

PGCertHE Evaluation by Dr Colleen McKenna

Course Design:

Dear Joe, This is an exceptional course design – thoughtfully structured; in tune with current developments in the discipline and wider society; inventive in its approach to assessment and curricular activities; and alert to students' agency and voices - offering them opportunities to negotiate elements of the course as well as participate in the marking and feedback process. The overall rationale for the course is compelling, timely and convincingly established. A particular strength is the way in which your pedagogic approach is interwoven into the rationale and the way in which content and pedagogy are considered jointly – and inform each other – throughout. The critical pedagog(ies) that you propose are apposite for the core theme and topics. The ILOs further align with these components with their emphasis on critique, analysis and justification and there's a sense, throughout, of the democratic classroom – which is, of course, completely fitting for a module on this topic. Indeed, I can see many ways in which you will be creating a sense of scholarly community with this full unit course – though the assessments (esp. blogs and project work), field work, key themes, learning tech – such as wiki - and general ethos of empowering students. The assessment is varied and 'valid' in the formal sense. I am delighted to see that peer feedback will actively contribute to the summative marking. No doubt it will require the explicit development of student skills as they learn how to engage in peer assessment, but I think it's a tremendously valuable attribute and should enhance their understanding of course criteria and their own work. Similarly, you may wish to build into the curriculum support for operating in groups in order to anticipate/prevent challenges that frequently arise. I wonder, too, how the external expert will be selected and involved. This could potentially be challenging for QA in relation to marking if the person is from outside the institution. Nonetheless, these are all superb ideas in relation to assessment. Finally, I thought the use of literature was excellent here and I appreciated your consideration of additional educational and disciplinary texts – esp. Ball and hooks. Equally, I very much appreciate the detailed and reflexive coversheet. This text is indeed exemplary; it is genuinely one of the most exhilarating and incisive course designs that I've read. Thank you.

Independent Inquiry:

Dear Joe, Thank you for this compelling, nuanced and stimulating text. This seems in many ways a manifesto for teaching and learning in the 21st century as well as a primer for ways of developing an engaged and capable citizenry. There are many laudable elements of this text. You establish the context from both an educational and societal perspective and you indicate how and when educators have previously faced such challenges. The foregrounding of hooks' work in critical pedagogy (and education as both transgressive and liberating) forms a powerful, sustaining thread or 'throughline' here and forms connections with prior periods during which authoritarian movements were on the rise – as you indicate – as well as being remarkably contemporary: many scholars active in the decolonising movement are drawing on hooks' work to support change in curricular and classroom practice. Similarly, I was struck by the ways in which you analysed educational models/theories from the past 4-5 decades (among them Biggs, Biesta, Carlisle and Jordan, and Perry) and identified a broadly similar trajectory from a naïve or singular understanding of ideas/discipline(s) to one that is more nuanced, complex and critical. The locus of power is also a significant motif here – both in terms of who holds it in politics and society as well as in the classroom. It seems to me that this text is, in part, an interrogation of the role and identity of the teacher who –in a student-centred classroom – shares power and responsibility with students thereby supporting them in their development as critical, discerning participants/specialists/future experts. One area that I think remains a challenge in relation to this shift is assessment as it is currently realised. Despite shifts in discourse and classroom practice, assessment is a clear site of power as it is currently constructed in most HEIs and unless a serious move is made towards self and peer assessment, this is unlikely to shift. You suggest some modes of assessment that might be adopted on page 8, but I think that this will be a component of the curriculum that will need extensive work by the entire HE community if a critical pedagogic approach is to be realised. Additionally, I have questions about how we might engage with these ideas at an institutional level. For example, how does a current trend for 'no-platforming' across UK HEIs sit with ideas expressed here in which you, rightly, promote the engagement with diverse and sometimes competing perspectives in a respectful manner to enable 'dialogue across boundaries'? I suppose one response to this question is that as students experience responsible debate and challenge in the classroom, they can see how such engagement can be carried out across an institution and beyond. Thank you very much for this fabulous paper. You pose a superb set of pertinent, timely questions and provide a cogent and detailed response based on a sharp analysis of a wide-ranging set of texts. If you plan to prepare a revised version of this piece for publication, I'd be happy to chat further about it.