



Name of the project/ initiative

Co-creating the Curriculum: Fine Art & Art History

Which teaching sessions/modules/ courses/directorates are involved in the initiative?

HA5201 *Researching the Contemporary*.

Core HA module for Level 5 BA Fine Art & Art History (15 students)

Module Leader: Helen Potkin

Briefly describe the initiative and the students who have participated.

The initiative consists of a project in which the student group designs and plans the curriculum content, learning activities and assessment brief for their second year Art History module. It emerged in relation to my interests in participation, collaboration and learning, and through it, I wanted to explore how working with students, with them shaping both *what* and *how* they learned could more fully involve them in the learning process and engender deeper and affective learning.

Carl Rogers' conceptualisation of education which embraces the learner as a whole and in which the nature of the relationships (such as that between teacher and student) is fundamental to creating significant learning, provided the impetus and basis for the development. Inspired by his writing I aimed to create culture of trust, a participatory environment and for us all to embrace the principle of learning through doing.

The work of academics, Julie Hall and Catherine Bovill on curriculum co-creation offered useful case studies, and advice on the development of projects. Bovill points out how academic staff are 'gate keepers' to the curriculum, and that co-creation offers a potential to dismantle hierarchies (to some extent) allowing for a more democratic and inclusive curriculum and learning experience. For a module based in concepts and practices of research, I wanted students to engage more critically with knowledge and its production, requiring some rethinking in terms of the operations of power and knowledge. I'm also interested in the idea of student as producer in the current conditions of higher education (student as consumer).

The module *Researching the Contemporary* has a dual emphasis on practices and process of research and contemporaneity in art and culture. The preponderance of models of collaboration, participation and inclusion in recent art practice - what Art Historian Grant Kester has termed 'dialogic practice' – offered both a site of interrogation and a way of thinking about module design. In the initial stages, I furnished students with previous iterations of the module, and asked them to come up with topics, approaches, and activities, which I then ordered and framed in response to their concerns about the thematic coherence of the module as a whole.

What emerged, was a series of ideas around how art history's relevance within contemporary culture could be explored, the ways in which the dominance of its canon could be challenged, through a more inclusive approach and how history and theory could be more fundamentally connected to studio practice (the other half of the students' programme). I particularly liked the idea of weekly 5 minutes slots which offer a forum for students to 'teach each other', as well as sessions in which would take place in the studio, in the form of critiques.

By teaching week 3 I could present back to the student a schedule of learning for the coming weeks, which aimed to reflect the nature of our discussion and decisions so far. Using the so-called 'educational turn' in contemporary art as our departure point, we turned to look inwards at sites of research, the art school and studio. To this end, the whole group worked on individual research tasks around our themes, and presented findings in relationship to a broader historical and theoretical framing by me – effectively we co-created and co-delivered the lecture.

What has been the impact? Is there any data on the effect on student performance? If it is too early for this, what are students saying about it?

The project is underway – we're up to teaching week 7. My observation is that the short research task which collectively builds the session has worked well in encouraging participation from all students in the group. Some of the less vocal students appear more confident in talking particularly in relation to images they have selected. Students have told me that they enjoy the participatory aspects but that sometimes, the openness and choice is overwhelming. The group have a meeting this week and plan to send feedback to me shortly.

How far could this be adopted elsewhere in Kingston University?

I think the concept of students as producers of curriculum content and delivery could be adopted elsewhere within other subjects and discipline areas –especially those connected to the social realm. This project is with a small group of students, who I taught last year and know well, so for larger groups there would need to be some form of adaption, in terms of how and the extent to which the students become involved.

Any other comments and contact for further information:

References: Carl Rogers, (1969) *Freedom to Learn*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall

Julie Hall, (2015) 'Co-creating a social justice and education curriculum with undergraduate students', HEA <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/co-creating-social-justice-and-education-curriculum-undergraduate-students-0#sthash.Lf0TYKT7.dpuf>

Alison Cook-Sather, Catherine Bovill, Peter Felton, (2014) *Engaging Students as Partners in Teaching & Learning*, Oxford: Wiley

Grant Kester, (2013) *Conversation Pieces, Community and Communication in Modern Art*, California: University of California Press

Paul O'Neill, (2010) *Curating and The Educational Turn*, London: Open Editions