Thinking about modules: group activity

Collection: Course design

Resource: Designing a creative-critical module

Approximate duration

Recording + one to two hours

Learning outcomes

Very often, despite best intentions, we find ourselves rushed into module design under the pressure of a validation deadline. In such circumstances, we tend to fall back on default thinking. One outcome of the kind of activity proposed here is to gain confidence in amking more radical steps: to move from a vision of content to a vision of activity.

Introduction

The module discussed by Ben Knights and Chris Thurgar-Dawson in the audio clip, 'Writing for Reading' (subsequently 'Transformative Writing 1'), was a level two (i.e. second year) option in a BA English programme. The module asked students to produce, across the module, a portfolio of short pieces of creative writing responding to literary texts: rewrites of certain scenes from the point of view of a different character, parodies, switches in pronouns, and so on.

At the time it began, there was no creative writing element in the programme, so while the focus of the module was on literary practice and understanding it may – as is suggested in the discussion – have fulfilled for students some of the needs that would have been fulfilled through creative writing. Chris and Ben were seeking to create a structured space in which students could engage in developmental dialogues over which they felt they had some control, and in which they could become inward with the process of writing. Chris and Ben also felt that it would offer students the scope to make connections, and to gain synoptic insight into their programme as a whole. (The connection with the concurrent core theory module comes up in the discussion.) The

idea of a literary practice module was influenced by the tradition of working established by the Development of University English Teaching Project (DUET), the work of Rob Pope on 'textual intervention', and of Robert Scholes on 'crafty reading'. It subsequently became the subject of a 2001 National Teaching Fellowship project on 'Active Reading'. The project and its implications are discussed in Knights and Thurgar-Dawson (2006).

The activity

Play the audio recording of the conversation between Ben Knights and Chris Thurgar-Dawson about the design process behind their creative criticism module. Explain the nature of the module they are talking about before playing the extract. (The details are in the 'Introduction' to this activity, above.) Encourage the participants to make their own notes as they listen to the audio clip.

1. Brainstorm with the full group a list of key topics mentioned by Ben and Chris. Topics that you write on the board are likely to include the following:
   o Influences on the creation of a new module
   o Relationship to colleagues and the institution more generally
   o Relationship to the rest of the degree programme
   o Explaining to the students what is going on
   o Risk-taking
   o Choice of content, texts, topics
   o Choice of teaching methods: what will the students be asked to do?
   o Choice of assessment methods
   o Lessons learnt after the first running of the module
2. Once you have written the list on the board, discuss each topic in term with the full group.
3. Ask participants to write down individually how they might use these ideas to imagine/design an experimental module (not necessarily on creative criticism) for their own institution's degree programme.
4. Encourage participants to share their thoughts in a plenary discussion.

Example

For example, see Individual Activity which you will find in the same folder as this resource in HumBox.

Links & References

- Knights, Ben and Thurgar-Dawson, Chris. *Active Reading: Transformative Writing in Literary Studies*. London: Continuum. 2006.
- Pope, Rob. *Textual Intervention: Critical and Creative Strategies for Literary Studies*. London: Routledge. 1995.
- Scholes, Robert. *The Crafty Reader*. New Haven CT: Yale University Press. 2001.

Relationship to the Professional Standards Framework

- **Core Knowledge 2:** Appropriate methods for teaching and learning in the subject area and at the level of the academic programme
- **Professional Values 3:** Commitment to the development of learning communities
- **Professional Values 4:** Commitment to encouraging participation in higher education, acknowledging diversity and promoting equality of opportunity

More information about the Professional Standards Framework can be obtained from the summary factsheet in the *Subject & Pedagogy* collection in HumBox.
http://humbox.ac.uk/2731/

Resources in the Course design Collection

- Course design: introduction to the collection
- Designing an English degree programme: resource overview
    - Designing in employability: individual activity
    - Designing in employability: group activity
    - Managing transition from A Level: individual activity
    - A delicate balance: group activity
    - A delicate balance: individual activity
- Designing an innovative English Literature module: resource overview

- o Location, location, location: individual activity

- o Location, location, location: group activity

- o Questions, questions

- o Integrating research into a module: individual activity

- o Integrating research into a module: group activity

- Filling the gaps: resource overview

  - o Filling the gaps between sessions: individual activity

  - o Filling the gaps between sessions: group activity

- Adapting a module: resource overview

  - o Adapting a Literature module: individual activity

  - o Adapting a Literature module: group activity

  - o Pacing it out: individual activity

  - o Curriculum framing

- Mapping and applying desirable student attributes: resource overview

  - o Imaginary modules: individual activity

  - o Imaginary modules: group activity

- Designing a creative-critical module: resource overview

  - o Thinking about modules: individual activity

  - o **Thinking about modules: group activity (*you are here)**