

Curriculum framing

Collection: Course design

Resource: Adapting a module

Approximate duration

One hour

Learning outcomes

A working understanding of the way in which the design of curriculum may influence the nature of the intellectual transactions that occur within a module.

Introduction

This activity is intended principally for literature teachers, though it has implications beyond literary studies. The point is a fairly basic one: that the context in which students encounter a text, a trope, a theme, a sub-field of knowledge influences their understanding of the item concerned. Remember that you (as the author or implied author of the syllabus) are also the subject of mental constructions on their part. There is an imaginary you (the curriculum maker) whose semi-inscrutable mental workings will be the subject of speculation or folklore. What did s/he mean in giving us this to read? What understandings are we meant to carry away? The whole curriculum - at the level of module or programme - can (and probably will) in fact be read as a text, and the curriculum maker is as much a source of imputed value as is the author. So juxtapositions and orderings are in a way as important as the choice of individual items.

The activity

This activity could be done individually, or in pairs within a larger group. The survey course still has an influential (and arguably high status) role in literature courses. Those

courses and the modules derived from them are likely to be so much part of the architecture of the programme that as a junior lecturer you are unlikely to get your hands on re-designing them. So here we are thinking more of thematic topics, special topics, new additions.

Individually, or in pairs, choose a text that you would like to teach. Then take several sheets of paper, and give each the heading of a thematic curriculum area. Write the title of the same text under each, and then write some reflective notes on the aspects of that text most likely to come into prominence under each heading. We are talking about the familiar notion of foregrounding, but applying it to curriculum choices. Ask yourself (or your partner): what would be the advantages / pitfalls of reading this text in this modular context? Take the discussion on from there Consider, for example, the significance of headline markers in the title like 'writing', 'literature', 'fiction', or the mention of periodising dates. There would be room for further discussion about the very idea of thematic modules. Does the thematised module lead to texts being treated simply as a source of evidence or propositional knowledge about the topic?

Example

Here's an example. James Baldwin's novel *Giovanni's Room* (1956). A rapid brainstorm suggests that this novel could plausibly be taught in modules on: African American fiction; post-War American literature; post-War fiction in English; The US Novel 1950 - 70; Gay Writing. Other facets would come into prominence if the text featured within an author-based special topic: 'James Baldwin: Tragedy to Triumph'. More marginal examples could include modules with titles like 'Writing the City', or 'Expatriate Fiction'. (Imagine if you called your module 'Voices from Exile', or 'Queering the Postwar'.) In each case, we suggest that remarkably different aspects of the individual text are likely to surface, and be dwelt on by both students and tutor. Some interpretations are likely to appear to be favoured by the very fact of the surrounding chronological or thematic frame.

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



2 | This resource is part of a set of professional development resources for Higher Education English (including English Literature, English Language & Creative Writing) called 'The Pool'. The resources were developed by the English Subject Centre in 2011 as part of a JISC/HEA Open Educational Resources (OER) Project.

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- **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
 - Location, location, location: individual activity
 - Location, location, location: group activity
 - Questions, questions
 - Integrating research into a module: individual activity
 - Integrating research into a module: group activity
- Filling the gaps: resource overview
 - Filling the gaps between sessions: individual activity
 - Filling the gaps between sessions: group activity
- Adapting a module: resource overview
 - Adapting a Literature module: individual activity
 - Adapting a Literature module: group activity
 - Pacing it out: individual activity
 - **Curriculum framing (*you are here)**
- Mapping and applying desirable student attributes: resource overview



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- Imaginary modules: individual activity
 - Imaginary modules: group activity
- Designing a creative-critical module: resource overview
 - Thinking about modules: individual activity
 - Thinking about modules: group activity



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