My colleague Dr McMullan and I taught a two-day seminar on behalf of NEER on 23rd and 24th July 2006. The seminar was held at Duchesne College, University of Queensland, and was organized by Dr Peter Holbrook (English Dept., University of Queensland).

The preparatory stages were greatly simplified by Dr Holbrook’s generous offer to have all the preliminary reading, which we had posted from London, photocopied and distributed to the students before our arrival in Brisbane. The support of the administrative staff in the English Dept. was crucial too. Dr McMullan and I were also extremely grateful for being granted access to the photocopying facilities at Duchesne College and at Women’s College, where we stayed for the duration of the seminar.

The seminar itself was also very well organized. By the time we met the students on 23rd July, we had had a chance to see a list of their names and details of their academic background. Knowing what courses the students were attending at the time and/or had successfully completed before the beginning of the first session proved useful to pitch our seminar at a level which we thought would suit most students.

Dr McMullan and I felt that we had to pay special attention to the students’ wide range of expectations and expertise, given the challenging topic of our seminar. The seminar was aimed at making students aware of the complex editorial, philological and hermeneutical processes involved in re-presenting early English drama to the modern reader. Dr McMullan ad I decided to use Thomas Middleton’s *Hengist, King of Kent; Or, the Mayor of Queensborough* as our sample text, mainly because there are two scribal copies (ca. 1630s) and one printed edition (1661) of this play, which is extremely unusual, as the vast majority of early English plays survives either in rare printed editions, or, even more exceptionally, in a handful of manuscript copies. Our choice of a relatively obscure play also gave the students a common starting point, which effectively reduced the gap between our academically younger student (BA Honours) and a young colleague who obtained his Ph.D. from the University of Auckland a couple of years ago and is now working as a temporary teacher in the English Department at the same university.

The first session of the first day of our seminar focused on the play in relation to its Jacobean context and the topical significance of the events dramatized in it. This opening session gave students an opportunity to become familiar with the text of the play before we started helping them decide how to edit it. By lunch-time on the first day we started to introduce students to early modern manuscript and print cultures by giving them short presentations in lecture format, followed by discussions focused on manuscript and printed samples from the period. Towards the end of the first day we also taught the students how to read Elizabethan secretary hand. None of them had attempted to
transcribe an early modern manuscript before. Our impression was that they greatly enjoyed the challenge and genuinely appreciated the opportunity to learn a new skill.

The second day started with a quick recap of the previous day and a quick exercise to consolidate their confidence as ‘readers’ of early modern dramatic manuscripts and printed playbooks. We then focused on how to help them progress from becoming expert readers of such texts to being actively involved in the process of editing and annotating them for a modern readership. While the morning was devoted to a quick overview of the history of the editorial tradition and, more specifically, how differently modern editors approach their task from their eighteenth- and nineteenth-century predecessors, the afternoon was mostly taken up by a workshop, which gave students a chance to apply their newly acquired knowledge and skills to our sample text. This session was particularly rewarding because the students produced their own edited version of the opening scene of Middleton’s play. The use of a laptop and data projector allowed everybody to give their input and the edited sample was the result of a genuinely collaborative exercise.

The administrative and technical staff at Duschesne and The Women’s College was remarkably supportive and made our job as seminar leaders a truly enjoyable experience. The students also seemed very pleased with the amount of ground that we managed to cover in two days. None of them had edited an early modern play before, and some of them had a background in music and industry, before they enrolled to complete their current English degrees. Considering their preliminary knowledge, the students did very well and demonstrated a remarkable level of interest and active engagement with the task at hand. One of them is still in email contact with me because he has chosen to edit for one of his current assignments. All in all, my experience of teaching this seminar was overwhelmingly positive.