

Paul Newland

Adran Astudiaethau Theatr, Ffilm a Theledu | *Department of Theatre, Film and Television Studies*

2011

SYLWER: O ganlyniad i newidiadau yng ngofynion portffolio'r TUAU, nid oes gan bob cylch dysgu a lwythir i CADAIR yr un nodweddion. Mae'n bwysig bod y cylchoedd dysgu hyn yn cael eu defnyddio fel adnoddau yn unig, ac nid fel canllawiau i'r hyn sydd ei angen i fodloni gofynion y TUAU. Os oes gennych ymholiadau, cysylltwch â thestaff@aber.ac.uk.

PLEASE NOTE: Due to changes in the requirements of the PGCTHE portfolio, not all teaching cycles uploaded to CADAIR share the same properties. It is important that these teaching cycles are only used as a resource and not a guide to what is needed to fulfil the requirements of the PGCTHE. If you have any queries, please contact thestaff@aber.ac.uk.

TYSTYSGRIF UWCHRADEDDIG ADDYSGU MEWN ADDYSG UWCH

POSTGRADUATE CERTIFICATE IN TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Cylch Dysgu 1 | *Teaching Cycle 1*

Blended, Deep and Active Learning



Mae'r Cylch Dysgu hwn o'r portffolio TUAU wedi'i gyflwyno i CADAIR gyda chaniatâd yr awdur uchod. Adnodd i'w ddefnyddio gan ymgeiswyr y TUAU yn y dyfodol a staff eraill ydyw, fel rhan o'u datblygu proffesiynol ym Mhrifysgol Aberystwyth. Erys yn eiddo i'r awdur a Phrifysgol Aberystwyth. Os hoffech dyfynnu'r gwaith hwn neu gyfeirio ato, cysylltwch â'r awdur. Ceir y manylion cyswllt yn <http://www.aber.ac.uk/cy/directory/>

This Teaching Cycle of the PGCTHE portfolio has been submitted to CADAIR with the permission of the author detailed above. It is to be used as a resource for future PGCTHE candidates and other staff as part of their professional development at Aberystwyth University. It remains the property of the author and Aberystwyth University. If you wish to cite this work then please contact the author. Contact details can be found at <http://www.aber.ac.uk/en/directory/>.

Teaching Cycle 1 Report

Blended, Deep, and Active Learning:

'Threshold Concepts' through Formative Assessment

1. Introduction: Account of the issue

The issue I want to address in my first teaching cycle is how to guarantee that as many of my students as possible can grow to understand a key 'threshold concept' in Film Studies - ,genre'. I will be giving a lecture on genre for the third year undergraduate module *Studies in Literanj Adaptations*. This lecture will fall within the sixth week of a twelve-week module. I want to employ formative assessment techniques during this lecture in order to gauge how well students have already engaged with 'genre' as a key 'threshold concept' (Meyer and Lad 2003; 2005; Land et al 2005). Basically speaking, a 'threshold concept' can alter the way in which a student thinks about an academic subject. In other words,

[A] threshold concept can be considered as akin to a portal, opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something. It represents a transformed way of understanding, or interpreting, or viewing something without which the learner cannot progress.

(Meyer and Land, 2006: 3)

It is important to stress that 'threshold concepts' are not necessarily key or core ideas or facts. They can often only merely open doors to other areas of learning. But 'threshold concepts' can help to transform a student's knowledge of (and approach to) a subject. These concepts might on one level appear to be simple. But they effectively require learning and relearning. As Ramsden points out, 'in real learning one goes "back to basics" time after time; learning subject matter properly involves several passes through the same material'

2011 - NEWLAND, P. - TC1 - Blended, Deep and Active Learning

(Ramsden 1992: 140) I would argue that in Film Studies - but also in the specific field within Film Studies of the study of film adaptations of literary works - 'genre' is one such threshold concept. And this threshold concept can facilitate further in-depth understanding of the subject.

In order to try to communicate issues around 'genre' I want to vary the classroom techniques I employ during this lecture. This, I hope, should facilitate what has been termed *blended learning* (Anderson and Rathwohl 2001; Bloom 1956; Garrison and Vaughan 2008; Littlejohn and Pegler 2006), but also - linked to this - 'deep' and 'active' learning. In other words, I aim to use a variety of pedagogical techniques during my lecture in order to try to encourage students to engage with, and gain further knowledge of, an **important**, specific idea and/or concept that is central to Film Studies.

'Genre' has been theorised by a number of film academics across the last thirty years. Generally speaking, 'genre' refers to the ways in which films are categorised according to type. But 'genre' is a slippery term. It can also refer to the expectations of film spectators, for example (Neale 1990: 46-8). So while almost anybody with an interest in cinema (or, indeed, any number of modes of cultural production) might have an idea about what genres are (including my students - and their prior knowledge will be important, as I will explain), these ideas in their simplest terms do not usually adequately account for the complexities inherent in this key concept. So the primary aim of this teaching cycle will be firstly to find out exactly what the students' current or *a priori* thoughts are on what the term 'genre' means, and then to develop the evident tensions that we together find in this threshold concept and our knowledge of this concept. Building on wide-ranging research, Bransford et al signal the importance of building on pre-existing knowledge in teaching: '(I)n the most general sense, the contemporary view of learning is that people construct new knowledge

and understanding based on what they already know and believe.' (Bransford et al 2000: 10)

Furthermore, they point out that 'teachers need to pay attention to the incomplete understandings, the false beliefs, and the naïve renditions of concepts that learners bring with them to a given subject.' (ibid.) However, it is important to add here that Bransford et al also acknowledge that '[N]ew developments in the science of learning also emphasise the importance of helping people take control of their own learning.' (Bransford et al 2000: 12)

Bearing this in mind, the overall aim of this first teaching cycle will be to guarantee that students have had to think about and consider the potential meanings of a key threshold concept, and that their thoughts and considerations of this concept - building on their prior knowledge - have allowed them to engage in deep, active learning. As Bransford et al point out, '[D]eep understanding of subject matter transforms factual information into usable knowledge.' (Bransford et al 2000: 16)

The Studies in literary *Adaptations* module is an optional third year undergraduate module. Students numbers are usually approximately 30-40. The aims of the module are spelled out thus in the Module Handbook:

=====

This module introduces students to the study of film adaptations, and, specifically, film versions of the plays of William Shakespeare. Firstly we will look at a range of films which adapt the written texts. Secondly we will pay attention to films which are based more loosely on these texts, and finally we will look at some films which document the lives of Shakespeare actors and the workings of Shakespearean acting companies. We will be examining these films from a variety of critical perspectives, and will be asking key questions such as: What is adaptation? How are 'original' texts to be treated? How do we decide on the legitimacy of an 'original' text? How

important is authenticity as a concept? We will also consider the reasons why Shakespeare's plays endure, and will try to determine what their 'timeless' qualities might be.

Learning outcomes for the module include the ability to critically assess the variety and often conflicting analytical paradigms which characterize the study of literary adaptations; the ability to critically assess who a literary adaptation film is addressing, and discuss how that address is constructed; the ability to critically assess differing approaches to genre in the adapted film; and the ability to critically assess the different perspectives between a literary notion of the author, and the 'author' within film studies.

=====

The module is taught through a series of weekly one-hour lectures and one-hour seminars. Topics covered include the 'myth' of Shakespeare; issues surrounding film adaptations of written texts; recent adaptations of Shakespeare's plays and new audiences; film authorship and Shakespeare; and film stars and theatrical actors. The lecture on Shakespeare and film genre falls in the sixth week of the duration of the module.

2. Plan of Teaching Cycle

This teaching cycle/intervention will take place within the context of a traditional lecture. Race and Brown (1998: 22) list a variety of reasons why lectures might remain a good way of facilitating learning. Many of these are fairly obvious - lectures give students a shared learning experience; they can provide focus; they can give large groups 'briefings' and information on how to undertake further study, for example. But lectures can also 'give students the opportunity of learning by doing, where they can get feedback from an 'authority' and from each other', and 'lectures' give students the chance to make sense of things they already know.' (Race and Brown 1998: 22; see also Bligh 1972; Bloom 1953; Baume and Baume 1996) Lectures can be energised in new ways, and specifically can be

designed to encourage more obviously active and deep learning (Bonwell and Eison 1991; Fazey and Marton 2002). This is what I intend to do.

After a ten minute introductory section of the lecture on 'genre', I plan to distribute a questionnaire to the students. This will feature five questions that will draw on their current views on the nature of genre. The students will be asked to answer these questions individually, and will be given five minutes to do this. I list these questions below:

1. What genre is the film from which this image has been taken?
2. What genre of films is Mel Gibson best known for appearing in?
3. What are the key iconic images most obviously associated with the horror genre?
4. Name a film that resists generic categorisation.
5. What genre is Shakespeare in Love?

As you will see, I will employ a PowerPoint image for the first question. This I hope will grab the students' attention, and will start the quiz in a fun way. The questions are very much designed to allow the students to draw upon what they already know about the

concept of film genre. I felt this was a good way of developing the teaching cycle, as film genre is, on the face of it, a topic upon which very many people will have some kind of opinion. Bransford et al (2000: 10-12) have argued that the development of 'pre-existing knowledge' (10) can prove beneficial in 'active learning' (12). Indeed, in Bloom's well-known 'Taxonomy of Educational Objectives' (1956), evaluation, synthesis, analysis, application, and comprehension are all based on initial knowledge.¹

When the students have had five minutes each on this quiz, I will then ask them to try to agree on answers to these five questions in pairs, or to flag up any clear disagreements. This approach to learning has been termed 'Think-Pair-Share' (Cross and Angelo 1993; Lyman 1981). 'Think-Pair-Share' is a collaborative learning technique that can stimulate engagement in discussions. It is also ideal for checking students' understanding of key concepts (as it enables students to come to an agreement around a key concept). This technique also encourages students to express themselves in smaller groups, and to compare their understandings with those of others (Cross and Angelo 1993). As K. Patricia Cross points out, '[C]ollaborative learning is a more radical departure. It involves students working together in small groups to develop their own answer - not necessarily a known answer - through interaction and reaching consensus.' (Cross 2005: 4) In order to save time in the lecture, I will then ask only three pairs for their responses, and these will be shared with the rest of the cohort - I will write these responses on a white board at the front of the lecture theatre. Moving to a traditional, transmission mode of lecturing I will then develop these answers to the questionnaire into my lecture on genre, by reflecting on the points raised by the students as I make further, perhaps more complicated points about the problematical nature of genre and the ways in which it has been theorised by academics.

¹ Bloom's Taxonomy - see <http://www.learningandteaching.info/learning/bloomtax.htm>

After the lecture I will post the questionnaire and the students' answers online on the Blackboard facility. I will also ask the students to fill in another short feedback form in order to try to gauge the effectiveness of this teaching cycle/intervention.

3. Concerns and Potential Problems with Teaching Cycle

My main concern about this teaching cycle is the number of students who will arrive at this teaching session - will there be enough students to carry out the exercise well? In order to generate a wide range of ideas in response to my mini quiz on the nature of genre I think I will ideally require at least ten students to turn up to the lecture and engage with this task. And, related to this, I will need to consider how far these students will feel comfortable doing the exercise and reporting back their responses to the rest of the group in a large lecture theatre. Some less confident students, of course, might perhaps be reluctant to come forward with ideas or to be vocal at all in a seminar situation, let alone in a lecture theatre. I also need to be very clear in my own mind about the aims of this teaching cycle. What is the real purpose? I need to remain focussed on the fact that there are a number of related purposes: I want to get the students to engage in active learning and thus to further and more proactively engage with the subject. I also want them to consider the meanings of the key threshold concept 'genre', and how far these meanings are not stable, but effectively fluid. I also carefully need to consider how to guarantee that this will be a useful learning experience. And, finally, I need to carefully think about how the level of success of this teaching cycle will be measured.

4. Progress note - putting the Teaching Cycle into Practice

I felt that in practice this teaching cycle worked very well. When I came to the moment in my lecture when I wanted to begin the mini quiz, I got the sense that the students were very

happy with the shift in tone of the lecture. They appeared very keen to pro-actively engage with learning at this stage, and, specifically, to think about the threshold concept 'genre' in this way, rather than having me discussing this in a traditional, transmission mode for the whole lecture. Luckily I had enough students present in the lecture theatre to complete this task. I found that the initial five minutes I allowed the individual students to work on the quiz worked well, as I could see them all making a genuine effort to answer the questions to the best of their ability. Their body language was good - they were generally happy and engaged with the task. Also, because I had previously flagged up the point that the students would initially be working alone, but then in pairs, I felt that this placed an impetus on all of them to engage with the task, as they knew they would have to work with a partner eventually, and, as such, they would need to be prepared for this. As we moved to working in pairs for 5 minutes ('Think-Pair-Share') the atmosphere and mood in the lecture theatre changed once again, while remaining positive. I heard some very interesting and engaged discussions taking place around the questions I had set in the mini quiz, and I could see immediately that the teaching cycle would be successful. When I asked pairs to feedback their points this was cemented in my mind - most pairs had produced very informed responses to my questions, but I could see very quickly that merely by engaging with this task in this way they could see how problematical the key concept 'genre' can be, and how far the term remains open to debate. I also found that the points made by the students really allowed me to take the lecture on (back in the transmission mode), by reflecting on their responses as I moved forward towards my concluding remarks.

5. Summary of relevant data and feedback on student learning

In order to gain feedback on this teaching cycle I circulated a brief feedback form to the students. On this feedback form I listed three questions:

1) How far did the quiz help you to understand the problems inherent in classifying films according to genre?

2) How far did the quiz make the following lecture more interesting or easier to understand?

3) How far do you think you learn more in lectures if you are asked to do things like take quizzes or answer questions from the lecturer?

These questions were scored with marks out of ten by the participating students. I received five of these feedback forms from the students. The scores were as follows:

	Question 1: Score (1-10)	Question 2: Score (1-10)	Question 3: Score (1-10)
Student 1	9	9	10
Student 2	8	8	8
Student 3	10	9	10
Student 4	7	8	7
Student 5	7	8	7

As this table shows, the students who filled in the feedback form clearly felt that the teaching cycle was a success from their 'learning' perspective. I was disappointed that more students did not respond to this request. But I have to take positives from the responses I did get. In future I will try to remember to think of ways to gain feedback from a wider range of students.

6. Evaluation of student learning experience in relation to intended outcomes

I have to say that it proved difficult to immediately gauge or evaluate student learning in relation to my intended outcomes. This is primarily because - short of any anecdotal evidence I could obtain from the feedback forms (which, again, was generally very positive- I designed no clear way of finding out how far students managed to learn about game during this teaching cycle. This I fear, in hindsight, was an error on my part. But the very fact that the students engaged with the task so well during the lecture, and I was then able to develop the issues raised from their responses immediately suggested to me that they were clearly learning something about game.

7. Comments on implications for professional development of teaching practice.

By way of summarising this teaching cycle and reflecting on its outcomes (and successes), my feeling is that I achieved two tangible things. Firstly, I have evidence (in responses to the original mini-quiz and the feedback students gave me on the teaching cycle) that students, generally speaking, enjoyed the process of the mini quiz, and found that it enabled them to further think through what they already thought they knew about the nature of film game. So I hope I managed to get the students to engage with and reappraise a key threshold concept in Film Studies. I certainly saw evidence in the lecture that blended learning - and deep and active learning - and the move away from the transmission mode in lectures - could all prove beneficial to the students, but also to myself as lecturer. One thing I have learned about teaching cycles is that I should try to design - wherever possible - a means whereby I can adequately gauge how successful my teaching intervention has been in terms of tangible and measurable outcomes. But I note at this stage the difficulties of achieving this, unless assessment is designed to specifically engage with the teaching interventions I design.

References

Anderson, L.W., and Krathwohl D.R. (eds) (2001), A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, New York: Longman.

Baume, D. and Baume, e. (1996), Learning to Teach : Making Presentations, OCSD.

Biggs, John (2001), 'The reflective institution: Assuring and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning', Higher Education 41, 221-238.

Bligh, D. (1972), What's the Use of Lectures?, Penguin.

Bloom, B.5. (1953), 'Thought processes in lectures and discussions.' Journal of General Education, 7, pp.160-169.

Bloom, B.5. (ed.) (1956), Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, the classification of educational goals - Handbook I: Cognitive Domain, New York: McKay.

'Bloom's Taxonomy.' Learning and Teaching.

<http://www.learningandteaching.info/bloomtax.htm>

Bransford, John et al (2000), How People Learn : Brain, Mind, Experience, and School, Washington D.e.: National Academy Press.

Bonwell, C. and Eison, J. (1991), 'Active learning: creating excitement in the classroom', ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report No.1. Washington, DC: George Washington University.

Brown, G. and Atkins, M. (1988), *Effective Teaching in Higher Education*. London: Routledge.

Cross, Patricia (2005), 'What do we know about students' learning and how do we know it?', CSHE Research & Occasional Paper Series: CSHE.7.05.

Cross, K. Patricia and Angelo, Thomas A. (1993), *Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Lecturers*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Entwhistle, N., Prosser, M. and Trigwell, K. (1998), *Teaching for Learning in Higher Education*, Buckingham: OU Press.

Fazey, John and Ference Marton (2002), 'Understanding the space of experiential variation', *Active Learning in Higher Education* 3 (3), 234-250.

Fry, H., Ketteridge, S. and Marshall, S. (2003), *A Handbook for Teaching and Learning in HE*. London: Kogan Page.

Garrison, D.R. and Vaughan, N.D. (2008), *Blended Learning in Higher Education: Framework, Principles and Guidelines*. SF: Wiley.

Johnson, C. (2002), 'Fostering Deeper Learning'.
<http://econ.unimelb.edu.au/TLdevelopment/fost.htm>

Land, R, Cousin, G., Meyer, J. H. F. & Davies, P. (2005), 'Threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge (3): implications for course design and evaluation', in: C. Rust (Ed.) *Improving student learning: diversity and inclusivity* (Oxford, OCSLD), 53-64.

Lyman, F. (1981). 'The responsive classroom discussion.' In Anderson, A. S. (Ed.), *Mainstreaming Digest*, College Park, MD: University of Maryland College of Education.

Macmanaway, L.A. (1970), 'Teaching Methods in Higher Education, Innovation and Research'. *Universities Quarterly*, 24, 3, pp.321-329.

Meyer, J.H.F. and Land, R (2003), 'Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge - Linkages to Ways of Thinking and Practising', in *Improving Student Learning - Ten Years On*. C.Rust (Ed), Oxford: OCSLD.

Meyer, J.H.F. and Land, R (2005), 'Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge (2): epistemological considerations and a conceptual framework for teaching and learning', in *Higher Education*, May.

Neale, Steve (1990), 'Questions of Genre', *Screen*, Vol. 31, No. 1

Race, Phil and Sally Brown (1998), *The Lecturer's Toolkit*, London/Sterling, USA: Koran Page.

Ramsden, P. (1992), 'The goals and structure of a course'. In *Learning to Teach in Higher Education*, London: Routledge.