (1997,5), or the exploration of 'what kind of things really exist in the world', are thus fundamentally connected to epistemological notions of the nature of knowledge. In addition, given the reflexive nature of any educational inquiry, the analysis of my data had to reflect Kamberelis & Dimitriadis' (2005) demand for the establishment of 'knowledge and how people come to have knowledge', providing a metacognitive dimension to questions of 'knowing' and the philosophical limitations of knowledge. Realist perspectives, for instance, dictate that all claims to scientific knowledge are imperfect, as meanings transcend individuality. Unconscious and subconscious motivations for people's actions and responses, for example, may undermine the validity of certain conclusions. It was thus important that my collection and analysis of data should closely acknowledge and reflect the culture and context from which that data emerged (Jacob, 1992). This was essential in order to take account of the claims of epistemic relativity – the perspective that all views are socially constructed, and that knowledge is to that extent transient.

Data Analysis thus became a complex series of processes through which I sought to extract meaning from the raw data collected. According to Tesch (1995), this is a process which aims at formalisation – the identification of emergent themes and their justification. This process of searching for meaning and the justification of it became a process refined by iterative cycles of data collection and data analysis, as explored in Chapter 3. The interpretation of one set of data led to the targeted collection of new data until meaningful analysis was complete (Sapsford & Jupp, 1998). The verification of conclusions drawn from raw data – what Janesick (2003) refers to as the 'crystallisation' of data – was also important. Within my own research, the employment of three methods of data collection – linked questionnaires, observation and interview – provided a means by which data analysis and reading iteratively 'fed forward' into the collection of new data and into further cycles of reading. The use of these three methods of data collection also provided a means by which any individual set of data could be verified or validated against other sources.

4.3 Student and teacher expectations

4.3.1 Introduction

Booth (1997) suggests that the issue of academic expectation is one of the most important factors operating in the process of transition between sixth form and university. The expectations held by teachers, lecturers and students are a variously conscious crystallisation of their experiences to date of the subject in which they engage. Such expectations are a powerful, internalised force, and have a deep influence on the success with which students make the transition between sixth form and university. Transition can thus be seen as a meeting of expectations, and depends upon one of two things:

- the extent to which individual students' subjective expectations match their lecturers' subjective expectations or subject constructs (Banks, Leach & Moon, 1999) and the notionally objective requirements of the institution or department in terms of course content, structure, work patterns, forms of assessment, performance indicators and so on; or
- where a workable coalescence of views does not exist, it depends upon the extent to which the various involved parties (the student, the teacher and the institution) can modify (or are prepared to modify) their various expectations to accommodate the expectations, needs, behaviours and schemas of subject of the others.

In this respect, Bourdieu's notion of the habitus, which identifies – though it does not define – distinct dispositions and schemas and their underlying assumptions and expectations within individuals and social groupings, is illuminating. Similarly, Vygotsky's identification of socially constructed and culturally transmitted 'rules', which operate as internalised guiding systems, provide stimulants to thought. In analysing the following data surrounding student expectations it is possible to identify some of the components of such a habitus and the nature of such internalised rules amongst sixth form students of English. From this, it is possible to go on to consider how such embodied expectations may impact upon the early stages of students' higher education

English Studies. Such an analysis is undertaken with the caveat that the actual formative elements of the habitus (a philosophical construct), and such rules (a psychological construct) are ultimately inaccessible (Jenkins, 1992), as the conditions of internalisation are in both cases unreproducible.

As has already been suggested, developing the argument of Evans (1993), English is a subject constructed at and around boundaries and meeting points. The four modalities of reading, writing, speaking and listening, for example, (even if we have to modify notions of 'speaking' and 'listening' within the context of virtual learning environments (Chambers & Gregory, 2006)) are all predicated upon notions of meeting. The reader and the author meet through the shared medium of a text, and are mutually engaged in the making of meaning. Similarly, two or more people engaged in conversation meet through their talk to construct negotiated meanings and outcomes. When we enter the domain of the English classroom, such notions of meeting proliferate. In a seminar, for instance, students and teachers (in person), critics and theorists (through texts, ICTs or through theories and concepts) and authors (in person or through texts) all meet in a mutual act of subject construction. Such meetings, their relative importance and the form(s) they take are further complexified depending upon the pedagogical focus established. The balance of the 'voices' in the classroom or the seminar, for example, will vary according to whether the session is teacher- or learner-centred, or according to whether the focus is on primary literary text(s) or secondary theoretical text(s) and the relationship that is established between them. The pedagogical context of the English classroom, its meetings and its boundaries is, therefore, extraordinarily complex in its nature.

Meetings within the classroom context, however, are not limited to the participants present in the teaching room. Each individual student and teacher will bring into the teaching session a multifarious set of views drawing upon their previous experiences of English and other relevant influences. Students will bring with them the views and expectations of their sixth form teachers, their parents and their peers, and may also be influenced by a range of other factors, such as their previous experiences of particular learning environments or concerns with regard to assessment of the topic under

consideration. Similarly, teachers will bring with them the views and expectations of colleagues, memories of their own higher education and higher education teachers, as well as factors related to the department and institution within which they work, or the need to prepare students for a particular task. (See Appendix 7 for a diagrammatic representation of significant meetings within the English classroom.)

Within the socio-pedagogical learning environment of the classroom, then, a series of individual, but overlapping and mutually interactive meetings take place. As has been suggested, these meetings, socially constructed as they are, depend upon co-operation. However, they are likely also to contain elements of conflict (maybe ritualised and symbolic, or maybe actual). Such conflict-based interactions may occur on multiple levels: between students within the group, between the group and the teacher, or between the teacher and the institution. In each of these situations we see operationalised what Bourdieu would explain as the conflict, based on deliberate mis-recognition, between the subjectively constructed habitus and the objective 'other'. Thus, he would argue, the classroom is a place of potent boundaries established on the basis of conflict between expectations, dispositions and schemes. The means *by* which and the extent *to* which these expectations, dispositions and schemes engage with, or fail to engage with each other, provides a key area for analysis when considering students' experiences of transition. Vygotsky, too, recognises the presence of socially constructed cultural boundaries within the learning environment. A culture of grade expectations, for instance, has led to undue reliance on summative evaluations of students' performance and cognitive ability as they emerge from A level. However, without carefully deconstructing students' A level experiences and expectations, the provision of suitably challenging interactive work with the teacher or more able peers is difficult and may limit students' access to learning. This is a very real danger on the evidence of the practice of many higher education institutions (Gawthrope & Martin, 2003) which rely solely, at the admissions stage, on A level examination data and who provide limited opportunities for truly interactive engagement with academic staff.

Through use of the linked questionnaires, observation and interviews, I was able to gain

insight into the perspectives of:

- sixth form students;
- first year undergraduates;
- sixth form teachers; and
- university lecturers.

The data gathered from each of these groups, and the perspectives they offer, reflects a varying set of expectations, assumptions, concerns and interests, all of which interact in the process of transition from sixth form to university. They are formed in part by the operation of external forces, and are in part the construct of internalised processes and sign systems. The interpersonally and intrapersonally constructed influences these bring to bear on the processes of transition form a significant set of meetings and boundaries within the transitional process. In analysing the differing (and in some ways conflicting) set of responses of these four groups, key expectational and experiential issues emerge that cast light on some of the difficulties of transition.

4.3.2 Pleasure

According to data gathered from sixth form and first year undergraduate questionnaires, a large proportion of students hold expectations of pleasure in undertaking an English degree. Most undergraduate respondents state that a love of English study at school and passion for literature are the primary reasons for their choice to go on to study English at degree level. It seems clear from this that pleasure (and specifically the pleasures attendant on A level study) is a significant expectation they carry with them into their university studies.

Pleasure, however, is not always an anticipated part of the student experience. A number of significant indications to this effect emerge from qualitative questionnaire data. The

following observations by two sixth formers (my emphasis) serve well to exemplify this:

SF 90: *An interest in the subject is important, as well as an ability to closely analyse texts that may not appeal to your taste.*

SF 111: *I think the key aspect needed in a student is an enthusiasm for the subject which would make the vast amounts of reading (as the main component to the degree) not seem tedious, a chore.*

Such observations give clear indications that students, even at sixth form level, are aware of the fact that reading for study and reading for pleasure are not straightforwardly linked. This is an issue further complicated by the substantive differences between sixth form and university English Studies.

The complex relationship between pleasure and study also emerged in student interviews. Interviewee S2 suggests the difference between study and pleasure quite clearly:

S2: *Well the texts I have to study, I just pick them up and read them like I would read a novel - for pleasure beforehand, you know.*

The implication that future readings of the texts are undertaken for purposes other than pleasure, and that the student's response to them is different in these subsequent readings, is clear.

A similar distinction is drawn by interviewee S5, who observes:

S5: *I think that you can't really enjoy [a text] as much when you read it now, because you have to be focusing on what does this mean, what does this mean, what's the theme, what's the context. And I mean obviously you still enjoy it, but it's not... it's kind of less reading for pleasure, but reading to kind of finish the book in time and to like have thought of some good*

things to say about it.

Interviewee S4 locates one source of this problematic issue of pleasure explicitly, relating it to the impact of core modules and their content on her first year experience:

S4: *Yes. I thought it would be more enjoyable. But I think that will be so next year, because we've got a choice.*

This student goes on to discuss in some detail the impact of an obligatory module on the eighteenth century novel, an experience which has clearly had a significant impact on her perceptions of her course and consequently on the ease with which she has been able to manage her academic transition:

S4: *... I think what the problem is I've got other friends that are doing English at [name deleted] and [name deleted] and they got to pick their modules, so they got a choice of what to study, so basically there's a higher chance of them enjoying them because they chose it. Whereas with us it was like here's eighteenth century literature go and read it, and it's really hard because we're not used to it first of all and second of all, it's just the same almost. Even though they are completely different stories, you lose enjoyment, which is what I thought university would be, you just enjoy reading it. Whereas you just dread like getting through the next text and the next text and then when you get behind you know you've got to go back and ...*

The content of the first year and its impact on students is, evidently, a very significant issue for this student, who finds her expectations of enjoyment unfulfilled. The pleasure question is a significant issue. Many students surveyed listed enjoyment and love of reading as one of the key reasons they opted for English at university. However, as Evans (1993) suggests, reading for pleasure and reading for study are by no means straightforwardly connected in higher education English Studies. The ideal that work

reading should be pleasure reading is not readily attainable.

Some students evidently feel guilt if they are not enjoying their reading, or if they do not believe they are reading enough. For example, S5:

S5: *Well I don't really do what I'm supposed to be doing. I don't do the extra reading before lectures which other people do that I talk to. But I don't actually prepare for lectures at all, apart from obviously like trying to read at least most of the play or book that we'll be doing. But apart from that I don't really do anything.*

This student also recognises, however, that there are skills in reading that she lacks, which need to be mastered if she is to improve this situation:

S5: *[T]he first year I guess you're not used to having to speed-read so much and we don't do any critical reading or anything in school, so I guess you just have to get used to reading a play a week, a novel a week as well as like secondary reading and stuff like that.*

Asked to describe her weekly reading, interviewee S2 clearly separates the acts of reading for study and reading for pleasure:

S2: *Well typically one novel, one Shakespeare play, one poet - maybe about ten poems - and some medieval text. So quite a lot of reading as well. And some extended reading. And then I still like to read for pleasure if I can.*

This quantity of reading evidently poses difficulties for some students, such as S4:

S4: *To read a Shakespeare play, a novel, do the assignment, the Medieval literature tales, look at about five poems, plus additional reading*

which we're expected to do. It's really, really hard to find the time to do it and to get through everything.

The impact of this on the student's enjoyment of her studies is significant. She goes on to state:

S4: *It just becomes work, it's not fun. It's I've got to get through this text in time, because you can't read to enjoy. And that's how A levels became as well. You stopped like enjoying learning.*

4.3.3 Contact time and the nature of contact

The issue of contact time was also raised by students in interviews. Student S1, for example states:

S1: *I thought there'd be a lot more time, because in the seminars they're only an hour long and it's quite vague.*

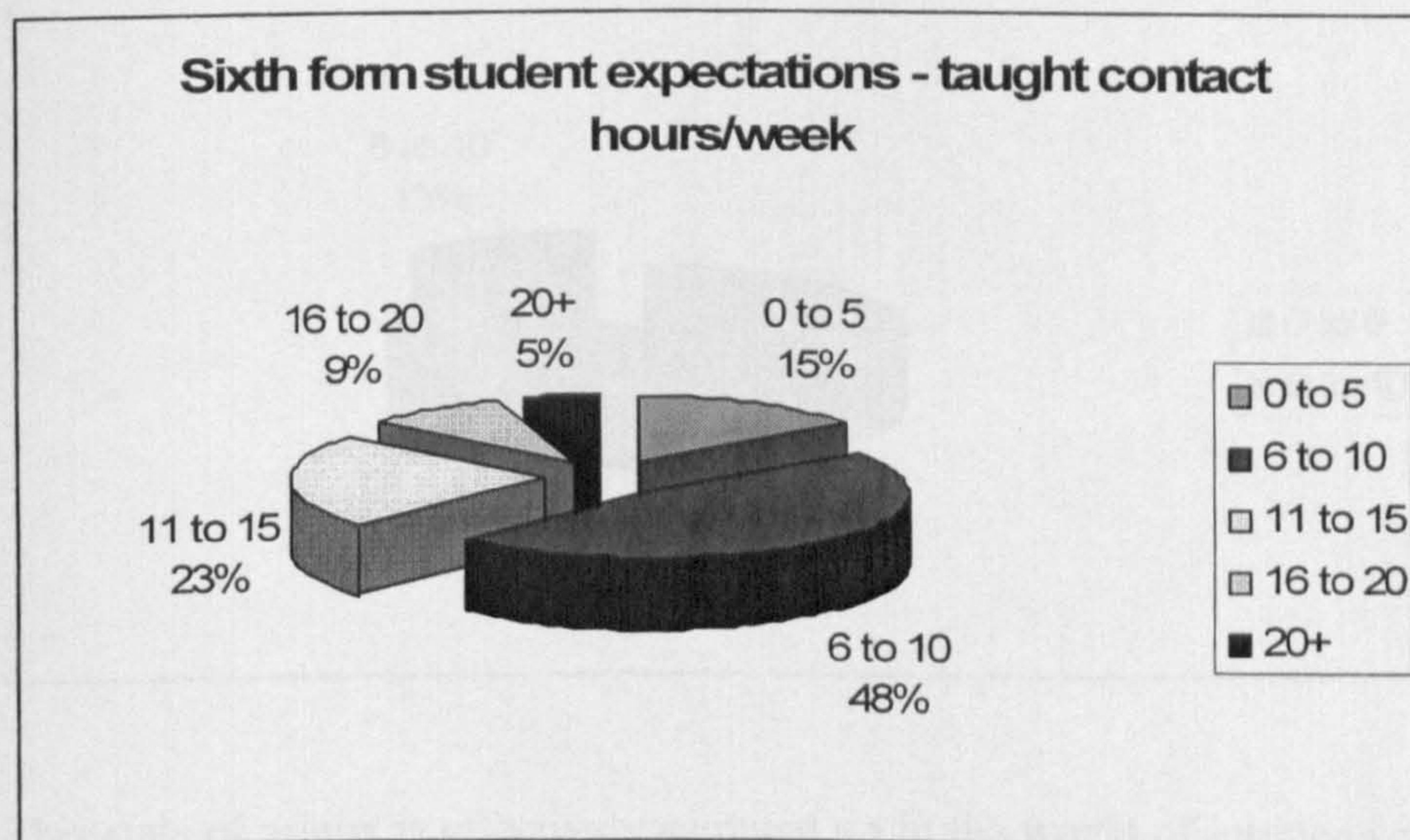
On the evidence of questionnaire data, this is a not untypical view amongst sixth form students entering university English. Of the 128 sixth formers surveyed, 48 (or 37%) anticipated receiving eleven or more contact hours per week (see Figure 8 for a full breakdown).

This is in contrast to the actuality expressed by first year students surveyed, none of whom receive more than ten hours per week taught contact time (see Figure 9).

Within the institution where I undertook my observational and interview research, the first year timetable amounted to nine contact hours per week. This covered the four core modules followed by all first year students, each of which was delivered through one lecture and one seminar per week. The final hour lecture was dedicated to a writing skills course run within the department. This is a radical departure from the situation at A level,

where students receive an average of six to seven hours of English per week, covering a much more limited range of material.

Figure 8: Sixth form student expectations of university English – taught contact hours/week



The reality of receiving less than ten contact hours per week, which is typical of first year undergraduate English timetables, reflects a significant change in working patterns for students, who are used to congested A level timetables. The sudden reduction in taught contact time after sixth form or college, where students typically follow three or four A level courses (between eighteen and twenty-four taught hours per week in total), not surprisingly impacts significantly on the nature of student learning. The nature of contact with staff is also markedly different. Whilst A level tends to be taught in small groups (rarely more than twenty, and frequently less than this), lectures and seminars are often delivered to much larger groups. In addition, A level groups tend to be characterised by a close relationship between teacher and student, fostered over many shared classroom hours within an intimate social context. The lack of such relationship with university teaching staff and peers within the teaching group is also a significant factor in distancing the experiences of learning at sixth form and university levels from each other. It is not surprising that under such circumstances, some students find difficulties in making the

know students at all, and know some far less than others.

Assistance within the university context, however, is available not only through academic staff. A number of the students interviewed identified that courses or support were offered on a range of issues related to academic performance, covering areas such as academic writing skills, Information and Communications Technology literacy, using the library, and support sessions related to specific learning needs. However, contrary to the recommendations of Durkin & Main (2002), these tended to be centrally- rather than subject-based.

Sixth formers' perceptions of what university study will entail and the nature of contact with staff they will receive are also illuminating. The following selection of views, offered in questionnaire responses, serves as illustration. One respondent focuses specifically on the issue of student-lecturer contact:

SF 109: *...the work is intense and perhaps too independent. From what I have been told the teaching is lacking in personal and further help outside the lectures.*

but also goes on to relate this to general perceptions about the nature of the teaching she will receive:

SF 109: *Very basic teaching approaches from what I gather.*

The nature of teaching and the expectation that university teaching encompasses only a narrow range of styles is also the impression of another respondent:

SF 89: *I enjoy creative activities, so lectures on English would bore me – not enough participation.*

And in the case of a third sixth form student, the typical staples of university teaching –

the lecture and the seminar – are seen to be intimidating fora for learning, distinctly different to the experiences of A level:

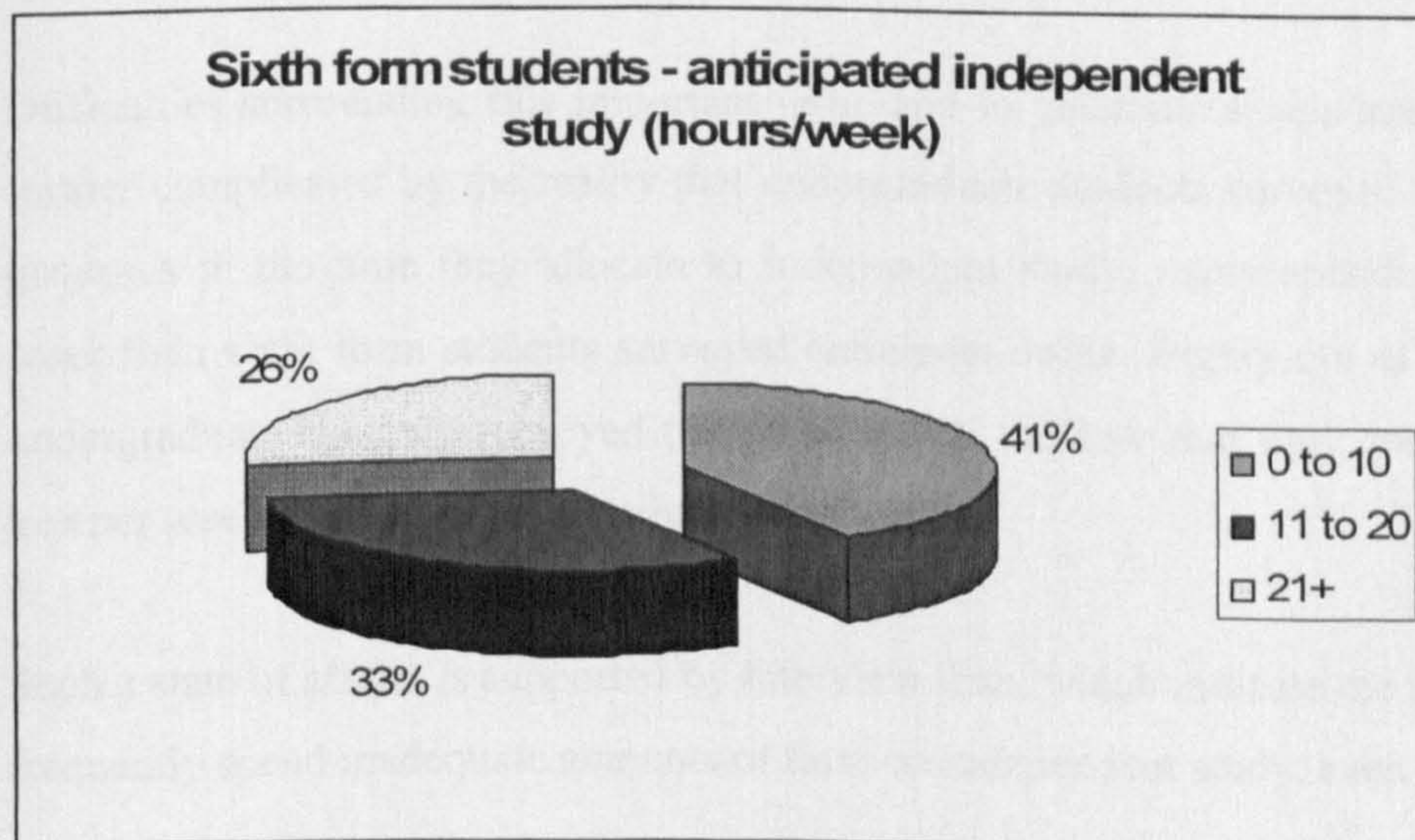
SF 49: *[English] would be a subject that I would particularly like to continue with. However, the different teaching styles, lectures and seminars appear to be slightly daunting and different to our current styles.*

The significantly different nature of staff-student contact and the amount of it are repeatedly identified as key issues by sixth form respondents when outlining their expectations of university English.

4.3.4 Independent study

The logical corollary of a decrease in taught hours at university is that students find more of their university work than anticipated relies upon independent study. Questionnaire data identify that 68 out of 128 (or 53%) of the sixth form students surveyed anticipate

Figure 10: Sixth form students – anticipated independent study at university (hours/week)



spending fifteen hours or less per week engaged in independent study, and 52 (or 41%) anticipate doing ten hours or less (see Figure 10). This would suggest that a large proportion of students arrive at university with unrealistic expectations in terms of how their study will be structured, which is likely to lead to difficulties in effectively engaging with university-style learning and consequently in successfully managing the experience of academic transition.

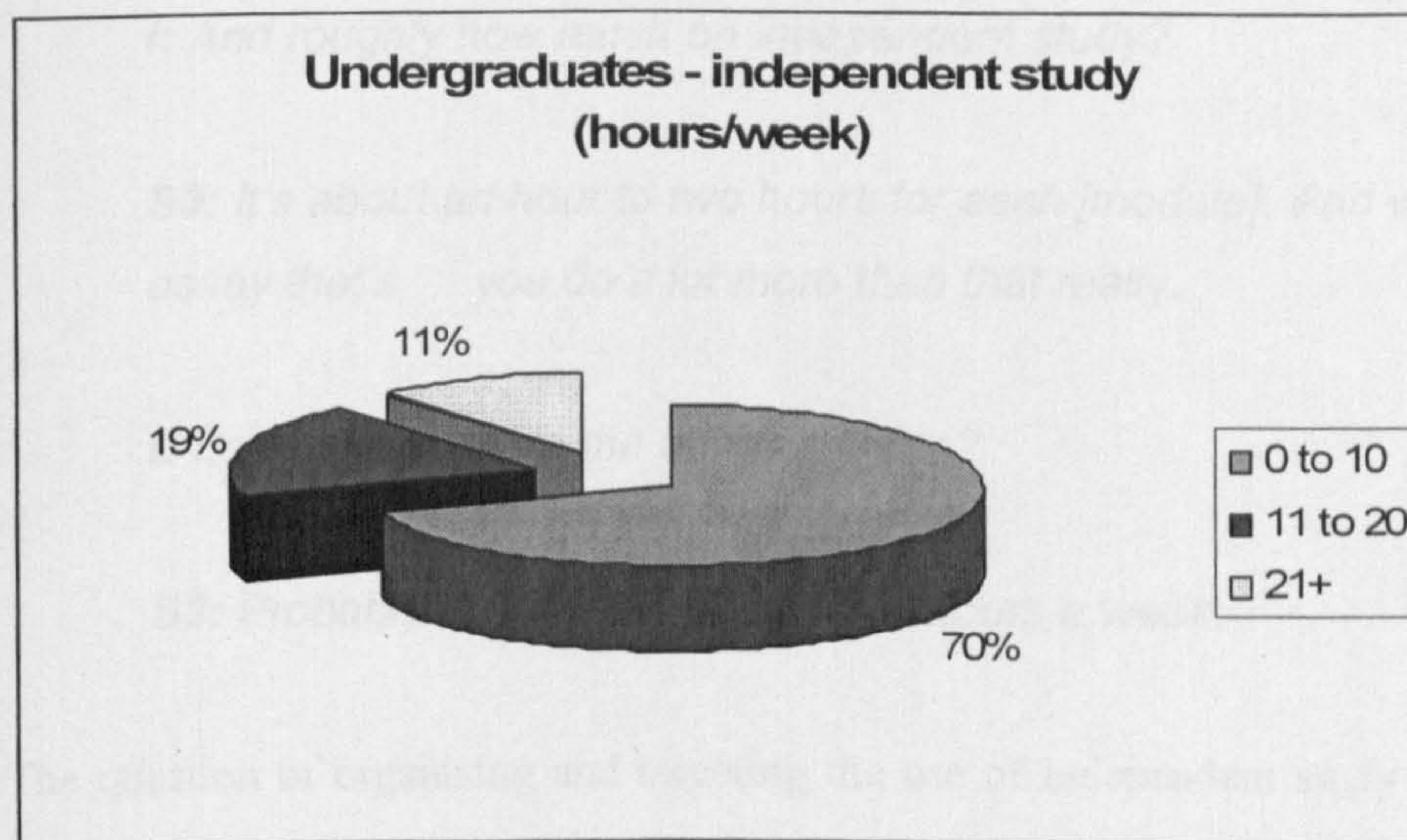
Interviewee S6 explains quite clearly how the nature of independence varies between sixth form and university:

S6: *The thing that I have found most difficult, academically, about the move to university is the independence one receives. In contrast to school, it is up to the individual to hand work in, attend seminars and lectures and to do background reading etc. This has been particularly difficult as it is not something I was used to at school. Coming from a high achieving school, where the focus was strongly on academics, and work would be chased up, lessons missed had to be explained and research was monitored, this has been particularly difficult for me.*

Difficulties surrounding this important issue and its relations to academic transition are further complicated by the reality that undergraduate students surveyed typically are not generous in the time they allocate to independent study, many spending less time per week than sixth form students surveyed anticipate doing. Eighty out of 113, or 70% of undergraduate students surveyed (see Figure 11), indicate that they spend ten hours or less per week on independent study.

Such a state of affairs is supported by interview data, which indicate the fact that students frequently spend inadequate amounts of time on independent study, even where specific

Figure 11: Undergraduates – independent study (hours/week)



advice has been offered by lecturers. Interviewee S1 is unsure precisely how long she dedicates to independent study:

S1: *Not as much as I should. Um, (laughs) it does though, it takes a while to get through the novels. So I suppose the majority of it is that. Um, I'm not sure. I don't know. Um, because it's not a set amount a day. It's, um, like because I have complete Tuesday and Thursday off. Um, so I'll spend a good amount of time on Tuesdays and Thursdays and Sundays, but maybe not do anything on a Saturday or a Monday.*

I: *So roughly ...*

S1: *Um (long pause) maybe twelve to fifteen depending on the book, the novel I'm doing.*

A similar imprecision and lack of organisation regarding independent study is also

evident in other responses. For example:

I: And roughly how much on independent study?

S3: It's about an hour to two hours for each [module]. And when there's an essay that's ... you do a lot more than that really.

I: So could you give me a rough figure?

S3: Probably about eleven to twelve hours a week.

The question of organising and targeting the use of independent study also arises. One interviewee suggests the need to develop personal study timetables in order effectively to manage preparation:

S4: I wasn't prepared in terms of I should spend this much time on this and that much time on this. I don't think I prepared myself enough.

The student goes on, however, to suggest how the host department could assist students in learning to manage their time:

S4: [O]bviously we are adults and need to take responsibility for ourselves, but I think that if we just had a little bit of a push; for example if you spent this much time and this much time and just took it from there ourselves. But I think it's an individual fault.

Another interviewee also identifies the need for specific time guidance:

S3: Things like time management. How we should be spending our time.

It would seem from the interview data, that the lack of clear support and guidance

students receive in structuring and constructively managing their independent study time is a particularly significant issue and does not relate solely to time management. Students' abilities in these areas relate not only to matters of study skills, but also draw on wider issues of subject knowledge and subject knowledge development. It is clear that students need to be proactively introduced by their teachers to syntactic dimensions of subject (Grossman, Wilson & Shulman, 1989). They need to be taught the tools and forms of inquiry within their discipline. Such teaching should address canons of understanding, the formation of evidence and proof accepted within that discipline and the ways in which new material is brought into the body of knowledge. This is subject not as content, but rather as process. These are issues with which many students entering higher education may be unfamiliar. However, within the context of university study, where often substantial quantities of independent research and extended writing are required, they are a key element of success. As developing learners, students need systematically to be introduced to the conventions and processes by which a discipline functions. Tacit knowledge of such procedures carries a certain weight, but metacognitive engagement with them needs to be made explicit and detailed within practice as students progress if they are to become autonomous practitioners. Also, bearing in mind Vygotsky's (1978) emphasis on the importance of social learning and accessing of the zone of proximal development, it is important to question the value of long hours spent on unmediated individual study. Benefits would accrue from students organising themselves into study groups of a more or less formal nature.

The issue of independence at university is also a constantly emerging theme within sixth formers' questionnaire responses, and is quite often viewed in a negative light. One respondent feels that the greater autonomy required of university study is likely to impact unfavourably upon his academic performance:

SF 100: *I feel that a lot more pressure would be put on me to take control of my own research and education, which could have a negative effect on my work.*

The reasons why this is a likely outcome may be touched upon by another respondent, who links the issue of independent study with the issue of contact with staff:

SF 66: *I don't think there would be the help available that I would need.*

This is a fear also expressed by a third respondent, who identifies a lack of security inherent within the university system. The immediate and stark contrast to the school environment is drawn by another sixth form student:

SF 56: *The idea of independent study at university would worry me, as I like the security of having teachers at hand (like in our school environment). I worry that it would be entirely different.*

Such fears about the nature and/or lack of staff contact and the quantity of independent study required at university are related to a feeling amongst many first year undergraduates that their A level studies failed effectively to prepare them for their degrees. This, they are clear, is because A level typically involves a large quantity of 'spoon-feeding', where teachers rather than students take responsibility for learning.

Interviewee S3 relates the issue of staff contact directly to reading – and the specific skills of reading in higher education – and comments on how he would appreciate support in terms of his reading and response to text:

S3: *It would be quite nice just to see if the angle I'm approaching is kind of the right angle just to get that reassurance so that I can further it rather than being in the deep end and thinking am I reading this in the right way?*

Asked about whether the department offers anything in the way of support to assist with this, he responds with the uncertainty that is typical of first year undergraduates who do not know who and what to ask:

S3: *There might be, but I haven't found it, and I haven't really been encouraged to look for it either.*

This means that not only are students making the transition from school to university required to come to terms with often radically different perceptions of how the map (Evans, 1993) of English is drawn, but also with an unfamiliar system in which the relationship between staff and students is significantly different. It is not surprising under these circumstances that some students feel as if they are, to a large extent, left to their own devices.

This is, by the accounts of many students surveyed, a significant change from the experience of studying at A level. Interviewee S5 comments:

S5: *I suppose what they're trying to do is that we're not being spoon-fed here at university, because that's what you do at school.*

Her easy equation of study at school with what she terms 'spoon-feeding' is a repeated theme in first year undergraduate survey responses. Students draw a clear distinction between their experiences (and consequently their expectations) at A level and at university.

U 93: *I don't think my study post-16 prepared me well, since at university most – nearly all – learning is done on your own. Whereas in college you are almost spoon-fed.*

The in many ways solitary (and possibly isolating) experience of university study is in contradistinction to the more 'shared' experience of learning within the sixth form environment, where the teacher-student relationship is much more like a partnership. This is an issue further explored by another first year undergraduate, who observes:

U 90: *[S]ixth form education ... was very different to the study of English*

at degree level. Individual thinking was not nearly as encouraged and the emphasis was on teacher-based learning rather than independent study.

The nature of the relationship between teacher and learner is explored more fully here. Although independent study clearly does form part of the A level experience, the purposes and nature of it are significantly different from the functions it serves within higher education. This respondent's reference to 'teacher-based learning' suggests the extent to which A level remains a teacher-constructed and assessment-focused curriculum (Hodgson & Spours, 2003a; Green, 2005a; Bluett, Cockcroft *et al*, 2004) rather than providing progression towards autonomy. This is far more starkly identified by another undergraduate student, who sums up the contrast between A level and degree level study thus:

U 47: A level: too much guidance constantly thrown at you. At university: no help and have to keep asking.

These data suggest that students moving from school to university are required to make radically dislocating transitions.

What emerges from this selection of responses is a clear indication of the differing nature of the experience of teaching and learning between A level and university. Students entering university English studies have, in many cases, been inadequately prepared for the experience of learning they will have there. The A level experience, the largest force in constructing students' expectations of what English is, is radically different, in many cases, to the reality of university study. This is summed up effectively by this first year undergraduate respondent:

U 85: The mode of study is completely different. I had no idea how independent I would have to be in study terms. Self-discipline is key, as university study is incredibly independent.

And another goes still further, offering a useful insight into the nature of university English study:

U 83: A level engendered a great interest within me. It stoked a passion. However, in terms of preparation it did very little. University is about working and thinking on your own and for yourself.

New undergraduates are not naive about the nature of the change they are experiencing. This became more evident in the course of interviews, where students proved themselves capable of reflecting on what they believe to be their university department's rationale in operating in the way it does. Commenting on the issue of independence, for example, which is, as demonstrated, one of the key areas of divergence between A level and university, interviewee S5 states:

S5: When you come to university you're supposed to be more independent and able to like motivate yourself and focus yourself, so I suppose that if they did give us a list of everything we had to think about and a list of tasks and things we'd never ever really be prepared at all for anything unless we had like a list of instructions.

Another interviewee, S5, offers a similar apology. When asked if seminar leaders provide structured suggestions about how to manage personal study, he responds:

S3: No. Which is quite good, as everyone has their own technique and it allows them to explore that, I guess.

Students' acquiescence and preparedness to accept the means by which university courses are delivered, and the 'apologies' they make for 'the system' are evidence of what Bourdieu (1990c) would see as pedagogic action at work. Pedagogic action he defines as 'the imposition of a cultural arbitrary [in this case cultural and educational capital] by an arbitrary power' (Bourdieu, 1990c, 5).

The means by which such arbitrary cultural and pedagogic power is manifested is through what Bourdieu terms symbolic violence. Symbolic violence, however, can only subsist where both the dominator and the dominated collude in such a distribution of power. Students' apologies for a system of pedagogy they cannot fully relate to in higher education English Studies is a good example of such collusion. Attendant on this is a sense amongst the students interviewed that where difficulty occurs, that difficulty is somehow in their interests, and such difficulties are seen as developmental or improving.

The granting of power to lecturers and the higher education institution is also an issue related to Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence within pedagogic action and is closely allied to issues of power. This becomes clear as Bourdieu (1990c, 6) observes:

arbitrary power... is the precondition for the establishment of a relation of pedagogic communication.

Such arbitrary power, Bourdieu is clear, must exist for the classroom effectively to function. Its existence is the overarching defining feature in establishing the boundaries around which pedagogic interactions are constructed and negotiated. This arbitrary power inevitably, Bourdieu (1990c, 10) goes on to suggest:

inculcates towards reproducing the power relations which are the basis of its power of arbitrary imposition.

By 'arbitrary', Bourdieu clearly does not refer to anything random or undefined. Rather, he seems to mean a particular, but non-specified corpus, either of people, or of knowledge, or a conceptual formulation. The right granted to this arbitrary to implement pedagogic action is termed by Bourdieu (1990c) 'pedagogic authority'. In granting the right to exert pedagogic authority, students confer on lecturers the right to impose. Such imposition is symbolic violence which, regardless of its actual legitimacy, is legitimised by students' very attitude of acquiescence.

Students are, then, prepared to offer apologies for a system they are coming to understand. However, acquiescence within the new learning environment and the recognition that they must modify personal working habits and conceptualisations of subject (what Banks, Leach & Moon (1999) term their 'personal subject constructs'), should not be mistaken for contentment. Students interviewed in the course of this study were often forthright in expressing their views of how their lecturers and the department in which they were studying could have made their experience of transition into the world of higher education learning easier. For all students, the lack of support at the operational, or syntactic level (Grossman, Wilson & Shulman, 1989) was a significant factor in making the transition to university more difficult.

The reasons advanced for this demonstrate students' perception that there are limits to the amount of support lecturers are prepared to provide. This may be on the grounds that to do so somehow undermines the academic credentials of study, or that to do so encourages student laziness. This is observed by a mature student, S2, who comments:

S2: *...some of the lecturers put their lectures on the website. I do find that useful, because - I don't know if it's an age thing because you remember things when you're eighteen that when you 50 you've got to read through five times to do it - but I find that is very useful and it makes it sink in more, but I know a lot of the lecturers don't like to do that, because then some of the kids don't go to the lectures. That's one thing I think would be good, but I understand why they don't do it.*

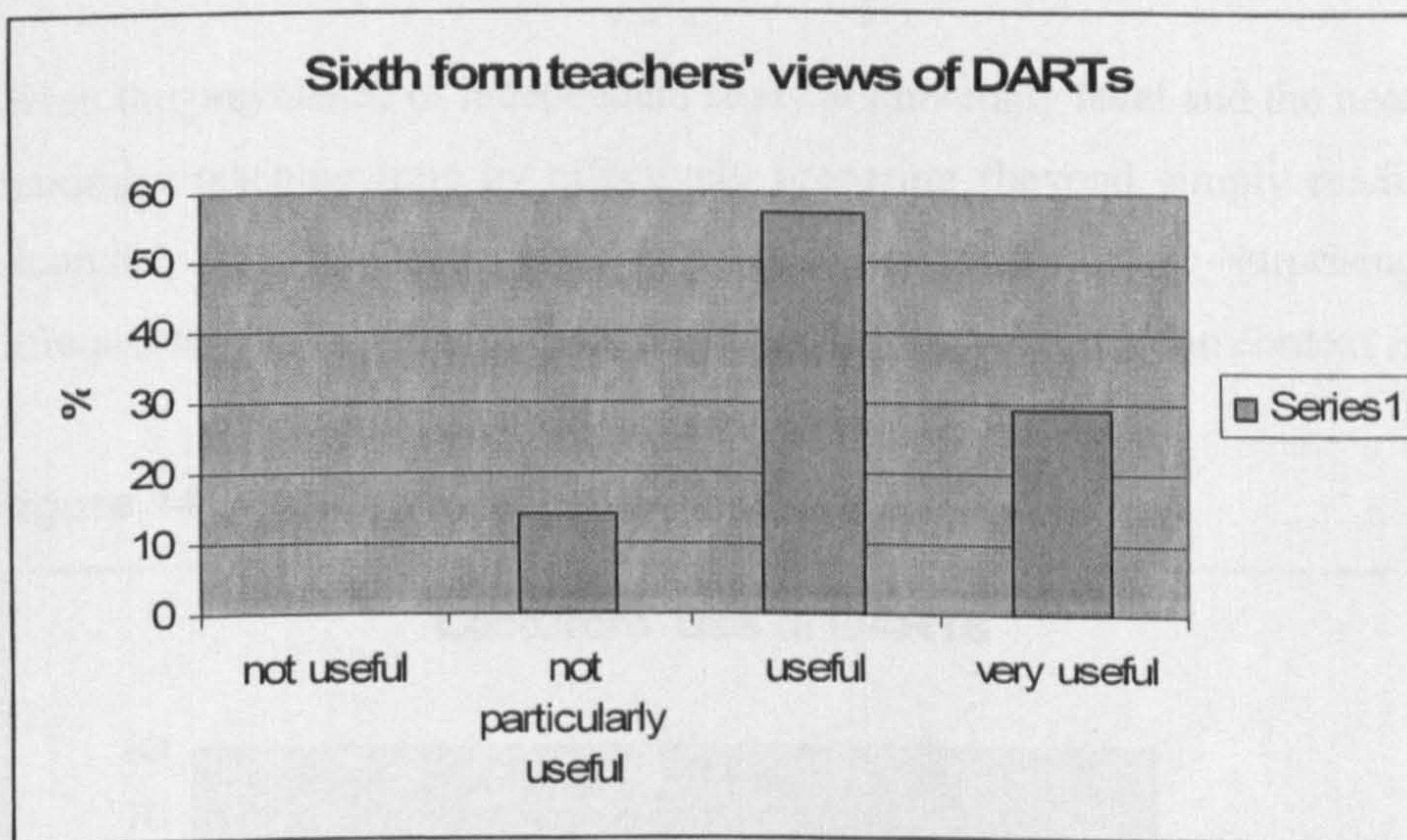
It is clear from student responses, however, that such support would be welcomed as a useful (and interim) support to students seeking to manage their learning effectively. One student observes how the provision of preparatory tasks, even of a very basic nature, would assist in preparation for and participation in teaching sessions:

S4: *It would give you more structure, because it would allow the seminar*

to be more focused as well. If everyone focused on something or like five themes, everyone could go in with all their points and really go for it, because everyone's done it. Whereas if, I don't know – I don't know how many people prepare – it can be really wishy-washy and you just touch one thing then move on to the next topic and it just doesn't work. It's really messy.

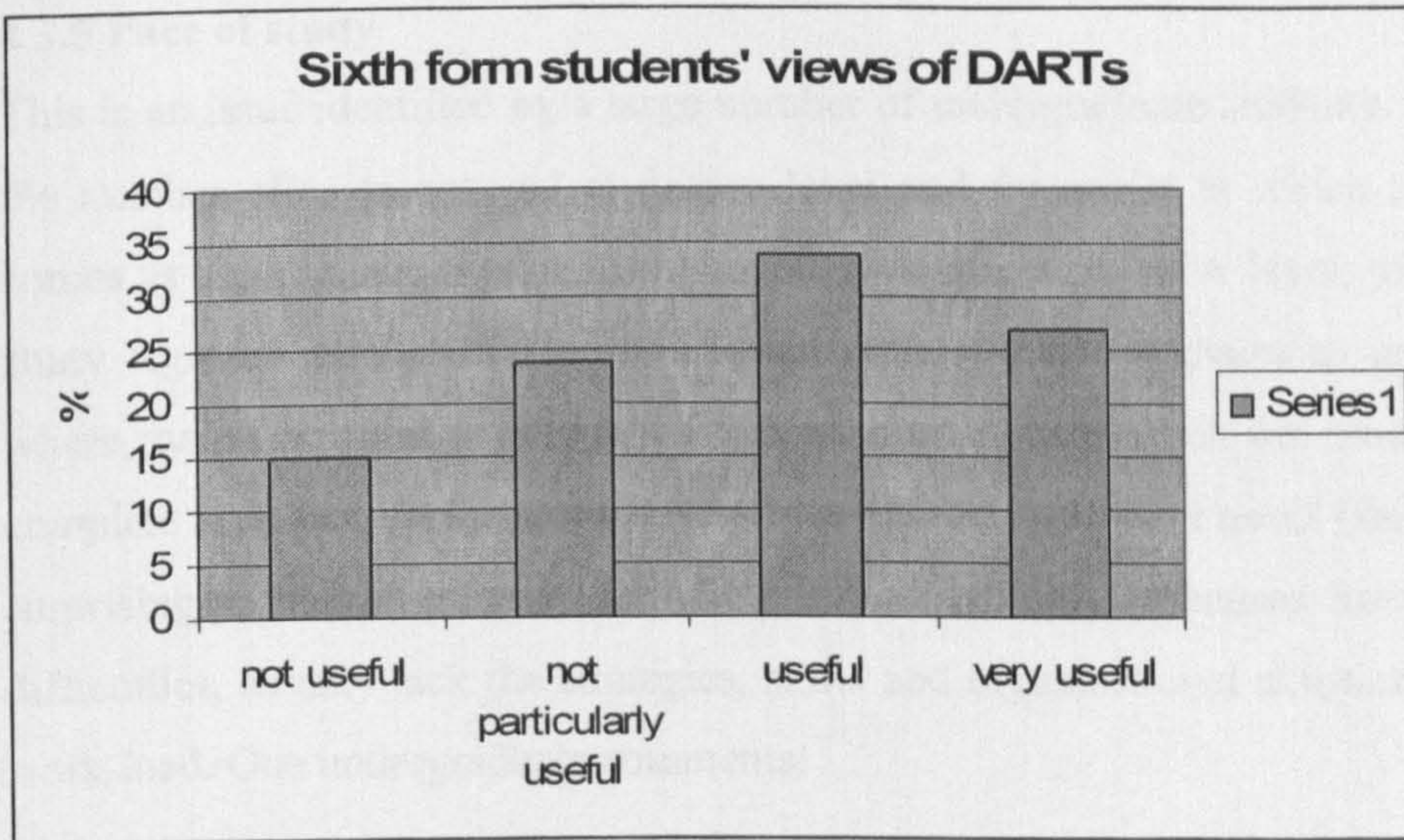
The benefits would not be for the individual teaching session alone, however. If such preparatory tasks are themselves made the subject of metacognitive and processual discussion, they aid the student in learning more effectively how to prepare themselves and can (and should) steadily be withdrawn as time progresses.

Figure 12: Sixth form teachers' views of DARTs



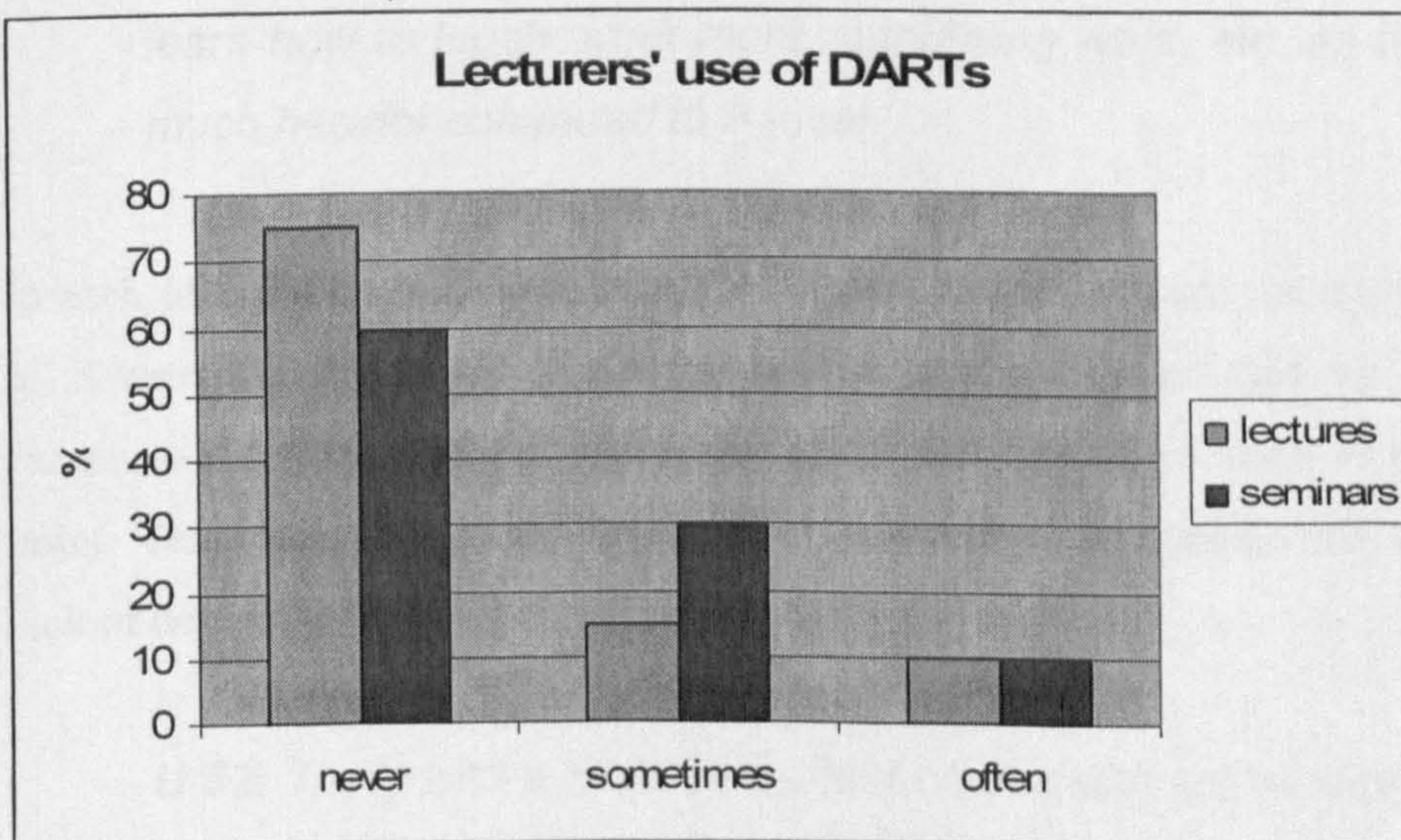
It is clear from questionnaire responses that activities such as DARTs (Directed Activities Related to Texts) are frequently used by teachers at sixth form level to structure students' responses and to enable them to prepare for teaching sessions (see Figure 12). The majority of sixth formers also relate that such activities are useful or very useful in helping them to formulate their understanding of texts (see Figure 13).

Figure 13: Sixth form students' views of DARTs



Given the prevalence of independent study at university level and the need for students to maximise teaching time by effectively preparing (beyond simply reading the text and secondary readings) for teaching sessions, it is therefore surprising to note how infrequently such methods are employed in the higher education context (see Figure 14).

Figure 14: Lecturers' use of DARTs



4.3.5 Pace of study

This is an issue identified by a large number of undergraduate students. It is evident that the number of texts covered at degree level and the speed at which they are covered comes as a complete surprise to the majority of students. At A level, most students will study eight or nine texts over a two-year course. This compares to university courses where, typically, texts are covered at the rate of one per week per module – up to four complete texts per week, one at least of which is likely to be a novel (see Figure 17). Not surprisingly, such a radical and unexpected shift in gear causes new undergraduates difficulties, as they lack the strategies, skills and organisational abilities to manage their work-load. One undergraduate comments:

***U 107:** I found the transition to degree level work hard. The pace and individual learning took some time to grasp.*

Another reflects:

***U 85:** At school we would look much closer at a text with a teacher. University asks you to look closer again, but by yourself. You need to learn how to juggle work more, prioritising work, etc. as the work load is much heavier compared to A level.*

In each of these cases, the students have clearly taken on board the implication that pace of coverage in lectures and seminars needs to be compensated for by detailed and extensive personal study. However, not all students surveyed seem to have grasped this point. This student observes the pace of coverage, and simplistically equates this with lack of depth:

***U 52:** There isn't a lot of time spent on in-depth knowledge. It seems to be basic overviews and moving on to the next topic.*

S5 provides a specific example:

S5: *I have gone from spending an entire term on Hamlet to 4 hours, which is understandable given that we cover far more texts here, but this does not make the transition any easier.*

The same is true of the following survey respondent:

U 53: *I was expecting to look at literary pieces in more depth, but some of what is done feels quite basic. I hoped to be challenged more. Also we don't seem to be given the chance ourselves to analyse pieces of literature. More in-depth discussions would make me enjoy the course much more.*

Here again the student sees the nature of coverage at university (which presupposes the importance of breadth of coverage) as a sign of lack of depth, failing apparently to identify that the kind of 'in-depth discussion' and 'challenge' she desires need to be provided by and for herself on the basis of what she has been introduced to in lectures and seminars.

The need to see teaching sessions in an entirely different way and the balancing need to redefine herself as a learner has been comprehensively grasped by another respondent, however, who offers a more sophisticated view of how she needs to perceive and use teaching sessions as a springboard for developing and engaging with taught content independently:

U 90: *Lectures [and seminars] do not only impart information, they act as guides and help you build your own ideas and opinions.*

It is in recognising both the constraints and the intentions of university teaching sessions,

and the ways in which these need to be used to form and inform independent study practices, that many students seem to find difficulty as they make the transition from school to university. The process of learning to learn requires them to recast the roles of their lecturers as teachers and themselves as learners. In this sense, the term transition is perhaps less helpful than the notion of acculturation, as students modify and develop their senses of what it means to learn and how learning takes place within the new culture of the higher education institution.

The disjunction experienced by many students at A level, however, may not to be felt by students who have followed alternative routes into higher education. This respondent, who followed the International Baccalaureate observes:

U 42: International Baccalaureate English is very similar to university with regards to depth of study, text analysis, coursework deadlines and independence. Good for preparation and a smooth transition to a degree.

Differences in view also emerge from students undertaking Access courses rather than A levels, who feel that their preparation has been generally effective, though this may also be related to the fact that students entering from Access routes tend to be mature candidates.

4.4 Curriculum and Assessment

The emphasis upon assessment under Curriculum 2000 has had a considerable impact on the form English teaching has taken at A level over recent years. The impact of this has been, in many cases, to widen the gap between the experiences of studying English at A level and at university. Far from making A level an effective preparation for degree level study, the new curriculum, with its time pressures and narrowly-targeted assessment demands (Hodgson & Spours, 2003a; Barlow, 2005c), has led to increased difficulties for students as they seek to come to terms with the demands of university study. One questionnaire respondent sums this up as follows:

U 60: At A level we were more directed at answering the question, which is completely different to the approach adopted at university.

S4, reflecting back on her experiences of A level at the end of the first year of her degree, states:

S4: To be honest my A level experience of English (although enjoyable...) had a simple 'philosophy' – to stick to Assessment Objectives so examiners can give you the highest possible marks! It was mainly about passing the exams and gaining good grades.

There is no easy conjunction between the intensely teacher-directed nature of study at A level, and the personally-directed nature of study at university.

The troubled relationship between A level study under Curriculum 2000 and university study is exemplified by interviewee S3, who comments on the role of contextual material within teaching at A level and the influence examination requirements have upon students' views of what is important:

I: And then you say you also did a lot of work focussed on the background to the texts.

S3: Yeah, that was, I think, one of the flaws actually of the way that we were taught. We were sort of focussing on context and the exam boards only have a tiny percent that was needed for context to get the marks. And it took me a while to get out of the habit of focussing on that before proceeding directly on to the text.

Student S1 also makes the influence of Assessment Objectives in this respect very clear:

S1: Well, at A level they were sort of extra bits that were ...they were the

bits that were going to get you from, you know, a C to a B or an A. If you could find ways to go sort of beyond just the bit of poem that was on your page, they were the bits that were going to get you the really high marks. Now at university, um, those kind of things are implied – you're not going to get any marks if you don't look at these kind of things, because ... the thing I used to view as being kind of extra special is now mandatory, so to find the extra thing here must be something much bigger which I'm sure I haven't found yet.

The extent to which academic performance is equated directly with grades and Assessment Objectives rather than with cognitive development is striking. The influence of assessment on the shaping of students' perceptions of study becomes further apparent as the same student observes:

S1: *Then towards the end of the year, when it got to near exam time, it was much more focused on, um, how you would approach it in an essay and how you would deal with an essay in a short amount of time. There was a lot of focus on, um, planning to work in exams.*

Similar issues are approached by interviewee S4, who, speaking of essay writing, makes clear the 'narrowing' impact of the Assessment Objectives on both thought and the expression of ideas at A level:

S4: *[H]ere you have to focus more on the question and pick out things from the question rather than the Assessment Objective. You don't get caught up in referring to what you needed to get the marks, so you're more open.*

The same student exemplifies clearly just what a shaping influence the Assessment Objectives were in the teaching of her A level course:

S4: *We didn't like waste time, we just did what we had to to get marks.*

I: *Right. How did you find that in terms of helping you to study?*

S4: *It was better, because you knew what you had to do, so it was more specific. For example, we did *The Duchess of Malfi* and that was focused on Context, so you just learned, I don't know, how widows were presented, like the nostalgia for Queen Elisabeth and then just interrelate it with the text and then you'd just write the essay. We were really just prepared for the exam in what we were taught.*

For this student, the comfort of knowing exactly what was required and where within the assessment structure of the course, and how this applied to specific set texts was obviously a positive factor. However, such dependence on Assessment Objectives as a means of defining learning also has a significant impact upon students' abilities to function within the less assessment-focused world of higher education, where cognitive risk-taking rather than assessment-linked delineation is required. This change in emphasis between A level and university, where assessment shifts from being a defining feature of study (see Hodgson & Spours, 2003a) to being a means of exploration is discomfiting for students. The following interview exchange, with student S5, makes this clear. It is evident that without the rigidly defined assessment structures she has come to expect at A level, this student feels considerable uncertainty when faced with the demands of university English study and assessment:

S5: *[A]ctually they don't give us information about the exams. Like we've only just got told today about one of our exams. But everyone's completely clueless. No-one knows what they're supposed to be revising over Easter and what to expect in the exam or anything.*

I: *Right. So let's separate those two things out then. In terms of the examination, you're not clear in terms of what? What is actually being*

assessed?

S5: *Yes. Well obviously we know in the Shakespeare exam we're going to be examined on the plays. But we don't know what. Is it going to be like themes? Do we have to learn lots of secondary - like critics' opinions and stuff like that of the plays. Are we going to have to compare them with each other? Like... no-one knows anything about what we're supposed to be doing.*

I: *Do you think that's because in your A levels it's very rigidly laid out - this is exactly where it is?*

S5: *Yes. I think even if they gave us just a hint of what they're expecting from us. You need to know. You need to be able to prepare yourself for it properly, and I don't feel like we've really been given enough information about that.*

It is not to be understood that students find the experience of writing and working in the less assessment-dominated world of higher education unfulfilling, but rather that this shift in practice is initially disconcerting. Indeed for one interviewee the cultural shift away from rigorously applied Assessment Objectives is a positive factor:

S3: *[I]n sixth form [the purpose of study] was to pass an exam to get to another stage. People weren't doing it because they wanted to. Whereas here everyone seems to be doing it with a passion and you can talk to anyone and have a massive discussion about certain parts of whatever you're reading and get really involved in it and argue it out, whereas before it was like I don't particularly care because I'm not that interested.*

The shift in emphasis away from assessment as rationale and on to study as the rationale in itself has clearly, for this student, been liberating. The same is true for interviewee S4,

who relates her comments specifically to the issue of writing tasks:

S4: *It's better, because you're writing to develop a different skill. You don't get lost in exams – like what you have to do to impress the examiner. You can be more independent, which is better. But it's a bit tricky at first, because it's like what do I write, because you don't have a focus or a structure.*

What this student seems to indicate, however, is the difficulty of engaging with new structures for learning and new ways in which to explore and convey knowledge. This is a difficulty sometimes exacerbated within the university system where such syntactic and substantive issues are not always explicitly approached with students.

To conclude this section, the potentially damaging effects of assessment and the extent to which it is fore-grounded under Curriculum 2000 are evident in the words of one interviewee, who offers this opinion:

S4: *I think my generation is very concerned with the exam. Like oh no, I've got to pass, and regardless however much you try to enjoy studying you always get backlogged by oh no I've got to pass the exam and then you get stressed about that and then you stop enjoying it.*

4.5 Student Study Skills

Data in this area tended to gather around a number of key issues.

4.5.1 Time management

One of the greatest difficulties facing students as they seek to make the transition from sixth form to university is how most effectively to manage their time. The small number of contact hours typical of first year English courses at university and the concomitantly high requirements for independent study means that students need to develop quickly the ability to manage and allocate their time efficiently. Student S3 outlines the issues

clearly:

S3: *I have found it essential to develop my time management skills. This skill affects everything that I do from reading to planning and writing essays.*

The all-pervading impact of time management is evident as students seek to find their way through the multifarious demands of lectures, seminars, independent study, socialising, house-keeping and in many cases also paid work. As Student S3 goes on to identify:

S3: *[T]ime management is quite a big thing and it involves quite a lot of discipline.*

The requirements of managing their own time are often onerous for students who have come from the A level world, where timetables are usually rigidly fixed. Typically at A level, the majority of the experience of study remains firmly under the control of the teacher, including independent study where study tasks are tightly controlled and routinely checked. This is clearly far from the world of higher education English Studies, where students are expected to manifest far more extensive autonomy in terms both of how they distribute their time and how they manage their own cognitive and processual development. This is a fact identified by student S4, who comments:

S4: *the main difference is studying, taking responsibility for learning by yourself, time management and just the fact that there's a lot more to do.*

The shift of responsibility away from the teacher and on to the student is one that students, who do not have the syntactic and substantive skills and the metacognitive awareness of their own learning processes, are likely to find difficult and which university procedures and practices often fail to address explicitly. Over 90% of Level 1 students surveyed indicate that their departments do not provide programmes to facilitate

the transition into Level 1. A number of specific support systems are identified by a small minority of respondents:

- drop-in sessions with tutors;
- academic guidance;
- personal tutorials;
- study skills programmes;
- study diaries.

It is, of course, entirely possible that programmes to support transition are present within departments and integrated support is provided within Level 1 programmes of study. If this is the case, however, the fact that the students surveyed remain unaware of such supports to their academic and personal development early in their studies proves a problem in its own right. If students are unaware that structures to support their transition needs are in place, it implies either that they are not fully aware of the nature of their needs or that the programmes are not fully effective. This appears to be an area for serious consideration.

By the beginning of the second term of her first year, student S4, recognising the need to provide herself with a clear structure for managing her work observes:

S4: I found time management very difficult during the first term. However, at the beginning of this second term I have created a study timetable where I devote time on different days to each module as an aim to complete the required reading on time.

Her comments relate particularly to the issue of developing structured programmes for

dealing with the large quantities of reading required, an issue developed more specifically by interviewee S3:

S3: *...with medieval that's quite easy – well not easy but it's less time-consuming because they're quite short – but with thick novels and three hour Shakespeare plays, my time management isn't doing me very well on those points.*

It is evident that students require formative assistance to help them develop appropriate programmes for independent study not only in terms of what to study, but also practically in the very management of the new-found freedoms of university English Studies.

4.5.2 Note-taking and note-making

There is good reason to believe that many students, as they progress into higher education, cling to the security of the lecture and take copious notes, a sign of their fundamental insecurity as independent learners and their uncertainty about how to select and evaluate information in the lecture forum (Smith, 2004).

The typical passivity of the lecture theatre environment is summed up in the expectations of S4, who observes:

S4: *In terms of lectures, I didn't really know what to expect...!!! Just what you see on the films really, sitting down and taking notes!*

Interviewee S5 also suggests the passive and uncritical nature of note-taking in lectures, albeit in a more positive frame of mind:

S5: *... so the lectures and stuff, I'm fine just writing down everything I hear*

The skills dilemma of the lecture is identified by S5. Her comments clearly indicate how stimulating and useful content can be undermined by more pressing imperatives within

the lecture format:

S5: *[I]t would be useful to actually listen to a lecture rather than worry about making notes fast enough.*

Speaking of operation within the lecture forum, S1 comments on both the difficulties and the skills necessary to function effectively:

S1: *As they are completely one sided it's easy to lose track of what is being said and then it's difficult to pick it up again. Sometimes it's hard to keep up with taking notes without missing the next part of the lecture- knowing which parts are vital to be taken down is difficult too.*

4.5.3 Reading

It is clear from interviews with first year students that perceptions of reading and the readerly skills necessary to cope with university study are considerably different to those required at A level. Reading large amounts of text at speed is one of the key issues. Interviewee S2 explains her own approach to reading, but is aware that this may not be the most practical:

S2: *Well the texts I have to study, I just pick them up and read them like I would read a novel - for pleasure beforehand, you know - and I know that they say you should skim through it first and then read it properly afterwards, but I can't do that. I have to just read it and then go back and read the bits again that I think I'd like to focus on.*

Interviewee S4 comments on the difficulties she perceives because of the quantities of reading required, relating to the time management issues identified above:

S4: *To read a Shakespeare play, a novel, do the assignment, the Medieval literature tales, look at about five poems, plus additional reading*

which we're expected to do. It's really, really hard to find the time to do it and to get through everything.

She goes on to discuss how processes in reading as preparation for teaching sessions could be facilitated by the provision of some basic resources:

S4: *I think if before we started a text we were given a worksheet or a sheet of paper with a list of bullet points saying while reading this text look for this, that or the other and just make brief notes.*

It is clear from this, as Smith (2004) suggests, how the once pleasurable act of reading at A level – where close reading skills are developed in controlled conditions over sustained periods of engagement with a limited number of set texts – significantly challenges new undergraduate students who are required to cover large numbers of texts mostly independently in short periods of time.

It is interesting to note the shift in emphasis in survey responses from sixth form teachers to university lecturers. The former frequently state that a 'love of reading' is pre-requisite for A level study and see this also as one of the key requirements of a successful degree level student. University lecturers, however rarely comment on 'love of reading', commenting instead on a range of issues relating to various reading skills:

- advanced reading skills;
- interpretative sensitivity;
- critical thinking;
- research skills;
- theoretical reading.

This evidences the significant semantic shift in the meaning of the word 'reading' that occurs between A level and university English studies. Student S3 is clear:

S3: *The whole purpose of reading is different.*

And S2 reflects usefully on how this is so, demonstrating her sense of the more holistic nature of reading in the university context:

S2: *I understand now why people say they're reading for a degree - they're reading English - whereas before I used to wonder why did they say that. Because it's not just reading the primary text, it's reading all the other things that are around it.*

4.5.4 Writing

Writing is clearly another key skills area within English studies. The written response, in spite of the possibility of oral assessment at A level and the positive requirement for it in the International Baccalaureate, remains the dominant mode of assessment within English Studies at post-compulsory level. Students' abilities (or perceived lack of abilities) as writers provide a continuous refrain throughout lecturer survey responses (see also Gawthrop & Martin, 2003).

This is an area where students interviewed demonstrate some uncertainty. As with the case of reading, they are aware that a shift has occurred between sixth form and university, but are not clear of the precise nature of this shift. One student expresses very clear confusion about her writing:

S5: *I don't know if I've actually changed my writing style since A levels or Highers. Well, I suppose I can compare and see what's changing and things, but I don't even know if I'm going in the right direction, so to speak, or... I just don't feel as if I know how good I am or how bad I am at what*

I'm doing right now.

The source of such uncertainty may well lie in the overtly 'assessed' nature of A levels, where written assignments are often tightly defined by weighted Assessment Objectives (see also Bleiman & Webster, 2006; Barlow, 2005c; Green, 2005a).

For some students, the release of their writing from the framework of Assessment Objectives is a cause of difficulty, therefore. For others, however, as in the case of S4, the release is liberating:

S4: *It's better, because you're writing to develop a different skill. You don't get lost in exams – like what you have to do to impress the examiner. You can be more independent, which is better.*

The change in the nature and requirements of writing, however involves students in reflexive engagement with themselves and their processes as writers, as S4 goes on to make clear:

S4: *[I]t's a bit tricky at first, because it's like what do I write, because you don't have a focus or a structure. It just takes practice.*

University departments can also involve themselves proactively in the development of students as writers. The department in which observation was undertaken, and within which all interviewees work, offers a writing skills course to all first undergraduates. This course evidently has an impact on students' confidence in their abilities as writers and how to relocate their writerly skills within the context of degree level study and its demands. Speaking of this course, interviewee S2 is enthusiastic:

S2: *Oh, yes. That's really good. That was really good, yes, especially the essays thing, because the first essay I did, I got a couple of books on how to write an essay, you know, and I was reading them in addition to*

everything else as well, um, but it was very concise on the Writing Skills and I think it really helped me. Especially the practice of writing mini essays, we had to do just a half a page, and I thought that was really good

The typical Ucas tariff required for admission to the department is 320 points (or ABB at A level – an A being required in English for students wishing to follow single honours English). Students have, therefore, demonstrated their abilities as writers within the structures of A level. Assessment Objective 1 of all three subjects (English Literature, English Language and Literature and English Language) focuses specifically on students' abilities to communicate clearly, using 'appropriate terminology and accurate and coherent written expression'. It would seem, therefore, that the issue should not be one of wholesale teaching to write, but rather teaching students how to modify their existing skills as writers to the new demands placed upon writing at university level, some of which may be stylistic and conceptual, others of which may be presentational. In the light of lecturers' views, however, it seems that requirements of writing at A level and at university are substantially different and that in-coming students require substantial training in academic writing.

4.5.5 Conclusions

It is evident from the above analysis that there are a number of significant issues surrounding study skills and the ways in which students are required to work in their university English Studies. The functional role such study skills play in enabling (or conversely in limiting) students' abilities to engage effectively in their studies is significant. Students, instead of connecting skills (the syntactic dimensions of subject) with content, tend to make a sharp and unhelpful distinction between them – a distinction which the implicit pedagogic approaches of higher education can serve to reinforce. Where process is implicit within practice rather than explicit, it is more problematic for students seeking to master the techniques which are an integral part of subject construct (see Banks, Leach & Moon, 1999).

Student S5 identifies a particularly strong division between the issues of subject content

and the skills required to function within the university learning environment:

S5: I've found that the course itself is to extract the information and then you develop the skills yourself. I don't know if that's quite right, but it's what I've been feeling.

Such a stark distinction between the academic content of the subject and the means by which that content is accessed and conveyed - study skills, note-making abilities, the successful application of a variety reading strategies, for example - points to a significant dislocation within university conceptualisations of subject. As Grossman, Wilson & Shulman (1989) note, successful teaching subject knowledge depends upon the integration of content with substantive and syntactic dimensions of subject. The atomisation of a subject - the separation of its content and its skills - means that students do not gain an integrated sense of how these two dimensions of subject must integrate if they are to become increasingly able and autonomous as practitioners. This is an issue particularly germane within the study of English which, by its very nature lends itself to such a division - functional literacy versus literary or linguistic study, for instance.

Such observations reflect directly back upon teaching practices in higher education and the respective roles afforded to content, syntactic and substantive dimensions of subject. Grossman, Wilson and Shulman (1989: 23) note:

Given the central role subject matter plays in teaching, we must re-examine our assumption that the subject matter knowledge required for teaching can be acquired solely through courses taken in the appropriate university department.

In coming to terms with this recognition, and in seeking to develop their effectiveness as teachers, academics may need to reconsider their position as subject experts and to establish an understanding of their multi-faceted relationship with their discipline, evaluating their subject knowledge on a variety of different levels.

Perceptions of what constitutes subject knowledge amongst both students and lecturers tend to be heavily content-biased. However, effective teaching knowledge and effective learning depend on more than content knowledge alone. It depends, for example, on the ability to make texts accessible to a variety of students and to ensure the development of discipline-specific skills (Durkin and Main, 1995; Amigoni and Sanders, 2003) and transferable skills, all of which are essential elements of good practice. Pedagogy and methods of delivery are key components of effective teacherly subject knowledge. They are of course affected by individual and departmental contexts, which play a key role in defining the curricular forms a subject takes. Also, it is important that lecturers try to clarify what distinguishes university study and knowledge from A level study and knowledge. The example of reading has already been explored as a case in point and the use of independent study time is another, along with the variety of teaching methods that are employed within lectures and seminars. Naturally, students arrive at university with assumptions and expectations about teaching formed by their experiences of A level. The range of approaches to teaching taken at school (e.g. guided reading, class reading, varieties of group discussion, DARTs, etc.) is typically wider than at university, and supportive of a wider range of learning styles (Gardner, 1987), needs and abilities (Atherton, 2005). An understanding of A level curricula and the epistemological basis of study at this level – see Barlow (2005) and Bluett et al. (2004) for a concise overview of this – enables awareness of where A level students come from and offers insight into the perceptions and assumptions they bring with them, facilitating the transfer and development of knowledge from school to university.

Students' difficulties in managing this transition are not necessarily a reflection of their academic impoverishment, but rather reflect the profound changes in the learning environment they experience and their unfamiliarity with the expectations of their lecturers. It is, therefore, important that consideration is given not only to the content-base of the subject for study, but also to the pedagogical and practical dimensions of subject knowledge. Theoretically robust subject knowledge incorporates not only cognitive content but also the sociological, transactional, political and pedagogical

principles that underpin interaction between lecturers and students. Of central importance here is the principle that any academic discipline functions around an essentially dichotomous, dialogic, structure. As Dewey (1903: 285) remarks:

Every study or subject thus has two aspects: one for the scientist as a scientist; the other for the teacher as a teacher. These two aspects are in no sense opposed or conflicting. But neither are they immediately identical.

The interface between these two linked but separate knowledges is the very business of teaching and learning.

Chapter 5

Analysis of Data – Pedagogy

5.1 Student ‘location’ and pedagogy

5.1.1 Introduction

The effective management of learning and the learning environment begins with an accurate recognition of where learners are ‘located’ at any given point in their education. In his discussion of English, Evans (1993) employs the analogy of a map to explore the nature of the subject. The map of English, he suggests, is complex and encompasses a wide range of approaches, philosophies and purposes, some of which are complementary, but some of which operate in diametrical opposition to one another. Within this multi-faceted, and therefore problematic discipline students and teachers locate themselves differently according to their perceptions of what the subject is or should be. For new students approaching university English, in all its multifarious forms, the question of location is further problematised as the map of the subject they have learned from A level may be sketchy – based on at most the study of nine or ten set texts – and significantly different to the map of the subject they are now expected to engage with.

Parlett & Simons (1988) and Stephenson & Weil (1992) point out the fundamental importance of recognising where learners come from and the implications of this for effective continued learning. If teachers in higher education fail to recognise the starting point and needs of in-coming students, then effective pedagogical thinking (Feiman-Nemser & Buchman, 1985) cannot occur. This is, perhaps, especially important in a subject such as English, where teaching contact is often minimal – typically nine timetabled hours per week in the first year. It is important, therefore, to establish the nature of student learning at A level, in terms both of content and of pedagogy, and to consider how this compares to the experience of undergraduates.

As argued in Chapter 3, it is fruitful to recognise the English classroom as a place where students and teachers meet at a set of shared boundaries. Their endeavours in the classroom will, to a greater or lesser extent, be shared endeavours, but in pursuing the complex tissue of processes at play in the English classroom, it is essential to

recognise how differently students and teachers view matters of teaching and learning. Data from linked questionnaires, observations and interviews serves to illustrate the extent to which student and teacher views of the nature of teaching and learning and the approaches adopted vary at sixth form and university levels. There follows a statistical breakdown of questionnaire data by percentage, addressing a range of approaches to teaching and learning. This allows comparison of the responses of sixth form and university students and sixth form and university teachers. This is then followed by qualitative analysis of the range of approaches, drawn from explanatory responses, from observational data, and from responses arising in interviews.

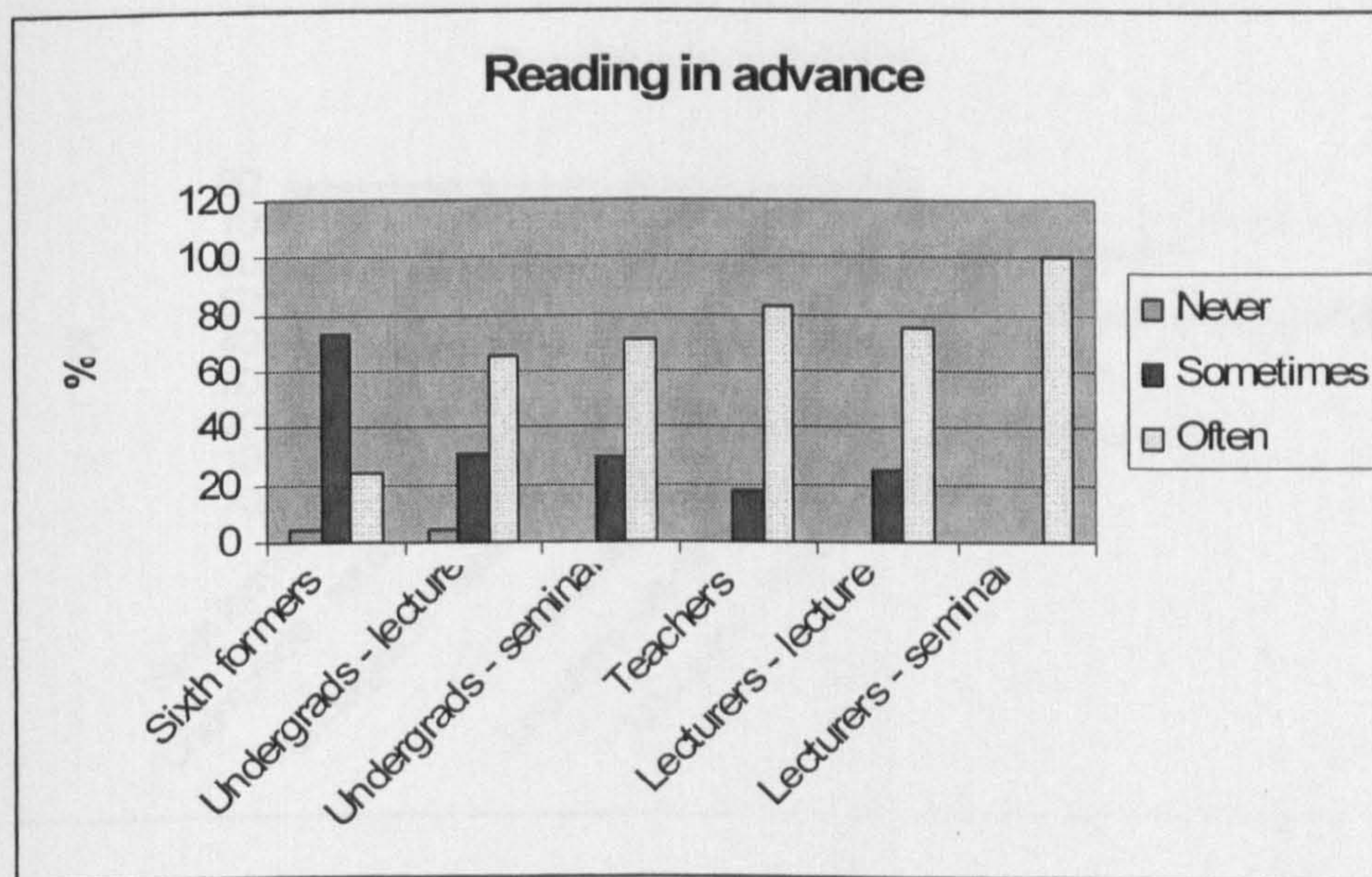
Students and teachers at both levels were asked to identify the frequency with which a selection of teaching and learning strategies are employed in their English teaching sessions. They were also asked to indicate using a Likert Scale, ranging from 1 (not useful) to 4 (very useful), how beneficial they find each of these approaches either as a means of teaching or learning, providing substantiating comments to support their responses. In considering the approaches students find the most useful (and why) and in the exploration of where these diverge from teachers' and lecturers' views lies evidence of significant paradigmatic and pedagogic divergence between the two sectors. Such divergences in practice constitute a significant source of academic difficulty for students seeking to make the successful transition from sixth form to university.

5.1.2 Reading in Advance

As Figure 15 demonstrates, pre-reading is a common feature of both A level and university level English Studies, though markedly more prevalent in higher education. Students at both levels identify the advantages of this, commenting on its value in preparing them for teaching sessions. The importance of such reading in helping them to develop independent responses to text is identified by many students. There is also a recognition that pre-familiarisation with reading materials increases their ability and confidence to contribute in teaching sessions. There is clearly, however, a distinction to be drawn between the nature and quantity of pre-reading at the two stages. A level student responses indicate that pre-reading tends to be more limited in scope and is usually supported by materials to focus reading (for example DARTs – see chapter 4), whereas undergraduates state that pre-reading is far more extensive and often without

specific guidance. The lack of guidance and support in pre-reading tasks at university level proves a difficulty for many first year undergraduate students, who find the copious, unstructured reading demands of their courses hard to manage. The assumptions and expectations of teachers at each level in terms of what students can and should manage in the way of such reading clearly differ significantly.

Figure 15: Reading in advance – summary frequency data



Questionnaire responses from first year undergraduates help to clarify this issue. One respondent observes:

U 84: *My A level didn't really make me read on my own – background reading, etc. – as the teachers told us all we needed to know. Therefore, reading around the texts was difficult at first knowing the amount to do, and finding the time to do it.*

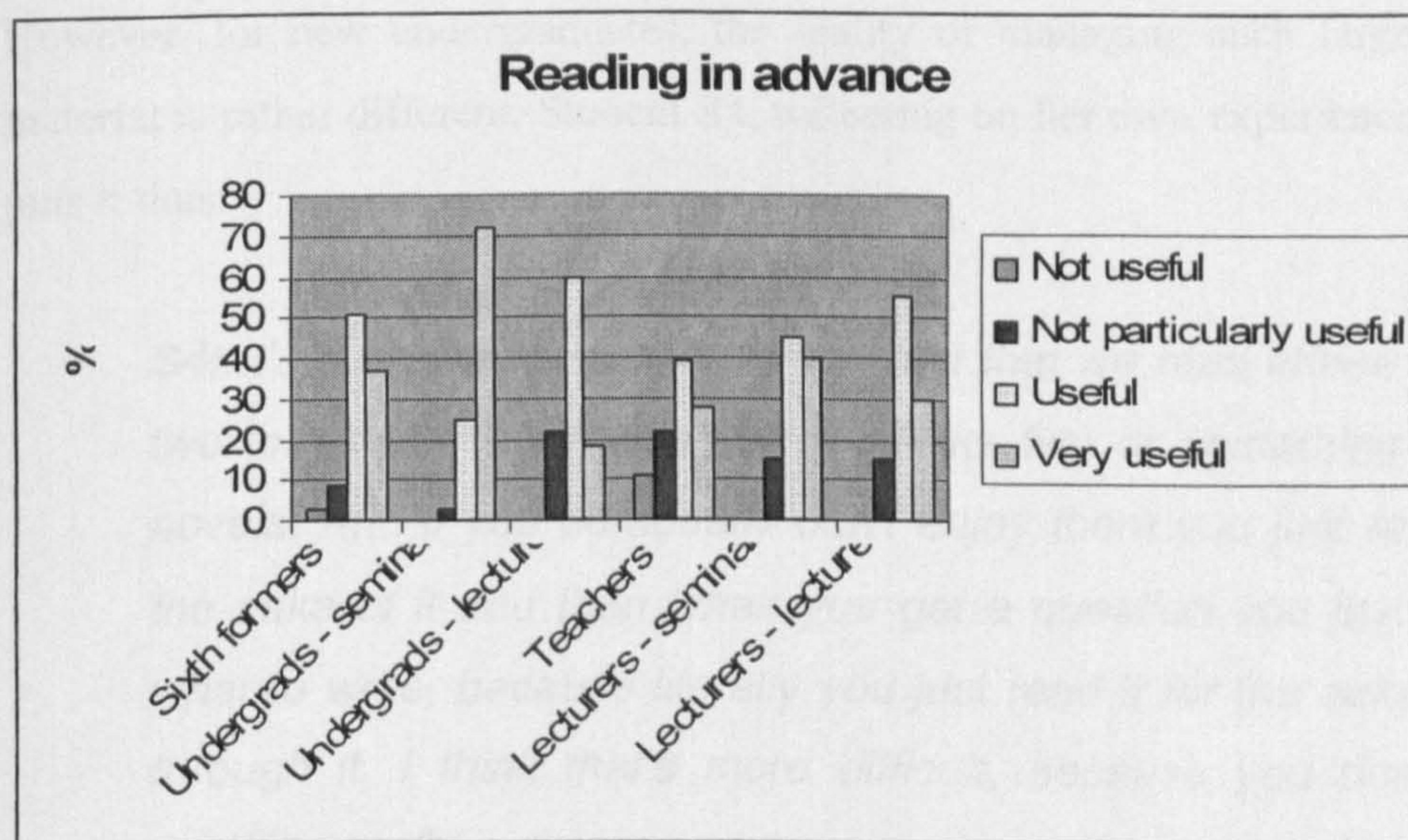
Another undergraduate student comments in a similar vein:

U 75: *Study of literature at A level consisted of a maximum of 9 texts over two years. University is more like a text for each unit each week or*

fortnight. At A level there was not enough attention to a wider range of literary issues and contexts.

This makes clear that pre-reading between school and university differs both in quantity and in nature.

Figure 16: Reading in Advance – summary usefulness data



Interview evidence supports this and makes clear that new university students find difficulty in managing the large quantities of reading demanded by English degree courses. Students are aware of what they should be doing in terms of reading and preparation for teaching sessions, as evidenced in this response:

S5: *Well I think you should definitely have read the text at least once. Probably would have been better if I'd read them all over the summer then when I came back to university then I read them the week before as well. Because you really need to have read things at least twice before you can actually really understand them. And I'd ideally like to have done some of the secondary reading as well, just probably in between readings so that I'd end up with different ways of thinking about the book when I read it again.*

With the benefit of hindsight, S4 also reflects on the lessons she has learned about how to manage the required reading load:

S4: *I would advise them [new first years] to read all primary texts before they come or a couple of weeks in advance, which will allow them to make enough time for secondary reading.*

However, for new undergraduates, the reality of managing such large amounts of material is rather different. Student S4, reflecting on her own experiences of reading, puts it thus:

S4: *It's a lot harder, purely for the fact that we read fifteen novels over two terms and at A level you read like two or something in terms of novels. And if you personally don't enjoy them you just read them for the sake of it and then when you get a question you just don't know what to write, because literally you just read it for the sake of it to get through it. I think that's more difficult, because you don't focus on anything really.*

The development of strategies to cope with the new demands of reading is an important issue in managing effective transition if students are not to drown in the volume of reading they are expected to undertake.

Interviewee S3 also comments on the difficulties of managing the reading of large quantities of text:

S3: *With the poems, they're quite easy to read because they're really, really short and you can question them as you're going through them, which is quite nice and they're gone through in loads of detail in the lecture and seminar. And with medieval that's quite easy – well not easy but it's less time-consuming because they're quite short – but with thick novels and three hour Shakespeare plays, my time management isn't doing me very well on those points.*

For these students, the quantity of primary reading alone is prohibitive, and this is before entering on the all-important issue of secondary reading.

On the issue of secondary reading, student S5 comments:

S5: *Well, I only really do secondary reading for when I've got an essay. So, if the essay's in on Friday, I'll go to the library either the weekend before or at the beginning of the week and um... Because secondary reading, when I do it, it's more like go to the index and see what comes up rather than reading the whole thing. Because it's too time-consuming. So it doesn't really take that long, I don't think. But that's probably because I'm not doing it as much as I should.*

The volume of reading has a significant impact on the ways in which this student reads. Secondary reading, in her case, is clearly unsystematic and unstructured. One questionnaire respondent states the problem baldly:

U 74: *I wasn't prepared for the volume of reading or how we are expected to read in the first year.*

The nature as well as the quantity of reading is, therefore, identifiably different from the ways in which students tend to experience reading at A level, as student S5's response makes clear:

S5: *When you're actually reading a text, you actually have to think about it at the same time, which you never used to do at school, because we'd read a few chapters a week and we wouldn't actually think about it. We'd read them, then we'd go into school and then the teacher would talk about them and then we'd know what we had to think about next time. But over here, for example when we're reading Othello, you've kind of got a rough idea of what the themes are going to be before you do it, like society and racism and things like that, and you just know that's what you should be thinking about. You have to*

start reading with a pen in your hand. It's just something you have to get used to.

This also inevitably has an impact in the way students perceive the act of reading and the influence of their reading upon them. Student S5 continues:

S5: But I do think that you don't really appreciate a text as much over here [at university], because you don't do it in any great depth.

The pace of study is clearly identified as a factor intervening between the student and his/her response to the text. The indication that university study requires something different of reading and readers is clear. A similar view emerges in another interview, where student S2 outlines the typical weekly reading requirements of her course:

S2: Well typically one novel, one Shakespeare play, one poet - maybe about ten poems - and some medieval text. So quite a lot of reading as well. And some extended reading. And then I still like to read for pleasure if I can. If there's a tiny little space left.

There is clearly a distinction being drawn here between the act of reading for pleasure and reading for the purposes of study. This is not to say that the act of reading for study does not involve pleasures and rewards of its own - the same interviewee comments on what she calls the 'stimulating' nature of her work - but serves to indicate that the pleasures and rewards are of a different nature. It is analytical, perhaps, rather than affective; about reader receptivity rather than creativity; requiring theoretical response rather than 'appreciation'. This corroborates the views of Evans (1993), who identifies a similar set of distinctions. The experience of university English resolves itself in all the students interviewed into a perception that what is meant by reading at university and what was meant by reading at A level are two distinctly different things (see also Green, 2005a).

Green (2005c) also provides an outline comparison of typical reading at A level and at university to exemplify the divergent nature of reading between the two phases (see Figure 17).

The importance of helping beginning students to structure their reading is evident.

Figure 17: A level and university – comparative weekly reading

A level		University			
<i>The Tempest</i>	<i>Regeneration</i>	Poetry	Middle English	Shakespeare	The Rise of the Novel
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Read Act 1 independently. ▪ Close reading: prepare in detail Act 1, Scene 2, ll. 1-180. ▪ Read opening section of Act 1, Scene 2 as a class. ▪ Read extract from critical introduction. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Read chapters 1 to 4. ▪ Prepare in detail chapters 1-2. ▪ Read extracts in class as basis for discussion. ▪ Read Rivers' paper "The Repression of War Experience". 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Read Seamus Heaney's collection <i>North</i> for lecture. ▪ Prepare in detail a selection of ten poems for detailed seminar discussion. ▪ Read background on <i>The Troubles</i> in Northern Ireland. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Read "The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale" for lecture. ▪ Prepare for group presentation on medieval views of women, using historical sources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reread <i>Othello</i> for this week's lecture. ▪ Read <i>King Lear</i> for next week's lecture. ▪ Read <i>Shame in Shakespeare</i>, Ewan Fernie, to compare presentation of shame in the two plays. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Refamiliarise <i>The Italian</i> for lecture and seminar. ▪ Read <i>The Monk</i> for next week's lecture. ▪ Read Radcliffe's <i>On the Supernatural in Poetry</i> and Burke's <i>A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful</i>.

At interview, all students demonstrated a more or less developed sense of how the act of reading was different at university than it had been at A level, or as part of their Access course. Student S4 explains the difference thus:

S2: *I think reading is not just about reading the primary text now. I understand now why people say they're reading for a degree - they're reading English - whereas before I used to wonder why did they say that. Because it's not just reading the primary text, it's reading all the other things that are around it. You know, the critics to see what they say, and the different perspectives on it. And it really does widen your knowledge of that book by getting lots of other views as well.*

Similar ideas also emerge in this response from student S3:

S3: *Reading before meant just one text and drawing from it what you were supposed to, whereas here the text you're given is supposed to supplement the texts that surround it, if that makes any sense. That's your focus and then everything else supports it and holds it up.*

And student S5 outlines very practically the differences between school and university reading:

S5: *[T]he first year I guess you're not used to having to speed-read so much and we don't do any critical reading or anything in school, so I guess you just have to get used to reading a play a week, a novel a week as well as like secondary reading and stuff like that.*

Another interviewee, S4, comments on the difficulties faced in knowing how to engage with reading as preparation for lectures and suggests the following:

S4: *I think if before we started a text we were given a worksheet or a sheet of paper with a list of bullet points saying while reading this text look for this, that or the other and just make brief notes and then maybe go into the lecture and they develop on them, so then you're not going into the lecture with nothing on your mind. You know what to expect. I know this is university and you shouldn't expect the university to prepare all this work for you and basically spoon-feed you. But for first years to spoon-feed you a little bit and make the transition easier,*

so that you can do it for yourself in the second year. Or maybe even in the first term do it.

Pre-reading is not, in many instances, an activity which lecturers seek to structure. Student S1 comments:

S1: ...we're given a suggested reading list, so it's implied we go out and find these books and do this extra reading ... but as for being told what to do, I guess it's more implied than actually stated.

The question of how to work with reading lists is also raised. These are clearly intended to provide students with an indicative list of useful reading. However, for new undergraduates such lists can be overwhelming, as interviewee S5 indicates:

S5: Well, I suppose one thing is that with secondary reading they give us... like suppose we were doing... like Ted Hughes... they'll give us a list of secondary books to consult. But there's so many that they'll give you for every single author or play or poet. So you kind of think well I can't read all of them and then it's like well which one do I read?

This demonstrates the extent to which reading is a key issue in the management of the transition to university English Studies. Students, early in their courses, clearly struggle to make sense of the large reading demands placed upon them, and need to be taught the strategies for coping with this. The widely differing requirements of A level (during which long periods of time are devoted to depth of reading of a small number of texts) and university (where texts are covered rapidly in class to ensure breadth of coverage and where students' independent study is expected to provide the depth) cause significant difficulties for students. It is important that the presence of such divergent expectations is recognised and strategies put in place to assist students in making successful transition between them. Smith (2004, 91) observes a significant divergence in praxis and requirement on this issue:

It is apparent that the abrupt change from limited intensive reading pre-higher education to wide-ranging, extensive, contextualised reading in

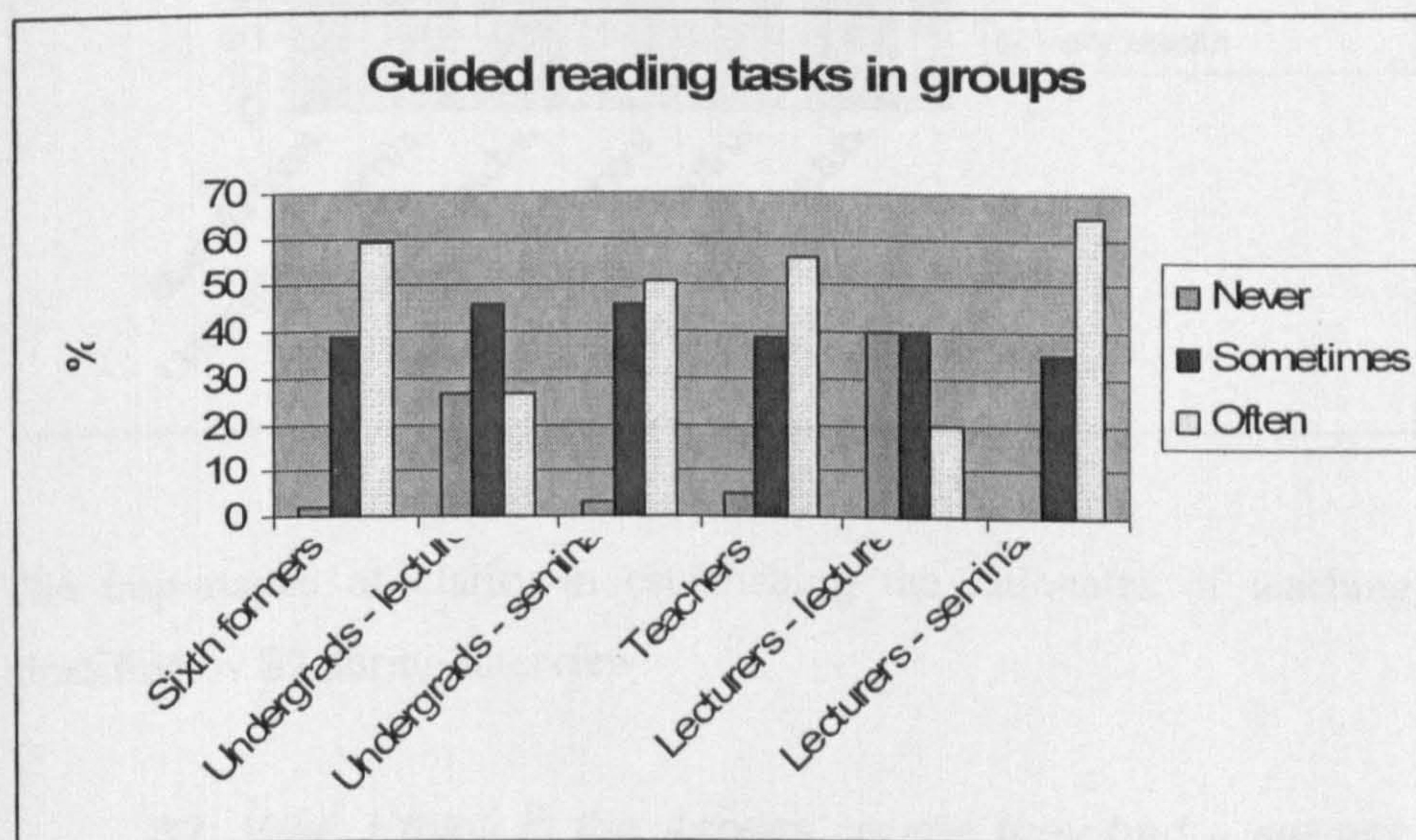
higher education is a major stumbling block for a significant number of students.

For effective transition it is essential that potential degree level students are prepared for the demands of university-type reading before entering on their higher courses of study. As Green (2005a, 49) states:

If, in expressing their love of reading, as most students entering English degrees do, the exercise to which they refer is essentially different to the activity university courses demand of them, this is indeed a deep problem.

5.1.3 Guided reading tasks in groups

Figure 18: Guided reading tasks in groups – summary frequency data

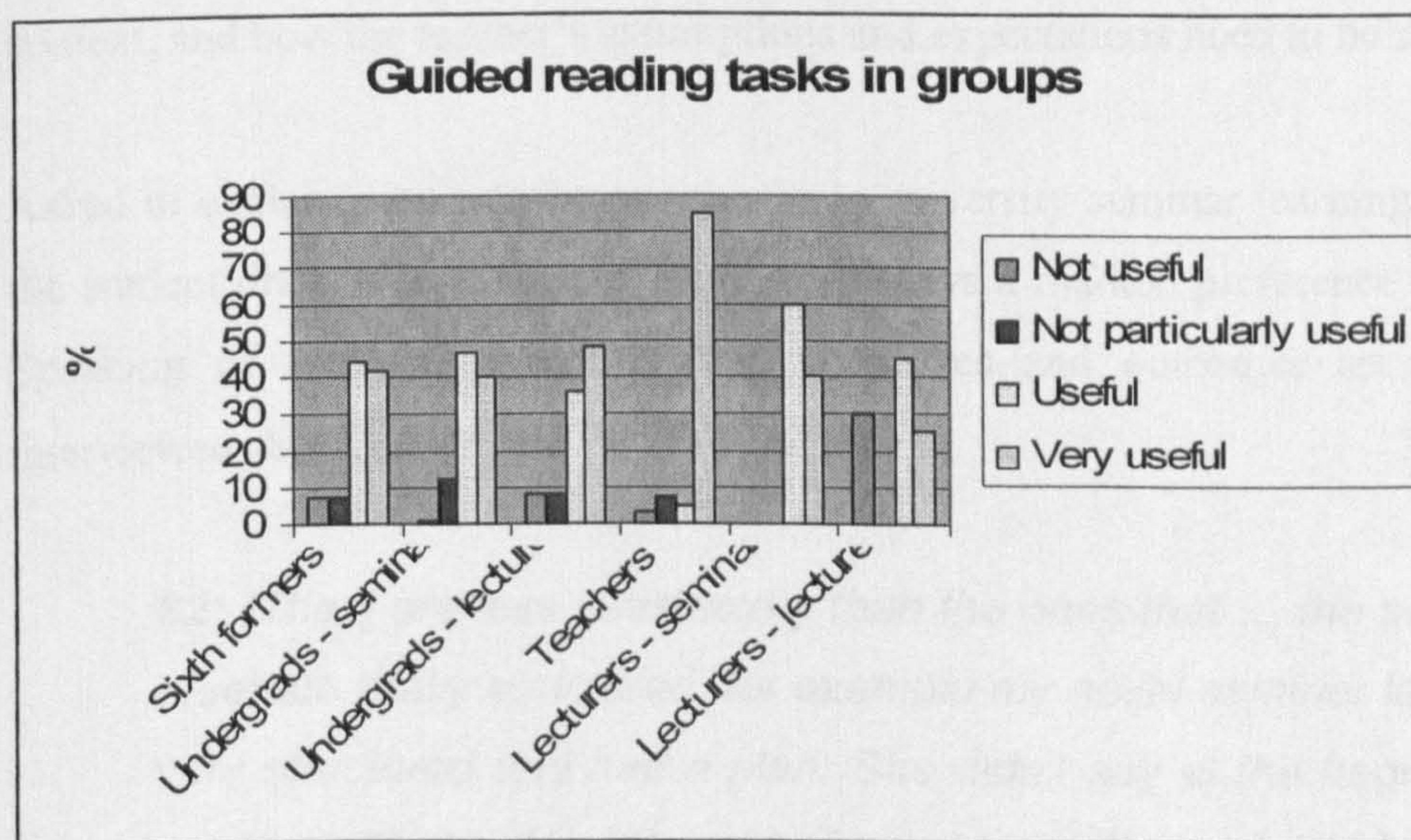


Students here address the use of targeted passage-based reading in class, followed up by specified group discussion, question response, analytical or written outcomes.

Both post-compulsory and undergraduate students observe how working in the smaller group context adds interest and variety to teaching sessions and encourages participation. They welcome the opportunity to exchange, develop and test out personal responses and ideas. This exemplifies the importance of social constructivist interactions, which facilitate the learning process. However, the proliferation of views

within whole-group or small-group contexts can lead to uncertainty and insecurity, especially where such views are not effectively moderated, or worse unmoderated by the teacher. The need for careful monitoring of such group reading activities to ensure that focus and purpose are maintained is clear, so that students are guided to useful and appropriate outcomes. Again the issue of teacherly expectations, and the role of the teacher in establishing clear and focused objectives and outcomes, comes to the fore.

Figure 19: Guided reading tasks in groups – usefulness summary data



The importance of clarity in establishing the rationales of teaching is an issue identified by S2 during interview:

S2: *Well, I think in the Access course they had a set agenda. By the end of that lesson they expected you to know certain things that they were going to teach you in that session, whereas in the seminars, um, well I suppose they do, but it's a bit more of a ... it's much more ... it's much less structured. I don't feel that it's a lesson in the same way that it was a lesson in the Access course. Everybody talks and everybody has ideas, and there's an awful lot of knowledge being shared there, because everybody's got their own ideas on whatever we're talking about, um, but I don't feel ... they probably do have a plan, they must*

have a plan, I'm sure they have a plan, but I don't always know what it is.

The comparatively unstructured nature of the learning experience in the seminar context is one with which the interviewee does not feel totally comfortable. The sense that this is different kind of lesson from anything previously experienced (*'I don't feel that it's a lesson in the same way that it was a lesson in the Access course'*) and that the expectations and the rules of the game are different provides a significant insight into how the student's underlying assumptions are challenged in the new learning context, and how the teacher's assumptions and expectations need to be shared.

Asked to explain how satisfactory she finds university seminar learning experiences, the student draws a variable picture. She displays a marked preference for structure. Speaking of seminars where desired objectives and outcomes are unclear, the interviewee observes:

S2: *[They] are less satisfactory than the ones that ... the seminars that I feel are really structured, for example my novel seminar leader's were very structured and had a plan. She didn't say at the beginning of the seminar, "Right, this is what we're going to discuss", but I felt that they were driven by her rather than ... I know you sat in a seminar last week and it was very quiet and not an awful lot of people had a lot to say, and I didn't ... to me it wasn't as enjoyable as something which is structured.*

I: *Is that because you don't feel as if you know where your learning is going in that session?*

S2: *Yes, I think I prefer to be guided towards it, because I feel that the outcome of that seminar is probably met by the end of it, because the seminar leader ensures that it is. It may be that the other seminar leaders ... everything is going the way they want it to, so they don't have to guide it. I don't know. But for me, I prefer that more structured learning, I think.*

Students' perceptions that some teaching sessions lack structure contrasts to the intensely structured nature of study at A level, where Assessment Objectives are often used as powerful structuring principles and where the management of reading, writing and note-taking is tightly controlled. This is illustrated in the following response from an interview with S1, who discusses reading:

S1: *Um, most lessons followed the same sort of thing. I mean we would do, if it was a Shakespeare lesson, we'd, um, we'd look as we were working through the play, because when we first start the play we go through it and read it together in class, so we'd be reading a section through each lesson and then sort of looking at that section, how it ties into what we'd looked at last week or something like that.*

The closely structured, chronological approach to the reading of text identified here is clearly distinguishable from the holistic reading approaches typically adopted at university. The structure of sixth form reading, specifically targeted at assessment, is far removed from the type of experience identified by S2 (p.140).

Another interviewee makes clear the intensely 'guided' nature of reading at A level:

S5: *Sometimes when we were doing a play the class would like read it out and we'd all have a part and then we'd read it out and the teacher would maybe make comments on it, but then after we'd finished reading the particular scene she'd go back over it and then talk about it and we'd make notes.*

A similarly structured approach to the study of a play at A level is also outlined by another interviewee, S1, who observes:

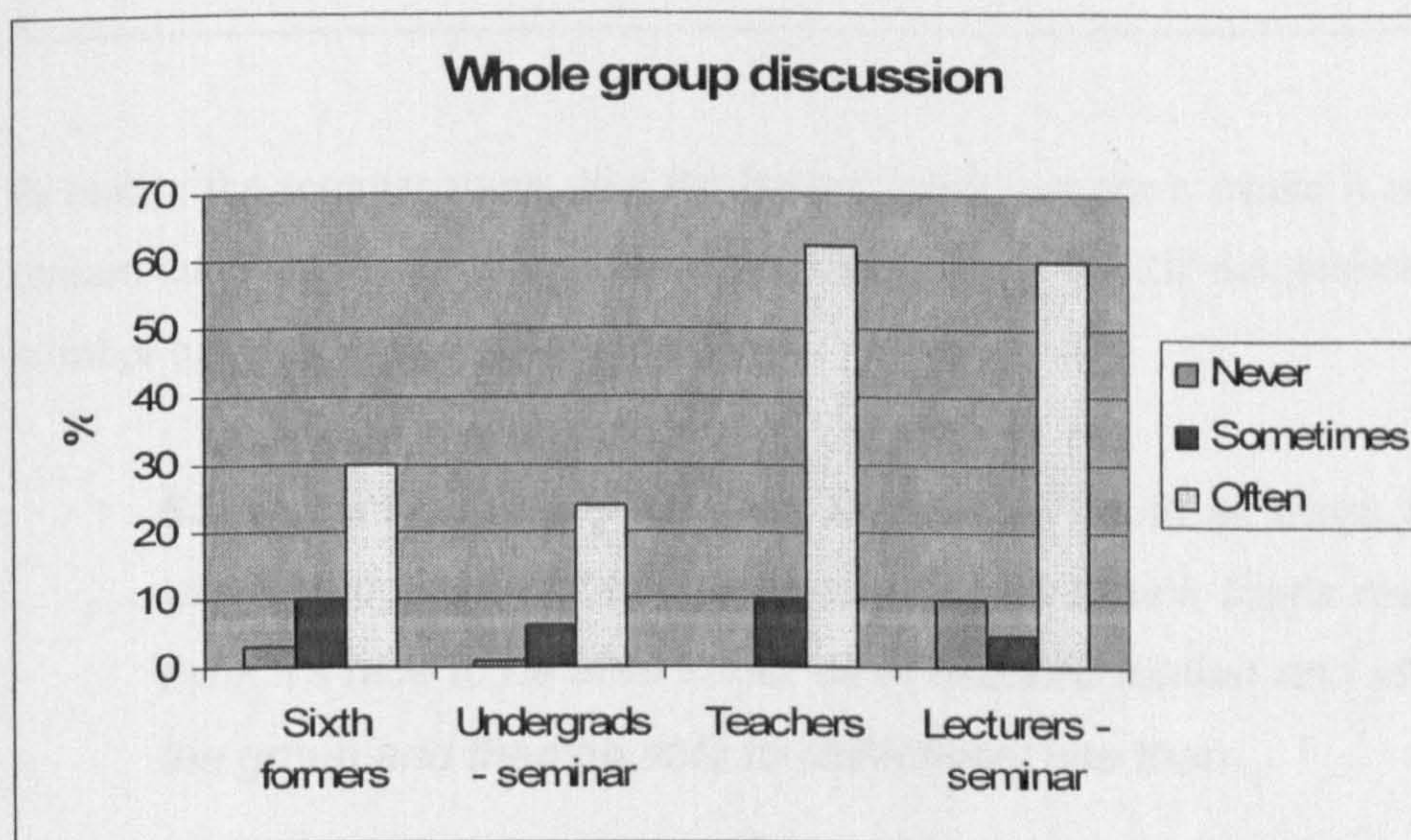
S1: *We'd be reading a section through each lesson and then sort of looking at that section, how it ties into what we'd looked at last week or something like that.*

In terms of ensuring coverage of a text and making sure relevant connections are drawn between lessons and between sections of text, this has its benefits. Not all students see this approach as advantageous and desirable, however. S3, comments on his experiences at A level:

S3: *Studying 'King Lear' the teacher insisted that we read it aloud in class and then she would go back over the piece of text read in detail. However, because of the amount of detail that was gone into I lost focus of what we were supposed to be doing. Instead of analysing meaning I was merely translating as were many of my peers.*

5.1.4 Group discussion

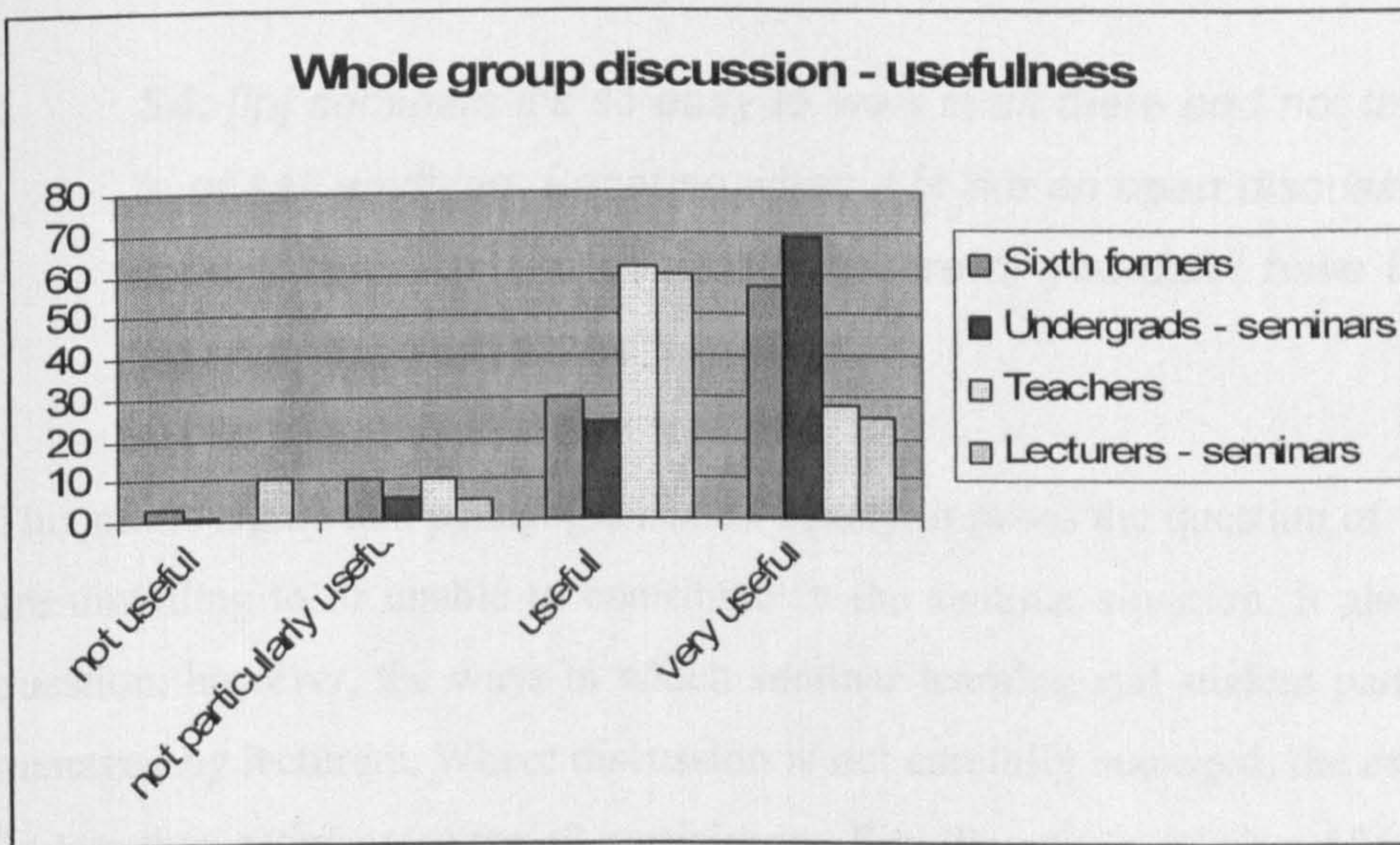
Figure 20: Whole class discussion – summary frequency data



Group discussion is an approach that students value highly (see Figure 21). The provision for moderated discussion where a wide range of views can be aired is something that students value. Questionnaire responses indicate that students find such approaches engaging and that they lead to a widening of personal response, as well as providing the opportunity to expand knowledge of texts as well as theoretical and contextual issues surrounding them. They also welcome the opportunities such approaches offer to exchange, develop and test out ideas. However, concerns also emerge, as students comment on the possibility of ill-guided discussion becoming

irrelevant, the tendency of some students to dominate discussion and the fact that not all students are willing or able to contribute within such open forum debates.

Figure 21: Whole group discussion – usefulness summary data



In reality the seminar room, like the lecture room is a place where it is very easy to remain anonymous and where non-participation is a clear (if not desirable) option. A number of interviewees comment on this.

S3: *I could go into a seminar, say, and I could sit there silent for the whole thing and not be questioned. I don't think that's really helpful. I think it's nice to be able to get all of this information and ideas out from the group and then be able to collectively use them.*

This view is supported by interviewee S4, who observes:

S4: *Because at first – even now – in a seminar group of fifteen people, six people talk and everyone else sits by themselves and doesn't say anything. And it's just a shame, because the six people that are talking are airing their views and then the people that are quiet are taking everything down, but the people that don't talk, they're not giving off what they think, so it's not a two-way thing, and that's not fair on the*

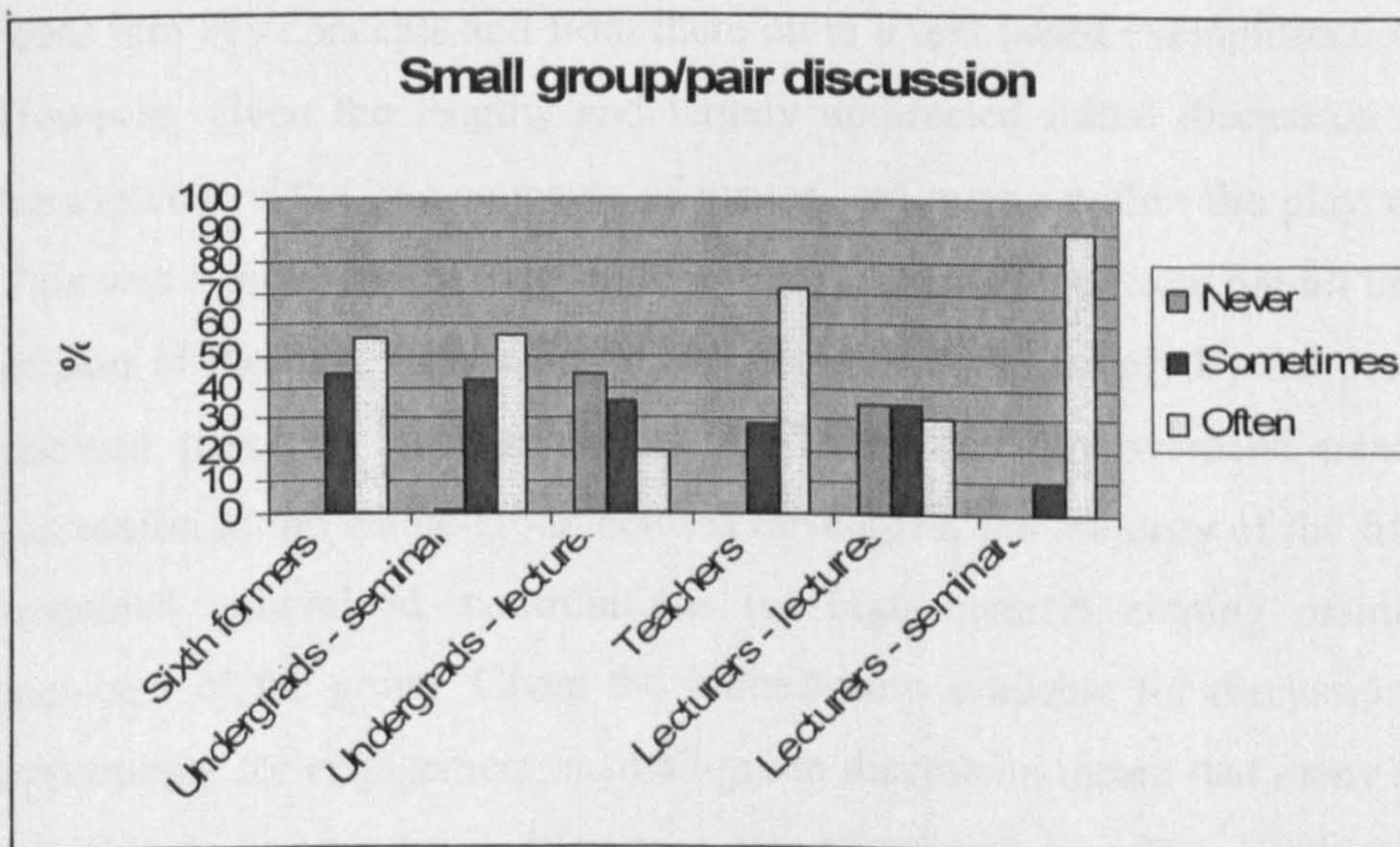
people who are talking, because they're not getting anything back, so the argument doesn't get explored as much as it could be.

She goes on to explore how such a situation can arise:

S4: *[In] seminars it's so easy to walk in sit there and not take anything in or say anything. Because when it is like an open discussion and you haven't read the text you just sit there or you don't have to engage – you can get away with it.*

This raises significant pedagogic issues. Firstly, it raises the question of why students are unwilling to or unable to contribute in the seminar situation. It also brings into question, however, the ways in which seminar learning and student participation are managed by lecturers. Where discussion is not carefully managed, the experience can be less than satisfactory for all participants. Significantly, a number of undergraduate students comment on the need, early in their university studies, for guided pre-reading tasks and note-taking activities to help with their preparation for seminars. This, they believe, would not only build their confidence prior to the teaching session, increasing the likelihood of detailed and incisive contribution, but would also enhance their ability to engage with texts and concepts in a more meaningful way.

Figure 22: Small group discussion – frequency data



Within the seminar situation itself, dynamic pedagogy and carefully structured management of discussion is essential if students are to engage fully with their studies. The limited time available (typically one hour per module per week) for developing students' conceptual involvement with the issues and/or text(s) to be covered makes this all the more important. A seminar observed as part of the first year Shakespeare module provided an excellent example of where the absence of such a dynamic and structured environment led to unsatisfactory outcomes. Fifteen students – eleven female and four male, and all traditional university entrants – were present. The text under discussion was *The Merchant of Venice* and the teaching session followed on immediately from a lecture on the play, thus providing a perfect opportunity for the seminar leader to allow students to engage with and develop the concepts introduced in the lecture. The lecture had dealt with the troublesome notion of comedy within this often dark play, issues of trade and commerce, the 'values' of the play and its presentation of aliens and outsiders. The seminar leader chose to focus on issues of justice and mercy, which related loosely to the matter of 'values' within the play.

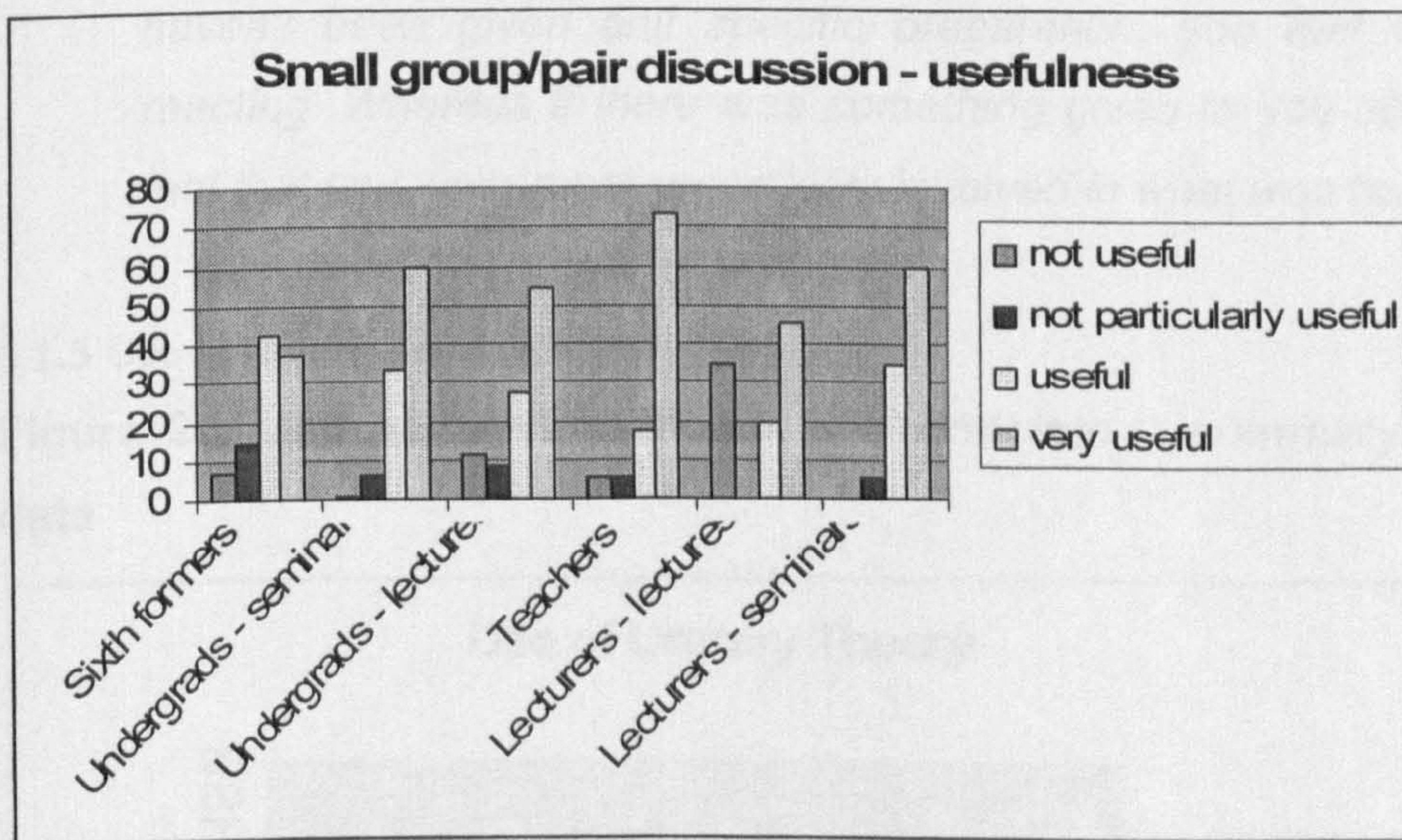
To open the session, students broke into groups to brainstorm examples of injustices, wrongs and transgressions within the play. This activity, which was designed to lead into a text-based discussion drawing on two of Shylock's soliloquies, should have taken only five minutes, but was allowed to run for twenty, thus cutting into the time available for the rest of the session. The intention was evidently to move from initial ideas into key concepts and from there on to a text-based exemplification of concept. However, given the lengthy and largely undirected initial discussion of examples, unravelling of the key concepts of justice and mercy within the play was curtailed. This was a problem exacerbated by the fact that students were not all using the same edition of the play. This could have been overcome simply by the provision of the relevant passages for discussion on a handout or an overhead transparency. As discussion in the whole-group context developed, the majority of the fifteen students remained uninvolved, contributions (of high quality) coming mainly from five members of the group. Given the limited time available for discussion, the lack of opportunity for engagement in small-group discussion meant that many students were not able to (or were unwilling to) enter the discussion. The employment of small group discussion centring on a selection of relevant passages, for example, or from

the perspective of the Jewish and Christian communities would have ensured fuller engagement from more of the students.

The seminar situation is more familiar to first year students than the lecture forum. It is, at least superficially, similar to their A level classes. The intimate familiarity that tends to characterise A level classes, however, tends to be absent. S1 indicates this when discussing the experience of lectures and seminars:

S1: *Well, um, we never had lecture-type things in the classroom at my high school. It was always interactive because they were only small groups. Um, so it was just a small classroom where we could all shout out and pitch in whenever we felt necessary. You can't do that in lectures, but in seminars you can.*

Figure 23: Small group/pair discussion – usefulness summary data



For this student, the familiarity of the learning context and the interactive nature of the learning experience is an advantage and contrasts with what she goes on to refer to as the 'one-way' nature of lecture teaching. For S1, reflecting at the end of the first year, a sense of how lectures and seminars interact within the university context has developed:

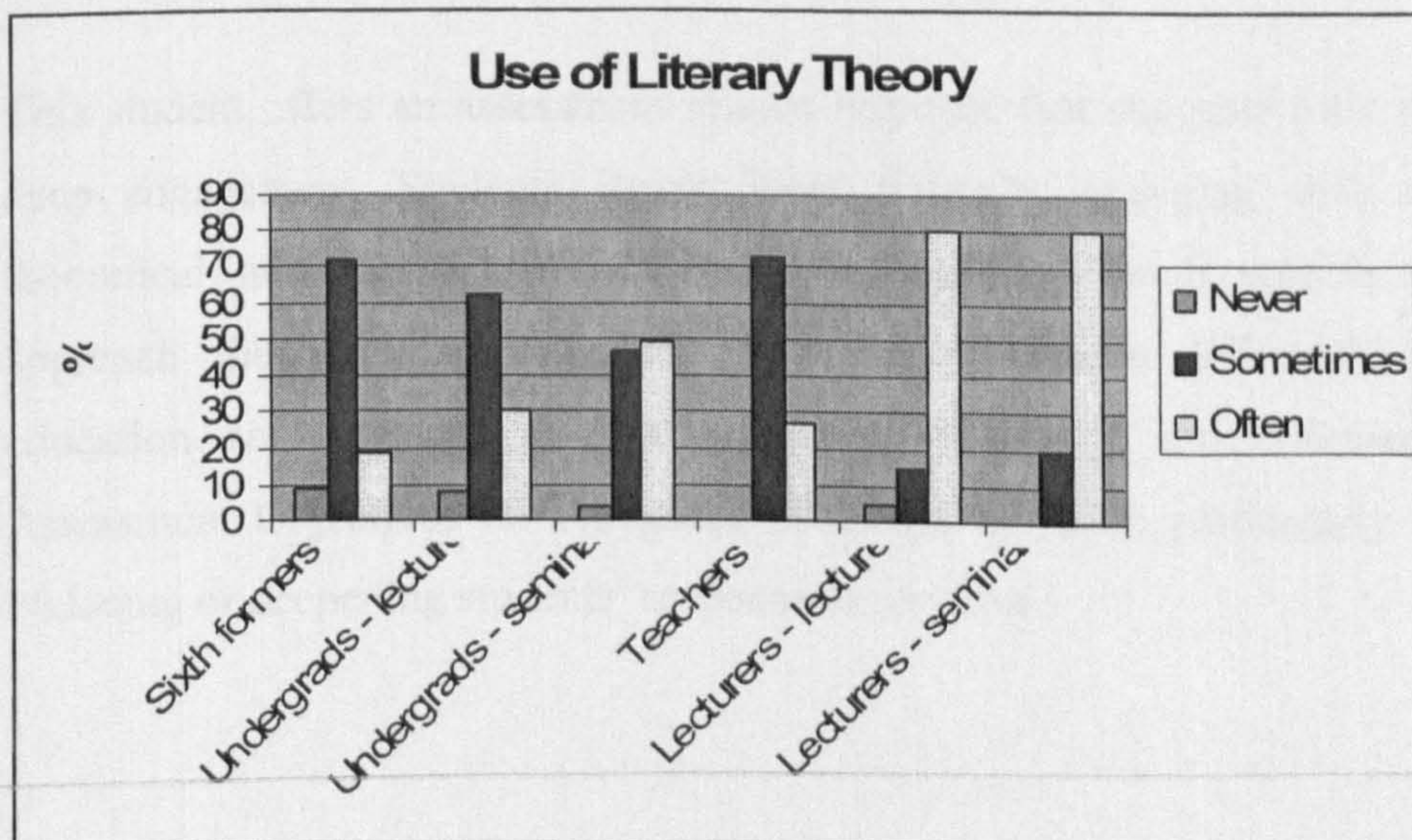
S1: *The lecture and seminar style work very well I feel; as the lecture throws lots of ideas out and the seminar is a chance to develop or ask questions about them.*

However, the importance of carefully structuring seminar discussion is also vital. In order fully to participate within the seminar context and to gain the most from the learning experience, whether discussion is required in the whole-group or the small-group context, students need to be effectively prepared. The extent to which students are assisted in (or trained in) preparing for seminars is a key issue (Bourdieu, 1990c). Student S4 comments clearly on how a lack of specified pre-session preparation has impacted upon her experiences in seminars:

S4: *So even if you've done the preparatory reading and what have you and you get to the seminar and that's all done, because you don't know what is actually going to be happening in the session and because you haven't been given any specific preparation, you feel as if you're reacting. Whereas if there was something given to you up front you'd feel that you were more proactively involved in what was happening.*

5.1.5 Use of theory and criticism

Figure 24: Use of Literary theory and criticism – summary frequency data



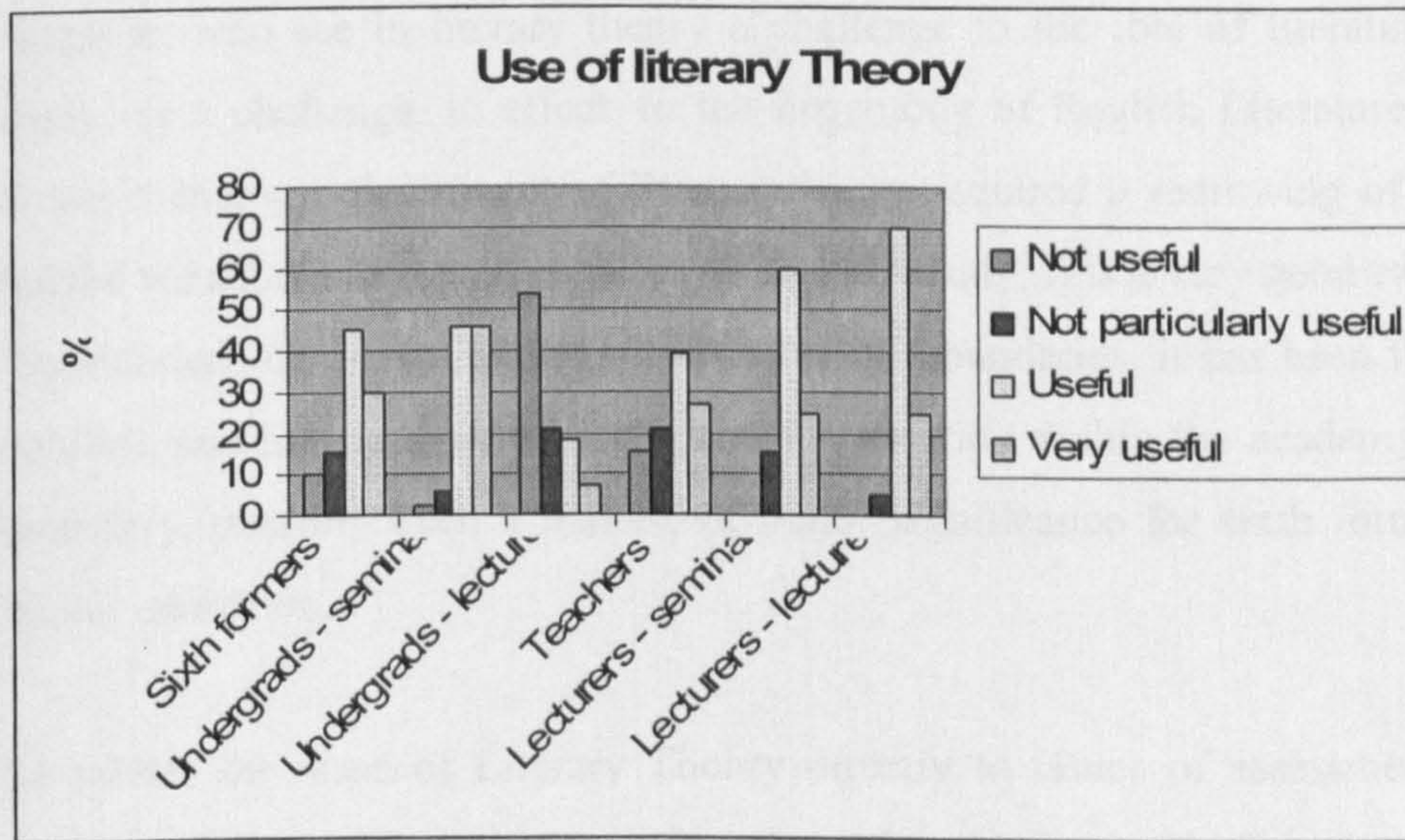
The use of literary theory, literary criticism, context material and other literary material in developing response to texts is a widely employed approach, though markedly more prevalent in higher education than in post-compulsory English (see Figure 24). Undergraduate and sixth form students, however, both find difficulty in expressing the intellectual and metacognitive benefits they gain beyond non-specific observations related to plurality of views and/or assessment issues. The discrepancy between qualitative and quantitative responses suggests that students are aware of the importance of such issues within university paradigms of English, but are unable personally to relate to this.

Uncertainty about the importance of this element of literary study at Advanced level is exemplified in the following response of S1, discussing the role of secondary materials in the study of English Literature:

S1: *...well I know that one of the grade boundaries in marking is whether you can bring in sort of secondary material. So you can learn how to write the essays and learn the facts and things, but if you could bring in quotes from critics or other authors who maybe hadn't been on the set list, um, you're going to do much better, and I know that it was those kind of tasks which pointed out where we could find those books and then I could go back and find them and learn the quotes from them, which was able to get me such a good mark in my exam.*

This student offers an assessment-related response that suggests little in the way of deep engagement. Students clearly have difficulty engaging with and applying theoretical materials. This highlights the extent to which schools and colleges approach theoretical, critical and contextual materials differently from higher education and suggests that the inclusion of theory and criticism within the Assessment Objectives for Advanced GCE has not been particularly successful in widening or deepening students' response in this area.

Figure 25: Use of literary theory and criticism – usefulness summary data



Assessment Objective 4 requires students to ‘articulate independent opinions and judgements, informed by different interpretations of literary texts by other readers’ and Assessment Objective 5 demands they ‘show understanding of the contexts in which literary texts are written and understand and evaluate the significance of cultural, historical and other contextual influences on literary texts and study’. It is, therefore, surprising that students do not enter higher education more aware and confident in this respect. In post-compulsory education, teachers’ assumptions and expectations of what is required under Assessment Objectives 4 and 5 vary widely. In many cases the application of theoretical and critical material is minimal and mechanical, and as such is of questionable value in preparing students for their university studies. This is further exacerbated given the particular identification of these assessment objectives with synoptic assessment, meaning, practically, that many students are not introduced to such approaches (in detail, at least) until A2, the second year of A level study. The extent to which A level students are engaged in any meaningful application of such theoretical and contextual material, even within the synoptic papers, is open to question, and the uptake of the Advanced Extension Award, a test which requires abilities far closer to university-style response (Barlow, 2003), has been notoriously low.

Literary Theory is, in itself, a key issue of dissension within the higher education English community, as Evans (1993) so clearly demonstrates. There are those, for example, who see in literary theory a challenge to the role of literature in literary study; as a challenge, in effect, to the hegemony of English Literature. To employ Evans's analogy, the advent of literary theory required a redrawing of the map (or maybe we should say maps) of English literary study. It is a very good example of the 'boundaried' nature of English. Like so many boundaries, it has been the subject of conflict, and has been a major source of contention within the academy. It is also a boundary, possibly even a barrier, of major significance for sixth formers entering higher education.

S1 relates the issue of Literary Theory directly to issues of assessment, providing further evidence of the pragmatism (or what Hodgson & Spours (2003a) term 'instrumentalism') prevalent amongst A level students:

S1: *One of the grade boundaries in marking is whether you can bring in sort of secondary material. So you can learn how to write the essays and learn the facts and things, but if you could bring in quotes from critics or other authors who maybe hadn't been on the set list, um, you're going to do much better, and I know that it was those kind of tasks which pointed out where we could find those books and then I could go back and find them and learn the quotes from them, which was able to get me such a good mark in my exam.*

Student S4 also relates the issue of contextual study to assessment:

S4: *...if the Assessment Objective was Context you'd get a pack on Context, read it and learn it and use it with themes and write the essay.*

S1 goes on, later in the interview, to elaborate on how she perceives this relating to her study at university:

S1: *Well, at A level they were sort of extra bits that were ...they were the bits that were going to get you from, you know, a C to a B or an A.*

If you could find ways to go sort of beyond just the bit of poem that was on your page, they were the bits that were going to get you the really high marks. Now at university, um, those kind of things are implied – you're not going to get any marks if you don't look at these kind of things, because ... the thing I used to view as being kind of extra special is now mandatory, so to find the extra thing here must be something much bigger which I'm sure I haven't found yet.

It is again interesting to note how far this student's perceptions are framed by issues of assessment. What is clear, however, is that the student is aware of how the emphasis on Literary Theory has changed between school and university. The ways in which such materials are to be used, however, is evidently not clear to the student, who simply has the sense that English at university is 'something much bigger', without being able to explain what that 'something' is.

Such non-specific response to the role of Literary Theory within English Studies by first year undergraduates was also typical of questionnaire respondents, whose observations paid lip service to its importance, but were unable effectively to express the values of it within their development as students of English. Particularly interesting in this respect is the discrepancy between student responses to the use of Literary Theory in lectures and in seminars (see Figure 24 and Figure 25). This seems to indicate that whilst students are aware of the importance of Literary Theory in higher education English and appreciate its value in lectures, they are far more uncomfortable with the realities of employing such theories in the more interactive context of the seminar. This is an interpretation supported by the fact that in substantiating responses, students are able to offer very little detailed comment on the perceived benefits of this approach and find difficulty in expressing the intellectual and metacognitive benefits that would be expected. This is symptomatic, no doubt, of the expressed difficulties they experience in engaging with and applying such materials. Where comment on the benefits of this approach is offered, it tends to be limited to non-specific observations on the benefit of gaining a variety of views and/or assessment linked.

Given the centrality of theoretical and intertextual approaches within higher education English paradigms, students' inability to express concrete learning benefits is an important issue. This, therefore, becomes a core area of concern to university departments wishing to consider issues of student transition and its effective management. The discrepancy between the qualitative and quantitative responses to the use of Literary Theory suggests that students are aware of the importance of theoretical issues within university paradigms of English (explaining the large-scale identification that these are useful or very useful) but are unable personally to relate to why this is so. This mismatch between the views of students and their lecturers is one that could valuably be explored to effect better 'bridging'.

S5 also comments on how the role of secondary material has changed between school and university:

S5: ...we did start doing context at A level actually, but we'd never done that before - whereas over here we... I mean we hardly really focus on character at all. It's more like either it'll be like large on detail, like, for example, last week or the week before last we focused on the Uncanny, which was something that, well I might not have known what the word was and things, but even the actual like what it's saying. I would never even have thought about it in the book that we did it in, which was The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner. So when they were talking about that, it was just something completely different that I hadn't thought about thinking about before. We do a lot more context work - like historical context and the author's biography and stuff.

Even where students do attempt to offer an explanation of the role of literary theory and wider reading in their degree level studies, they struggle for accurate definition, as this response from S3 indicates:

S3: Reading before meant just one text and drawing from it what you were supposed to, whereas here the text you're given is supposed to

supplement the texts that surround it, if that makes any sense. That's your focus and then everything else supports it and holds it up.

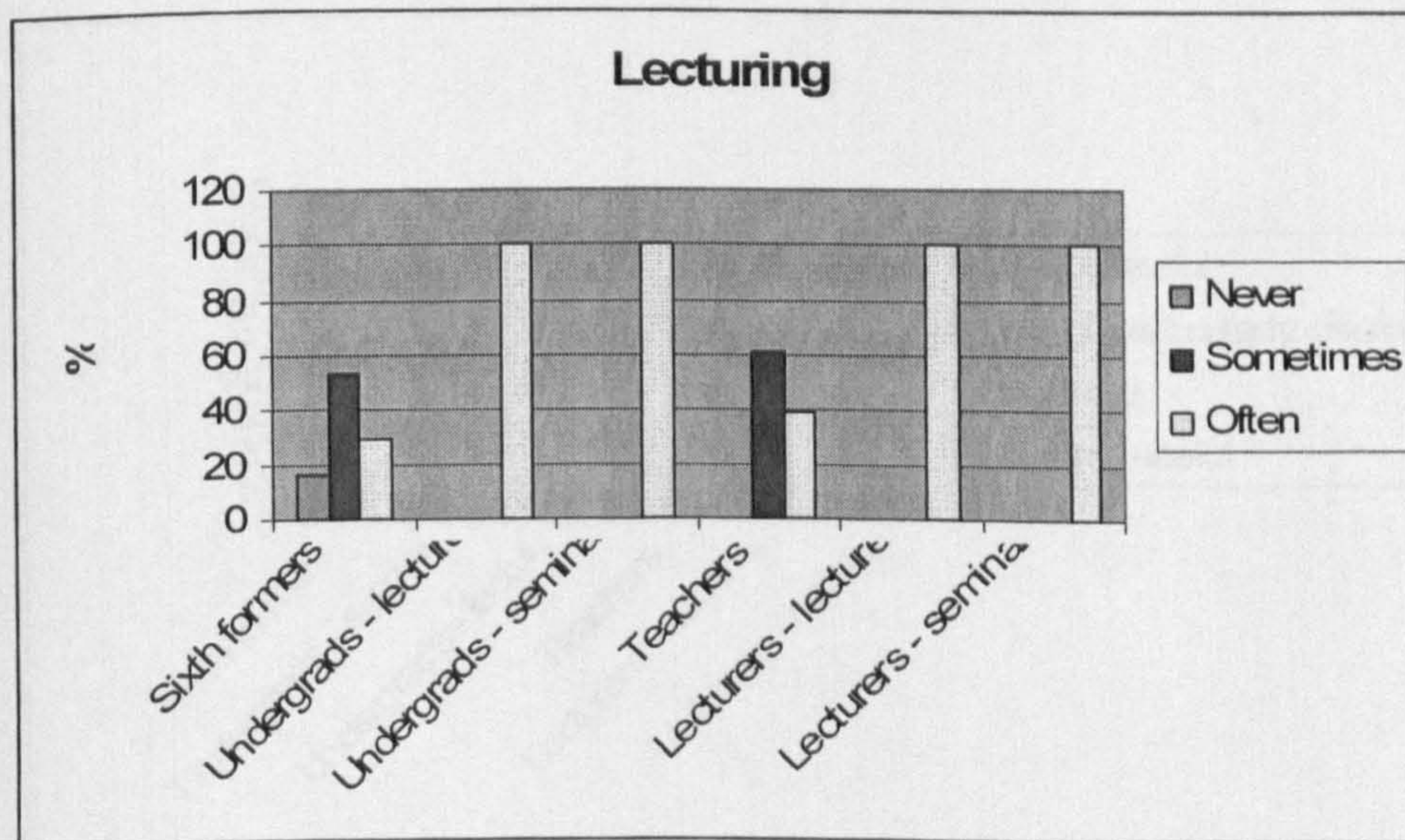
A similar difficulty in locating wider reading is also evident in this response from S2:

S2: ...it's not just reading the primary text, it's reading all the other things that are around it. You know, the critics to see what they say, and the different perspectives on it. And it really does widen your knowledge of that book by getting lots of other views as well.

Students' inability to rationalise the use of such materials (where they are trying to do so at all) suggests a lack of engagement with the rationale of many undergraduate courses. This, therefore, becomes a core area of concern. It evidences a significant underlying transitional divide (another key 'boundary') between the teacher and the student in the higher education context which is likely to be a barrier to effective transition during the early phases of degree study, until the student learns the new way of learning, and perhaps for more sustained periods (McInnis & James, 1995).

5.1.6 Lecturing

Figure 26: Lecturing – summary frequency data

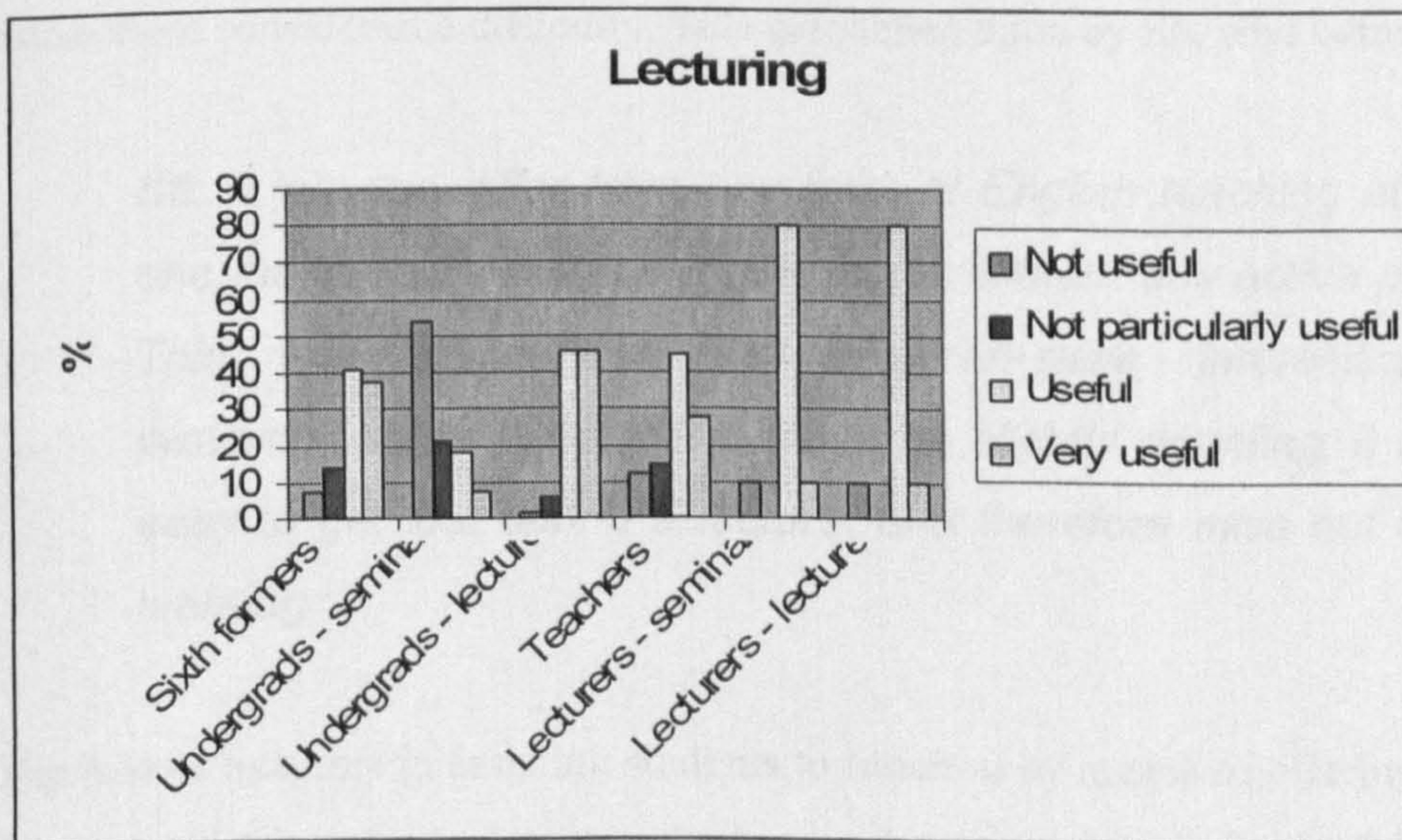


The majority of students cling to 'teacher talk' or the lecture as a key source of learning, indicating, perhaps, a lack of confidence in their own ability to construct

'knowledge' and a lack of developing independence. As they progress into higher education, lectures offer security and the opportunity to take copious notes. Smith (2004) sees this as a sign of their fundamental insecurity as independent learners and their uncertainty about how to select and evaluate information in the lecture forum. It may also be related to the low number of contact hours typical of English undergraduate courses, which encourages students to hold fervently to the valued contact time they have and to see the input of the lecturer at the heart of this. There is also, however, a general lack of understanding about how best to operate as a learner within the lecture forum. S1, commenting on preparation for lectures, responds:

S1: *Um, yes, I guess ...I mean there is a tendency for lectures not to worry too much, because you know you're never going to get picked on or asked to do something or speak about something. And quite often by the time you've had your lecture, you can go to the seminar and you feel much better about it anyway because you've learnt in the lecture that you've just had. But I don't know if preparing for lectures any more than the notes in the handbook ... I don't know.*

Figure 27: Lecturing – usefulness summary data



A minority of students responding to the questionnaire expressed a more interesting set of ideas. Typically these students disliked the lack of opportunity for personal

engagement within the traditional lecture format, preferring to learn through personal interaction with text. Such students try to use the lecture as the basis for further personal exploration. This has clear implications for the study of English at university, where autonomy and independence of thought take on great importance.

The skills necessary to function effectively within the lecture context are important, especially as the lecture continues to be a dominant (if pedagogically questionable – see Evans, 1993, 54-8) forum for learning, owing to the economies of scale it offers. Evans (1993, 61) expresses this succinctly, describing lectures as:

ancient pedagogic forms surviving largely because they are ancient, and because they meet institutional needs over and above the requirements of a process of knowledge acquisition and professionalisation;

Relevant here is Bourdieu's (1990c, 32) identification of 'the inertia of educational institutions, whose essential function always leads them to self-reproduce as unchanged as possible'. This relates to Evans' (1993) observations about the persistence of arcane learning fora, such as the lecture and the Oxford tutorial. These fora for learning are far from the usual learning experience of new students and often cause them considerable difficulty. This is touched upon by S6, who comments:

S6: *[L]ectures differ from any form of English teaching at school, as one must simply listen and take notes without any active participation. This is effective as the lecturers raise interesting, thought provoking points, yet at first it can be slightly daunting. It is also very easy to get lost during a lecture, and therefore miss out on valuable learning.*

The role of lecturers in assisting students to function by means of offering appropriate support and 'sign-posting' within the lecture is essential here. Student S1 comments on how this is done by what she considers effective lecturers:

S1: *Um, well, quite often the lecturer will start with "I'm going to be looking at this, this, this and this", so you can make a quick note of the headings of the things you're going to be going through and you can check them off as you go along, but sometimes it's just, um, facts or little extra bits of information that are interesting to listen to and then you have them written down and then when you get back into it it's hard to catch up with the pace. Um, but quite a few lecturers post up their lectures on the internet anyway, which is great, so you can go back to it.*

5.1.7 Preparing for lectures

Smith (2004) and Green (2005a) amongst others have observed the ease with which students can flounder within the lecture context. It is important, therefore, to consider how students prepare for lectures and how they are assisted (or not, as the case may be) in doing so.

Uncertainty about how to prepare for the unfamiliar form of the lecture is a key issue, as this student identifies:

S4: *To be honest, I don't think I really do. I just try and read the text before or get through as much of it as I can. Because I don't know what to prepare. I just go in and take notes and put them in my folder really.*

The lecture is also a daunting forum for learning. Because of its frequent lack of interactivity, students' questions are often left unanswered and their difficulties unaddressed:

S3: *I found it quite daunting because you're just being spoken to the whole time and if you've got a question you either write it down and then bring it up in the seminar or you leave it which is not always that promising.*

It is, therefore, important to recognise how students can most effectively be assisted to function within lectures, as this continues to be one of the primary means of 'delivery'

in university courses. The lecture remains as one of the two major fora for teaching and learning in higher education in spite of doubts as to its efficacy by many lecturers. Clearly the lecture is a useful tool in terms of economies of scale and in logistical terms. Most of the lecturers surveyed see the lecture as a useful teaching approach, but also recognise its limitations, not least in that it offers much more limited opportunities for student interaction and involvement. Significantly, but perhaps not surprisingly, this is contrary to the views of a significant number of students (and sixth form students) who hold on to the security (and anonymity) of the lecture.

One interviewee commented on the value she would place on simple note-taking support in the early stages of her university experience to help her prepare for lectures. Supporting devices such as keynote headings, structural outlines for lectures and explanations of key theoretical terminology would, she felt, have significantly improved her engagement with lectures in the early stages of her degree.

Student S3 also comments on how valuable such pre-session materials would be in guiding him to interact with materials presented in lectures:

S3: It would give you more confidence. From where I've done it it has given me more confidence to sort of question what's being said and I feel more engaged with what's happening whereas the times that I haven't done it it's felt like I'm just sitting here taking notes and the thing gets passive rather than active.

The unfamiliarity of the lecture format, with its minimal opportunities for interaction with the material presented means that for many students there are real difficulties in managing individual learning. A case in point emerged during an observation of a Shakespeare lecture. This lecture, on *Twelfth Night*, was delivered to the whole first year cohort and took place early in the academic year. The first half of the lecture was dedicated to an exposition of key features of Shakespearean comedy, and drew to a large extent, for exemplification purposes, on the previous week's lecture on *As You Like It*. The purpose of this was clearly to encourage the students to broaden their conceptualisation of studying Shakespeare.

The lecturers' use of the play within the first half of this lecture was distinctly different to the teaching of a play within the typical A level experience of students. Instead of being the subject of study – the set text – the play was one of a number of exemplifications of the true subject of the lecture, which was much more general in its scope, requiring the students to engage with broader concepts in reading and approaching the plays. To do this effectively required reflection on generic issues of comedy and features of Shakespearean comedy in particular, rather than focussing specifically on *Twelfth Night* itself. The second half of the lecture moved on to explore the ways in which these generic features are treated within *Twelfth Night*, considering to what extent this reflected the previous week's discussion of *As You Like It* and how it differed from it. The dynamic of the lecture was thus from the general to the particular, rather than from the particular to the general.

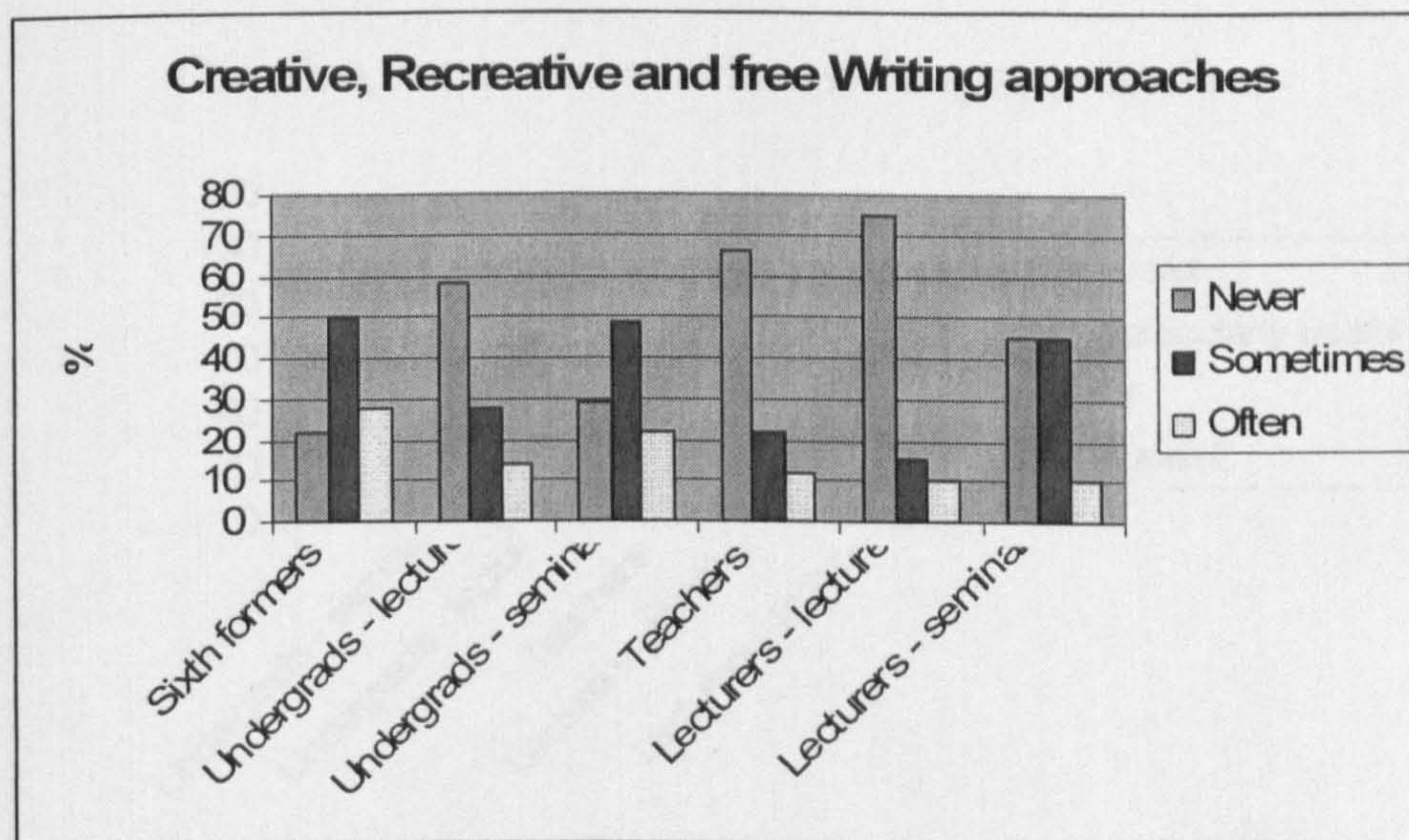
It was clear, as the observation progressed, that many students had difficulty in managing this particular means of framing discussion and managing learning. The early section of the lecture was characterised by a lack of note-making, as students evidently failed to perceive and 'locate' how the lecturer's discussion related to the play they thought they had come to hear a lecture on. Successful application of the generic issues and principles under discussion required students to reconceptualise their engagement in the reading and study of Shakespeare, a reconceptualisation which, this early in their course, many students were evidently unable to make. It was not until the lecturer moved into the second half of the lecture, where he addressed *Twelfth Night* specifically that most students, with an almost audible sigh of relief, took up their pens and commenced making notes, having missed the bulk of the genuine 'meat' in the lecture. It was evident that the strangeness of the forum (the mass lecture) and the change in emphasis in learning disenfranchised many of the students present.

The lecture was accompanied by a handout identifying key passages for discussion and key points. However, at this early stage in their university experience, the provision of a set of semi-structured notes or a table for completion, requiring students to apply the generic points made to the play nominally under consideration may have assisted in facilitating student engagement not only with the cognitive and theoretical content of the lecture, but also (fundamental in the development of

students' broadening conceptualisation of subject knowledge) with the syntactic processes of studying at degree level (Grossman, Wilson & Shulman, 1989).

5.1.8 Creative, recreative and free writing responses to text

Figure 28: Creative, recreative and free writing responses to text – summary frequency data



A high proportion of sixth form students and first year undergraduates surveyed value the opportunity to engage creatively with texts they read. The following selection of comments from sixth form students surveyed makes clear the expectation amongst students that creative approaches will be part of their university experience. It also illustrates the intrinsic value placed on such approaches by some students:

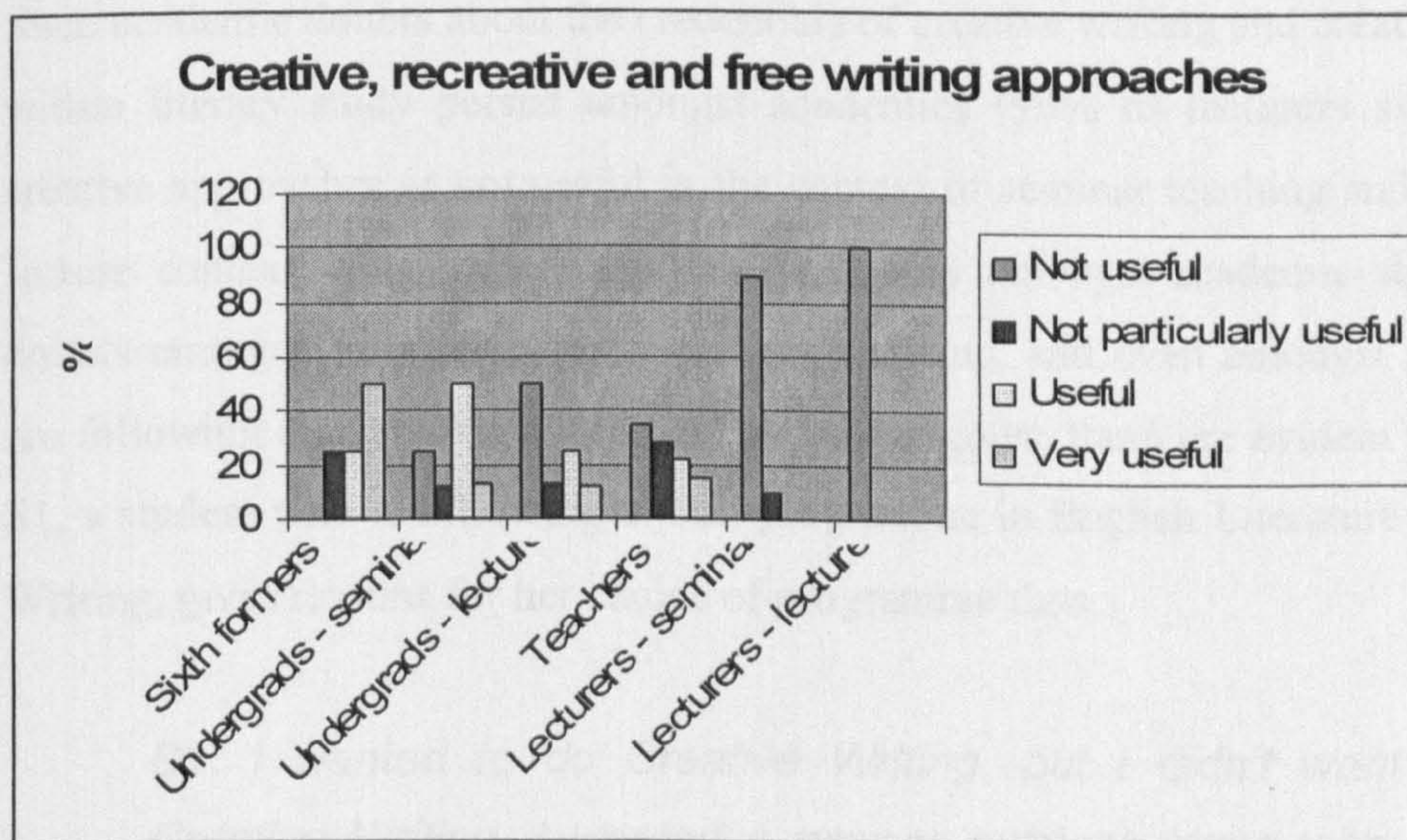
SF 33: *I find interactive teaching methods – active learning – most useful.*

SF 24: *I would find student participation approaches most useful, but I don't think this technique is adopted at degree level.*

SF 57: *Group discussions, frequent essays and creative and free writing to develop ideas are the most useful.*

However, it is striking to note the considerably smaller proportion of teachers who consider it useful and the complete absence of lecturers within the survey who considered such methods to be useful.

Figure 29: Creative, recreative and free writing approaches – usefulness summary data



Suspensions surrounding the value of creative writing are amply illustrated in this letter from an Oxford alumnus, published in *Oxford Today*:

A Master's degree in Creative Writing? At Oxford? You must be joking! In 50 years, a latter-day Gibbon will note this nonsense as a milestone in the Decline and Fall of Oxford.

Writing is a craft well within the normal compass of every Oxford student; indeed it is a sine qua non of scholarship. The addition of the adjective 'creative' is hogwash, and does nothing to legitimise this programme, unless Oxford also intends to offer a PhD in Non-Creative Writing. And, by heavens, anything is possible in a university where the Chancellor trundles around in a four-wheeled sandwich board. It is absurd to argue that writing is a craft worthy of scholarly study and a

university degree. The only useful route to authorship is to read widely, write often and learn something of the grammar and syntax of English, although, today, one may get by on remarkably little.

These craft degrees debase the credibility of all other degrees, and bring the University into disrepute. (Peter Weygang, Jesus 1953)

Such academic doubts about the credentials of creative writing and creative responses within literary study persist amongst academics (90% of lecturers surveyed view creative approaches as not useful in the context of seminar teaching and 100% in the lecture context – see Figure 29). It is not only amongst academic staff that such doubts emerge, however. Amongst many students, and even amongst students who are following creative writing as part of their degrees, there are evident uncertainties. S1, a student who is following a joint programme in English Literature and Creative Writing, gives reasons for her choice of programme thus:

S1: I wanted to do Creative Writing, but I didn't want to do just Creative Writing. I wanted a proper subject along with the creative one. English Literature was something that I enjoyed and I think is a core subject. It's sort of commendable to have a degree in English Literature rather than just Creative Writing. (My emphasis)

The student's feeling that she needs to justify her choice is in itself evidence of the innate suspicion of the value and worth of creative writing, a suspicion which interestingly does not attach to the study of such works by others within the context of an English Literature degree. In spite of her wish to pursue creative writing, the student nevertheless proceeds to verbalise a pejorative view of the subject (as in the repeated 'just'), and conversely elevates the study of English Literature through her use of words like 'proper subject' and 'commendable'. The uneasy relationship between Literature and creativity as manifested in creative writing is very apparent.

However, obvious benefits accrue to students from creative involvement with texts (see Pope, 1995). Tasks requiring students to write creatively 'into' and 'out of' texts can provide extensive insights into authorial choices, requiring students to adopt a

writer's language, and in so doing to engage in detail with issues of narrative, character, imagery, lexis, and so on. Such creative engagement with text involves students in deep critical and theorised reading, especially where the act of creation is accompanied by a reflective analysis upon the insights so obtained.

The study of literature is centrally concerned with acts of creativity. Reading and the construction of meaning is essentially an act of creation or recreation, which can and should be explored in students' own writing (Kress, 1986; Bloom, 1973; Green, 2004). The infrequent use of creative writing as an approach to learning is, therefore, both surprising and regrettable. The centrality of creative processes is outlined by Bakhtin (1981, 280), who reflects on the nature of language as vehicle between addresser and addressee:

every word is directed towards an answer and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates.

He posits here the dialogic relationship between the reader and the author and the text they share. As such, the importance of acts of creation and recreation in understanding text is established. To remove students from creative dialogue with the text is to remove them from the very act of reading, or at least to remove from their reading an invaluable dimension of the processes by which readers interact with texts.

The role of creative writing and other creative approaches within the context of A level study is, on the basis of survey evidence, also limited. The prevalence of comments from teachers of post-compulsory English that they lack time to adopt such approaches and that they do not lend themselves to translation into the terms of the Assessment Objectives for English Literature (although creative writing is addressed in Assessment Objective 6 of the English Language and Literature specification) is a testament to the impact the Curriculum 2000 reforms have had upon post-compulsory teaching. Hodgson & Spours (2003a, 109) note the narrowing focus of study that Curriculum 2000 has ushered in, observing:

...the sheer amount of content to be tackled and assessed has, so far, in our estimation, made Curriculum 2000 a tedious and uninspiring

curriculum that encourages instrumentalism and game-playing to maximise qualification outcome rather than experimentation, creativity and preparation for lifelong learning.

The knock-on effect of this in terms of students' abilities to engage with their university studies is self-evident.

The lack of creative experience within A level is evidenced by S1:

S1: We didn't do anything creative, er, independently creative at A level in Literature. We had a section of that in Language where we had tasks to do that were creative, but in Literature it was, um, I suppose the most creative piece was designing our own essay using a set text and a novel of our choice for coursework, but, er, still not very creative.

The lack of creative work within A level is also discussed by another student:

S5: In the sixth year we didn't do creative writing. We did it in Highers. Occasionally in the sixth year we did like write a poem but it wasn't a serious task or anything.

And a third student, asked about the use of creative or active approaches to teaching and learning at A level remarked:

S3: No, not really. The only drama was either watching it on video or reading aloud in class. We didn't really perform it or anything like that.

Although the use of creative approaches is regrettably small in post-compulsory studies, they are still less employed in the context of university teaching. Creative writing is an expanding area within university English, which makes it surprising that this is not more widely exploited as an approach within the study of English Literature. The inter-relations between reading and writing are firmly established by Kress (1986, 198), who points out:

Reading and writing are functionally differentiated aspects of one system, and of one set of processes. An exclusive concern with either overlooks essential characteristics shared by both. Most importantly, reading and writing are both activities that draw on the forms, structures and processes of language in its written mode ... Hence neither the process of reading nor that of writing can be understood in isolation from the other.

Creative writing and reading are thus established as obversely related processes, which can operate together in cementing stylistic and conceptual grasp of text. The lack of creative approaches and the use of creative writing within traditional English courses exemplifies neatly several of the dichotomies identified in Figure 3. It highlights the conflicts within English Studies between creativity and receptivity, between affectivity and analysis, between personal engagement and public expression.

5.1.9 Conclusions

Lowe and Cook (2003, 63), in their study of a first-year group at Ulster University, identify that 'about one-third of the cohort appear to expect teaching styles associated with school'. This is only natural. However, the advancement of cognitive ability and thinking is frequently manifested as a spiral sequence of learning followed by developmental *unlearning* (or modification of prior learning) in order to make way for the next stage of development. Development into the next phase of learning can only happen in relation to previous learning. Students necessarily seek to define new learning (and new methods of learning) by measuring them against prior learning experiences. Previous ways of working and ways of understanding are an inevitable point of reference. Such subjective and behaviour-forming definitions are what Bourdieu refers to as the habitus, and in this can be seen the seeds of conflict between phases of education. They also create the underlying tensions of transition from school to university, where previous modes and models may no longer apply, or apply only to a limited extent. The problematic interaction of new learning with previous learning meets in Bourdieu's analysis (1990c) over notions of accomplishment. The criteria (dictated by what Bourdieu terms the cultural arbitrary) for accomplishment may vary considerably from one habitus to another.

Bourdieu (1990c, 33) goes on to relate this to pedagogic work, or the act of inculcating pedagogic action, the productivity of which, he suggests:

is measured by the degree to which the habitus it produces is transposable, i.e. capable of generating practices conforming with the principles of the inculcated arbitrary in a greater number of different fields.

A key feature of successful habits, therefore is their adaptability and flexibility – the extent to which they are modifiable to operate in new contexts. Similarly in Vygotsky's terms, successful mediated learning is capable of taking students beyond their actual developmental level into new arenas for learning where newly internalised systems can operate with a degree of autonomy. This is of direct relevance to the transition from school to university. It addresses the extent to which the messages, expectations and means of learning at A level and the skills related to this are transferable to the context, or field, of higher education English Studies. As such, students intending to pursue English at degree level need to be introduced as early as possible (arguably while they are still undertaking their A level studies) to the nature of the study they will be expected to undertake.

Common sense dictates that transition will be easiest where assumptions and rationales about the nature of the subject and its delivery are shared. Where such shared paradigms are not in existence, however, transparency of expectation, open acknowledgement of difference and constructive discussion of how to progress, at the very least, are necessary to enable students to make the necessary cognitive and metacognitive adjustments.

A striking feature of discussions with teachers and students at both phases is the extent to which they seem to agree upon what is required in the successful study of English at degree level. It soon becomes clear, however, that this apparent coalescence of views (as manifested most specifically in shared disciplinary vocabulary, but with significant semantic differences) masks and perpetuates misunderstanding. There is a shared view of the issues that are central to success in

the successful study of English at university, but what constitutes satisfactory performance in each of these areas and how each area is defined is a far more elusive and problematic issue.

First year undergraduate students are clear in expressing the view that a significant difference exists between A level English and the study of English at university. Materials studied, the nature of study and the level of independence expected are all areas of discrepancy. Added to these issues, they also identify differing teaching methods and the quantity, pace and nature of reading to be undertaken as significant areas of divergence. This provides a substantial body of evidence to indicate how subject paradigms and expectations differ between post-compulsory and university levels.

There is a significant difference between approaches to teaching and learning in the contexts of schools and colleges and higher education institutions. The range of techniques employed within the post-compulsory context is generally wider and more supportive of a variety of learners and their learning styles. The predominance of the lecture and seminar in higher education, both of which tend to operate with much larger groups than are experienced at A level, are formats unfamiliar and threatening to students who are already insecure in the face of the many changes starting university entails. The requirement to use material presented in the lecture forum and in large seminar groups as a basis for independent thinking and study (and in a frequently less structured way) is a new and disconcerting demand for the majority of students entering higher education.

The experience of students of post-compulsory English has changed radically under the auspices of Curriculum 2000, but practice within university departments has not moved significantly in light of this. Whatever the rights and wrongs of changes in practice at A level, the reality is that students entering higher education English Studies courses come with expertise and skills and also deficits and support needs that must be addressed. Students, if they are to succeed in higher English Studies, must be met where they arrive in terms of subject knowledge and subject skills and these must be tailored and built upon to ensure successful retention and student development.

Chapter 6

Discussion and Conclusions

6.1 Introduction

The following discussion, for purposes of clarity, will be structured in four sections, relating to both the review of literature in Chapter 2 and the analysis of data presented in Chapters 4 and 5:

- **student and teacher expectations;**
- **curriculum and assessment;**
- **student study skills; and**
- **student 'location' and pedagogy.**

It seeks to relate the literature to data presented in the previous two chapters, and from this to draw conclusions apposite to students' experiences of transition and how they become accustomed to the new learning environment of the higher education institution. Finally, implications for practice and future personal research will be addressed.

6.2 Student and teacher expectations

6.2.1 Expectations, habitus and internalised 'rules'

Booth (1997) sees students' expectations as a set of filters through which they perceive and also evaluate their higher education experience. This view relates to Bourdieu's concept of the habitus. In this experience-formed and experience-forming locus, which he explains as 'the site of the internalisation of externality and the externalisation of internality' (1990c, 205), Bourdieu sees codified the means by which students will

conceive, receive and perceive their higher educational studies. Bourdieu seeks to summarise this, thus:

... the habitus acquired at school conditions the level of reception and degree of assimilation of ... any intellectual or semi-intellectual message.
(Bourdieu, 1990c, 43-44)

This relates interestingly to the experiences and views presented by both sixth form and first year undergraduate students. Many respondents within both questionnaire and interview data demonstrate the natural tendency to evaluate their university experience against or in the light of their most recent experiences of English studies, be it A levels, International Baccalaureate or Access course. Through such comparisons, post-16 or sixth form study impacts directly upon university study, becoming a filter (Booth, 1997) or a lens through which students read and make sense of their new experiences in transition. There are, then, significant questions to be raised here. Is it possible, for example, to deconstruct a particular set of values and views (or habitus) that school English Studies inculcates? And if such a set of shared values (or habitus) exists, how precisely does it relate to individual students' abilities to manage the transition from one site and culture of education to another? A number of key issues can be extrapolated from the data presented in Chapters 4 and 5. There are particularly significant matters emerging from students' engagement with reading, both of primary and of secondary texts. The small number of texts typically covered at A level (generally a maximum of ten) and a pre-eminent focus on close teacher-led reading, create in sixth form students patterns of study well-suited to work in the small, highly-structured and guided groups. The result of this is that students often emerge from A level with a limited and limiting perception of what reading at university will entail. They also bring with them a set of approaches to reading and a set of skills which do not entirely appropriately map on to the demands of degree level reading. Thus, faced with the pace, nature and expectations of textual study at university, students face significant challenges in reading (see Green, 2005a and Smith, 2004).

Secondary reading also provides a core area of difficulty, as discussion has demonstrated. In spite of the inclusion of wider reading within A level specifications under Curriculum 2000, and specific requirements for students to engage with critical and contextual readings of set texts, on the evidence of many of the students surveyed, this was a limited part of the experience of A level. The wide-ranging demands of theoretical reading at degree level, therefore, are demands many students do not enter their degrees effectively prepared to meet. Students struggle to make appropriate selection of secondary reading materials, even where reading lists have been provided, and also have difficulties in coordinating secondary reading *with* and applying it *to* the reading of primary texts.

Other significant defining features of the experience of sixth form English studies must also take account of:

- the importance of and nature of independent study;
- the role of assessment and Assessment Objectives under Curriculum 2000; and
- the nature of contact with and relationships with teaching staff.

These issues all lead students entering their university studies to make certain presuppositions about the experience of university study and about the nature of the subject they have chosen to study. Also significant within this analysis is the extent to which sixth form students understand what university English studies entail, and the extent to which they feel confident in approaching this.

As explored in Chapter 4, a number of significant disjunctions occur in the process of transition, as students encounter the new and sometimes radically different expectations and requirements of university study. It is not correct, however, to see such changes as entirely unexpected on the part of students. On the contrary, sixth formers surveyed indicate that they have a clear sense – albeit undefined – that the study of English will be different at university.

Figure 30: Sixth formers' confidence in sixth form study

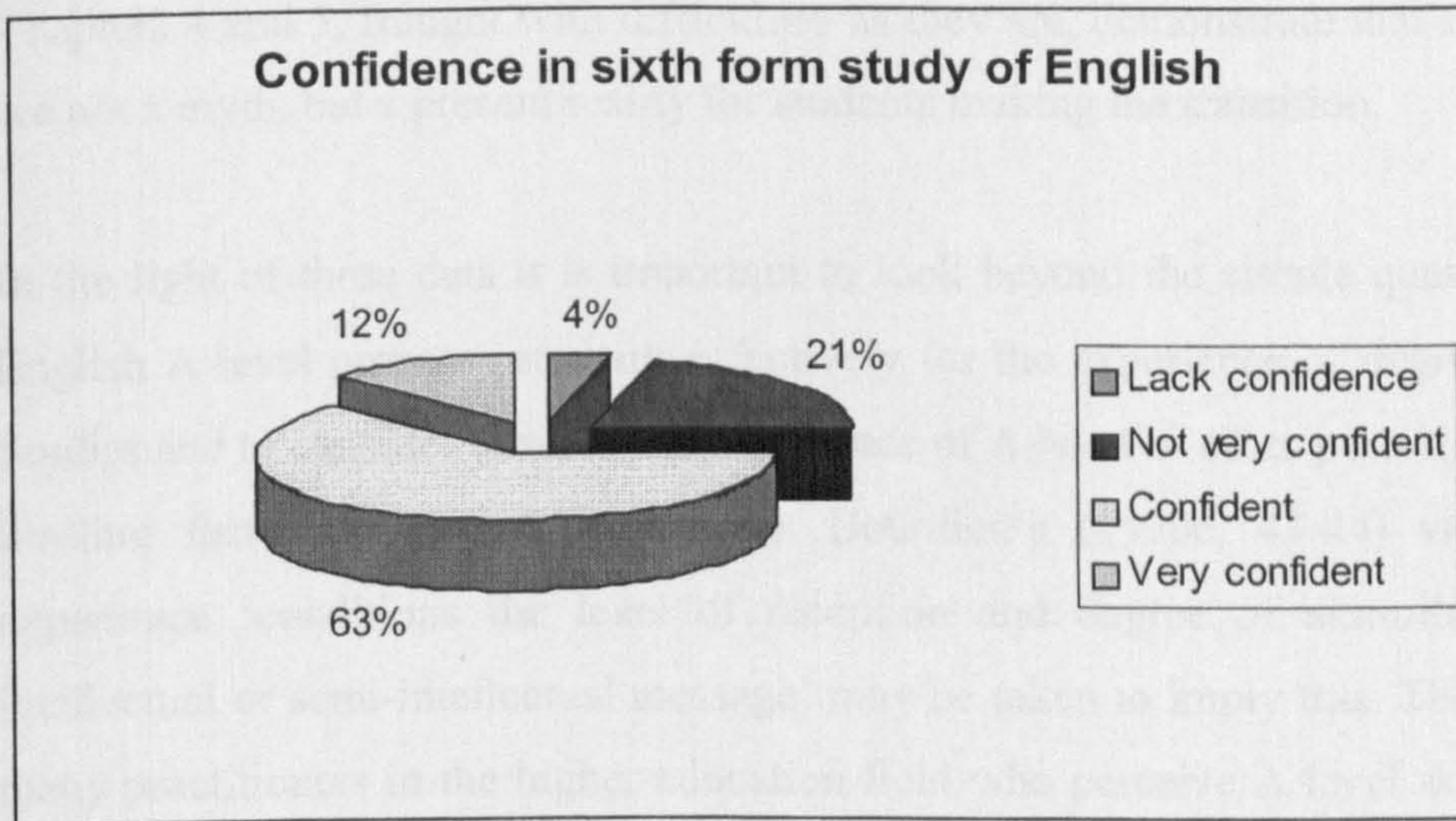
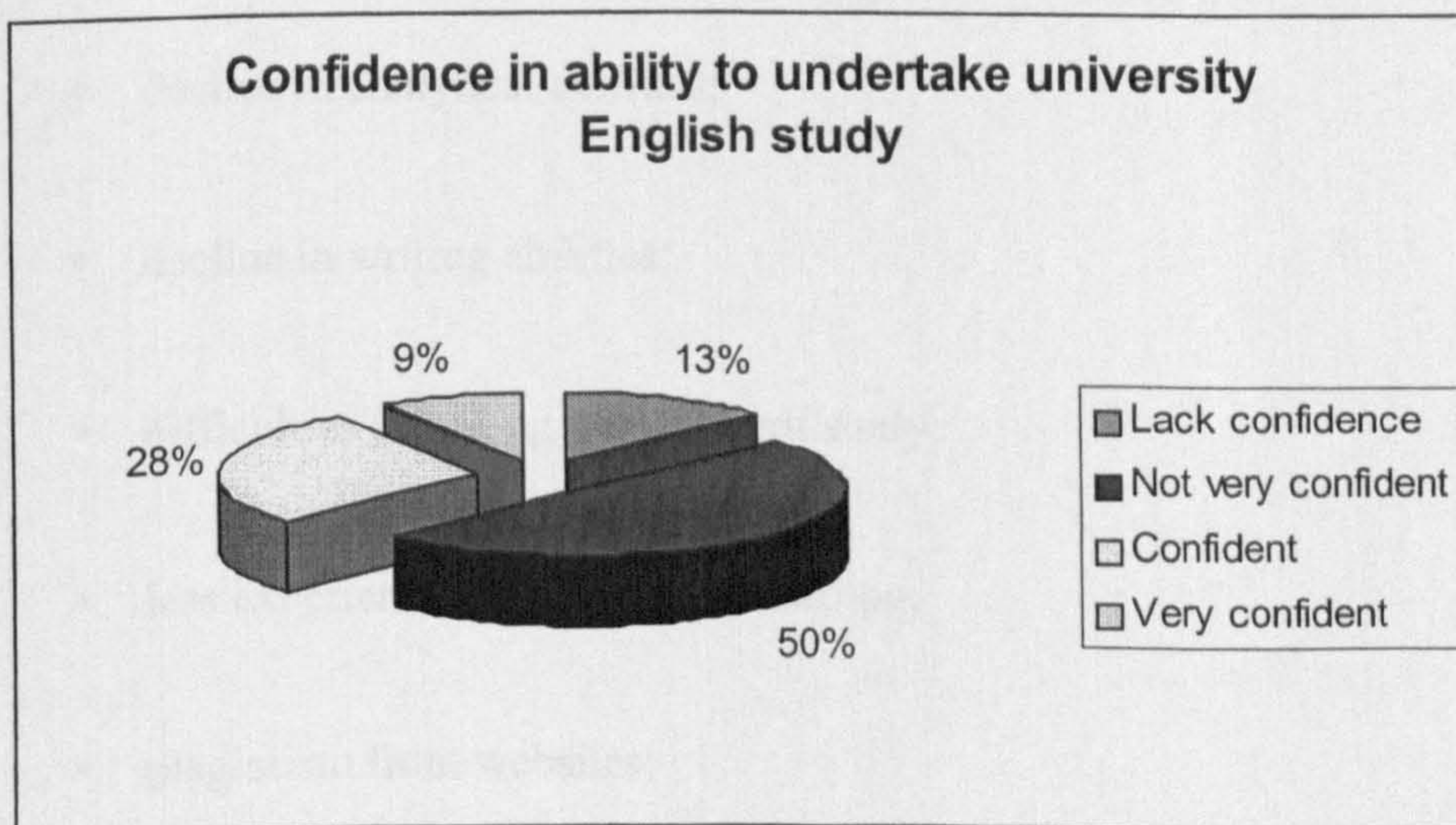


Figure 30 demonstrates that 75% of sixth form students of English surveyed, regardless of their intentions with regard to the higher study of English, feel confident or very confident that they understand the rationales, purposes and forms of English study at A level. However, when asked to consider their confidence to take on the study of English at university, this fell to only 37% (see Figure 31). This makes clear that many sixth form

Figure 31: Confidence in ability to undertake university English studies



students have a distinct, but unformed sense, of how sixth form and university studies differ. The experiences of students commencing their degree level studies charted in Chapters 4 and 5, fraught with difficulties as they are, demonstrate that such perceptions are not a myth, but a present reality for students making the transition.

In the light of these data it is important to look beyond the simple question of whether English A level prepares students effectively for the experience of degree level English Studies and to consider how far the experience of A level or other post-16 study may be a limiting factor in students' transition. Bourdieu's (1990c, 43-44) view that school experience 'conditions the level of reception and degree of assimilation of ... any intellectual or semi-intellectual message' may be taken to imply this. There are certainly many practitioners in the higher education field who perceive A level as an increasingly poor preparation for the demands of higher education English studies, and who see the parameters it lays down as a significant limiting force on students' development. Green (2005a) presents data outlining a number of key areas in which lecturers perceive such limitation:

- students have been taught to the text;
- over-reliance on taking and recycling notes;
- decline in analytical abilities;
- decline in writing abilities;
- difficulties in coping with pace of study;
- less experience in independent reading;
- plagiarism from websites;

- students arrive drilled in an assessment-driven system;
- students regard education as a set of assessment ‘hoops’ rather than a process of learning;
- less imaginative;
- less secure in transferable skills; and
- less willing to undertake wider reading.

There is an extent to which these limitations must be accepted. The study of English at A level is not and never can be the same as the study of English in higher education, as Barlow (2005c) and Atherton (2005) observe. Significantly, none of the limitations identified above is specifically related to issues of curricular content in the study of English, although they clearly impact upon such issues. The concerns raised instead reflect upon what Grossman, Wilson and Shulman (1989) refer to as syntactic areas of subject – the skills agenda, ethics, etc. These concerns also reflect broader educational and societal trends. That students will enter higher education having familiarity with a wide range of literary and critical reading, for example, is, as Chambers & Gregory (2006, 136-137) identify, an increasingly untenable expectation. What students read (taking into account the rise of the ‘new literacies’) and how they read it (related to the proliferation of ICTs and media) has changed significantly, and needs to be taken into account. Likewise, the assessment-led priorities identified in many students reflect an extrinsic valuation of learning at all levels beginning with Key Stage 1 SATs – a valuation ironically reinforced by university admissions procedures with their emphasis on A level grades (Gawthrop & Martin, 2003; Hodgson & Spours, 2003a).

As the earlier discussion of reading demonstrates, students struggle to manage the diverse and copious reading demands of undergraduate study. Many also have a highly pragmatic view of study predicated on assessment, some students making clear that they struggle to

define their studies without the structuring Assessment Objectives that hold sway at A level and delineate students' experiences of their English Studies. Indeed, the narrowly defined, Assessment Objective led teaching that many students seem to receive at A level – in the study of English Literature and the literary modules of English Language and Literature courses, at least, which Bluett, Cockcroft et al (2004) convincingly present as largely untheorised – seems to create in students a highly text-centered perspective. Set texts appear to be the focus of many students' experiences of A level English rather than literary study. This atomistic approach to the teaching of English, and of literature in particular, inevitably exacerbates the difficulty of moving into the faster paced and more broadly based study expected at university.

This discussion suggests that the study of English at A level creates in students a set of values, habits and approaches which are not congenial to degree level study. It leads us towards the conclusion that post-16 study, alongside a range of other societal influences, builds a set of limitations within students, which are likely to prove determining factors in their ability effectively to engage with higher level English studies. Deterministic notions such as this arise within Bourdieu's concept of the habitus. To what extent we must ask, however, does it lay within the power of the individual to escape such determinism? Bourdieu answers this by allowing that the habitus (and the expectations and aspirations it creates) can:

- produce different practical manifestations in varying circumstances or fields; and
- be transformed by changed circumstances.

Bourdieu does, therefore, allow for the action of modifying influences upon the habitus. He does not conceive of the habitus as an absolutely fixed state. As Jenkins (1992, 84) points out, however, both of these rebuttals depend upon changing *external* circumstances and are not internally driven. Transformative power within Bourdieu's analysis, it seems, does not lie within the habitus or the individual, but must be externally applied by a 'sanctioned' pedagogic action. The shaping features of previous experience

are thus still essentially deterministic in their nature. This does not easily equate with the views of students who, as the data demonstrates, often recognise the changes that need to be made either within their own academic and study practices or within the higher educational institution if they are to progress and independently take steps to address these. The process of understanding and coming to terms with higher education study is not unidirectional, but essentially dialogic. Certainly students use their A level studies as a ready means of reading and trying to make sense of their new experiences in degree level studies. They also, however, reflexively use their degree level studies to critique their A level experiences and the expectations these gave rise to, as a means of working out how their practices and perspectives need to change if they are to succeed in higher education. There is a significant role, within the process of transition, for student experimentation. As the data have shown, most students do not expect university English studies to be the same as A level English, but expect new challenges and demands. This may be a difficult, even a painful process for students, but also represents a useful rite of passage into academia.

The foregoing discussion is evidently not to suggest that intervention by university teaching staff is unnecessary. On the contrary, as interviewees and questionnaire respondents make clear, staff input into coming to terms with these challenges and demands, be they cognitive, metacognitive or paradigmatic, is an essential part of the process of transition. The shared role of students and lecturers is to negotiate successful pedagogic means by which this can take place.

Bourdieu suggests that it is the expectations and locus of the habitus that form probabilities and create social realities, not the other way round; the habitus is, in other words, the subjective expectation of objective probabilities. The notion of the habitus as an internalised site defined by and defining previous experiences within a given field is a useful starting point for thinking. It is a significant influence on students' views of other fields in education, and is a potent factor in determining how effectively individual students will engage with the new context of higher education. To the extent that it is a deterministic notion, however, it proves unsatisfactory in the light of the data. Interview

and questionnaire responses point to the fact that students identify and employ the social and educational realities they face to reshape their expectations and do not simply allow themselves to be passively reproduced in the image of higher education. In diagnosing their own needs, in considering how these needs can be met (either personally or through the external mediation of peers, lecturers or other sources), and in adapting their practices accordingly, students demonstrate the possibility of creating the grounds for change themselves.

It is important to recognise, therefore, that the 'limitations' associated with A level study outlined above remain limitations only if they are perceived as the end rather than as the beginning of students' further learning. Students entering their higher education are keen to succeed to learn and to learn to succeed. As Parlett & Simmons (1988) and Chambers & Gregory (2006) identify, recognition of students' 'location' on entering higher education is an essential basis for pedagogic thought. Furthermore, any consideration of this should simultaneously be retrospective and prospective, serving both diagnostic and prognostic purposes. It is important, as Vygotsky observes, not to mistake students' *actual developmental level* for their *potential developmental level*, perhaps especially in the case under consideration, where the 'currency' of A level qualifications is regarded with such academic suspicion. The fact, for example, that many students have not, prior to entering university studies, habitually read widely, does not mean that they cannot and will not, with appropriate guidance, learn to do so. Nor does the fact that students initially struggle to engage fully and effectively in lectures and seminars – pedagogic fora they find at first alien, as the data demonstrate – mean that this state of affairs needs to persist. New students cannot be expected at once to master all the new tools of their trade. Pedagogic practices need to take account not only of the content learning of courses, but also of students' needs in learning to learn. These are teachable skills and need to be part of taught programmes.

Where students face new cognitive concepts or alien learning environments alone, engagement with learning is necessarily made more difficult. The initial unmediated reception of new concepts or learning environments is inevitably measured *against*, and

to that extent conditioned *by* previous experiences and learning. Pre-formed notions of subject at cognitive, metacognitive and functional levels determine students' responses. However, where such experiences are mediated – a mediation students surveyed and interviewed for this study often express the desire for – the student is enabled to reintegrate pre-formed notions and learning and to use these in the formation of new cognitive structures. Mediated social interaction within learning therefore facilitates the opening up of new areas of learning. Through such mediation, whether this is direct teacher mediation within the seminar context, or whether it is through peer mediation or the provision of other learning supports within the context of independent study, response and access to new cognitive material is not limited by previous experience. Such interventions lead to cognitive expansion whereby higher functions do not simply overlay previous levels of functioning, but interact with them and extend them to create new functional systems (Vygotsky, 1978: 124). There is, perhaps, a real danger within the university English Studies environment, where students spend long hours in unmediated independent study, that engagement can indeed be limited and students can struggle to move forward from A level cultures and levels of performance. It is, therefore, essential to look at how students can be provided with appropriate mediated support, perhaps especially in independent study, to enable them to access higher concepts and to advance in their learning. It is clear from the evidence presented in Chapters 4 and 5 that for many students such mediation is not readily available within taught programmes, and they struggle to make sense of the new learning environment of the university and the new cognitive paradigms they encounter.

6.2.2 Homogeneity or heterodoxy

A significant question emerging from the foregoing discussion is the extent to which the institution *can* and *does* take account of the individual and of individualism, and the extent to which it requires conformity. In the context of transition, therefore, it is important to consider the interface not only between A level English and university English, but also between the (subjective) individual and the (objective) institution. The educational institution, Bourdieu (1990c, 57-58) suggests, exists to promote homogeneity and orthodoxy, not heterodoxy and individualism. The curricular formation of English

studies at A level or, indeed, of any subject requires a certain level of conformity, for purposes of standardisation in assessment, for the benefit of staff, students and end-users. The extent to which individualism is permitted is, therefore, open to question. The majority of staff surveyed, at both sixth form and university levels, indicate that individuality, personal interpretation, creativity or other individualistic criteria are essential features of effective engagement and performance within English. In stating that they expect students to develop individual and personal responses to texts and theory, however, we must question how far university departments in fact genuinely seek to develop student individualism and autonomy, and how far they rather require students to conform to pre-established programmes, norms and expectations.

Bourdieu's claims, centered on the concept of 'reproduction', are worthy of consideration. Instead of desiring and allowing genuine individualism, do university departments rather allow the coexistence of a plurality of sanctioned orthodoxies to one, some or all of which students have to ally themselves and within which they have to demonstrate proficiency? One of the key features of student interview and questionnaire data is the extent to which A level strictly codifies and even compartmentalises student experiences of set texts and of literature in general. This is most strikingly displayed through the A level Assessment Objectives, which frequently form the structuring rationale of teaching and student engagement with text. Although many sixth form teachers, therefore, state that independence and individual interpretative analysis are key abilities required for higher education, questionnaire and interview evidence suggests that concentration on Assessment Objectives frequently serves to define student response. Students therefore emerge from an A level system that limits freedom of interpretation and response.

Whilst university paradigms of English require and encourage students into broader views of subject and allow them to engage with a plethora of new materials, notions of freedom still need to be questioned. For students in the host institution for my own observational research, for instance, the first year consists of a set of core modules which all students must follow. These address Shakespeare, the rise of the novel, medieval

literature and poetry. The lack of freedom to choose modules for study in the first year proved a major issue for at least one interviewee. The curricular formation of subject in the first year, therefore, immediately led this student to question the extent to which she was free to follow her own interests and choices. The experience proved defining in more than one sense. The presupposition of value and questions of canonicity are foregrounded in the curricular choices institutions make. It may be argued that taught modules and the content of these is a starting point for students' own literary explorations, and that independent study time or peer group study provides the opportunity (or the tacit requirement) for students to develop their studies on a broader front. However, given student difficulties in managing reading and independent study identified in the previous two chapters, the extent to which students are actually free to develop their own interests – whether because of time pressures or because of inexperience as independent learners – is open to question.

The freedom sixth form students often anticipate of higher education is, therefore, a freedom defined – a freedom much greater than that offered at A level certainly, but a freedom defined nonetheless. Study at any level inevitably operates within forms and boundaries established by the objective institution for purposes of manageability of transmission, moderation of assessment and practical necessity (related to Grossman, Wilson & Shulman's (1989) 'syntactic' and 'substantive' dimensions of subject knowledge). For a wealth of educational, canonical and practical considerations, which may be related to notions of reproduction, there are good reasons why this should be so. Hence Bourdieu sees in 'every teaching body the tendency to retransmit what it has acquired by a pedagogy as similar as possible to the pedagogy of which it is the product' (1990c, 60). Higher education institutions, he suggests are innately conservative – conservatism perpetuated by the recruitment cycle of successful postgraduate students on to the academic staff of the institution. The tacit acceptance and redeployment of pedagogic methods, therefore, and accepted means of exploring and writing about texts provide useful examples. This is interestingly identifiable in my data on the question of creativity and creative writing within teaching and learning, which are viewed with some suspicion (see Chapter 5). It would also account for the unwillingness of many lecturers

to experiment with the pedagogic forms they employ (Knights, 2005a; Knights, 2005b), even where quite minor adjustments and the employment of a greater variety of pedagogic approaches would be of benefit to students and teachers alike (Green, 2005a; Green 2005b).

6.2.3 A changing student body

As analysis of the data has shown, the nature of students, and consequently the expectations of students entering higher education English Studies, has changed. The academic and cultural changes ushered in by Curriculum 2000 have had a significant impact (not always negative) on the abilities and needs of incoming undergraduate students. These are changes, as data analysis has suggested, which need to be carefully assessed and understood if students are successfully to make the transition to university, and if higher educational pedagogic practices are to provide appropriate challenges and support to incoming students. The need to maintain focus on these important issues is emphasised as further changes in the nature of the student body are likely under the influence of a number of factors:

- the widening participation agenda (DfES, 2003a; DfES 2003b);
- planned developments to the 14-19 curriculum (DfES, 2005);
- changes to English post-16 curricula for English Literature, English Language and Literature, and English Language for first teaching as of September 2007; and
- the advent of tuition fees and the marketisation of higher education.

Taken in combination, it is likely that perceptions of the relationship between the student, the lecturer and the institution will change. In order to address these changes and the shifting points of contact between A level and higher education, significant movements may well be required on both sides to make possible a constructive redefinition of the boundaries between A level and higher education English Studies. This has clear

implications for pedagogy at both levels. Data presented in Chapters 4 and 5 suggests that significant work now needs to occur to create an effective interface between sectors and to ensure that students and teachers (and teachers and lecturers) work in ways that are mutually beneficial. The aim of effective pedagogic practice must be to create bridges rather than damaging tensions for students who opt to continue beyond A level into higher education. Continuing learning, if it is to be managed effectively, must allow students to build upon and challenge prior experience rather than requiring them to reconstruct it wholesale. As analysis of data has demonstrated, expectations again come to the fore here.

Bourdieu (1990c, 99-100) directly addresses the problematic relationship between students' expectations and the expectations of the higher educational institution. He particularly approaches the knotty issue of institutional (pedagogic?) response to students whose needs and expectations do not meet the conventional requirements of the academy. He writes:

To the extent that it disappoints the unforeseen and untimely expectations of the categories of students who no longer bring into the institution the means of meeting its expectations, the educational system betrays the fact that it tacitly demanded a public which could be satisfied with the institution because it satisfied the institution's demands from the outset.

This presents a view of the educational institution as monolith. Data collected from lecturers' questionnaire responses suggests that such a view is, if not entirely accurate in the dispassionate picture it presents, not unrealistic. In spite of awareness of the changing nature of students emerging from A level study (and therefore presumably of their changing needs), 41% of lecturers responding indicated that there had been little change, and 53% that there had been no change in their pedagogic practice (see also Figure 35 and related discussion). As Green (2005a) observes, this gives rise to a number of potential conclusions:

- the quality of students entering Higher Education English has not in fact changed as significantly as recent media coverage and departmental views suggest;
- the gap between post-16 and Higher Education paradigms of English that many lecturers believe exists is in fact not as marked as it may appear;
- a large number of lecturers continue to teach in their old ways in spite of the shifting needs of students;
- faced with a significant change in the nature of the student body and the needs attendant upon this, lecturers have found themselves uncertain of how to deal with the new demands they face.

Whatever conclusion is to be drawn, it is clear that such unmoving practice in the face of striking changes to English studies at A level is a matter of concern. It does not suggest, amongst the lecturers surveyed, a sensitive and thoughtful management of the issues and difficulties students face in transition.

Given the significant changes resulting from Curriculum 2000 reform, to sixth form education in general and to English Studies in particular, it is most important that pedagogic approaches in higher education be interrogated. Without entering into the question of whether incoming students are better or worse than they used to be, what is certain is that they are different. In fact, judgements of the quality of students are as likely to reflect divergences in paradigm between A level and university as they are to reflect changes in ability or the reliability of A level assessment outcomes. Under the auspices of Curriculum 2000, nevertheless, a crisis has emerged. As the analysis of data has demonstrated, significant differences have emerged between A level and university study, manifesting themselves in the 'unforeseen and untimely expectations' of students to which Bourdieu refers. What A level prepares students to do and what it leads them to expect of higher education, and what higher education in fact offers are, if not at odds, frequently out of line with each other. The luxury, in other words, of teachers at either

sixth form or university level continuing to teach as they have always taught without a view to the progression of students in the process of transition is no longer a tenable position.

Here again, Vygotsky's distinction between students' *actual developmental level* as represented by their A level results and their *potential developmental level* needs to be taken into consideration. Firstly, in that lecturers need to have a clear sense of what A level assessment data actually represent; otherwise, no clear picture of students' true ability will emerge from their grades. Secondly, in that without such understanding, dynamic pedagogy that actively addresses and engages with students' needs cannot be formulated. Lectures, for example, tend to passivise the student role, and (as the data has shown) students often find them problematic as a forum for learning. The lack of active engagement characteristic of the lecture format tends to leave students stranded at their *actual developmental level* rather than providing the socially interactive environment necessary for accessing higher learning. As John-Steiner & Soubberman (1978, 131) observe:

The mere exposure of students to new materials through oral lectures neither allows for adult guidance nor for collaboration with peers.

Such problems, as the data have shown, are clearly multiplied where lecturers have an imperfect understanding of where students are coming from in terms of their English Studies.

And so we return to Bourdieu's observations above. Through the analysis of data it has become clear that for a variety of possible reasons, perhaps the most likely being a lack of understanding of the true nature and requirements of A level study, lecturers apply a set of often tacit expectations relating to the study of English to incoming students. These (tacit) expectations, coming into contact with students' own expectations (constructed within the cultures of Curriculum 2000 or the International Baccalaureate or an Access course), create a set of tensions which need to be overcome. As the analysis of data has

shown, the seminar room becomes, therefore, a place of variously shared boundaries and pedagogy the means whereby these boundaries are established and negotiated. It is unjust to conceive of the higher education institution as a coldly unmoving mass and higher education teaching as a vehicle of 'reproduction'. Lecturers surveyed and observed in data collection and analysis clearly wished to encourage the development of their students and to stimulate them through their studies in English. However, where expectations remain tacit and where pedagogy fails effectively to engage students and teachers in fruitful negotiation of boundaries, it is all too easy for reproduction to become the default position.

It is apparent from data provided by lecturers that they believe many students no longer bring to higher education studies the skills and aptitudes requisite for success. Students fail, in other words, to meet the subjective expectations of their teachers, which are to a certain extent a reflection of the objective pedagogic authority they represent. Conversely, it is clear from undergraduate and sixth form student data that lecturers' expectations of what is required of university study tend to remain tacit and therefore opaque. Changes in the nature of A level studies under Curriculum 2000, which were undertaken largely without reference to higher education professionals, have, Hodgson & Spours (2003a) suggest, led to a sense of alienation from A levels amongst academics. There exists in this alone a significant gap between A level and university, and therefore between incoming students and the academy. Even what may be considered, for want of a better term, the conventional body of students has therefore found itself somewhat distanced from higher education by means both of the Curriculum 2000 reform process and by means of the curricular formations these reforms led to.

The New Labour policy of widening participation can only further accentuate these problems. As the number of students entering higher education study increases, and as the nature of those students (in terms of socio-economic background and in terms of their relationship to what Bourdieu would call the cultural arbitrary of English Studies) becomes more diverse, so the range of student needs also increases. Pedagogic practices that do not expand and vary to meet such a proliferation of needs will lead only to further

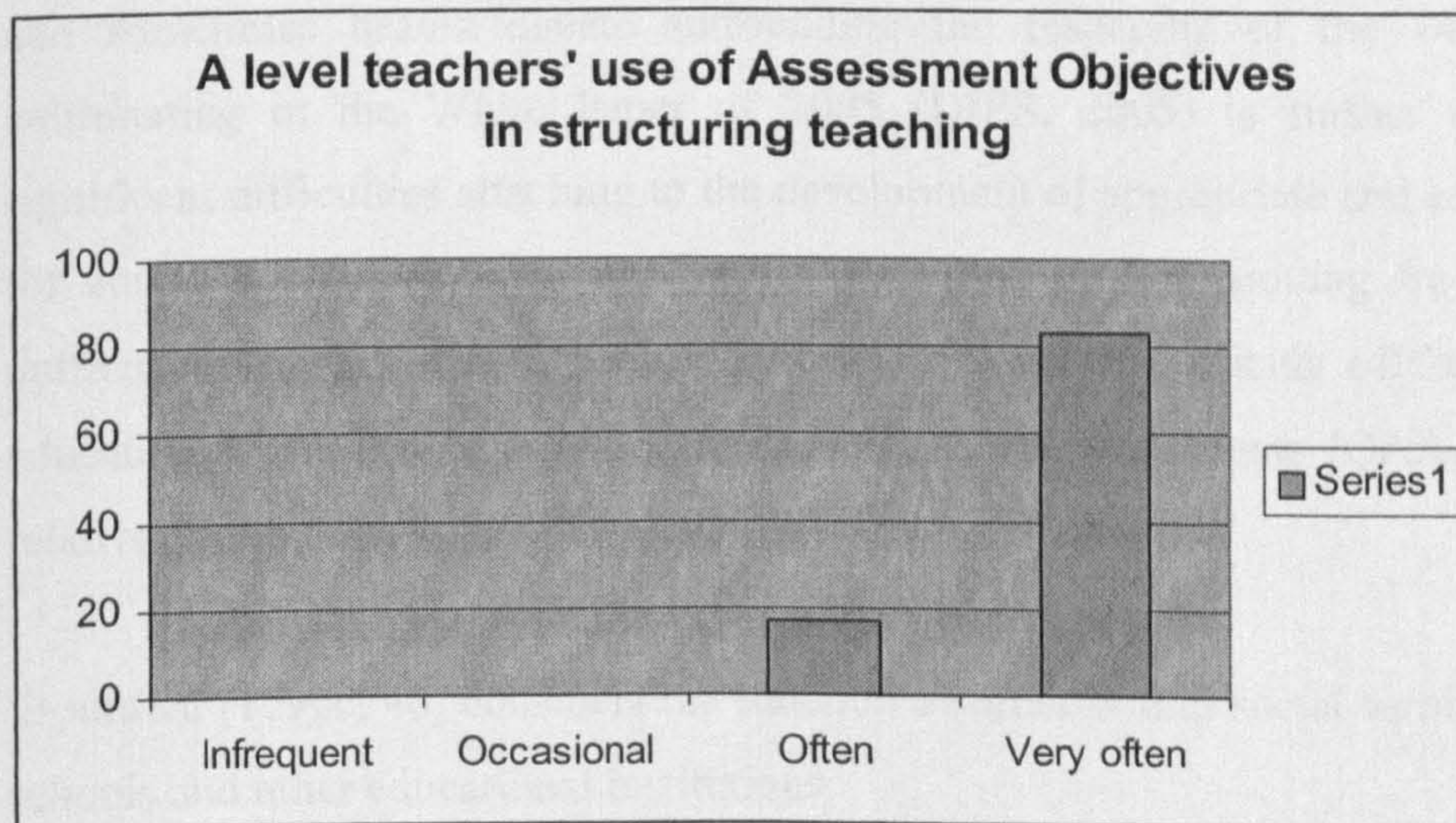
difficulties for students as they enter higher education (see Green 2006b and Knights 2005b) – difficulties which will inevitably also reflect back on to teaching staff.

6.3 Curriculum and assessment

6.3.1 Introduction

As the preceding discussion has begun to make clear, curriculum is central to the issue of transition between A level and university. The Curriculum 2000 reforms have had a profound impact on the nature of English studies at A level. All three A level English subjects – English Literature, English Language and English Language and Literature – are tightly defined by specifically located Assessment Objectives. These Assessment Objectives, as the data presented in Chapter 4 have shown, strongly influence the nature of teaching at A level. Asked to identify the extent to which they employ the Assessment Objectives in their teaching, and the extent to which they explicitly discuss this with their students, sixth form teachers' response was striking (see Figure 32).

Figure 32: A level teachers' use of Assessment Objectives in structuring teaching



As a result of this, the Assessment Objectives have become a very significant formative influence upon students' understanding of what English Studies entail. A number of interviewees, as the analysis in Chapter 4 illustrates, and many questionnaire respondents

comment on the extent to which their thinking and response in English was shaped (and limited) by the Assessment Objectives. Clearly the internalisation of such assumptions (possibly as part of the individual habitus) and the expectations they create is a very significant factor in students' progression to university and causes many first year undergraduates difficulty.

6.3.2 Curriculum as 'manager'

Curriculum serves an essential function within the management of any educational institution or educational system. It defines the parameters of study (or at least the minimal parameters of study) and relates closely to both pedagogy and the means of assessment. Curriculum is, therefore, one of the key methods by which the educational system and individual subjects within it are defined. Curriculum, at a subject level, is thus an attempt to establish discipline boundaries. The significance of this dimension of curriculum is particularly evident at points of transition, where different curricular formations of subject and their related pedagogies meet. Such points of transition cause difficulty even within apparently progression-based curricula: between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3, for example, or between Key Stage 3 and GCSE (Key Stage 4). On-going and sometimes heated debate surrounding the reshaping of the 14-19 curriculum, culminating in the White Paper of 2005 (DfES, 2005) is further evidence of the significant difficulties attaching to the development of appropriate and coherent curricula for study. Such difficulties are further exacerbated when moving from the relatively unified curriculum of A level study to the plethora of curricula offered within higher education which, in spite of the Subject Benchmark statements (QAA, 2000), remains relatively autonomous.

Bourdieu (1990c, 40) considers the function of order within social formations, including schools and other educational institutions:

In any given social formation, the pedagogic work through which the dominant pedagogic action is carried on always has a function of keeping order.

Pedagogic work, therefore, the means by which Bourdieu believes the habitus is inculcated, also serves the function of establishing the rules of engagement within the academic context. It also, he states, maintains order within institutions and within disciplines. The presence and the importance of such order and control within an effectively functioning system are evident in the data presented in Chapters 4 and 5. Significant issues emerge, however, in relation to their transparency and their underlying rationales. A significant part of the experience of transition involves in-coming students in the process of learning to apply themselves *to* and to operate *within* the new parameters of higher education English. However, a number of interviewees comment on their uncertainty about course and teaching structures and rationales, unfamiliar means of teaching and learning, assessment procedures, and so on. Not only what is being ordered, but the means by which it is ordered, therefore, needs to be clear to students.

The processes of ordering may be seen to operate in a number of ways, all of which are closely allied to curriculum (see Figure 33).

Figure 33: 'Order-keeping' through pedagogic work in the educational Institution

- | |
|---|
| <p>'Order-keeping' through pedagogic work in the educational in</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Curriculum content;▪ methods of delivery (pedagogy);▪ dictating the terms (and times) of staff-student contact;▪ modes of assessment. |
|---|

The particular formations these means of order-keeping take at sixth form and in higher education are, of course, different, leading to the confusion and uncertainty students often feel and the difficulties they often face in managing the transition from one phase of

education to the next. As demonstrated in Chapters 4 and 5, for example, lectures and seminars as the typical and sanctioned fora for learning in higher education tend to utilise a narrower range of pedagogic approaches. This obviously serves to order study and students' perspectives of their subject in quite another way than the order that prevailed within A level studies. Similarly, the primacy of the set text at A level and the ordering principles of the Assessment Objectives encourage students to fashion their responses to texts in quite a different way than in higher education.

This is exemplified in Figure 34.

Figure 34: Order-keeping pedagogic work at sixth form and in higher education

	Sixth form	Higher education
Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Students study for English as one of 4 or occasionally 5 AS subjects, then usually drop one subject as they progress to A2; ▪ Students follow three modules per year, each requiring the minimum (often in reality <i>maximum</i>) study of one or two texts per module; ▪ Some (often minimal) emphasis is placed on the use of literary theory in relation to set texts (AO4 and AO5 in English 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Students follow Single honours, Combined honours or Major/minor programmes of study; ▪ Students typically follow four modules per year, each covering a wide range of texts; ▪ Literary theory often plays an extensive and significant role;

	<p>Literature specifications; AO3 and AO4 in English Language and Literature specifications);</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tendency towards a limited and largely canonical list of set texts – where more adventurous texts (e.g. Ackroyd's <i>Hawksmoor</i> in comparison with Barry Unsworth's <i>Sacred Hunger</i>) are set, take-up tends to be very limited. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tendency to cover a wide range of texts, both canonical and non-canonical.
Methods of 'delivery'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Slow coverage, generally of a maximum of 10 texts; ▪ Strongly guided reading; ▪ Little secondary reading; ▪ Small teaching groups (typically 12-18); ▪ Interactive methods of teaching, employing a variety of techniques such as drama and DARTs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Quick coverage of many texts; ▪ Reading largely unguided; ▪ Much secondary reading; ▪ Seminars and lectures (and very rarely, tutorials) – large forum teaching; ▪ Students often passive; a more limited variety of approaches to teaching.
Staff-student contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Close contact, usually with one or two teachers; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Distant contact, often with many lecturers;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regular personal contact with teachers – usually about five or six hours per week; ▪ Staff frequently available. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More limited contact, often impersonal owing to group sizes – often only one hour per week; ▪ Staff contact often limited to ‘office hours’ and email.
Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Detailed (and structuring) assessment regime – evidence suggests this often over-rides cognitive content; ▪ Assessment Objectives weighted and allocated to specific texts – can encourage students into atomised rather than holistic views of text and of the discipline as a whole; ▪ Assessment Objectives often used in teaching – heavy emphasis on assessment; ▪ Regular retakes are possible throughout both years; ▪ Grades can improve in retakes, leading to problems of grade maximisation and inflation (Barlow, 2005c). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assessment subservient to cognitive content; ▪ Holistic views of text and of discipline required throughout university study; ▪ Assessment Objectives not usually used in teaching; ▪ Assessment generally at year end; ▪ Where retakes are permitted, retake grade has a ceiling mark – usually pass only.

These tables are not intended exhaustively to outline the nature of all the order-keeping forces operating within the respective environments (and what Bourdieu would call the

pedagogic works) of sixth form and higher education English Studies. Rather, they are intended to indicate a number of key ways in which such order-keeping functions (and the underlying pedagogic principles and pedagogic practices that legitimise such orderings) operate as shaping influences on students' experiences and expectations. The impact of these different controlling forces within the pedagogic environment upon students and their ability to manage transition is clearly significant.

6.3.3 Assessment

As data presented in Chapters 4 and 5 have demonstrated, the largely text-centric expectations and assumptions formed in many A level students are to a considerable extent controlled by assessment and teachers' response to the A level Assessment Objectives. This is clearly pointed out by Hodgson & Spours (2003a), Green (2005a) and Barlow (2005c), amongst others. The possibility of repeated retakes impacts both on grades, as Barlow (2005c) demonstrates through case study, and also upon the ways in which A level students conceive of the nature and purpose of their learning. Although Curriculum 2000 set out to shift the basis of A level study, away from the study of a limited number of set texts and on to a corpus of more generic skills associated with literary study, the extent to which teachers have responded generously to the spirit of these intentions is open to question. Instead of allowing and encouraging students to broaden their exposure *to* and practice *of* literary study and their conception of what it entails, it appears that in many cases they have instrumentally used the Assessment Objectives as a means of improving students' examination performance. Data presented in Chapters 4 and 5 make apparent that assessment and specifically the Assessment Objectives have a major impact in defining students' experiences and understanding of English at A level. As demonstrated above, Assessment Objectives have arguably become the defining feature of A level teaching. Students carry the impact of this with them into their study of English at university. The separation of study from such rigorous assessment confines at degree level, many students find profoundly dislocating. They are forced radically to challenge and relocate their sense of what English Studies is.

6.3.4 Staff-student contact

The nature of staff-student contact is also an issue of importance. Data presented in Chapter 4 demonstrate the extent to which this differs between sixth form and university. This is not to say that all students see the change in practice as a negative (for example S3), however many do. By nature, A level classes tend to be comparatively intimate. Contact both with teachers and with peers is frequent and sustained, and familiarity is developed over two years. In addition, in many cases students have already learned how to work alongside each other over the preceding five years of their secondary education. The high level of interpersonal engagement this environment provides allows ample opportunity for the socially constructivist educational benefits Vygotsky posits. This is very different from the situation at university, where teaching is usually undertaken in larger seminar groups, in big lecture formats, and where a considerably different emphasis is placed on independent study. In this environment, the development of relationships with other students and staff inevitably tends to be of a more limited nature and it is comparatively easy for students to become isolated. The social context of learning is substantially different from that pertaining at A level, and the more limited social interactions of university study can, unless carefully mediated, act as a limiting force on students' academic development. The implied relationship between staff and students and between peers is presupposed by the amount and nature of teaching contact at each level. Hence for many students, the lack of close contact with teaching staff at university becomes another significant boundary to overcome in the higher education context (Evans, 1993).

6.3.5 Conclusions

As this discussion of curriculum, assessment and staff-student contact indicates, one of the most significant difficulties faced by students making the transition between A level and higher education English Studies (and for teachers of those students) is that the boundaries do not really meet. Degree level study, as both staff and student responses in questionnaire and interview data illustrate, does not begin where A level ends. There is, in the case of many students interviewed and surveyed, a significant experiential, cognitive and conceptual distance between what happens in the sixth form and what

happens at university. The expectational 'filters' Booth (1997) refers to do not, in the case of a very significant number of new undergraduates, offer a helpful and reliable means of evaluating their experiences at university. However, such expectations and assumptions are the only means students have, without staff input, of coming to terms with their new study environment.

In many ways, perhaps by default, contact between the two phases of education is reduced to assessment. As I have argued, however, this is in itself problematic. Differing assessment philosophies and related pedagogic systems at A level and in higher education mean that data in the form of A level results is of questionable use either diagnostically or prognostically. The current system of admissions, in which offers are usually made on the basis of A level grades alone (see Gawthrop & Martin, 2003) without interview, places heavy emphasis on the reliability of such data. In this lies one of the most difficult (and potentially harmful) barriers to transition.

6.4 Student study skills

6.4.1 Skills and 'training'

The question of students' study skills is a further significant issue within the data. As has already been seen, lecturers surveyed express dissatisfaction with students' abilities as readers, analysts and writers. They also observe that students manifest less in the way of usable transferable skills and struggle to cope with the pace of university study. Here again the differing nature of A level and university study and the expectations of each becomes apparent. Notions of 'formation' and 'training' therefore become significant, related to Bourdieu's concept of reproduction. The skills required of students in any given discipline are, as Durkin and Main (2002) suggest, best conceived of and taught within the confines of that subject. Where such subject-based training is provided, skills will not (as is often the danger) become dislocated from practice, but will be integrated with it. This is not to suggest that skills are or should be a purely implicit dimension of subject, although Bourdieu's (1990c) 'perfect' model of educational reproduction would have it that such totally internalised, implicit inculcation is possible. On the contrary, skills as much as cognitive content need to be an explicitly taught component of courses

at every level to assist students in developing as autonomous practitioners. What the data make evident is that for a variety of reasons already discussed (for example assessment or curriculum) the skills required to succeed at A level and those required to succeed at university do not straightforwardly connect with each other.

The notion of ‘training’ – something which all the students interviewed expressed a desire for in one form or another – also relates to Grossman, Wilson & Shulman’s (1989) notions of syntactic dimensions of subject and subject knowledge formation. Syntactic subject knowledge, they suggest, relates to the tools and forms of inquiry within a discipline. It deals with canons of understanding, the formation of evidence and proof accepted within that discipline and the ways in which new material is brought into the body of knowledge. This is subject not as content, but rather as process. Such syntactic issues are unfamiliar to many students entering higher education. However, within the context of university study, where substantial quantities of independent research and extended writing are often required, they are a key element of success. As developing learners, students need systematically to be introduced to the conventions and processes by which a discipline functions. Tacit knowledge of such procedures carries a certain weight, but metacognitive engagement with them needs to be more and more explicit and more and more detailed within practice as students progress if they are to become effective autonomous practitioners.

There is a clear sense, then, in which higher education – as education at any level – is designed to ‘train’ whether in terms of a skills or a cognitive agenda. Bourdieu terms such training ‘inculcation’, and in so doing again lays himself open to charges of determinism. However, the notion does usefully imply the political dimension of pedagogy and casts the relationship between the educational institution and the individual (teacher or student) in a suggestive light. Students’ desires, expressed in Chapters 4 and 5, to succeed in mastering the new models of learning represented by university study, suggest the underlying power of such politicised readings of the educational environment.

Whether we see its purposes and outcomes as incultation (Bourdieu) or guidance

(Vygotsky) by teachers and the institutions they represent, however, one phase of education inevitably impacts upon the next. As has been seen, the educational experiences of students at A level are highly influential in determining their abilities to engage with the new educational context(s) of higher education. Bourdieu (1990c, 33) observes such impact and seeks to measure the 'productivity' of any educational work or experience according to its transposability. The effectiveness of any pedagogic work, he argues, cannot be measured in relation to its specific context alone:

The specific productivity of pedagogic work, i.e. the degree to which it manages to inculcate in the legitimate addressees the cultural arbitrary it is mandated to reproduce, is measured by the degree to which the habitus it produces is transposable, i.e. capable of generating practices conforming with the principles of the inculcated arbitrary in a greater number of different fields.

Without rehearsing once more the limitations of the concept of habitus, this is nevertheless an enlightening proposition. It requires us to question the extent to which post-16 study provides students with genuinely transposable versions of subject and perspectives that will assist them in coping with the new demands of university English Studies. Conversely, it requires us to consider how far lecturers understand what is being transposed. Such notions of transposability and their influence on students' ability effectively to engage in a variety of learning contexts also emerge in Vygotsky's writings (1978, 124). The ability to engage creatively with new learning, or to play with learning, provides a useful example of a relevant transposable skill. Vygotsky discusses the means by which previous learning and educational experiences interact with new pedagogic or experiential contexts to develop psychological and cognitive structures. Such development occurs, he suggests, through processes of creative experimentation or game-playing and is all the more effective where it is a socially mediated experience. The creation of such mediated and creative learning environments assists students in moving from a position where meaning is subservient to action, to a position where the ratio is inverted and action is invested with meaning.

The role of mediated creativity within English study is, the data suggest, increasingly missing from A level. In support of this view, Hodgson & Spours (2003a) also comment on the damaging effect crowded A level curricula have had upon the space and time available for more experimental and creative teaching and learning. As such, therefore, A level leaves students unprepared in a key area for their degree level studies. If students entering degree level studies are to engage effectively in the kinds of sophisticated intellectual risk-taking Knights (2004) advocates, the creation of opportunities for similar and sustained experiences during A level English studies is also important.

On the evidence of questionnaire, observational and interview data, however, lecturer-mediated opportunities for such experimentation are also tellingly absent in the higher education context. Lectures and seminars are frequently strongly lecturer-led, offering a limited range of opportunity for student engagement and little (if anything) in the way of discussion of the syntactic processes underlying pedagogy. The assumption that students come out of their A level studies with the ability to provide such creative and processual structures for themselves, whether within taught sessions or within their independent study is, as has been demonstrated, untenable. Misunderstanding or lack of understanding of pedagogic encounters on both sides creates a situation which is detrimental to lecturers and students alike. The discussion of creative writing and its role within English literary study in Chapter 5 provides a useful illustration of this, drawing on students' experiences at both A level and university.

Particular issues also emerge in relation to students' abilities to operate effectively within university learning fora – the seminar and the lecture. The skills to function effectively within the contexts of seminars and lectures are radically different to those required within the intimate context of an A level teaching group, where students are frequently very closely guided through their studies (see Chapter 5). The emphasis on guiding students at A level means that when faced with the freedom of the university seminar, many students are ill- or under-prepared to maximise their learning opportunities. Indeed, many struggle to make sense of the experience at all in the early phases of university

study. The ‘uncomfortable silence around which the tutor and two or three of the more vocal, confident or uninhibited students manoeuvre’ (Knights, 2005b, 265) is all too familiar, as data presented in Chapter 5 make clear. The lack of structure – or at least the lack of *perceived* and *familiar* structure – in university teaching sessions is a significant factor in distancing students from full and effective engagement in learning. It means in effect that the freedom many lecturers wish to develop is in reality anything but liberating for students. Instead of opening doors of possibility, such freedom frequently serves to close them. The desired openness of dialogue and discourse within the seminar (especially after the ‘unvoicing’ experience of a preparatory lecture, where students rarely have the opportunity to challenge or question the ideas presented to them) becomes a threatening uncertainty. The removal of boundaries in fact operates as the most potent of boundaries in its own right, preventing many students from openly engaging in meaningful debate and successfully engaging in the early phases of their university studies.

A further complication arises because the extent to which students are truly free to explore within A level and higher education contexts (as in any educational context) is open to question. At A level, as has already been observed during data analysis, the process of learning is often strictly guided by teachers. Within such a strictly controlled and monitored learning environment (see Hodgson & Spours, 2003a), the opportunities available for students to explore their own avenues of interest – even within the context of coursework modules, where teachers still usually exercise a considerable amount of control (see Bleiman & Webster, 2006) – are limited. In higher education also, as previous discussion has clarified, while the seminar is seemingly intended to free students as interpreters it often has quite the opposite effect (Rosslyn, 2005; Chambers & Gregory, 2006). Independent study also frequently has such effects. Whilst intended to provide students with a forum within which to voice and explore their ideas, there is the potential that freedom may be limited by two key factors:

- the offer or requirement of freedom instead of liberating students may in fact prove threatening; and

- lack of understanding about how to operate within a new learning forum is likely to limit students' abilities to respond unless appropriate mediation is provided to support them.

Both of these difficulties reflect interestingly on the ideas of Bourdieu and Vygotsky. From the latter's perspective, freedom in new areas of learning is only truly available through the mediation of more able others. As such, the freedom to explore is never truly individualistic, but is a socially constructed experience. Bourdieu, on the other hand, would attribute these difficulties to a lack of understanding of the 'rules of the game' within the cultural arbitrary of the higher education institution. Freedom, within such a deterministic analysis, is no more than another veiled means of control which students misrecognise. Given the cultural arbitrary's predisposition to reproduce itself, Bourdieu argues, the educational institution exists to promote homogeneity and orthodoxy, and therefore challenges (and limits the opportunity for) unsanctioned heterodoxy and individualism. Established views of what constitutes success and accomplishment are inevitably defining features of the experiences of and allowable manifestations of study.

Such ideas are directly relevant to the issue of transition. The more extreme implications of Bourdieu's concept of reproduction seem contrary to the genuine pursuit of individual academic development and response. However, the general trend of his argument towards the practical (self-)management of academic disciplines and the limitations imposed to achieve such ends (for example in setting, standardising and moderating assessment) is convincing in the light of the expectations and experiences of staff and students presented in Chapters 4 and 5. Both A level and university studies operate according to their own sanctioned orthodoxies, which are to a greater or lesser extent plural. Effective performance at each level depends upon the ability of students (and their academic practices – or *habiti*) to function within the parameters established by these sanctioned, disciplinary orthodoxies or boundaries.

The pedagogic constitutions of A level and higher education English Studies are thus

thrown into relief with each other at the point of transition. Both are seeking, through their respective pedagogic work, to create distinct definitions of what constitutes expertise or accomplishment. This is achieved through the establishment of a set of delimitations and definitions, as has already been suggested. Definition and delimitation play important roles in Bourdieu's (1990c, 34) pedagogic action and his understanding of what constitutes accomplishment or success. He writes:

... [A] pedagogic action implies, in addition to a delimitation of the content inculcated [the curriculum for study]*, a definition of the mode of inculcation (the Legitimate mode of inculcation) [the means of pedagogic transmission, i.e. lectures, seminars etc.]* and of the length of inculcation (the legitimate training period) [length of programme: two years for A level; three years for degree, etc.]*, which define the degree of completion of pedagogic work considered necessary and sufficient to produce the accomplished form of the habitus, i.e. the degree of cultural attainment (the degree of legitimate competence) by which a group or class recognises the accomplished man.

(* Material in square brackets constitutes my own examples in response to Bourdieu's observations.)

This can be related to both the means and the matter of A level English and higher education English. Accomplishment (and the different means by which accomplishment is taught, displayed and assessed) is substantially different in nature between A level and degree level. Students' sense of uncertainty about what they are trying to achieve and the means by which it can be achieved is evident from the data. Thus also emerge the difficulties faced by lecturers and first year students as they seek to (re)define and (re)negotiate the pedagogic encounters of the lecture hall and the seminar room, as well as the functions and forms of independent study. The expectations and practices of A level students, as interview data presented make clear, are challenged and developed (and even sometimes broken) through classroom encounters in higher education. These

encounters require the student through politico-pedagogic negotiations with lecturers – most of which will be tacitly rather than explicitly undertaken – to redefine their sense of what they are doing, how it must be done and why. Without coming to such realisations, accomplishment on the terms of higher education will not effectively be achieved.

To return to Bourdieu's observations on transposability, then, transition highlights two essential and mutually interdependent issues:

- the need for A level to provide students with a corpus of useful and relevant transposable abilities for use within higher education; and
- the need for lecturers to recognise what abilities their incoming students *do* and *do not* bring with them and to reflect this within their pedagogical choices.

This makes clear the importance of mutual understanding and dialogue between sectors so that students can serve well and be well served; that the transposition, in other words, between sixth form and university can be made more harmonious. Students should not be held to ransom for the failures of A level and degree level study effectively to interact, but must be helped to engage in their new learning context.

6.5 Student 'location' and pedagogy.

6.5.1 Teachers and learners

Whose interests, it is germane to ask in starting this section, does pedagogy reflect: the interests of the learner, or the interests of the teacher? It is glibly possible to assume that its function is to assist the learner, and of course in responsible teaching the needs of the learner must be paramount. However, as the previous discussion has made clear, to adopt such a straightforward view is to over-simplify (Bourdieu, 1990c, 26). Vygotsky's dialectical analysis of pedagogic encounters recognises the dependence of the learner on the teacher. In the process of internalising new systems (moving from the *interpersonal* to the *intrapersonal*) students rely on teachers or other pedagogic agents to provide suitable mediation in order to allow access to higher learning. It is also important, though, to take

into account the political and controlling impulses that often underlie pedagogic practices and encounters. A pedagogic agent, for instance, (the educational institution, or the teacher, or the lecturer) commands a certain pedagogic authority by virtue of its position. However, the nature of that authority and the nature of what it may legitimately convey or inculcate (what Bourdieu calls the cultural arbitrary) is often defined by powers beyond the control of the individual agent (e.g. the requirements of the 14-19 curriculum and Curriculum 2000 in the case of A level, or the demands of the QAA Subject Benchmark statements in the higher education context). Similarly, the modes of delivery at A level are dictated not by student and teacher needs so much as by institutional imperatives, timetabling requirements, teaching economies and so on. Teachers and students can, of course, opt to operate outside such requirements and stipulations. To do so, however, risks failure to achieve within the established parameters for assessment or accomplishment. Pedagogy cannot, therefore, be seen as a purely benign force, the purpose of which is disinterestedly to enable students to access learning. Pedagogy is by its very nature political.

In arguing that:

the mode of imposition defined by [a cultural] arbitrary, entails the impossibility for that [pedagogic] agency of freely defining the mode of imposition, the content imposed and the public on which it imposes it (the principle of the limited autonomy of pedagogic agencies)'

Bourdieu (1990c, 27) suggests that pedagogic practices are inevitably culturally defined. They are (sub-)consciously formed by and reflect the cultural context (or arbitrary) from which they spring. This provides a useful way of understanding the differences between students' experiences of English study at school and at university, and the difficulties innate within inter-institutional transition. Sixth form and higher education institutions represent and deal with widely different constituencies. They also, as has been established, reflect substantially different conceptualisations of how English operates. This means that mutual understanding of student 'location' across the boundary between

sixth form and higher education is likely to be problematic and that the initiation of incoming students into higher education pedagogic practices is likely to be difficult. This is amply demonstrated within the data.

6.5.2 Teachers' and lecturers' choices and practice

As the discussion above has begun to identify, there are ways in which teachers' and lecturers' choices are defined for them (in terms of curriculum and in terms of practice) by the power-forming agency or the institution that delegates to them the authority to practice. It is against this background of requirements that teaching forms itself. Pedagogy, however, must not only serve the institution, it must also satisfy the needs of students. Teachers and lecturers become, therefore, the mediating influence between the institution and the student. Pedagogy is simultaneously a means of empowerment and a product of necessity. It recognises the imperatives (cultural, curricular, philosophical) of the institution, and seeks to enable students to operate and demonstrate accomplishment within these imperatives.

This, of course, is not to suggest that teachers and lecturers cannot and should not seek to develop and employ a range of pedagogic practices to assist students within this process. Knights (2005b) observes this when he argues that pedagogic encounters, if they are to be effective, must be dialogic. Effective pedagogic encounters are constructs created by students and teachers through interaction. Reading and writing, speaking and listening, the four modalities of language upon which the study of English at any level is based are all dialogic processes, presupposing the notion of meetings (as explored in Chapter 5). As F.R. Leavis famously used to say, literature is the place where minds meet. The essential presuppositions of English as a discipline and therefore of English pedagogy are dialogue and interaction. It is the role of the teacher to facilitate and maximise the opportunity *for* and the impact *of* such dialogue and interaction, even where reproduction, in Bourdieu's sense, remains part of the pedagogic process. Indeed, the necessity for such dialogic interaction is in itself central to the cultural arbitrary that higher education English may be said to inculcate.

It is essential to recognise, however, that in any given educational institution or system the form such dialogic interaction takes and the issues which are open to dialogic interrogation will vary. What this means in reality is that there are certain limits (boundaries again) beyond which the defining authority – be it the curriculum, the institution or the expectations and limitations of the individual – makes it difficult to sustain certain pedagogic practices. There are certain choices that teachers and lecturers are not free to make, because they fall without the definitions of sanctioned orthodoxies. Such practices fail to meet the requirements *of* or actively militate *against* the defining pedagogic action and pedagogic authority and as such fail to (re)produce desired and sanctioned outcomes. It is not, for instance, possible for teachers to dictate the size of teaching group or to make a totally free choice of texts to be studied. Nor is it possible for lecturers to jettison the lecture as a teaching forum, in spite of its dubious credentials as a learning environment.

The prevailing 'market' model of education encourages the view that teachers and lecturers are providing a service and that their students are a 'product'. The successful outcome of the educational system is a formed (and trained) individual, who will be able to meet the demands of society – culturally, socially, educationally and structurally. For this reason, teachers, lecturers and students are required to (and often prepared to) acquiesce in education as if this were its only function. The instrumental practices identified by Hodgson & Spours (2003a; 2003b) and also evidenced in Chapters 4 and 5, demonstrate the extent to which students shape their expectations to the dominant force of their teachers. In turn it is clear that many teachers and lecturers shape their expectations and pedagogic practices to meet the needs of the post-16 and higher education systems rather than entering into a genuine dialogue about the purposes of English education and how students can be enabled to access these. The extent to which teachers are willing to allow their pedagogic practices to be dictated depends upon the rigidity of institutional requirements and the strength of their own philosophical perspectives.

6.5.3 'Reproduction' in higher education

The issue of cultural reproduction within the higher education context is significant. Student interviews demonstrate that students wish to do what they think their lecturers want of them. Students wish, in other words, to learn to comply because they wish to succeed. Clearly such motivation is prerequisite in considering cultural reproduction (see analysis of data in Chapter 4). It is equally clear that a similar reproduction occurs at A level, leading to a narrow focus on Assessment Objectives, a tendency to value learning extrinsically rather than intrinsically, and a focus on the study of set texts rather than broader conceptualisations of literary study.

Whether it is for personal, social and cultural development or for pragmatic reasons (for the perceived value in banking educational capital, for example) students have, Bourdieu would suggest, a vested interest in playing along with the game. Reproduction, in Bourdieu's sense, is of value not only to the educational institution in retaining the *status quo*, but also to the student, because of career aspirations and so on¹. For this state of affairs to persist, however, a fundamental and deliberate misrecognition of pedagogic action and pedagogic interactions must take place. The extent to which students can or will acquiesce in the demands of the new pedagogic domain of higher education, even where they perceive difficulties in so doing, will depend upon the extent to which they value its outcomes. A range of influences, such as familial values placed on higher education and/or English as cultural capital, come into play here, as do students' experiences of English at A level. As has been demonstrated, however, as the boundaries between A level and higher education have become increasingly problematic under the aegis of Curriculum 2000, so the influence of expectations derived from A level becomes less useful. Consequently, notions of what university English departments are trying to reproduce and the likelihood of doing so, becomes more problematic. As the incoming body of students has changed, and will continue to change, so either the methods or the outcomes of A level and/or university English studies also need to be re-evaluated.

¹ A significant number of first year undergraduate respondents demonstrated this directly, 15% explicitly identifying as one of their main reasons for studying English at university the wish to become teachers of English in schools.

This is, naturally, not an unproblematic process. As identified in Chapter 2, Lowe & Cook (2003, 63) find that: 'about one-third of the cohort [of new undergraduate students] appear to expect teaching styles associated with school'. It is apparent from data presented in Chapter 5, however, that the experience of university learning is radically different from the experience of A level, and that this causes students (for a variety of good, and less good reasons) to struggle in making a successful transition and in beginning to shape themselves as successful learners in higher education. Almost all of the first year undergraduates surveyed indicated difficulties in coming to terms with how to prepare effectively for lectures and how best to function within seminars. They also commented in detail on the management of their own independent study, an issue which causes particular difficulties. The ability to apply pedagogical demands and tasks to their own learning was something that they felt, in many cases, quite unable to do alone. It was also clear that in many cases there is little – or little that is effectively communicated and taken up by students – in the way of support from university departments.

Bourdieu's comments on the inertia of educational institutions are helpful here. If, as he posits, the 'essential function always leads them to self-reproduce as unchanged as possible' (1990c, 32), then the applied pedagogical practices and principles of school and university (as separate inert institutions, each enshrining different codes) are likely to conflict. Although it is a relatively recent phenomenon, Curriculum 2000 has already developed its own peculiar inertia and culture, often involving strongly teacher-led learning experiences and structuring Assessment Objectives. Similarly, Evans' (1993) observations about the persistence of arcane learning fora, such as the lecture and the Oxford tutorial are illuminating. These fora for learning are far from the prior learning experiences of new undergraduate students and often cause them considerable difficulty, as data presented in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 demonstrate. However, students accept these fora and struggle to overcome the many difficulties they present simply because they are the way they are expected to learn at university.

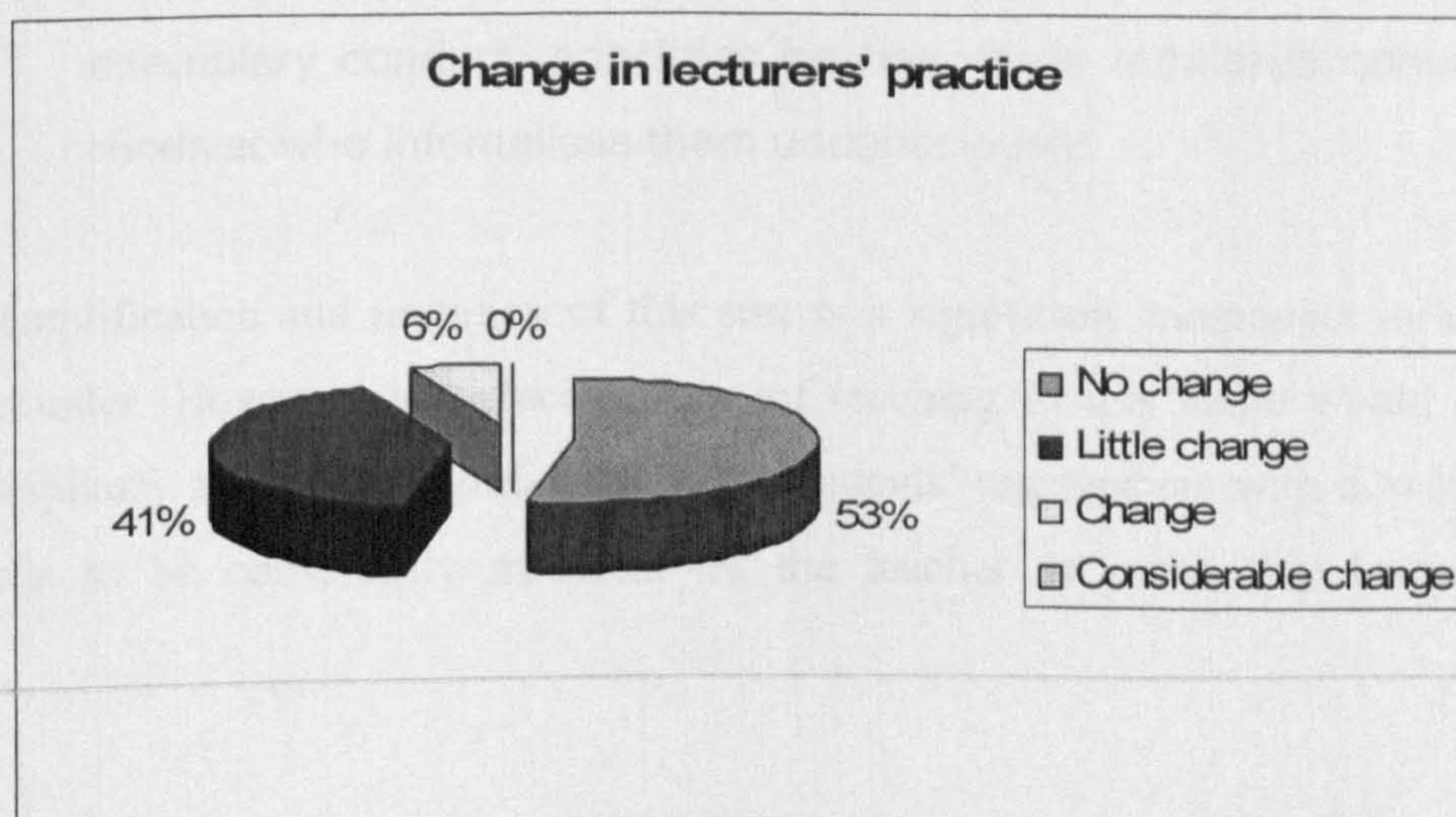
6.5.4 A broadening student base and pedagogic implications

Issues of transition are still more difficult to manage when dealing with non-traditional students. Such students, a growing body of which is now entering higher education under New Labour's widening participation agenda, face particular difficulties in managing transition. The roots of such difficulty lie again in the expectations and the academic practices these students bring with them to university study. Typically these students reflect and relate to the cultural and educational practices of higher education to a lesser degree than conventional university entrants. The result of this, unless pedagogic practices are modified to take account of these differences, is likely to be alienation. Bourdieu (1990c, 41) reflects on this:

... the pedagogic work ... tends ... to impose on them [the dominated groups] by inculcation or exclusion, recognition of the illegitimacy of their own cultural arbitrary.

This is a very relevant issue in view of the widening participation agenda. With a wider (more democratic?) range of students entering higher education, the number of students who will come into contact (and conflict) with new cultural formations and expectations will increase. This will inevitably impact upon issues of transition, especially if pedagogic approaches do not (as data suggest they do not – see Figure 35) shift to meet students where they are upon arrival in terms of their personal engagement with subject.

Figure 35: Changes in lecturers' teaching practice



The challenges posed by widening participation, however, are only a marginally more demanding version of the challenges faced in managing transition generally. The cultural and pedagogic gaps between sixth form and higher education English Studies (identified in Chapters 4 and 5) are such that the majority of students are likely to experience difficulties.

Here it is important to consider the benefits of explicit over implicit pedagogy, and its impact on student learning. Bourdieu (1990c, 47), makes a useful distinction in relation to this:

between (1) the mode of inculcation producing a habitus by the unconscious inculcation of principles which manifest themselves only in their practical state, within the practice that is imposed (implicit pedagogy) and (2) the mode of inculcation producing a habitus by the inculcation, methodically organised as such, of articulated and even formalised principles (explicit pedagogy).

Student and lecturer responses suggest that pedagogy within English resides towards the implicit end of the spectrum - possibly because university lecturers' training means that their own pedagogic awareness (as people effectively trained within the system, as it were) is in itself implicit. This process of implicit inculcation, Bourdieu (1990c, 48) describes as a cycle, thus:

... a process in which the master transmits unconsciously, through exemplary conduct, principles he has never mastered consciously, to a receiver who internalises them unconsciously.

Exemplification and imitation of this sort is a significant component in any pedagogic encounter. However, to reduce the act of teaching to this alone would be pedagogic redundancy and would significantly limit students' engagement with new learning which needs to be consciously mediated by the teacher or more able learner. This may

especially be the case for students from non-traditional backgrounds, who do not understand the cultural and pedagogic 'rules' in operation. Grossman, Wilson & Shulman (1989), in their discussion of syntactic subject knowledge, emphasise the importance in teacherly practice of making the processes of subject (which are the basis of pedagogy in that subject) an explicit focus of teaching, in order to assist learners (and teachers) in developing autonomy. In fact, Grossman, Wilson & Shulman (1989, 23) go so far as to note:

Given the central role subject matter plays in teaching, we must re-examine our assumption that the subject matter knowledge required for teaching can be acquired solely through courses taken in the appropriate university department.

They clearly indicate that pedagogy must be an explicit dimension of reflective and effective practice.

In their research into early university experience in Australian universities, McInnins & James (1995) identify that divergences exist not only between the school or college and university, but also, very significantly, between students and lecturers, a view supported by my own data. In the British context, as the nature of students and the nature of student learning under Curriculum 2000 has changed (see Chapters 4 and 5), so university teaching, if it is to continue to reach students effectively, needs to modify. This is not to say that taught content needs to be cognitively less challenging or that students should be patronised, it means rather that the consideration of pedagogical aims and rationales requires a higher profile. Reflexive pedagogic practice (a move away from implicit towards more explicit pedagogy) would, as Knights (2005b) suggests, encourage the perception amongst both lecturers and students that pedagogy lies at the heart not on the periphery of academic disciplines. Discussion of pedagogic issues can, therefore, serve only to enhance students' and lecturers' experiences, and their abilities to engage in a variety of meaningful and stimulating ways with the subject they have chosen to study and/or teach. The likely impact of such discussion and its practical outcomes on transition

is self-evident.

In Bourdieu's conceptualisation, the closer the habitus of the addressee (the learner) is to the forms required by the dominant pedagogic action, the less explicit pedagogic work is required. This is because the dominant cultural arbitrary is already to a considerable extent 'owned' by such addressees, along with its assumptions and expectations. As has already been observed, however, since the inception of Curriculum 2000 the general trend of study and pedagogic practice has served to increase the distance between sixth form and higher education English Studies. The extent to which any students enter university with a sense of 'ownership' is open to question. The level of misunderstanding of the expectations of degree level English manifested in students' questionnaire responses and in interviews is testimony to this.

The lack of support provided to students (as evidenced in Chapters 4 and 5) in terms of how to function as effective learners within the higher education context may relate to Bourdieu's description of implicit pedagogy, implicitly learned. Alternatively, it may be evidence of a lack of awareness on the part of lecturers of students' pedagogical needs and how these *can* be and *need* to be met. As research for a forthcoming English Subject Centre/English and Media Centre report (Bleiman & Webster, 2006) indicates, many lecturers remain to a large extent unaware of the nature and requirements of A level study. Such a lack of awareness is likely to account for some of the distance between A level and higher education English Studies. Parlett and Simons (1988) emphasise the importance of understanding students' location on entering higher education. Where there is no detailed and accurate sense of this location, pedagogy is unlikely to match the needs of incoming students. As the needs of students have changed under Curriculum 2000 and continue to diversify – a logical likelihood under the widening participation agenda – the need to be all the more aware of individual students' location becomes apparent.

6.6 Implications for practice

As this discussion has demonstrated, there are a number of significant implications surrounding the transition between sixth form and higher education English studies.

These relate to providers of both sixth form and higher education. Issues of pedagogy and respective views of what this entails vary significantly between the two sectors, but the extent of these variations has tended to remain hidden by a deceptive shared vocabulary. This has tended to reinforce the notion that A level and higher education English Studies *should* and *do* reflect each other and that they share a set of values. It is clear, on the evidence of data presented, however, that a shared subject vocabulary and a broad consensus with regard to subject content knowledge has served only to mask deep (and in many ways understandable) paradigmatic differences.

6.6.1 Recommendations for practice

Some practical implications, if more effective acculturation of students making the transition between sixth form and university is to be achieved, are evident for both sixth form and higher education sectors.

6.6.1.1 Sixth form

The need:

- for sixth form students to engage more fully with issues of wider reading and to learn ways in which to manage the large quantities of independent reading expected in university English Studies;
- for teachers at sixth form level to introduce students to processes similar (or at least more similar) to the processes they will experience at university;
- to develop students' abilities as independent learners and to provide them with tools for managing large amounts of independent work;
- to create constructive and creative links with higher education, whereby students can be introduced to the forms and demands of higher education;

- to seek to broaden students' perceptions of English study and what it entails, rather than allowing the experience of A level to be overtly narrowed to the parameters of the Assessment Objectives and set texts.

6.6.1.2 Higher education

The need:

- to work actively with students early in their courses, teaching them how to manage the substantially different nature and quantity of work required in university English studies;
- to develop a range of strategies to assist students as they learn to operate in unfamiliar learning fora such as the lecture and to make these strategies an explicit part of teaching;
- to allow a more explicit pedagogy to inform practice, thus more effectively engaging students in the processes of their own learning;
- to create links with sixth form education to increase awareness amongst sixth formers of the requirements and forms of higher education;
- to develop admissions criteria less exclusively linked to A level grades, which can serve to reinforce instrumental practice at sixth form level amongst both staff and students.

6.6.2 Future personal research

As is inevitable, the processes and outcomes of researching sixth form to university transition have raised many new questions. Such questions open new avenues for research. Some of the key areas for potential further research are:

- developing a longitudinal study to evaluate students' progression from sixth form *to* and *through* their degree level studies, seeking particularly to see if it is

possible to define the features of specific habiti, how these change and the means by which this change is effected;

- detailed study of student experience of and response to specific learning fora – lectures and seminars;
- in-depth observation of practice at A level, considering how diversity issues are addressed and the impact of this on students' experiences of English at A level;
- detailed exploration of lecturers' personal understanding of pedagogic processes within their teaching, and their experiences of pedagogy as students, seeking to understand how they see their own educational experiences, both as teachers and as learners as 'shaped' by the higher educational institutions within which they work or have worked;
- with changes to the specifications for A level forthcoming and as New Labour's 2005 14-19 Education White Paper unfolds, further research will be required to evaluate the impact of these changes on practice, student perceptions and the impact on university entrance.

6.7 Conclusion

In considering the issue of sixth form to university transition, it is important to recognise the purposes of English study at A level, its function and locus as a general qualification, and the reality this imposes upon teachers at this level. These factors are evidently significant in establishing the form the subject takes at A level, as well as in forming the views of many teachers in schools, sixth form colleges and further education colleges of what they desire to achieve within the framework that is A level English and how they set about achieving it. The realities of an A level classroom which comprises a majority of students (typically more than 80% – Barlow, 2005) who will not go on to study English at degree level are clearly very different from the realities of a lecture or seminar in a

higher education institution. The purposes and expectations of the majority of A level English students – and consequently the views of their teachers – are, therefore, substantially different to the views of university lecturers (Green, 2005a; Atherton, 2005).

The fact remains, however, that a significant proportion of students studying for one or more of the three options at English A level – English Literature, English Language or English Language and Literature – or related subjects such as Media Studies do go on to enter English degree level courses, and many more commence degrees in related fields such as Media Studies, Communications, Creative Writing and so on. There is, therefore, an obligation placed on teachers of A level to consider the specific needs of students who intend to progress their study of English to the next phase of education. Such students, if they are to be effectively prepared for the experience of making the academic transition to university, require their A levels to introduce them to the demands of English study at university level. This includes introduction to the typical approaches to teaching and learning employed (including how to manage large quantities of independent learning) and discussion of the skills necessary effectively to function within this new environment. They require, in short, to be introduced to the expectations not only of what they are doing within their A levels, but also to how this relates to what they are going on to do.

In fruitful recognition of where practices diverge lies the possibility of more effectively defining the boundaries between A level and university English Studies. And in effectively defining these boundaries may lie the key to enabling students to overcome them.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Interview Consent form

Consent to be interviewed

- 1) I understand the purposes of this interview as explained in the accompanying Research interview information sheet.
- 2) I understand that I may at any time, without the need to provide a reason, withdraw from the interview and/or withdraw my permission for the use of data arising from the interview.
- 3) I do / do not* give permission for this interview to be recorded using audiotape equipment.
- 4) I wish / do not* wish to see a transcript of this interview before data is used as part of this research project.
- 5) I understand that the use of any data resulting from this interview will maintain total anonymity and confidence.

* Please delete as appropriate.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

HEI: _____

Appendix 2

Research Outline

Research programme:

I am currently undertaking study for the Doctorate in Education at Brunel University, where I lecture in English Education. The progression from post-16 to higher education and the difficulties associated with this is the focus of my research.

Intentions:

The primary intentions of my research are:

- to focus on teaching and learning in a variety of contexts within school, colleges of FE and HEIs, and to identify similarities and differences in practice between phases of education.
- to evaluate the impact differences in practice have upon students at Level 1.
- to consider the perceived purposes of learning English of both students and staff at both phases.
- to consider the nature of assessment post-16, its impact upon candidates' experience of English and the implications of this for HEIs; to reflect on assessment procedures at Level 1 and students' responses.
- to consider the extent to which education post-16 prepares students with the requisite study skills for Level 1 study.
- to consider admissions/selection policy and practice.
- to evaluate the nature and effectiveness of departmental provision of induction/transition, including links between the HEI and schools/colleges of FE.

As the basis of part of my research, I am interviewing a range of students in a number of university departments. The data resulting from these interviews will be used for comparison with responses from students in other Higher Education Institutions and with responses from students currently undertaking A levels or other comparable qualifications.

Appendix 3

Example completed questionnaire

Post-16 teachers' Questionnaire

Section 1: Background Details (please tick as appropriate)

1 Current Educational institution:

State school	<input type="checkbox"/>
State Sixth Form College	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Independent Sixth Form College	<input type="checkbox"/>
Independent school	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>

2 Qualifications taught:

Advanced GCE English Literature	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Advanced GCE English Language and Literature	<input type="checkbox"/>
International Baccalaureate	<input type="checkbox"/>	Access course	<input type="checkbox"/>
GNVQ/NVQ (name below)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (give details below)	<input type="checkbox"/>

_____ Advanced GCE English Language

Section 2: Teaching and Learning

1 How often do you use following methods with your students in English teaching sessions? (Tick box to indicate.)
How effective do you find each method to be? (Use number scale to indicate.)
Explain the learning benefits you think your students derive from this method.
Even if you do not use some of the methods, please explain the benefits you believe they would bring. (Use spaces provided.)

a) Student reading in advance

Never	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Often	<input type="checkbox"/>
1 (ineffective)		2	3	4 (very effective)	

Many students do not complete a reading homework.

b) Guided reading in groups (targeted passage-based reading with specified group discussion, question response, analytical or written outcomes)

Never Sometimes Often

1 (ineffective) 2 3 4 (very effective)

All students reading same text with clear target. weaker students supported by stronger ones.

c) Reading as a class

Never Sometimes Often

1 (ineffective) 2 3 4 (very effective)

Only effective in short bursts, otherwise students switch off & cease to be active learners.

d) Whole class discussion

Never Sometimes Often

1 (ineffective) 2 3 4 (very effective)

Whole class discussion disadvantages the shy, weak or vulnerable students.

e) Group/pair discussion

Never Sometimes Often

1 (ineffective) 2 3 4 (very effective)

Students support each other's learning and provide reinforcement.

f) Close textual analysis

Never Sometimes Often

1 (ineffective) 2 3 4 (very effective)

Teaches close reading skills essential to any student of literature.

g) Research using other materials (e.g. literary theory, literary criticism, context material, other literary texts)

Never Sometimes Often
1 (ineffective) 2 3 4 (very effective)

Necessary for one A2 paper provides discussion points, stretches the material

h) Student presentation

Never Sometimes Often
1 (ineffective) 2 3 4 (very effective)

Need teacher input before presentation otherwise quality can be patchy.

i) Teacher presentation

Never Sometimes Often
1 (ineffective) 2 3 4 (very effective)

Necessary for difficult concepts & to focus on exam technique.

j) Use of Directed activities related to text - DARTs (e.g. sequencing activities, tabulation of information, cloze procedures, prediction exercises)

Never Sometimes Often
1 (ineffective) 2 3 4 (very effective)

Less with A2 students than with AS

k) Audio-visual/ICT stimulus

Never Sometimes Often
1 (ineffective) 2 3 4 (very effective)

Effective for seeing different aspects of the texts & for context.

l) Drama-based activities (e.g. role-playing, hot-seating, improvisation)

Never Sometimes Often
1 (not useful) 2 3 4 (very useful)

A useful way in to drama, Shakespeare & prose.

m) Creative, recreative and free writing responses to text

Never Sometimes Often

Very little time in the crowded A1 + A2 syllabus, but effective in understanding the writer's craft.

2 To what extent do you make your students aware of the QCA Assessment Objectives?

1 (unaware) 2 3 4 (very aware)

3 Explain how this has affected the ways in which you set about teaching texts.

AOs are frequently mentioned + used as specific targets in work, especially as the exams approach. Tasks are sometimes compartmentalised by AOs.

4 Do you believe students' academic performance has improved/ would be improved by focussing on the Assessment Objectives? Please explain.

Yes - see above. However, I also feel that focus on AOs actually hinders the response of the most able. Weaker students are supported & enabled to do better, but gifted students are restricted by having to hit AOs.

NB

- 5 Do you believe the nature of the Assessment Objectives has broadened or limited the teaching of English Literature post-16? Please explain.

See previous response.

Students are able to be less exploratory & experimental in their reports - and fewer texts are read. Over reliance on teacher led evaluation means that students think less for themselves. AOS

Section 3: Transition to Higher Education

- 1 How effectively do you believe study of the subject(s) you teach post-16 would prepare students for the study of English Literature at degree level? Please explain as fully as possible.

Students are prepared for close reading and for ~~critical~~ the study of critical writing. However the syllabus is so narrow in terms of ~~time~~ periods studied & the number of texts students read that they are bound to find the volume of literature at university a shock. The ~~result~~ ~~is~~ ~~that~~ ~~students~~ ~~are~~ ~~spoon~~ ~~fed~~. A result's ~~is~~ ~~that~~ ~~students~~ ~~are~~ ~~spoon~~ ~~fed~~. ~~is~~ ~~that~~ ~~students~~ ~~are~~ ~~spoon~~ ~~fed~~. means that students are spoon fed.

- 2 What abilities do you believe students need to succeed in the study of English Literature at degree level?

A love of literature & reading
Strong analytical skills
Fluency in writing
The ability to work alone.

3 What contact (if any) do you have with teachers of English in HE and the methods they employ? How useful would such contact be?

Very little. Limited to the occasional speaker (in the past year only from UCL and one from Cambridge).

4 What programmes (if any) does your school/college have in place to assist students in making the transition to university study?

We run an AEA course for students who are expected to do English Language or Literature at University.

Appendix 4

Breakdown of questionnaire respondents

Sixth form student	Gender	Age range	Institution	Qualification
SF1	M	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF2	M	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF3	M	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lang & Lit
SF4	M	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lang & Lit
SF5	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF6	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF7	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF8	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF9	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF10	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF11	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF12	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF13	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF14	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF15	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF16	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF17	M	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF18	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF19	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF20	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF21	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF22	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF23	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF24	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF25	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF26	M	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF27	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF28	M	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF29	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF30	M	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF31	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF32	M	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF33	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF34	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF35	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF36	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit

SF37	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF38	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF39	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF40	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF41	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF42	M	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF43	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF44	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF45	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF46	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF47	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF48	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF49	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF50	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF51	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF52	M	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF53	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF54	M	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF55	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF56	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF57	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF58	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF59	F	under 21	State School	A2 Lit
SF60	F	under 21	State School	A2 Lit
SF61	F	under 21	State School	A2 Lit
SF62	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF63	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF64	F	under 21	State School	A2 Lit
SF65	F	under 21	State School	A2 Lit
SF66	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF67	M	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF68	M	under 21	Independent	IB
SF69	M	under 21	Independent	IB
SF70	M	under 21	Independent	IB
SF71	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF72	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF73	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit

SF74	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF75	F	under 21	State School	A2 Lit
SF76	F	under 21	State School	A2 Lit
SF77	F	under 21	State School	A2 Lit
SF78	F	under 21	State School	A2 Lit
SF79	F	under 21	State School	A2 Lit
SF80	F	under 21	State School	A2 Lit
SF81	F	under 21	State School	A2 Lit
SF82	F	under 21	State School	A2 Lit
SF83	F	under 21	State School	A2 Lit
SF84	F	under 21	State School	A2 Lit
SF85	F	under 21	State School	A2 Lit
SF86	F	under 21	State School	A2 Lit
SF87	F	under 21	State School	A2 Lit
SF88	F	under 21	Independent	IB
SF89	F	under 21	Independent	A2 Lit
SF90	F	under 21	Independent	A2 Lit
SF91	F	under 21	Independent	A2 Lit
SF92	F	under 21	Independent	IB
SF93	F	under 21	State School	A2 Lit
SF94	F	under 21	State School	A2 Lit
SF95	F	under 21	State School	A2 Lit
SF96	F	under 21	State School	A2 Lit
SF97	M	under 21	State School	A2 Lit
SF98	M	under 21	State School	A2 Lit
SF99	M	under 21	State School	A2 Lit
SF100	M	under 21	Independent	A2 Lit
SF101	M	under 21	Independent	A2 Lit
SF102	M	under 21	Independent	A2 Lit
SF103	M	under 21	Independent	A2 Lit
SF104	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF105	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF106	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF107	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF108	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF109	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF110	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit

SF111	F	under 21	Independent	IB
SF112	F	under 21	Independent	IB
SF113	F	under 21	Independent	IB
SF114	F	under 21	Independent	A2 Lit
SF115	F	under 21	Independent	A2 Lit
SF116	F	under 21	Independent	A2 Lit
SF117	F	under 21	Independent	IB
SF118	F	under 21	Independent	IB
SF119	M	under 21	Independent	IB
SF120	M	under 21	Independent	A2 Lit
SF121	M	under 21	Independent	A2 Lit
SF122	M	under 21	Independent	A2 Lit
SF123	M	under 21	Independent	A2 Lit
SF124	M	under 21	Independent	A2 Lit
SF125	M	under 21	Independent	A2 Lit
SF126	M	under 21	Independent	A2 Lit
SF127	M	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
SF128	M	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit

Undergraduate	Gender	Age range	Post-16 Institution	Advanced Qualification
U1	F	21 to 30	Independent	A2 Lit
U2	F	31 to 40	Other	Access
U3	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
U4	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
U5	F	under 21	Other	A2 Lit
U6	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
U7	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
U8	F	31 to 40	State school	A2 Lit
U9	F	31 to 40	Other	Access
U10	F	under 21	State school	A2 Lit
U11	M	under 21	State school	A2 Lit
U12	F	21 to 30	Other	Access
U13	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
U14	F	under 21	State school	A2 Lit
U15	F	21 to 30	State school	Access
U16	M	21 to 30	Other	Access

U17	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
U18	F	under 21	Independent	A2 Lit
U19	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit & A2 Communications
U20	F	under 21	Independent	A2 Lit
U21	F	under 21	Independent	A2 Lit
U22	F	under 21	State school	A2 Lit
U23	F	under 21	Other	A2 Lang
U24	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
U25	F	under 21	Other	BTEC
U26	F	under 21	Independent	A2 Lit
U27	F	under 21	Independent	A2 Lit
U28	F	under 21	Independent	A2 Lit
U29	F	under 21	Independent	A2 Lit
U30	F	under 21	Independent	A2 Lit
U31	F	under 21	Independent	A2 Lit
U32	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
U33	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
U34	F	under 21	Independent	A2 Lit
U35	F	21 to 30	State sixth form	A2 Lit
U36	F	21 to 30	Independent	A2 Lit
U37	F	21 to 30	State sixth form	A2 Lit
U38	F	under 21	Independent	A2 Lit
U39	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
U40	F	21 to 30	Other	Access
U41	F	21 to 30	State sixth form	A2 Lang
U42	F	under 21	State sixth form	IB
U43	F	under 21	State school	A2 Lit
U44	F	31 to 40	Independent	A2 Lit
U45	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
U46	F	21 to 30	Other	A2 Lit
U47	F	21 to 30	State sixth form	A2 Lit
U48	M	under 21	Independent	A2 Lang & Lit
U49	F	under 21	State school	A2 Lit
U50	F	under 21	State school	A2 Lit & A2 Lang
U51	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lang & Lit
U52	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
U53	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lang & Lit

U54	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
U55	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
U56	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit & A2 Communications
U57	M	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
U58	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
U59	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
U60	F	41 to 50	Other	Access
U61	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
U62	M	31 to 40	Other	A2 Lit
U63	F	31 to 40	Other	Access
U64	F	31 to 40	State sixth form	A2 Lit
U65	F	31 to 40	Other	Access
U66	F	under 21	Independent	A2 Lit
U67	F	21 to 30	State school	Overseas
U68	F	under 21	State school	A2 Lit
U69	F	under 21	State school	A2 Lit
U70	F	under 21	State school	A2 Lit
U71	F	under 21	State school	A2 Lit
U72	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
U73	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
U74	F	under 21	State school	A2 Lit
U75	F	under 21	State school	A2 Lit
U76	M	under 21	Independent	A2 Lit
U77	F	under 21	Independent	A2 Lit
U78	M	21 to 30	Independent	A2 Lit
U79	F	under 21	State school	A2 Lit
U80	F	21 to 30	State school	A2 Lit
U81	F	under 21	State school	A2 Lit
U82	M	under 21	State school	A2 Lit
U83	F	31 to 40	State sixth form	Access
U84	F	under 21	Other	A2 Lit
U85	F	under 21	Independent	A2 Lit
U86	F	under 21	State school	A2 Lit
U87	F	under 21	State school	A2 Lit
U88	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
U89	F	under 21	State school	A2 Lit
U90	F	under 21	State school	A2 Lit

U91	F	under 21	Independent	A2 Lit
U92	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
U93	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
U94	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
U95	F	under 21	State school	A2 Lit
U96	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
U97	F	21 to 30	State school	A2 Lit
U98	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
U99	M	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit & A2 Media Studies
U100	M	under 21	Independent	A2 Lit
U101	F	31 to 40	Other	Access
U102	F	under 21	State school	A2 Lit
U103	F	31 to 40	Other	A2 Lit
U104	F	41 to 50	State school	A2 Lang
U105	F	under 21	State school	A2 Lit
U106	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
U107	F	under 21	State school	A2 Lit
U108	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
U109	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
U110	M	under 21	State school	A2 Lit
U111	M	21 to 30	State sixth form	A2 Lit
U112	F	under 21	State sixth form	A2 Lit
U113	M	21 to 30	Independent	A2 Lit

Sixth form teacher

T1	State Sixth Form
T2	State Sixth Form
T3	State Sixth Form
T4	State Sixth Form
T5	School Sixth Form
T6	School Sixth Form
T7	School Sixth Form
T8	School Sixth Form
T9	School Sixth Form
T10	School Sixth Form
T11	School Sixth Form

Qualifications taught

T1	A2 Lit, A2 Lang
T2	A2 Lit, A2 Lang
T3	A2 Lang
T4	A2 Lit, A2 Lang
T5	A2 Lit
T6	A2 Lit
T7	A2 Lit
T8	A2 Lit
T9	A2 Lit
T10	A2 Lit
T11	A2 Lit

T12	Independent School	A2 Lit
T13	School Sixth Form	A2 Lit
T14	Independent School	A2 Lit, IB
T15	School Sixth Form	A2 Lit
T16	Independent School	A2 Lit
T17	School Sixth Form	A2 Lit
T18	Independent School	A2 Lit, IB
Lecturer	Institution	Qualifications accepted
L1	post-1992	A2 Lit, A2 Lang, Access, GNVCQ
L2	pre-1992	A2 Lit, A2 Lang & Lit
L3	post-1992	A2 Lit, A2 Lang & Lit
L4	post-1992	A2 Lit, A2 Lang, Access, GNVCQ, IB
L5	post-1992	A2 Lit
L6	post-1992	A2 Lit, A2 Lang & Lit, Access
L7	post-1992	A2 Lit, A2 Lang & Lit, Access, IB
L8	UC or HE College	A2 Lit, A2 Lang & Lit, Access, IB
L9	UC or HE College	A2 Lit, A2 Lang & Lit, Access, IB
L10	post-1992	A2 Lit, A2 Lang & Lit, Access, IB
L11	UC or HE College	A2 Lit, A2 Lang & Lit, Access, IB
L12	pre-1992	A2 Lit
L13	pre-1992	A2 Lit, A2 Lang & Lit
L14	pre-1992	A2 Lit, A2 Lang & Lit, Access, IB
L15	pre-1992	A2 Lit, Access
L16	pre-1992	A2 Lit, A2 Lang & Lit, Access, IB
L17	post-1992	A2 Lit, A2 Lang & Lit
L18	pre-1992	A2 Lit, A2 Lang & Lit, Access, IB
L19	pre-1992	A2 Lit, A2 Lang & Lit, Access, IB
L20	post-1992	A2 Lit, Access
L21	pre-1992	A2 Lit, A2 Lang & Lit, Access, IB

Appendix 5

Initial written response schedule

1. **Personal Details**
2. **Details of post-16 education**
3. **Detail the approaches to teaching English you experienced at post-16 level**
4. **Which method did you find most helpful to your learning? Explain why**
5. **What were your expectations of studying English at university?**
6. **Have these expectations been met? Explain your answer**
7. **What have you found most difficult academically about the move to university?**
8. **How does your teaching at university differ from the teaching you received at school/college? How has this affected your learning?**
9. **What skills have you found it essential to develop in order to succeed at university level? How has the department addressed and supported this?**
10. **What structures have been provided by the department/university to assist you in managing your transition?**

Appendix 6

End of year written response

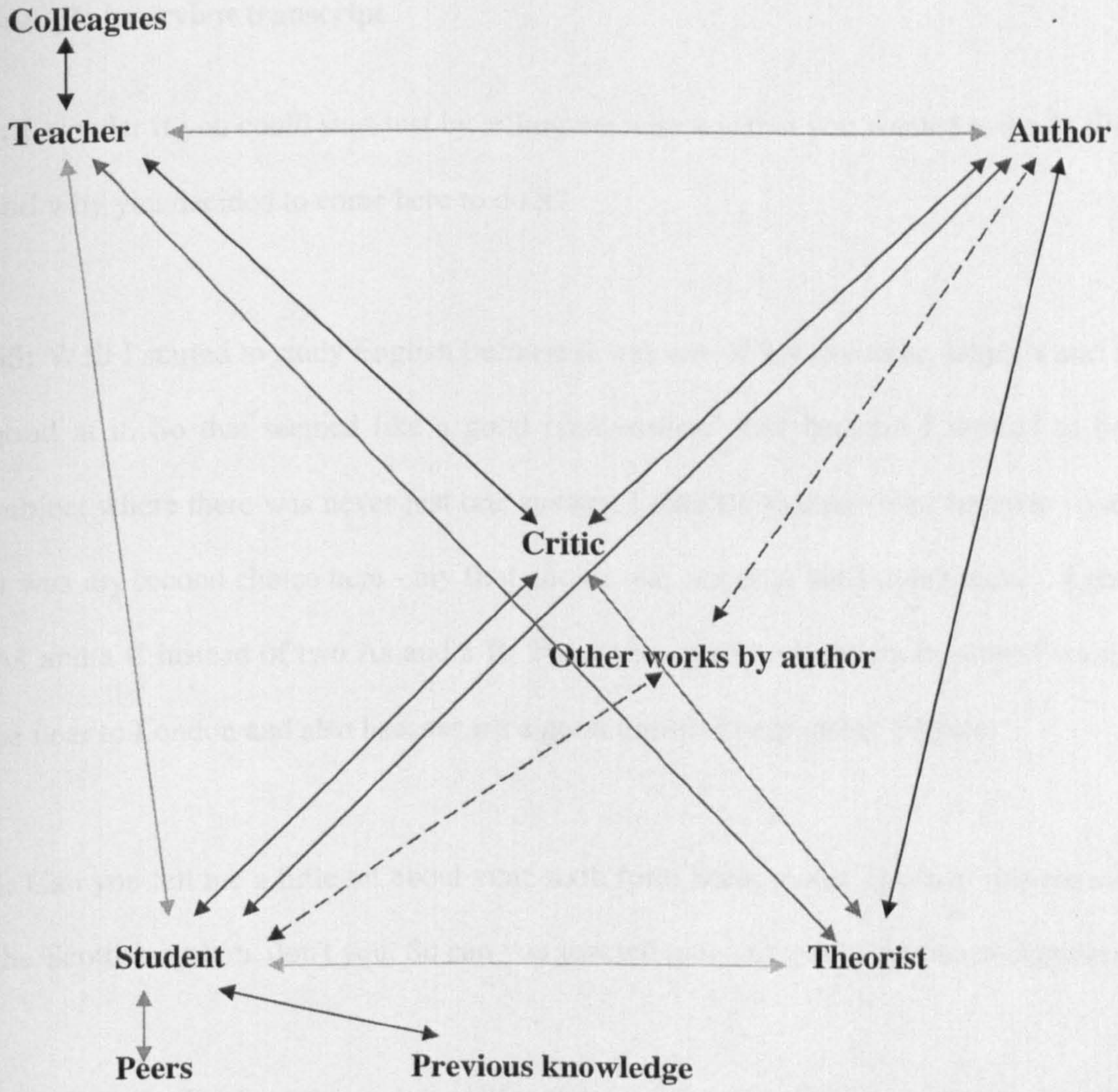
- 1) What differences have you found between the nature of studying English at A level or Access and the nature of your study at university? Please identify as many areas as you can and explain as clearly as possible what the differences are. Also explain how you have tried to or how you have been helped to bridge these differences.**
- 2) What have you found most difficult in coming to terms with your academic work? Explain (if you have) how you have managed to overcome these difficulties. If you feel you have not managed to overcome them, why is this?**
- 3) What kinds of academic or other assistance would have been most useful to you in helping to overcome these difficulties?**
- 4) Explain as clearly as you can what the study of English seemed to be about when you studied at A-level or Access. What seemed to be the philosophy of your teachers and your fellow students?**
- 5) Explain as clearly as you can what the study of English seems to be about at university. What seems to be the philosophy of your teachers and your fellow students?**
- 6) What, academically, are the most positive aspects of your experience of English at university?**
- 7) What, academically, are the most negative aspects of your experience of English at university?**
- 8) Explain as fully as possible how you believe you have developed as a student of English in the course of this year. What have been the most important factors in helping you to make these developments?**
- 9) What did your lecturers assume you would be able to do when you arrived at university? Were these reasonable assumptions? Were you offered any assistance in meeting these?**
- 10) Did your lecturers seem to understand/were they interested in the nature of your study before you came to university? Did they make any reference to your previous learning? And did they seek to make links between what you had done at A level or Access and what you were expected to do in the university department?**
- 11) Think about your main teaching forums (Lectures, seminars and tutorials). Please explain what you see as the advantages and the disadvantages of each and explain how you have learned to work within them and to prepare for them.**
- 12) Think carefully about your independent study time. Please explain as carefully as**

you can how you use your independent study. How has this developed in the course of the year. What has helped you to use your study time more effectively? What could your lecturers have done to help you learn how to study in this way?

**13) What are you most looking forward to about the second year of your studies?
How has your study this year contributed to this?**

14) What advice would you give to a new student entering the course next year to help them succeed in making an easy transition into university English study?

Appendix 7: 'Meetings' in the English classroom



Appendix 8

Sample interview transcript

I: I wonder if you could start just by telling me why it is that you wanted to study English and why you decided to come here to do it?

S5: Well I started to study English because it was one of my favourite subjects and I was good at it. So that seemed like a good combination. And because I wanted to have a subject where there was never just one answer. I decided to come here because - actually it was my second choice here - my first choice was Imperial but I didn't make... I got two As and a C instead of two As and a B. This was my second choice, because I wanted to be near to London and also because it's a good university for doing English.

I: Can you tell me a little bit about your sixth form background, because you come from the Scottish system, don't you. So can you just tell me your qualifications background?

S5: Well, in Scotland the main qualifications are Scottish Highers, which we do in the fifth year. The sixth year is an optional year where you can either do A-levels or Advanced Highers, and it's more for people that want to come to university in England or that want to do something like medicine at university that needs higher grades. So I did two A-levels in English and History and one Advanced Higher in French.

I: And those are the same entry qualifications as students would gain studying their A-levels in England?

S5: Yes.

I: I wonder if we can start talking about your experience of studying English at school. You say that you had five hours' English a week, which is quite a lot by comparison to what students in England would have.

S5: That's because we were doing the A-level in one year, so we had like double as fast. So that's probably why.

I: Talk me through some of the ways in which the teachers actually used to work with you in class.

S5: It varied from teacher to teacher. One teacher used to basically give us a lecture in class and we'd basically make notes as he went through the poems or whatever we were doing. Some teachers were a lot more interactive and basically the whole class would be like a big discussion with the teacher asking questions - what you thought about the play or poem and it would go back and forth. Sometimes when we were doing a play the class would like read it out and we'd all have a part and then we'd read it out and the teacher would maybe make comments on it, but then after we'd finished reading the particular scene she'd go back over it and then talk about it and we'd make note. Basically it was a complete variation from teacher to teacher.

I: And what for you was the most effective way of learning?

S5: It was when it was a complete balance between the students actually taking part in reading out parts of the play and the teacher also giving notes. Because if you do just one or the other it never works. Because if the teacher just talks, some people aren't able to concentrate for that long and then they don't retain any information. And then if it's all discussion, some students just don't feel comfortable enough about making their voices heard, so that doesn't work for them either. So I think the balance.

I: Do you have anything in the way of more creative approaches to teaching? Did you ever do anything like drama or creative writing?

S5: In the sixth year we didn't do creative writing. We did it in Highers. Occasionally in the sixth year we did like write a poem but it wasn't a serious task or anything. I did do a course in drama in the sixth year, though it wasn't anything to do with A-level. We did *An Inspector Calls* by Priestley. When you're doing a play you have to understand it, obviously, so you do analyse it as well as looking at it like from a different perspective, which I thought was quite helpful.

I: And how do you think the ways that you were taught at school prepared you for the ways you are taught here?

S5: Well here, obviously, it's lectures and then there's seminars. But the lectures are

basically where you get all your information from, because in seminars it's more you're talking about what you've heard in the lectures rather than seminar leaders actually telling you more, adding to what you've learned. Although obviously it ranges a bit. But it's more like both extremes from school, but they don't manage to kind of combine it, I don't think. But then, that's what you do at university. You have lectures and you have seminars. It's not school.

I: You say the most effective lessons at school were the ones that had the combination of the didactic bits that the teacher would do and then the discussion activities that the students would do. How has that actually made you able to cope with the lecture situation, for example, where you are frequently a listener for fifty minutes?

S5: Well, at school I was better at the listening parts than actually contributing part, so the lectures and stuff, I'm fine just writing down everything I hear, which obviously doesn't work for everyone, but I do like... I'm quite happy making notes and things like that, so it doesn't...it's not a disadvantage for me, but I think it is for other people.

I: How do the group sizes compare to what you were used to at school as well. I mean obviously the lectures are a lot bigger, but what about the seminar groups?

S5: I think, in fact, the seminar groups are smaller than classes at school.

I: So, on average how many people are there in your seminars?

S5: I think it's between fifteen and twenty. Whereas at school probably it was about between twenty and... not quite thirty, but ...

I: I want to talk a little bit about the lectures and seminars separately now, because I'd like to get a bit of a picture about what happens in both and how you're prepared for both - personally and in terms of the way that you're supported in your preparation for lectures and for seminars. If we could start with the lectures. How do you go about preparing for the lectures for the courses you're on?

S5: Well I don't really do what I'm supposed to be doing. I don't do the extra reading before lectures which other people do that I talk to. But I don't actually prepare for lectures at all, apart from obviously like trying to read at least most of the play or book that we'll be doing. But apart from that I don't really do anything.

I: Why is that? What is the reason that you don't do that?

S5: There's no real reason. Next year my aim is to do all the secondary reading and stuff, but the first year I guess you're not used to having to speed-read so much and we don't do any critical reading or anything in school, so I guess you just have to get used to reading a play a week, a novel a week as well as like secondary reading and stuff like that.

I: What do you think you should be doing to prepare for a lecture then?

S5: Well I think you should definitely have read the text at least once. Probably would have better if I'd read them all over the summer then when I came back to uni then I read them the week before as well. Because you really need to have read things at least twice before you can actually really understand them. And I'd ideally like to have done some of the secondary reading as well, just probably in between readings so that I'd end up with different ways of thinking about the book when I read it again.

I: What about support that you're offered by the lecturers or the university helping you specifically prepare for the content of lectures? Are you ever given anything in the way of personal tasks to complete before you attend the lecture or any issues to consider and make notes on before you go to the lecture?

S5: In our novel lectures we have got a booklet, which is like a course outline and there were bullet points on all the lectures. So, like when we did *Robinson Crusoe* we knew that we were going to be doing things about colonialism and stuff like that. But for the other ones they don't give you the same kind of outline of every lecture. We did for the Critical and Cultural Practices, but we've only had that for like half a unit. They don't ever give us any specific tasks really apart from to read the book and I think they probably assume we should have read some of the secondary reading, but then they probably know that we haven't, so...

I: Would that kind of preparatory task be useful for you?

S5: Well, I think most people if they're actually told they have to do something find it a lot easier to do it than to do it of their own accord. If you're told you have to read this, then I would be a lot more inclined to go to the library and take it out.

I: Do you think that something more structured in the way of questions, perhaps some specific areas in which you were required to take notes would benefit your ability to focus in the lecture.

S5: Yes, probably, but then I suppose what they're trying to do is that we're not being spoon-fed here at university, because that's what you do at school. When you come to uni you're supposed to be more independent and able to like motivate yourself and focus yourself, so I suppose that if they did give us a list of everything we had to think about and a list of tasks and things we'd never ever really be prepared at all for anything unless we had like a list of instructions.

I: So you appreciate some of the reasoning behind...

S5: Yeah. I can see like if they gave me a list of tasks then I would think it was helpful, but I can see why they don't as well.

I: One of the things that you identify in your written response is the issue of the amount of texts and the detail in which texts are covered. That at school you cover a

comparatively small number of texts in considerable detail. Here it's a wide number of texts in less detail. How have you found it trying to make the move between those two situations?

S5: Well, I think you just have to get used to it. When you're actually reading a text, you actually have to think about it at the same time, which you never used to do at school, because we'd read a few chapters a week and we wouldn't actually think about it. We'd read them, then we'd go into school and then the teacher would talk about them and then we'd know what we had to think about next time. But over here, for example when we're reading *Othello*, you've kind of got a rough idea of what the themes are going to be before you do it, like society and racism and things like that, and you just know that's what you should be thinking about. You have to start reading with a pen in your hand. It's just something you have to get used to. But I do think that you don't really appreciate a text as much over here, because you don't do it in any great depth. And I know that other people, for example when we're talking about Shakespeare plays, like people's favourite plays are the ones they did in school. And even if - like we did *Hamlet* here, where like a lot of people thought *Hamlet* was the best play - but over here, people who hadn't done it at school, they don't understand why it's so good and they don't appreciate it, because we did it in two weeks. So, people... Like for me it's the same. *Macbeth* is my favourite Shakespeare play, but that's because I did it at school in so much depth. Whereas it might have been something else if they just... like the way they do it here... we just skim through everything. You focus on little things, but not on the thing as a whole.

I: That kind of links to what I was wanting to move on to next anyway, thinking about your seminars, which is obviously the point at which you most have the opportunity to look at the detail of texts in a structured teaching situation, anyway. How do those tend to run? What kinds of approaches to teaching do seminar leaders use?

S5: Well, some seminar leaders kind of roughly go over a particular section of the poem or whatever and then they'll just ask questions to get things going. Sometimes we work as a whole class and is like a big discussion, but sometimes we work in smaller groups where like... sometimes we have to think up the questions ourselves and discuss it with the class. Sometimes we're given things to think about. It varies quite a lot, actually.

I: How useful do you find them as a way of expanding on the material that was covered in the lecture?

S5: I think actually they're quite useful, because you hear a lot of different points of view about the same thing. Because in lectures sometimes they'll give you like what it says in the story about a character or something, but you don't really... because the lecturer has their own point of view most of the time you only hear that one. And like they might say "well some people think this" but you don't really hear the full argument for the other side. Whereas in seminars everyone has got a different opinion, so then you hear every single point of view and some people like raise issues which I've never thought about, which is really helpful, which is kind of different in lectures, because the lecturers are preparing something to say and they've already kind of decided what they think and it's a

lot of facts and things like that. But in seminars everyone's in exactly the same position as you are and everyone's got a completely kind of fresh way of looking at things, so they're not influenced by knowledge they have of the author or whatever, because they don't know.

I: So it's a good forum for you all to come together and share your own ideas.

S5: Yes. I think so.

I: How do the seminar leaders tend to structure those? How do they take all of those ideas and transform them into a meaningful teaching format?

S5: Well basically, most seminar leaders just kind of let you go with it really. If there is a bit of a gap they'll ask you a question, and sometimes they'll give you like specific tasks, but if there's a discussion going they'll just try to keep it going really. They won't try and like veer it off in any specific direction.

I: So do you feel as if seminar sessions have a specific objective in terms of learning that the leader is trying to guide the group towards?

S5: I don't think so, because I think the seminar leader is most of the time quite surprised where we end up at the end of the seminar, because often they'll say "Oh, I never thought of that before" or "the class before was saying something completely different". So, I

don't think... they basically just let the students go with it and they just kind of provide a bit of guidance. But I think to be honest it would be very helpful if there was more seminars than there are at the moment, because there's just one a week. I think one lecture is fine, because we get so much information in it, but it would be better if seminars were longer or if there were more of them.

I: So do you find the seminars a constructive experience?

S5: Yes. Well it's more enjoyable really than lectures. People feel that they have to go to seminars, whereas a lot of people think well there's not much point in going to lectures because I can copy someone else's notes or I can just go and do the secondary reading.

I: What about the reading? Let's go back to the reading. You talked about the amount of reading that you have to do. How do you set about structuring and organising your time for reading?

S5: Well, it really depends... I try to give myself as much time as possible before I have to read something, but some things you can just skim through really quickly, whereas some take you a lot longer. So, for example, the Jane Austen books. We did *Persuasion* and *Sense and Sensibility*, and I read them both in like three days and it... because they're so easy to go through. But something like *Frankenstein* or something, it takes a lot longer to read because it just feels like it's harder to get through really. And um Shakespeare plays, they don't take that long, because I could say - if I've got the lecture on Friday - I

could say oh I'll just read it the night before and I'll feel content that I've actually finished reading it. And the same for poetry and medieval. I read it the night before, kind of thing.

I: And what about the secondary reading?

S5: Well, I only really do secondary reading for when I've got an essay. So, if the essay's in on Friday, I'll go to the library either the weekend before or at the beginning of the week and um... Because secondary reading, when I do it, it's more like go to the index and see what comes up rather than reading the whole thing. Because it's too time-consuming. So it doesn't really take that long, I don't think. But that's probably because I'm not doing it as much as I should.

I: What about the whole nature of reading? I mean, do you think the way you read now is different from the way you read when you were at sixth form?

S5: Yes. Because I think that you can't really enjoy it as much when you read it now, because you have to be focusing on what does this mean, what does this mean, what's the theme, what's the context. And I mean obviously you still enjoy it, but it's not... it's kind of less reading for pleasure, but reading to kind of finish the book in time and to like have thought of some good things to say about it. Or you know like, considering what you might have to write your essay about and things like that. But I think that's because of the way I'm doing it. If I'd done the reading beforehand in the summer, then that's when you enjoy the book and you properly appreciate it, but then when you come back and you

read it again that's when you start like making notes and thinking about it. So really I think that's just my system that's wrong.

I: Do you think that reading is a more layered process in university?

S5: Yes. I think you do have to think about a lot more.

I: So what are some of those things?

S5: Well, at school really what you think about is you think about the main character, maybe a couple of the relationships the main character has with other characters. You think about themes, but the things you think about are so general - it's like love, hate, death, which you can apply to anything. You don't really - well I'm talking about novels really - you don't really go into language and things and you don't go into author's technique and you don't do much on narrative. You basically just do a rough - we did start doing context at A-level actually, but we'd never done that before - whereas over here we... I mean we hardly really focus on character at all. It's more like either it'll be like large on detail, like, for example, last week or the week before last we focused on the *Uncanny*, which was something that, well I might not have known what the word was and things, but even the actual like what it's saying. I would never even have thought about it in the books that we did it in, which was *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. So when they were talking about that, it was just something completely different that I hadn't thought about thinking about before. We do a lot more

context work - like historical context and the author's biography and stuff.

I: So in many ways all the things that you were looking for when you read when you were writing for A-level are minimal considerations.

S5: Yes.

I: Let's think about your independent study time. As a rough guide how many hours a week would you say you spend on independent study?

S5: Well we were told we should be spending I think 40 hours a week. I can't remember what that works out at - about eight hours a day or something like that. Which is nothing like what I do.

I: That would include your contact time. Lectures and seminars.

S5: True. I don't know how long I spend. Some people take like a whole week or two weeks to write an essay, whereas if I start it I have to finish it. Otherwise I lose my train of thought and i just have to do it all in one go. So I probably take less time doing essays than most people do. And because I don't do secondary reading except when I've got an essay, I don't spend a lot of time doing that. I don't know how long I spend. Definitely not long enough. There's nine hours altogether with lectures and seminars. Then when it's doing an essay I probably only spend like the evening doing it the night before... and then

reading things. Hardly any time, to be honest. But I think because it's the first year, your focus isn't really on the course so much, because it's your first year of uni you're living away from home, and it's really bad to say this but it's true, it's all about your social life and going out and having fun more than it is about your course. Whereas in theory everything will change next year, because in your second and third year everything you do counts towards your final degree. So the emphasis would be back on studying and things like that. Ask me again next year and hopefully I'll have a better answer.

I: What about how you've been helped to structure that? I mean you've said you were given a figure guide.

S5: Yeah. Apart from that... that's it really. We've not been told anything.

I: What do you think would have been helpful for you to have?

S5: Well, I suppose one thing is that with secondary reading they give us... like suppose we were doing... like Ted Hughes... they'll give us a list of secondary books to consult. But there's so many that they'll give you for every single author or play or poet. So you kind of think well I can't read all of them and then it's like well which one do I read? And obviously you know the reason they are doing that is because there are so many people taking books out they need more than one, because then everyone can get a book. But it kind of makes you think well I don't know which is the best one to read and you make up feeble excuses for not doing it. So, if they kind of told you which ones would be better

possibly that might be a bit more helpful, but I don't really think... I think it's our responsibility. So, yeah.

I: And what else do you do with your study time? You said the majority of the study time you spend is with reading of one kind or another. What about the way you convert that reading into useful resources for yourself? Are you given any indication about how you can usefully record and order this material?

S5: No. We're not told anything about that really. And unless we've actually got an essay then I don't go back and make further notes or think about it. I kind of leave things up to when I'm going to be revising for exams. We're not given any like pointers exactly on what we should be doing.

I: Again, what would it be helpful for you to have?

S5: Yeah. It would be. Even if they gave after the lecture something that we could think about that they haven't actually talked about, possibly. They do that occasionally, lecturers, but I think they should refer back more to the novels that we've done in the past, just to keep us fresher about all the novels...

I: The ones you've done earlier in the course?

S5: Yeah. I mean like this term the lecturers have hardly mentioned any of the books we

did last term, like *Robinson Crusoe*, for example. And the thing is in the exam we are crossing... we have to compare books from the first term and second term. Maybe that's why they're not talking about it, because they want us to think about it for ourselves. But it just feels like you forget everything you did in the first time when you get to the second term, because it's just not mentioned again.

I: So, some way in which they begin to build up your idea of the way these texts link to one another in some kind of network that you can put into place.

S5: Yes.

I: Are there any other kinds of academic support that you would really have appreciated early in your course?

S5: The only thing that I had a bit of a problem with was with essays and feedback. I really don't think they give us enough, and I really don't think they help us with how to improve and also actually they don't give us information about the exams. Like we've only just got told today about one of our exams. But everyone's completely clueless. No one knows what they're supposed to be revising over Easter and what to expect in the exam or anything.

I: Right. So let's separate those two things out then. In terms of the examination, you're not clear in terms of what? What is actually being assessed?

S5: Yes. Well obviously we know in the Shakespeare exam we're going to be examined on the plays. But we don't know what. Is it going to be like themes? Do we have to learn lots of secondary - like critics' opinions and stuff like that of the plays. Are we going to have to compare them with each other? Like... no one knows anything about what we're supposed to be doing.

I: Do you think that's because in your A-levels it's very rigidly laid out - this is exactly where it is?

S5: Yes. I think even if they gave us just a hint of what they're expecting from us. You need to know. You need to be able to prepare yourself for it properly, and I don't feel like we've really been given enough information about that. But again, it's leaving us up to it, I suppose.

I: And you were talking about the essays. You write one a week, is that right?

S5: Probably. It probably averages out at that.

I: And so you were talking about the feedback you get from those assignments.

S5: Yes. Basically you get like a mark and you get a little comment sometimes. Like when they're going through maybe they'll mention little things, but the problem is they

might tell you some things aren't good enough, but they won't tell you how to improve on it. Or suppose you get like 65, which is like obviously a fine mark to get - they'll say like good effort - they don't tell you how you can make that a 70. They just don't give you enough information on how you improve and what you should be working on and... because I suppose when the seminar leaders they just give you the essay back. Occasionally they'll talk to you for like a minute about it, but apart from that it's just not very clear.

I: Right. So you'd value more formative feedback on the written assignments.

S5: Yes definitely. And I think everyone else would. Because everyone wants to know what they need to do to improve. Because it's the kind of thing you can't really sort out for yourself. You do what you've always done before. You might know that you should change it but you don't really know how.

I: Is there a difference in the way you're expected to write here as well?

S5: Well, I'm not sure. I don't know if I've actually changed my writing style since A-levels or Highers. Well, I suppose I can compare and see what's changing and things, but I don't even know if I'm going in the right direction, so to speak, or... I just don't feel as if I know how good I am or how bad I am at what I'm doing right now. Because the mark doesn't really tell you anything. Because some seminar leaders are higher markers than others. Some are more picky about layout whereas some don't care, so you know like you

can have the same essay and one leader will mark it as 55 and another will mark it at 65 or whatever. But the mark's not the important thing, it's just how to actually improve the essay itself.

I: Right. So something in the way of helping you to understand more about the actual processes of writing, the ways you can develop those out now in terms of developing your own critical writing skills.

S5: Yes. Focus more on the individual. How do *you* write? How do *you* improve. Rather than "students as a whole have done quite well at this, but not so well at this", which isn't helpful, because we're not all the same. We need to know personally what we should be working on.