

Digital Theatre + Action Research Project – Evaluation of Drama/Film Foundation module

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Context

2016-2017 was the first year of running the Drama/Film module in Foundation. This module presents a number of challenges:

The students have particular needs: they have a wide range of abilities; very few (approx 5 percent) are hoping to continue with the subject; very few (less than 10 percent) have studied the subject at key stage 5

Last year there were problems in attendance, engagement and preparation for seminars. In particular, students were resistant to reading the plays and seminar readings

There was no practice taught on this module which doesn't give the students an experience of the Drama undergraduate curriculum

Last year 4 out of approximately 70 students continued to study BA Drama. These students had originally planned to study the subject.

Action Research Questions

In participation with others action research brings together theory, practice and reflection in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of concern and the flourishing of individuals and their communities.

(Brydon-Miller et al., 2003)

1. How can I improve Engagement? (Independent learning and dialogic practice)
2. How can a digital resource improve engagement?
3. How should I scaffold the learning?

Enable, Enhance, Enrich, Empower

What, if anything, might be improved by working with a digital resource?

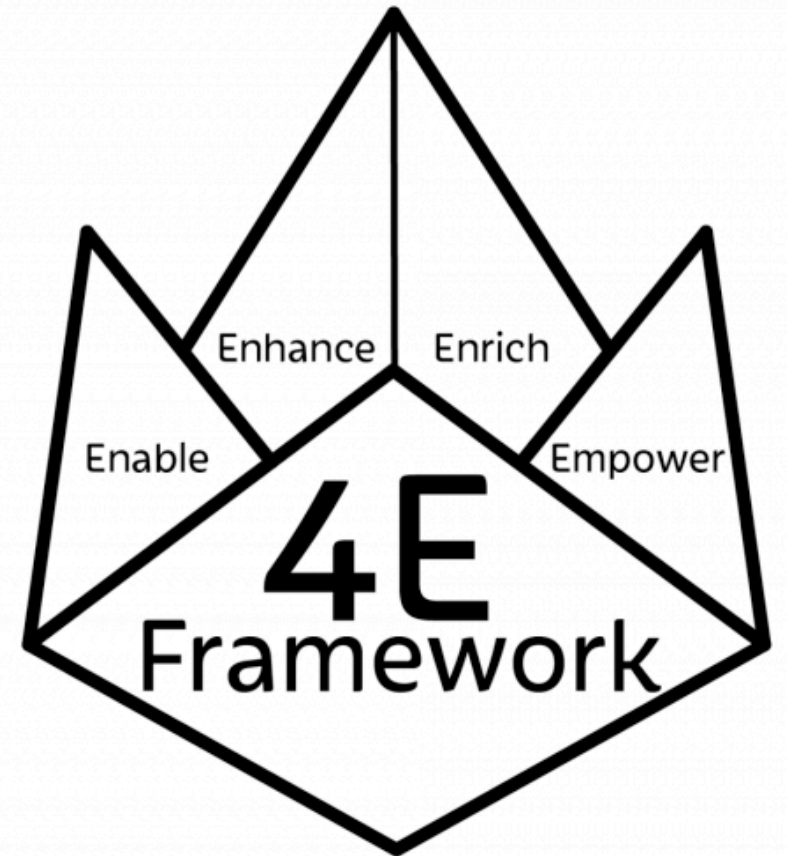
Simon Thomson, Leeds Beckett University, July 2017

What can technology 'enable' us to do? That we can't do without it?

How can technology 'enhance' what we already do?

How can technology 'enrich' our learning experiences?

How can technology 'empower' our learners and our teachers?



Methodology

Secure DT+

Plan a module around the materials on the site

Build a virtual learning site with links to DT+

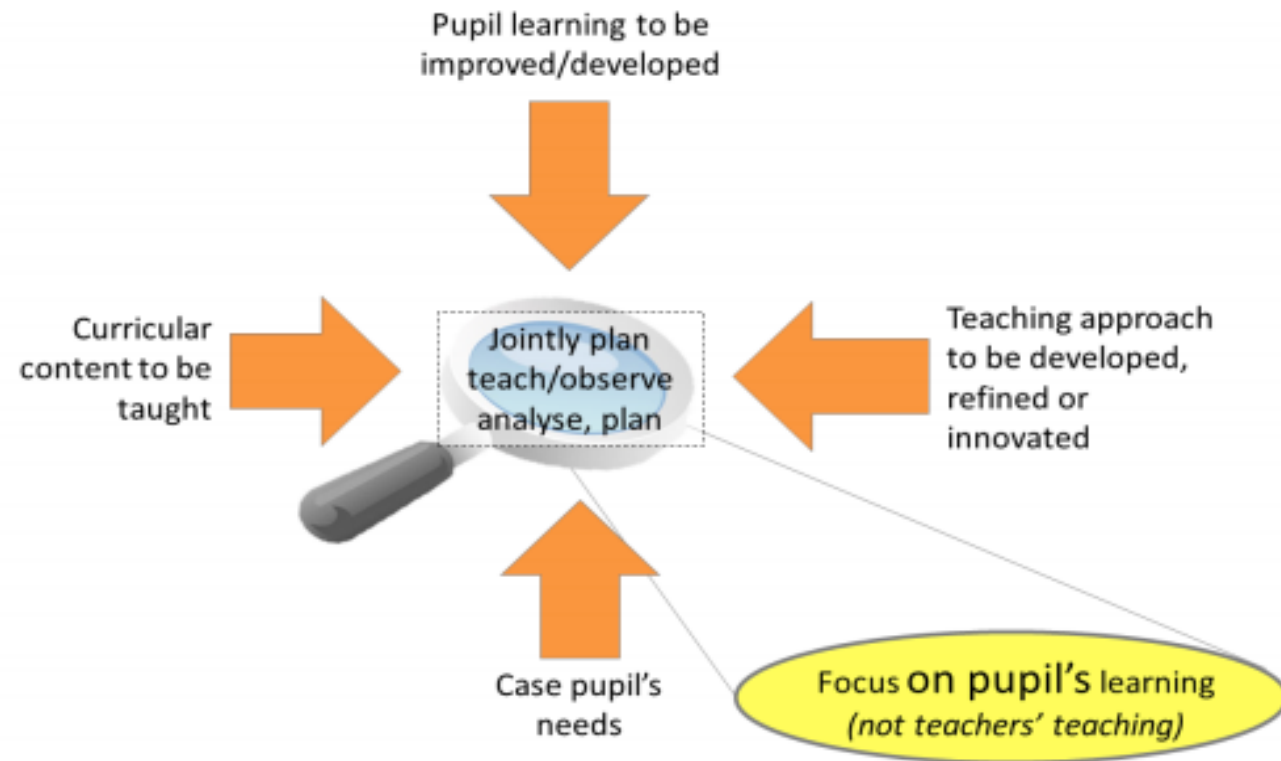
Implement Lesson Study with a colleague in English to observe and give feedback on two lessons over the term with a particular focus on engagement

With DT+

Set up online survey

Analyse data

Conduct focus group meeting



Anticipated Outcomes

- To enable a focused investigation into how the resource works in practice at this level and to collect data
- To include the participant group (teacher and learners) in feedback
- To enable close scrutiny of teaching and learning
- To improve engagement in seminars
- To improve the quality of written/presentation assessments
- Improved recruitment onto the BA course

Overview of Scheme

Week One: What is Drama? Theatre? Performance?

Things I know to be True; Interview with Scott Graham, director and founder of the company *Frantic Assembly*.

Week Two: Space

Macbeth, Liverpool Everyman Theatre, *Macbeth*, The Globe; Interviews with Director (Gemma Bodinez) and Designer (Francis O Conner)

Week Three: Actor

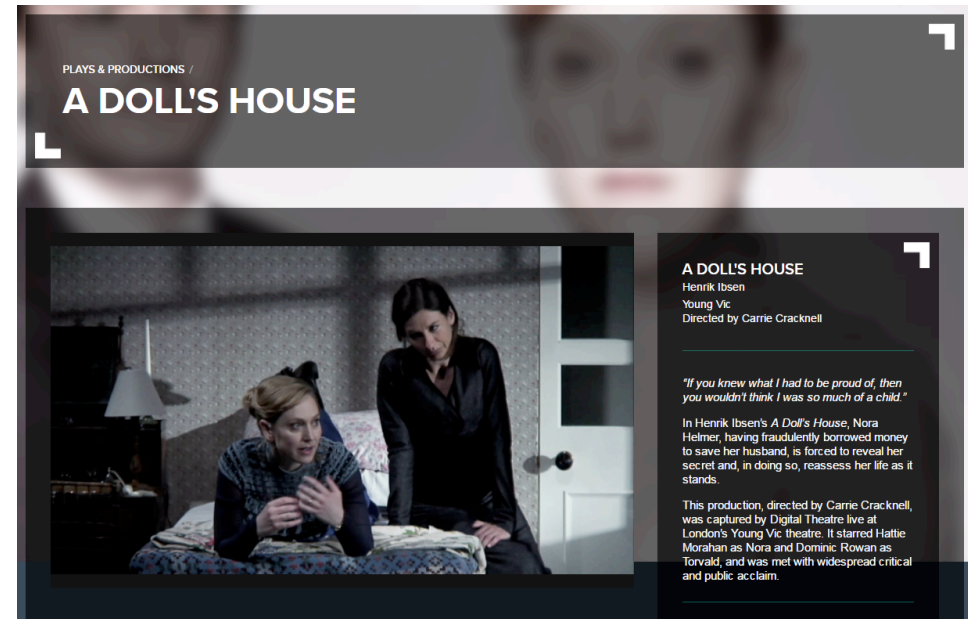
A Doll's House – the start of both versions. Interview with actor Juliet Stevenson; Encyclopedia entries – Realism and Naturalism

Week Four: Audience

Interview with Eric Bentley

Week Five: Participation

Boal documentary (9 – 33 mins)



Data Collection: Questionnaire

Discoverability

How are students using the taxonomy filters – are they just using the search box or are they using the filters?

If the latter, do they find what they need?

Can they find what they want easily?

Are the three main tabs at the top helpful or would they prefer content-related tabs (such as ‘Shakespeare’ etc)?

Functionality/usability

How important is it that there’s no ‘cite this’ button yet?

Do they want to upload their own material (user-generated content)?

Would they use DT+ in conjunction with textbooks, journal articles, monographs, to inform their essays/assignments? If so, how?

Do they want to hear the ‘voice of DT+’ in the form of updates and curatorial guidance from us, directly speaking?

Are the pages of ‘teasers’ (which are the boxes with info on each item and brief blurbs) too big and require too much scrolling?

Personalisation

Do they want a ‘My DT+’ button, which stores their previous searches and preferences?

Do they want to be able to give regular/more feedback, more easily?

Findings from Student Data

Learning: Transition from a-level to undergrad was smooth – DT+ used in the same way at both stages
Students regularly use *YouTube*, *Crash Course*, *Schmoop* or *Kanopy*
Strong preference for AV over written materials
Site needs to be more relatable to young with younger interviewers or lighthearted content (like *Othello Project*).

Interface / Usability: Site described as ‘cluttered’ and ‘overwhelming’ - main listings pages considered too long
Frequently frustrated by search – would regularly go to YouTube for content they couldn’t find on DT+
Need for citation export tool – haven’t been referencing DT+ thus far
Need for chaptering – students want to immediately access the section they’re looking for
Would like more guidance through the site – playlists, watch next, recommended etc.
Positive consensus on new site designs – liked the Netflix-style interface and agree that ‘trending’ is a category they would expect to see but weren’t sure what we meant by ‘featured’

Content Additions: Scripts (especially if the script and production can be viewed simultaneously)
Captions and transcripts
Contemporary productions / recognisable names
Experimental performance (i.e. Wooster Group)
Career-focused content (i.e. guide to theatre jobs)
Key quote banks

Pedagogical Findings

Improved engagement in seminars:

This was noted in the quality of student discussion, preparation for seminars and engagement in seminar tasks.

“ I was impressed by the strength of the group dynamic, both within small groups and in the class as a whole, and by the readiness with which students self-organised and engaged with the task.”

Ronan McKinney observation notes

Growth in uptake for Drama degree:

An increase to 9 students so a rise in over 50%. This is significant as it means that a fifth of the cohort on the BA will be ex Foundation students.

Improved quality of writing:

Students were able to include close analysis of a stage moment which significantly improved their grades on the Argument and Analysis strand of the marking criteria. More students achieved first grades in their assignments.

Improved quality in presentations:

This year more students achieved high grades in presentations reflecting a growing confidence in presentation skills.

Evaluation

WWW (What Went Well)

Enriched the curriculum

Improved engagement, from students and from teacher!

Allowed wide mixed ability group access to theatre

Enabled higher ability students to browse, extend and discover

Improved intake numbers for the subject

EBI (Even Better If)

Ability to download and embed scenes into VLE

Not able to embed into power-points for lectures

Must have internet access (had to work with DVD copies)

Lack of range in productions – particularly in Epic theatre, Theatre of Cruelty, World theatre and experimental work

Interviews too long and need chapter headings