Mae'r Cylch Dysgu hwn o'r portffolio TUAAU wedi'i gyflwyno i CADAIR gyda chaniatâd yr awdur uchod. Adnodd i'w ddefnyddio gan ymgeiswyr y TUAAU yng nodeddion. Mae’r Cylch Dysgu hwn yn cael eu defnyddio fel adnoddau y tu allani, ac nid fel canllawiau i’r hyn sydd ei angen i fodloni gofynion y TUAAU. 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.

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. 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/.
Cycle 3: Designing Routes to Modernism

Context

- *The Politics of Modernism* (EN32330) is a 3rd-year Option Module, which I took over teaching from Professor Tim Woods in 2005-6. I had initially revised the content and structure of the Module, and see it as very much a work-in-progress, in that I am still developing and reflecting on the best ways of teaching it. The development of the Module is also closely related to the revision of the Twentieth Century Core Module for the new degree scheme structure (see Appendix: Module Evaluation Summary for details of the discussion I took part in about redesigning that Module). *The Politics of Modernism* attracts a small group of students (10-15), who are somewhat ‘self-selecting’ in that the fact that they have chosen to concentrate on some of the most challenging texts in the English syllabus – those by Eliot, Woolf, Joyce or Stein – tends to indicate that they are higher-ability students.

- This teaching cycle is based on the group of 10 students who chose *The Politics of Modernism* in 2006-7. The module is taught in ten 2-hour seminars.

Problems

1) The biggest problem of this Module for students is the sheer density of ‘reader-unfriendly’ texts it comprises, as well as the industrial levels of secondary critical material available on those texts. Since it is a third-year Module, the critical engagement with Modernist literature it offers
is intended to be actively supported throughout by independent student research; but given the difficulty of some of the texts and the large amount of material covered in the Module, students sometimes struggle to maintain their own level of participation throughout.

2) From my own point of view as seminar leader, I need to strike a balance between making the workload manageable for students, and covering the right amount of material, and in sufficient depth, for the Module to constitute a genuine introduction to Modernist literature, with its major theoretical and cultural contexts outlined as well as some of its crucial texts explored.

Teaching Plan
My initial plan in 2006-7 was to shift the overall sense of the Module away from it being merely another roll-call of the gargantuan figures of Modernism (Yeats, Eliot, Joyce, Woolf etc) by presenting each seminar as an exploration of a theme or figure with general relevance to all (literary) experience. So my seminar schedule looked like this:

EN32330: The Politics of Modernism

Semester 2: 2006-7

Seminars take place on Thursdays, 9-11am, in room 318 on the 3rd floor of the Physical Sciences Building. Module tutor: Dr Luke Thurston, tel. 2389, e-mail lut@aber.ac.uk

1/02 Modernism: A Painful Case?
8/02 Symbol
15/02 Image
22/02 Tradition
1/03 Gender
8/03 --- writing week --- 5/03: First essay deadline
15/03 Eye
22/03 Babel
29/03 Abstraction
--- Easter Vacation ---

26/04  Thought
3/05   The End
8/05   Second essay deadline

- So in the ‘Symbol’ seminar, which concentrated on the poetry of Yeats, there would also be consideration given to the relation of Symbolist poetry in the 1890s to early Modernism, and to the various Modernist inflections of the whole tradition of the literary symbol.

- For each seminar, students were given detailed preparation instructions with specific texts to read and a sheet of questions to prepare answers for, as well as a mini-bibliography and set of web-links (all of this available on the Blackboard Module page). The Blackboard page contains a range of resources for student research, from reading lists to instructions about how to use the Internet to support research on Modernism.

- I divided each seminar into two halves, with the first session spent on close reading and the second on a more general discussion, referring to previous seminars and to the developing overall sense of what Modernism entails. When I taught the Module in 2005-6, I asked the students to give presentations but, since that this tended to reduce the students’ freedom in choosing essay questions (since they almost always wrote on the topic of their presentation), I decided to make seminars interactive in other ways – mainly, by asking all students to prepare responses beforehand (see Implications below for my further reflections on this change).

- I devised a special plan for the first seminar. I asked the students to read ‘A Painful Case’, a short story from Joyce’s *Dubliners*, and then used our collective reading of that text to outline an introductory perspective on Modernism, concerning an ethical life and an ‘ethics
of writing’. This aimed to show students – through a reading experience – one way of characterizing, or giving meaning to, the enigmatic term ‘Modernism’; and it set up a series of questions about individual and writerly ethics to be taken up with different texts throughout the Module.

Evidence
The Module will be assessed on the basis of two student essays, with the questions made available four weeks before the deadline. I will also evaluate the Module, and seek to establish ways of improving it, through my own reflective observation of the student participation in seminars.

Progress Notes
- The Module began very well: in the first seminar a real debate took place on Joyce’s ‘A Painful Case’ and on the question of Modernism and ethics, a discussion which showed a high level of commitment and interest among the students. It was however difficult to maintain the same level of intense engagement as the Module progressed, and the ensuing seminars were not all as productive as the first one had been.

- My decision to structure the seminars as open group discussions, without individual or team presentations by students, had some good effects, such as (I think) a greater variety in the essay questions answered by individual students; and sometimes an open discussion worked well. However, my current feeling is that oral presentations by students should be re-introduced next year (see Implications below).

Feedback
There was one Peer Observation of this seminar (see below, Observation Sheet 1d), as well as an observation of a lecture on Joyce I gave much earlier in another module, Twentieth Century Core (EN30830) (Observation Sheet 1a). My own reflection on the level of the discussion in seminars, as well as
student evaluation forms, also provided feedback; and finally there was my assessment of the student essays.

Implications

- The challenge of teaching this Module is to motivate the less academically gifted students (like Robert in Biggs, 2003:3-10), as well as the ‘natural’ academic high-achievers (Biggs’s Susan, *ibid*), to put in the extra effort required to engage productively and enjoyably with texts like *Ulysses* or *The Waves*. Although this Module tends to attract more Susans than Roberts, there remains the problem of eliciting the scholarly commitment required to tackle Modernism from all of the students who choose to study the topic (some of whom may start with only a quite casual interest).

- I am currently working on redesigning the Module’s preliminary information and learner support systems (located on Blackboard) with a view to motivating students more effectively. I can see that the sheer superabundance of academic commentaries on Modernism, as I had been presenting it to the students in devising bibliographies and web-links, may have intimidated or baffled some students – so my aim is to produce a more streamlined and manageable version of the Module for next year. Those students who wish to pursue more advanced research will be able to make an appointment with me and will be provided with appropriate resources; without all of the students having to have the greatness of Modernism thrust upon them.

- It seems to me that having student presentations, while there is a risk of material being repeated in essays, is nonetheless a crucial element of the Module: not only does it make the learning process more interactive, it also tends to raise the level of student research, leading to
a deeper engagement with particular texts. I will therefore re-introduce presentations next year, making them into team presentations, so that – with a group of only 12 students, say – they will be able to present twice during the Module; and I will encourage students to put together PowerPoint shows as well as hand-outs.

Conclusion

I started with the question of being an authority – at once an academic goal and (suggested Cicero and Montaigne) a possible hindrance to learners’ attempts at gaining their own access to knowledge. I have addressed three kinds of learning-and-teaching difficulty in my teaching development cycles – those experienced by newcomers to the university environment and those habitually generated by Literary Theory, on the one hand, and by Modernist Literature on the other. In each case, I have looked to facilitate the ways in which students can overcome these difficulties. I have tried to foster an open, interactive learning environment where knowledge is a collective property, but above all to seek to elicit commitment or engagement from students, rather than to transmit specific techniques or pieces of knowledge to them. Indeed, my own scholarly expertise in a particular field – in Joyce studies, say – has sometimes seemed part of the problem, as it were; and I am keenly aware of the need to repress scholarly prejudices, to attempt to begin with the same clean sheet as the students, in developing a successful teaching practice.
Cycle 3: Designing Routes to Modernism

Assessment: Plan and Implementation (to be added after ‘Evidence’, p. 22)

This module is at level 3, so the learning outcomes include – alongside an increased knowledge of Modernist literature and of its historical/critical contexts, and active participation in group discussions of the same – a significant development of the students’ independent research skills. The assessment tasks given to students were two 4,000-word essays, as well as (less formally) performance in seminar discussions.

In assessing the student essays, I produced a comment sheet with sections on knowledge, argument, relevance, terminology, expression and presentation (see Figure 2). This increased specification of essay-writing skills (compared with the comment sheet given to first year students, see Figure 1) reflects the more advanced level of the work and the concentration on individual research skills.

I strongly encouraged the students on this module to meet me for discussions of their essays and of my comment sheets; and several of them did so. These discussions were very constructive, and helped me get a sense of how to improve the module’s learning environment. As I indicate below, the main consequence of my discussions with students, together with their views as expressed on evaluation forms, has been my intention to introduce team presentations the next time I teach the module.
**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH/ ADRA N SAESNE G**

**COMMENT SHEET**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Reference No.</th>
<th>041728138</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Module No. and Short Title</td>
<td>EN32330: The Politics of Modernism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminar Tutor</td>
<td>Dr Luke Thurston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>April 2007</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments:-

**KNOWLEDGE**
There is a good use of critics in this essay, and it shows a very thorough knowledge of both *The Waves* and of Woolf’s other writings.

**ARGUMENT**
A first class essay! The argument is persuasive and wide-ranging, moving with ease between Woolf’s texts and her various Modernist contexts (Bloomsbury, Imagism).

**RELEVANCE**
The essay is a well-focused response to the question, exploring its different aspects with great sensitivity.

**TERMINOLOGY**
There is a very good critical vocabulary used here.

**EXPRESSION**
The writing is articulate, free-flowing and eloquent.

**PRESENTATION**
Fine.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Marker</th>
<th>75</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Second Marker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Agreed Mark</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>