

A Reflective Report on My Teaching Intervention Cycle

Introduction

In this teaching intervention cycle, I will focus on two modules I have taught as a lecturer at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD) by using Gibbs's (1988) reflective cycle methodology. As such, I will first portray each experience, describe my thoughts about the experience, discuss evaluations, speculate on what could have been done differently and suggest alternatives for the future. The key difference between the two modules is the mode of teaching – while one was taught in a traditional manner, the other was taught in a block. Hence, throughout the essay, I will compare my experiences in teaching in a traditional format versus teaching in an immersive block system (K2, K4, K6). I argue that while the immersive system allows students to focus exclusively on one module, the shorter time frame creates student anxiety in relation to deadlines. Overall, it is difficult to conclude whether or not the block system is an improvement over the traditional one (V1, V3).

This essay is divided into three sections, the first section focuses on my module: *International Political Economy* (A1, A2, K1) and the second part focuses on my module: *Political Economy of Natural Resources* (A1, A2, K1). The final section evaluates the outcome of these two teaching experiences and proposes possible alternatives for future module deliveries.

Traditional Method of Teaching: HPAN5018-HPAN6018, International Political Economy

I taught *International Political Economy* during the second semester of the academic year 2017-2018. This was my third module at UWTSD and my last one taught in a traditional format (as opposed to teaching in blocks). Having been trained as an International Relations scholar within the sub-discipline of International Political Economy, I was highly motivated to design a comprehensive yet accessible module on the topic (K1)(K3).

Module Design

For module design, I always use the concept of constructive alignment, which emphasizes the significance of gearing students towards pre-identified and precise outcomes. This method also envisions an alignment of all teaching components including aims, learning outcomes, teaching methods and the assessments (A1, A3, K6, V3) (J. Biggs, 1996).

Accordingly, I wanted to make sure that the all of the teaching components of this module aligned with the pre-identified aims and objectives. This main aim of *International Political Economy* was to evaluate the challenges faced by states in an era of global economic integration and fragmentation. I also wanted the students to explore and critically evaluate interaction between politics and economics in international relations (A1, A2, A4, K1, K3).

To align the module content with the above-stated aims, I first set off to construct the weekly content of the module. Having already completed two postgraduate degrees in International Political Economy my key challenge was not so much to find enough content but to make sure I can convert all that experience and knowledge into a meaningful lesson plan for ten weeks of classes (K1, A2).

I decided to divide the module into two main sections. The module first started with theories of International Political Economy including neo-Mercantilism, Liberalism, Marxism, and Critical approaches. These theories would allow students to understand and contextualize state-market relations when they evaluated contemporary global issues.

After this first section on theories, the second section focused on issue areas in global political economy such as money and finance, trade and regionalism, multinational corporations, international development, energy, and the environment. These issue areas are some of the most important themes in the discipline and fundamental to understanding current global challenges states experience (A1, A2, K1, K3).

Following up on my objective of constructive alignment, I wanted to ensure that the learning outcomes were also aligned with the aims and the content. Hence, upon the successful completion of this module, I expected the students fully understand the impact of the forces of globalization and fragmentation on states and identify the increasing importance of non-state actors in the politics of international economic relations (A4, A5, K1, K2, K3, K4).

I picked Theodore Cohn's book "Global Political Economy: Theory and Practice (Cohn, 2016) as the mandatory textbook mainly due to its quality and clarity, but also because it aligned very well with the weekly contents of the module (A5, K6). I assigned at least one chapter from the book for every week throughout the term and the students were able to use these chapters for their assessments.

Assessments

My assessment strategy is influenced by Sambell et. al. (2012)'s model of authentic assessments and punctual feedback to improve learning (A1, A3, K6, V3). To achieve this aim, I use both summative and formative assessments. Having separate functions, both types of assessments are essential for a complete teaching experience (Harlen & James, 1997).

Formative assessments are important because they help the students reach out to their full potential without the additional stress of marking. The formative assessments also enable students to practice and improve their skills and be prepared when it matters the most (V1, V2)(Nicol & Macfarlane - Dick, 2006).

Accordingly, I had two formative assignments for this module. On Week 6, students were expected to write a one-page essay proposal. This earlier informal deadline gave them an incentive to start working on their essays in advance of the actual deadline. On Week 6, we arranged a workshop in class, so that each student could present their proposal and receive feedback from their peers and the lecturer alike.

Another formative assessment was a presentation. I assigned a ten-minute presentation based on the essay question. Again, this exercise helped students to build up their confidence for the summative assessment, which is described below (A4, V3, V1).

Formative assessments allowed me to give regular feedback to my students, which helped them improve their essay. Understanding the feedback process also gives students substantial skills of self-reflection in later life (A3, A4, A5, K3, V1, V2, V3, V4)(Irons, 2007).

While formative assessments give confidence and experience to students, summative assessments are crucial for assessing students' knowledge and learning. These type of assignments provide students the ability to critically engage with the material (Bligh, 1998; Bloom, 1953; Gibbs, 1982). For this module, I prepared two summative assessments: an Exam (short answers) and a 2500-word essay. The exam motivated students to learn the essential part of the module: theoretical approaches. The essay question ensured that assignments were also aligned with aims, learning objectives, and the teaching outcomes. I asked the question: "Are states the most important actors in the global economy? Why, or why not?"

Teaching Methods

International Political Economy was taught in a traditional manner, which means we had ten weeks of classes divided by a half term and the Easter break. As such the module is spread over almost three months. The long time scale allows students to have more preparation time for each assignment. For example, during the first 5 weeks students had to prioritize learning the theories so that they could do well in the exam. In the second part of the module, their focus was more on essay writing and issue areas (A1).

At the same time, teaching ten sessions over three months, I find that students often struggle to remember the earlier content. In addition, having different deadlines for their various assignments in three modules, some students have difficulty keeping up with the readings and lectures.

For this module, I used the Moodle page heavily for supplementary readings and primary sources. For example, when we were discussing global finance, I posted the original text of the Dodd-Frank Act, which deals with transparency and corruption related to financial transactions. I almost always use Power Point in my lectures, because in my experience students find it easier to receive and process learning material with the help of visual aids. However, I also make sure that I do not rely heavily on slides (Jones, 2003). I also upload the slides on the Moodle page following each lecture (A4, K3, K4).

The real-world relevance of learning is an essential part of my teaching philosophy (V4)(Clinebell & Clinebell, 2008). In line with this approach, we watched short clips from the 2015 film *The Big Short*, which narrates the causes and the impact of the 2008 global financial crisis (K1,K2, K3, V4). The students found this very interesting - the real life events the movie depicted sparked a big debate in the classroom.

Teaching Outcome

Overall, I felt that *International Political Economy* was quite well received by all five of my students. Based on my own observations, all of them seemed genuinely interested in the topic and they cared about the specific issue areas. Especially free trade agreements and financial crises were major hits as students often hear and read about these events in the media. With the help of this module, they were able to recognize the underlying academic debates around these events that directly affect their lives and welfare. I also found that most students responded well to small group discussions at the end of some lectures (A4, V1, V2, K4, K3).

On the negative side, some students struggled with the economics aspect of the module during the lectures. One example is the “Unholy Trinity” – a concept that explains how governments cannot follow an independent monetary policy, adopt floating exchange rates, and allow free movement of capital at the same time. I realize now that I should have maybe gone a bit slower and explained each concept in more detail before showing students how these different mechanisms interact (V1).

As this was a small class – only five students enrolled – the absences had a huge impact. I have had one student who was absent during most weeks due to personal reasons. We also lost couple of students in some weeks to cold and flue. However, this was not a major concern in traditional mode of teaching.

Block Teaching: HPAN5001 - HPAN6001, Political Economy of Natural Resources

I taught HPAN5001 - HPAN6001, during the first semester of the academic year 2018-2019. I had taught a similar version of this module in French at Université Laval, Canada, which was based mostly on my research interests during my Ph.D. and post-doctorate work. Overall, I felt confident in my ability to deliver this module

(K1), yet at the same time I was also a little bit nervous since this would be my first experience in block teaching.

Module Design

Having thought this module before, the key challenge for me was not the find enough content. The weekly content of the module would include a discussion of comparative politics and international relations theories, energy security, resource curse, resources and conflict, and geopolitical hotspots such as the Middle East, Eurasia and China (A1, K1). However I had to translate my notes and slides from French to English. This took more time than I thought it would, but I managed to translate all the material and update the contents.

I had an even bigger problem at this point: designing a module for block teaching for the first time. While there is a general understanding of what traditional teaching involves, there is absolutely no certainty about what block teaching entails. This is mostly due to the fact that there is no established format of this type of teaching. Similarly academic resources on block or intensive teaching are also very scarce (K2) (Davies, 2006).

Obviously, the key difference between traditional teaching and block in terms of module design is the time scale. While I had ten days of classes over three months for *International Political Economy*, I had to squeeze in sixteen days of classes in four weeks of *Political Economy of Natural Resources*. Hence, I realized that immersive teaching requires significant amount of planning in advance (K2).

Upon the successful completion of this module, I expected students to analyze and learn the impact of natural resources on a variety of economic and political issues, including geopolitics, growth, economic stability, climate change, corruption, civil wars, and democracy. The module would also offer some very practical gains to the students including regional expertise, ability to write policy papers, and experience how International Relations work in practice by participating in a simulation (K2). (K3).

As *Political Economy of Natural Resources* was a module structured around my own research, it was unlike any modules in other UK universities (K6, V3). This made the module unique and valuable, yet the downside of it was that I could not find any textbooks that aligned with my syllabus. In the end, I chose the Quest by Daniel Yergin as the main textbook (Yergin, 2011). While this was not an actual textbook, it was a perfect introduction to the main themes of this module such as energy security and resource curse written by a world-renowned expert (A1, A2, K1). However, I knew that I needed to compliment this book with additional journal articles and primary sources to offer a compressive reading list to my students (V1, V2, V4).

Assessments

In block, the first deadline is usually two weeks after start of the classes. This creates a high level of anxiety in students. To address this, I wanted to make sure that students knew exactly what they were expected to do in each class and what the assignments would be. I made sure that all this information was on the Moodle page at least a week before the beginning of the module.

Being aware of the time limitations in block teaching, I have assigned one major assignment to the students with several associated parts (V1). The assessment aligned well with the aims of the module, which were stated above. The whole exercise was based on a classroom simulation of a global energy crisis where each student would represent a country in a special meeting of major oil consumers and exporters. The simulation took place in the last day of classes and the written assignment prepared the student for the simulation. The written part consisted of three sections with different deadlines: Country Analysis (1000 words), Strategy (1000 words), and Summary (1000 words - written after the simulation). The overall assessment also included a non-written section based on the student's active participation in the simulation (K3, K4, A4).

As a formative assignment, I asked students to present their Country Analysis and Strategy sections in class before the deadline so that we could all give them feedback.

Teaching Methods

In block, I quickly realized that I had to modify my teaching method to make sure that students do not get overwhelmed with new material while they prepared their assignments. Having talked to other lecturers who have taught in blocks before, I knew that I could not simply introduce new material every day. Therefore, I decided to lecture during the first three days of the week and leave the last day (Friday) for revisions, films, workshops, and presentations.

My teaching philosophy requires students to be active in constructing their understanding of knowledge (Hunt & Chalmers, 2013), which reflects my student-centered teaching. I try to keep the students dynamically involved in the process of learning (Hannafin & Land, 1997). In addition, I am heavily influenced by game-based learning (Bardon & Josserand, 2009; J. B. Biggs, 2011; Whitton, 2014) (A5, V3). That is why I designed the simulation described above, where each student had to represent a different world leader in a global summit (V2). During the simulation, students had to get into character and engage in constructive diplomacy in order to find a solution to a plausible global energy crisis. I knew that these types of simulations prepare students to real-life situations where they would have to quickly respond to various challenges (V3, V4).

Teaching Outcomes

Overall, I was very content about this teaching experience, and I was lucky to have students who were very interested in learning the key themes of this module and participated enthusiastically in the assignment. The students particularly loved the idea of studying a country in detail and representing it in a simulation. Some of the students were quite excited to get into character and even adopted the accents of their respective countries when they addressed each other during the simulation (K3, A4).

There were two unexpected developments. One student who represented Saudi Arabia stopped coming to class after the second week and she was not present for the simulation. This was a major blow as Saudi Arabia was one of the key players. Second, another student who represented the European Union, was very nervous and did not utter a word during the simulation. However, the rest of the students did not seem to mind these disruptions. They adopted a resolution to address the imagined crisis, which was voted on by the majority of the participants. Overall, it was a very successful simulation.

Academic sources that address block teaching generally paint a positive picture of students' experiences especially with regards to social aspects of learning, higher than usual motivation, and confidence in their learning (Lee & Horsfall, 2010). In *Political Economy of Natural Resources*, I was able to observe some of these effects. The students quickly became friends and discussions became lively after a couple of days. Most of the students were very eager to participate in the simulation and this provided an additional motivation for them to complete their written assignments. However, it would be difficult to assert that the block teaching was the main cause of this latter outcome. I had run this simulation before in a traditional mode of teaching and the students' experiences and enthusiasm were quite similar.

Studies also suggest that controlling for different factors, student evaluations were actually higher in intensive modules compared to traditional ones (Kucsera & Zimmaro, 2010). In my experience, my evaluations were equally high in both modules and in any case it would be difficult to generalize from my two-case sample.

On the negative side, certain studies raise concerns regarding student and faculty workload and administration of modules (Lee & Horsfall, 2010). I think this is a valid concern for block. I had two students who missed numerous classes due to personal and health reasons. They were unable to keep up with the fast pace of the class, and both failed the module. This was an unfortunate situation that could perhaps have been better managed in a traditional format.

Evaluations and Future Teaching

Evaluations

I distributed and received module evaluation forms for both teaching experiences. In *International Political Economy*, all of the respondents (five out of five) were fully content with the teaching, content, structure, and delivery of the module. One student wrote: “the teacher makes it easy to understand, clear and all very relevant”. Another student wrote: “the lectures have been engaging and interesting” (K5, K6).

Only one of the students was not content with the library resources. This was an improvement over the last academic year where the majority of the students raised concerns. The main reason for the change could be that I asked the library quite in advance to purchase the main textbook (V3).

Overall, even though this was a newly designed module, *International Political Economy* worked quite well in terms of content, delivery, and assessment; and almost all students agree with this.

In *Political Economy of Natural Resources* all of the students who responded definitely agreed with the following two statements: “lecturer has been good at explaining things and made the subject interesting” and “the module has challenged me to achieve my best work and is intellectually stimulating.” This is very important because that was one of my main goals. One student thought “the discussions” were especially good. (K1, K2). Another said: “the lecturer has made the module very interesting and has been very supportive.”

With regards to block teaching, one student mentioned that “the workload was appropriate to time scale and fitted with block system, assessments are interesting and different”. They also said, “it is a very well put together module that fits well with the block system.” Another student stated: “structured VERY well compared to other blocks I’ve taken. Moodle and resources were very clear and accessible. Very student focused. I think other lecturers should take a leaf out of Kerem’s book.” (A1, A4, K2, K3, K4, V1)

The evaluations also show that all of the students believed that “the lecturer had been good at explaining things and had made the subject interesting”, the module had “challenged them to achieve their best work and had been intellectually stimulating”. They also stated that module had “provided them with opportunities to explore ideas or concepts in depth”, “bring together information from different topics”, and that “the overall structure of the module had been clear and coherent” (K1) (UWTSD, 2018).

Similarly, all students agreed that “the teaching methods were appropriate to the subject matter of the module”, that the module was “well organized”, they had the “right opportunities to work with other students as part of this module” (K2) (UWTSD, 2018).

The students also agreed that their “feedback was listened to and valued”, “the criteria used in assessment and marking had been specified clearly in advance of submission”, and they had received “sufficient and good academic support both from the lecturer but also from the Moodle page” (V1, V2, K2, K5, K6) (UWTSD, 2018).

In terms of suggestions for improvement, one student actually wrote that “more guidance/examples of report style writing” would have improved and enhanced the module. I had actually given guidance to students on writing country positions, but I realize that given the short time scale, the written assignment could have proved challenging to some students.

Self-reflection and Future Modifications

Based on my self-reflection and the module questionnaires, I have identified several areas to improve my teaching.

Firstly, I will continue to make innovative assessments in the future, since this is something that the students seem to enjoy. Apart from simulations, I would also consider board games as potential candidates for assessment. In fact, in my World Politics class, students will have to prepare an essay based on their in-class experiences of playing the popular board game “RISK”. They will be expected to relate how the RISK simulation relates to theories of international relations.

However, the “learning space” (Jankowska & Atlay, 2008; Temple, 2008) and the number of students may constrain this decision. Some of the classrooms in Lampeter are not ideal for simulations, or games. Also, low student numbers in my modules would also make it difficult to plan ahead for these types of assessments.

Secondly, I would aspire to make my modules even more interactive. One possibility is to have discussion questions after each short section, rather than waiting until the end of the class. One potential risk with this approach is that since only a few students actually come to class having done the readings, they might not have much to say.

Thirdly, I would do even more to make sure that students are comfortable with the directions in the assignments. This is a major challenge for block both due to the shorter time scale but also due to the innovative aspect of some of my assignments.

Finally, I would be interested in keeping logs as suggested by Ann Campbell (2007) in order to help me reflect on my teaching. Students give feedback in unpredictable times and log keeping would allow me to keep a track of these comments. These would be especially useful when I am teaching the class for a second time.

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Innovative Assessments in Block Teaching by Dr. Kerem Öge (UWTSD)

Background

Traditional forms of assessments, such as essays, examinations, and standardized tests are often criticized for being outdated ([Phillips, 2006](#)). Alternative assessments can help students actively use knowledge in real-life circumstances ([Reeves & Okey, 1996](#)) (V3).

My teaching encourages active student involvement in assignments through simulations and game-based learning ([Bardon & Josserand, 2009](#); [I. B. Biggs, 2011](#), [Hannafin & Land, 1997](#)) (A5, K4)

I designed two new and innovative assessments for my modules *Political Economy of Natural Resources* (HPAN5001) and *World Politics* (HPAN5019) – both taught in blocks at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David – Lampeter (A1). Both assessments were received well by the students and I plan to continue using similar assignments in the future.

The RISK game

In my World Politics module, students prepared an essay based on their experiences of playing the popular board game “RISK”. They were expected to explain how the RISK game relates to theories of international relations, such as Realism and Liberalism.



The outcome was a major success. Students enjoyed the game-playing experience and most of them produced strong essays. It was clear that students found it easier to identify and evaluate theories and models when they could apply them in a game (A3, V4).

Student comments from the Module Evaluation Questionnaire: “Really enjoyed the RISK game” “The game of RISK was especially good” (K5)

The Simulation

For my Political Economy of Natural Resources module, I designed a simulation, where each student represented a different world leader in a global summit (V2). During the simulation, students had to get into character and engage in constructive diplomacy in order to find a solution to a global energy crisis (V3, V4)



The students particularly loved the idea of studying a country in detail and representing it in a simulation. Furthermore, the simulation provided an additional motivation for them to complete their written assignments (K3, A4).

Student comments from the Module Evaluation Questionnaire: “Assessments are interesting and different” (K5)

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Peer Observation Report

Date: 3 May 2018

Module: International Political Economy

Type of session (e.g. lecture, seminar): Lecture

Tutor: Kerem Oge

Observer: Martin Bates

Focus for session: Energy and environment

Objectives:

Strengths (potential sector-leading practice)

- Good detail and easy to follow (Powerpoint).
- The session was clear, with objectives clearly spelt out, images were appropriate

Points for consideration

If particularly relevant, comment on further contextual factors (e.g. group size, accommodation, student profile, resources)

Post observation notes (to be agreed by observer/tutor).

Following reflection, identify key points for the Assistant Deans and Dean of Faculty to consider and to share with a wider professional audience within the Faculty:

1 Clarity of the lesson

Clear aims and objectives

Signed: (observer) M Bates Signed: (tutor)____ K Oge_____

Date: ____3 May, 2018_____

PGCert tHE STAFF OBSERVATION FORM

Name of Staff member: Dr Kerem Öge

Date: 20/12/2018

Name of Observer: Mr Christopher Fleming

Number in class: 7

Student level: Level 5/6

Location: Founders' Library, Lampeter campus

Topic/s: HPAN5001/6001 'Political Economy of Natural Resources' – session on Oil Summit

Start Time: 10.00

Finish Time: 11.00

Teaching Characteristics: Preparation, selection and organisation of content. Choice of teaching/learning methods.

- Session took form of role-playing game (RPG).
- Context: UN hosted meeting of the 'BigOil8' (Russia, China, Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, USA, European Union) to discuss hypothetical crises and establish a response.
- KO played role of UN General Secretary, with individual students playing the role of the members represented at the meeting.
- Role-play very appropriate method for teaching this module – students able to engage in current diplomatic processes and the political aspects linked to natural resources from an economic point of view.

Presentation: Beginning class, introduction, continuity with other sessions, students' prior knowledge. Clarity of presentation. Pace. Attitude to subject matter. Use of appropriate reinforcement. Ending the session – summary, future work etc.

- KO set up the RPG task – 5 min setting up the crisis and the aim of the session while in character as UN General Secretary
- Students had prior knowledge of the session and prepared accordingly – each gave an overview of their position in character.

Technique and Aids: General apparatus – board, data projector, use of handouts. Question and answer technique. Other evaluation procedures, class management, instructions to students.

- Instructions given to students at beginning of session were clear and concise.
- Room was well-chosen – gave atmosphere of a prestigious event, in-keeping with the RPG

elements, while allowing space for students to work in smaller groups/individually if required.

Student Responses: General class atmosphere, level of participation, attention and interest. Student attitude and ability to carry out classwork. Were learning problems identified and overcome? Awareness of individual needs. Attitude to students.

- KO showed awareness to students' needs – one student felt uncomfortable giving an overview at beginning of session, which KO accepted and moved on swiftly so as to not cause distress.
- Students showed passion for the subject – evidence of high-quality research shown in discussions with references to relevant texts and documents.
- KO maintained authority throughout – stepped in when discussion reached deadlock, but otherwise allowed students to drive discussion.

General: Was effective communication achieved? Was there good student – teacher rapport? Were the aims/outcomes achieved? Appropriateness of teaching/learning methods

- Very good rapport with students – KO had obviously built up good relationship with the student cohort in previously lectures, which is reinforced by the intensive nature of block teaching system. This results in almost daily contact with students promoting good learning practices and allowing students to build up relationship with lecturer.
- RPG combined with block teaching system makes for a very appropriate learning method

Examples of good practice:

Excellent demonstration of truly immerse learning with the combination of block and RPG.

Very good student-lecturer relationships.

Excellent example of student-driven learning.

Transferrable skills such as communication and negotiation built into task.

Action points:

None.

Observer C Fleming.....

Date 10/01/2019

Oberservee K. Oge.....

Date 10/01/2019

On completion of the peer observation reports for each module, compose a short reflective paragraph on your observation experiences.



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Peer Observation Report

Date:	08/01/2019	Module: World Politics HPAN5019 – HPAN6019
Type of session (e.g. lecture, seminar): Lecture		
Tutor: Kerem Oge		Observer: Eloise Govier
Focus for session: History of the State / Nation		
Objectives: To understand how the nation-state became the most popular form of political organization.		

Strengths (potential sector-leading practice):

Engaging delivery and great pace to the lecture. Great slides that clearly present the information in an accessible way.

Kerem introduced the basic principles of the lecture theme, and offered real life examples so that students could think through the concepts in relation to actual events. Students were clearly engaged with the concepts right from the beginning of the lecture and felt comfortable asking questions which Kerem took time to answer clearly.

Points for consideration:

Great session.

If particularly relevant, comment on further contextual factors (e.g. group size, accommodation, student profile, resources):

In terms of resources: the slides are particularly strong.

Post observation notes (to be agreed by observer/tutor).

Following reflection, identify key points for the Assistant Deans and Dean of Faculty to consider and to share with a wider professional audience within the Faculty:

No notes – great session.

Signed: (observer)___Eloise Govier_____
Oge_____

Signed: (tutor)___Kerem

Date: _____25.2.19_____

Continuing Professional Development Event 1 – Block Teaching - Kerem Öge

I attended a workshop organized by Kyle Erickson and Ros Coard in Lampeter on the 4th of September 2018 as part of the Staff Development Week. The title of the workshop was “Block Teaching”. The main aim of this Continuing Professional Development (CPD) event was to talk about practical problems the lecturers might encounter during block teaching in Lampeter especially with regards to assignments and students’ module choices.

The block-teaching model in University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Lampeter, started in September 2018, a couple of weeks after this workshop. This major change in the teaching method inspired various workshops and this CPD event was one of those workshops that aimed to prepare the teaching staff during this transition period. This particular workshop was organized to address Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) from the lecturers and guide them towards best practices.

The item on the agenda was assessments. Assessments are an essential part of teaching and learning (Dochy & McDowell, 1997; Nitko, 1996) and an assessment can be defined as the “process of determining whether students have attained curricular goals” (Reeves & Okey, 1996, p. 191). The academics have a certain amount of liberty in choosing their assignments when designing their block modules. In an earlier CPD, alternative methods of assessments for block were discussed, including portfolios, posters, blog posts, board games, etc. The organizers of this CPD picked up from where we left off at the last meeting and they began to highlight the need to specify the contents of the assignments in detail before the beginning of the term.

The workshop organizers pointed out that the block system required advanced planning from the part of both the students and the lecturers. Hence, it was important that students have access to all necessary information about assignments at the beginning of the academic year when they had to choose their modules. This was a major change from the previous system where both the students and the academics focused on semesters, rather than blocks.

The workshop also highlighted that clarity is particularly important for lecturers that chose “portfolio” as their preferred method of assessments (Paulson, Paulson, & Meyer, 1991). While portfolios give lecturers a sense of flexibility, which is especially useful in blocks, it is also a vague form of assessment for students if it’s not specified clearly. Furthermore, in block teaching, where the time scale is short, higher the number of assignments in a portfolio, more difficult it would be for students to find adequate time to complete them. As a result, the lecturers were advised to go over their assignments – clarify and change them if needed - before the validation in mid-September.

Overall, CPD events are extremely important to reflective practitioners and professionals in Higher Education. I am glad to have attended this CPD event as it

motivated me to reevaluate some of my assessments for this year's modules. At that point in September, I was in the process of designing five blocks: *Political Economy of Natural Resources*, *World Politics*, *Microeconomics*, *Macroeconomics*, and *Global Environmental Politics*. After this workshop, I removed exams from some modules and clarified some of my assignments that were vaguely titled such as Policy Paper, or Portfolio. As such, this CPD was highly relevant to my job as a lecturer specifically and to my teaching practice in general.

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Continuing Professional Development Event 2 – Distance Learning Moodle Pages - Kerem Öge

I attended a workshop organized by Christian Stevens and Errietta Bissa in Lampeter on the 5th of September 2018 as part of the Staff Development Week. The title of the seminar was “Distance Learning”. The main aim of this Continuing Professional Development (CPD) event was to make Moodle pages for distance learning modules at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD) more accessible. From next year onwards, I will be teaching distance-learning modules as part of a newly validated MA programme called *International Development and Global Politics*. As such, for me this CPD is highly relevant both to my job as a lecturer and to my teaching practice.

Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) have become standard in higher education in the last decade (Bri, García, Coll, & Lloret, 2009). While there are several different options to choose from (Moodle, Blackboard, etc), their main function remains the same: to create a learning environment where students and the lecturers can share information about the module contents and the assignments in a meaningful and an efficient way.

For distance learning Moodle pages, the UWTSD has clear baseline standards on structure and navigation, orientation, communication and student participation, assessment, resources, accessibility and intellectual property. This particular workshop addressed issues regarding design, accessibility, communication, and student participation.

The first part of the workshop focused on design. The workshop organizers demonstrated the effectiveness of the grid design compared to the standard list format, which is the default for undergraduate Moodle pages. Accordingly, the grid layout would become the standard for distance teaching modules in Lampeter.

The workshop also demonstrated how the lecturer could make the module more accessible by embedding videos directly on the Moodle page – instead of a pop-up. The workshop also focused on the using the label function to either to instruct students or to add reading lists. Finally, the organizers also showed how the lecturers could edit the welcome page without disrupting the new sleek design.

The second part of the workshop focused on improving student-tutor engagement in Moodle pages. Distance learning is a major opportunity for many learners to access courses in Lampeter. At the same time, many distance learners could feel isolated from the university and other learners. This would have an impact not only on student satisfaction, but also academic success. The workshop suggested various alternatives to address this issue and o make course components and students’ progress more visible on the Moodle page. One good example is the use of Moodle forums, rather than individual emails or Skype meetings.

Overall, I believe that an attractive and functional VLE is key to distance learning and it contributes substantially to student satisfaction and progress. I am glad to have attended this CPD event, as I will be designing three distance-learning modules for the next academic year as part of the new MA programme. Hence it is essential for me to learn and adopt best practices in Moodle design.

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Continuing Professional Development Event 3 – Postgraduate Supervision - Kerem Öge

I attended a workshop organized by Bettina Smith and Katharina Zinn in Lampeter on the 19th of December 2018. The title of the workshop was “Active Supervisors PGR @ FHPA”. The main aim of this Continuing Professional Development (CPD) event was to clarify and discuss the roles of supervisors in Faculty of Humanities - the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD) in postgraduate supervision.

At the moment, I am a supervisor of two postgraduate students. Supervising research students is often seen as the traditional “path for entry into the research and academic community” (Bitzer, 2007). Supervision could also be seen as a form of teaching and supervision methods borrow heavily from traditional teaching and learning practice. Supervisors care about their student’s progress and they provide regular feedback – not too different from the relationship between a lecturer and an undergraduate student (Ketteridge & Shiach, 2009). Therefore, as an early career academic, this CPD was highly relevant both to my job as a lecturer and to my research practice.

The workshop was divided into two main sections. The first section included valuable information on supervising research degree students for new supervisors. The main topics included the code of practice and framework, student guidance, monitoring progress, and troubleshooting. Most importantly for me, the workshop organizers explained the roles of both lead and second supervisors as well as the director of studies.

The role of the supervisor begins at the application process where they have to decide whether or not they have the capacity for the project that the student proposes to do. Following up on this the supervisor has to assess the topic of the student and assess whether or not this topic could be successfully researched at the UWTSD considering access to library, archives, etc. Furthermore, the supervisor has to decide whether or not the student can get enough support for their research method at the UWTSD. This is particularly important for those students who require lab space and/or special software.

The second section of the workshop was about monitoring students. Accordingly, maintaining regular contact is a key part of the tutor-supervisor relationship. This contact can be either in person (including at conferences or other occasions outside UWTSD) or by email or Skype. Supervisory team and the student should have at least three formal meetings during an academic year. Meanwhile informal meetings could be held every two weeks especially in the early stages to make sure that the student is on the right track. However, international students require more face-to-face meetings due to specific visa requirements.

The workshop organizers then highlighted the importance of keeping records of all meetings with the students including dates, those present, outcome of actions from

last meeting, actions agreed, and the date of the next meeting. These records are not only important for keeping track of the students' progress but also serve as evidence of tutor-student interaction in case this is needed for any reason in the future.

As an academic, who is currently supervising two postgraduate students, I am glad to have attended this CPD. Research supervision is an essential part of an academic's work load and as new supervisor I benefited from the guidance offered in this workshop.

References

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Assessment of my Development in the PGCert tHE Programme – Kerem Öge

I have been enrolled in the Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching in Higher Education (PGCert tHE) since May 2017 (A5). This brief assessment will reflect on my experiences and progress as a practitioner and discuss future developmental needs. Despite my initial reservations (as someone who was already doing a lot of teaching), I believe that this programme has substantially contributed to my teaching practice and will have a positive impact on the success of my future delivery.

I have been lecturing in higher education since 2008, mostly in North American institutions. In the United States and Canada, where I completed my doctoral and postdoctoral studies respectively, there was no requirement for academic staff to undertake a specific teaching course (A1, A2). Hence, I had not had a chance to formally reflect on my teaching practice (except going through student evaluations) before I started this programme (K5, K6). In particular, this programme allowed me to think critically about some of my key assumptions regarding teaching methods and assessments (K2, K3).

First, soon after I enrolled in this programme, I found out that UWTSD – Lampeter was switching to a new teaching method: immersive or block teaching. I began to make preparations to modify my modules in accordance with the new model. At this crucial point, my assignments in the PGCert tHE helped me reevaluate some of my own teaching methods (K2). For example, thanks to Mark Flagg’s workshop, I learned about a new and innovative method of teaching called flipped learning. Flipped learning allows for lectures to be completed outside the classroom via Virtual Learning Environments, meanwhile, the assignments are carried out during lecture hours under the supervision of the lecturer (K2, K4, V3). The PGCert tHE also motivated me to find more ways to keep students actively involved in the process of learning and create classroom dynamics that permit dialogue (V1, V2). To that end, I began to use more interactive activities such as discussion groups, case studies, debates, and simulation exercises in order to encourage the students discuss the material critically (K1, K2, K3).

Second, assessments are an essential part of teaching and learning. While designing my modules, I had often adopted the traditional form of assessments such as essays and exams. However, innovation is often the key to keeping students engaged with the course material. The block system and the PGCert tHE helped me try out more innovative assignments, such as board games and simulations. For example, in *World Politics*, students had to describe how the RISK game relates to theories of international relations. In *Political Economy of Natural Resources*, student each had to represent a world leader in a global summit (A1, A4, K2).

Overall, I have improved as a lecturer thanks to PGCert tHE and my positive evaluations in my last two modules demonstrate that my teaching practice also benefited from my

participation. For the future, I would like to incorporate more research-led teaching into my modules. I find that students show more interest in learning when they can personally relate to people who contribute to knowledge. In future modules, I aim to use more examples from my own research findings and fieldwork experience to complement the module material where relevant (V3, V4).