# 'Building learning packages': one of the more significant benefits of using ICT in teacher education? Learning to manage pupil behaviour – a case study

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## Abstract

In spite of the influence of Mishra and Kohler's TPACK Framework (Mishra and Kohler, 2006), in many countries, the ability of student teachers to use ICT in their subject teaching continues to be framed predominantly in terms of students' ability to learn to use a range of ICT applications in their teaching. A fairly recent ICT competence framework used in the UK includes the recommendation that providers should try to ensure that student teachers have access to, and learn to use subject specific hardware and software, VLEs, relevant web based applications, and what have been termed 'cutting edge' ICT applications, such as, e-portfolio software and interactive whiteboards (TDA, 2009).

However, other commentators have suggested that such lists of technological capability misrepresent or ignore the most influential ways in which new technologies can help teachers and student teachers to improve teaching and learning in their subject. In a book chapter published in 2003, Walsh argued that the most significant benefit of ICT was the facility it provided for collecting and sharing high quality resources on particular topics. Walsh termed this process, using ICT to 'build learning packages', arguing that the most useful ICT applications were not 'cutting edge' (and expensive) applications such as interactive whiteboards, voting/response technology and e-portfolio software, but the facility to cut and paste, to collect and share files using the internet and the humble memory stick, and the use of social networking sites to paste URLs to particularly useful resources. The 'collections' which are developed can be accessed and used outside formal teaching time, and can enable student teachers to use the resources on their teaching placement, to test out against their own experience, and to at least some extent, work out for themselves 'what works and what doesn't work', using 'reflection on action' to improve their teaching (Stenhouse, 1975, Elliott, 2006).

Drawing on recent work in the UK by the Higher Education Academy (http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/disciplines/education), the paper presents a case study of the use of an electronic 'learning package' about classroom climate and the management of pupil behaviour which is currently being trialled in a teacher education partnership in the UK. Based around a 10 point scale which encourages student teachers to reflect on the factors influencing the working atmosphere in the classroom, and a range of supporting materials, the 'learning package' shows some of the ways that new technology can contribute to the development of pedagogical expertise beyond simply learning to use particular ICT applications

## Context

In the UK, as in many other countries, an important part of learning to be a teacher is that those entering the profession should be able to make effective use of new technology to improve teaching and learning in their subject teaching (OECD, 2009a). In spite of considerable investment in new technology, and political enthusiasm amongst education policymakers (Haydn, 2006), the outcomes of investment in new technology for educational purposes has often seemed to be less than transformational. There is much talk of the 'potential' of ICT for improving educational outcomes (Convery, 2009), but as Laurillard points out, education continues to be 'on the brink of being transformed through learning technologies... it has been on that brink for some decades now (Laurillard, 2009).

The aspiration that all new teachers should be 'good at ICT' does of course raise the question of what it means to be 'good at ICT' as a teacher, and what facets and attributes of new technology have most potential for improving teaching and learning.

In spite of the influence of Mishra and Kohler's TPACK Framework (Mishra and Kohler, 2006), in many countries, the ability of student teachers to use ICT in their subject teaching continues to be framed predominantly in terms of students' ability to learn to use a range of ICT applications in their teaching. A fairly recent ICT competence framework used in the UK - 'Characteristics for the provision and use of ICT that all teacher training providers should be aiming to attain' - includes the recommendations that providers should try to ensure that student teachers have access to, and learn to use subject specific hardware and software, VLEs, relevant web based applications, and what have been termed 'cutting edge' ICT applications, such as, e-portfolio software and interactive whiteboards (TDA, 2009). Investment in interactive whiteboards is a particularly good example of the belief that at least part of the answer to realising the potential of ICT to enhance learning outcomes lies in equipping classrooms with fairly expensive and sophisticated technology. One survey cited in a recent OECD report on the use of interactive whiteboards in schools (Hennessy and London, 2013) estimated that one in eight classrooms (34 million teaching spaces) across the world now have an IWB, and that 80% of UK classrooms were equipped with whiteboards, with a rapid increase in interactive whiteboard provision in the Netherlands, Denmark, Australia and the US – in spite of a number of research studies pointing to disappointing use of and outcomes arising from whiteboard installation (see, for example, Hennessy and London, 2013, Smith et al., 2005). A series of case studies of student teacher use of new technology conducted by Hadfield et al. also found that student teachers tended to be influenced by what was termed 'the social status' of particular ICT applications, as opposed to their potential for improving teaching and learning – it being seen as high-status to be expert at using an interactive whiteboard, irrespective of the effect this had on learning outcomes (Hadfield et al,. 2009).


**'Building learning packages': an alternative view of the usefulness of ICT in education**

In a book chapter published in 2003, Ben Walsh, (an experienced UK teacher and teacher educator, who has written and presented widely in the UK on the educational potential of ICT), argued that the most significant benefit of ICT was the facility it provided for collecting and sharing high quality resources on particular topics. Walsh termed this process, using ICT to 'build learning packages', arguing that the most useful ICT applications were not 'cutting edge' (and expensive) applications such as interactive whiteboards, voting/response technology and e-portfolio software, but the facility to cut and paste, to collect and share files using the internet and the humble memory stick, and the use of social networking sites to paste URLs to particularly useful resources (Walsh, 2003). Walsh pointed out that there was no necessary correlation between the sophistication of new technology applications, and their potential for improving teaching and learning. More recently, Mishra (2012) has also made this point – the development of a (free) word processing social media application with a maximum capacity of 140 characters was not 'cutting edge', sophisticated and 'blue skies' technology compared to voice recognition and eye tracking software, response systems and video-editing software, but it is nonetheless now acknowledged as an important mode of continuing professional development and information sharing for teachers.

As early as 1989, Davis et al. argued that for a technology application to be useful in education, it needed to be a) able to do something useful that teachers wanted to be able to do, and b) easy to use. It could be argued that, as Walsh suggests, the single most useful attribute of new technology is the potential that it offers teachers, student teachers and teacher educators to quickly build up collections of what I have termed elsewhere 'gems' or 'impact resources' (Haydn, 2012). This is defined as a teaching resource which is particularly well written or useful, or which makes a particular teaching point in a powerful and vivid way; something that will often stay in learners' minds after the teaching session has finished (what Heath and Heath – 2008 - term 'stickiness'). It is often something that disturbs learners' previous understandings, or which 'problematises' the issue or concept in a way that makes learners think further about it. It can also encourage 'dialogic' learning, whereby learners will be sufficiently interested by the resource that they are willing to clarify and modify their understanding through discussion with others; it intrigues learners to the extent that they are prepared to play an active part in constructing meaning themselves.

Of course, one of the problems which new technology has occasioned or exacerbated is that of information overload (Edmunds and Morris, 2000). Any educator wishing to explore the phenomenon of 'Death by PowerPoint', for example, will have to sift through over 8 million web pages to find the most helpful and appropriate resources for this topic. What is crucial in this respect is the accumulated expertise and shared collective experience of (in this case), teacher educators in selecting the very best resources available on particular topics to be taught, and discarding resources that are anodyne, tangentially relevant, or which do not fully repay time invested in engaging with them. Luckin et al. make the point that for ICT to be effective in this way, the teacher or teacher educator needs to act as a 'filter', to discerningly select the best and most powerful learning resources on the topic to be taught, from the morass or mountain of information now available digitally (Luckin et al., 2012). One of the problems of 'lists' which have been compiled, either in books, blogs or wikis, is the

tendency to go for 'comprehensiveness' rather than thinking in terms of 'what are the best resources out there for teaching this topic?'

This is where 'communities of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991) have an important role to play in maximising the 'value added' possibilities of ICT – but only if they function discerningly and selectively in their collection and dissemination of 'impact resources', rather than attempting to provide as large a collection as possible on educational topics and problems. Page ranking software is one way of addressing this issue, but another way of trying to ensure that 'learning packages' contain as high a proportion of 'gems' as possible is to consult stakeholder groups, to ask them what they found to be the most helpful resources.

One of the first initiatives to move in this direction in the UK is the Higher Education Academy (www.heacademy.ac.uk), which convened a series of workshops for those involved in teacher education, to elicit their views, and draw on their collective experience, in drawing up a highly selective resource list for a number of issues of relevance to teacher educators (these included Special Educational Needs, Subject knowledge and Pedagogy, Planning and Progression, Teaching pupils with English as an additional language, and teaching early reading; for a full list see http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/disciplines/education).

**The case study: building a learning package to get student teachers to reflect on the working atmosphere in the classroom and the range of factors which influence classroom climate**

The issue or problem of pupil behaviour was chosen as it has consistently proved to be the biggest concern of student teachers about to enter the profession (Hammerness, 2011, van Tartwijk et al, 2011, Wubbels, 2013). It was also one of the issues in teacher education which had been surveyed by the Higher Education Academy, with eight workshops of those involved in teacher education suggesting resources which they had deemed to be helpful.

The choice of managing pupil behaviour and the issue of classroom climate was also chosen to counter recent suggestions which have been made in the UK that the management of pupil behaviour is a fairly straightforward issue which can fairly easily be 'sorted out' (Ofsted, 2006, Wilshaw, 2010). Suggestions that the problem of poor behaviour is a fairly simple issue to sort out can be unhelpful for student teachers. This is not an aspect of learning to teach which is straightforward or susceptible to simple solutions or quick fixes. The reality is that schools and teachers will always have to work hard, and with considerable initiative and ingenuity, to eliminate the problem of disruptive behaviour and deficits in classroom climate. In the UK, as elsewhere in the developed world, there are many pupils in high schools who are not perfectly socialised, and who are not wholeheartedly committed to learning (Elliott and Phuong-Mai, 2008, OECD, 2009b).

Central to the learning package which was developed was a 10 point scale which attempted to describe levels of teacher control within a classroom, and 'classroom climate' in general; with 'Level 10' representing a classroom where the teacher was in completely relaxed and

assured control of the lesson, and all the pupils keen to learn, and 'Level 1', where very little learning could be achieved because the teacher had no control over pupils, and many pupils were interfering with the learning of others (see Appendix 1 for a full version of the scale).

The scale was devised as an attempt to get teachers and student teachers to think about the levels on the scale which they encounter in the schools they work in, and to consider the factors which influence the levels which prevail in their classrooms, those of colleagues in their own school, and in other schools. The idea in phrasing the level descriptors was to attempt to evince a chord of recognition in practising teachers and student teachers, and to be sufficiently transparent and accessible as to be meaningful to others involved in the educational process - teachers, parents, governors and policy makers. The scale was originally used in work with student teachers, based on the idea that it would be helpful for them to have some ideas about where they stood in the continuum between relaxed control and chaos, to think about levels to aspire to, about what factors influenced the working atmosphere in the classroom, and why there were differences both between and within schools, (some student teachers reported seeing or experiencing level 1 to level 10 within the same school placement). Student teachers who used the scale in the course of their teaching placement were also asked to consider what influence the scale had on their lesson planning and delivery, in terms of learning objectives and teaching strategies. Implicit in the level descriptors is the suggestion that below a certain point on the scale, the atmosphere in the classroom will influence not just the outcomes of the learning process, but the inputs as well, in that below certain levels on the scale, planning may be directed to at least some extent towards the objective of control rather than learning.

The purpose of the scale and accompanying materials was to develop student teachers' understanding of the range and complexity of factors which influence classroom climate. 'Level 10' on the 10 point scale is not a natural state of affairs. Elliott (2009) argues that teachers need to develop a range of complex and sophisticated skills in order to achieve and sustain a classroom climate which is ideally conducive to learning with their most challenging teaching groups. And although the teaching and management skills of the classroom teacher are amongst the most influential factors influencing classroom climate there are other factors which influence the working atmosphere in the classroom. This includes not just school level factors such as the quality of school leadership and school systems for dealing with pupil behaviour, and the appropriateness of the curriculum, but 'out of school' factors, such as pupil intake, levels of parental support, and the culture surrounding attitudes to school and education. The accompanying materials therefore included a wide range of DVD clips, journal articles, teacher education websites and teacher testimony which attempted to problematize the issue of classroom climate. Many of the resources in the 'learning package' were recommended in the outcomes of the Higher Education Academy survey which asked teacher educators for advice about resources which they had found helpful in working with student teachers in the area of managing pupil behaviour (many of the resources in the learning package can be accessed at http://www.uea.ac.uk/~m242/historypgce/class_management/welcome.htm).

The idea was that student teachers on teaching placement would engage with the resources in the learning package, which was distributed to all the schools in the teacher education partnership. Central to the idea of using the resources was that they would be used in conjunction with the 10 point scale, and the students' reflections on their lessons. They were encouraged to try out some of the suggestions and strategies which were mentioned in the range of resources, to see which were helpful, and which less so. As Schon (1984), Elliott (2006) and others have argued, this involves student teachers having to some extent to work things out for themselves. The suggestion is that it is not possible to become good at managing pupil behaviour simply by reading expert advice, or attempting to execute a few precepts suggested by 'experienced combat veterans'. This is in line with Professor Lawrence Stenhouse's suggestion that the purpose of education research was get teachers to test out ideas against their own experience (Stenhouse, 1975).

The research is 'work in progress', and not all schools have reported on the outcomes of trialling the materials, but there is evidence to suggest that some schools and student teachers have found the 10 point scale and accompanying materials to be helpful (Haydn, 2012).


**Implications for teacher education policy**

Hadfield et al. (2009) point out that a substantial proportion of the recent investment in ICT in teacher education has been in the form of improved infrastructure: in particular, the provision of interactive whiteboards so that student teachers can become proficient in whiteboard use before they embark on their teaching placement. Funds have also been invested in e-portfolio software, response technology (voting software) and sets of tablet computers. Although these investments have been welcomed by initial teacher education institutions, many of the expert practitioners interviewed in a recent survey of higher education based teacher educators argued that perhaps too much money had been invested in 'expensive kit', when Web 2.0 applications had some or most of the functionality of sophisticated equipment, at much lower, or no cost (Haydn, 2010). They also argued that future investment in ICT should pay greater attention to the importance of ensuring that all teacher education tutors were trained to be expert in the effective use of Web 2.0 applications, so that they could take full advantage of the 'communities of practice' which were aware of the range of high quality 'impact resources' which were available to teacher educators through the sharing of resources. The Higher Education Academy's initiative in making available high-quality 'learning packages' on a range of important teacher education issues appears to be an excellent example of the potential of this approach, but there is no guarantee that funding for this initiative will be sustained.

John Naughton points to the danger of politicians being attracted to 'cutting edge' ICT applications (and what Hadfield et al. term the 'social status' of ICT applications, rather than their potential for enhancing teaching and learning): 'We need to stop being dazzled by the tech sensation du jour and focus on something mundane that really works....' (Naughton, 2012). He has also warned of the dangers of politicians underestimating the complexity of

learning processes, and regarding ICT as a tool for 'transmitting' learning to pupils and student teachers: 'It's not every day you encounter a member of the government who appears to understand that the Net. Most politicians (Clinton, Blair, Blunkett to name just three) see it as a kind of pipe for pumping things into schools and schoolchildren. (Naughton, 1998).

The use of ICT to 'build learning packages' for teacher education is not just about making available high quality resources to student teachers; it is about getting them to explore the ideas which these resources suggest in relation to their own practical experiences of teaching, and to engage in professional dialogue with their peers and with the teachers they work with, in order to discover which ideas, theories and suggestions work for them, in the context that they are working in. Dede (1995: 12) is one of several commentators (see also Mishra and Kohler, 2006, Selwyn, 2011) who argue for the vital role of constructivist and socio-cultural components to effective learning:

> We have found that learner investigation and collaboration and construction of knowledge are vital, and these things don't follow teaching by telling and learning by listening. It isn't that assimilation of knowledge isn't a good place to start because it's hard to investigate something unless you know a bit about it. But assimilation is a terrible place to stop.... Only if access to data is seen as a first step – rather than as an end in itself, will it be useful.

The UK government is currently in the process of transferring teacher education into schools and reducing or eliminating the role of higher education in teacher education arguing that the best place to learn to be a teacher is in school (Gove, 2013). Existing 'learning packages' such as the one briefly described in this paper could still in theory be electronically transmitted into schools so that student teachers can have access to the materials as they learn 'on the job'. However, there is a danger that the mantra of 'simple' and 'common sense' solutions to managing pupil behaviour, and faith in the 'craft knowledge of teachers' (Gove, 2010) will take the place of more complex and nuanced materials and resources. Moreover, given UK politicians' simplistic ideas about the affordances and limitations of new technology (Haydn, 2006), there is the danger that ICT is simply seen as a 'delivery mechanism'. Student teachers will largely work within one school, and will not therefore be in a position to compare teaching approaches with peers working in very different contexts ( a key 'message' which emerges from the materials on managing pupil behaviour is that 'what works' depends to at least some extent on school context).

The work of the UK Higher Education Academy in designing 'learning packages' for initial teacher education, and the case study described in this paper offer examples of how ICT can be used in teacher education in a very different way to the upgrading of ICT infrastructure which has consumed a large proportion of recent investment in ICT in initial teacher education in the UK. Ideally, the dissemination of learning packages across initial teacher education partnerships will be followed by feedback from partnership schools to critique and modify the learning package, and this is what we hope will happen over the next few months, as schools provide feedback on the package

described in this paper. Whether such partnerships and 'communities of practice' will still be in existence in the UK in the longer term is a different question.

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## Appendix 1: The working atmosphere in the classroom: a ten-level scale

The scale was devised to encourage student teachers to think about the degree to which teachers are in relaxed and assured control of their classrooms and can enjoy their teaching, and also, the extent to which there is a 'right to learn' for pupils, free from the noise and disruption of others. It is not designed as an instrument to pass judgement on the class management skills of teachers (not least because there are so many other variables which influence the levels – most obviously, which school you are working in). Its purpose is to get student teachers (and teachers, departments and schools) to think about the factors influencing the working atmosphere in the classroom, the influence of the working atmosphere in classrooms on teaching and learning, and the equal opportunities issues surrounding the tension between inclusion, and situations where some pupils may be spoiling the learning of others.

| Level 10 | You feel completely relaxed and comfortable; able to undertake any form of lesson activity without concern. 'Class control' not really an issue – teacher and pupils working together, enjoying the experiences involved. |
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| Level 9 | You feel completely in control of the class and can undertake any sort of classroom activity, but you need to exercise some control/authority at times to maintain a calm and purposeful working atmosphere. This can be done in a friendly and relaxed manner and is no more than a gentle reminder. |
| Level 8 | You can establish and maintain a relaxed and co-operative working atmosphere and undertake any form of classroom activity, but this requires a considerable amount of thought and effort on your part at times. Some forms of lesson activity may be less calm and under control than others. |
| Level 7 | You can undertake any form of lesson activity, but the class may well be rather 'bubbly' and rowdy; there may be minor instances of a few pupils messing around on the fringes of the lesson but they desist when required to do so. No one goes out of their way to annoy you or challenges your authority. |
| Level 6 | You don't really look forward to teaching the class, it is often a major effort to establish and maintain a relaxed and calm atmosphere. Several pupils will not remain on task without persistent surveillance/ exhortation/threats. At times you feel harassed, and at the end of the lesson you feel rather drained. There are times when you feel it is wisest not to attempt certain types of pupil activity, in order to try and keep things under control. It is sometimes difficult to get pupils to be quiet while you are talking, or stop them calling out, or talking to each other at will across the room *but* in spite of this, no one directly challenges your authority, and there is no refusal or major disruption. |
| Level 5 | There are times in the lesson when you would feel awkward or embarrassed if the head/a governor/an inspector came into the room, because your control of the class is limited. The atmosphere is at times rather chaotic, with several pupils manifestly not listening to your instructions. Some of the pupils are in effect challenging your authority by their dilatory or desultory compliance with your instructions and requests. Lesson format is constrained by these factors; there are some sorts of lesson you would not attempt because you know they would be rowdy and chaotic, *but* in the last resort, there is no open refusal, no major atrocities, just a lack of purposefulness and calm. Pupils who wanted to work could get on with it, albeit in a rather noisy atmosphere. |
| Level 4 | You have to accept that your control is limited. It takes time and effort to get the class to listen to your instructions. You try to get onto the worksheet/written part of the lesson fairly quickly in order to 'get their heads |

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|---|---|
| | down'. Lesson preparation is influenced more by control and 'passing the time' factors than by educational ones. Pupils talk while you are talking, minor transgressions (no pen, no exercise book, distracting others by talking) go unpunished because too much is going on to pick everything up. You become reluctant to sort out the ringleaders as you feel this may well escalate problems. You try to 'keep the lid on things' and concentrate on those pupils who are trying to get on with their work. |
| Level 3 | You dread the thought of the lesson. There will be major disruption; many pupils will pay little or no heed to your presence in the room. Even pupils who want to work will have difficulty doing so. Swearwords may go unchecked, pupils will walk round the room at will. You find yourself reluctant to deal with transgressions because you have lost confidence. When you write on the board, objects will be thrown around the room. You can't wait for the lesson to end and be out of the room. |
| Level 2 | The pupils largely determine what will go on in the lesson. You take materials into the lesson as a manner of form, but once distributed that will be ignored, drawn on or made into paper aeroplanes. When you write on the board, objects will be thrown at you rather than round the room. You go into the room hoping that they will be in a good mood and will leave you alone and just chat to each other. |
| Level 1 | Your entry into the classroom is greeted by jeers and abuse. There are so many transgressions of the rules and what constitutes reasonable behaviour that it is difficult to know where to start. You turn a blind eye to some atrocities because you feel that your intervention may well lead to confrontation, refusal or escalation of the problem. This is difficult because some pupils are deliberately committing atrocities under your notes, for amusement. You wish you had not gone into teaching. |

Classroom management is a major element of the teaching and learning process, impacting on standards of achievement, pupil motivation and the quality of teachers' working lives. It has been cited as the most prominent concern of student teachers and newly qualified teachers and is an important and problematic issue (although in varying degrees) in most schools in the UK.

**It should be stressed that there are many schools where you will not encounter the lower levels on the scale,** (but it is still important to remember that there are schools and classrooms where the lower levels do exist). Although recent Ofsted reports have suggested that pupil behaviour is less than satisfactory in under one in ten secondary schools, my research suggests that deficits in the working atmosphere are much more prevalent than that figure suggests, and that there are many schools where levels might range between at least level 10 and level 5.

It is unlikely that you will spend your entire PGCE year in schools where the working atmosphere is always at level 10 with all your teaching groups. There are not just differences between schools in terms of the working atmosphere in the classroom, there are usually differences *within* schools – teachers can make a difference.

It is worth investing a lot of time, thought and work in this area because it makes such a difference in the extent to which you can enjoy your teaching. There are very few things in professional life less edifying than being, in effect, locked in a room with 30 children not

fully under your control. These are some comments from teachers I interviewed recently about what it is like when you are teaching at levels 9 and 10 on the scale:

*'I cannot stress how wonderful it is to teach a well behaved class. It actually enables you to lower your guard and completely relax. I really enjoyed the lesson and the children did too... I could tell.'*

(Trainee)

*'You come out feeling great. You know that you have their respect, they rate you, they think you are a good teacher.'*

(NQT)

*'Your teaching actually gets better when you are at levels 9 and 10... your exposition is more fluent, you can think of things off the top of your head... you seem to be able to think of lots of good ideas because you're not thinking at the back of your mind about control and surveillance issues. You get a buzz out of it and you can let your hair down more, take a few more risks.'*

(Experienced teacher)

*'As you are walking round the classroom, or looking out of the window, you think to yourself, there aren't many people who have a job as fulfilling and enjoyable as this.'*

(Experienced teacher)

*'In terms of how much you enjoy your teaching, there's a massive difference between operating at levels 7 and 8... which are OK... no big hassle... and level 10, when it's just a fantastic job, pure pleasure... you can get a real buzz out of the interaction with pupils. It's like the adverts for teaching on the TV but in real life.'*

(NQT)

Many of the decisions you have to make in this area are context dependent; there are very few, if any strategies that are guaranteed to work with every pupil, every class, in terms of how to get them quiet in the first place, how to cope when you haven't got complete control, in what circumstances to send a pupil out of the class, and so on. You have to think, learn and work to get to the highest levels possible – I think that above all it is about 'being a good learner', from your own experience, from advice, reading and watching people who are accomplished in this field (although you can also learn from bad practice). It is helpful to have an open-minded attitude, and to be prepared to test ideas and theories about pupil behaviour against your own experience.

Adapted from Haydn, T. (2007) *Managing pupil behaviour, key issues in teaching and learning,* London, Routledge.